MAPPING WOMEN'S NEEDS IN ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL HEALING PROCESS

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Introduction

Policymakers increasingly realise that a democratic and developmental state that internalises the norms of human rights cannot be created unless the grievances of the past are addressed. There is no future without a past, as the present and the future are shaped by what has gone before. Recognising this, the purpose of this paper is to map the needs of women in Zimbabwe's national healing process and to examine these needs within the theme of transitional justice. The paper aims to offer policymakers insights that they can use to drive the inclusion of gender justice within transitional justice processes.

Written against the background of rising expectations, fears and anxieties about Zimbabwe's socio-political transition, and its potential for recovery from its grisly immediate past, this paper is founded on two intertwined arguments. The first is that many national healing processes fail to consider the needs of the victims of violent conflict, especially women (partly because transitional justice processes are often driven by elites who proscribe and institutionalise them). The second is that, in identifying and addressing women's needs in the national healing agenda, Zimbabwe should aim to avoid the traps of transitional justice initiatives that have focused on the human-rights violations alone, and should focus also on the equally important arena of economic violations and psychosocial needs, as well as social and cultural rights that are intrinsically connected with sexual and gender-based violence (Mutua, 2008).

This paper unpacks the national healing agenda using a women-centred lens. It aims to map the needs of women in holistic terms, and to convey their opinions and suggestions on how these needs can best be addressed. It also frames the genesis of Zimbabwe's political and economic crises from 2000 to 2008 and provides insight into the vision and aspirations of women in Zimbabwe in relation to transformative transitional justice.

A product of a deliberate process of engagement with women from various segments of Zimbabwean society, the research was conducted in Harare, Mutare, Bulawayo and Masvingo. Stratified and snowball techniques were used to locate respondents in both urban and rural settings. Almost all the participants were women and they were drawn from civil-society organisations, members of parliament, lawyers, students from Africa University, and victims of the 2000 to 2008 political violence. The research data was collected between May and June 2011 using questionnaires, personal interviews and focus-group discussions. These methodologies allowed women from different socio-economic sectors to share their needs relative to the national healing agenda. Of 25 questionnaires distributed, 21 were completed and returned; 15 personal interviews and 4 focus-group discussions took place.

Before discussing the findings of the research, I begin with a brief analysis of the violence experienced by women in Zimbabwe, and relate this to Zimbabwe's need for national healing and transitional justice. I show that such processes will only be effective if women are included in the relevant decision-making structures and processes.

I then discuss the findings of the research, and report on the needs and perspectives of respondents with regard to: the rule of law; safety and security; economic and livelihood issues; and political participation. This is followed by a discussion of retributive versus restorative justice and issues such as women's psychosocial and emotional needs and the need for relatives to know the fates of people who have disappeared. I then touch on the need for transformation in the training of personnel in all state services within the broader framework of security-sector reform. I conclude by highlighting the key points relevant for policymakers, human-rights activists and lobbyists as well as academics and researchers.

Context and background

Since 2000 Zimbabwe has been trapped in a complex and protracted political crisis that has seen rising levels of human-rights violations, including kidnappings, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual violence and the forced recruitment of youth by armed groups, to name just a few. The alleged participation of agents of state security, including the military and the police, as well as youth militias and war veterans in these violations has further complicated the political crisis. The root causes of this militarised political violence are deeply embedded not only in the country's colonial history but also in patriarchal power relations that cut across all levels and sectors of the population (Du Plessis and Ford, 2008). Addressing the violence requires a holistic response that is attentive to the fractured and polarised landscapes in which the conflicts have arisen, and for which solutions are yet to be framed (Eppel and Raftopoulos, 2009).

Many analysts argue that the alliance between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the security forces is designed to prevent the opposition political party – the Movement for Democratic Change led by Morgan Tsvangirai (known as MDC-T) and the smaller faction of the same party led by Welshman Ncube (known as MDC-N) – from accessing the levers of state power. The MDC's growing popularity (evident in the success of the 'No' vote in the constitutional referendum of 2000 and the party's win in the March 2008 elections) is certainly seen by ZANU-PF as a major threat to its hegemony (Eppel, 2008; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2008).

The Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 18 September 2008, and the establishment of the transitional Government of National Unity in February 2009 by the three political parties – ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-M – brought both relief and hope to many Zimbabweans, and particularly to women who tend to be even more vulnerable during periods of political tension. The establishment of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration by the Government of National Unity was further seen as offering a much needed panacea to the prevailing culture of violence which, it can be argued, targets women in particularly harsh and brutal ways.

The discourse on national healing

The discourse on national healing has arisen in the context of transitional justice and in response to the challenges of societies emerging from conflict or political violence. It has also become the preferred lens through which to examine levels of democratisation in such countries (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Boraine and Valentine, 2006; Mallinder, 2007). In the last two decades the concept of transitional justice has, for many, come to represent the values associated with democracy, the rule of law and the recognition of human rights. As defined by the United Nations:

> Transitional justice is the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with
> a society's attempt to come to terms with the legacy of large-scale past abuses, in

order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. It consists of both judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms, including prosecution initiatives, facilitating initiatives in respect of the right to truth, delivering reparations, institutional reform and national consultations. (United Nations, 2010)

Historically, however, as Mutua (2008) argues, one of the blind spots in human-rights discourses (which encompass transitional-justice discourses) has been their inattentiveness to women's rights and needs for justice. Civil-society and human-rights defenders have tended to focus mainly on legal and prosecutorial agendas. Feminist scholars, such as Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin (cited in Mutua 2008) have denounced the patriarchal construction of international law. Even at the United Nations' Beijing Conference on Women held in 1995 women's rights were seen as an addendum to human-rights discourses, despite the fact that the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was already over 15 years old. However, since the 1995 Beijing Conference, the search for answers to women's needs in times of transition has begun to receive more attention. A women-centred national healing process that consults broadly with women as part of effecting transitional justice is beginning to be seen as imperative, and this dispenses with the narrow legalistic perspectives that have tended to dominate the discourse until recently.

Violence against women

The most widely used definition of violence against women is provided by the United Nations' General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Resolution 48/104 of December 1993). Article 1 and 2 of this resolution offer the following definition:

> Violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

The resolution goes on to say;

> Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not limited to the following: a) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; b) physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

The same definition is recalled in UN Resolution 45 of 2003, in which economic exploitation is added to the definition of violence against women. It is important to note that although the above declaration provides a fairly comprehensive description of acts of gender-based violence, violence against women is in no way limited to these acts alone.

As in other violent conflicts in the region, sexual violence against women became a politically motivated and systematically orchestrated strategy in Zimbabwe after 2000. An analysis of the political landscape in Zimbabwe reveals four main manifestations of violence (see Galtung, 1969; 1990) that have affected women both during and since the worst of the 2000–2008 political crisis.

The first is direct physical violence, calculated to 'wound a perceived enemy' by dehumanising the victim, injuring her and her family circle, and spreading terror in her

community with the objective of controlling political territorial spaces and resources. Women have been both direct and inadvertent targets of this violence through the often sexual brutalisation of their bodies, leaving them not only traumatised but experiencing a loss of both identity and womanhood.

The second is structural violence, represented by the networks of unequal power relations between men and women, which are reinforced by oppressive policies that create psychological harm and trauma for women. Structural violence legitimises the power inequalities between men and women, both in their families and in society more generally. It also perpetuates gender-based violence through the enactment of discriminatory laws and policies and through the discriminatory application of the law (Valji, 2010). This form of violence renders almost all women vulnerable to being forcefully displaced from their families and homes and causing them to lose access to the means of ensuring their daily livelihoods. An even more extreme form of structural violence are practices that involve forcing women to provide sexual services to members of political gangs, militias or security forces. These acts intend, among other things, to exercise social control over women, and to make this control common knowledge in communities. Change and intervention at the level of structural violence can only occur as a result of altering the systems that support it. This includes, but is not limited to, instituting policies that prohibit the commodification of women's rights and needs as citizens, and ensuring equal access to social, political and economic rights (Ho, 2007). In times of conflict and political violence, structural violence in the form of sexism and sexual abuse can become so common that it appears almost normal.

Third is cultural violence aimed at justifying violence against women as an acceptable and even desirable attribute of masculinity while simultaneously devaluing the dignity of women and all attributes considered feminine. This form of violence invokes cultural values, beliefs and norms that glorify patriarchal practices including wife beating and polygamy. These are in turn used to legitimise violence in its direct and structural form. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look and feel right and acceptable to society (Galtung, 1990).

Fourth is the social and economic violence, which is usually a manifestation of direct, structural and cultural violence, and which traps women in vicious cycles of poverty, disempowerment and dependence. It is perpetrated against multitudes of women by denying them equal access to education, and cultural as well as socio-economic and legal status.

As Galtung (1969; 1990) argues, these four forms of violence interact in a dynamic and toxic causal relationship to shrink and constrain the public and private spaces occupied by women. Traditionally-framed processes of transitional justice in Zimbabwe are not exempt from the influence of this toxic mix, hence the need to subject them to the interrogation, analysis and critique attempted in this paper.

(Re)conceptualising national healing as a transitional-justice process

Debates around gender issues in transitional justice tend to emphasise sexual violence against women, and focus particularly on the role of the judiciary in addressing these violations (see Anderlini et al.). While this approach is essential and can lead to prosecutions, critics argue that it tends to minimise the causes of violence and puts the perpetrator of violent acts at centre stage. Human Rights Watch (1996), for example, argues that instead the focus should be on gendered power relations, and particularly on how these power dynamics allow continued sexualised violence against women. In other words, a primary focus on acts of violence means that the structural, cultural and economic issues that lie at the heart of women's disempowerment, and which can be said to facilitate gender violence, are underplayed. In Zimbabwe, acts of physical as well as structural and cultural violence,

often vividly express the gendered injustices and structural inequalities that perpetuate the marginalisation and disempowerment of women.

The problem with national healing in Zimbabwe is that (at least until the time of writing in mid-2012) the approach taken has been politically institutionalised and highly prescriptive, with political elites taking dominant positions in the leadership and governance of the process. As a result, the national healing agenda has become so politicised that it now fails to meet the objectives of a transparent transitional-justice mechanism. Furthermore, many victims of political violence, particularly women living in rural areas, have been excluded from the major activities of the national healing project. Zimbabwe is not unique in this; similar criticisms have been levelled against national healing processes globally (Staub et al., 2005; Valji, 2010). There is, however, a growing awareness worldwide that recovery from a traumatic past must be rooted in an understanding of how human-rights violations carried out on a mass scale have impacted and transformed affected populations.

It is widely accepted that in conflict situations women face a myriad of challenges, and their needs are as varied and complex as the reasons why women and girls are so often violated and displaced. Traditional transitional justice processes generally approach women's needs from the perspective that they are victims of systems, thereby inadvertently denying their agency as rights holders. The central question then is how societies can best accommodate the needs and rights of women as integral to national healing processes.

In Zimbabwe, as in most societies, patriarchy has historically placed males in a superior position relative to females, and society generally accepts this as a justification for the subordination of women. In other words, hetero-patriarchy or male-centredness is culturally celebrated in many African countries and reinforces the view that males deserve a sanctified position in society (Tichagwa and Maramba, 1998). Discrimination, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation related to culturally accepted patriarchal norms and beliefs thus present major and ongoing challenges for the majority of the Zimbabwean women. Notions of equality and autonomy (widely regarded as the two basic tenets of democracy) have not yet proven powerful enough to uproot deep-seated gender biases and misogyny. It is important to note that Zimbabwe's cancerous patriarchal cultural system is mirrored elsewhere in Africa and throughout the world, although in Africa the feminisation of poverty and societal acceptance of violations of women's rights tend to exacerbate the suffering of women in particularly extreme ways (Mekonnen, 2010).

Many analysts, including Du Plessis and Ford (2008) and Valji (2010), have observed that failing to address women's needs in a national healing project can slow a country's recovery in relation to issues such as democratic governance, economic development (especially of women), public-service delivery, psychosocial well being and ultimately gender justice. The recognition that women are a powerful positive force for long-term national healing and transitional justice can no longer be denied or avoided. Women are crucial to the promotion and implementation of participatory, community-based nurturing and caring processes that have the potential to dramatically strengthen social cohesion through family and other social networks.

Women-centred national healing and transitional justice

Research by UNIFEM (1999) revealed that women in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region comprise, on average, fewer than 10 per cent of official negotiating teams at peace talks. For example, despite extensive civil-society lobbying, the negotiations that led to the current Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe included just one female principal negotiator, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga. The striking absence of women from such peace and mediation processes means that they lack a voice in all the processes related

to bringing about justice and peace. Unsurprisingly, tense situations often become even more complex when institutions brokering peace deals almost invariably fail to address women's needs (such as vetting officials accused of perpetrating sexual violence against women) and to uphold the rights of women.

In the interviews conducted as part of the research for this paper, women were asked to share their visions of a national healing system serving the needs of women in Zimbabwe. Respondents unanimously viewed the involvement of women who had been directly affected by political violence as basic to any truly restorative national healing agenda. Asked whether women were adequately represented in the GPA, responses affirmed the GPA's own acknowledgement that women in Zimbabwe have not exercised their full rights as citizens, and that the new constitution should recognise the importance of women. Article 20 of the GPA acknowledges the need for gender parity and equal treatment for all, regardless of gender, sex, class, religion or tribe.

An analysis of the GPA in the context of the political violence since 2009 reveals the ways in which the principal actors in the unity government have neglected their obligations in relation to preventing further violence. Granted that the GPA does not mention the term transitional justice, nor does it specify the processes to be followed in cases of gender-based violence. Acknowledging the value of the Domestic Violence Act (No. 14 of 2006), most respondents in this study felt that, in times of political violence, women continue to bear the brunt of the conflict no matter what may be stated in neatly written commitments and policy documents. Of great concern to women respondents was the reality that, more than three years after the signing of the GPA, much of what it contains remains mere rhetoric. Little progress has been made in terms of the agreed principles of denouncing violence and ending the use of hate speech.

This problem is part of a broader lack of inclusion of women in decision-making. An analysis of the representation of women in government in Zimbabwe's reveals a grim picture. The proportion of women in government falls far short of SADC's 1997 Gender and Development Declaration, in which member states undertook to achieve 30 per cent representation of women in their governments by 2005. A report by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network based on the 2008 elections reveals that ZANU-PF appointed women to just 13 per cent of its ministerial posts and to 5 per cent of deputy-minister posts. The MDC appointed women to 33 per cent of its ministerial posts and 1 per cent to deputy-minister posts. Although the GPA calls for the appointment of women into strategic cabinet positions, very little has been achieved in this regard.

Not surprisingly, therefore, many respondents called for greater female representation among those leading the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration and for political rhetoric to be matched with action. While the creation the Organ is understood to be a long-term process that aims to allow people to recover from their experiences by addressing the injustices created by the violence, one woman expressed a view held by many when she commented:

> How excellent would it be if more women who have been politically abused and exploited were the facilitators of national healing, reconciliation and justice within the organ, like Minister Sekai Holland. (Interview, 12 June 2011)

Furthermore, discussions with NGO activists revealed that women who have joined the women's wings of the various political parties lack any real power or agency and struggle to influence party decisions. The MDC's Women's Assembly and ZANU-PF's Women's League were said to operate mainly as support structures for the male-dominated party leadership, aiming to produce 'good cultured female cadres' instead of locating themselves as integral to the empowerment of women members or occupying spaces that would define them as

political leaders. Several respondents argued that the inclusion of women in political decision-making structures would be a direct way of making transitional justice and national healing processes truly women-centred, and pointed with appreciation to the positions held by Vice President Joice Mujuru and Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe.

With reference to perceptions of gender-based political violence, survivors of such violence called for a shift of focus away from seeking out abusers to concentrating more on survivors' needs. During focus-group discussions, some respondents expressed a need to be heard with dignity, respect and without risk of being stigmatised when narrating their ordeals. They spoke of their need to be compensated for the loss of their property, and to be given free access to psychosocial support to help them deal with trauma. Women also regarded the addressing of systemic discrimination in the justice system – especially against women from the MDC formations – as crucial to gender justice. Respondents from the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association defined gender justice as 'adequate protection, security and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality'. Respondents who had experienced political violence were well aware of the cycles of violence and power dynamics at play in Zimbabwe's political sphere. Loyal allegiance to the status quo was said to be retrogressive in relation to creating a democratic society in Zimbabwe.

Participants in this study also lamented the fact that Zimbabwe is signatory to various international instruments, agreements and protocols that seek to promote and enhance the status of women in society, yet often ignores these in practice. Reference was made to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Declaration of the Rights of the Child; the Convention on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; the African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights; The Beijing Platform of Action; and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Section 1.11 of Zimbabwe's constitution provides that these international instruments be ratified and domesticated by incorporating them into national law. Unfortunately, from the perspective of the women who participated in this study, few of these commitments have been honoured.

The need for the rule of law to support national healing

Experience in Zimbabwe over the past decade has clearly demonstrated that the consolidation of peace in an immediate post-conflict period, and the maintenance of peace in the long term, cannot be achieved unless the affected population is confident that, through accessing legitimate structures, they can obtain redress for grievances (Du Plessis and Ford, 2008). At the same time, the heightened vulnerability of women and children, displaced persons and others, which is evident in all conflict and post-conflict situations, adds an element of urgency to the restoration of the rule of law.

The rule of law is highly valued by many women in Zimbabwe. To most respondents in this study, the concept refers to a principle of good and legitimate governance in which all persons, institutions, public or private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equitably enforced, independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human-rights norms and standards. To be fully realised, respondents were of the view that the rule of law requires measures that ensure adherence to the principles of:

- transparency and accountability to the law;
- equality before the law and fairness in its application;
- the separation of powers – executive, legislative and judiciary;
- participation in decision-making;

- legal and human security;
- the avoidance of arbitrary arrests; and
- procedural and legal transparency.

In the view of many respondents in this study, Zimbabwe's state authorities have been more concerned with consolidating their own power than with strengthening the rule of law, and seem to perceive the latter as a threat to the former. Given the legal impunity for human rights abuses that has reigned in Zimbabwe since 2000, the majority of respondents strongly advocated for institutional reforms in all sectors including education, health, public service and local government, but most importantly in the police, the military and the judiciary. The women acknowledged, however, that security-sector reform is fraught with challenges because of the high levels of politicisation and militarisation within state institutions. The women lamented that as long as the political environment remains fragile and contested, the development of a relationship of mutual trust between the military and civilians will remain a challenge. The judiciary and institutions of state security need to be reformed to ensure that they uphold the rule of law in a non-partisan manner.

Participants in the study were asked about the timing of electoral processes. In the view of most respondents, recent experiences in Zimbabwe have demonstrated that holding elections without adequate political and security preparations undermines rather than enhances the community's respect for the rule of law. They noted that, at the time of the study (in 2011), certain politicians were encouraging early elections in an attempt to lend legitimacy to their political leadership, processes and institutions. But respondents felt that premature elections had the potential to deliver, at best, nothing more than cosmetic electoral democracy. Respondents noted that previous elections held in insecure conditions discouraged meaningful participation by key groups, including women, and simply exposed the electorate to undue personal risks. For example, candidates and parties that have scant commitment to democratic principles and human rights have used election processes to advance their political interests and consolidate their power. This can lead to radicalised political discourses which promote violence and intimidation against opposition candidates, particularly women.

Security and safety needs

Women respondents emphasised the need for the rule of law to be restored, not only to promote peace but also to combat impunity related to sexual and gender-based violence. Historically, sexual and gender-based violence have been the predominant abomination in civil conflicts and wars, yet this egregious form of violence attracts little media attention and tends to be excluded from transitional-justice discourses and processes (Mutua, 2008). As shown later in this paper, respondents in this study noted that the trauma, stigma and social ostracism endured by survivors of sexual violence have led to family and community breakdowns, thus eroding the social fabric of society and creating long-term obstacles to bringing about gender justice. They expressed the view that failure to prosecute crimes of sexual violence sends a message to perpetrators that they can act with impunity. In fact, many respondents were strongly opposed to policies and peace agreements that include amnesties for crimes against humanity, gross violations of human rights or serious violations of international humanitarian law. For them this makes a mockery of efforts to reassert the rule of law.

These views are reinforced by a report released by AIDS-Free World (2009) on the serious obstacles faced by women opposition activists who are attempting to dismantle the patriarchal attitudes and practices of alleged ZANU-PF political stalwarts. The report revealed

shocking facts related to the use of rape as a form of political violence during Zimbabwe's 2008 elections. Rape was reportedly part of a widespread and systematic strategy aimed at MDC female members and supporters, calculated to intimidate, humiliate and punish MDC supporters and their families. The patterns and similarities that emerge from the stories of survivors reveal the existence of targeted cycles of violence.

The report alleges that more than 2000 women of all ages were abducted, raped, tortured and beaten across the country for their political affiliation (AIDS-Free World, 2009). Similarly, women in this study made reference to violent attacks been meted out to female leaders of civil-society organisations for their political activism in defending human rights. One example mentioned was Jestina Mukoko's widely publicised abduction and torture by members of the state's secret police service, the Central Intelligence Organisation, in December 2008. As Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project, she was captured and brutally tortured before being dragged before the courts over unsubstantiated terrorism charges. In the same vein, the secretary general of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe, Gertrude Hambira, was abducted and tortured for exposing police's physical and sexual brutality against farm workers (Interview, 12 June 2011).

Thus, Zimbabwe's transitional-justice processes must address the need for:

- a fundamental paradigm shift from patriarchal and paternalistic hegemonic dominance to a holistic perspective that recognises the equality of men and women;
- the restoration of women's dignity; and
- transformative empowerment.

If this does not occur, the risk of sexual violence will continue to prevent girls from attending school, women from resuming livelihood activities such as market gardening, and will discourage women from engaging in active politics.

Economic and livelihood needs

As Mutua (2008) argues, rights aim to regulate conflicts over scarce resources. They are not about abstract struggles taking place in a vacuum or removed from the human condition. Thus no credible transitional-justice initiative can fail to address the complex question of economic power for women. As one respondent in this study asked, 'Can a person eat the right to vote?' In her view, the rights of women to own and to control land and other economic resources are central to combating the kind of powerlessness that leads to sexual and gender-based violence. The fact that women's agricultural and market activities help to sustain Zimbabwe's national food security underscores the need for women to have access to control over productive assets, including land.

Not surprisingly, therefore, economic and livelihood needs emerged as priorities in national healing from participants in this study. Women who live in poverty are forced to prioritise their basic survival needs rather than aspirations they may have of political engagement and equality. However, as alluded to in the previous section, respondents explained that political abuse has often been linked to economic obstacles that prevent them from achieving sustainable livelihoods. In fact, some respondents equated economic powerlessness with political powerlessness both of which, in turn, lie at the root of sexual and gender-based violence.

Several respondents who had survived political violence had also experienced difficulty in returning to stable livelihoods. Many families have found themselves destitute and displaced, and facing continued threats to their security over allegations of supporting an opposition political party. Not surprisingly, many experienced a dramatic decline in their

health after such experiences. Rural women in particular spoke of the need for food, medical treatment and education of their children.

Some respondents expressed the view that transitional-justice processes tend to privilege civil and political rights over social, economic and cultural rights, reflecting a bias in the normative human-rights discourse. Providing women with loans and protecting their property rights was suggested by respondents as a means of assuring a significant multiplier effect on gender justice. A lawyer interviewed added her voice to this, arguing that securing women's land and property rights must be a major focus of recovery efforts, and should be addressed in any national healing project.

Some respondents also noted that when the state creates jobs these are usually earmarked for young men, often at the expense of adequate investment in women's employment and livelihood needs. Hence, it would be inadequate to address one set of political and civil rights and relegate economic and social rights to the background. As Mutua (1996) argues, human powerlessness and human dignity do not respect the commonly held simplistic and linear compartmentalisation of civil, political, economic and social rights.

Political needs

So far, this paper has argued that governments need to engage more proactively with women during transitional-justice processes. This necessitates the full inclusion of women in political, economic, social and judicial structures so that women are integral to all decision-making where laws and public policies are determined. The perceptions of the women interviewed are that the current Zimbabwean government lacks the requisite political will to effect the transformative transitions that would address women's political rights. Thus, there is need to engender widespread recognition of women's political rights at all levels of society.

The United Nations Security Council's Resolutions 1820 and 1888 address key elements of gender violence in conflict situations. Resolution 1820, adopted on 19 June 2008, particularly stresses the need to eliminate all forms of violence against civilians, particularly women and girls where rape and violence are used as instruments of warfare (UNIFEM, 1999; Van Reisen and Kabatesi, 2010). The resolution notes that these atrocious acts not only affect the health and safety of women but also the health and security of whole communities, and that the breakdown of law and order leaves women and girls vulnerable to further attacks and with little recourse to justice. Through these resolutions, violence against women is universally recognised as a peace and security issue linked to national healing and reconciliation (Hudson, 2003).

While many of the rural and urban women who participated in this study were unaware of the UN Security Council's various resolutions, those who did know of them noted Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1882, 1888 and 1889 with appreciation. They indicated that they see Resolution 1325 (which was adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000) as offering a robust basis for building a potentially powerful system of gender justice. They argued that it could be useful for: equalising women's participation in conflict resolution and peace-building; strengthening the protection of women during and after conflict and helping to prevent conflict in the longer term.

As a way of strengthening accountability for offences against women, lawyers interviewed expressed the need for consistent reporting mechanisms and indicators against which all these resolutions can be reported. They noted that, while aggregated data is not always easy to obtain, this cannot be a reason for abandoning the struggle for women's rights and emancipation. They stressed the need for women to record the number of women raped during and after political violence, the number of internally displaced women who had never recovered their property, and the number of women human-rights activists and defenders

who were arbitrarily arrested, detained, physically and mentally tortured for speaking out.

Furthermore, funding needs to be earmarked for women affected by politically motivated violence. This was seen as an important part of any empowerment and recovery strategy. For this strategy to function, women called for a leadership and accountability system anchored on the principles of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions and a transitional-justice architecture that has the potential to strengthen women's recovery processes.

Retributive versus restorative justice

Justice is generally defined as the ideal of accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs. When asked what justice meant to them, most respondents in this study mentioned notions of prosecution, compensation and truth telling. They noted that justice implies a regard for the rights of the accused, a regard for the interests of victims and aims to ensure the well-being of society. Several interpreted justice to mean more than retribution, conflating it with a need for the restoration of lost livelihoods and economic security. They acknowledged that, as a contested concept, justice is always rooted in cultural traditions, and that Zimbabwe has formal judicial mechanisms as well as other customary dispute-resolution mechanisms. Many respondents argued that, in the context of politically motivated violence against women, healing and reconciliation can occur only when the need for justice overrides other needs.

Respondents who advocated for the prosecution of perpetrators gave two reasons for doing so. The first was that most victims want to ensure that those accused of committing crimes, including serious violations of international humanitarian law, are prosecuted, and see this as the best way of validating their own worth and dignity. The second reason was that prosecutions have the potential to prevent revenge attacks and the escalation of violence, and thereby contribute to upholding the rule of law and sustaining peace and political stability. Essentially, respondents stressed that that post-conflict societies and states have an obligation to prosecute and punish perpetrators as a way of guaranteeing future security for all.

While acknowledging the potential good that can come from restorative justice for victims of violent conflict, some respondents voiced concerns that, in the current polarised political climate, restorative justice for women might include a victim-blaming component that could prevent healing. They raised concerns about being forced to take responsibility for the crimes committed against them, and thus having to accept insincere apologies in the name of reconciliation. The women referred to the fears that traumatised them every day as grounded in the power imbalances between men and women. This situation was, in their view, likely to lead to offenders manipulating restorative-justice processes and trivialising the gravity of crimes committed, thereby overshadowing the victims' interests and rights to justice. Others expressed concerns that perpetrators may opt for restorative justice, seeing this as an easy option that might earn them lenient penalties. Respondents felt that such situations would merely reinforce the patriarchal norms that condone male dominance, and make behaviour change among perpetrators of violence even less likely. In the view of several women, cultural norms that put women in subservient positions, undervalue and disrespect them in relation to men, make them prone to violence from their male counterparts. One of the interviewees explained:

> Restorative justice is good. You need to forgive before your healing process can go on. It might not be for the good of you as a victim, but what you feel inside, removing the burden of hurt from yourself. By telling my story, I can be vindicated...that I was not to blame but the violent offender should take responsibility. But, I need to decide when it is right to forgive. I don't want an apology because most of the time they are empty apologies, hoping to go unpunished. (Interview, 6 June 2011)

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Women were supportive of national healing processes that would involve truth seeking and the mapping of patterns of past violence as a way of trying to understand what actually happened to them. During focus-group discussions women argued for gender-sensitive approaches to the gathering of this information so that rape victims would be able to testify or tell their stories without further humiliation.

Women stressed the need to prosecute serious offenders and that the state should compensate women who were victims of state-sponsored violence. They noted that, in the absence of arrests and prosecution, few people take healing seriously; perpetrators continue to threaten communities and many women continue to feel vulnerable and insecure. The state should end the current state of impunity for perpetrators and establish legal mechanisms for transitional justice. With support from different stakeholders the state should facilitate gender-sensitive projects in communities for people to rebuild their lives. As one woman noted:

> I think that without some compensation or assistance to victims it would be difficult
> to rebuild lives because people's means of livelihood were destroyed by the violence.
> (Interview, 6 June 2011)

Several respondents expressed the view that the most restorative act that the current government could perform would be to reveal the truth about the arbitrary arrests, detention and disappearances of opposition political activists. Others cited reparation programmes that provide a range of material and symbolic benefits to victims, and institutional reform that includes vetting the public service and removing from office those public employees personally responsible for gross violations of human rights. Some women expressed concern that paying compensation to affected families might be construed as somehow designed to distract families from pursuing the truth about their loved ones. Other affected families, especially female-headed families that have little economic security, could face a dilemma about the need to feed themselves in the short term, and the need to know the truth before any compensation or reparations can be accepted. There is also the distress caused by putting a value on the life of the disappeared by accepting money from authorities. As one woman remarked:

> Compensation is a thing when you destroy someone's property and give some money
> to cover the loss; but how can you cover the loss of my father, brother, husband? It's
> not possible. (Focus group, 7 June 2011)

Most participants stressed the need for full consultation as a critical element in the success of any model of compensation or reparation as a healing tool in transitional justice. By full consultation, they meant meaningful public participation, particularly including the affected women and their families, in co-ordinating the broader assistance aimed at strengthening the rule of law in the country.

Some were of the view that women should demand a truth commission or a tribunal for crimes committed during the political violence, and that they should also lobby for a speedy process in addressing the suffering experienced. However, many were highly sceptical of the willingness and commitment of the present government to institute such bodies given government's record on past commissions whose findings were never made public. The majority of respondents argued strongly against blanket amnesties through presidential decrees, as has been the practice in Zimbabwe to date. A group of female students who participated in a focus group agreed that:

> The truth about the facts should be clarified, but the perpetrators should not be given amnesty otherwise this will defeat the whole objective of national healing as the attitude of most affected families will remain resentful. Therefore, amnesty should not be given. Families, particularly those that are politically engaged, have a burning desire to see the sacrifice of their loved ones officially acknowledged. (Focus group, 7 June 2011)

Several women also explained that reparations would provide a range of material and symbolic benefits to victims individually and collectively, while encouraging institutional reform. Important goals of reparations policies should be to empower survivors to be able to make independent decisions about their own future, to restore their dignity and to advocate for reforming power relations in all spheres of life.

However, most respondents had strong reservations about state-led or politician-driven transitional justice processes because of the paternalistic nature of Zimbabwean politics, currently viewed as being characterised by mistrust and persistent state-sponsored violence.

Women recounted stories of small-scale healing ceremonies being held in a number of provinces as part of restorative justice processes in which communities have attempted to make peace with victims of brutal clashes that left many dead. Such projects use traditional-justice mechanisms and rituals to heal the wounds and hatred caused by the violent conflict. For some, the response has been overwhelming. In their view, these processes do not have the trappings of modern courts, which are often experienced as inaccessible and unfamiliar. Instead, perpetrators are put before village elders, and surrounded by a familiar environment. Trials take place, guilt is acknowledged and compensation offered before the perpetrators ask for forgiveness and are reintegrated back into the community. One woman reflected on the effectiveness of the process as follows:

> Here we are not talking of strangers who committed crimes and violence in the villages, we are talking of those we know and [we] recognised that they caused harm and suffering and also did injustice to innocent civilians, mainly women and children. (Interview, 3 June 2011)

It was acknowledged that transitional justice processes are never perfect and will not satisfy all segments of society. For now, though, the biggest challenge is that most women in Zimbabwe have no access to the relevant justice systems.

Several women, especially in the rural areas, revealed that they did not know much about the GPA or the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration and its function. They said that no one had disseminated information about the two institutions. Those respondents who had heard about the Organ observed that it has a limited mandate, is poorly funded and that the government has not shown commitment or political will to the national healing agenda. In the rural areas women revealed that various forms of violence continued, and that women were not free to discuss issues related to the traumatic experiences of the 2008 political violence. Women suggested lobbying via women's organisations, parliamentary committees and women leaders in the GNU. Through focus group discussions it was also noted that NGOs and churches have been encouraged to capture women's contributions and to pass these on to the GPA principals and parliament.

Some respondents argued that SADC, as a regional body with a gender unit and specific gender protocols, should vigorously lobby for the involvement and participation of women in the process of national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Others suggested that women's movements from other countries that have experienced violent situations such as Rwanda, Ghana and Sierra Leone should share their ideas on reconciliation and healing.

Psychosocial needs

According to Eppel (2008) traumatic situations are those in which a person is rendered powerless in the face of great danger. Trauma is a response to an event that overwhelms an individual's coping resources, making it difficult for him or her to function effectively in society. It generally manifests in heightened levels of anxiety, distress and loneliness, and other somatic symptoms (Hayner, 2001). Thus, when left unattended, such symptoms can lead to serious mental disorders or even death.

In this paper, the term trauma is used to include events experienced by women during the political violence that occurred between 2000 and 2008. Because this trauma was highly political, it is important to stress the cultural, political and social context in which the trauma was embedded. In other words, cultural and environmental systems mediate human experience and can provide resources that either help people to cope, or deny and exacerbate their suffering (Boss, 2006). Respondents in this study stated that trauma has overtaxed their own personal resources and those of their communities, thereby destroying both individuals and the collective structures of society.

One survivor narrated her ordeal at the hands of the youth militias. They abducted her and physically assaulted her many times using batons before gang-raping her in front of her eight-year old son, claiming that she was a 'sell out'. Her traumatic experience typifies the stories of many women who experienced horrendous and politically motivated sexual violence. What needs to be healed, therefore, is a multitude of individual, political, social and cultural traumas. As Eppel (2008) argues, a variety of psychotherapeutic methods will need to be harnessed, using not only western models but also cross-cultural and collective-healing therapies.

The women's narratives collected during this study show that, as a post-conflict society, Zimbabwe has a clear need to confront trauma as a support mechanism for healing and reconciliation. As Summerfield (1996) points out, societies caught up in long-term conflict can undergo serious changes as a result of extended exposure to political violence. New social patterns, such as widespread prostitution, rape and domestic violence may emerge. Violence can also reinforce a sense of group identity and victimisation, and can encourage the emergence of markers of group identity, expressed through dress, language and social practices such as spirituality and prayer. Women respondents in this study felt that the horrendous sexual exploitation they were subjected to had left indelible marks upon their individual and group consciousnesses, marking their memories forever and changing their identities in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

Spirituality and prayer were mentioned by respondents as strategies used by female victims to cope with their situations. One woman recounted:

> I usually feel sad and start crying as a way of taking away my pain. I pray daily for my health although at times I experience feelings of anger, revenge for the perpetrators and resentment and ask why God allowed such things to happen to me. (Interview, 3 June 2011)

Women in the study also expressed fears about confrontations with their abusers, noting that this affects them psychologically and can endanger the recovery process. One rape survivor lamented:

> If you have been sexually assaulted or raped the worst thing you could do is to say I could face my rapist. How could you think straight when the person who had instilled so much fear in you is staring at you with a dead cold look. All of that would come

back. Even if it is for a short while, it would be so unnerving that you couldn't think straight. The grief I felt when it was done is still the same no matter how many years have passed. You don't just get over sexual abuse or rape. (Interview, 3 June 2011)

Another woman echoed this, saying:

> Women who suffered during the political violence, and were sexually or physically abused, suffer trauma and have flashbacks. Seeing the perpetrator can trigger this. My body would just go numb when I imagine them walking into my house again. I feel the tension in my shoulders and my hands would start shaking. I get this kind of shock sensation. I go into what the nursing sister at the clinic said was post-traumatic stress. I am not sure what that means but at times I just stutter and look a little stupid. My self-esteem is now very low. (Interview, 3 June 2011)

The opinions of women interviewed converged when it came to emphasising the inter-generational effects of trauma. The view expressed was that, if adult individuals cannot cope with their past trauma, there is a high chance that they will pass unresolved traumatic experiences on to their children. Referring to what she perceives as a significant increase in drug abuse and mental illness in both young people and adults, a nursing sister from a psychiatric centre in Harare pointed out that societies that are deeply traumatised by the long-term effects of political violence can become trapped in highly self-destructive political dynamics and perpetual cycles of violence. In her view, justice and reconciliation will not be achieved through the signing of a peace agreement alone, but will also require Zimbabweans to make adjustments at a more fundamental psychological level.

Despite growing evidence of the individual and collective consequences of trauma, a number of participants consider the measures being taken to address these invisible wounds as inadequate, if not entirely missing from transitional-justice discourses and processes. The acknowledgement of trauma caused by political violence remains relatively marginalised, and the few non-governmental organisations working with traumatised victims of political violence, such as the Research and Advocacy Unit, have noted that their findings and recommendations are either ignored or trivialised by national policy makers tasked with designing and implementing transitional-justice mechanisms. Debates surrounding the complexity of trauma remains narrowly defined and confined to the health professions; they are thus disconnected or marginalised from broader discussions of political and transitional justice.

Emotional needs

Several women reported suffering abuse at the hands of investigating police officers and other justice professionals even as they sought help and safety from further violent attacks. Frequently cited was a victim-blaming attitude taken by police and judicial officers, often accompanied by threats of political 'investigation' of the victim. Respondents also described being treated as if they had deserved the assaults. Several described facing criminalisation because they had gone to the police after being physically assaulted or sexually abused. There is a perception that female members of opposition groups who fell victim to political violence are treated more harshly than men in comparable situations. Several women expressed concerns about the sexist attitudes of police and judicial officials, as well as about compound discrimination and how that had negatively affected their own restorative processes of healing and recovery. During focus-group discussions, women stressed that putting new laws in the books is not enough, but that law enforcement and court mechanisms also have

to be made friendly and accessible to women. Respondents revealed that the police force was often uninterested in both domestic and political violence; and unless a woman can show physical evidence of the violence she has suffered, police and law-enforcement authorities are often unwilling to believe and assist them.

A number of women who had experienced the criminal justice system described the ongoing trivialisation of politically motivated physical or sexual abuse of women. These women condemned the institutional inertia and dysfunctionality in the justice system as a whole. Women survivors described the difficulties they had faced in laying charges due to the trivialisation of the politically motivated assaults and abuse in general, and the characterisation of some offences as minor. They remarked on the incongruity between the seriousness of the abuse they had suffered and the nature of the charges that were eventually laid.

During discussions women pointed out systemic tendencies towards politically motivated sexual abuse and exploitation:

> The point is not that the officials do not know that sexual abuse is a serious violation of my rights as a woman, but that the system itself refuses to recognise politically motivated crimes [against] those seen as the opposition. It's all about ZANU-PF politics to punish those viewed as MDC prostitutes. (Interview, 7 June 2011)

Another woman described the justice system's trivialisation of sexual assault and abuse:

> In my case, the court date kept changing. There was no regard concerning my life as a human being. The court thought it was funny…they laughed and kept moving the court date. Then when the police responsible for the investigation was transferred, I lost the charges and that was the end of story. (Interview, 7 June 2011)

However, a few respondents felt that the symbolic role of the court and police was still important. These women emphasised the important role of the formality of the courtroom and the relative power that some judges and other court officials had shown in responding to their ordeals. Some women also cited improvements over the years in police responses and in support for police intervention.

The need to know the fate of the disappeared and to see human remains

Knowing the fate of relatives who have disappeared was a priority for all the women who took part in the interviews and focus groups that inform this paper. They want this not just to end the uncertainty they live with, but also so that they can reach a sense of closure and healing. In African culture, and for families of the disappeared in general, the death of a loved one is almost impossible to come to terms with when the deceased's remains cannot be accounted for. Four of the six women interviewed grudgingly accepted that their relatives were dead while the other two said they remain hopeful, even though their loved ones had been missing for many years. One woman from the Seke communal lands near Harare, whose husband and brother both disappeared, described the difficulties she faces as follows:

> As a family we have not yet carried out any rituals because we have no proof they are dead. It is still a matter of investigation by the police. According to our marriage custom and culture I cannot wear the symbols that I am a widow because we have not seen his dead body, maybe he is still alive somewhere. It worries me a lot

and every day, I am troubled because, until the police declare that they are dead, we cannot register their deaths. This makes it difficult for me to use some of my husband's property because the authorities do not believe that they are dead since they were linked with the opposition political party MDC-T. (Interview, 21 May 2011)

An analysis of these women's narratives shows some resemblances with what Pauline Boss (2006) refers to as the 'ambiguity of loss' in those who experience the traumatic loss or disappearance of loved ones. The significance of seeing the dead body also brings closure to the haunting experiences of denial, and allows relatives to grieve and conduct the mandatory traditional rituals celebrating the life of the departed. Religious attitudes and ritual obligations after death shape perceptions of the importance of human remains to families. During interviews, most women concurred on the need to either see the human remains or have absolute evidence of death in order to complete the necessary rituals. For most women, particularly those in rural areas, documents alone cannot confirm the death of someone who has disappeared – a sense of closure comes only with the retrieval of the body or human remains. The issue of disappearances was also seen as an economic issue, with relatives spending a lot of money consulting traditional healers in search of missing relatives. For women who depended on their missing husbands financially, the loss of a breadwinner often creates economic insecurity and poverty for those left behind.

Women activists indicated that, because of the continuing polarisation among members of different political parties in Zimbabwe, families of the disappeared do not trust the government's investigative efforts, and this extends to a lack of confidence in cases where remains are returned to them without DNA tests being carried out. As one woman remarked:

In our African culture, people do not just disappear or die. There is an explanation to every death. Therefore, to perform burial rituals we need something like his clothes, his bones or anything like that, but with what we are seeing now I don't think this is possible. Whoever is responsible has to tell us the whole story how they killed our person, where they buried him and only then will the elders in the family accept to perform the ritual. (Interview, 21 May 2011)

Analysis shows that the process of understanding death or disappearance due to politically motivated violence is heavily embedded in cultural practice, which can be distinguished from seeking the judicial truth. This implies that national healing in Zimbabwe needs to take cognisance of cultural sensitivities in order to help promote healing and avoid further emotional damage to those affected.

From a gender perspective, the disappearance or death of a male relative by political abduction can also bring about an identity crisis among the women in his family. In Zimbabwe, the traditional family is patri-local, in the sense that married women move to the husband's home on marriage. While this can provide economic and emotional support, it can also become a great source of stress if the wives of the disappeared are alienated from their husband's family because of intergenerational and gender-related power relations. Younger married women tend to find themselves at the bottom of family hierarchies in which they are expected to be subservient to their mothers-in-law who are, in turn, dominated by older men (Osirim, 2001).

Both urban and rural women talked of the stigma attached to a married woman whose husband disappears due to politically motivated violence. If that woman decides to leave her in-laws' home or remarry, she can be seen as betraying both her husband and her in-laws. In many traditional cultures in Zimbabwe, as long as ambiguity remains about her husband's fate a married woman may not consider remarriage. Thus a married woman may be trapped in a family that resents her presence, but does not want her to leave due to the

social stigma that would result if she did (Osirim, 2001). In some cases, the wife is blamed for the disappearance or for bringing bad luck to the family. As one woman lawyer said:

> The family also sees the wife whose husband has disappeared in a different way. In many cases, the family members suspect her in many ways. Even when she is busy searching for her husband she is accused of having gone for something else. There are even mothers-in-law who suspect that the daughter-in-law has other boyfriends who are responsible for the disappearance. Economically, the woman may be perceived as bringing nothing to the family yet being another mouth to feed, therefore a burden. (Interview, 22 May 2011)

The net result of this web of obligation and resentment can be an environment of extreme difficulty for such women. One extreme example of the crisis of identity and vulnerability that such women face was a situation in which a father-in-law sought to abuse the woman sexually and take her as a second wife.

These crises of identity and stigmatisation can also have an impact on communities. Generally, in Zimbabwe traditional cultures have relative respect for widows, but women whose husbands are abducted and disappeared are stigmatised because they cannot adopt the status of widows. A number of women argued that unless the state authorities give proper answers regarding political disappearances there is no resolution to the ambiguity of these women's status in society.

The need for transformation in the education and the security sectors

The first line of defence against patriarchy is early education and socialisation that models more appropriate behaviour in the first few years of a child's life. An early consciousness of sharing, equal and respectful relations between genders is likely to create adults who are more conscious and discouraging of male-dominated hierarchies. The state has an obligation to create an education system that forges a citizenship that is averse to misogyny.

Similarly, the state has an obligation to provide state and human security through democratic governance, respect for the rule of law and human rights (Chitiyo, 2009). The women who participated in this research regarded education and advocacy around preventing abuse and enhancing women's equality as critical. These women also noted the need for reform with regard to personnel in the justice system, including the police and the military. They emphasised the need for security-sector reform through institutional restructuring, in-service training and education on transformative justice. Women cited outdated and insensitive remarks, actions and attitudes of some police officers, lawyers, judges and other professionals in the judicial system as sufficient evidence of the need for retraining and reform. They felt that mandatory education on what constitutes abuse, gender justice, gender-sensitive transitional justice, women's equality and cultural sensitivity was needed. Some respondents called for greater female representation among senior police officers, lawyers, magistrates and judges as part of the reform package. Others expressed a wish for holistic transformation in the education and judiciary sectors, including curriculum reform so that these systems become responsive to reforms taking place in other sectors.

Conclusion

This paper has examined a range of theoretical, political and empirical issues related to empowering women to effectively engage with transitional-justice issues in Zimbabwe. In drawing attention to women's immediate needs for healing, the paper aims to encourage an awareness of transitional justice and, in particular, what this means for women. Many women in Zimbabwe have already come to realise that their own healing is essential for national healing to take place. They are advocating for a transitional-justice system capable of bringing about justice and sustainable peace through mechanisms for psychosocial healing, including acknowledgements, apologies, reconciliation, accountability, truth, reparations and personal empowerment. They have also proposed the need for a widespread recognition of the rule of law as a basis for the restoration of social harmony and stability. Although there is some scepticism about whether retributive justice can really advance women's claims for justice, judging from the views of participants in this study, there is a degree of openness to alternative restorative-justice practices that aim to meet women's transitional-justice needs more holistically. Debate on the merits of restorative justice revolved around those who believe that this offers victims, offenders and communities more options than the more established mechanisms of retributive justice. Greater reflection is, therefore, required on the respective roles of retributive and restorative forms of justice, mainstreaming criminal justice and other transitional-justice mechanisms as a way of mitigating (and preventing) gender-based human rights violations.

In moving towards a holistic approach to dealing with the past, many people seem to agree that societies recovering from violent conflicts need both legal instruments and incentives for healing and relationship building. This study therefore suggests that retributive justice should complement restorative approaches based on the five key pillars of accountability, truth recovery, reparations, institutional reform and reconciliation. With regard to the truth versus justice debate, my findings seem to suggest that public exposure of truth through truth telling provides redress for victims, counteracts cultures of denial, contributes to individual and social healing, and supports reconciliation through dialogue.

Respondents in this study expressed different views about the degrees to which the state and criminal justice system can be trusted to effectively respond to the needs of women in the broader national healing project. Because of their experiences of oppression and discrimination at the hands of patriarchal state institutions, respondents stressed the need for institutional reforms and women-centred national healing practices that are tied to awareness-raising and women's economic and political empowerment.

It is clear that increased attention needs to be given to women-sensitive justice principles. Thus, the process leading to security-sector reform should include consultation with all stakeholders, including women suffering as a result of gender-based violence and those affected by the prevailing political violence in Zimbabwe.

It is hoped that further empirical research, including comparative analyses of women's transitional-justice needs in different communities, taking into account their different political, social and economic contexts, will add to the findings of this paper, and provide further pathways towards transformative social change.

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