The Paucity of Female Educational Leadership in Politically Volatile Context of Zimbabwe: Women Leading Education

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

Zimbabwe is one country that experienced deep political turmoil soon after attaining independence in 1980. This study explored the intertwining of violent politics, the politics of fieldwork, and the paucity of female educational leadership research by examining the volatile contexts within which knowledge construction occurs. The researcher reviewed related literature to gain insights into the impact of volatile contexts on research. The study provides a literature review on issues and concepts related to the studies put forward by other scholars within which the study was discussed and analyzed. The review of related literature was conducted mainly to analyze three interweaving factors: the visibility of studies on educational leadership and management publications in 2008, migration, and political violence in Zimbabwe. The study established that the terror operation (Gukurahundi) waged in Midlands, Matebeleland South, and Matebeleland North provinces from 1982 to 1987, the formation of the political opposition party - Movement for Democratic (MDC) and commercial farm invasions in 1999, operation Murambatsvina in 2005 and elections in 2008 are enough evidence that the Mugabe regime developed a tradition of using violence and intolerance as a tool of consolidating political power. These events formed a complex, multi-layered volatility that silenced academic research and other forms of documentation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Post-independence Zimbabwe has been significantly marked by a repressive dictatorial government using state agencies to unleash gruesome violence on unarmed civilians to maintain its hold on power. The rise of dictatorship and authoritarianism (Hwami, 2014) by the ruling Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) was characterized by internal colonization, and this had an impact on research and documentation. That ZANU PF subjected the citizens of Zimbabwe to ruthless and consistent attacks, silencing opposing voices and instilling fear is well documented (Hwami, 2014; Mangwiro, 2016; Matereke, 2012; Mvundura, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004; Zhira, 2004) This paper explores significant aspects of political violence affecting Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, which deserves an investigation. The researcher explores the intertwining of violent politics, the politics of fieldwork, and the paucity of female educational leadership research by examining the volatile contexts

within which knowledge construction occurs. Also, the researcher seeks to illuminate the power of context in academic research, particularly the voiceless and marginalized (women).

This article argues that context has been considered a challenge. However, it has not been explored how the volatile contexts have contributed to the paucity of female educational leadership research in Zimbabwe until 2008. More than this, the aim of conducting this study was framed by the belief that contextual factors manifest themselves in the organization and management of education and school systems (Hallinger, 2018a). From a series of papers evolving from a research review on women's educational leadership in Zimbabwe, the study established that publications emerged in 2008, the geographical distribution of studies by provinces was uneven, and no study examined nor mentioned the political context. This prompted the researcher to review related literature to interrogate how political violence has impacted academic research. The researcher relies on scholarship that has narrated the Zimbabwean political violence from the liberation struggle from 1966 to 1979 and the post-independence era from 1980 to 2018.

Literature has featured internal colonization by the ZANU PF empire in alliance with a partisan state to mobilize a compliant citizenry (Matereke, 2012). The volatility of the Zimbabwean politics violated human rights, leading to intimidation of citizens, hence the need to uncover the implications of political developments on academic research, particularly female educational leadership. The coincidence of the visibility of female educational leadership in 2008 and the internal and external displacement of citizens is worrying. The rationale for conducting this study lies in conceptualizing unjust structural, socio-economic, and political practices affecting women in educational leadership in a post-colonial state. The essence of this argument, which the researcher illustrates by examining the existing body of knowledge, is that volatile contexts restrict free movement and access to knowledge construction in academic research. This discussion is important as the researcher seeks to unearth the deepest root causes of the scarcity of female educational leadership research. The direct experience of the author as a black immigrant woman having grown up in a politically volatile post-colonial context positions her well to raise consciousness about African women's oppression. The significant contribution of this analysis lies in the quest to seek the advancement of knowledge in female educational leadership. In addition, it guides the growing body of researchers and policymakers regarding future research regarding volatile contexts. The void in this knowledge bank, particularly regarding the Zimbabwean context, has given rise to this study.

African feminist perspectives frame this literature review and undergird the discussion of implications and conclusions. From these perspectives, Zimbabwean women in education leadership's lives are positioned prominently while oppressive, intimidating, marginalizing, and repressive ideologies and practices of political violence are thoroughly exposed and critiqued. First, the researcher provides background on policies promoting women's advancement in education. The researcher then captures literature on the volatility of Zimbabwean politics and ends with a discussion of implications.

2 BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe's cultural values and political, social, and economic features have roots in patriarchy, hence the need for this brief historical background to understand issues of female leadership in Zimbabwe. To begin with, the Zimbabwean constitution has elaborated provisions on gender equity and empowerment. Hence, the government has put in place several pieces of legislation and policies to implement the provisions. The Public Service Circular No. 4 of 1991 prioritized the promotion of women, hence the increase in the number of women venturing into school leadership positions (Muzvidziwa, 2013). This happened after the implementation of universal primary education and heavily subsidized secondary education. Zimbabwean education expanded at all levels, and problems began to be visible, particularly a lack of financial resources (funding of physical facilities) and human resources (shortage of teachers and lecturers) (Chabaya & Gudhlanga, 2013). Despite the challenges, the expansion of education was unstoppable; everyone desired to access the doors previously made impossible by the colonial regime. The government was guided

by a socialist ideology, declaring education as a basic human right and the means of achieving equity (Chabaya & Gudhlanga, 2013).

It was during this period that women were appointed to educational leadership positions. The government continued to engender laws and policies aligned with the Constitution to empower women. For instance, it was realized that despite all the efforts to increase the enrolment of women in tertiary institutions, their number remained very low (Chabaya & Gudhlanga, 2013). This was a result of the Zimbabwean society's patriarchal nature that glorified male dominance. To rectify the imbalances and reinforce Circular No. 4 of 1991, the government introduced the Affirmative Action Policy in 1992 to increase the number of females in tertiary institutions. This further increased the demand for tertiary education, culminating in the growth in quantity of universities. As a follow-up to its gender equity commitment, the government later introduced the National Gender Policy in 2004. Although women seized opportunities and benefits that facilitated advancement in the labor force, they continue to face challenges that impede their full access to such opportunities (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), 2016). It has been thirty-two years since Circular No. 4 of 1991 was instituted to redress gender imbalances in educational leadership. Nevertheless, research has unearthed several political, economic, cultural, social, and structural challenges perpetuating gender inequalities, making it difficult for women to realize their full potential (Grogan, 2015; Makura, 2009; Mapolisa, Tichaona, & Madziyire, 2012; Mapolisa, Tichaona, Mhlanga, Madziyire, & Chimbwadzwa, 2013; Moorosi, 2012; Steyn & Parsaloi, 2014; Zikhali & Perumal, 2012). The structural and decision-making processes remain male-dominated, relegating women to subordinate positions.

To expedite the advancement of women, the Public Service commissioned Circular No. 11 of 1997, which encouraged women who had the potential to lead schools to be recommended regardless of seniority or experience (Hlatywayo, Hlatywayo, & Muranda, 2014). Female teachers were encouraged to apply for promotional posts. This forms the backdrop against which the impact of volatility on academic research in Zimbabwe can be understood. The researcher argues that volatility exacerbated social constructs engrained in traditional patriarchal beliefs that suppressed documentation of women's experiences in education leadership, leading to a dearth of literature on contextual features peculiar to female leadership. The researcher reiterates the centrality and significance of female educational leadership in the global knowledge economy, which cannot be contested. Especially when the African feminist movement is out in full force to achieve indigenization in knowledge production. Further, the implication of education's importance in women's emancipation is necessary for the feminist movement (Goredema, 2010; Mikell, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004).

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher chose to locate this argument in the African feminist perspectives to understand the realities of African women working and living in Africa. They support Western and Anglo-American feminism because of its hegemonic position of claiming to know about African women, over-focusing on fighting battles with men and excluding them from the movement (Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti, & Sunderland, 2013). Nonetheless, the researcher knows that African feminism(s) came from Western feminism. On the contrary, African feminists recognize the role of women responsible for holding families together when there is little state support (Sachikonye, 2010). African feminist discourses raise critical questions about the construction of knowledge as a process and seek to unmask the faceless body of knowledge and put a human face on it instead (Nnaemeka, 2004). It is important to note the inclusivity of African feminism(s) in facing the challenges of societal transformation; both men and women are included in the struggle (Kolawole, 2011). Feminist scholarship foregrounds the notion of African women by scrutinizing the exclusion of women in scholarship, and their persistent marginalization (Nkealah, 2006). African feminists have rejected the earlier collections of knowledge that have marginalized and silenced African women's voices. While African feminists advocate for diverse voices in the knowledge economy, the researcher, as a feminist activist, is worried about the internal silencing of women's voices, particularly in Zimbabwe. For instance, Nnaemeka (2004) defiantly proclaims, in the same way that Africa produced the raw materials that the metropole transformed into manufactured products,

African women are instrumentalized as researchers/ scholars. They are the instruments for collecting the raw data with which foreign scholars manufacture knowledge as they research. They are the instruments through which scholarship is produced and careers built.

African feminism(s) counteracts the shortcomings of developing knowledge engineered from outside Africa for Africans, hence their firm stance on indigenous knowledge production (2016). Building on the Indigenous advances ownership that opens avenues for democratic and participative processes that validate diverse world views and values (Ebunoluwa, 2009). The researcher's concern is that knowledge construction cannot take place when so-called democratic governments who have the mandate to uphold human rights turn off the voices of their people. African feminists challenge the patriarchal structures and psychological and political systems that use traditional force, customs, education, labor, law, language, rituals, and others to keep women governed by men (Mekgwe, 2008). They seek to overturn the complex stratification that places women at the bottom of the gender hierarchy. In both public and private life, African women have been silenced by the traditional practices that have produced social contributions that define what is male and what is female. Such ways have disadvantaged the females; everything has been made to look normal in many ways. In contrast, such practices are dehumanizing, for example, polygamy, excision, forced marriages, and powerlessness in society (Mikell, 1997). African feminists seek to subvert patriarchal dominance, beliefs, practices, norms, and values that subjugate women – rather, encourage an egalitarian society through the creation of social institutions (Azuike, 2009).

African feminists continue to voice their views about war, political violence, military coups, undemocratic governments, migration, economic recessions, and other crises that have subjected Africans to dehumanizing circumstances (Mama, 2007). Since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, European and Anglo-American nongovernmental and civic society organizations have supported women's activism. Colonial rule in Africa and the market economy have marginalized women from the means of production and denied them the right to own land (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016). Likewise, the African women in post-colonial Africa have continued to live under the matrix of colonial rule because of the brutality of governments that have turned on them. Women continue to be side-lined in leadership structures and important decision-making positions. In countries like Zimbabwe, where state-sponsored political violence was born at independence in 1980, women bear the brunt. Women activists are stepping up their liberation struggles against exploitation; however, because of masculine leadership structures and lack of representation, they are failing to put enough pressure on political parties to listen to them. More specifically, they are intimidated and silenced.

Since African feminism(s) as a paradigm and movement is shaped by African contexts and experiences, its goals depend on the stability of the states (Sachikonye, 2010). African feminists are committed to giving voice to African women (Ntseane, 2011) whose historical experiences have been blurred by European and Anglo-American feminist theories. African feminism(s) is a collective movement in a struggle to eradicate patriarchal systems, structures, and ideologies that privilege men (McFadden, 2011). Therefore, African feminists do not embrace the notion that gender inequality is natural; rather, they believe that it is a man-made phenomenon that can be questioned. They query the denigrating inferiority complex associated with women always. They seek to restructure the economic and gendered relationships across society. The women of Zimbabwe are not independent, contrary to the declaration made in 1980. The post-colonial era has continued to support patriarchy and the oppression of women.

Zimbabwean women have been traditionally excluded and relegated to subordinate roles within masculine formal structures, systems, and practices. Women collectively seek to challenge the institutional structures to promote systemic change (Christensen & Kelly, 2016). Women are faced with a multitude of discriminations in a post-colonial society. Their needs, reality, oppression, and empowerment are best addressed through an inclusive approach (Kolawole, 2011) that accommodates their historical trajectory and specific experiences (Nkealah, 2006). In addition, the pluralist nature of African feminism(s) allows it to create a new liberal, productive, and self-reliant African woman within the diversities of African cultures. African women share a common struggle, which is male privilege. African feminism(s) addresses cultural issues that

subordinate women across the African continent. Therefore, (Nkealah, 2016) sums, 'African feminism(s) is a resistance to patriarchal domination, ethnic discrimination, linguistic segregation, poverty and literacy and other forms of oppression which condemn to make sexitude.'

4   REVIEW METHOD

This paper emanated from a systematic research review of Zimbabwean female educational leadership literature. The research review established that publications of female educational leadership emerged in 2008, followed by an uneven geographical distribution across the ten provinces in Zimbabwe. In addition, it is noteworthy that of all the twenty-five publications reviewed, no study attempted to investigate nor mention the political context. This was a catalyst of this literature review to examine the extent to which political violence has shaped academic research in female educational leadership. Therefore, this literature review paper relied on a body of literature focused on Zimbabwean political violence dating back from the liberation struggle from 1966 to 1979 and the period after independence from 1980 to 2018.

In order to examine the intersection of the visibility of studies on educational leadership and management publications in 2008, migration, and political violence in Zimbabwe, the researcher analyzes literature according to the following events: the liberation struggle 1966-1979, the Gukurahundi massacre 1982-1987, the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change and farm invasions 1999 and Operation Murambatsvina 2005.

5   CONTEXTUALIZING THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN ZIMBABWE

Former president of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe's deeds of holding on to power has haunted the Zimbabwean internal political landscape and academic scholarship activities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Scholars who have documented the mass migration of Zimbabweans at the turn of the third millennium (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Manik, 2013; McDuff, 2015; Pasura, 2013; Ranga, 2015) and other scholars who have been keen to understand what went wrong in Zimbabwe have held Robert Mugabe responsible for destroying the economy and authorizing state violence on citizens (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). In order to understand the volatility of Zimbabwean politics, the researcher traced the deeper roots of the patriotic history that presided over and articulated a violent form of nationalism (Matereke, 2012), which has kept Zimbabweans narrow-minded and short-sighted. The researcher opposes the widely confirmed reports that the Zimbabwean political violence started at the turn of the third millennium; rather, the researcher argues that it only escalated in 2000. The researcher started with the liberation struggle, which dislodged the colonial regime.

6   THE LIBERATION STRUGGLES 1966-1979

The 1966 to 1979 liberation war exposed the entire population to a (Sadomba, Chigwanda, & Manyati, 2015). Two forces - the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) led by Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo fought alongside to conquer the colonial government's Rhodesian Front led by Ian Smith. The ceasefire agreement between the colonial government and ZANU PF and ZAPU at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979 saw a new dawn of independence in 1980, ending the bloody war (Coltart, 2008). A coalition government formed by ZANU PF and ZAPU at independence broke down in 1982 because of power struggles worsened by the Lancaster House Constitution that allowed Robert Mugabe to consolidate and later monopolize power (Zhira, 2004). Contrary to South Africa's post-apartheid agreement, the Lancaster House agreement did not provide for reconciliation - aggrieved war veterans, mainly ZAPU, mobilized masses to revolt against the new government (Sadomba et al., 2015). Perpetrators for the bloodshed in the liberation struggle remained in the army and continued to commit crimes against humanity in the new government (Zhira, 2004). Cracks within the new government leadership caused political disunity, and eventually, clashes broke out. It was officially justified that the government was attacking the ex-combatants who did not want to be integrated into the national army, and they

were described as dissidents (Coltart, 2008). This was followed by the Gukurahundi massacre, as in the next section. Meanwhile, Robert Mugabe pursued his one-party state, and he made progress (Coltart, 2008).

7   THE GUKURAHUNDI MASSACRE 1982-1987

In 1982, the government used the attacks of the dissidents as an excuse to eliminate the ZAPU leadership and its supporters, including civilians, because they were a threat to national unity, seen as toppling the government and destabilizing the country. As a result, Joshua Nkomo was removed from parliament and charged with treason – sparking further desertions from the army (Zhira, 2004). The conflict escalated, and the government decided to unleash its North Korean-trained troops, known as the Fifth Brigade and other state agents, to massacre civilians and ZAPU members in Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, and Midlands provinces. The massacres have been shrouded with controversy, so other scholars have argued that Robert Mugabe persecuted opponents as an excuse to create a one-party state (Zhira, 2004).

The genocide waged from 1982 to 1987 left 20000 people dead. The most dreaded Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) worked alongside the fifth brigade in the terror campaign, targeting Ndebele-speaking people (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). Today, the CIO remains the most feared of Robert Mugabe's 'machinery of dictatorship' (Zhira, 2004) and has been used to silence voices opposing the government. The terror of which hunting continued, leading to abductions, murder, torture, intimidation, silencing, restrictions, and oppression of civilians. Burning of victims alive was meant to leave bitter memories so that survivors were never to forget – even after death (Zhira, 2004). Meanwhile, all these atrocities were hidden from the public eye and the state-controlled media; hence, Zhira (2004) study relied on interviewing survivors and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). The genocide has not been documented; it is not in the history books.

Interestingly, what happened to the three provinces later spread to the rest of the country, leading to endless intimidation and violence (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). In sum, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) emphasizes, 'The ruling party ZANU PF government attempted to use hegemonic and monolithic solution underpinned by the sword of its violent agencies inherited from the past such as the party Youth League, Women's League, ex-combatants, CIO and the army.' In the run-up to elections in 1985, youth brigades were deployed to intimidate the electorate not to support ZAPU but the ruling ZANU PF (Zhira, 2004). The massacre stopped in 1987 when Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU was absorbed into a government ZANU PF.

8   THE FORMATION OF THE MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE AND FARM INVASIONS 1999

The formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999 created a sense of panic in the unchallenged ZANU PF (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010), leading to the escalation of violence in subsequent election periods (Mvundura, 2014). Robert and his ruling ZANU PF notched up violence against the opposition, especially after losing the 2000 referendum to change the constitution. Mugabe surrounded himself with the few political elites and was determined to hang on to power through whatever means – accusing the commercial white farmers of sponsoring the opposition MDC, leading to violent commercial farm grabs (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). The land grabs were followed by massive wholesale looting of private properties (Coltart, 2008), culminating in the economic meltdown. Violence intensified in the subsequent years after 2000, characterized by a common pattern of the rule of violence and coercion leading to economic collapse, unemployment, political stalemate, and increased international isolation (Cawthra, 2010). Mugabe increased purges on civilians using ex-combatants and the youth who had always pledged loyalty to the ruling party (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Leadership structures and personnel in all sectors were politicized along narrow ruling party lines (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004).

9   OPERATION MURAMBATSVINA 2005

In the 2005 elections, ZANU PF lost all urban seats to the opposition MDC except one, while the MDC lost ground in the rural areas (Coltart, 2008). In retaliation, the government launched the controversial operation Murambatsvina against urban people. The event was marked by the destruction of urban shelters that left 700,000 homeless and jobless. The researcher added a voice to the controversial callous act that was meant to drive as many people as possible to the rural areas where geographical restrictions made it impossible for them to escape the terror. This had a major impact on the already failing economy. Teachers who were readily considered to be MDC supporters were consistently targeted – they were tortured and displaced, and some were removed from their posts (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004). This pushed Zimbabwe as a state to an authoritarian political framework.

10   ELECTIONS 2008

The volatility of the Zimbabwean political violence reached its peak in 2008. The terror, which was mainly concentrated in rural areas, took the form of violent assaults, destruction of property, torture, murder, death threats, abductions, and disappearances. The youth militia led by military personnel kept the civilians under constant surveillance (Mvundura, 2014). Restricted mobility left people with limited access to information and financial resources. In order to contain dissent, legislation, and suppressive notions, for example, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) were instituted (Coltart, 2008), turning the public broadcasting authority into an unceremonious Propaganda tool. Non-governmental organizations and civic society organizations operations were targeted and restricted. The ruling party viciously mobilized its members (the highly politicized CIO, police, defense forces, youth, and military combatants) to attack state structures, mechanisms, and legal procedures (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010).

The economy virtually collapsed at the hands of political instability and lawlessness, giving birth to what has been referred to as the 'Zimbabwean crisis' (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010) 'Human catastrophe' (Coltart, 2008) leading to the historic mass migration as a survival strategy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). The people of Zimbabwe had no choice but to abandon their country in large numbers because of the tragedy threatening their livelihood. They had to face the well-documented turmoil and tenacity of life in a foreign land, for instance, Xenophobia in South Africa and taking up the most despised care work in the UK.

11   DISCUSSION

As the researcher discusses the implications in this section, the researcher highlights how events in the above section formed a complex multi-layered volatility that silenced academic research and other forms of documentation. The unstable Zimbabwean politics violated human rights and intimidated citizens, further marginalizing women who already occupied the bottom of power structures. Undoubtedly, academic research did not document how women in educational leadership dealt with patriarchal systemic societal structures until 2008. To be more specific, the number of scholarships created for women managing and directing the education sector in Zimbabwe has been hidden. The volatile context worsened the widespread patriarchal system, which always carries over into the organization and leadership of educational institutions. Women are the hardest hit as their advancement has been hampered by colonial legacies as well as patriarchal Indigenous cultures. Organizational culture is deeply rooted in social practices. In summary, all masculine cultures negatively affect the operation of women in their workplace (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Unequal power distribution between sexes remains a barrier to advancement opportunities for women. It is important to note that the violent political context inflamed the challenges of women's advancement. It emerged from the studies that culture sustains gender stereotyping, social practices, family and work relationships, and how women are viewed in society.

Further, this study established the demographic changes in the mass migration of Zimbabwean citizens that was male-dominated in the late 1990s and later dominated by women and unaccompanied minors at the turn of the millennium to date (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Manik, 2013; McDuff, 2015; Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). Equally notable was the shift in traditional roles – women taking over the breadwinner role. The crisis impacted women in various ways. The crisis dawned a definitive moment when women realized the need to advance their careers to compete in the global market. In our empirical study 'Narratives of Zimbabwean female teachers' experience in South Africa,' The researcher established that two participants were postdoctoral research fellows, two PhD holders, five about to complete their master's degrees, and one studying towards a B.Ed. Honours degree. Meanwhile, the peak of Zimbabwean mass migration in 2008 coincides with the visibility of female educational leadership publications. The researcher deduce that scholars transcended the challenges of living in a foreign land and consolidated the gains of globalization. Having escaped human rights abuse, lawlessness, and systematic militarisation of the state, they decided to write about the violence. Of much interest to us was that all the authors of the studies The researcherexamined were affiliated with non-Zimbabwean institutions. This is an accurate portrayal of the intensity of the volatility of the Zimbabwean context. Another factor contributing to the visibility of publications by Zimbabwean scholars could be access to funding.

The silence of the grave about female leadership in a post-colonial state in the twenty-first century is outstandingly disturbing. The crucial function of academia cannot be disputed in the quest for gender equality. Researchers must provide unobstructed criticism of society, systems, practices, and institutions and generate theories and policies that enhance development. This has been missing in Zimbabwe for a long time. While African feminist discourses would like to see women taking the lead in eradicating gender disparities, the Zimbabwean education system has been used to propagate the ruling party's propaganda, further marginalizing women who already occupy the bottom of the gender hierarchy. It also emerged that Zimbabweans constantly lived in fear, which has its long-term origins in the liberation struggle, which exhibited anti-democratic tendencies and intolerance of dissent (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). The post-independent government inherited the same structural political-economic legacies intertwined with African nationalist politics and traditional culture, further worsening the position of women. Women who have traditionally been silenced were further intimidated by the thirty-seven-year-long chains of violent events.

The events have been kept alive by the fact that victims have always remained near the perpetrators in Zimbabwe. The researcher questions how women continue to be silenced, intimidated, and exposed to various manifestations of oppression in a post-colonial state. States must prioritize societal peace as it is a prerequisite for knowledge construction. The researcher advocates for what Nnaemeka (2004) describes, 'space which allows for the coexistence, interconnection, and interaction of thought, dialogue, planning, and action,' which nurtures the unfolding of African feminism(s). Violence has had devastating effects on the development of consciousness in African states. As a result, African societies have not been researched and documented to match the global knowledge production, leading to unexamined reports about Africans. As the world has become connected, it is time for women's movements to intensify collaboration to achieve far-reaching impact.

Further, the lack of access related to the constant surveillance of citizens suggests that researchers could not access the research sites and participants. Take, for instance, the experiences of researchers who documented their difficulties in accessing research participants in their studies; Mangwiro (2016) undertook a study in six provinces where a non-governmental – Heal Zimbabwe Trust is operating. The six provinces have been classified as highly volatile violence hot spots: Midlands, Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Masvingo, and Matebeleland North. The researcher reported that some places were impenetrable, especially since the leadership structures that approve research activities are highly aligned with the ruling party – ZANU PF. He explained that some participants withdrew from the research after victimization. Mvundura (2014) expressed how he considered it ethically safer not to seek official approval of access from local leadership structures or to meet participants outside their homes. The

researchers often had to be accompanied by people known at the research sites. Coltart (2008) warned that he could access census statistical information because of his position as a member of parliament. Zhira (2004) reported the difficulties he faced interviewing Gukurahundi survivors and church leaders, especially the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) – the genocide was not documented, nor has it appeared anywhere in the history books.

The geographically uneven distribution of publications mentioned earlier is linked to the volatility of Zimbabwean society. The descriptions above confirm the importance of free movement and freedom of speech in society. Culture: The Zimbabwean government's meddling in everyday aspects of its citizens' lives makes it impossible for researchers to access participants. The researcher also reiterates the importance of proximity in feminist methodologies. This has further concealed African women's studies, and Africa as a context remains misrepresented, increasing chances of being homogenized by European and Anglo-American scholarship. Contemporary scholarship is dominated by non-Africans who have taken strategic positions to speak on behalf of African women – advancing the portrayal of Africa as a dark continent (Pailey, 2016). The extent to which African studies can be hidden or revealed depends on the commitment of the producers of knowledge and enabling contexts. The African feminist movement disregards the falsification of African women – rather, it insists on individual autonomy, access to resources, and democratic government for its goals to be feasible. African women's lived experiences and world views in history, social sciences, anthropology, and sociology must be considered to undo the misrepresentation.

The concept of academic research has great potential to enhance the transformation of the African political landscape. The volatility of the Zimbabwean context needs interrogation because it impinges on the knowledge construction process. The researcher seeks to contribute to building peaceful societies where women's voices can be heard. African feminists encourage self-reliant women; hence, peace and tranquillity are prerequisites for sustainable development. Despite attaining independence in 1980, the culture persisted in nurturing dominance sustained by authoritarian nationalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). Culture as a negative force remains a central issue (Nnaemeka, 2004) in the emancipation of women. However, African feminists argue that culture should not be dismissed as a negative factor; rather, its notions of oppression should be interrogated and transformed in a way that makes it serve development (Mama, 2007). Culture and structure are twisted together, and they have historically constructed women's sexuality and femininity. Women must fight a multi-layer of complexities – the traditional culture of male dominance, the inferiority complex created by the colonial regime, and the violence infiltrated by post-liberation internal colonization. Internal colonization is evident in other post-colonial African states, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Kenya. Women and children suffer the most as they are likely to be treated unfairly. The researcher talks about women who have been marginalized, exploited, and oppressed culturally, politically, and economically, with or without the colonial regime. Most women in Zimbabwe live in rural areas (Mvundura, 2014), where they are reeling in poverty, heading families with little or no basic services such as education, which has long been side-lined (Coltart, 2008). Female school leaders are expected to perform in ill-resourced schools.

Another implication emanates from the government's denial of all the atrocities and the economy's failure. Non-governmental organizations, human rights, and civic society organizations have been denied access to support Zimbabwean citizens in dire need of necessities when food became a luxury. The researcher, therefore, suggests that since non-governmental organizations have dominated women's activism, the government did not commit itself to implementing the gender legislative framework, policies, and programs. Almost four decades after independence, women remain underrepresented in educational leadership (Hlatywayo et al., 2014; Mapolisa et al., 2013; Mudau & Ncube, 2017; Muzvidziwa, 2013) and school leaders face perennial challenges related to physical and financial resources (Makura, 2009; Mapolisa et al., 2013; Shava & Ndebele, 2014; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016).

As if the difficulties above were not enough, Zimbabwean residents also had to deal with a worsening crisis in governance and human rights, in which they were routinely threatened with

violence and intimidation by members of the government and the ruling party for siding with the opposition (Coltart, 2008; Crush & Tevera, 2010; Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). A dishonest political establishment is at the heart of Zimbabwe's issues. About 35 years of economic gains have been reversed in the past ten years. Tragically, the Gukurahundi incident continues to plague the entire country and is essential to silence dissent (Coltart, 2008). Noteworthy is that this violence became mainly synonymous with the emergence of some strict surveillance of citizens. The silences linked to this violence include silence as cultural censure, an adaptation to dominant discourse, and a marker of liminality (Mvundura, 2014). All this negatively impacted the economy and, most importantly, the lack of political will to prioritize academic activities. Therefore, a lack of financing has significantly harmed academic research efforts. This cannot be contested given that most recent scholarly reviews have reported minimal contribution of Zimbabwean universities to international academic research, for example, Hallinger (2018a).

The literature constantly mentions how the government withdrew from crucial sectors such as education to concentrate on militarizing the state to consolidate power. The researcher notes how it was easy for the government to abandon the once highest-ranked education system on the African continent (Sadomba et al., 2015). The untold political upheaval and its economic effects on the education system created more bottlenecks, causing a mass exodus of lecturers and teachers, a lack of infrastructure, and a lack of funding, which could have rendered female leaders incompetent. The political and economic collapse of Zimbabwe has given the crisis' causes and effects more attention, obscuring the regrettable marginalization of groups with low socioeconomic standing, such as women and girls. This could be why the Zimbabwean female educational leadership literature is dominated by challenges/ barriers and under representation. There is limited research on context.

Therefore, the researcher suggests further research on how context impacts female leadership. Also, the invisibility of literature needs to be further investigated. For instance, the aim to increase women in leadership may have been deflected because female enrolment levels of education may have halted and overturned the access of girl children to secondary and tertiary education, making it unaffordable. Education should prioritize gender equity. This opens new avenues for departing from bureaucracy and centralization to decentralized systems. While effective educational leadership depends on the commitment of leaders, structural context, political context, and economic and social contexts are indispensable.

12   LIMITATION

Several limitations apply to this literature review. First, this study did not aim to review related literature from a corpus of studies; rather, the purpose was to focus on Zimbabwe to understand the volatility's magnitude. More importantly, while these findings cannot be generalized, some lessons can be learned and transferred to similar contexts, especially post-liberation African states, for example, regarding the invisibility of scholarship on women. Secondly, this study is written from the point of view of a black woman, adding her voice to the struggle for women's emancipation.

13   CONCLUSION

We have seen how the complex multi-layered Zimbabwean volatility has affected academic research activities, fuelling the uneven geographic distribution of studies across provinces. The use of state violence to eradicate political opposition and secure citizenry has been central to ZANU PF's dominance over Zimbabwe. There is no doubt that this has played a vital role in the invisibility of publications on female educational leadership, only to emerge in 2008, in coincidence with the mass migration. The consequences have been far-reaching - on women in educational leadership who are already oppressed by traditional and colonial regimes.

This could stimulate further research and reviews comparing studies of various contexts in developing regions. Since volatility has persisted over the years, The researcher suggests further research to contextualize female leadership to increase its contribution to the existing wealth of

knowledge. This also speaks to policymakers and funders, who should consider conducting needs analyses in educational institutions and determine how academic work can be supported. As a movement, African feminism(s) needs to intensify the scientific insights to map the terrain about guiding the future and further research to uncover the extent of gender imbalances, violence, intimidation, and silencing of women. The researchercall for moral leadership with a mandate to fulfill societal and institutional educational goals rather than political appointees loyal to the ruling party.

14   DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

According to the authors, there are no competing interests to declare.

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