


Regime enablers and captured religious mandate in Zimbabwe

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Dates:

Received: 30 June 2020

Accepted: 19 Oct. 2020

Published: 14 Dec. 2020

How to cite this article:

Dube, B., 2020, 'Regime enablers and captured religious mandate in Zimbabwe', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41(1), a2126. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2126>

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Zimbabwe's second republic, born after the fall of Robert Mugabe on 17 November 2017, has been characterised by many controversies. Some of the most important of these include claims that human rights, accountability and democracy are being disregarded, and religious leaders are acting as regime enablers to maintain injustice. This article problematises the role of Nehemiah Mutendi and Andrew Wutawunashe, the harbingers of the second republic. I look closely at Mutendi's and Wutawunashe's roles in the second republic, in the light of human rights and show how their involvement in the political matrix has the potential to disrupt social cohesion, stoke hate and misrepresent the religious mandate by assuming the role of regime enablers. I argue that, although religious leaders have a constitutional right to be involved in politics, their primary mandate is to promote morality and human rights, fight for the poor and marginalised and not to surrender these rights for the sake of obtaining benefits.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article draws from the nexus theology, religious studies, politics, economy and sociology. The article attempts to show how religious leaders in their involvement in politics affect social arrangements, economy and peace. Therefore, it is interdisciplinary in the sense that it discusses religious issues informed by politics, economy and peace narratives.

Keywords: Wutaunashe; Mutendi; politics and second republic; decoloniality; regime enablers; social justice.

Introduction

For many Zimbabweans, who had longed to see the end of the 37-year rule of Robert Mugabe, 17 November 2017 was perceived as a new dawn. Mugabe had ruled Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2017. In 1980, Mugabe was seen as the leader who had inherited the 'jewel of Africa', and he became a role model for many African states that opposed Global North hegemonic regimes (Loudon 2019). Just like many other African leaders, he overstayed his welcome in power, became irrelevant to economic development and, instead of handing over power, he created various structures, instruments and a cohort of regime enablers to remain in power. Consequently, the economy weakened, whilst abuse of human rights became the order of the day, especially for citizens with a different political ideology or orientation. To shed light on the foregoing argument, Mahere (2019) reported that, whilst he was revolutionary and eloquent in his speeches, Mugabe tarnished a precious jewel with violence, economic mismanagement and repression. This led to the Zimbabwean military launching Operation Restore Legacy, in a bid to force President Mugabe out of office, and to facilitate a transfer of power to his former vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa (Beardsworth, Cheeseman & Tsinhu 2019) and consequently, ushering in a new regime and dawn, affectionately known as the second republic. The coup to reconfigure Zimbabwe's autocratic system and breaking from Mugabe's corrupt and patronage-based rule (Noyes 2020), however, seems to have nothing new to show for the evolution of a second republic, because the Zimbabwean political landscape is still marred by political violence, militarisation and economic mismanagement. Just like the Mugabe era, the second republic has various actors who have actively assumed the roles of regime enablers, whose role is to ensure that political leaders remain in power, regardless of their failures, who force leaders on people through lies, propaganda and, where necessary, violence, which undermines the values of democracy and the rights of a multiplicity of voices in the political field. One of the effective regime enabler cohorts that is often ignored by political commentators, is religious leaders, whose influence and power have contributed, directly or indirectly, to prolonging the rule of African leaders. A regime enabler can be defined as an individual or group that helps politicians to gain power and, later, help them to maintain that power (Magaisa 2019).

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Upon assuming the presidency, Mnangagwa took active steps to unite the Zimbabwean community and persuaded people that he was presiding over a new-look government that was committed to ensuring that the rights of the people of Zimbabwe would be respected. One of the groups of people he extended the olive branch to was religious leaders. Perhaps the assumption was that their involvement in the political space would serve as an assurance that a new dawn had, indeed, arrived, and religious leaders, as moral custodians, would endorse it. However, Zinyama (2019) argued that Mnangagwa's approach provided an opportunity for new constituencies to ingratiate themselves with a government, which was eager to find new allies in order to redefine its community base. This community base was not for the benefit of its religious members by creating more regime enablers, who access benefits from the state and act as harbingers of the second republic. The new community members who were recruited, and who this article will be discussing, are religious leaders; in particular, I will zero in on Andrew Wutaunashe and Nehemiah Mutendi. My discussion acknowledges that there is scant literature on these two, which enhances the uniqueness of this article, because it focuses on narratives that are undermining, yet influential, in the Zimbabwean political and religious landscape. As I discuss these two religious leaders, I will show how a religious mandate can be captured by an influential person assuming the role of a regime enabler, by causing division in religious groups and by thwarting efforts to use religion as a reconciliation tool, as happened in Zimbabwe. In fact, the underlying problem of Wutaunashe and Mutendi is that, instead of serving the nation, they serve the ruling party, they safeguard the integrity of institutions and they manipulate and abuse them to the benefit of the ruling party (Magaisa 2019).

I will discuss how scholars who underwrite decoloniality can contribute to a religion uncaptured by politicians and thereby promote a democratic space in Zimbabwe. This does not mean there are no religious leaders who have assumed this role; however, for the sake of the article, I will limit the discussion to these two. Before elaborating further on Wutawunashe and Mutendi, I will discuss the theoretical framework of this article, which is decoloniality.

Theoretical framework: Decoloniality

The article is framed in decoloniality. Regarding its origins, scholars such as Wanderley and Barros (2018) argued that the decoloniality theory has its roots in Latin America, amongst leading scholars such as Walter Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Quijón and Dussel. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) are of the view that decoloniality has a history, *herstory*, and praxis of more than 500 years. In another note, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argued that decoloniality is:

[B]orn out of a realisation that ours is an asymmetrical world order that is sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but

also by pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to produce alienated Africans. (p. 11)

I use this theory in this article because it seeks to make visible, open up and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). Furthermore, as explained by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), decoloniality is a

[M]elee against invisible vampirism of imperialism, technologies and colonial matrices of power (coloniality) that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South. (p. 11)

The theory is suitable for analysing Wutaunashe and Mutendi and their nexus with politics, because they have visible power, and they continue to contribute to the crisis in Zimbabwe by using their authority to assume regime-enabling positions. I argue this way in support of Enroth (1992:41), who believed that the holders of spiritual power become strong role models through their dogmatic teaching, bold confidence and arrogant assertiveness. However, with reference to Wutawunashe and Mutendi, I agree with Magaisa (2019): 'they (religious leaders) start from the periphery wearing the label of technocrats but soon enough, they will find themselves deep in the cesspool, wearing scarfs and chanting ridiculous slogans'; as a result becoming enablers, which the article seeks to challenge within the decoloniality lens. Decoloniality posits itself as part of the continuing search for a new base by the excluded and subordinated people, from which they can launch themselves into a new world order that is humane and inclusive (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). With this need in mind, there is need for a new religious and political order that includes and rehumanises the formerly excluded. In short, I have chosen decoloniality to address and challenge injustice (Mpofu 2017), especially as applied by religious leaders in the political context in Zimbabwe. In the 'Wutaunashe as regime enabler: A mandate captured' section, I will discuss Wutaunashe in the light of his actions as a regime enabler and the way he has captured the religious mandate.

Wutaunashe as regime enabler: A mandate captured

Andrew Wutaunashe is one of the prominent preachers in Zimbabwe, especially within the political space. Regarding his rise in the religious arena, Wutaunashe rose to prominence in the 1980s under the banner of the Worldwide Family of God (FOG). Over the years, his influence grew, and he established several branches of FOG in Zimbabwe and beyond (Togarasei 2005). He was born in 1953 in the Gutu district of Masvingo province, and Wutaunashe's early life was characterised by political activism rather than religion (Togarasei 2005). His religious journey started on 06 June 1974, when he was totally transformed, and he entered into a new relationship with Jesus, which saw him making a total break with his former life (Togarasei 2005). It is also hinted

that he was active in the Dutch Reformed Church, where he led the youth department. Thus, according to Togarasei (2005), Wutaunashe's activism in the youth department of the Dutch Reformed Church and the formation of the Witness Ministries should be seen as steps towards the formation of his own church in 1980. The year 2016, when he divorced Rutendo Faith Wutaunashe, was a defining year for his religious life. Family of God split, with one group following Wutaunashe's long-serving pastor, Bishop Henry Muzhari, who formed the Family Covenant Church (Mashudu 2019), whilst church members remained with him.

Zeroing in on the focus of the article, it should be known that Wutaunashe was very active in Zimbabwe's political regime, even during Robert Mugabe's era. *The Herald* (Shumba 2014) reported on Wutaunashe's commitment to Mugabe by quoting Wutaunashe's view that:

President Mugabe is a God chosen leader. He was raised by God to lead this nation. He has worked diligently for this country and was given the strength to fight for the nation's wealth to be owned by the black majority, which has been a success. (p. 1)

In fact, against all odds and in spite of irregularities in the implementation of land reform in Zimbabwe, Prophet Wutaunashe praised Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front's (ZANU PF's) land reform programme, whilst criticising the European Union and the United States for imposing sanctions on certain political leaders (Manyeruke & Hamauswa 2013). This is evident that he was a regime enabler, who tried to convince the people that ZANU PF had done well with the land redistribution that had caused many people to be displaced, killed or suffer violence from the state. Such acts were condemned by the international community, who referred to them as acts against humanity (Cliffe et al. 2011; Lahiff & Cousins 2001). Based on the foregoing argument, Magaisa (2019) posed two critical questions: (1) Why, in some circumstances, does evidence of mendacity, crudeness or cruelty serve not as a fatal disadvantage, but as an allure, attracting ardent followers? and (2) Why do otherwise proud and self-respecting people submit to the sheer effrontery of the tyrant? These are the questions that foreground the argument that Wutaunashe has assumed the role of a regime enabler, overtly or covertly.

Although Wutaunashe was a known proponent of Mugabe, he made a political loyalty shift to Emmerson Mnangagwa during the rise and consolidation of the second republic. It should be noted that, after the disputed Zimbabwean election in 2018, Nelson Chamisa, the leader of the Movement for Democratic Challenge Alliance (MDC Alliance) challenged the outcome of the presidential elections, and accused it of rigging and the 'Zanufication' of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and, consequently, refused to recognise Emmerson Mnangagwa as the legitimate president of the Republic of Zimbabwe. Today, the question of legitimacy is still being contested on various platforms, especially within the political arena. There have been various fruitless attempts to persuade Nelson Chamisa and Emmerson Mnangagwa to come to the negotiation table. It is important to raise this

issue here because in the midst of this confusion and debate, Wutaunashe entered the picture, represented by a flawed religious constituency and contested political position, and embraced Mnangagwa as the winner of the elections, and even argued that any planned negotiations must be premised in (on?) this understanding. Mlenga (2019) said that the Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches, led by Andrew Wutaunashe, has shot down efforts to reach agreement (negotiations) and has warned Mnangagwa about entering into negotiations centred on legitimacy of Mnangagwa. Mugabe (2019), in *The Herald*, sheds light on this point by citing Wutaunashe, who said:

To this end, we as the indigenous (church) leaders, we are also saying there cannot be genuine dialogue based on trying to determine whether or not you are the President of Zimbabwe; you are the President of Zimbabwe ... as church leaders who represent millions of people, to recognise the President of Zimbabwe openly. (p. 1)

Whilst Wutaunashe, as a Zimbabwean citizen, is entitled to his own view, I begin to problematise and see him as a regime enabler with a captured mandate when he says his view represents that of millions of Zimbabweans. By doing so he is taking a partisan stance and facilitating an enabling environment for the people of Zimbabwe to accept Mnangagwa. I problematise this claim, cognisant that religious space should not be used as a means to settle political scores – doing so is referred to as a coloniality of power and involves power being used for abuse and to access resources under the guise of promoting peace. I argue this way, because Wutaunashe, according to *Zimbabwe Situation* (2019), has long been known as a ZANU PF bedfellow, who, by warning Mnangagwa about entering into negotiations centred on his legitimacy, exacerbates the suffering of ordinary people, whilst pastors are rewarded by being given land and other goodies by the system. Manyeruke and Hamauswa (2013) confirmed that Wutaunashe represents prophets who developed close relationships with ZANU PF as long ago as the days of the liberation struggle. Informed by the foregoing observation, it becomes very difficult to centre prophets like Wutaunashe within a space where their narratives can bring about a consolidated Zimbabwean nation because their presence in the political space lacks objectivity and moral standing, which compromises the role of religious leaders in nation building. To this end, Kaunda (2017) argued that some Pentecostals lack an adequate political theology of social justice that would challenge the status quo of the wealthy and powerful and redirect the government towards promoting the common good. My position related to Wutaunashe is that a religious mandate has been captured and sacrificed on the altar of political gains.

My view, informed by decoloniality, is that genuine prophets speak the truth to authorities, even at the risk of retribution. True prophets do not seek favours or comfort from political leaders (Chamanyawi 2019), but represent the suffering masses, and call for accountability, good governance and social justice. It is unfortunate that Wutaunashe, as reported by *Harare Live* (2019), asked the government, on behalf of other

loyalists, to disregard calls by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, which voiced concern about the deteriorating social, political and economic situation in the country – concerns that I believe make up the fundamental role of a religious organisation. In addition, there is no record of Wutaunashe condemning political violence and the military killing people in Harare in the aftermath of the contested 2018 elections; instead, he rushed to force the legitimacy issue and ignored the lives lost because of the contestation of the elections. Therefore, I agree with Kaunda (2017) that most prophets move from being fools for Christ to fools of politicians. Thus, Magaisa (2019) argued his (Wutaunashe) presence goes some way to legitimating the regime, thus giving the impression that it is so good that respectable professional works with the ruling party.

Mutendi as regime enabler: A mandate become a political constituency

In this section, I focus on Nehemiah Mutendi as a regime enabler, whose religious constituency has assumed a passive yet powerful political constituency in favour of ZANU PF of the second republic. He inherited the church leadership from his father the late Samuel Mutendi. In terms of membership, it is estimated the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) has more than a half-a-million, and it is regarded as one of the biggest indigenous churches in Zimbabwe. It is believed that the ZCC draws its spiritual teachings from the life, times and history of Bishop Samuel Mutendi, who survived surprising birth circumstances around the 1880s (Sunday Mail 2017). Bishop Samuel Mutendi died in 1976, and after his death, his sons Reuben and Nehemiah succeeded their father in running the church. However, at some point they had a quarrel and both left Gokwe, each forming his own church. Reuben moved to Bikita and Nehemiah to Mbungu Estates just outside Masvingo; the latter still maintained Zion City at Gokwe (Makay & Partisen 1988:361–362). In essence, Nehemiah Mutendi is popular and is accredited for the growth of the ZCC church after the death of Mutendi. It is arguably one of the biggest indigenous church in Zimbabwe and this can also be attributed to his (Mutendi) role within the political landscape of Zimbabwe. From the days of Robert Mugabe, he has played a regime enabler role, which perhaps counts for his survival in the religious and political landscape compared to some such as Pius Ncube and Norbert Kunonga who faced displacement for championing a different religious ideology (Dube & Nkoane 2018). To this end, I discuss Mutendi especially with reference to his public support for ZANU PF. I see him as the kind of a regime enabler whose constituency continues to be used as a political constituency to advocate Zanu PF. The Mutendi is cited by *Herald* (2017) saying: support the (Zanu-PF) leadership because the Bible tells us that is the right thing to do – to support and be obedient to our leaders and Government.

Mutendi declares support for ZANU PF and doing so does not infringe anyone's rights; however, it becomes a problem

when his utterances are taken as representing the entire ZCC. Decoloniality, as indicated earlier, opposes the coloniality of power, where leaders use their power to express political representation, especially when it benefits an individual. To further buttress how he has assumed the role of regime enabler, *Zimeye* (2019) cited Mutendi as follows:

The people of Zimbabwe know that MDC is a project of the West which is why they fail to win elections. The people do not want Chamisa to rule the country because they know the whites will come back and occupy our land.

In addition to this statement, Mukokoromba (2019) cited Mutendi telling his followers:

[D]o not be fooled with the opposition because they are being used by the whites who have a hidden agenda. The whites know they will not be able to have their way in this country with Zanu PF in power which is why they have chosen Chamisa.

These utterances mean Mutendi has moved from the role of pacifist to acting as a mobiliser for ZANU PF support, which represents a serious threat to social cohesion. When people visit religious shrines, they hope to achieve spiritual enlightenment, receive comfort and find the best solutions for dealing with various social trajectories, amongst which is political instability in Zimbabwe; however, in reality, especially with ZCC, the religious space has been turned into a political arena with the aim of denouncing the enemies of the state, whilst enabling current political leaders to continue ruling despite failure, corruption and unaccountability. I make the argument that, when religious leaders and followers join hands with, or fail to denounce political leaders who promote self-benefit, at the expense of the entire, suffering population, the followers are not only the victims, but accomplices too.

Thus, with decoloniality, I can tease, challenge and expose the darker side of modern politics in Zimbabwe. In addition, informed with decoloniality, the purpose of teasing, challenging and calling for reconstruction is not to get revenge, but to argue on behalf of the people, who have experienced the pain of domination, exclusion and exploitation; thus, I expose a need to engage in a decolonial struggle for liberation, and to seek justice, whilst keeping in mind the temptation to indulge in hate and vengeance (Mpofu 2017:19). In this sense, decoloniality aims to make visible the struggles and strategies to counter coloniality, by thinking not just from its paradigm, but from the people and their social, political and epistemic practices (Walsh 2012:20).

To emphasise the role of Nehemiah Mutendi as an enabler whose political and religious constituency has been hijacked, resulting in him losing his religious mandate, I quote Bulawayo24 News (2020), which cites Mutendi as saying:

We must survive the hardships we are experiencing. This is a passing phase. Wake up! This is your country. Do not give false information to the outside world but seek solutions from the Lord. We want to use the gift of God to enhance and firmly embrace the President's Vision 2030 Empowerment Agenda. We applaud the work our President is doing in uplifting our souls in prayer. We appreciate his work.

In addition, Mutendi is cited by Share (2018) as playing a regime enabler role when he said:

Do not be afraid, President, we are with you. Some people say we are being ruled by soldiers, which is false. We are being led by mature people who came from the war. Those who are still in the army are not here. What is left is for us to go and tell our people on the direction to follow.

We should be able to be objective, and it is admirable to appreciate political players when they do well, but this praise should come from a neutral standpoint. In the same way, when political leaders err, religious leaders who usually sing their praises should take a public stance and denounce, for instance, violence and killing by politicians of their citizens. However, Nehemiah Mutendi has not done this, which makes me question his legitimacy to take up a moral vocation, such as leading people. I agree with a sentiment by Chitando (2019), who recommends that Bishop Mutendi realises that Zimbabwe is not a family project, like ZCC, which Mutendi inherited from his father. I agree with Chingarande (2019) that religious leaders, such as Mutendi are guilty of 'Instead of serving the state, they serve the ruling party. Instead of safeguarding the integrity of institutions, they manipulate and abuse them for the benefit of the ruling party'. Pentecostal elites use the politics of befriending those in power as the means to access privileges, social status and national resources. In doing so, they have succumbed to a politics of status that effectively silences the prophetic voice (Kaunda 2017). A captured prophetic voice deprives the religious community of ideal service and leadership that is essential for making religious bodies relevant and ensuring that they contribute to sustainable development, good governance and social cohesion.

In concluding this section, I note that decoloniality does not end with the notions of naming, unmasking and engaging but continues by suggesting how religious leaders can engage with the political matrix to achieve the values of justice, righteousness, human rights, hospitality and peace (Wink 1984). Cognisant of the foregoing argument, I suggest ways that can act as a counter-hegemony strategy to counter religion being captured, or lost to political leaders, to achieve a religion that promotes reconciliation, peace and social justice.

What could be done? Towards an uncaptured religious mandate

In this article, I discussed how the religious mandates of Wutaunashwe and Mutendi have been captured, lost and hijacked by the political elite. Whilst religious leaders are human beings and have the right to decide what they should oppose in the democratic space, it is important that their involvement in the political space should be framed by values such as integrity and a need for peaceful coexistence amongst various conflicting parties. Thus, I argue that being an enabler always has negative consequences, not only for religious followers but also for religious leaders. Hence, I agree with Magaisa (2019), who argued that:

Would-be enablers must know that there is a price to pay for being an enabler. But the price of being an enabler of repressive regimes is not always paid in the courts of law. That price might be loss of reputation, credibility and respect of enablers among peers and in the eyes of the public. Once lost, it is very hard to regain the trust and confidence of those around you.

Informed by Magaisa (2019), it is important that religious leaders such as Wutaunashwe and Mutendi, understand that there is always a price to pay for sacrificing integrity and this price is often loss of reputation, which, consequently, affects their religious vocation. There is a need for religious leaders who can 'free individuals and groups from suppressive social and ideological situations, particularly those that place socially unnecessary precincts upon development and enunciation of human consciousness (Alvesson & Willmott 1992:432). Informed by this idea, it is also important to realise that, although political leaders come and go, the religious message should remain grounded within the narrative or ideology of principle, integrity and the need for reconciliation. Informed by decoloniality, we can attempt a process of resuscitation of the religious mandate, as an alternative to a new humanity that departs from the model of a religion being used for political and financial benefits. In the 'Continuous challenge of political and religious oppression' section, I will make suggestions for countering the capture of religion for political gain in Zimbabwe.

Continuous challenge of political and religious oppression

The problem of religion being used as a tool of political oppression by some religious leaders requires constant exposure, problematisation and challenge from all angles, in this case, by decolonial scholars who hope to contribute to achieving a better Zimbabwe, one devoid of political and religious enablers. With this aim, the article engages in a struggle to achieve a world in which everyone can participate in democracy voluntarily, without being influenced by a few individuals who do so for personal gain.

Mashau (2018) stated that decoloniality is a project that African churches should embrace and attend to as a matter of urgency. This recommendation does not imply fundamentalism; instead, it is about shifting the geography of reason towards a clear locus of enunciation (Sithole 2014). A decoloniality approach evokes, according to Hertzke (2012), a religion that treats all groups equally, promotes greater societal tolerance and civility, and leads to positive relations, in which groups channel their energies and desire for competition into civil society pursuits. I respond to the call by Bottoms et al. (1995:109) that 'in the long run, society should find ways to protect people [against] religion-related abuse, and help religion evolve in the direction of the better treatment of people'.

The behaviour of religious leaders such as Wutaunashwe and Mutendi should not be normalised, but challenged because it sets a precedence that suggests that, once one

becomes a religious leader, and is connected to politics, one can use one's religious constituency to push a personal wealth agenda. Thus, I agree with Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) that:

[W]hat Africans must be vigilant about, is the trap of ending up normalising and universalising [power of religious and political leaders] as a natural state of the world. This trend must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed, because it produces a world order that can be sustained only through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies. (p. 11)

I conclude this section by arguing that efforts to reconcile Zimbabweans through religion cannot be done within a space where religion is used to exploit, enrich certain individuals, normalise oppression, promote regime enabling and perpetrate social injustice.

Epistemic disobedience

The problem of the captured religion in Zimbabwe does not always require outside interference to eradicate; it also requires that religious members contribute to their own redemption through epistemic disobedience. According to Hlatshwayo (2019:68), epistemic disobedience need to be located within the broader decolonial school of thought, one that is preoccupied with counter-hegemonic thinking against western modernity and Euro-American thought. However, Hlatshwayo's conceptualisation does not recognise that decoloniality projects also extend as a counter-hegemonic strategy against all forms of coloniality, which include Global South structures such as abuse of religion in pursuit of a religion that addresses the lived realities of the Zimbabwean people; epistemic disobedience is inevitable to construct a new terrain on the nexus of religion and politics. By engaging in epistemic disobedience, there is a shift in the geopolitics of knowledge. By this, I argue that Zimbabwean people should reject any religious knowledge that undermines democracy and equality. People should engage in counter knowledge that directly challenges religious leaders who contribute to crisis in Zimbabwe such as Wutawunashe and Mutendi. In implementing epistemic disobedience, religious people should interrogate such as who and when, why and where is knowledge generated? (Mignolo 2009). Any knowledge that does not promote social justice and democracy must be rejected through every possible space unconditionally. The success of the foregoing, there is need for people to transform how they perceive religious knowledge (Hooks 1992).

There is a need for religious followers of Wutaunashe, Mutendi and like-minded leaders to engage in a process to awaken their consciousness and awareness of social injustice (Stinson 2009). The awakening can come through religious followers rejecting a message of oppression. I advocate epistemic disobedience because it 'disrupts coloniality of power by religious and political leaders, and develop a society based on free and undistorted communication' (Habermas 1987:183).

The use of epistemic disobedience in this space is not a violent movement, but a rehumanising experience that opposes

knowledge that undermines emancipation and democracy for all. It evokes listening attentively to knowledge produced by religious leaders whilst ready to challenge and oppose knowledge produced to create coloniality. Once religious people embrace epistemic disobedience, liberation is inevitable and a democratic religion is reinvented to contribute sustainable development. In short, total liberation from religious and political oppression will require all Zimbabweans to take the step to refuse to be regime enablers. There is always a price to pay – not only for being a regime enabler but also for agreeing and remaining silent about the abuse of religion.

Conclusion

This article discussed two prominent Zimbabwean leaders whom I label as regime enablers as a result of their active roles in the political landscape. I showed how they, covertly or overtly, have caused public concern by siding with a certain section of the community, namely ZANU PF. Taking sides as a religious leader is a disastrous strategy and inhibits efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. I end the article by suggesting two ways through which religion followers can participate in their own liberation and undo the toxic culture of being regime enablers. I did so because the article is couched in decoloniality, which requires a continuous struggle, not for revenge purposes, but to ignite the need for a new Zimbabwe in which religious leaders represent suffering and marginalised members of society. It is through all this that Zimbabweans can participate in modernity and democracy.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

Author's contributions

B.D. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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