

An Exploration of the Impact of Zimbabwe's 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina* on Women and Children

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*The article considers the impact of an urban clean-up exercise which was carried out by the Zimbabwe government in 2005. It focuses mainly on the impact of the exercise on urban women and children. The methodology of the article is predominantly literature review, and the major findings are that the Zimbabwean state has a long history of targeting and victimising women. Officially known as Operation Restore Order, Operation *Murambatsvina* was a police-led operation to rid the urban cities of informal structures, both housing and business. However, human rights activists argue that it was a covert operation targeting voters who had shown a preference for the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The ensuing demolition of structures designated illegal had devastating effects on the family unit and, as this article argues, violated the core tenets of sovereignty. The state solution to the demolition, which was in the form of another operation known as Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhl*, was a failure as it lacked a genuine, legitimate and ethical authority and the political will to remedy the situation caused by Operation *Murambatsvina*. The paper concludes by noting that the government of Zimbabwe, through its continued and consistent operations that specifically target and affect women, perpetuates male dominance, patriarchy and discrimination against women and children in Zimbabwe.*

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Operation *Murambatsvina*, women and children, victimisation and discrimination.

The use of violence as an instrument of governance predates independence in Zimbabwe. Its use towards specific groups is equally not a new phenomenon. Thus violence must be analysed not as episodic but rather a continuum which was perpetuated by the various administrations since the formation of modern day Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was colonised through the use of violence, colonial Zimbabwe was ruled by violence and the threat of violence, the country was liberated through violence and continues to be ruled through violence. Hence it can be argued that, in Zimbabwe, the preferred method of governing is through violence. Episodes of state violence can be enumerated as follows: First *Chimurenga* (War of Primary Resistance 1896-1897), Second *Chimurenga*

(War of Independence 1965-1980), *Hondo Yeminda* (land reform programme 2000), Operation *Gukurahundi* (genocide in the two regions of Matabeleland and Midlands 1983-1984), and Operation *Mavhotera Papi?* (election-related violence, meaning literally 'where did you place your vote?' 2008) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 281-295; Sadomba 2011: 229).

If, broadly, the use of violence is part of the statecraft, then many episodes of violence in Zimbabwe which the state considers an instrument of governance may be construed as human rights abuse elsewhere. This raises the very contentious notion of sovereignty. Whose sovereignty matters? Is it that of the individual or that of the state? Closely linked to this is the notion of independence. Whose

independence is it? Is it the independence of the state so that it can behave as it likes, that is like a sovereign, or is it the independence of the individuals in the state? This analysis enables one to understand the two divergent interpretations of Operation *Murambatsvina*. However, an exploration of police operations that specifically targeted women will first be undertaken in the following paragraphs as a precursor to the contextualisation of Operation *Murambatsvina*.

Police operations targeting women in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean police have a long history of running operations that have targeted women. The Solidarity Peace Trust (2010: 16) records that as far back as October 1983 'unaccompanied women in urban areas were suddenly deemed to be prostitutes and were routinely arrested, in another version of "operation clean up"'. Specific episodes of violence which have targeted women include Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa* (ladies, get married) of 2 March 2007. Operation *Chinyavada* (Scorpion) of 2 June 1983 specifically targeted hundreds of women found walking on the streets after 6pm; they were taken to detention centres. During the operation, any women found walking alone in the urban areas was deemed to be a prostitute soliciting for sex, hence contravening Section 8 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Law) Act, Chapter 9:23. Operation *Chinyavada* of 1983, also known as Operation Clean-up, was meant to clean the streets of 'pfambi/mahure' (prostitutes) and force them to the rural areas where they 'belonged' (Harris 2008). The government of Zimbabwe wants Zimbabweans and the rest of the world to believe that 'there is no Zimbabwean without a rural home'. This observation is affirmed by the police officer commanding Harare Province, who told journalists that 'no one in Zimbabwe comes from nowhere. Everybody belongs somewhere' (in the *Daily Mirror* 21 June 2005).

Musiyiwa (2008: 65) also notes that

another operation that specifically targeted women was conducted by the City of Harare in 1991, which was justified as a preparation for the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Vambe (2008: 137) concur with this observation and notes that the operation was 'conducted just before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare to give the impression to the visiting Queen of England that Zimbabwe was a clean country', albeit that this operation was targeted at people, particularly women, in Mbare, one of Harare's oldest high-density suburbs. In 1986, when Zimbabwe was preparing for the Non-Aligned Movement's meeting, 'women walking alone at night were the targets as they were presumed to be prostitutes' (Vambe 2008: 137), and further clean-up exercises were done in preparation for the visit to Zimbabwe of Pope John Paul the Second (Vambe 2008: 137) and in the 1991 'Clean up' campaign (Musiyiwa 2008: 65).

On 2 March 2007, the Zimbabwe Republic Police launched Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa*, which was meant to rid urban areas of prostitutes by encouraging them to get married, as the name of the operation suggested. This operation used the Sexual Offences Act to criminalise women and charge them for loitering and soliciting for sex. Most of the women arrested were accused of contravening Section 8 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Law) Act, Chapter 9:23. The operation was biased as it targeted only women and not the men who formed the bulk of their clients. This puts an ironic twist on the patriarchal belief that women cannot be independent; they have to have a man to be valued and legitimated. This reduces women to nothing but the property of men.

The intention of Operation *Murambatsvina*, as argued by the government of Zimbabwe, was 'to rid the country of illegal structures, crime, filthy stalls and squalor' (Musiyiwa 2008: 65). In doing so, the operation 'evicted thousands of people deemed to be illegal squatters country-wide, particularly in urban centres'

in a bid to 'restore order in the country since hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the 1970s war of independence had settled illegally in urban centres and commercial farms'. These included large numbers of the 'squatters and vagrants in Epworth, Mbare Musika and other parts of greater Harare' (Musiyiwa 2008: 65).

Another women-specific operation was launched on 1 January 2011 and code-named Operation *Chengetedzai Hunhu* (maintain your dignity). It had similar objectives as its predecessor, Operation *Chinyavada*, and also targeted urban women. This was followed by Operation *Dyira Bonus Kumba* (spend your annual bonus at home) launched on 1 December 2012. The latest in these series of operations is Operation No Loitering, which was launched on 1 February 2013 and has the objective of ridding urban areas of prostitutes.

Contextualising Operation Murambatsvina

On 19 May 2005, with little if any warning at all, the Zimbabwean government embarked on the operation it called Operation *Murambatsvina*¹ (Chari 2008: 105; IDMC 2008: 18; Mhiripiri 2008: 149; Nyamanhindi 2008: 118). It is claimed that Operation *Murambatsvina* was officially announced as having ended on 25 June 2005 (Chari 2008: 110), exactly 37 days after its official commencement, yet the negative effects of the operation are arguably still felt and experienced today. The Vice President of Zimbabwe, Joyce Mujuru, is also said to have announced that Operation *Murambatsvina* 'was now complete' on 28 July 2005 (COIS 2006: 165). This exposes the uncertainty that surrounded Operation *Murambatsvina*.

The legality of Operation *Murambatsvina* is a contentious issue which unfortunately is beyond the scope

of this paper. However, in that regard, the then Chairperson of the government-appointed Harare Town House Ms Sekesai Makwawarara stated categorically that Zimbabwe was within the bounds of the law when it instituted and executed the operation (Nyamanhindi 2008: 119, citing *The Herald*, 19 May 2005: 1). Makwawarara further asserted that the government of Zimbabwe was right in claiming that it was within its sovereign rights to determine its trajectory concerning urban dwelling structures and commerce. As quoted by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat 2005) in Chibisa and Sigauke (2008: 31), the Zimbabwean government argued that it was 'arresting disorderly or chaotic urbanisation including its health consequences; stopping illegal, parallel market transactions, especially foreign currency dealing and hoarding of consumer commodities in short supply; and reversing damages caused by inappropriate urban agricultural practices'.

If the operation was legally constituted, the manner in which it was executed, especially the brutality of the evictions and the resultant damage to property cannot be argued to be legal. The ferocity of the Operation *Murambatsvina* left the most vulnerable groups of the Zimbabwean societies, particularly women and children, even more vulnerable. The timing of the operation was also not a coincidence given that it was executed in the middle of a bitter winter leaving room for asserting that this was a move meant to inflict the maximum damage, loss and suffering on the victims.

The execution of Operation *Murambatsvina* was rightly challenged by a number of governments and organisations such as The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRIZ), the Country of Origin Information Service

¹ *Murambatsvina* is translated to mean 'drive out the filth' in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. It is officially translated as 'Operation Clean-Up' (Chari 2008: 105; Harris 2008: 40; Musiyiwa 2008: 65).

(COIS 2006: 68), and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2008: 22). These organisations publicly and vehemently spoke out against Operation *Murambatsvina*, citing its multiple human rights abuses specifically Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights² and Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) and the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) are some of the institutions within Zimbabwe who provided opposing views to the operation (Ncube, Bate & Tren 2005: 8). There were also discerning voices from within the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). One such disapproval of the cruelty of the operation came from Professor Jonathan Moyo, who noted that Operation *Murambatsvina* was 'an inhumane, barbaric demolition of properties belonging to the weak and poor in our society' (Ncube, Bate & Tren 2005: 9). In other words, contrary to the government of Zimbabwe's denial of committing human rights abuses and contraventions in its Operation *Murambatsvina*, as described by the aforementioned civil society organisations, the impact and consequences of the operation indicate gross human rights abuses, as was claimed and proven by various other international, regional and local civil society organisations.

Current discourse on Operation Murambatsvina

A number of studies have been conducted on Zimbabwe's Operation *Murambatsvina*. Some studies, for example by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2008) and Potts (2008), concentrated on the sociological impacts of Operation

Murambatsvina on the population of Zimbabwe. Other studies focused on the policy weaknesses that surrounded Operation *Murambatsvina* (Maroleng 2005). Yet others investigated the political context and impact of the operation on Zimbabwe (Chari 2008) and the southern African region (Tibaijuka 2005). Operation *Murambatsvina* was also studied and explored in relation to migration (IDMC 2008), urban developmental control (Chipungu 2011) and human rights (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions & Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights 2007). Vambe (2008) investigated some economic implications of the operation on ordinary Zimbabweans, particularly women, and similarly Nyamanhindi (2008) focused on the gender implications of Operation *Murambatsvina* in the Zimbabwean context. Of the studies conducted on Operation *Murambatsvina* thus far, only two analysed the phenomenon strictly from a gender perspective, namely Vambe (2008), who focused mainly on the economic implications of Operation *Murambatsvina* for women, and Nyamanhindi (2008), who focused on gender. This article seeks to investigate the impacts of Operation *Murambatsvina* from a gender perspective focusing on how women and children were affected by this operation.

Beauty Vambe (2008: 76), citing the report by Tibaijuka (2005:45), concedes that

most of the victims were already among the most economically disadvantaged groups in society ... particularly among widows, single mothers, children, orphans, the elderly and the disabled persons.

Vambe (2008: 77) further contends that these violations of the Constitution of Zimbabwe by the authorities [of Zimbabwe] put in doubt the legality of Operation *Murambatsvina*. Also and more importantly, they lead one to infer that it may have been conducted in order to undermine black women's economic activities.

² Article 25 of the UDHR states that, 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control'

It can thus be argued that Operation *Murambatsvina*, in the words of Vambe (2008: 81), 'actually targeted women in order to undermine their efforts, in the process depriving people [particularly women] of their money, livelihood and property'. Vambe premised her pronouncement on the injustices committed against women by state organs and state machinery which ought to protect them. This position of the government of Zimbabwe contradicts what the government once stood for, i.e., the emancipation of women. Ironically, Zimbabwe is part of many legal and policy frameworks that specifically protect women and children. These policy frameworks, policies and protocols will be discussed below.

International gender policy frameworks

Zimbabwe is a part to the following fundamental conventions which were designed to protect women by aiming to achieve and uphold gender justice:

- the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991),
- The Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995);
- The Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR);
- The Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour
- The Convention on Economic, and Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC).

Regional policy frameworks

Regionally Zimbabwe is a part to a plethora of protocols that promote and preserve the rights of women. These include the following:

- 2003 African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women,
- 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender and Equality in Africa
- Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol (later ratified in 2008 after the operation)
- the COMESA Gender Policy

National legal and policy frameworks

It is hard to conceive the effects of the operation given that Zimbabwe passed more than 17 separate pieces of legislation aimed at advancing gender equality. If these legal developments are anything to go by, then Zimbabwean women should be among the most legally protected in the world. Specifically the Zimbabwean constitution protects women (both the 2005 and the 2013 constitutions). Specific sections worth noting are:

- Chapter 2 on National Objectives
- Chapter 4 on the Bill of Rights

If Zimbabwe has such an array of legal instruments how then did it convince itself to undermine these laws and go ahead to execute the operation with such negative effects. This becomes even more difficult to interpret given the government's earlier call to women in the 1990s, to build cabins in their backyards to generate income through rentals as part of women empowerment, (Human Rights Watch, in Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 35).

The impact of Operation Murambatsvina on children and women

The extent of the effects of the operation was noted in a combined report by Action Aid International in collaboration with the Counselling Services Unit, Combined Harare Residents' Association and Zimbabwe Peace Project (2005a). The report showed that the total number of the victims of Operation *Murambatsvina* was 1 193 370 (Action Aid International 2005b: iii). Of these as much as 70% lost their source of livelihood as a result of the operation. Of that 70%, the majority were women who were engaged in informal enterprises. These enterprises included flea markets, tuck shops and roadside vending. Since Operation *Murambatsvina* targeted flea market traders, most of whom were women (Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 40; Human Rights Watch 2005), it in essence and by implication targeted women specifically. Demographically the report pointed out that the total number of children affected comprised 56 % of the operation's total

victims. It is a fact that women form the bulk of the informal sector, and McPherson puts their share at 57% in Zimbabwe (in Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 5).

The United Nations has estimated the number of those left homeless as a result of Operation *Murambatsvina* to be around 570 000, most of them being women and children (cited in IDMC 2008: 4 & 10).

The effects of Operation *Murambatsvina* on women and children can be enumerated as loss of shelter, loss of livelihoods and income, loss of education for children, loss of property. In terms of property loss government figures released on 7th July 2005, '32 538 small and medium size enterprises were demolished figures of the ' (Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 40). Another impact was also felt in the health sector where cases of loss of access to health care facilities, food insecurity, and the general disintegration of families increased after the operation. It can further be argued that women and children, especially orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), suffered increased vulnerability, with those on medication suffering loss of quality and continued care. This is in addition to the trauma that the whole operation brought to them. Without any psychosocial support being administered to the victims, most of them are still to recover from the trauma of their abrupt, forced and at times violent evictions. Women suffered a double tragedy as the option of seeking alternative dwellings in the rural areas was not an obvious and automatic choice owing to the land rights in Zimbabwe being skewed in favour of men.

Three years later (2008), the government launched the panacea to the problems brought by Operation *Murambatsvina*, particularly homelessness. This was in the form of Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*³, which when translated means Operation 'live well'. Operation *Garikai* was aimed at mitigating, if not covering up the failures of Operation *Murambatsvina*. The objectives of

the operation were purportedly to be achieved through the provision of affordable government housing. However, only a couple of thousand units of the houses were built and most of them were not inhabited (IDMC 2008: 5). The allocation of the houses was also mired in controversy, especially around the choosing of beneficiaries, which was subjected to patronage politics and favouritism. This further exacerbated the plight of women and children, as the housing allocation system favoured and benefited those with political connections. Thus the failure of Operation *Garikai* to provide proper housing for the victims of Operation *Murambatsvina* exacerbated the plight of women and children as it compounded other challenges associated with the lack of shelter, such as lack of security for both persons and their belongings.

According to the Country of Origin Information Service (COIS 2006: 147), citing the *Daily Telegraph* of 4 December 2005, 'people evicted from their homes following Operation *Murambatsvina* were struggling to obtain sufficient amounts of food'. The report noted that, as an alternative, women without food resorted to eating chafer beetles, whose botanical name is *Rhizotrogus majalis*, to stay alive. Whilst the consumption of *Rhizotrogus majalis* (or *mandere* as they are known in Shona) is not a new phenomenon, it was shocking that whole families lived entirely on *Rhizotrogus majalis* as their only source of nutrition. This created new challenges of malnourishment, diuresis and the possibility that *Rhizotrogus majalis* may become an endangered species. Other beetles and caterpillars that became the main source of nutrition to the victims of Operation *Murambatsvina* included *madora*, *magandari*, *nhowa*, *harurwa*, *harati*.

By the year 2006 the government had not kept its promise to provide decent and affordable housing to the victims of Operation *Murambatsvina*, thereby rendering Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* a still birth (COIS 2006: 69). Commenting on the devastation caused by Operation

³ Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* derives its name from a combination of Shona (*garikai*) and Ndebele (*hlalani kuhle*), words meaning live well.

Murambatsvina, the United Nations Special Envoy to Zimbabwe, Mrs Anna Tibaijuka, noted that

while there is a degree of overlap between those who lost their homes and those who lost their businesses, the total figure of 650,000 to 700,000 people directly affected by the Operation is considered plausible' (Tibaijuka 2005: 34).

The majority of the 650 000 to 700 000 people directly affected by Operation *Murambatsvina* were women and children (IC Publications 2013: 60-63). This resulted in an escalation in the rate of social ills such as prostitution. This development was confirmed by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, which noted that young women were turning to prostitution in a bid to earn a living (IDMC 2008: 24). This created downstream challenges such as those associated with HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, further compounding the risk of contracting them. Operation *Murambatsvina* had already created challenges for those on antiretroviral drugs, as they were forced to move abruptly to new habitats, leaving many of them to struggle with access to their antiretroviral therapy. OVCs that were benefiting from certain donor-funded programmes were suddenly displaced to new geographical areas, creating challenges of access to regular OVC interventions. It can therefore be argued that, under these circumstances, OVCs suffered a double tragedy, namely the loss of parents and the loss of support they were receiving from donor agencies.

Female victims of Operation *Murambatsvina* were also victimised by state security agents in the aftermath of the operation. These include women who were brutally repressed by the police for demonstrated against the negative effects of the operation on their livelihoods. This development was confirmed by the online Zimbabwean newspaper, *ZimOnline*, on 14 July 2005, which reported that '28 members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) were arrested in June 2005 while protesting against Operation *Murambatsvina*'. This

demonstrates the magnitude of the suffering and at times abuse that women endured during and after the operation. Their plight notwithstanding, the demonstration and subsequent arrest of the women illustrated that women were prepared to fight against the marginalisation and victimisation inherent in both Operation *Murambatsvina* and Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*.

These demonstrations and resultant arrests indicate that women and children were not only directly affected by Operation *Murambatsvina* but were also further abused by the system of governance that was supposed to protect them but ended up criminalising their agitation for respect of their human rights.

The specific suffering experienced by children as a result of Operation *Murambatsvina* related to the following destabilisations: schooling, parental care, nutrition and security. When their parents or guardians were forcibly moved, children had to move as well. This resulted in the disruption of their schooling. Although there were no figures of the aggregate or estimated number of children whose schooling was disrupted by the operation, most school authorities in areas affected by the operation testified to the huge movement of pupils away from their schools. This created a host of other challenges, such as attaining the famed Millennium Development Goals and other government programmes to increase literacy levels. Children whose schooling needs were met by special programmes such as the government-run Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) also encountered further challenges in trying to enrol in new schools. The same can be said about pupils whose schooling was paid for by aid donor agencies.

An example of the suffering endured by children, particularly OVCs, as a result of the operation was the demolition of an orphanage run by Roman Catholic Dominican nuns in the Hatcliffe suburbs, rendering the 180 resident orphans homeless (COIS 2006: 119, citing the *Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 2005). The *Daily*

Telegraph article noted that many of the orphans had lost their parents to HIV and AIDS and now had practically nowhere to go. This demonstrated that Operation *Murambatsvina* uprooted people from their social settings and in the process disturbed a wide range of people ecosystems.

Analysis

Sekesai Makwawarara, Chairperson of Harare Town House, announced officially on 19 May 2005 that Operation *Murambatsvina* was 'a programme to enforce by-laws and to stop all forms of illegal activity in the city' (Nyamanhindi 2008: 119, citing *The Herald*, 19 May 2005: 1). Of particular interest in the statement that was issued on 28 May 2005, nine days after the official commencement of Operation *Murambatsvina* by Makwawarara, is that prostitution was identified as a factor that contributed to operationalising *Murambatsvina*. The statement said:

These violations of the by-laws in areas of vending, traffic control, illegal structures, touting/abuse of commuters by rank marshals, street life/prostitution, vandalism of property infrastructure, stock theft, illegal cultivation, among others have led to the deterioration of standards thus negatively affecting the image of the city. (*The Herald* 28 May 2005 cited in Harris 2008: 45)

Allegations of prostitution are mainly levelled against women as they are believed to be the dischargers of carnal services sought by mainly men, and in the process they are often abused and sometimes even killed. It could be argued that it was precisely to curb this and liberate women from such perils that Operation *Murambatsvina* targeted prostitution. This, however, is tantamount to treating the symptoms as it ignores the very reason why women go into prostitution in the first place. The very framing and crafting of Operation *Murambatsvina* seems to be biased towards women and children.

Given that almost 55% of the population of Zimbabwe is female, it is apparent that women bore much of the burden of the consequences of Operation *Murambatsvina*. Action Aid International (2005: 13a) bears witness to this fact as they recorded that 47% of the homesteads visited in assessment of the impacts of Operation *Murambatsvina* were female-headed, of which 34% were actually widows. It is generally the norm as tradition would have it in Zimbabwe that women tend to children, so women are more involved directly with children's rearing and upbringing. What affects women inevitably affects the children who depend on them. 'Many divorced, widowed or separated women have migrated to town because they have been squeezed off the land and their social links in rural areas have become dysfunctional' (Solidarity Peace Trust 2010: 18). In the year 2010 '37% of household heads in the informal settlement of Killarney in Bulawayo, consisted of widowed, divorced or single women' (Solidarity Peace Trust 2010: 18). In Harare alone 37% of interviewed households acknowledged that 'women and children had become more vulnerable to abuse' (Mwaniki 2005: 10). Most of the people settled at Killarney are victims of Operation *Murambatsvina*. This gives evidence that women and children were affected more as they constitute the majority of the general populace of Zimbabwe. Of the sampled population nationally, Harare had the highest number of orphans and recorded 31%, with Bulawayo at 25% and Mutare 23% (Action Aid International 2005: 11-12a).

Operation *Murambatsvina* affected women healthwise more than men. It appears not to have occurred to the authorities that the destruction of people's houses and dwellings in winter would affect their health. The Country of Origin Information Service (COIS 2006: 62), citing the World Health Organisation (WHO), 'noted in *Summary country profile for HIV/AIDS treatment scale-up (2005)* that "women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, constituting 51% of the

population and 53% of people living with HIV/AIDS in 2003 ... Other groups severely affected by HIV/AIDS include women who engage in sex work, uniformed personnel and orphaned children". Given these numbers, it is evident that disturbing women's social settings in the face of HIV/AIDS would be likely to disturb their intake of HIV/AIDS-fighting drugs and medication. Because the displacement caused by Operation *Murambatsvina* was unanticipated, it is likely that many people were caught unaware and therefore could not make alternative arrangements for acquiring their antiretroviral medication (ARVs). In fact, the civic protest movement Sokwanele also noted that 'on 2 December 2005 people whose HIV and AIDS treatment had been disrupted by Operation *Murambatsvina* in June 2005 were still unable to access ARVs or treatments for TB and other opportunistic infections by October 2005' (COIS 2006: 64). Action Aid International (2005a: vi) corroborated this observation, reporting that 'approximately 15% of surveyed households reportedly had lost ARV treatment as a result of the Operation' and that as a result 14% of the surveyed population claimed that they had lost home-based care (HBC).

It is well documented that Operation *Murambatsvina* was ill prepared; if indeed any planning was involved in its execution at all. Displacing people, or resettling them as the government of Zimbabwe claimed, without giving them alternative accommodation is plain evil. Most people who were evicted from their urban dwellings were forcibly taken and dumped in open spaces without water, electricity, housing and health facilities. Their food security was compromised and they faced starvation. The consequences of such evictions and displacement 'include an increase in vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and a disruption in HIV/AIDS services particularly Anti Retro Viral (ARV) Treatment, home based care and prevention. In cases where ARV treatment has been disrupted, this could result in drug resistance, declining health and ultimately death' (COIS 2006: 64). This

development was supported by the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) on 3 August 2005, when it reported that people suffering from HIV and AIDS and caught up in Operation *Murambatsvina* were forced to abandon antiretroviral treatment. A clinic, a crèche and an orphanage run by Missionary Sisters, the Dominicans, were demolished in Hatcliffe, Harare, leaving the children vulnerable and exposed to abuse (Ncube *et al* 2005: 5). A list compiled by directors in the education sector in Zimbabwe revealed that about 300 000 children had dropped out of school as a result of Operation *Murambatsvina* (Ncube *et al* 2005: 6).

This analysis will further divulge the impact of Operation *Murambatsvina* as evidenced in Zimbabwe's three major cities, Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. Harare's projected affected population was pegged at 851 434 people by Action Aid International (2005a: iii). Harare's affected population constituted 71% of the total affected by Operation *Murambatsvina*. A survey by David Mwaniki (2005) in collaboration with Global Crisis Solutions, Action Aid International and Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA) visited 14 137 homesteads in Harare to compile the following information (Mwaniki 2005: 5-8): 32% of the population, which is almost a third of those surveyed, claimed to have been hosting an orphan, while 41% were female-headed households, indicating that females bear much of the burden. Of the households surveyed, 13% admitted to hosting a chronically ill person, and this figure could be an underestimation due to the stigma still attached to HIV/AIDS. Women-headed households constituted 44% of the surveyed population, and 14% of those were widows. Children of school going age were reported to have stopped attending school as a result of Operation *Murambatsvina*, and 22% of the households interviewed bore testimony to this fact. A further 45% were destabilised by the operation to the extent that accessing schools had been very difficult if not impossible.

Bulawayo is the second largest city in

Zimbabwe (Action Aid International 2005b: 13) and the projected affected population was 196 635 people in August 2005, contributing to 16% of the total number of people affected by Operation *Murambatsvina* in Zimbabwe (Action Aid International 2005a: iii). Mutare is the third largest city after Harare-Chitungwiza and Bulawayo (Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 43). After the infamous Operation *Murambatsvina*, the *Manica Post* (in Chibisa & Sigauke 2008) claimed a 'decline of 50% in crime rate' (*Manica Post* June 2005); this newspaper is viewed as a mouthpiece of the government in Mutare and the greater Manicaland. A survey carried out by Chibisa and Sigauke (2008: 46) revealed that 72% of the 200 respondents who participated in the exercise were females whereas 28% were males. This gives further evidence that women were the most affected in the so-called Operation Restore Order. The survey by Chibisa and Sigauke (2008) assessed specifically how Operation *Murambatsvina* impacted people's economic livelihoods and particularly informal traders; and it concluded that 'Operation *Murambatsvina* worsened urban poverty' (Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 60). Operation *Murambatsvina* affected mainly Zimbabwean citizens (Zimbabweans by birth), as foreign flea-market traders may have been forced to leave Mutare because of Operation *Murambatsvina* (Chibisa & Sigauke 2008: 47). Another survey carried out by Action Aid International through its Southern Africa Partnership Programme (SAPP) in August 2005 revealed that Mutare alone had a projected affected population pegged at 92 481; this figure amounts to 8% of the population affected by Operation *Murambatsvina* (Action Aid International 2005a: iii).

Nationally women, children and orphans have become more vulnerable to abuse due to Operation *Murambatsvina* as evidenced by 35% of the interviewed households, which indicated that the highest proportion of these were female-headed households (Action Aid International 2005a: vi).

Whose sovereignty matters?

One issue brought to the fore by the execution and effects of Operation *Murambatsvina* is the contested notion of sovereignty in Zimbabwe. The nodal question to be asked is whose sovereignty matters? Is it that of the state or that of the individuals who collectively make up the state? In the same vein, who got independence in Zimbabwe? Was it the state or the citizens? It can be inferred that the state's interpretation of sovereignty and independence is a statist one in which the state presumes that it became independent to behave as it wishes. In terms of sovereignty, the state feels that it is the one subject of sovereignty and not the citizens. Balogun (2011: 4) articulates well the concept of individual sovereignty when he writes that 'the interest of the individual is served when s/he enjoys maximum freedom to decide matters which concern her/him and nobody else'. In convergence with Balogun's view, Reus-Smit (2001: 213) asserts that 'individuals are the source of their own conceptions of the good. Actors [individuals] are also self-interested, concerned primarily with the pursuit of their own interests'. This encapsulates the core of what individual sovereignty is about – the ability to make unrestricted choices and pursue one's own interests and preferences as predicated on the social contract (Boucher & Kelly 1994: 1; Shelton 1992: 85).

Conclusion

This article has chronicled a brief history of operations that have targeted and victimised women in Zimbabwe since its independence in 1980. The article has specifically highlighted the impact of Operation *Murambatsvina* especially on women and children in Zimbabwe in 2005. It is argued that despite the justification that Zimbabwean government officials offered in the face of criticism of the operation, it was inhumane, illegal and unethical. The general populace of Zimbabwe was severely affected, but it was the women and children, who form the majority of people infected with HIV and AIDS, who were left most exposed and

vulnerable to opportunistic infections as a result of lack of proper medication and health facilities. The disruption of children's social surroundings meant a disruption of schooling and institutionalised learning. Many people were left homeless, especially women and children.

Contrary to what the government of Zimbabwe claimed through the introduction of Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle*, not much was done to mitigate the challenges as displaced families are still homeless. The article also posited that Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* was introduced by the Zimbabwean government to mitigate the negative effects of Operation *Murambatsvina*. The effectiveness of Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* was also questioned, and it was noted that its major shortcomings emanated from its susceptibility to patronage politics and corruption. Operation *Murambatsvina*'s official objectives of ridding Zimbabwe's urban areas of illegal dwellings resulted in the suffering of predominantly women and children. It was argued that the operation perpetuated their marginalisation and victimisation, including the continued discrimination against women in particular.

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