Revisiting Veteran Recognition: The Vetting of Non-Cadres and War Collaborators at Elangeni Centre, Bulawayo (April 2022)

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the vetting of non-cadres and war collaborators at Elangeni Centre in Bulawayo during the April 2022 exercise, focusing on how the process affected dignity, welfare, and psychosocial wellbeing, and proposing reforms to improve Zimbabwe's compensation frameworks. The study aimed to document lived experiences of marginalized veterans, assess the ethical and emotional impacts of vetting, and recommend reforms. Guided by Transitional Justice Theory and Just War Theory (Jus in Bello and Jus post bellum), the research analyzed vetting as both an institutional mechanism and a moral obligation, emphasizing recognition, fairness, and dignity restoration. A qualitative explanatory design was adopted, situating the inquiry within interpretivism. Data were collected through key informant interviews with veterans, officials, and community leaders, complemented by document analysis of legislative texts, constitutional provisions, and reports such as the ZIPRA Veterans Trust Report (2022) and the ZANU PF Central Committee Report (2021). Using thematic analysis, transcripts and documents were coded around three objectives. The study found that vetting was experienced as humiliating, politicized, and procedurally opaque, with affiliation-based questioning reopening old wounds, corruption undermining credibility, and lack of psychosocial support retraumatizing participants. Women and elderly veterans were particularly disadvantaged, while delays and irregularities eroded trust in institutions. Statutory frameworks disproportionately favored combatant cadres, leaving informal actors marginalized. Overall, the research concludes that Zimbabwe's vetting process has failed to meet constitutional and ethical standards, reproducing exclusion and trauma rather than recognition and healing. It argues that reforms must embed standardized criteria, trauma-informed support, community participation, and depoliticized oversight, aligning national practice with global transitional justice principles and ensuring that all contributors to the liberation struggle are recognized with dignity and fairness.

Key Words: War collaborators, Vetting processes, Transitional justice, Compensation frameworks

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Globally, vetting is a cornerstone of transitional justice, intended to restore public trust, uphold human rights, and prevent recurrence of abuse in post-conflict societies. According to Duthie (2019), vetting processes aim to exclude individuals responsible for serious violations from public service, while affirming the dignity of victims and survivors. However, Mayer (2017) and Teitel (2014) argue, vetting often fails when politicized, poorly designed, or implemented without ethical safeguards. In many cases, it becomes a tool for elite consolidation rather than a mechanism for justice, leading to exclusion, retraumatization, and institutional decay. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC, 2015) emphasizes that vetting must be guided by principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability, yet these are frequently undermined by partisan interests and weak oversight. Across Africa, transitional justice efforts have struggled to meaningfully include non-combatant actors such as war collaborators, detainees, and civilian supporters of liberation movements. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, for instance, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions acknowledged the role of non-combatants but failed to translate recognition into material benefits or institutional reform (Sawyer, 2019; Sesay, 2020). South Sudan's

attempts at reintegration have similarly marginalized non-combatant veterans due to fragmented policy and ethnicized politics (Akol, 2021). These cases reflect a broader continental pattern where transitional justice is often elite-driven, with limited grassroots participation and inadequate attention to psychosocial wellbeing. Gready and Robins (2014) argue, transitional justice must move beyond legalism to embrace "transformative justice" that addresses structural inequalities and lived experiences.
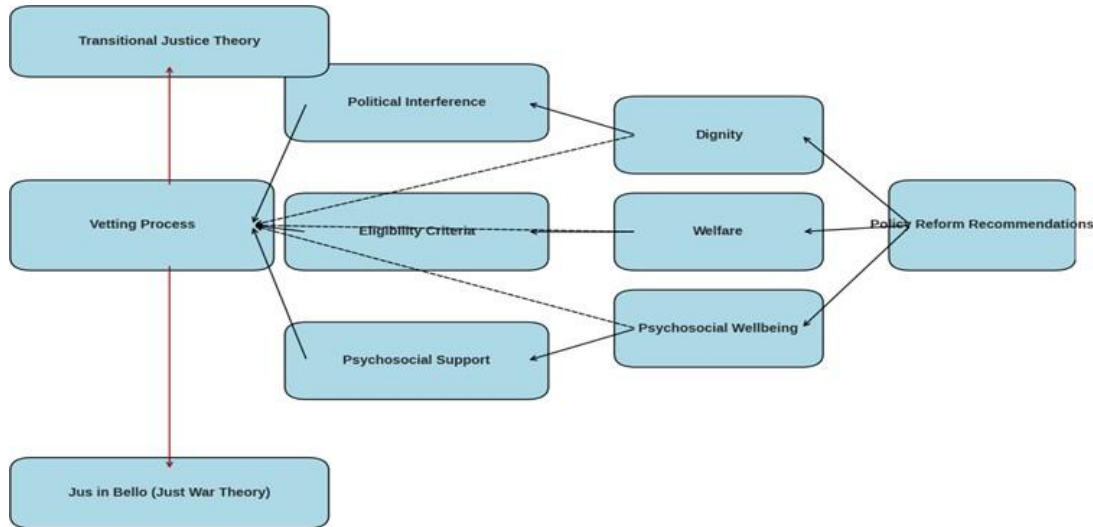
In Zimbabwe, the vetting of war collaborators and non-cadres, those who supported the liberation struggle without formal combat roles has long been contentious. While the Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12] provides legal recognition, implementation has been marred by politicization, bureaucratic opacity, and exclusionary practices. The April 2022 vetting exercise at Elangeni Centre in Bulawayo, which registered over 205,000 individuals (Herald News, 2022), was intended to identify beneficiaries for a new welfare scheme. However, field reports and testimonies reveal widespread frustration, procedural ambiguity, and emotional distress among participants. Many were subjected to humiliating questioning, denied participation due to unclear criteria, and felt re-traumatized by the process (ZIPRA Veterans Trust, 2022). The lack of counselling, ethical safeguards, and standardized frameworks also undermined the credibility of the exercise and deepened the marginalization of these veterans.

Institutional gaps within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, coupled with legislative deficiencies in the War Victims Compensation Act, have allowed bogus veterans to access benefits while genuine collaborators are excluded (Nyathi, 2004; Sadomba, 2011; Hove, 2014). The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), initially tasked with veterans' affairs, lacked the mandate and capacity to address the complex needs of non-cadres and war collaborators. Although the Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association (ZLWVA) later pressed for legislative reform, implementation remained skewed toward combatant cadres, side-lining other categories of veterans. Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) argue, Zimbabwe's vetting processes lack ethical clarity, participatory mechanisms, and psychosocial support, resulting in a system that perpetuates trauma rather than healing. The Zimbabwean Constitution mandates respect and recognition for all veterans, including war collaborators and detainees. Yet, as the President of Zimbabwe, in the 2nd Republic, Cde ED Mnangagwa acknowledged in the ZANU PF Central Committee Report (2021), the definition of a war collaborator remains contested, complicating vetting and compensation efforts. The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), tasked with promoting transitional justice, has struggled to assert its role due to political interference and limited capacity (Scarnecchia, 2021). Without clear policy frameworks, ethical guidelines, and inclusive participation, vetting risks becoming a performative exercise that reinforces elite narratives while silencing marginalized voices.

Despite government efforts to initiate vetting exercises and establish welfare schemes, the vetting of non-cadres and war collaborators in Zimbabwe remains deeply contested which undermines dignity, psychosocial wellbeing, and access to compensation for thousands of marginalized veterans. As of 2022, over 205,000 individuals registered for vetting, yet many were frustrated out of the process due to institutional neglect and abuse at vetting centers (Herald News, 2022). The problem persists because reforms seemingly have been failing to reflect lived realities. This study responds to these unresolved issues by documenting the lived experiences of non-cadres and war collaborators at Elangeni Centre, analysing the ethical and psychosocial impacts of the vetting process, and proposing inclusive reforms. The research seeks to reposition marginalized veterans within national memory and welfare systems. Ultimately, it aims to contribute towards restoration of dignity for non-combatant veterans, promote accountability, and ensure that transitional justice serves all. The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the vetting experiences of non-cadres and war collaborators at Elangeni Centre, Bulawayo.

2. To assess the effects of the vetting process on dignity, welfare, and psychosocial wellbeing of participants.

3. To recommend reforms for improving Zimbabwe's vetting and compensation frameworks.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study positions the vetting process variable which influences three key dependent outcomes, that is; dignity, welfare, and psychosocial wellbeing of non-cadres and war collaborators. These relationships are shaped by mediating factors such as political interference, eligibility criteria, and psychosocial support, which either facilitate or hinder the realization of just outcomes.

The framework was guided by two complementary theories that is; the Transitional Justice Theory, which informs analysis of institutional reform, inclusion, and compensation; and Just War Theory (Jus in Bello and Jus post bellum principles) (Walzer (1977); Orend (2006),which provides ethical grounding for recognition and humane treatment of all war actors. The theories offered complementary lenses for examining the ethical, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions of vetting in Zimbabwe. The Transitional Justice Theory provided the foundation for understanding how post-conflict societies address legacies of violence, exclusion, and institutional breakdown. It emphasizes that justice had to be both retrospective and transformative, encompassing mechanisms such as vetting (Hayner (2011). Just War Theory provided ethical imperatives to the aftermath of war, stressing fair treatment, recognition, and restoration of dignity for all actors. The combination of these two frameworks enabled a multidimensional analysis that bridged institutional critique with moral reflection, aligning directly with the study's objectives

The framework also incorporates a feedback loop that connects empirical findings to policy reform recommendations, ensuring that the research contributes to practical change. This loop reflects the transformative ambition of the study to not only document experiences but also influence future vetting frameworks. Transitional Justice Theory supports this by emphasizing the interdependence of justice mechanisms and the need for context-sensitive reform, while Jus in Bello reinforces the moral obligation to treat all war actors with dignity, regardless of formal status. This framework enables a multidimensional analysis that bridges institutional critique, ethical reflection, and lived experience, ultimately guiding the development of inclusive and trauma-informed vetting policies in Zimbabwe.

Methodically, a qualitative research approach was adopted with an explanatory design, chosen to capture the complex, socially constructed realities of vetting as experienced by non-cadres and war collaborators. The explanatory design allowed the researcher to go beyond description, interrogating the underlying causes of exclusion, humiliation, and institutional failure within the vetting process. Through situating the inquiry within interpretivism, the study emphasized context, meaning, and participant voices, aligning with transitional justice scholarship that privileges narrative and experiential evidence (Hayner, 2011; Robins & Gready, 2019). Data collection relied on key informant interviews and document analysis. Key informant interviews provided rich, first-hand accounts of how participants experienced the vetting exercise at Elangeni Centre. These interviews captured emotional responses, perceptions of fairness, and reflections on institutional conduct. Document analysis was conducted on legislative texts such as the Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12], the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), and reports including the ZIPRA Veterans Trust Report (2022) and the

ZANU PF Central Committee Report (2021). This triangulation ensured that findings were grounded both in lived experiences and in institutional frameworks, strengthening validity.

The target population for the study comprised non cadres and war collaborators who presented themselves for vetting at Elangeni Training Centre in Bulawayo during the April 2022 exercise. These individuals represented a marginalized group within Zimbabwe's veteran community, often excluded from recognition and compensation despite their contributions to the liberation struggle. The population was purposively selected because their experiences directly addressed the research objectives. Key informants included participants who had undergone vetting, representatives of veteran associations, and local leaders involved in the process. This purposive sampling ensured that the study captured diverse perspectives within the non-cadre and collaborator category, while maintaining focus on those most affected by the vetting exercise. For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis, a method well suited to qualitative research. Interview transcripts and documents were coded in line with research objectives: vetting experiences, impacts on dignity and wellbeing, and reform recommendations.

Historical Overview Of Vetting In Transitional Justice

Vetting within transitional justice has historically served as a mechanism for determining who legitimately qualifies as a veteran after conflict. It has evolved from a tool of accountability into a framework for recognition affirming the dignity of those who contributed to war efforts and ensuring that compensation, status, and institutional inclusion are granted fairly. Teitel (2000) situates vetting within the "rule of law" phase of transitional justice, where societies rebuild institutions by legally and ethically defining who merits honour and trust. In post–World War II Europe, this was evident in Germany's denazification and Japan's post-imperial purges, which not only removed perpetrators but also established legitimate categories of veterans while excluding those complicit in systemic abuses (Dower, 1999). These early models framed veteran status narrowly around formal military service and ideological alignment, setting a precedent for exclusionary recognition.

In developed democracies, the determination of veteran status gradually shifted toward structured, rights-based processes. Eastern European lustration laws, for example, sought to vet individuals for public office based on prior affiliations, but Mayer (2017) argues that these often blurred the line between justice and politics, undermining fairness and transparency. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) did not formally define or vet veterans, but instead created a moral framework of recognition through conditional amnesty and public testimony. Wilson (2021) critiques this approach for failing to materially compensate non-combatant contributors, highlighting the persistent gap between symbolic recognition and substantive veteran welfare. These cases underscore a broader global tension: while transitional justice mechanisms increasingly acknowledge diverse wartime roles, the formal determination of veteran status remains contested and uneven.

Across Africa, the question of who qualifies as a veteran has been shaped by political dynamics, institutional capacity, and historical legacies. In Liberia, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended excluding certain individuals from public office, but Sawyer (2019) notes that elite resistance undermined broader recognition efforts, leaving many informal contributors unacknowledged. Kenya's post-2007 vetting of police and judicial officers initially promised transparency, yet Ghai (2020) shows how political interference eroded its credibility, complicating efforts to define legitimate service. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mobekk (2019) highlights how DDR programs marginalized informal war actors—especially women and youth—by failing to recognize their contributions as veterans. These examples reflect a continental pattern where formal combatant status is privileged, while collaborators, informants, and civilian supporters are excluded from veteran frameworks.

Southern Africa presents similar tensions. In South Africa, the TRC emphasized symbolic justice but did not establish a formal veteran recognition process, leaving non-combatant contributors without institutional status or compensation. Lambourne (2019) argues that this omission weakened the reintegration of informal actors and perpetuated social exclusion.

From a national Zimbabwean angle, vetting in Zimbabwe emerged within a distinctly legalistic tradition anchored in the War Veterans' Act [Chapter 11:15] of 1995, which defined veterans as those who underwent

military training and "participated consistently and persistently" in the liberation struggle between 1962 and 1980. In practice, this statutory framing underwrote the 1997 compensation moment, ZW$50,000 gratuities and ZW$2,000 monthly pensions, administered through a government-led screening platform intended to establish eligibility and manage payouts. Contemporary accounts and policy analyses noted that while the framework promised welfare, its rollout bore the hallmarks of political commitment more than institutionalized social protection, with a dedicated fund created but contested in terms of sustainability and design (World Bank, 2011; de Greiff, 2015). Interviews from this study echoed that initial justification: veterans themselves did not demand vetting as an end in itself; they accepted it as an administrative necessity to secure orderly, dignified compensation.

Literature critiques have consistently shown that the legal definition and administrative instruments were interpreted in ways that privileged combatant cadres, narrowing recognition for non-cadres and war collaborators. Nyathi (2004) documented ambiguities and uneven implementation that entrenched cadre-centric benefits. Sadomba (2011) traced the political economy of veteran recognition, demonstrating how organizational power, particularly through the Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association (ZLWVA) shaped allocations and status in ways that favored formal fighters. Hove (2014) revisited veteran welfare, finding systemic bias and bureaucratic opacity that hindered inclusive recognition. These studies converge on a central tension: a law written to encompass a broad veteran community was operationalized through procedures that effectively sidelined informal contributors whose wartime participation did not fit combatant benchmarks. The consolidation of veteran politics in the 1990s marked a turning point. ZLWVA's mobilization pressed the state to expand recognition and compensation, yet successive vetting exercises became vehicles for administrative gatekeeping and, at times, partisan manipulation. As vetting stretched into the post-2013 constitutional era with its stronger commitments to dignity and equality, institutional capacity and autonomy lagged. Scarnecchia (2021) shows how the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), mandated to promote justice and reconciliation, struggled to assert oversight amid political pressures, weakening ethical safeguards around vetting. The United Nations guidance on rule-of-law tools and non-recurrence emphasized non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability in post-conflict processes, but Zimbabwe's practice frequently fell short of these standards (United Nations, 2004; de Greiff, 2015). The April 2022 Elangeni Centre exercise crystallized these historical tensions. With over 205,000 registrants reported in the public record.

Viewed through Transitional Justice Theory, Zimbabwe's trajectory illustrates how vetting, meant to restore moral order and institutional trust, can be co-opted by elite interests or reduced to proceduralism that neglects psychosocial realities (Teitel, 2000; Hayner, 2011). De Greiff's emphasis on the interdependence of justice measures linking vetting to truth-telling, psychosocial support, and inclusive governance, was weakly realized in practice, contributing to "fragmented implementation" and diminished legitimacy. Jus post bellum adds a complementary ethical lens: Walzer's and Orend's arguments for fair post-war treatment and dignity restoration underscore the moral failure of affiliation-weighted questioning, onerous proof burdens, and the sidelining of informal actors who bore risk without formal rank (Walzer, 1977; Orend, 2006). This therefore entails that Zimbabwe's vetting often reproduced hierarchy and harm rather than recognition and healing.

Based on the above, literature converge on the principle that veteran status must be determined through inclusive, transparent, and ethically grounded processes. Duthie (2019) emphasizes that effective vetting requires clear criteria and participatory mechanisms to ensure that all categories of contributors, combatants, collaborators, informants, and detainees are acknowledged as part of the veteran community. Arthur (2009) adds that transitional justice must be victim-centered and inclusive, while Walzer (1977) insists on ethical conduct during and after conflict, including fair treatment of all actors. This affirms the arguement that the determination of veteran status must move beyond narrow legal definitions and embrace the full spectrum of wartime contributions.

Vetting Experiences Across The Globe

Teitel (2000) identifies vetting as a legalistic tool to remove perpetrators from public service and restore trust in governance, but its deeper function has often been to determine who deserves the title of veteran or contributor. In the United States, post-Civil War Reconstruction involved informal vetting of Confederate officials, yet Foner (2014) argues it lacked consistency and failed to establish clear recognition criteria. In post–World War II

Germany, denazification was a formal vetting process, but Mayer (2017) critiques its selective enforcement, noting that many Nazi affiliates were reintegrated due to Cold War pragmatism, raising questions about who truly merited recognition as legitimate citizens. In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement included vetting of security forces; Lundy and McGovern (2015) argue that while symbolic reforms were achieved, deeper structural vetting to determine deservingness was avoided to preserve political stability. Japan's post-imperial purges sought to exclude militarist bureaucrats, but Dower (1999) notes that U.S. occupation authorities prioritized economic recovery over justice, leaving recognition incomplete. In China, post-Mao reforms involved quiet purges of Cultural Revolution perpetrators, but Zhou (2020) highlights their lack of transparency, which undermined fair recognition of victims and contributors.

Across these contexts, scholars converge on the principle that vetting must be ethically grounded and procedurally fair, but diverge on whether recognition should prioritize reconciliation or accountability. Arthur (2009) and Duthie (2019) advocate for victim-centered approaches that affirm dignity, while Mayer (2017) warns that politicized vetting erodes legitimacy and distorts recognition. In Africa, vetting after war has been uneven, often shaped by elite interests and weak institutions. In East Africa, Kenya's post-2007 vetting of police and judiciary was initially lauded for transparency. Ghai (2020) notes that civil society played a key role, but political interference and lack of psychosocial support undermined its credibility, leaving questions about who truly qualified for recognition. In Uganda, Pham et al. (2019) highlight the reintegration of Lord's Resistance Army abductees, noting that while community acceptance was emphasized, formal vetting was absent leading to stigma and exclusion of those who sought recognition as survivors rather than perpetrators.

In West Africa, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended barring individuals from public office, but Sawyer (2019) argues that elite resistance rendered the vetting process symbolic, failing to establish meaningful recognition for victims and collaborators. Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission incorporated community hearings, which Asamoah (2020) credits with fostering trust, though material reparations and recognition remained limited. In Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo's DDR programs aimed to vet and reintegrate ex-combatants. Mobekk (2019) documents how rigid eligibility criteria excluded women and youth, while corruption and poor oversight allowed perpetrators to be reintegrated. This distorted recognition, privileging formal combatants while marginalizing informal contributors. In Southern Africa, South Africa's TRC emphasized symbolic justice. Wilson (2021) critiques its failure to materially compensate victims, especially non-combatants, leaving recognition largely symbolic. Lambourne (2019) calls for a "local turn" in transitional justice, arguing that community-led vetting enhances legitimacy and ensures recognition of diverse contributions.

Zimbabwe's vetting history is deeply shaped by its liberation war legacy and post-independence politics. The Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12] provides legal recognition for war veterans, including non-cadres and war collaborators. However, Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014) argue that implementation has disproportionately favored combatant cadres, sidelining informal actors who nonetheless contributed to the liberation struggle. The formation of the Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association (ZLWVA) in the 1990s marked a shift toward demands for recognition, but vetting processes remained opaque and politicized.

Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) critique Zimbabwe's vetting for lacking ethical clarity and standardized criteria, leaving recognition contested. Scarnecchia (2021) notes that the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) has struggled to assert its mandate due to political pressure and limited resources. The April 2022 vetting exercise at Elangeni Centre registered over 205,000 individuals (Herald News, 2022), yet many were subjected to humiliating questioning, denied recognition, and left without psychosocial support (ZIPRA Veterans Trust, 2022).

Based on the above, literature converge on the need for inclusive, depoliticized vetting that recognizes diverse contributions to the liberation struggle. Yet contradictions persist: how to define a war collaborator, how to verify contributions, and how to balance justice with reconciliation. These unresolved tensions justify this research, which sought to document lived experiences of non-cadres and collaborators, analyse ethical and psychosocial impacts of vetting, and propose reforms grounded in global best practices and Zimbabwean realities.

Effects Of Vetting On Dignity, Welfare, And Psychosocial Wellbeing

Transitional justice literature has increasingly recognized that vetting is not only about institutional accountability it is also about affirming dignity and recognition for those who contributed during conflict. Robins and Gready (2019) argue that transitional justice must address the "affective dimensions" of recovery, including healing and symbolic validation. Teitel (2000) emphasizes that justice mechanisms must restore the moral order disrupted by war, which includes affirming the humanity of those previously marginalized or excluded from veteran status. In developed contexts, the psychosocial impacts of vetting have been studied in relation to recognition. In post-Holocaust Germany, selective denazification left many victims feeling unacknowledged. In South Africa, Wilson (2021) critiques the TRC for failing to provide psychosocial support to non-combatants, leaving their recognition symbolic rather than substantive. In Northern Ireland, Lundy and McGovern (2015) established that symbolic recognition without material reparations left victims emotionally distressed and excluded from veteran-like status. Furthermore, Dower (1999) notes that post-war purges lacked mechanisms for psychological healing, undermining recognition and contributing to long-term fragmentation.

To this effect, Arthur (2009) and Duthie (2019) converge on the idea that justice must be holistic, integrating legal accountability with emotional restoration. Yet they diverge on implementation: Arthur emphasizes state-led frameworks for recognition, while Robins and Gready advocate for community-based, trauma-informed approaches that validate dignity at the grassroots level. Across Africa, the psychosocial effects of vetting, especially in determining who qualifies for recognition are increasingly documented. Pham et al. (2019) studied the reintegration of Lord's Resistance Army abductees in Uganda, finding that lack of formal recognition and counselling led to stigma, depression, and exclusion from community status. Ghai (2020) notes that police vetting post-2007 failed to include trauma support, leaving many emortionally harmed and uncertain of their recognition. In West Africa, Liberia's TRC acknowledged the emotional toll of war but, as Sawyer (2019) argues, its failure to implement psychosocial programs left victims retraumatized and collaborators unrecognized. Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission incorporated community hearings, which Asamoah (2020) credits with fostering emotional healing and symbolic recognition, though material support was limited.

In Central Africa, Mobekk (2019) documents how DDR programs in the DRC excluded women and youth from psychosocial services, denying them recognition as legitimate contributors while privileging formal combatants. This reinforced trauma and social exclusion. In Southern Africa, South Africa's TRC is often cited as a model, yet Wilson (2021) and Lambourne (2019) argue that its emphasis on truth-telling over emotional healing left many victims unheard and unrecognized. Lambourne calls for a "transformative justice" approach that centres psychosocial wellbeing and community agency, ensuring recognition is both symbolic and material.

In Zimbabwe, the psychosocial effects of vetting have been under-researched, particularly for non-cadres and war collaborators seeking recognition. The Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12] provides legal recognition, but lacks provisions for emotional support or dignity restoration. Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014) argue that vetting has been bureaucratic and politicized, failing to affirm the humanity of informal war actors and leaving their recognition contested. Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) highlight that many non-cadres experience humiliation during vetting, including invasive questioning and public rejection, which undermines their dignity. Scarnecchia (2021) notes that the NPRC has limited capacity to provide psychosocial services, leaving veterans emotionally unsupported. The author argued that in many vetting experiences are exposed shame, invisibility, and despair. Many were retraumatized by being forced to recount painful memories without counselling or validation, undermining their recognition as veterans. This echoes Robins and Gready's (2019) concept of "disjointed justice," where institutional vetting fails to address emotional harm or affirm dignity. Literature also resonate with Walzer's (1977) Jus in Bello principle, which insists on ethical treatment of all war actors, including recognition and care after conflict. Emerging issues therefore include the need for trauma-informed vetting, community-based healing, and depoliticized recognition. Literature converge on the importance of restoring dignity and wellbeing, but diverge on how to achieve this. Some advocate for state-led reforms (Chinyonga & Kurebwa, 2023), while others call for civil society and veteran-led initiatives (ZIPRA Veterans Trust, 2022).

Ethical, Inclusive, And Depoliticized Reforms In Vetting And Compensation Frameworks

Globaleforms in vetting and compensation frameworks are increasingly understood as essential to ensuring fair recognition of those who contributed during conflict. Teitel (2000) argues that transitional justice must evolve from punitive legalism to transformative institutional reform, where justice is forward-looking and affirms dignity. Duthie (2019) reinforces this view, asserting that vetting must be embedded within governance reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and recognition of diverse contributions.

In post-war Germany, denazification initially sought to exclude perpetrators, but Mayer (2017) critiques its dilution under Cold War pragmatism, which allowed former Nazi officials to reintegrate without ethical vetting undermining recognition for victims. In South Africa, the TRC emphasized symbolic justice, yet Wilson (2021) notes that its failure to institutionalize ethical vetting and provide compensation left many victims, especially non-combatants, disillusioned. In Japan, Dower (1999) documents how post-imperial purges were reversed under U.S. occupation, prioritizing stability over recognition and accountability. In Northern Ireland, Lundy and McGovern (2015) argue that vetting reforms for security forces were diluted by political compromise, weakening their legitimacy. Across these contexts, scholars converge on the need for ethical clarity, procedural fairness, and depoliticized adjudication in recognition processes, though they diverge on whether reforms should be state-led, civil society-driven, or hybrid. Emerging global trends therefore include integrating psychosocial support into vetting, establishing independent commissions, and codifying eligibility criteria. Arthur (2009) emphasizes grounding reforms in human rights norms and participatory principles, while Robins and Gready (2019) advocate for "transformative justice" that empowers marginalized voices and ensures recognition beyond formal combatants.

Across Africa, reforms in vetting and compensation frameworks reflect diverse political contexts but share common challenges in defining who qualifies for recognition after war. In East Africa, Kenya's post-2007 vetting of police and judiciary was guided by the National Accord and Reconciliation Act. Ghai (2020) praises its legal architecture but critiques its vulnerability to elite capture and lack of community oversight, which left recognition incomplete. In Uganda, Pham et al. (2019) highlight how the absence of formal vetting and compensation for Lord's Resistance Army abductees led to stigma and exclusion, underscoring the need for reforms that recognize informal war actors. In Rwanda, Clark (2020) documents how post-genocide justice focused on perpetrators, while survivors, especially women and children received limited recognition and support. In West Africa, Liberia's TRC proposed barring perpetrators and compensating victims, but Sawyer (2019) notes that elite resistance stalled implementation, undermining recognition. Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission incorporated community hearings and non-partisan adjudication, which Asamoah (2020) credits with fostering trust and ethical reform, though reparations were unevenly distributed.

In Central Africa, Mobekk (2019) critiques DDR programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo for failing to vet reintegrated combatants ethically. Perpetrators were reintegrated without accountability, while victims especially women and youth were excluded from recognition and compensation. Southern Africa presents instructive contrasts. South Africa's TRC is often cited as a model, yet Wilson (2021) and Lambourne (2019) argue that its emphasis on truth-telling over institutional reform left enduring gaps in recognition. Lambourne advocates for "localizing transitional justice," where reforms are designed and led by affected communities, ensuring that vetting is trauma-informed, inclusive, and embedded in broader social justice agendas.

In Zimbabwe, the legal framework for veteran recognition is anchored in the Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12], which includes provisions for war collaborators and non-cadres. However, Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014) argue that implementation has disproportionately favoured combatant cadres, marginalizing informal actors in both vetting and compensation. The formation of the ZLWVA created pressure for reform, but vetting remained opaque, politicized, and vulnerable to manipulation. Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) critique Zimbabwe's vetting for lacking standardized criteria, ethical safeguards, and participatory mechanisms. They document cases where non-cadres were subjected to humiliating questioning, denied benefits due to unclear eligibility standards, and excluded from decision-making. Scarnecchia (2021) notes that the NPRC, mandated to oversee transitional justice, has struggled to assert its role due to political interference and limited resources.

The April 2022 vetting exercise at Elangeni Centre registered over 205,000 individuals (Herald News, 2022). The ZIPRA Veterans Trust (2022) reports that war collaborators and non-cadres experienced trauma, humiliation, and denial of recognition. Reviewed literature underscore the urgent need for ethical, inclusive, and depoliticized reforms that restore dignity and affirm diverse contributions to the liberation struggle. This would include; Defining eligibility criteria which entails grounding recognition of war collaborators and non-cadres in historical evidence and community validation to correct decades of neglect.; Standardizing vetting procedures which has to do with establishing transparent, fair, and accountable protocols to prevent favouritism and ensure equitable recognition; Integrating psychosocial support: Embedding counselling, peer support, and trauma-informed care into vetting and compensation to prevent traumatization which entails creating independent vetting boards inclusive of civil society and veteran associations, codified in legislation to protect reforms from elite manipulation.

Empirical Literature

Empirical studies on vetting in transitional justice have increasingly highlighted the tension between accountability, recognition, and psychosocial wellbeing. A research titled, "*Justice as Prevention: Vetting Public Employees in Transitional Societies*" by Mayer-Rieckh and de Greiff (2007) examined vetting as a preventive justice measure across multiple contexts. Their objective was to understand how vetting could restore institutional legitimacy while protecting human rights. They found that vetting often failed when criteria were opaque, oversight was weak, and political interference was rampant. This differs from the current study at Elangeni Centre, which focuses specifically on the lived experiences of non-cadres and war collaborators, but it is similar in its emphasis on transparency and fairness as essential to legitimacy. Post-war Germany, denazification has been studied extensively as an empirical case of vetting. Mayer (2017), in "*Vetting: The Way to Prevent Recurrence?*" critiques its dilution under Cold War pragmatism, noting that many Nazi affiliates were reintegrated into public service without ethical vetting. The objective of denazification was to exclude perpetrators and restore democratic institutions, yet the findings revealed selective enforcement and compromised legitimacy. This contrasts with the Zimbabwean case, where vetting is not about perpetrators but about determining who qualifies for recognition as veterans. However, the similarity lies in how political compromise undermines the fairness of vetting processes.

Lundy and McGovern's (2015) did a study titled, "*Security Sector Reform and Transitional Justice*", in Northern Ireland. Their objective was to assess whether vetting contributed to reconciliation and stability. They found that while symbolic reforms were achieved, deeper structural vetting was avoided, leaving victims feeling excluded. This resonates with Zimbabwe's vetting of non-cadres, where symbolic recognition exists in law but practical implementation remains exclusionary. Similarly, Dower (1999) in their study, "*Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*" revealed that U.S. occupation authorities prioritized economic recovery over justice, reversing purges and leaving recognition incomplete. These global cases highlight how vetting, when compromised, fails to affirm dignity and recognition, an issue central to the Elangeni study. Turning to Africa, empirical research has documented uneven vetting experiences shaped by political contexts. In Kenya, Ghai (2020) in "*Judicial and Police Vetting in Kenya*"studied the post-2007 vetting of police and judiciary under the National Accord and Reconciliation Act. His objective was to evaluate transparency and accountability in the vetting process. Findings showed that while initial transparency built public trust, political interference and lack of psychosocial support eroded credibility. This is similar to Zimbabwe's vetting, where political manipulation undermines fairness, but differs in that Kenya's vetting targeted state officials while Zimbabwe's focuses on liberation war contributors.

Furthermore, Pham et al. (2019), in "*Reintegration of Former LRA Abductees in Northern Uganda*", studied recognition and psychosocial wellbeing. Their findings revealed that the absence of formal vetting and compensation led to stigma, depression, and exclusion. While Uganda's case differs in that abductees were victims rather than collaborators, the similarity lies in the psychosocial harm caused by exclusion from recognition. In Rwanda, Clark (2020) did a study titled, "*Post-Genocide Justice and Survivor Support*" which examined survivor recognition, finding that survivors especially women and children received limited institutional support while perpetrators were prioritized. This highlights the danger of narrow eligibility criteria, a challenge also evident in Zimbabwe's vetting of non-cadres. Sawyer (2019) in a study titled, "*Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Implementation Challenges*" studied the TRC's recommendations to bar

perpetrators and compensate victims. The objective was to promote accountability and recognition, but findings revealed elite resistance and weak enforcement, leaving victims unrecognized. This parallels Zimbabwe's experience, where recommendations and legal frameworks exist but implementation is seemingly undermined. Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission as studied by Asamoah (2020) in "*Community Hearings and Transitional Justice in Ghana*" incorporated community hearings to foster trust. Findings showed that participatory processes enhanced legitimacy, though reparations were unevenly distributed. This offers lessons for Zimbabwe, where community validation could strengthen recognition of non-cadres and collaborators.

Central Africa's experience, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been documented by Mobekk (2019) in a research titled, "*DDR and Vetting in the DRC*". This inquiry study found that rigid eligibility criteria excluded women and youth, while corruption allowed perpetrators to be reintegrated. The objective was to assess ethical vetting and reintegration, but findings revealed systemic exclusion and trauma. This is highly relevant to Zimbabwe, where non-cadres and collaborators face exclusion due to unclear criteria, echoing the DRC's challenges. Southern Africa has also been studied extensively. Wilson (2021), in, "*The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*", analysed psychosocial and material outcomes of the TRC. His findings showed that truth-telling without compensation left non-combatants traumatized and unrecognized. In the same vein, Lambourne (2019), in the article, "Localizing *Transitional Justice*" proposed community-led, trauma-informed vetting. These studies align closely with Zimbabwe's case, where psychosocial wellbeing and community validation are critical reform priorities.

At the national level, Zimbabwean scholars have documented the biases and failures of vetting. Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014), in studies such as, "*War Veterans and the Politics of Recognition in Zimbabwe*" examined the liberation war legacy, finding that implementation favoured combatant cadres while marginalizing collaborators and non-cadres. Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023), in, "*Ethics and Standards in Zimbabwe's Vetting Processes*" critique vetting for lacking standardized criteria and ethical safeguards. They document cases of humiliating questioning and denial of benefits, directly aligning with Objective 1 and 2 of the current study. Scarnecchia (2021), in "*The NPRC and Transitional Justice in Zimbabwe*", assessed the Commission's mandate, finding that political interference and limited resources undermined its role.

Drawing from literature above, clear convergence in the literature is the recognition that vetting in transitional justice must be ethical, transparent, and inclusive to restore dignity and legitimacy. Studies emphasize that vetting is not merely a bureaucratic exercise but a moral obligation to affirm the humanity of those affected by conflict. African scholarship, including Ghai's (2020) work on Kenya and Asamoah's (2020) study of Ghana, similarly highlight the importance of participatory mechanisms and community validation. In Zimbabwe, Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) converge with these global perspectives by stressing the need for standardized criteria and ethical safeguards. The literature therefore affirm that recognition processes must go beyond cadre-centric frameworks to include diverse contributors such as non-cadres and war collaborators. Emerging trends in the literature point to the integration of psychosocial support and trauma-informed approaches into vetting and compensation frameworks. Wilson (2021) and Lambourne (2019) argue that truth-telling and symbolic recognition are insufficient without material reparations and emotional healing. In Uganda, Pham et al. (2019) document how the absence of counselling and recognition for abductees led to stigma and depression, while Mobekk (2019) shows how exclusion of women and youth in the DRC reinforced trauma. These trends reflect a growing consensus that transitional justice must address not only legal and institutional dimensions but also the psychosocial wellbeing of participants. Contradictions in the literature revolve around whether vetting should prioritize accountability or reconciliation, and whether reforms should be state-led or community-driven. Mayer (2017) critiques Germany's denazification for its selective enforcement, suggesting that accountability was compromised for political stability. Similarly, Dower (1999) highlights Japan's reversal of purges in favour of economic recovery. In contrast, Lambourne (2019) and Robins & Gready (2019) advocate for community-led, trauma-informed approaches that prioritize reconciliation and dignity. Zimbabwe's case reflects this contradiction: while the Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act provides a legal framework for recognition, its politicized implementation undermines inclusivity and fairness, leaving unresolved tensions between state authority and community validation.

Vetting Experiences Of Non-Cadres And War Collaborators At Elangeni Centre

The interviews revealed that many participants experienced the vetting process as humiliating and divisive. One respondent made this lamentation;

"It just prickles and freshens my pain… I did not know that I was being called to remind me what I experienced as a ZIPRA fighter, and not a ZANLA member.

This quote illustrates how affiliation-based questioning reopened old wounds and reinforced divisions rather than fostering unity. Such practices contradict the principles of Transitional Justice Theory, which Teitel (2000) argued should restore dignity and promote reconciliation rather than reproduce exclusionary narratives. Participants also perceived the vetting exercise as a stalling mechanism rather than a genuine recognition process. One interviewee made this remark;

This vetting is not for finding who should be in or not, but just to get more time to gather funds.

This perception reflects a lack of trust in institutions and suggests that vetting was disconnected from actual compensation. Similar concerns were raised in Mayer's (2017) study of Germany's denazification, where pragmatic delays undermined legitimacy. In Zimbabwe, this perception of "buying time" highlights how institutional weakness erodes confidence in transitional justice mechanisms.

Corruption and malpractice were also reported. Respondents claimed that people were paying for being vetted and that some were vetted informally over the phone while others endured endless queues. These irregularities compromised the integrity of the process and reinforced exclusion. Such findings resonate with Sawyer's (2019) critique of Liberia's TRC, where elite manipulation undermined fairness. This also confirm de Greiff's (2006) warning that fragmented and politicized implementation of vetting erodes legitimacy and fails to deliver holistic justice. The requirement for corroboration was another source of exclusion. Elderly applicants expressed despair at being asked to produce witnesses from distant places, one of had this to state;

I am told to find someone to support that I was with them… can they come from Harare to speak for an ageing useless person like me, really?

This burden of proof was unrealistic and discriminatory, especially for those without access to former commanders or networks. Mobekk (2019) documented similar exclusion in the DRC, where rigid eligibility criteria marginalized women and youth. Zimbabwe's case reflects the same problem: procedural rigidity that ignores lived realities.

Participants also noted that they were not prepared for vetting, lacked orientation, and were subjected to provocative questioning without knowledge of their rights. One respondent made this explanation;

We just go for vetting; no one prepares us… officials vetting us just provoke us with disturbing questions.

This absence of rights-based orientation can heighten vulnerability to distress and exclusion. Hayner (2011) warned against one-size-fits-all models of transitional justice, stressing the need for context-sensitive and participatory approaches. The Elangeni process ignored this, leaving participants disempowered. The frustration and despair of participants escalated to warnings of potential unrest. One participant stated this;

People will fight for their long-awaited compensation… chaos will never cease until we are properly vetted.

This reflects how exclusionary vetting can destabilize communities rather than promote reconciliation. Walzer's (1977) Jus post bellum principle emphasizes that post-war justice must restore peace and dignity; yet, Elangeni's process risked producing renewed conflict. The interview findings therefore demonstrate that vetting, instead of affirming dignity, became a site of renewed trauma and social tension.

Beyond humiliation and procedural opacity, several respondents emphasized the **psychological toll** of the vetting exercise. One participant had this to reflect;

We were asked to recount painful memories without any counselling; it felt like reopening wounds we had tried to heal.

This highlights the absence of trauma-informed approaches, which Robins and Gready (2019) argue are essential for transitional justice to address the affective dimensions of recovery. The lack of psychosocial support at Elangeni meant that vetting therefore became a retraumatizing process rather than a restorative one, undermining the very dignity it was meant to affirm.

Another recurring theme was the **erosion of trust in state institutions.** Respondents expressed skepticism about whether the vetting exercise would ever lead to tangible benefits, with one noting that they had been *vetted before, but nothing changed hence felt were just used to fill registers.* This perception of futility resonates with Scarnecchia's (2021) observation that Zimbabwe's National Peace and Reconciliation Commission has struggled to assert its role due to political interference, leaving recognition processes compromised. The findings therefore suggest that repeated cycles of vetting without meaningful outcomes have deepened disillusionment among non-cadres and collaborators.

Participants also raised concerns about **partisan bias and politicization.** Several interviewees claimed that affiliation with ruling party structures influenced vetting outcomes, with one stating this;

If you are not aligned, you are side-lined.

This echoes Sawyer's (2019) critique of Liberia's TRC, where elite manipulation undermined fairness, and confirms de Greiff's (2006) warning that fragmented, politicized implementation erodes legitimacy. Politicization of vetting not only excluded deserving veterans but also reinforced perceptions that recognition was contingent on political loyalty rather than contribution to the liberation struggle.

The issue of **gendered exclusion** also emerged. Women collaborators reported being dismissed or trivialized during vetting, with one respondent making this statement;

They asked me if cooking for fighters was really part of the struggle.

Such experiences reflect Mobekk's (2019) findings in the DRC, where women and youth were marginalized by rigid eligibility criteria. This failure to recognize the diverse contributions of women collaborators perpetuates patriarchal narratives of the liberation war, contradicting transitional justice principles of inclusivity and equality.

Respondents further highlighted the **economic vulnerability** created by exclusionary vetting. Many explained that denial of recognition meant denial of compensation, leaving them unable to meet basic needs. One participant lamented this;

We are dying poor while those who fought alongside us are living better.

This aligns with Wilson's (2021) critique of South Africa's TRC, where symbolic recognition without material support left victims disillusioned. In Zimbabwe, exclusion from compensation perpetuates structural inequalities, undermining the welfare dimension of transitional justice.

Interview data also revealed a sense of **collective disempowerment and invisibility.** Participants described feeling erased from national memory, with one stating this;

It is as if we never existed in the struggle.

This resonates with Teitel's (2000) argument that transitional justice must restore moral order and affirm the humanity of marginalized actors. At Elangeni, however, vetting reinforced invisibility rather than recognition, leaving non-cadres and collaborators excluded from both material benefits and symbolic status.

Document analysis findings echoed interview findings. The Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12] provide statutory recognition for war collaborators and non-cadres, but its implementation lacked clarity on proof requirements and psychosocial support. Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014) all noted that the Act disproportionately favoured combatant cadres, side-lining informal actors. This explains why participants at Elangeni faced unrealistic corroboration demands and affiliation-heavy questioning, which contradicted the Act's inclusive intent. The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) enshrined dignity and equality, mandating recognition for all veterans, including war collaborators and detainees. However, participants' accounts of humiliating questioning and affiliation-based discrimination revealed a gap between constitutional ideals and practice. Scarnecchia (2021) observed that the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), tasked with promoting justice, struggled to assert its role due to political interference. This institutional weakness explains why constitutional guarantees were not translated into ethical vetting practices.

Reports such as the ZIPRA Veterans Trust (2022) and Herald News (2022) corroborated the interview findings. The Trust documented shame, invisibility, and re-traumatization at Elangeni, while Herald News reported the registration of over 205,000 individuals, highlighting the scale of the exercise but failing to address its ethical shortcomings. To this effect, documents confirm that the vetting process was procedurally ambiguous, ethically compromised, and politically manipulated. They reinforce the conclusion that Zimbabwe's vetting failed to meet the standards of Transitional Justice Theory and Jus post bellum, undermining its legitimacy and eroding the dignity of those it was meant to recognize.

The Effects Of The Vetting Process On Dignity, Welfare, And Psychosocial Wellbeing Of Participants

Interviews at Elangeni Centre revealed that the vetting process had a profoundly negative impact on participants' dignity. One respondent explained this;

We were treated like beggars, questioned as if we were lying, and made to feel worthless.

This humiliation undermined the very recognition the process was meant to confer. Such experiences confirm Robins and Gready's (2019) argument that transitional justice must address the "affective dimensions" of recovery, including dignity and symbolic validation. Instead, the Elangeni vetting reproduced exclusion and shame. As earlier alluded, participants also reported feelings of invisibility and despair. One interviewee stated this;

We felt invisible, as if our sacrifices did not matter.

This echoes Wilson's (2021) critique of South Africa's TRC, where non-combatants were symbolically acknowledged but materially excluded, leaving them emotionally distressed. This lack of recognition for non-cadres and collaborators perpetuated marginalization, eroding their sense of belonging in national memory.

Psychosocial wellbeing was further compromised by retraumatization. Respondents described being forced to recount painful wartime experiences without counselling or support. One participant had this to say;

They made us relive the war, but no one cared to comfort us.

This resonates with Pham et al.'s (2019) study in Uganda, where abductees suffered stigma and depression due to the absence of psychosocial services. At Elangeni, the lack of trauma-informed vetting deepened psychological harm rather than promoting healing. Economic welfare was also negatively affected. Many participants reported being denied benefits due to unclear criteria, leaving them in poverty despite their contributions. One respondent lamented this;

We are excluded from compensation, yet we gave our lives to the struggle.

This exclusion reflects Sawyer's (2019) findings in Liberia, where victims were acknowledged but not materially supported, undermining the credibility of transitional justice. In this regard, the denial of compensation perpetuated economic marginalization and widened inequalities among veterans.

Furthermore, the absence of psychosocial support was a recurring theme. Participants highlighted that no counselling was provided before or after vetting, leaving them emotionally vulnerable. One respondent had this to say;

We were left alone with our pain; no one cared how we felt.

This affirms Lambourne's (2019) who called for "transformative justice," which emphasizes trauma-informed, community-led approaches. To this effect, the Elangeni non-combatants vetting process ignored this emerging trend, reinforcing Robins and Gready's (2019) concept of "disjointed justice."

Ethical, Inclusive, And Depoliticized Reforms For Improving Zimbabwe's Vetting And Compensation Frameworks

Interview findings revealed that participants strongly desired reforms that would make vetting more ethical and inclusive. One respondent stressed;

We need a process that respects us, not one that humiliates us.

This call for dignity aligns with Teitel's (2000) Transitional Justice Theory, which emphasizes that post-conflict justice must restore moral order and affirm humanity. Participants consistently argued that recognition should not be politicized or dependent on affiliations, but rather grounded in fairness and transparency. Another participant highlighted the need for standardized procedures, stating, this;

Every centre should follow the same rules; otherwise, some of us are excluded.

This reflects de Greiff's (2006) insistence that vetting must be linked to broader governance reforms and institutional clarity. Without standardized criteria, participants felt vulnerable to manipulation and favoritism. Their experiences confirm Mayer's (2017) critique that politicized and inconsistent vetting erodes legitimacy and undermines trust in transitional justice.

Furthermore, the demand for psychosocial support was also prominent. One interviewee had this to say;

We need counselling before and after vetting; otherwise, the process just reopens wounds.

This resonates with Robins and Gready's (2019) concept of "transformative justice," which calls for trauma-informed approaches that address emotional harm alongside institutional reform. Participants recognized that without psychosocial care, vetting risks re-traumatizing rather than healing which echoes Wilson's (2021) critique of South Africa's TRC.

Participants also emphasized the importance of depoliticization. One respondent had this to argue;

Compensation should not depend on which party you support; it must be for everyone who contributed.

This reflects Sawyer's (2019) findings in Liberia, where elite resistance and politicization undermined vetting outcomes. This also confirms Scarnecchia's (2021) observation that political interference weakens transitional justice institutions.

Community participation was another reform priority. Respondents argued that they must be involved in designing the vetting process because only then will it be fair. This concurs with Lambourne (2019) who called for localized transitional justice, where reforms are designed and led by affected communities to enhance legitimacy. Participants believed that grassroots involvement would prevent manipulation and ensure recognition of diverse contributions. In the same vein, participants called for awareness campaigns to educate veterans about their rights and the vetting process. One interviewee made this postulation;

We don't know what to expect; we need information so we can prepare.

This reflects Hayner (2011) who warned against one-size-fits-all models and highlights the need for participatory, context-sensitive approaches. Awareness and education would empower veterans, reduce confusion, and strengthen trust in institutions.

Coming to document analysis findings, the Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12] provided a statutory framework for recognizing war veterans, including non-cadres and collaborators yet as earlier alluded Nyathi (2004), Sadomba (2011), and Hove (2014) documented that implementation disproportionately favoured combatant cadres which confirms interview findings that reforms must clarify eligibility criteria and ensure inclusivity. That without such reforms, the Act risks perpetuating exclusion rather than correcting it.

These findings demonstrate that both interviews and documents converge on the urgent need for reforms that are ethical, inclusive, and depoliticized. Participants demanded dignity, standardized procedures, psychosocial support, community participation, and awareness campaigns. Documents confirmed that existing frameworks lacked clarity, were politicized, and failed to deliver on constitutional promises. Linking these findings to Transitional Justice Theory and Jus post bellum, it is clear that Zimbabwe's vetting must evolve from exclusionary practices to transformative justice that restores dignity and affirms recognition for all contributors.

DISCUSSION

The evidence gathered from both interviews and document analysis demonstrates that the vetting of non-cadres and war collaborators at Elangeni Centre was experienced as humiliating, divisive, and procedurally opaque. Respondents consistently described affiliation-based questioning as reopening old wounds, while documents such as the *Veterans of the Liberation Struggle Act [Chapter 17:12]* and the *ZANU PF Central Committee Report (2021)* confirmed that statutory recognition was framed in ways that privileged combatant cadres. This contradiction between inclusive legal provisions and exclusionary implementation reflects Teitel's (2000) caution that transitional justice can be co-opted by elites to reinforce hierarchies rather than dismantle them.

The study further revealed that the vetting process has negatively affected dignity, welfare, and psychosocial wellbeing. Respondents described being treated "like beggars" and forced to relive painful wartime memories without counselling, while reports such as the *ZIPRA Veterans Trust (2022)* documented shame and invisibility among participants. These experiences confirm Robins and Gready's (2019) argument that transitional justice must address the affective dimensions of recovery, not merely procedural recognition. Government officials defended vetting as a necessary safeguard to maintain the integrity of compensation schemes, particularly given fiscal constraints and defence imperatives. However, critiques highlighted that delays and lack of psychosocial support undermined trust and perpetuated marginalization. Balancing these perspectives, the research concludes that while vetting is necessary for accountability and security, its current form neglects the human dimension of justice.

Corruption and malpractice emerged as critical obstacles, with respondents reporting that individuals were paying to be vetted or vetted informally over the phone. This undermined the credibility of the process and reinforced exclusion, echoing Sawyer's (2019) critique of elite manipulation in Liberia's TRC. Document analysis confirmed that the NPRC has struggled to assert oversight due to political interference (Scarnecchia, 2021), leaving the vetting process vulnerable to abuse. From a government perspective, the defence and security imperative requires strict vetting to prevent fraudulent claims and safeguard limited resources. Yet civil society actors argued that corruption within the process itself erodes legitimacy more than fraudulent claimants ever could. The research therefore highlights the need for depoliticized oversight and standardized procedures to reconcile state security concerns with civil society's demand for fairness.

Gendered exclusion was another dimension of the vetting process. Women collaborators reported being dismissed or trivialized, with their contributions reduced to domestic roles. This perpetuates patriarchal narratives of the liberation war and contradicts transitional justice principles of inclusivity and equality. Mobekk's (2019) findings in the DRC, where women and youth were marginalized by rigid eligibility criteria, resonate strongly with Zimbabwe's case. Whilst some often framed veteran recognition in terms of combatant roles, reflecting a defence-oriented definition of service. Others emphasized that the liberation struggle was

sustained by diverse contributions, including logistical, domestic, and emotional support. The research concludes that redefining veteran status to encompass these roles is essential for both justice and national reconciliation.

The study identified reform pathways articulated by participants and corroborated by documents. Respondents called for standardized procedures, trauma-informed support, community participation, and awareness campaigns. These demands align with Lambourne's (2019) call for localized transitional justice and with Walzer's (1977) Jus post bellum principle, which insists on fair treatment and dignity restoration after conflict. Some perspectives emphasized the need to maintain control over vetting to safeguard national security and fiscal stability, while counter arguments stressed the importance of transparency and inclusivity. In synthesis, the research concludes that reforms must integrate defence imperatives with human rights principles, ensuring that vetting both protects the integrity of compensation schemes and restores dignity to marginalized veterans.

At theoretical level, he findings affirm key assumptions of Transitional Justice Theory, particularly Teitel's (2000) argument that transitional justice must restore dignity and moral order. The humiliation, politicization, and exclusion experienced at Elangeni demonstrate how transitional justice mechanisms can fail when co-opted by elites, confirming de Greiff's (2006) warning about fragmented implementation. At the same time, the demand for trauma-informed support and community participation resonates with Robins and Gready's (2019) concept of transformative justice, suggesting that Zimbabwe's vetting must evolve beyond procedural recognition to address psychosocial and welfare dimensions. The findings also challenge aspects of Jus post bellum. Walzer (1977) and Orend (2006) emphasize fair treatment and dignity restoration after war, yet Zimbabwe's vetting reproduced trauma and inequality. The requirement for corroboration and affiliation disclosure, while defensible from a defence and security perspective, undermined the ethical imperative of post-war justice. This tension highlights the need to reinterpret Jus post bellum in contexts where informal actors played critical roles but lack formal documentation. The research therefore contributes to theory by demonstrating that transitional justice and post-war ethics must adapt to local realities, ensuring that recognition frameworks encompass diverse contributions and prioritize both security and dignity.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the vetting of non-cadres and war collaborators at Elangeni Centre in Bulawayo has been conducted in ways that undermine its intended purpose of recognition, dignity, and equitable compensation. Instead of serving as a restorative mechanism, the process has been marked by humiliation, politicization, procedural opacity, corruption, and the absence of trauma-informed support, leaving many marginalized veterans excluded from both material benefits and symbolic status. The requirement for affiliation disclosure and corroboration by commanders reopened old wounds and entrenched divisions, while delays and irregularities eroded trust in institutions and deepened disillusionment. Women and elderly participants were particularly disadvantaged, reflecting broader patterns of exclusion in transitional justice across Africa. The cumulative effect has been emotional distress, economic vulnerability, and social disempowerment, with some veterans resorting to protest as a means of voicing their frustration. To achieve its mandate, vetting in Zimbabwe must evolve into an ethical, inclusive, and depoliticized process that restores dignity, recognizes diverse contributions, and embeds psychosocial support, thereby aligning national practice with constitutional commitments and global transitional justice principles. Only through such transformation can vetting contribute to reconciliation, sustainable peace, and the reintegration of all who bore the burdens of the liberation struggle.

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