

COPING STRATEGIES AMONGST EX- COMBATANTS: THE CASE OF EX ZPRA EX-COMBATANTS IN BULAWAYO

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the coping strategies of ZPRA ex-combatants in the post independent Zimbabwe setting. It unpacks how the ex-guerrillas are coping in light of the difficulty environments they encounter in the political, social, economic and psychological sphere. This is achieved by adopting self and identity model to examine the trajectories of ZPRA ex-combatant's identity construction and social belonging through mechanisms such as ZPRA Veterans Trust, group gathering, and social networks. The research employed a qualitative methodology and case study design as well as aided by instruments such as semi-structured interview and participant observation, through these instruments the research discovered that ZPRA ex-combatants devised spontaneous and long term negative and positive coping strategies to cope the difficulties they encountered. The study posits that the post Gukurahundi treatment was the major cause of many challenging experiences as it became a multiplier effect to other challenges. The research findings revealed that ZPRA ex-combatants encountered a plethora of difficulties and employed a variety of coping strategies to improve their livelihoods. Amongst the key research findings was the difficult experiences such as the Gukurahundi era, which resulted in many complications in their lives for example it contributed to the marginalisation of the ex-ZPRA combatants and Matabeleland region in terms of underdevelopment which has resulted in their economic suffering and more importantly their children have met a difficult environment to cope against. Other experiences include; community rejection, unemployment, Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD), lack of accommodation amongst others. In the same vein, ex-combatants employed some coping strategies, these included migration, social networking, group gathering, joint venture programs, alcoholism and drug use, seeking counselling amongst others.

Key words: Coping strategies, ZPRA ex-combatants, self and identity Model, DDR.

Introduction

Zimbabwe was born out of a bloody war of attrition which polarized and tore the fabric of society. The nationalist liberation movements Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and their respective armed groups waged a bitter, atrocious, protracted violent war against the Rhodesian army and the Rhodesian Front. Both ZANLA and ZPRA combatants were exposed to the vagaries and atrocities of war for a period of nearly 15 years (Pfukwa, 2012). The atrocities that took place during the Zimbabwe war of liberation left deep scars on the veterans of the liberation struggle. ZPRA ex-combatants suffered serious casualties in bombardments, a large number were maimed due to cluster bombs this led to many invalids. Black African youth were recruited, some volunteered, and others were coerced into joining the struggle for liberation against the Rhodesian government and its policies which perpetuated structural violence against the African population (Dzinesa, 2006). Thousands of young men and women joined the liberation armies, the Rhodesians on their part also recruited from among the whites, coloured and Africans. Resultantly, by the end of the war, there was ‘human capital’ of combatants, this was not healthy and ideal as the country was moving towards peace. The country was in need of a peaceful transition, a political transition had been ironed out but there was a need for a social and economic transition that would help former combatants. There was a need for social integration, economic empowerment and psychological and PTSD counselling for former combatants, (Chung, 2007).

Despite undergoing these harsh and trying moments, initially the veterans of Zimbabwe liberation war were widely accepted as heroes, liberators and addressed as comrades (Lyons, 2004). After independence, ex-combatants were made to leave their units informally and some botched demobilization exercise was carried out but soon left the ex-combatants in the open as the exercises was terminated within 24 months. There was no formal reintegration of ex-combatants into the society, but an integration exercise of the three forces namely (ZANLA, ZAPU and Rhodesian Forces). Disarmament was not effective because sooner than the first majority rule government formed by ZANU PF was in place, had some disgruntled ZAPU leaders and their combatants went back to the bushes to fight the government (Chung, 2007). The un-procedural demobilization without a follow up reintegration process left some of the former combatants vulnerable to social and economic problems. The bulk of ex-

combatants were not enlisted in the regular Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) as only about a third could be absorbed into the new dispensation. All those who were discharged from the liberation armies faced problems of failing to cope with their new situation, in schools, colleges and cooperatives and soon abandoned their efforts to re integrate. Those allocated land for co-operative farming, encountered issues of mismanagement, poaching, deforestation and theft of farm implements for sale was the order for survival, while, some of those that went to schools and colleges challenged their teachers and the systems under which they learned. Some of those who returned to their homes and could not access academic development and sustainable economic engagement could not make the social adjustment or cope with the new civilian life because their families had either perished in the war, trauma affected, poverty stricken, encountered a recovering society which was disdainful. Mental derangement and stress caught up with some of the ex-combatants and as such they still languish in social vices of poverty.

The 1987 DDR process after the Unity Accord was not applied according to the UN principles. The resulting impact of the non-compliance with procedures of DDR had a bearing on the community security affecting their social dispositions as a backlash from the security system. While ex combatants question the whole process, the female ex combatants (ZPRA) allege that their role in the liberation struggle is not being recognized, and they have not been rewarded for their role as female ex combatants (Kigma, 2000). There is a general belief from the ZPRA ex-combatants who allege that the integration of ex combatants into the armed forces and civil service of Zimbabwe was skewed in favour of ZANLA ex-combatants who by and large dominate in large numbers in the government systems (Kriger, 2003). ZPRA freedom fighters had planned for their future lives as they collected Zim\$50 from ZPRA ex-combatants while they were still in assembly points, the money which was then used to purchase ZPRA properties that would be administered under the Nitram Holdings, a company this was meant to take care of the welfare of ex-combatants. These properties included Castle Arms Motel, and various farms such as Nest egg, Ascort Farm, sadly these were taken away by the government as arms were planted in these farms. ZIPRA ex-combatants suffered the party's often violent wrath, experiencing difficulties in forming and sustaining cooperatives and obtaining employment or training where ZANU (PF) had control (Kriger, 2003). Given this background the ex-ZPRA freedom fighters still seek ways to fully finish this phase and look forward to benefit from social assistance and protection from the

state in terms of the welfare of their brothers and sisters through revitalization of ZPRA properties monitored by the NITRAM, formation of the ZPRA Veterans Trust which has become a safe haven for all the former ZPRA fighters.

Statement of the Problem

ZPRA ex-combatants had to manage livelihood that they least expected especially when they believed that in a new political dispensation of independent Zimbabwe they would live in luxury and life of honour to having contributed to the liberation of the country. However, in a new political dispensation they found themselves challenged by a situation where they could not manage to bring local bread on the table for themselves at the same time they were running from persecution in the new dispensation right from 1980 there was no peace any more. As a result some fled to diaspora, some migrated to neighbouring countries for fear of safety, and some preferred not to go back to their rural homes for fear of being hunted down hence they decided to live in town where there was no accommodation, food, so they began to live under bridges, used cardboard boxes to create shanty towns as a way of their livelihood, these were the coping strategies that were beginning to emerge. This impacted on the security of the state and their own security as they were threatened in all spheres. This study assesses the coping strategies adopted by the ZPRA ex combatants that ranged from political, social, economic, ideological and psychological.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research focuses on meaning, experience and understanding, providing an opportunity to interact with the individuals or groups, whose experiences the researcher wants to understand (McCandles and Bangura, 2007). The study adopted qualitative methodology as the study looks at the social phenomena of ZPRA ex-combatants and how they interacted in the post independent setting. The study uses non probability sampling method as is purely qualitative in nature. De Vos (2002), postulate that non-probability sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher in that the sample is composed of the elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population. This sampling method was aided by convenience sampling technique due to its nature as non-probability sampling procedure in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet

certain practical criteria such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility and willingness to volunteer, (Farrokhi, 2012).

The sampling size was relatively small as compared to the overall number of all the ZPRA ex-combatants. Due to the large, unmanageable population of ex-combatants which could not be studied directly, the study conveniently sampled the population of ZPRA ex-combatants living in the Khami District in Bulawayo Metropolitan province. These respondents were selected amongst those that were willing to participate in the study at a short notice and limited time frame for this research. In this case the research conveniently sampled the population of the ex ZPRA combatants who had a membership in the ZPRA Veterans Trust. To access most of the respondent the researcher was assisted by the ZPRA Veterans Trust's office to get some contacts of some of the respondents and help set up interview appointments with some of the respondents at a short notice. A population of 20 respondents was sampled with five of them being female ex-combatants, 7 were the Members of the Former ZPRA High Command and 8 were the general ZPRA male combatants who held lower ranks. This was done so as to capture the data from all the groups, the members of the Former high Command were important as they helped to unpack the original plan of ZPRA after winning the war as to how the life of their fellow comrades was to be like, women were to present facts on behalf of the female ex-combatants and the rest were important in the understanding of the ex-combatants life in the post independent Zimbabwe and the survival strategies employed.

Data was collected over a period of 2 months in January-February 2016. The study triangulated three data collection methods that are semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation. To fully understand the coping strategies of ex combatants, it was important to interview respondents to unearth their perceptions on the effects of DDR in their own personal experience. Furthermore, participant observation was important to this study as it provided the opportunity to know the subjects, brought the researcher closer to them and made the researcher to understand things from their perception. In this study the researcher was particular in observing the expressions, gestures, the language tone and choice of words of respondents during the research. One was also particular in observing the most fatal experiences as they discussed and unpacked most of the

major events that affected them. Focus group discussions were important as one paid attention to group dynamic which helped to gain more data.

Table 1: Biographical data of the participants

ZPRA Male Ex-combatants								
Particip ant	Age- rang e	Se x (M /)	Marita l status	No. of childr en	Level of educati on	Professiona l qualificatio n	Integration into the ZNA	property
1	50- 60	M	Married	3	(JC)	Carpenter	Not integrated	Nil
2	50- 60	M	Married	5	‘O’ Level	Teaching	Not integrated	House, cattle
3	50- 60	M	Divorced	2	JC	Builder	Not integrated	House
4	50- 60	M	Divorced	3	JC	Resigned from ZNA	integrated	Nil
5	50- 60	M	Divorced	7	JC	Mechanic	Not integrated	Nil
6	50- 60	M	Married	5	Degree	Retired From ZNA	Integrated	House, Farm
7	60- 70	M	Married	5	Doctor	Lecturer	Integrated	House, cars, cattle, farm
8	60- 70	M	Married	3	JC	Security guard	Not integrated	Nil.
ZPRA female Ex-combatants								
10	50- 60	F	Widow	6	JC	Nursing	Not integrated	House
11	50- 60	F	Married	7	JC	Self employed	Not integrated	House,car park

12	50-60	F	Single	1	Nil	N/A	Not integrated	Nil
13	60-65	F	Divorced	2	'O'	Police	Not integrated	Nil
14	60-70	F	Married	4	'O' level	Retired from ZNA	Integrated	House, Cars
Members of the Former ZPRA High Command								
1	70+	M	Married	7	JC	Resigned from ZNA	Integrated	House, cattle
2	70+	M	Divorced	11	JC	Hunter	Integrated	House
3	70+	M	Divorced	6	JC	farming	Not integrated	House, cattle, farm.
4	70+	M	Married	4	'O' level	Retired Brigadier	Integrated	House, farm, cars, cattle
5	70+	M	Married	5	JC	Carpenter	Not integrated	House
6	70+	M	Married	4	Nil	N/A	Not Integrated	house
7	70+	M	Married	5	'O' level	Miner	Not integrated	Mine, house, cattle, farm

Source: field work. Key: ZNA-Zimbabwe National Army, JC-Junior Certificate

Theoretical framework

The study is bolstered by Mead's concept of 'self' and Erickson's identity theory and explores how ZPRA ex combatants coping strategies informed by this concept in order to survive in their environments. The concept of 'self' presupposes social interaction between actors and audience in a given environment (Mead, 1934, Erickson, 1959). The theory holds the view that human beings are viewed as the product of interaction between actors and audience (Goffman and Ritzer, 2004). This concept of self perceives that the relation between the individual and society is cordial as neither can exist without the other. In this regard

individual are created through the process of social interaction within the society. The concept of self, attest that social interaction and social belonging are facilitated through a set of recognised symbols that have the same significance for each individual within a given social group (Mead, 2004). It is argued that social interaction is provided by a shared language that allows each individual to examine their own thoughts and attitudes to determine their actions. The existence of recognised symbols is necessary for social interaction as a result without it communication with one another is impossible. From this one denotes that ex-ZPRA combatants created social symbols of social interaction and social belonging aided by shared language to interact, identify and socialise as a group with shared meaning so as to find existence in their environment. (Goffman and Ritzter, 2004), have denigrated the concept of self as they argue that it only concentrated on the meaning, symbol and interaction, while ignoring psychological factors such as need, motives, intentions and aspirations. This is one of the reasons why the researcher had to aid this theoretical novelty with the human needs theory as the later will fill the gaps left by the self and identity concepts.

The identity model also helps to unpack how that some of their coping strategies are shaped by resilience. Resilience describes a process that changes over time and by environment (Erickson, 2012:1). Margaretten (2011), explains the adoption of coping strategies as influenced by social belonging. This entails that ZPRA ex combatants are able to survive due to the social interaction they have with other people in their localities. It can be argued that following the Gukurahundi atrocities and the demise of ZAPU, a sense of the tragic, a sense of ZPRA social and cultural identity became under siege, the question of identity became pivotal. In this instance not Zimbabwean identity but a state and prospects of a ZPRA identity as the independent state had shown its propensity and inclination towards violence against former ZPRA guerrillas. Identity has been viewed as the typification of self as defined by self and other (Weirget and Gecas, 2005). One can paint a picture that social interaction has a bearing on defining who we are, and how we are seen within a society defines our identity. This view fits well to female ZPRA ex-combatant whom the society defined as unwomanly and not fit for being good wives. This became their identity within the community and they faced identity crises that needed survival strategies to overcome it.

An alternative reading of ZPRA literature in post-independence setting

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) have been regarded as key to a peaceful transition to a democratic dispensation and form a natural continuum in peace process. DDR provides an opportunity for ex combatants to acquire skills needed to survive life after combat, social skills that are required by society as well as an opportunity to engage in sustainable development programmes (Kigma, 2008). The DDR program is supposed to contribute to creating sustainable, secure and peaceful transition (Dzinesa, 2006). The DDR process in Zimbabwe lacked many important aspects which should have contributed to effective transition process as successful re-integration of ZPRA ex-combatants. In this respect the ZPRA ex-combatants cry foul and allege arguing that the DDR process was supposedly carried and it defied the logic of its objective as it was manipulated to save partisan interests. A reading of the international standards on DDR lays out those principles which should have been followed to accomplish a comprehensive DDR program in Zimbabwe as the beneficiaries of the program ought to be ex-combatants.

The UN IDDRS of 2006 views the DDR of ex-combatants as a complex process with political, military, security, humanitarian and socio economic dimension, as it aims to deal with the post conflict security problem that arise when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks other than their fellow comrades during the vital transition period from conflict to peace and development (UN IDDRS, 2006a: 9). The UN IDDRS shows how DDR can contribute to building security, reconstructing the social fabric and developing human capacity resulting in the establishment of a sustainable, long term peacebuilding capacity. IDDRS programme strategies are characterized by flexibility including funding structures in order to be able to adapt quickly to the dynamic and often volatile post conflict environment (IDDRS, 2006: 145). Dzinesa (2000), underscores that the opportunity to plan a comprehensive DDR strategy at the earliest possible stage was lost. The limited reintegration strategy resulted in ineffective integration of these demobilized combatants. Those that attempted to be integrated into the army have complained about the sidelining and marginalisation of ex-ZPRA combatants in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). “Suspected ZAPU/ZPRA dissidents and dissident supporters who were tortured or detained were rarely brought to court suggesting that the government knew it had no case” (Kriger, 2003: 136).

The treatment of the ZPRA ex-combatants in the post independent setting rendered a volatile environment for them to cope against. The critical period to reckon in the minds of the former ZPRA ex-combatants was their subject to the dissident movement in the 1980s. Gatsheni (2003) on the Matabeleland civil military relations, hazards that the discovery of arms caches in ZAPU owned properties broke the camel back and the government used it as a pretext to launch a massive security situation on ZAPU and ZPRA. By employing violence against the former ZPRA combatants violence targeted towards a social and ethnic group, the state demonstrated its sheer force as it went on to ‘discipline and punish’ those who were viewed as deviants, those whom they called dissidents (Gatsheni, 2003). Disciplining and punishment took the form of imprisonment, imposition of curfews, detentions, torture, abductions, maiming, beatings, rape, decapitations all these nefarious and cruel instruments had the effect of frightening and breaking the spirit of those who were being discipline.

Women have also complained that the post independent setting of Zimbabwe was gender insensitive as female ex-combatants were side-lined and relegated into the margins of history. Mhanda (2011), concurs that “Women ex-combatants faced significant obstacles to qualify for integration, such as the requirement to pass aptitude tests as they were given an exam whereby they were questioned on commerce and accounting. If they failed they went back to the assembly place as a result of this female ex combatants were beset with an environment that perpetuated gender inequality” (Kriger 2003:128). Lyons (2004), writes that civilian men broadly stigmatized female ex-combatants as being ‘too independent, rough, ill-educated and unfeminine to be good wives. Female ex-combatants had problems with stigma and needed counselling on how to walk, dress, and relate to their peers and the importance of acquiring education and staying with their parents.

Major findings- ZPRA- ex-combatants coping strategies

The ZPRA Training Syllabus as coping strategy

ZPRA training syllabus was the method of training which the ZPRA ex-combatants were trained in so as to cope against the difficult situations which they encountered during the war. They were trained to become resilient, above all the training taught them four main basic strategies of survival these included (1) Flexibility, (2) high manoeuvrability, (3) maintenance of aim of what you want to achieve and (4) the ability to administer the

situation. As a result the study found that the ZPRA training syllabus was used as a coping strategy in post-independence Zimbabwe by many ex-combatants. However, one of the respondents was quick to explain that training was meant to deal with the experience in war situation it was never meant to be used in a post independent setting, however due to the subjection to the Gukurahundi era the training helped them to cope as they were thrown back into the bush to escape the brutal nature of the 5rd Brigade. This coping mechanism was employed mostly to cope against the political persecution they received during the Gukurahundi (Matabeleland disturbances) in the 1980s and the ill treatment received by those who were integrated into the Zimbabwe National Army. Respondents attested to the fact that they were effectively trained to survive in very hardly conditions like the Gukurahundi period. A closer look at this one suggest that ex-combatants are still praising the training Syllabus they received and they attest to it as the best. In the words of one of the interviewee:

“...ZPRA training meant that you will be in an enemy territory that you need to survive, therefore the training was so harsh so that one will be able to cope against pressure, (respondent)”.

The challenges of the post-independence encountered by the ZPRA ex-combatants redefined their identity and social belonging in the community. It resulted to many observe that their lives were more like animals in the jungle where the principle of the survival of the fittest was the order of the day. They began to identify themselves more like animals as they had to escape the vagaries of the Gukurahundi period, the jungle became more of their better society to live in and hide against the atrocious acts of the 5th Brigade.

Migration as a coping strategy

The study observes that most of the ex-ZPRA combatants used migration as a coping strategy. Mostly this migration was employed during the dissident era as they were running away from political persecution as Gukurahundi was accompanied by imprisonment, torture and persecution without trial and many of them were declared to be the enemies of the state. To the ZPRAs this was a difficult environment to survive in as the ‘revolution was now devouring its own children’. In this respect it became hard that the state they had sacrificed their lives to liberate suddenly turned out to be their worst enemy hence to migrate to other countries became the only solution for them. Without a shadow of doubt ex-ZPRA

combatants failed to identify themselves with community, this resulting in social identity crises and lack of social belonging. Migration took from rural to urban migration as Gukurahundi was mostly concentrated in rural areas and some migrated to neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Botswana while those who were educated migrated to overseas. The ZPRA ex-combatants became the outcasts of the society.

One of the respondent argued that *“most of our fellow comrades could not go back to their homes as a result the majority of them decided to go back South Africa particularly to Wenela mines, Marikana mines...when the post- independent Zimbabwe became an unfavourable living condition for us, those who were once in Wenela went back taking with them some of the ex-combatants, however, most of them faced difficulties as they could not be employed because their positions were occupied by others. This then gave rise to an increase in crime rate amongst our fellow comrades as they resorted to mischievous means of survival and some of those who went in places like Britain found themselves sweeping toilets, and some became homosexuals those governments could not help them”*

Formation of ZPRA ex-combatants organisations

Another form of coping strategy was the creation of institutions of social belonging, identity and welfare creation for their fellow comrades. The respondents revealed that after the failure of the government to fully cater to the welfare of ex-combatants and the continued marginalisation, they formed institution known as the ZPRA Veterans Trust. From the self and identity model it can be deduced that ZPRA Veterans Trust assumed greater importance amongst ex-ZPRA combatants as it came to be viewed as the Vanguard of the ZPRA identity. The research revealed that the Trust has been viewed as a safe arena to express their feelings with regards to their post liberation war experiences. One of the cofounder of ZPRA Veterans Trust whom I interviewed said that:

“...as ex-ZPRAs we observed that the Zimbabwe National Liberation of War Veterans Association (ZNLWA) continued to have some structural flaws that affected us as ex-ZPRA combatants as it was clear that it was still biased and it had been politicised meaning that those who did not support that political party were now excluded. Therefore we formed ZPRA Veterans Trust in 2008, to cater to the welfare of our fellows regardless of any political

affiliation. Most of our brothers and sisters have praised this Trust as they say it has finally given them sense of belonging...”

The Trust has played a commendable role for us by standing to the government to take our Nitram holdings back and trying to revitalize it. It has further taken to re-write our history which was taken from us as well during the Gukurahundi era...yes Mafela Trust is the institution that was formed to document and store our history, up to now it has done nothing hence ZPRA Trust had to take this initiative which we quite support as ex-combatants.

In this regard it would appear that the former ZPRA ex-combatants have been seeking for an institution which they can fully identify with, an institution which they regard as truly ‘their own.’ Others argued that ZAPU was ‘taken away’ from them and had really become part of ZANU, others felt that by signing the Unity Accord, Nkomo had sold out and strengthen ZANU which was then going to go ahead and consolidate its dominance in the country. Without a shadow of doubt the Trust has been a source of healing, and rehabilitation to the ex-combatants. The Nitram properties were meant to help ZPRA Ex-combatants and their dependency.

Consortiums and joint ventures as coping strategies

The research finding revealed that ZPRA freedoms fighters have engaged themselves in a number of consortiums as coping strategy against the economic hardships. One of the participant said that “*in 2014 there was the formation of the Zimbabwe Trust which is more of a cooperative Trust where members contributed US \$50 every month for 12 months each so that they use the money to repay Old Mutual which had loaned them money to buy 10000 cattle. This money is being taken automatically from their pensions funds in the banks.* The outcome of this was that each individual member will be given his own after the cattle reproduces. Also some have been engaged in consortiums called SEDI where they each contributed US\$40 as a form of investment with the hope that this money will expand. Some of the respondents heavily criticised these consortiums for being viewed as bogus and means of making money and they subjected it to heavy corruption by those who run the program. What is observed from this is that ZPRA ex-combatants have suffered so much that they have even lost the reason capacity as they cannot see when they are being robbed. Another

participant said that if the Zimbabwe Trust initiative was the highest form of robbery, that is why some of those who joined have started to deregister themselves

Social networks

The researcher observed that the rise of technological innovation and globalisation opened a new window of opportunity into how ZPRA ex-combatants developed coping strategies on issues related to social identity. In this respect respondents highlighted that the emergency of various social networks gave them the chance to meet and socialise through various platforms of different social media. Respondents argued that the dominant social network used as a coping strategy was the Facebook and what'sapp, these two social networks were appraised by ex-ZPRA freedom fighter due to the fact that it became the vessel which gives them a sense of social belonging and social identities. Just like other ZPRA institutions that were created, face book and what'sapp gave them a lee way in which they can define themselves as former ZPRAs. It became a form of memorialisation and remembrance of history which was thrown to the dustbin of history by not being published. This can be drawn from one of the respondents who postulated that

“I thank God for what'sapp which has given us as Former ZPRA freedom fighters an opportunity to unite, discuss and reflect on our past liberation war and post- independence experience. What's app has given us another chance to socialise with our fellow comrades in diaspora, rural areas and other various parts of the world where our fellow brothers went to seek for safe haven to ensure that their human needs are fully satisfied”, (respondent,).

To make sure that one examined the use of social media as a coping strategy one requested to be included to one of the what'sapp chat group of ex-combatants at ZPRA Veterans Trust. The aim of this was to observe on the major issues that ZPRA ex-combatants discussed on. This gave the chance for the researcher to be a participant observer; hence various difficult experiences and other issues that worried them were discussed. For example through an participatory observation analysis one noticed that one of the symbol constantly used by ZPRA ex-combatants was the use of their Nome Daguerre (war pseudonyms) in their interaction when they met. The use of these names gives them a sense of memorialisation and reflection of the past and evaluates them in what they have become in some years after life in the bush. Some will be constantly heard calling their senior commanders highlighting that

such use of language gives them a sense of fun and relaxation. One stands to reason that symbolic interaction improves people's ability to think and perceive their environment. The platform became a healing mechanism against psychological problems as the problems they faced were discussed in this community what's app group.

Village jobs

Most of the participants attested that ZPRA ex-combatants did demeaning jobs as way of coping against the challenges of unemployment. Respondents highlighted that ZPRA Ex-combatants worked as cattle herders in rural communities, garden boys; they did market gardening and other piece jobs such as clearing the land, building huts and other things for the community members who did not go to the war. This was due to the fact that they did not have the milk and honey to sustain themselves. Also participants concurred that some of those who migrated to towns faced challenges of housing and accommodation, hence to cope with this situation they lived under bridges, some constructed squatter camps using cardboard boxes. For economic survival most of them came with the idea of pushing Scantias, (small carts) so that they could be paid to transport people's goods so that they try to sustain themselves. Most women did vending business selling perishable food such as tomatoes, vegetables amongst other things, those who were better-off managed to join what is called "siphatheleni (money exchangers) business' where they engage in foreign currency exchange. This has helped them to cope against the economic hardships. What is gleaned from the above is that this situation contributed to more and more psychological trauma to them, as living under bridges, in squatters was dangerous to their health and mostly to the ex-combatants this was not what they fought for as well as the life they envisaged after liberating of the country. Others opted to become vagabonds in the cities so that they could not be disturbed. One respondent argued that;

"Most of the old vagabonds you see in the streets are former ZPRA combatants who opted to live in the streets not necessarily that they were mad but because they wanted to survive without being harassed. This led them to become more and more psychologically affected and up to now have become permanently affected and no one has tried to help them".

From the above one observed that 'vagabondism' became a coping strategy to cope against the Gukurahundi treatment, marginalisation, rejection by their communities and the problems

of economic challenges as they failed to have commendable jobs to sustain themselves. This may have been a result of the psychological trauma which ended up affecting their mind. They gave an example of one vagabond whom they nicknamed “*Jabu*” who has lived in the street since post -independence Zimbabwe. The researcher knew the person but did not have the knowledge that he was a former ZPRA combatant who was psychologically affected due to lack of effective DDR process.

Counselling

The study revealed that most of the ex-combatants did not receive psycho-therapy counselling and this led to increased PTSD. To cope with the problems of Trauma ex-combatants adopted various means to ensure that they receive counselling, these included group gatherings and discussions as former ex-combatants. One respondent attested that *“having group gatherings, and discussing as former ex-combatants helped me a lot as some of my comrades shared with me their experiences and how they have managed to cope against some of their problems hence I got motivated and challenged myself to cope effectively, (respondent)*. For this social gathering and group discussion gives them a sense of social support, (Myers, 2002). Also the researcher found out that ZPRA ex-combatants began to seek solutions as they began to look for various civil society organisation (CSO) that deal with issues related to trauma healing. These organisations included the Tree of life (TOL) as organisation that deals with trauma healing through social interaction and discussion.

Alcoholism, smoking and drug use

The research findings also revealed that ZPRA ex-combatants have used alcohol and drugs to cope with problems associated with trauma. Respondents revealed that most of the times when they start having problems such as nightmare, flashback and sense of guilt they take too much of alcohol, sometimes smoke. This corresponds with Gay, (2008) who argued that the use of alcohol may help wash away memories, increase social confidence, or induce sleep. But it causes more problems than it cures, by creating a dependence on alcohol, harming judgment and mental abilities, causing problems in relationships with family and friends, and sometimes, placing a person at risk for suicide, violence, or accidents. From the above view one argues that alcoholism has resulted in family problems for most of the ex-combatants since when they were drunk they became bullies and sometimes they wish to kill. It can be

reconciled that the use of alcohol and smoking gives them a sense of belonging and a way to identify themselves. This is given evidence as women fighters who returned with fatherless children were rejected by their families and lived as misfits, seeking solace in drug and alcohol abuse and prostitution because the government did not offer them specific assistance” (Financial Gazette 1997).

Conclusion

In conclusion, ZPRA ex-combatants found themselves having to live in condition which they least expected. The hopes of a prosperous and better life after gaining independence were soon faded into oblivion and they found themselves in various predicaments which impacted to their daily living and sustainable livelihoods. One argued that freedom fighters were exposed into the vagaries of war; as a result the challenges of Post Trauma Stress are still haunting them. The study observed that the post independent Zimbabwe setting was informed by structural violence and lack of distributive justice as the government chose to marginalise the former ZPRA freedom fighters; this was evidenced in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) where most of the integrated former ZPRA freedom fighters found the environment not conducive for them to be party of the ZNA system as they were pushed to the margins of power. In the same vein, the institutionalisation of Gukurahundi against the former ZPRA freedom fighters appears to have been the most difficult lived experience after the attainment of independence. Furthermore, Zimbabwe was beset by the challenges of lack of effective Disarmament, Demobilisation and Re-integration (DDR) which was never conducted in good faith as it did not follow the internationally defined DDR standards that promote effective post war reconstruction. The failure of the DDR program also is attributed to the outbreak of the Matabeleland disturbances.

Using the self and identity model, the study reveals that the issues of identity and fight for existence lay at the epicentre of the ZPRA freedoms fighters coping strategies. One observed that ZPRA ex-combatants have attempted to use various means and initiatives to reconstruct their identity. These includes use of social networks to unite and discuss about their way of life, social gatherings and formation of associations to help redefine their role. ZPRA combatants used various survival strategies to manage the difficult environment in all aspect of their lives in political, economic, social, and psychological. The survival strategies

employed by ex-combatants were both positive and negative to improve their sustainable livelihoods.

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