

War time experiences of Female Ex-combatants of Zimbabwe's war of Liberation

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Abstract: The story of sacrifice and suffering in the liberation struggle has been dominated by men and the role of females in the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe has not been equally celebrated. However, females played heroic roles without which the course of history might have been distorted. Due to their physical biological make up, females suffer more hardships, some humiliation, as compared to their male counterparts. In contemporary writings, a few researches were done targeting individuals such as Chung's and Nhongo-Simbanegavi's works. This study traces the plight of female ex-combatants back to their war time experiences to get a rich background to understand their psychological disposition and ability to be socio-economically reintegrated in post-independence Zimbabwe. These war time experiences show the inherent complexities of transitional justice as invisible war-borne scarred human emotions are often not given due attention when peace finally prevails. The study which employed the qualitative approach and the target population included both male and female ex-combatants from Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's (ZIPRA) cadres, revealed that female ex-combatants went through distressing experiences during the war which required close attention (which unfortunately seemed not rendered) at reintegration in post-independence Zimbabwe. Recommendations are that the female ex-combatants be afforded systemic counselling.

Key Words: *female ex-combatants, systemic counselling, liberation struggle, transitional justice.*

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The various important socio-economic roles of females in any society have been greatly researched in gender and feminist studies. Females in precolonial Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, played many prominent roles that included being heads of states (queens), for instance queen Nzinga of Angola, ¹and spiritual leaders like Charwe Nyakasikana popularly known as Mbuya Nehanda². The dominance of female in important state issues was diluted by the arrival of colonial settlers who failed to appreciate the gender and sexual social stratifications in Africa, and instead applied 'Victorian' stereotypes which were also readily accepted by men as they strengthened their patriarchal dominance.

¹ Queen Nzinga was an Angolan female leader who received military training as a child

² Mbuya Nehanda is a well-known and recognized Zimbabwean spirit medium who guided and counselled freedom fighters during the country's war of liberation.

However, in different important epochs in Zimbabwe, female stepped up to prove that their societal worth was not only limited to the domestic arena. One of these epochs was the Second Chimurenga in which female summoned their courage to join their male counterparts in the struggle. Women had always been part of the organised civil disobediences prior to the armed struggle because they equally felt the pain of colonialism (Mudeka, 2014). When the liberation movements realised that independence would not be obtained through public disorder and demonstrations but through an armed struggle, women steadily skipped the country's borders to join either ZANLA or ZIPRA combatants and made their mark in the war. The heroism of the female ex-combatants should be viewed with different lenses from their male counterparts. The biological makeup of female coupled with societal stereotypes meant that the trials and tribulations of the struggles were harder on them than men. While men faced many challenges which females also faced in some cases, the struggles of the female were compounded by their male counterparts through alleged sexual exploitation (Mudeka, 2014).

This study traces the plight of female ex-combatants back to their war time experiences as these provide a rich background to understand their psychological disposition and their ability to be socio-economically reintegrated in post-independence Zimbabwe. These war time experiences show the inherent complexities of transitional justice as invisible war-borne scarred human emotions are often not given due attention when peace finally prevails (Machakanja, 2010).

1.1 Transitional Justice and Gender

The UN (2010) recognises that transitional justice must provide for special measures to ensure that female (including female ex-combatants) fully participate in processes such as reintegration and that their rights and perspectives are adequately addressed in such processes. In fact, the UN encourages transitional justice processes to take into consideration a gender and female's human rights perspective. With respect to the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes the UN (2010) transitional justice framework implores the incorporation of a gender approach to DDR which addresses the needs of female ex-combatants who have participated in armed conflict.

Although the transitional justice framework stipulates that female must play a role in the reintegration processes, they are almost never included in the planning and implementation of these processes (UNIFEM, 2009). This means that female ex-

combatants are recipients of reintegration processes and initiatives they did not take part in formulating and implementing. The fact that female ex-combatants are not fully consulted in the planning and implementation of reintegration processes shows that achieving transitional justice in the post war era is as complex as dealing with the root causes of conflict. The complexity of transitional justice is that it sets the normative values that processes such as reintegration should follow, without considering the realities on the ground.

Gender differentiations manifest themselves in transitional justice processes such as reintegration whereby female ex-combatants find themselves being marginalised and treated as less equal to men (Watteville, 2002). Transitional justice processes are often blind to gender differences and do not take into consideration the special needs of female ex-combatants who have to be reintegrated into communities and societies that down play their role in post conflict reconstruction. Thus, after the war in 1980, Zimbabwe went through a process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Female ex-combatants like their male counterparts who could not be absorbed into the amalgamated Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) ³were disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated into mainstream society. The major concern with the Zimbabwe Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process after 1980 was that it took a blanket approach which did not adequately address the needs and aspirations of the female ex-combatants who had fought in the war of liberation. There were no mechanisms and structures put in place to deal with the reintegration needs of female ex-combatants.

1.2 Social Reintegration of Ex-combatants

Social reintegration aims at transforming the posture and mindsets of ex-combatants so that they are able to assimilate back into civilian life as active participants within their respective communities (UN, 2007). War situations lead to the formation of new social bonds, norms and values, different from those valued and expected by civilian societies, which have a lasting influence on the social development of ex-combatants (Batel, 2011). In a way, the impact and long-term effects of war related experiences in ex-combatants represent distressing events with ramifications for their social system. The main purpose of social reintegration is thus to deconstruct war created experiences, social norms and values which are often at variance with those of a normal society. According to ILO (2009), ex-combatants need psychosocial support to help them assimilate back to civilian life. Psychosocial support for ex-combatants covers counselling and rehabilitative programmes that help them to change their mindsets so that they deal with their past experiences and accept their new status as civilians.

1.2.1 Counselling of Ex-combatants as Part of Psychosocial Support

Counselling is an important aspect of social reintegration of ex-combatants. McGuiness (1998) refers to counselling as a helping process that uses trust engendered by a special kind of relationship to help individuals get access to a greater part of their personal resources as a means of responding to the challenges confronting their lives. Thus, counselling helps ex-combatants to come to terms with their past and embrace the future. During the war, ex-combatants experience torture, death of close comrades, kill in self-defence or as part and parcel of being a combatant, and in some cases commit acts of human rights abuse. These war experiences create post war traumatic stress. Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to a traumatic or distressing event such as violent crime or terrorist attack. The reactions include intense emotional and or physical reactions.

According to Mazarire and Rupiya (2000) post-traumatic stress is usually associated with symptoms such as sleep disturbances, flashbacks, anxiety and over-reacting in situations which need one to be calm. Barth (2002) notes that post war traumatic stress, if not properly dealt with through counselling, can cause ex-combatants to develop apathy, depression, low esteem, fatalism and a sense that life is pointless and unfair. Charema (2010) notes that counselling, helps ex-combatants to gain useful insights into their problems in such a way that they view problems in a new or different light, which helps them to make rational, constructive decisions meant to change behaviour and find solutions to their problems. As a result, most conflict reconstruction programmes have counselling trauma centres to help ex-combatants deal with their war time experiences in a post conflict situation. The expectation in Zimbabwe after the war in 1980 was that trauma centres ⁴were going to be established throughout the country to provide specialized counselling to ex-combatants.

1.3.1 Rehabilitation of Ex-combatants as Part of Psychosocial Support

Rehabilitation as a component of social reintegration is used, not in the criminal justice sense as a complement to punishment, but to signify a generative forging of new life out of the ruins of the old (ILO, 2009). This can mean to say that rehabilitation seeks to help ex-combatants adjust their lives to suit the peace conditions that prevail in a post war situation. According to Medi (1998) rehabilitation is a process of social, political and economic adjustment to, and underpinning of, conditions of relative peace in which the participants, especially those who have been disempowered and immiserated by violence, can begin to prioritise future goals, beyond immediate survival. Survivors not only need a stake in achieving these adjustment goals but need ultimate direction over the means to achieve them.

³ The Zimbabwean army at this stage consisted of members from the Rhodesian army, ZANLA and ZIPRA cadres.

⁴ Trauma centres are hospitals equipped and staffed to provide care for patients suffering from major traumatic injuries.

The foregoing definition of rehabilitation by Medi (1998) assumes the transformative approach to rehabilitation. Thus, in this study, rehabilitation included the creation of enabling conditions and conducive environment for ex-combatants to adjust their lives to conform to the post war situation (Charema, 2010). In relation to Zimbabwe, ex-combatants needed a transformative adjustment of their behaviours in conformity with the post war situation. Adjustment of lives and lifestyles is essential if ex-combatants are to fit seamlessly into civilian life. War situation is often associated with a harsh, brutish and abnormal existence. Charema (2010) posits that during the Zimbabwean armed struggle, ex-combatants violated conventional moral conduct as they robbed shops, committed acts of sexual abuse, hijacked trucks of goods and abused drugs and alcohol as a means of survival. This was acceptable because it was a war situation. Such morally wrong behaviours have no room in a non-war situation. Hence if ex-combatants are not sufficiently rehabilitated, they may relapse back in those war time behaviours which are anti-social and thus threatening post war peace and stability. Again the general expectation was that trauma centres were to be set up nationwide for the specialized counselling of ex-combatants.

The UNDP (2003) notes that rehabilitation has to be extended to the receiving communities where the ex-combatants settle and live for probably the rest of their lives. Often, after a period of conflict, people are suspicious and fearful of ex-combatants basing on their past experiences, which they endured during the war. They are supposed to live, interact and relate with the victims of war in the post war era (Khadka, 2010). The ex-combatants were and are still stigmatised and painted in bad light. Thus, communities and society at large needed to be educated, once war was over, to accept that ex-combatants are normal people like them and needed to be accepted back into normal civilian life. Female ex-combatants suffered prejudice at the hands of their receiving communities and society at large because of societal suspicions and stigmatisation. Barth (2002) notes that due to societal stigmatization, ex-combatants are well known to face difficulties in getting accepted by traditional society, and the consequence may be that they do not come forward to receive the assistance they are entitled to, but on the contrary try to hide their past.

The problem of societal stigmatisation is rife in Zimbabwe. Barth (2002) observes that there are examples in which ex-combatant female try to be proud of their contributions as soldiers, but are nevertheless rejected by civil society. It has been further noted that Zimbabwean female ex-combatants describe how, upon their return to civil society they were pulled between living up to the image of a superwoman while being looked down upon by society (Zimbabwe Female's Writers, 2000). The above observation clearly brings to fore the fact that the values of civil society and the values of the war of liberation are often in contradiction with each other and females who have been combatants in the war have to suppress the soldier in them in order to be accepted and fit

into civil society. In a way, Zimbabwean society was not fully prepared to accept female ex-combatants and this affected their full social integration into civilian life hence the need to look into the experiences of female ex-combatants after Zimbabwe's war of liberation.⁵

Objective

The study's main objective was;

To explore war time experiences of female ex-combatants during Zimbabwe's war of liberation.

Statement of the Problem

Feminist critics have noted that after the war, Zimbabwean female ex-combatants felt, and still feel, betrayed by the post-colonial government (Chogugudza, 2012). This gendered thinking affected the reintegration strategies as nothing much seems to have been done to adequately assimilate female ex-combatants back into mainstream society or civilian life after the war time experiences. It is against this background that this study sought to explore the war time experiences by female ex-combatants in the Zimbabwe war of liberation.

II. METHODOLOGY

Experiences of people who have gone through war time experiences is best understood through their personal interactions. The study was therefore developed using information obtained from key-informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with female ex-combatants. The researcher selected six Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) female ex-combatants, six Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) female ex-combatants, four male ZANLA ex-combatants and four ZIPRA male ex-combatants using purposive sampling.

Employing qualitative research data gathering techniques and interpretation enabled the researcher to interview the participants while using observation as another data gathering tool. The interactions with the participants went beyond the spoken words. Some of the responses could be observed through non-verbal cues. For example, the researcher observed how they physically responded to questions while recalling events, some of which culminated in tears, laughter, getting lost in memory and in extreme cases, breaking down. People who have gone through distressing experiences speak not only through the words of mouths but also through the non-verbal responses to questions and statements and as a counsellor, the researcher observed these appropriately applied requisite counselling qualities.

The thematic analysis approach was used to analyze data. Thematic analysis was chosen because of its simplicity and high cost effectiveness. In-depth interviewing notes and FGDs notes provided the basis for the data. According to Gray (2010:) thematic analysis is historically a conventional practice in qualitative research which involves searching through data to identify any recurrent patterns. A theme is a

⁵ Zimbabwe got its independence from colonial rule in 1980.

cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings that usually emerge through the inductive analytic process which characterizes the phenomenological qualitative paradigm. The key is to transform the data into explicit codes which can enable the encoding of data into themes, relationships and indicators.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the interview scripts. This analysis involved the identification of recurrent themes which highlighted accounts and experiences of women ex-combatants which was considered relevant to the study. After the recurring themes were identified, data was coded under themes. A structure from the coded data that gave a rich description of the war time experiences of women ex-combatants was developed.

The gathered data contextualised experiences from physical and non-physical scars of warfare. Responses were analysed and contextualised to give meaning to various stories and narrations which helped to shape the discussions in the research. The research, therefore, broke down the experiences into four categories, namely; witnessing death for the first time, hunger and extreme deprivation, sexual exploitation, abuse, unwanted pregnancies and premature motherhood, as well as social deprivation caused by broken up family ties, before concluding.

III. FINDINGS

3.1 Witnessing Death for the First Time

The Second Chimurenga, like all wars, was a brutal affair which exposed the cruel nature of human beings and left an indelible mark on the psychosis of those who lived through the war experience. This was contrary to the expectations of the female ex-combatants who went to war. The female, initially had a romanticised perception of the war, where they could leave their home areas to get guns in either Mozambique or Zambia, 'come back, fight and remove the white government just like that. Comrade Chiedza, a female ex-combatant who was with the ZANLA forces in Mozambique expressed the general view held by most female ex-combatants before they went to war:

Before we went to war, we thought war was a simple affair, where we could just simply leave our parents and comfort of our communities to get guns, come back and overthrow the Smith regime. The notion that war meant death and hardship did not really ring a bell in our minds. Our excitement about joining the war was further given an appetizer by the macho image portrayed to us by guerrillas at pungwes⁷ (whole night gatherings) and the war propaganda we heard on the radio.

⁶ Mozambique is Zimbabwe's neighbouring country on the eastern side while Zambia is a northern neighbour.

⁷ Pungwes were revolutionary community meetings that were used by the Zimbabwean liberation movement during their war against the colonial regime.

This romanticised view of the war was not to be, because in the real war, as the female ex-combatants were to discover, war was full of mind excruciating experiences. Most of the female ex-combatants interviewed had gone to war whilst they were still teenagers and had not therefore witnessed first-hand psychologically shattering phenomenon such as death. Female ex-combatants, interviewed disclosed that they experienced death for the first time they went to war in the camps. For instance, Chido, a female ex-combatant who fought the war under ZANLA pointed out that:

The war traumatised me in a big way, as I witnessed the death of close comrades and sometimes close relatives who were bombed or shot in cold blood by the Smith regime during raids on our camps. I was very young barely 17 years, yet I went through the emotions of bearing the bereavement of colleagues.

Young as they were, the female ex-combatants had buried the dead in mass graves and this further traumatised them. The burials were often a crude operation which involved shovelling the sometimes disfigured bodies of the dead into pits which served as graves. One female ex-combatant interviewed stated that:

As if witnessing the death of comrades was not enough, we had to bury the dead in mass graves. Some had missing limbs or burnt beyond recognition and there we were burying them. This was a terrifying experience, a radical departure from the rosy perceptions we had before we went to war (MaNdlovu a ZIPRA female ex-combatant).

From the participants' responses, witnessing the death of fellow comrades and burying the dead at such a tender age affected their psychological state. Most of the female ex-combatants interviewed repeatedly pointed out they often experienced nightmares even 34 years after independence, withdrawal or moments of hysterical attacks as a result of their encounters with death at an early age. These are indications of inbound mind disturbances which are not expressed explicitly but kept within (Colliers, 1995). This connotes pathological responses to trauma which require external assistance in the form of counselling for the female ex-combatants to cope in the current life.

3.2 Hunger and Extreme Deprivation in the Camps

The war exposed female ex-combatants to unspeakable deprivation and hunger. In the camps food was always in short supply and this made it extremely impossible for the combatants to have a balanced healthy diet that kept the body in good health. The hunger was beyond their imagination. A female ex-combatant, Maggie, who was with the ZANLA forces at Chimoio⁸ disclosed that the acuteness of the food shortages was shown by the fact that some females ended up experiencing irregular menstrual periods.

⁸ Chimoio is a Mozambiquan town that is situated close to the eastern border of Zimbabwe. Some war combatants were based in Chimoio.

From the foregoing sentiments, the war had an effect on the physiological state of female ex-combatants. Processes such as menstrual periods are natural processes which any normal woman go through for self-renewal and rejuvenation. If this natural process is affected, it does not only cause physiological harm, it can also result in mental disturbances that impair the rational state of some female. A number of female ex-combatants complained that failure to go for menstrual periods caused incessant headaches. Due to the shortage of medicines such as painkillers, the female ex-combatants had to endure pain in the face of hunger.

For those who had their menstrual periods, it turned out to be a horrible experience as they did not have accessories such as cotton wool and pads to deal with the soiling. A female ex-combatant who referred to herself as Comrade Nehanda told the researcher that:

During the war, the time of menstrual periods was a horrendous experience as we did not have cotton wool or any sanitary wear. This forced some comrades to use leaves, cloth cut from our already torn clothes. Just imagine inserting leaves into the womanhood, this compromised our health.

From Comrade Nehanda's response it is clear that deprivation of basics such as clothes and sanitary wear could traumatise and pose a health hazard to the female ex-combatants. Responses from the female ex-combatants also showed that lack of sanitary wear for the female ex-combatant during their menstrual periods at times became a source of ridicule from their male counterparts. In the African culture of most Zimbabweans, issues of menstruation are a secret of female which is only revealed among themselves and not to any strange persons, especially men. Culturally, women in their menstrual periods were viewed as dirty and could not perform some special cultural duties. A female ex-combatant who trained with ZANLA forces in Mozambique, Chidamoyo, stated that:

Our male colleagues would pour scorn on us if they discovered that we were menstruating. This was usually noticed during training that involved moving in water as we did not have pads to limit the flow of the blood. We would mess the water with menstrual blood and this irked the male combatants who did not feel comfortable to wade in water which had been messed up.

Female ex-combatants who participated in this study stated that in such training sessions female ex-combatants felt uncomfortable and this affected their mental disposition. Some female ex-combatants faked illness to avoid being ridiculed by their male comrades during training. Though the war engendered fictitious egalitarianism among all the combatants this sense of equality was shattered when female ex-combatants experienced their menstrual periods.

Deprivation was not limited to food, medicines and sanitary wear, the female ex-combatants highlighted that they lacked proper clothing during the war. They did not have proper

shoes and uniforms suitable for fighting the war. Judie, a female ex-combatant posits that:

Women have delicate bodies which need special clothing. For example, during the war we lacked bras to cover our breasts and this affected us during training. Sagging breasts normally limit swift movement.

In a way, hunger and extreme deprivation completely degraded the female ex-combatants. In order to survive the anguish of the bush life, female ex-combatants had to develop an 'I do not care' attitude. Some of them carried this attitude over into independent Zimbabwe and this needed to be reversed in the post war period. Once the human mind develops a negative attitude towards life, it creates problems of adjustment and adaptation which require high levels of psychosocial support for the victims to extinct such behaviours (Ginifer, 2012). Female ex-combatants needed psychosocial support in the post war period to help them wipe out or mitigate the effects of these negative emotions.

3.3 Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; Unwanted Pregnancies and Premature Motherhood

A recurring theme that came out of the participants was that female ex-combatants experienced sexual exploitation and abuse. This was raised by male ex-combatants who trained under ZANLA forces. From the interviews, it appeared that unlike ZIPRA which had separate training camps for female and male combatants, ZANLA training camps mixed both male and female combatants. It emerged from participants' responses that female ex-combatants in ZANLA camps experienced high incidences of sexual exploitation and abuse. Acts of sexual exploitation and abuse were mostly perpetrated by high ranking officials within the camps who had the powers to determine who gets what, where and how. The powers of the high ranking officials were strongly felt by the female ex-combatants in an environment characterized by hunger and extreme deprivation. These powers were often abused or exercised unfairly to entice female ex-combatants into illicit sex. This point was poignantly highlighted by a male ZANLA ex-combatant who confided to the researcher that:

Girls suffered sexual exploitation during the war so that they could have a decent meal, clothes and avoid duties that involved hard labour. There was nothing they could do but offer their bodies to the chefs for those seemingly small privileges (Shanty, male ex-combatant).

These sexual abuses and sexual exploitations were experienced by the female whilst they were very young. The female ex-combatant participants stated that the bulk of the combatants who left for Mozambique around 1977 and 1978 were teenagers who were around 15 to 17 years. These groups were made up of very young girls who had not yet experienced sexual encounters, and with older men for that matter. A female ex-combatant, Gringo, informed that she had her first sexual encounter when she was 14 years old with "an older comrade who was almost 40 years old".

Sex at such a young age had its own perils to the female ex-combatants. It was often unprotected sex which exposed and resulted in them contracting sexually related diseases and unwanted pregnancies. In fact, sexual exploitation and abuse resulted in unwanted pregnancies among some female ex-combatants. The worst affected were the teenage female ex-combatants who became expectant mothers without any preparation of any sort. Since most of the female ex-combatant participants were still teenagers when they went to the war, there was bitterness when discussions placed a spotlight on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse. The sentiment expressed by Ndanyadziwa, a female ex-combatant aptly captured the general feeling of most of the female ex-combatants interviewed. She stated that:

Instead of us fighting in the war, we were reduced to “sex machines, there to provide comfort to our male colleagues who saw us as instruments of pleasure.

From the above statement it can be deduced that female ex-combatants were traumatised by the sexual experiences they encountered during the war. This experience occurred to them whilst they were still very young and naive about life. This required specialized psychosocial support to help female ex-combatants cope with such experiences in the post-independence era.

Closely related to sexual exploitation and abuse, and worth special attention in this study, were the issues of forced motherhood raised by the female ex-combatants. Sexual encounters ended up with some female ex-combatants becoming pregnant and subsequent mothers. Pregnancy had its own dangers especially for the teenage would-be mothers. As has been highlighted earlier, life in the camps was characterized by hunger and extreme deprivation of the basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. Pregnant females require a balanced diet and proper clothing to sustain their health and capacity to carry the unborn baby. They also needed psychological support from the spouse who made them pregnant. The tragedy, however, was that the father was usually not known and if were known, refused to take responsibility or did not have the financial and material resources to sustain the mother because of the war situation. One participant recounted a heart rendering experience:

I fell pregnant in Mozambique when I was only 15 years. The male comrade who made me pregnant was a senior camp commander. Upon discovering that I was pregnant he had himself transferred to another base camp and with time I eventually lost track of him. There I was, alone and pregnant with no spouse to share my experiences with. I almost had a miscarriage as a result of the emotional stress I went through. This was worsened by hunger as there was insufficient food to sustain pregnant mothers. I had left home with the hope of going back home to fight the enemy but there I was, pregnant and expecting a fatherless child whose father was only known by a war-time pseudo-name (Brenda, female ex-combatant.)

The above narration shows that unwanted pregnancies among the teenage female ex-combatants were a humiliating affair on many fronts. Firstly, the feeling of rejection that the pregnant female ex-combatants, in instances where the father refused responsibility of the pregnancy, had to deal with was sometimes too much to bear (Khadka, 2010). Failure to handle such stress could result in miscarriages which were not properly cared for because of poor medical facilities. Secondly, there was also the shame of being mother to a fatherless child at a young age in the midst of a war. In some cases, a child became mother to another child, particularly when the mother was a teenager. Thirdly, how was the fatherless child going to be accepted by the family of the female ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwe when the parents had not received any lobola as envisaged by African culture? For those who believed in African tradition, how was it going to be done when it comes to the appeasement of the spirits of the child in case of afflictions of a spiritual nature? Combined, these factors placed an emotional burden on the female ex-combatants who had unwanted pregnancies and were forced into motherhood before they were fully prepared for it. The postmodern feminist theory sought to highlight these tensions in society which tend to marginalize the female reintegration in the post war period (Nyangairi, 2010).

3.4 Social Deprivation caused by the Breakup of Familial Ties

The war caused the breakup of family ties as combatants had left their families and sojourn with strangers in a foreign land such as Mozambique and Zambia. Female ex-combatants interviewed revealed that the loss of contact with their parents, siblings and other relatives created a sense of isolation. This caused moments of home sickness which affected their mental state. A female ex-combatant, Nobuhle, who trained with ZIPRA in Zambia told the researcher that:

I left for the war in 1975 and went to Zambia where I received my military training. The problem with Zambia was that it was difficult and dangerous to cross the Zambezi River. So we were mostly confined to the Freedom Camp where life became routine. There was little action apart from the occasional bombings by the Rhodesian forces. As a result, most of my comrades including me became homesick. At times we became so withdrawn because of the stress induced by the fact that we missed home, our parents, siblings and that tranquil community life.

The loss of family ties was a form of social deprivation which affected some female ex-combatants irreparably as some never reunited with their family members again. Those who returned from the war were alienated from their family members by the new war time norms and values which were at variance with those of a normal society (Barth, 2002). Some female ex-combatants had developed wild behaviours which were not compatible with those of their family members who had not gone to war. This created problems of adjustment and assimilation for the female ex-combatants.

3.5 Psychosocial Support: Counselling

When the participants were asked about how counselling was done to address the needs of female ex-combatants the responses were:

There was no special counselling programme to deal with the traumatic experiences that war veterans encountered during the war (Magaramombe, female ex-combatant).

Contrary to our expectations the new government did not put in place a counselling mechanism that would help female ex-combatants find solutions to problems they faced in post independent Zimbabwe (Loveness, a female ex-combatant)

The study noted that the new government of Zimbabwe did not have an explicit programme to provide counselling services to the female ex-combatants. Some basic counselling services were available to female ex-combatants who joined the army, police and the private sector. The bulk of the female ex-combatants who did not join the army, police or the private sector after receiving demobilization money had to nurse their wartime experiences silently alone.

When the female ex-combatants were asked on what it meant to them that they did not receive proper counselling in post independent Zimbabwe they had this to say:

The war was a nasty experience which affected our mental condition. Surely lack of counselling means that we have to bottle up these nasty experiences as a result we tend to lose our cool on simple matters that could be solved amicably (Jekesa, a female ex-combatant) .

After the war there was an emphasis on physical injuries which are visible to the naked eye. But during the war we were mentally scarred as a result some of us no longer think in a rational and coherent manner. This could have been mitigated had we received proper counselling (KaNcube male ex-combatant).

The foregoing expressions indicate that there was no individualised counselling given to female ex-combatants when they returned from the war. As a result, female ex-combatants could not correct some of the negative behaviours that they sometimes manifested linked to their war time experiences.

The participants alerted the researcher to the fact that counselling was not only denied the female ex-combatants but was not also available to the immediate family members of the combatants and the wider communities that they were to reintegrate. One of the participants stated that:

There was need to also help our families and communities' members to accept us back into civilian life and to deal with incidents of wayward behaviours that are sometimes manifested by the female ex-combatants as a result of their war time experiences (Getrude, female ex-combatants).

From the study, it was revealed there was no systemic counselling offered to the host communities so that they could accommodate the female ex-combatants given their peculiar character and experiences as a result of their war time encounters. Counselling needed to be done at three levels. Level one, the female ex-combatants needed and still need proper counselling to help them cope with moments of irrationality that were linked to their distressing war time experiences. At level two, immediate family members needed counselling so that they could accept back the female ex-combatants who had been away for a long time. Some female ex-combatants brought back babies and children whose fathers were not known, in such cases the family members needed counselling to help them accept these children of the war (most whom are grown men and women now). Level three, the host communities to which female ex-combatants were to be integrated needed counselling interventions so that they could forgive those ex-combatants who had committed atrocities during the war and accept those who returned from the war as civilian members of society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Female ex-combatants performed multiple duties and assumed various responsibilities during the war. These duties and responsibilities were assumed under difficult conditions which caused mental distress and trauma which were carried over into the peace time. However, after the war there was no attempt to consult the female ex-combatants so that they could narrate their war time duties to inform programmes such as psychosocial support. Female ex-combatants who bore children during the war had to endure social ridicule from their family, community members and society at large for bearing fatherless children. They were chastised by society and their families for going off to war to engage in immoral behaviour which resulted in fatherless children instead of fighting the enemy. Combined, these war time experiences traumatized the female ex-combatants to such an extent that they are still living with these stress disorders years after the war. The experiences that female ex-combatants underwent during the war are still with them and failure to deal with them through counselling and rehabilitation means that psychosocial support was not put place to help them cope.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

• Provision of Systemic Counselling⁹

Female ex-combatants are still suffering from war related psychological stress. The government needs to set up counselling units within the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare centres such as clinics and hospitals where female ex-combatants can go as individuals and their families to access systemic counselling. Counselling associations such as the Zimbabwe National Association for Mental Health (ZNAMA) and CONNECT-ZIST can enter into collaborative

⁹ Systemic counselling is therapy that includes counselling intervention that addresses clients/ female ex-combatants as part of a system (family) as opposed to individual intervention.

partnerships with the government where these associations offer counselling services to female ex-combatants.

- *Rehabilitation of Female ex-combatants*

Female ex-combatants who were injured during the war still need rehabilitation and those developed stress related behaviours need rehabilitation services. The government should open up rehabilitation centres which are like the Tsanga Lodge in Nyanga to ex-combatants who are not serving in the forces for rehabilitation purposes. This can allow female ex-combatants to use existing rehabilitation facilities at low cost or no cost at all.

VI. SUMMARY

The study sought to bring forward the experiences of female ex-combatants during Zimbabwe's Second Chimurenga (liberation struggle). The study was motivated by a need to show the heroism of female who had extra militating challenges to participating in the war than their male counterparts. The study noted that while both men and women in the struggle faced daunting challenges, the biological make up of female made their struggle more excruciating. Besides the general challenges of shortages of supplies such as food, ammunition, and clothing, female's challenges were increased on the fact that even on clothing, it is not easy for female just to make do with what is available as with men due to their biological make up. Females also go through menstruation which needs sanitary wear if one is not to get embarrassed or ridiculed by fellow combatants. The last major problem was that female became the sexual prey of the male comrades whom they looked up to as fellow comrades and brothers. The subjects of rape, unwanted pregnancies, and being '*child mothers*' left some indelible scars in the hearts and minds of female ex-combatants. The struggle to survive led many women to adopt what can be termed as the '*I don't care*' attitude which while being a strategic survival strategy, saw some female being family outcast on their return from the struggle. The scars might still remain due to the lack of comprehensive counselling during demobilisation and reintegration process. These scars still manifest today as informed by participants.

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