



*Routledge Contemporary Africa*

# **POWER IN CONTEMPORARY ZIMBABWE**

Edited by  
Erasmus Masitera and Fortune Sibanda



# Power in Contemporary Zimbabwe

In recent years, the Zimbabwe crisis rendered the country and its citizens to be a typical case of ‘failed states’, recorded the world over. Zimbabwean society was and is still confronted with different challenges which include political, economic, spiritual and social problems. Attempts to overcome these challenges have thrown light on the power that rests within individuals and or groups to change and even revolutionize their localities, communities, states and ultimately the world at large. Through experience, individuals and groups have promoted ideas that have aided in changing mentalities, attitudes and behaviours in societies at different levels.

This book brings together contributors from various academic disciplines to reflect on and theorize the contours of power, including the intrinsic and or extrinsic models of power, which pertain to individuals, communities, and or groups in order to transform society. Reflections are on various groups such as political movements, environmental movements, religious groups, advocacy groups, gender groups, to mention but a few, as they struggle against marginalization, discrimination, exploitation, and other forms of oppression showing their agency or compliance.

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Fortune Sibanda**

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# 1 Grappling with power in contemporary Zimbabwe

## The introduction

*Erasmus Masitera and Fortune Sibanda*

A driving force in this post-independent period has been the quest for total emancipation. In this regard, the major thrust of this work is to reflect on ‘emancipation’ through understanding ‘forms of power’ within the contemporary Zimbabwe society. In making the reflections, the discussions presented here are consistently guided by the fundamental question on how Africans are to extricate themselves from the experiences of ‘slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism . . . and today globalization’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni: 2013, 11).

On reflecting on power and emancipation in Zimbabwe, and indeed Africa at large, it is a folly not to ‘think’ of the existential circumstances that shape contemporary African societies. The circumstances include social, economic, and political challenges; these invite and invited a lot of responses that range from analysis to diagnosis to prognosis, from both within and without Africa. At the same time, a number of views have also been forwarded as relevant for challenging the African conundrum. Among the myriads of propositions on reformulating Africa from the challenges are scholars such as Nkrumah (1965); Fanon (1956) and (2004); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013); Mbembe (2016); and Hwami (2016), among others. These scholars have made serious reflections on how Africa may extricate herself from various political, social, and economic challenges that she faces. Interestingly, the scholars argue for different ways through which Africa may liberate herself; the arguments range from use of physical violence and absolute departure from colonial systems, to engagement based on an intellectual epistemological renaissance of endogenous and indigenous systems. Underlying all these endeavours is the clandestine vitality of African people to define, redefine, understand, restructure, and above all decolonize themselves. The desire to decolonize themselves is premised upon the realization that they have the capability and power to do so. It is then the endeavour of this work to also understand the different forms of power that inform Zimbabweans, and indeed Africans, in the process of decolonization. This kind of thinking resonates with Michael Foucault’s (1982, 780–782) thinking in ‘The Subject and Power’, where he discusses how people use the ‘power’ they have to understand and control what is around them. In this sense, this project considers various ways in which power (political, social, spiritual, and economic power) is understood and used in Zimbabwe to influence and control

society. Hence the discussions in this work reflect on ‘power’ in redefining (self-understanding) and decolonizing society from challenges. It is correct to argue that this project reflects seriously on how Zimbabweans, and indeed Africans, attempt to understand their social reality, interact with each other, and attempt to extricate themselves from the colonial and post-colonial bondages.

Though this work will concern itself with understanding the different facets in which power is found, it is important here to understand what is meant by the use of the word ‘power’. Defining the term ‘power’ is elusive, and where such a definition exists, it is highly controversial (Hay: 1997; McAuley: 2003, 11); however, it is easy to connote what is referred to by the term, a position this work adopts. An overview of the connotations is forwarded by Mann (1986). Mann shows that ‘power’ is in the form of: i. ideological power that is operating at the level of indoctrinating and convincing people towards a shared way of living. This has to do with social power, which includes cultural and educational influence; ii. economic power that discusses issues that deal with production, distribution, exchange and consumption – in other words, the discussion is on the level of class system; iii. military power: the discussion here centres on physical survival and direct control of geographical space through coercion; and iv. political power, which talks of state control that is disseminated through some form of administration. These forms of ‘power’ have the effect of controlling and/or bringing about consequences (Lukes: 1974, 634), transforming humans and their conditions of living (Giddens: 1985) and the ability to pursue a course of action based on decisions either in the interest of or against other groups (Bottomore: 1979, 8). The above exposé fits into the ethos of this project: that is, discussing the different facets of power and how it has influenced or may influence the decolonization process. In addition to these predominant forms of power identified by Mann (1986), this work also focuses on religious power and spiritual power. The spirituality of Africans and the power of religion in Africa and among Africans is aptly captured in Mbiti’s (1969, 2) observation that ‘Africans are notoriously religious.’ This African theologian noted that the power of religion was shown through its pervasiveness in all sectors of life, such as in politics, economics, and social relations. Essentially, religion and politics are intertwined in some contexts. Nevertheless, religious power is ambivalent as it can be found under the guises of liberation and oppression. In this regard, the ideas in this paragraph resonate very well with the above, which discusses the methods through which the exercise of power is realized – violence, dissociation, engagement, and/or intellectual rebellion from the thongs of colonialism and post-colonial practices. Effectively this means that this work attempts to reveal the connection that exists between the different kinds of power, self-understanding, and emancipation. Thus, this project approaches the question of power from a broader understanding rather than limiting it to a particular way of understanding.

The expansiveness of understanding ‘power’ in the process of existential circumstances and the ‘decolonization’ process as presented above sets this work apart from other books which have since been published. For instance, Mapara and Mazuru’s (2015) work focuses only on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS)

as foundations for African knowledge; Mawere and Mubaya (2016) generalize on the importance of knowledge systems. Furthermore, this work does not limit itself to a particular discipline such as African Philosophy (Mawere, Mubaya and Mukusha: 2017), Africology (Asante and Ledbetter: 2016), or understanding decolonization and processes of decolonization in Africa as is the case with Fanon (1956 and 2004) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) works. Rather, this work combines the decolonial project, use of IKS, self-understanding/identity, emancipation, different forms of power, and how the interplay among these impacts negatively or positively on social relations in Zimbabwe and indeed as applicable to Africa.

In discussing the interplay of power, the discussions in this work aver that people have the ability and capability to transform their circumstances. This is only possible when people understand themselves and what is at their disposal so that they challenge and alter their predicaments. In unpacking this influence of power, this work considers people as revolutionaries (Fanon: 2004, 44) rather than mere collaborators and workers as Karl Marx thinks. The thinking behind this opinion is that people have ideas, and views, be they ideologies or otherwise, on the kind of lives they want to live. In addition, people also are aware of hindrances to achieving the particular lives they value and would want to achieve; these are mostly linked to political organisations. Beyond these, people have ideas on how to emancipate themselves through (i) the use of arguments (historical and contemporary), persuasion, and convincing others (social power); (ii) rearranging social and political systems (political power); (iii) evoking the spiritual realm (religious power); (iv) knowledge and information society enhanced by technology (media power); and (v) using violence (military power). When people live the kind of lives they have reason to value, they are seeking to achieve dignity and emancipation from colonial and post-colonial bondage. It follows then that in order to achieve this, individuals have to understand the kind of exploitative and manipulative life they are living, and then make an effort to transform it for the better. This involves understanding the environment in which one is living. The environment is to be understood as constitutive of the political, social, religious, and economic spheres in which individuals find themselves. According to Sen (1999, 89) the environment has a bearing on the lives of people and it influences the kind of lives that people lead, though at the same time the same environment may influence people to think beyond its confines. The idea expressed by this social philosopher is that humans have the ability to transcend the confines of the communities that shape them. They can use the same environment that seemingly limits their abilities to change it or manipulate it to become relevant in their endeavours. These endeavours are hinged on the motive to become better people or to live lives which people have reason to value (Sen: 1999, xii). Understanding the existential conditions in which individuals find themselves is therefore key to any form of human living. With that in perspective, the different chapters in this work reflect and do, among other things, unpack the different human dimensions that range from the social, economic, religious, and political circumstances of how people attempt to understand themselves, decolonize, and attain full emancipation.

The discourses in this book go beyond understanding 'power' as the outright control of behaviour (through force, brutality, political, religious, social, and economic influence); this work adds the dimension of possibility to change unjust circumstances. In this sense, the chapters in this work reflect, at times, the added dimension of power as the turning of the term upside down to reveal the efforts of the mostly 'ordinary' agents, described by the Brazilian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez as those living on the 'underside of history' (1973). These people with 'the view from below' are associated with the majority and are exposed to poverty, oppression, and other injustices; yet the same oppressed individuals make use of their wits, spirituality, heritage, strength of numbers, and instruments/tools for human living to change the course of events. This is necessary especially in environments where some aspects of human lives are considered to be of no consequence. However, reflections in this book reveal that the media, intangible and tangible heritages such as spiritual beliefs and social structures that are used to oppress, latently hold the power to turn tables upside down or to change society for the better. The very powers that oppress, objectify, exploit, and marginalise can be at the same time used by the oppressed to express the power they have to become and realise the lives they want. This thinking is well expressed or captured by the saying of Jesus of Nazareth when he was referring to himself as the 'key' to life beyond this world. Through metaphoric language, Jesus compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected that had become the cornerstone (cf. Matt. 21:42). Along the same lines, Jesus Christ claimed the spirit of the Lord was upon him and that his mission was to proclaim liberty to the captives, recover the sight of the blind, liberate the oppressed, and bring the inauguration of the 'jubilee year' (Luke 4:16–21). This shows God's vision of what the ideal world could be – an environment full of justice and care for the vulnerable and down-trodden. In the same sense, that which was considered as non-essential in human living among the African people, is the real deal necessary for their living. These ideas are well put forward in the chapters that are contained in this work.

Noteworthy and important is the fact that authors in this work take time to engage with their heritage, both tangible and intangible. These heritages had been either neglected or rejected by the colonial and post-colonial systems. The different authors therefore take time to reveal and appreciate the importance and relevance of such heritages in shaping contemporary living. This is very important as a process of decolonization and in reasserting the human dignity and worthiness which had been denied indigenous African people. At this juncture it is necessary to focus on the existing Zimbabwean society.

### **Zimbabwean situation<sup>1</sup>**

In presenting the Zimbabwe situation, we begin by positing that politics influences all other dimensions of life, and as such the presentation starts by assessing the political situation. Politically Zimbabwe is a polarized state. On the one hand, there is a group of individuals who support and hero worship the veterans of the liberation war. In this group is the ruling party, ZANU PF, which has governed



Zimbabwe since the attainment of independence (1980) from British rule, and in most cases, the administration has been marked by repression of opposition groups. In the words of Fanon (1956) the administration is a replica of colonial rule except that those in charge have changed colour – *Black Skin, White Masks*. This government has been accused of gross human rights violations and heavy-handedness in its administration. Also, the same government has been accused of corruption, nepotism, and favouritism – favouring indigenous inhabitants and promoting indigenous knowledge, but only for its own benefit and political expediency.

On the other hand, there are individuals and parties opposed to the governance of the war veterans. These argue that democracy and human rights ought to be respected and upheld in governance and political practices. There has been no agreement between the two political groupings except for the period when a Government of National Unity (GNU) was established between the years 2009 and 2013. The opposition does not necessarily argue for the exportation of foreign systems onto the Zimbabwean political scenario; rather, their thinking is that every policy (indigenization included) ought to benefit all, not the powerful and well-connected individuals. Further, they argue against hero-worshipping of former war veterans by saying this is bound to *de facto* legitimize their activities as the expected.

On the social front, it is important to note that there have been demise and dilution of the local cultures due to colonial influence, and seeming neglect of the same cultural values and systems by post-independent governments. Upon reflection, scholars and traditionalists have realized that it is important to revive local cultures as a way to preserve them, advance humanism in fractured societies, and bring sanity in the political, religious, economic, and social lives of the people. Hence, there has been a drive towards reviving local indigenous knowledge systems as a panacea to some social ills that Zimbabwe is facing. Discussions in this book focus on issues related to health, education, environmental protection, religion, political organization and governance, and media use. Among the issues raised by the scholars are that there is power in understanding social circumstances, the influence thereof, and working at effecting change for common good. In that sense, the contributors argue that history has a huge role to play in people's lives. The argument is that forgetting and rejecting the historical experiences (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) is folly. There is no way historical experience can be erased and be forgotten; rather, that experience should help people to learn the good and the bad, thereby enlightening them in formulating values that appreciate and accommodate diversity.

The above sections are relevant in that they situate the reader into the existential reality of life that ordinary Zimbabweans lived. Apart from that, situating the social livelihood of the people conforms to Habermas (1989 and 1996) and Honneth's (1991) thinking that encourage understanding one's social circumstances. They further say that after knowing one's situation, the individuals will then work from that to achieve liberation. In most cases, the thinking is that social structures in which individuals find themselves are the chains that cause social alienation.



This social alienation subjugates people to a situation in which they become slaves of their own society (Marx: 1975). In the same manner, social structures that have been created by colonial systems have also led to this social alienation. The alienation and subjugation has been based upon the ‘them’ and ‘us’ relation. In this analogy, ‘them’ refers to those who control society, and ‘us’ refers to those who do not belong to the group of ‘them’. These are the binary oppositions of social living, also known as the ‘centre-periphery’ dichotomy. The suffering has not only been limited to physical abuse, but relates to religious, legal, political, and even economic dimensions of human living. According to Jonathan Wolff (2017), for Marx, understanding the cause of suffering or one’s position is the beginning of the process to liberate oneself. Furthermore, the liberation of oneself is a process, not an event. Ending suffering is equal to ending binary oppositions. One cannot make an oversight of this thinking in the process of understanding oneself as well as reasserting, re-educating, and rethinking about Africa and its place in the twenty-first century. All the mentioned dimensions are essential in understanding who Africans are and how they can reclaim and regain their position in the dynamics of world social interactions. Indeed, in order to effect change in a particular society, one ought to know how it works, how power is accumulated and challenged, and how social structure can be realigned to serve the cause of justice instead of injustice. This is a process that Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist and philosopher, called ‘conscientization’ (Freire: 2005). This element influenced the liberation theologians and black theologians to emphasise the agency of the racially and socially oppressed people. Just like Marx’s thought, the agents of change are the people themselves, who have the power to move the world and to reclaim what has been denied them. This is the same position presented in this work, that people who understand themselves have the power to reassert and reclaim their position. The struggle for reassertion and reclamation can be through armed struggles, persuasive dialogue, and intellectual input, a position advanced in this work. However, the struggles captured in the chapters of this work are not necessarily violent, since most African countries went through these stages in anti-colonialist struggles that culminated in political independence. Nevertheless, what is required is a struggle in other dimensions, such as intellectual facets, as well as the reclamation of social and public spaces.

This work is a contribution to the ongoing decolonizing process, a process which is becoming clearer each day. The advent of democracy and its practice in African countries has changed the outlook of social organization. Whereas previously there was a distinction between ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’, that distinction has been replaced by the idea of ‘citizenship’ – a democratic principle. It is this very concept – citizenship – in which those formerly called ‘natives’ attempt to understand themselves and try to undo the thongs of colonisation that the democratic process kind of ignored. Attempts at addressing the classifications of people and other unresolved issues are what Joseph-Achille Mbembe refers to as the decolonising process (Mbembe: 2016). The process of decolonising itself involves demythologising both whiteness and blackness as an embodiment of humans. It also involves demythologising knowledge and practices by taking off

all entrapments that individuals find themselves in, and decommissioning remnants of colonial legacies (Mbembe: 2016). In like fashion, the ideas in this book attempt to supplement the process of epistemic decolonisation through bringing in different understandings of epistemic knowledge that have been neglected. The attempt is not to obliterate the colonial epistemological legacy, but to reclaim and enlarge the epistemic space such that all citizens' knowledge is acknowledged. Hence, in the decolonisation process of knowledge, the writers seek to decommission obsolete and irrelevant forms of knowledge and commission the relevant knowledge systems and patterns that relate to people's lives in Africa. For Mbembe (2016) this is a process of reshaping knowledge, which is exactly what the chapters in this book bring forth.

In that regard, this book project is made up of thirteen chapters that deal with varying themes ranging from religious issues to political and social facets of human living. Some of the discussions in this project address areas that have to do with dispute resolution, liberating and re-educating the mind through different methods of problem solving. Furthermore, the discussions focus on the dynamics of power around issues like the Indigenous Knowledge Systems, the environment, morality, religious freedom, and justice. Thus, this intellectual input represents an interdisciplinary flare that critiques and reflects upon issues pertaining to socio-economic, religious, and political transformation in Zimbabwe from the religious studies, theology, social and political philosophy, and environmental philosophy disciplines.

Over and above, the intention of the chapters is to proffer varied perspectives to the social, religious, environmental, political, and economic challenges that the Zimbabweans are facing. Each chapter has its own reflections that have to be taken on their own merits, yet the contribution of each chapter cannot be underestimated in its contribution to understanding or resolving varied Zimbabwean challenges.

## **The chapters**

Edmore Dube's chapter is concerned with the issue of achieving justice and peace after chaotic land reforms in Zimbabwe. He argues that the chaotic land reform, which is termed '*Jambanja*', was a reversal of the colonial land expropriations and exploitations experienced by the local communities. Further, the researcher notes that the land reform benefited the politically positioned and a few rich individuals who are in this case 'petite' land bourgeoisie. Thus, the *Jambanja* reform, instead of creating a situation whereby equality in land redistribution is achieved and ultimately finding justice for the formerly oppressed societies, actually led to further marginalization of such groups and to the creation of elitist groups.

Invariably the *Jambanja* land reform and its outcomes have been criticised by various social groups in Zimbabwe. These groups include civil societies, churches, and international communities who view *Jambanja* land reform not as foreshadowing justice and peace, but as a real source of conflict. The *Jambanja* justice is also a way through which particular values and interests of a group are imposed

upon others. This imposition is unacceptable, according to Dube. In order to avoid the imposition of ideas, values, and interests, the author proposes dialoguing. The argument of the writer is that through dialogue the chances of settling squabbles amicably are high, and chances of even reconciling different members of society are increased, hence achieving peace and justice. In addition, the author realizes that the idea of dialoguing is appealing because dialogue itself embeds within it therapeutic powers: forgiveness, truthfulness, and reconciliation. These powers, Dube notes, have historical precedence: they have been experienced in the local court systems of *Dare/Indaba*. The *Dare/Indaba* system encourages real engagement of the different people, and the resolving of issues peacefully.

Dennis Masaka is engaged with the importance of liberating the Zimbabwean educational curriculum from Eurocentric ideas as the genesis of any form of liberation. The argument presented is that Eurocentric ideas or western ideas perpetuate colonial thinking that alienates itself from the local indigenous ways of controlling resources. The educational curriculum is a necessary foundation for mental independence. The mental liberation exhibits itself through political, social, and economic independence that is revealed by liberated control of these. In that regard, Masaka thinks that education independence, as a form of social independence, necessitates economic liberation as well. Through removing the thongs of Eurocentric domination in education curriculum in Zimbabwean education, the chances are that the indigenes' minds will be liberated. The idea is that a home-grown educational system disseminates local cultures and practices as well; these will then be used by the locals in the economic systems. Masaka's thinking is that through indigenizing the educational curriculum, the chances are high of empowering people mentally and, eventually, in controlling material resources.

Shoorai Konyana and Elias G. Konyana present a case for religious multiculturalism within a sect. Their argument is that there is need for embracing and appreciating cultural and religious diversity, especially when confronted by social and spiritual problems. For Konyana and Konyana, the African Independent Church founded by Mai Chaza known as *Guta Ra Jehova* (GRJ) illustrates the ingenuity and genius inculturation of Christian practices and beliefs into African beliefs and practices, or vice versa. The mixing of African religious beliefs with Christianity at the same time is an endeavour to respond, firstly, to the cultural diversity and multiculturalism that characterises the Zimbabwean society; secondly, it addresses the weaknesses that are inherent in one culture through adopting another. In this sense, complementarity and the supplementary factor of religious traditions is reflected. Konyana and Konyana's chapter is more concerned with the second response to multiculturalism and multi-religious practice that their chapter focuses on. Their focus is on how the GRJ as a religious sect responds to the social problem of *ngozi* (the avenging spirit). The GRJ sect, they argue, appreciates the value of Christianity that respects human being and dignity, but is dissatisfied with failure of Christianity to respond to the local evil spirit-related problems, chief among them being *ngozi*. Resultantly, the religious sect encompasses and accommodates African spirituality that is relevant and responds to the African peoples' spiritual desires, but does not neglect Christian thinking

and practices. In that reflection, the GRJ church's theological thrust is based on faith-healing (which is Christian-based) and the appeasement of wronged spirits, which include avenging spirits (which is African spirituality-based). Mixing the two shows the power deeply embedded in the practice of multi-religious and multicultural thinking. In concluding the chapter, Konyana and Konyana say that the ingenuity of GRJ falls within the category of religious ingenuity that attract, returns, and advances new theological thinking that seeks to appease both the Christian world and the traditional African world as well. In this sense, GRJ and other African Independent Churches return the strength and power to add value to the social living of the Shona people and traverse into the Christian world as well.

Ephraim Taurai Gwaravanda contributes to the debate on decolonising the African mind from colonial epistemology. The major premise that Gwaravanda forwards is that western hegemony in the political and social realms has resulted in Shona epistemic injustice, hence the destruction of indigenous political and knowledge systems. Furthermore, the colonial practice has been inherited by the present day Zimbabwean political system, which has continued intentionally with the practice, yet at the same time propping up the promotion of the indigenous system which they do not respect most of the time since they only respect it when it supports or benefits the politicians' political expedience. It is no surprise, then, that the indigenous political and knowledge systems have been discriminated against through side-lining and marginalization. By citing an example of what happened in Chiadzwa, where members of the local community were removed from their traditional homesteads to make way for diamond mining, Gwaravanda gives the exact conflict that exists between the two systems. Gwaravanda alludes to the fact that the people were moved without proper respect of local traditions, and the government of the day turned a deaf ear to their plight. With this in mind, the author avers that colonial epistemology and practice has blocked the self-development of local political systems while promoting myopic political ideas. In order to end colonial dominance, the researcher argues that it is important to appreciate and respect local political systems so as to expand political ideas, end unequal power relations, and improve home-grown solutions and values. There is therefore a sense in which a fusion of ideas is a requirement, which can be achieved through adopting the indigenous systems. This fusion, Gwaravanda concludes, has the power to create a pluralistic cultural, political, and epistemic society that produces a balanced and well-developed people-oriented system.

Archieford Kurauone Mtetwa interrogates the role of the community in guaranteeing the power of the leaders. Mtetwa thinks that social engagement that is based upon shared social values is the hallmark of successful leadership, and a guarantee of social stability and economic development of a nation as well. Legitimacy of leaders, Mtetwa proffers, comes from the people, and the power to govern emanates from empowering the masses. For this position, the author argues that there is a historical basis. Historically, ancient Israel's religious practice is a point of reference, whereby control of the people came from the ability to understand and to be understood by the people, thereby leading to social cohesion as opposed to power that comes from outside the people. In other words, governing from