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# Introduction: Religion-Regime Relations in Zimbabwe

Co-operation and Resistance

*Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei and  
Joram Tarusarira*

## Introduction

The religion-regime interface has been debated controversially within scholarship. This volume grapples with the problematic by posing a number of questions. These include: What happens to the religion and politics nexus when one political leader who has dominated the scene (such as Robert G. Mugabe in Zimbabwe) (see for example, Chitando, 2020a and 2020b) departs and is replaced by a new political leader (such as Emmerson D. Mnangagwa in Zimbabwe) (Duri et al., 2019)? What happens when a young, zealous Pentecostal pastor enters the political ring as the leader of the main opposition (such as Nelson Chamisa in the 2018 presidential election in Zimbabwe and up to the time of writing) (Tarusarira, 2020)? Does the religion and politics interface change its character and outlook when long term players depart and new actors come on stage? Or, are there underlying ideas and practices that already predetermined how the newcomers approach politics and religion? How, and to what extent, do the new actors seek to repackage themselves as different from, and also in some sense similar to, their predecessors? Is this “new” any different from the “old” (Gusha, 2020)? To what extent do politically inclined Pentecostal prophets/pastors, with their penchant for prophecies, pose a threat to national security (see for example, Ikem, Ogbonna and Ogunnubi, 2020)? These and other related questions are important, as they enable scholars of religion to reflect on some key forces that have the capacity to impact on politics and religion in a specific context.

Grappling with the foregoing questions generates another set of questions. These emerging questions include: What is the role of rhetoric, symbolism and theology in characterising one regime as distinct from the other? What are the patterns of continuity, discontinuity, creativity and re-appropriation? Can the study of politics and religion derive new insights from Zimbabwe’s “Second Republic’s”<sup>1</sup> engagement with religion? Given the intricacies of politics and religion (see, among others, Gill, 2001; Bellin, 2008; Philpott, 2009; Bokhari and Senzai, 2013; Haynes, 2016; Kaunda, 2018; Haynes, 2019; Offiong and Ekpo, 2020; Musoni, 2021; Gao, 2022), how does the emergence of a new regime in a particular context colour the interface between these two fields? We regard the Zimbabwean setting beyond Mugabe as enabling a sustained engagement with

these and other related questions. In particular, both Mnangagwa and Chamisa soaked themselves in religious rhetoric, evoking God in their politics. Mnangagwa presented himself as a prolific reciter of Bible verses, while Chamisa consistently spoke of how to invite God's blessings for the nation. Chamisa referenced the need for Repentance, Redemption and Revival while calling for the zero worshipping of idols (his shorthand for the role of African Traditional/Indigenous Religions in the public affairs of the state and the private lives of individuals). Mnangagwa (or "ED": his initials) or his backers were adept at presenting different religious actors as supporting his bid to remain in office. Thus, diverse groups such as "Madzibaba for ED" (i.e. Apostolic Churches) and "Pastors for ED" (mainline and Pentecostal churches) emerged, suggesting that Mnangagwa had spiritual support for his political project. This was at a time when various "xx for ED" groups were sprouting, including "Men, Young Women, Makorokoza (artisanal miners), Teachers, Touts, etc. for ED." Like Mugabe before him, the figure of Mnangagwa donning Apostolic white robes or using the sermonic discourse in his interactions with Christians from diverse backgrounds became a common feature.

Contributors to this volume are arguing that it is important to reflect on how politicians view religion, and how religious actors view politics. They seek to unlock the religion-regime matrix in a specific African context. This is consistent with observations from other publics, or contexts: politics and religion have an affinity for each other. On our part, we contend that probably, in secret, virtually every politician would strongly endorse the notion that "there is power, power, wonder-working power"<sup>2</sup> in religious symbols, ideas and practices. These tend to work wonders for politicians. Thus, it is that the former United States of America president Donald Trump got citizens, who were protesting against the killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by a policeman, pummelled and cleared for him to pose with a copy of the Bible in his hand in front of St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. on 01 June 2020. For Trump, the religious constituency, particularly the white Evangelical cluster, is critical to his politics (Marti, 2018). Further, religious ideas have been key to his framing of foreign policy (Haynes, 2020). Across history and in diverse political contexts, politicians have appropriated and deployed religious symbols to gain political mileage or defend political power. On their part, religious individuals and institutions have also dabbled in politics. In interactions between religious and political actors there is a lot of give and take, thereby challenging the naïve assumption that religion is only there to serve politics. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic that wreaked havoc across the globe in 2020 and 2021 saw a lot of interactions between the two spheres. In some instances, many politicians appealed to religious leaders to assist in passing on the public health messages to their followers. On the other hand, some religious leaders appealed to politicians to accord them certain favours in the wake of COVID-19 protocols relating to the control of worshipping in religious buildings. Some African presidents hosted contested prayer meetings against the pandemic. Cases in point include the prayer meeting President E.D. Mnangagwa held at State House, at which he said, "We have chosen to repent and seek his mercy, help, healing and wisdom in the face of this coronavirus."<sup>3</sup> These meetings

were contested because those in opposition politics saw it as a ploy to mobilise support for the president. The call for scholars in politics to take religion more seriously (Grzymala-Busse, 2012) must, therefore, be embraced as religion tends to feature in politics and vice versa.

In the specific context of Zimbabwe, in August 2020, despite the Catholic Church's participation at the aforementioned prayer meeting the president hosted, there was a dramatic falling out between the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) and the government of the day after the latter published a hard-hitting, forthright and unrelenting pastoral letter entitled, "The March is Not Over" (ZCBC, 2020). With the title evoking the African American civil rights activist John Robert Lewis, the authors of the pastoral letter charged that there was a serious dearth of imagination within the political leadership class in Zimbabwe. They insisted that the country was in a crisis of major proportions and criticised the use of strong-arm tactics to silence dissent. The pastoral letter by the Catholic bishops prompted a robust response from different government and ruling party officials (see Chapter 1 by Masiwa R. Gunda in this volume), with the President donning his party regalia and inviting the bishops into the political ring if they so wished. On the other hand, the pastoral letter triggered solidarity messages in the ecumenical movement from within Zimbabwe and beyond. Clearly, the politics and religion interface is complex and has ramifications for both domestic and international relations.

In view of the foregoing theoretical and practical considerations, this volume seeks to examine the interface between politics and religion following Mugabe's military-enforced resignation on 17 November 2017 and Mnangagwa's succession as an interim president (2017) and as an elected president (from period 2018 to the time of writing). However, we must hasten to add that his presidency was characterised by sharp contestation from the beginning, with Chamisa and his party, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDCA) (and later, in 2022, the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)) charging that the election result was rigged. That the Supreme Court dismissed Chamisa's challenge did not settle the matter, as the sharp polarisation continued to dominate Zimbabwe's political arena. This had a negative impact on the economy, with a dramatic reversal of the momentary gains that had been made following the government of national unity (GNU, 2009–2013), which had brought together the dominant political parties and personalities into an inclusive government, being experienced. In turn, this had direct implications for the politics and religion interface in Zimbabwe (Dube and Nkoane, 2018; Mujinga, 2018; Manyonganise, 2022). However, it is necessary for us to provide some pointers of our understanding of politics and religion in general, before proceeding to analyse the Zimbabwean context in particular.

### **Politics and Religion: A Note on the Intersection**

Although it is tempting and rather convenient to maintain that everyone has some working definition of politics and religion that they utilise to interpret reality, we are convinced that we need to devote some space and time towards clarifying

these two key concepts. If religion is notoriously difficult to define (Smith, 1962), politics is equally a slippery concept. Clearly, it is not possible to provide comprehensive definitions of these two concepts within the scope of this introduction. The term religion has had political and racial implications in African contexts (Chidester, 1996; Chitando, 1997; Mndende, 1998). It has been used to promote particular versions of Western Christianity, while suppressing African Traditional or Indigenous Religions. Therefore, we are very much alive to the political and ideological assumptions behind the concept (see Masuzawa, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2000). Instead of dwelling on the intricacies of such debates, what we seek to do here is to raise a few points that are relevant for understanding politics and religion, so as to be able to appreciate their interface during Zimbabwe's "Second Republic."

First, it must be accepted that academic disciplines are themselves an invention, as it is very difficult for any discipline to ring-fence itself so neatly as not to overlap with neighbouring disciplines (Krishnan, 2009). Thus, the notion that there are unique, stand-alone and pristine fields of study is a figment of the imagination. For example, some scholars of religion have popularised the notion that religion is *sui generis*, that is, a discipline in its own right, irreducible and not to be explained using categories beyond religion itself (Cox, 1992; Capps, 1995 and Fitzgerald, 2000). We accept that religion does have unique (identifiable) characteristics, such as having beliefs and practices relating to the (putative) unseen world, generating social harmony, fulfilling psychological needs and others, but refuse to accord it special epistemological privileges. Religion shares a lot in common with other phenomena, including politics. For instance that it is relational and invented are qualities that it shares with other notions like "politics," "nation" and "state" among many others (Fitzgerald, 2000). It is, therefore, often possible and desirable to approach the challenges of humanity by adopting a holistic perspective (see for example, Stinton, 2006) than adopting narrow disciplinary perspectives. Further,

Religion and politics are two fundamental dimensions of human society, and yet they are often at loggerheads. Religion appears to belong to a different realm, signifying matters that are permanent and enduring, residing beyond the everyday. Politics appears to involve the secular struggle for power and influence, being driven by interest. I use this verb (to appear) because in fact religion and politics are almost inevitably entwined and they are both deeply concerned with the control or regulation of everyday affairs.

(Turner, 2013:1)

Second, although we are insisting that religion shares a lot in common with politics, we are aware of those who belong to the non-intersecting school of thought. This category of scholars maintains that politics and religion are separate and distinct disciplines that must not be brought together, both conceptually and practically. If anything, they must be separated. Space considerations preclude the possibility of outlining the historical, ideological, legal, theological, methodological and other

factors that influence scholars belonging to this camp. Most scholars in this school of thought maintain that these two disciplines must remain separate for the sake of intellectual clarity and in order to ensure the separation of spheres of influence. In particular, the separation of Church and State and the preference for secularism over religion in international relations represent such a stance. However, the notion that secularism is superior to religion is problematic (Hurd, 2009; May et al., 2014; Tarusarira, 2020b).

Nonetheless, we are also alive to those who define politics and religion in ways that seek to protect those with political power from critiques by religious actors. In this scheme, each group must stay within its lane. That is, religious actors must invest in prayer alone, never to comment on the impact of political policies and actions on the lives of citizens. To do this is to invite the violence and wrath of politicians! Such definitions of politics and religion appear designed to silence religious actors. One contributor to the ZCBC pastoral letter which was published by the official media made the following claim:

The ZCBC is rebelling against what God has instituted.

Church and politics must never mix for they are like oil and water and are strange bedfellows. The duty of politicians is to create a conducive environment for religious liberty. Conversely, the duty of the church, according to the Bible is to pray for the leaders who were ordained by God.

(Shumba, 2020)

Third, there is a pressing need to investigate the interface between politics and religion as and when one or both of these change(s). Historical enquiry demands that the changing terrain be investigated in order to capture the continuities, changes, recasting of ideas and repositioning of people across different historical periods. For example, when the political context changes, there is likely to be an accompanying shift in the religious response. Similarly, when there are changes in the area of religion (such as new religious ideologies, new personnel leading religious institutions, etc.), the politics and religion interface is likely to undergo changes. For example, in Zimbabwe, the coming of a new government in April 1980 had a direct impact on Church-State relations (Hallencreutz, 1988). With Mugabe having departed the scene, it becomes necessary to enquire into the interaction between politics and religion during the tenure of his successor.

Fourth, it would be naïve to assume that patterns of the interaction between politics and religion that have been established in one part of the world can be generalised for every other part of the world. There would always be regional, national and local variations, as each context colours the relationship between politics and religion. For example, the African socio-economic and political setting influences how politics and religion interact (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004; Gunda and Kügler, 2012). Given the extent to which religion is interwoven with other social realities and processes in Africa, it would be reasonable to anticipate that religion is heavily implicated in politics in Africa. Consequently, we argue that investing in understanding how politics and religion interact in specific African contexts, as

we do in this volume, contributes towards broadening the general understanding of these two key concepts.

Fifth, the impact of religion on politics is discernible in the extent to which women either participate or are restricted from participating in politics (Ncube, 2020; Mateveke and Chikafa-Chipiro, 2020). In societies where religious and cultural ideologies position men as leaders and women as followers, it is difficult for women to access the topmost leadership positions. This challenge is not limited to the global South, but it is visible in the global North as well. For example, conservative Christian attitudes make it difficult for a woman to become the president of the United States of America. The same challenge also confronts sexual minorities, as religious arguments are marshalled against them. Thus, "... the struggles of women and gays are unique among minorities in the United States because their subordinate positions in society are still justified by religious faith long after theological arguments for racial discrimination have been repudiated" (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2011:310).

Overall, we consider politics and religion as mutually interacting systems of power. Although they are often separated to facilitate closer analysis, in reality they are constantly interlocking. Occurring in space and time, and responding to concrete and material human conditions, politics and religion seek to govern human beings by directing (sometimes forcing) them along certain, predetermined paths. Writing within the Zimbabwean context, Masitera and Sibanda (2018) are more generous in their interpretation of power. They approach it from the perspective of the capabilities that individuals have to transform their situations for the better. We are more circumspect about power, understanding that politicians and religious people use it to achieve their desired material goals. For us, it is always important to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion whenever politicians court and quote religious actors, sacred texts and engage in religious actions. Equally, it is important for scholars to be on high alert whenever religious actors proclaim the divinity of political actors. Contributors to this volume largely share this perspective; they contend that although we can debate the sincerity of their actions, both political and religious actors tend to act in self-preserving or self-enhancing ways through appropriating and deploying ideas from within the religious sphere.

There has been valuable scholarship on the era beyond Mugabe, who had dominated the Zimbabwean political space for decades. Indeed, it is not possible to do justice to the output within the confines of this introductory chapter. For example, Duri et al. (2019) edited the volume, *Mugabeism after Mugabe?* which interrogates the claims of the "New Dispensation" or "Second Republic." Also, the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* carried articles that reflected on the continuities and changes from Mugabe to Mnangagwa (Helliker and Murisa, 2020). Employing historical analysis, Mashingaidze (2021) charges that the rhetoric relating to the "New Dispensation" is an indistinct rebranding of the status quo, while Nyamunda (2021) reviews the persistence of a poorly performing economy. The volume, *The Zimbabwean Crisis after Mugabe* (Mangena, Nyambi and Ncube, 2022) interrogates the purported transition and highlights the challenges facing Mnangagwa's regime. All these reflections are highly informative. However, they

mostly overlooked the regime-religion interface. The current volume seeks to address this particular gap in the extant scholarship.

### **Politics, Religion and the Ongoing Zimbabwean Crises**

In order to appreciate the dynamic interaction between politics and religion, and the centrality of power to this interface, it is important to highlight the socio-economic context in which these two concepts related to each other. Although ruling party officials continued the mantra, “There is no Crisis in Zimbabwe,” inherited from Mugabe’s tenure, it became crystal clear that there was need for urgent steps to stop the rapid deterioration in the standard of living for the majority of citizens. Food shortages in both the rural and urban areas, high unemployment, unsustainably low salaries for professionals, never ending strikes by medical personnel and heavy handedness when dealing with dissent were all signs that the “New Dispensation” faced multiple challenges. As Mugabe’s regime struggled on the economic front, so did Mnangagwa’s regime. Thus,

There is no good news coming out of Zimbabwe at the moment. The newspaper headlines are mostly focused on; allegations of corruption in high offices, rumours of squabbles amongst political leaders in the two major parties, collapse of social service delivery and a sense of despair. The bromance between citizens and the “new” leadership in the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) seems to have quickly died down and, in its place, we have returned to high levels of mistrust and a gridlock on how to proceed.

(Murisa et al., 2020:1)

Culling the context in which Mnangagwa and his team interfaced with religion is crucial since the drama of politics and religion is never staged in a vacuum. It is concrete human conditions that necessitate the deployment of power. Although Mugabe’s departure and Mnangagwa’s arrival were couched in deeply theological terms and projected as heralding a seismic shift, the economy stubbornly rejected any simplistic renaming. If anything, there was a clear regression in the quality of life for the majority. The sharp inequalities that characterised Zimbabwean society deepened, with the elite (deriving mainly from the political, military and business classes) living in stupendous splendour, while the majority wallowed in shocking squalor. Where dollarisation had brought down inflation and ushered economic stability and made the Zimbabwean economy one of the fastest growing within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) during the era of the inclusive government, 2009–2013 (Makochekeanwa and Manyeruke, 2017), Mnangagwa’s government rushed to bring back the hugely discredited local currency in June 2019. Inflation returned with a vengeance, real earnings were decimated and penury among the citizens became pronounced.

It is in such a dire economic context that both Mnangagwa and Chamisa sought to promise their followers an era of unparalleled prosperity. Mnangagwa preached the futuristic gospel of Zimbabwe becoming an upper middle-income economy by



2030. On his part, Chamisa preached the message of prosperity (see for example, Togarasei (2011), Togarasei (2018) and Otonko (2018) for descriptions of the message of prosperity) where Zimbabwe's fortunes would be turned overnight due to divine favour. Building on his identity as an ordained minister of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM), arguably the oldest Pentecostal church in Zimbabwe, Chamisa charmed his audiences with the prospects of transforming their economic fortunes in a radical way. He took the prosperity gospel to its extremes, promising his supporters and Zimbabweans "*kuvhura pombi dzemari*" (opening taps of money)<sup>4</sup> and an era of Messianic bliss. In Chamisa's scheme, God would make the country so prosperous that Zimbabwe's name would need to be changed to "the Great Zimbabwe!" Deploying his mastery of the biblical text, humour and youthful arrogance, he tantalisingly painted the image of streets plaited with gold to many young people who had never held payslips in their hands. Chamisa would openly call for fasting (Tarusarira, 2020a) or engage openly in religious practices as part of his complex religio-political (or politico-religious) identity.

Intriguingly, the different religious actors and institutions that were prominent during the previous titanic battles between Mugabe and (now late) Morgan R. Tsvangirai did not take long to position themselves in the emerging but tense contestation between Mnangagwa and Chamisa. Most African Initiated Churches (AICs) of the Apostolic type (Vapostori or white garment churches) quickly lined up behind Mnangagwa (Dube, 2019; Musoni, 2019). Other individuals who had featured prominently in the "Old Dispensation," such as Andrew Wutawunashwe and his Faith for the Nation Campaign and Nehemiah Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) also came out, under the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC), to pronounce that God was on Mnangagwa's side. Mnangagwa was the biblical Joshua who was to complete the task that Moses (Mugabe) had either failed to complete due to his human limitations, or all this was part of God's glorious plan for the country after God's own heart, namely Zimbabwe.

On the other hand, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) and the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD)<sup>5</sup> retained their criticism of the government of the day. They were joined by religious actors such as Ancelimo Magaya and Talent Chiwenga who had been critical of Mugabe (Hove and Chenzi, 2017). As with Mugabe, the contestation was over the livelihoods and upholding of the rights of citizens, the need for political dialogue and the detoxification of the political environment. Although Mnangagwa had projected himself as "a Servant Leader and listening President," his government did not display any patience with or tolerance for religious leaders who dared to criticise him. This led to the question underlying reflections in this volume: Was Mnangagwa's government "new new," or "old new?"

### **The "Second Republic": Old Politics in a Changing Context?**

With Mugabe having virtually monopolised Zimbabwe's (and featuring prominently on the continental and global) political spaces, this volume primarily seeks to

understand the politics and religion interface in the post-Mugabe period. Could it be that scholars, analysts and casual observers had overrated Mugabe's genius when reflecting on the appropriation and deployment of religion to achieve political goals? Could it be that his party, namely the Zimbabwe African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) had an in-built religio-political ideology that transcended individuals? When Mugabe's successor, Mnangagwa, performed politics and religion by going through the same processes that Mugabe engaged in (for example, attending AIC prayer meetings, putting on white garments and addressing crowds using sermonic discourses), was he guilty of mimicry, or was he sticking to the pre-existing party (or generally successful) script?

When both the sitting president and the leading opposition leader utilise religious concepts with abandon, what type of politics will dominate the nation? Do we witness politics and religion in action, or all politics becomes religion, with all religion becoming political? What are the gains (if any) and the losses? These are important questions, as some critics have already sounded alarm regarding the overbearing nature of religion over politics in Zimbabwe. For example, Chipere (2020: 7) writes,

The nation of Zimbabwe is under the spell of superstition and juju Christianity; at the core of this moral degeneration are traditional healers and the self-styled men of God who have sprouted up across Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa. They make grandiose claims that they can speak to God directly. Their insidious activities range from selling anointed condoms, to alluring women to bring their underwear to church so they can bless them. Other flippant antics include guessing (for show) their supplicant's home addresses and ID numbers, and predicting the death of old, senile world leaders.

Cognisant of this critique (which is overstated, in our opinion) and in the quest to make politics and religion intelligible, in this volume scholars from diverse personal backgrounds, political ideologies or schools of thought, theological persuasions, place of residence, age, gender,<sup>6</sup> academic training and other differences tackle the theme of politics and religion in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. They interrogate the appropriation of religion by the two major protagonists, namely Mnangagwa and Chamisa, as well as questioning whether in the face Mnangagwa's tenure can properly be described as "the Second Republic" or "the New Dispensation."<sup>7</sup> Other contributors focus on how different religious actors have interfaced with politicians to tease out the lines of persistence or disjuncture in the marriage between politics and religion in Zimbabwe. What became clear in preparing this volume is that Zimbabwean academics working in the fields of religious studies and theology are passionate about the future of their nation. Challenging the phenomenological ideals of neutrality and value-free analysis of religious phenomena, though trying at all times to practice reflexivity, they address the question of politics and religion, not as disinterested onlookers, but as stockholders.<sup>8</sup> The polarisation that characterised the electorate (Bratton and Masunungure, 2018) could also be detected within Zimbabwe's intellectual class. Perhaps this was

unavoidable, given the fact that in this instance, the researchers were part of the communities that they researched on. The peer review process was characterised by sharp critiques, haranguing and contestation that confirmed that Zimbabwean scholars have markedly different interpretations of the regime–religion interface. We detected the fears, hopes, anticipations and longings that the authors shared with their fellow citizens. It was clear that after the struggles for survival for those who remained in the country and others being forced into economic exile, both categories of authors shared the same hope as Mnangagwa and Chamisa, namely that Zimbabwe would have its fortunes restored and citizens would enjoy an era of economic and political stability. Whereas the two protagonists differed on the methodology regarding how to achieve this, some of the authors called for dialogue and commitment for the greater national good.

### **The Chapters**

Does a change in political actors in a specific national context immediately result in a change of the interface between politics and religion? In the event that there are changes, what is the nature of these changes? How do religious actors who have been on the scene prior to the arrival of new political entrants respond to them? Given the changing political and economic realities in Zimbabwe, how have the different religious actors interfaced with political actors? What must religious leaders do in order to promote dialogue and development? The authors of chapters in this volume wrestle with these and other questions in seeking to clarify the politics and religion interface in Zimbabwe.

Chapters in the first set focus on the politics and religion in Zimbabwe through the prism of specific denominations, church groups and strands of Christianity. These are denominations, apex bodies and strands of Christianity that were there during the Mugabe era. How have they responded to the claims and actions of Mnangagwa’s “New Dispensation?” The opening chapter, by Masiwa R. Gunda, reviews the exchanges between the ZCBC and Mnangagwa’s regime. Reflecting on the fiery exchanges and fall out from the Pastoral Letter, “The March is Not Over,” Gunda’s chapter highlights the tension between the two protagonists. His essay draws attention to the underlying continuities and changes, subtly drawing attention to how the Mugabe regime used to respond to ZCBC pastoral letters. Gunda maintains that while the earlier Pastoral Letters were more diplomatic in terms of identifying those responsible for the sorry state of affairs, “The March is Not Over” was unrelenting in blaming the government. In Chapter 2, Herbert Moyo offers an overview of the pressing economic conditions that greeted the “Second Republic.” Moyo critiques the initiatives by Mnangagwa’s government, maintaining that many of the old challenges persisted. Moyo then turns to the responses by one of the mainline Protestant denominations in Zimbabwe, namely the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ). Moyo contends that the ELCZ has a challenging relationship with the State. He identifies the military factor within the leadership of the denomination and the complexities that emerge from this reality. However, using the concept of “critical solidarity,”

Moyo identifies the areas where the ELCZ is collaborating with the State to facilitate development.

Chapter 3, by Martin Mujinga, reflects on the controversy and debate surrounding the question of Mnangagwa's status as a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ). Whereas some critics have charged that Mnangagwa's association with the MCZ is part of political posturing, Mujinga insists that there are adequate theological grounds for the MCZ to accord space to individuals from diverse backgrounds. Adopting a church history perspective, as well as ideas from political theology, Mujinga argues that there is nothing scandalous about MCZ members being actively involved in politics in Zimbabwe. With Pentecostals constituting a significant portion of Zimbabwe's spiritual market, in Chapter 4 Kudzai Biri interrogates the Pentecostal response to politics in the "New Dispensation." Biri seeks to examine patterns of continuity in the Pentecostal response to politics in Zimbabwe, drawing attention to how Pentecostals have been consistent in calling for prayer and fasting as resources for building the resilience of citizens in the face of serious socio-economic challenges. However, she contends that the weak political theology among Pentecostal leaders has prevented them from taking radical positions in the "New Dispensation." Chapter 5, by Mediel Hove, Chido M. Muswerakuenda and Washington Mazorodze, interrogates the interface between politicians and prophets in the post-Mugabe era through the prism of "doom." In their formulation, the exchanges between the two categories of actors were characterised by mutual vilification. The prophets insisted that they were dealing with "politicians of doom," while the politicians contended that they were facing "prophets of doom." The chapter describes the tension and hostility that marked the politics and religion interface during Mnangagwa's tenure, while describing how some prophets endorsed the new political leaders.

Chapters in the second set focus on the discourse of "change or no change" in relation to how different religious actors either warmed to, or resisted the "Second Republic." In Chapter 6, Bekitemba Dube reflects on the ambivalence of some church leaders in the face of a guard within the political sphere. This theme is pursued by Tenson Muyambo in Chapter 7. Muyambo is convinced that the "Second Republic" is following the template set by the "First Republic" in its appropriation and deployment of religion. On the other hand, in Chapter 8, Silindiwe Zvingowanisei contends that Muslims found new space in their interactions with the state following the arrival of new players at the helm of national politics.

The last set of chapters constitutes reflections on diverse themes relevant to understanding the "radical continuity" or "significant departure" model of the religion-regime interface in Zimbabwe. In Chapter 9, Ishanesu S. Gusha examines the deployment of the Bible in the Pastoral Letter by the ZCBC in their reflections on Zimbabwe's trajectory since independence and prospects going forward. Chapter 10, by Noah Pashapa, interrogates the politics surrounding the call for a 7 Year Political Sabbatical by the ZCC. Chapter 11, by Obert B. Mlambo, reflects on the complex interplay among the variables of religion, veteran masculinities and politics in Zimbabwe. Mlambo frames the "New Dispensation"

in terms of shifts within veteran masculinities, where there is a decisive shift of allegiance from Mugabe to Mnangagwa. This shift is simultaneously informed by political, gender and spiritual factors. Mlambo proceeds to highlight that Chamisa's rise can be interpreted as an expression of resistance by youth masculinities. For Mlambo, then, the emergence of, and tensions during, Mnangagwa's term can be interpreted through the prism of masculinities that have been spiritualised. In Chapter 12, Xolani Maseko argues that there is an urgent need to invest in sound theology in order to achieve effective social transformation. He reflects on how the divergent positions regarding the shift from the Judges to the monarchy in the Hebrew Bible can be compared to different interpretations of the "Second Republic." Maseko maintains that although there are differences, the role of prophets or religious functionaries is noteworthy in both transitions. Overall, Maseko calls for a theology that facilitates the health and well-being of Zimbabweans in a trying socio-economic and political context. Due to the Zimbabwean exodus in the quest for better livelihoods, there are now many citizens in the diaspora. In Chapter 13, Nomatter Sande explores the religion-politics in the context of the Zimbabwean diaspora in the United Kingdom. He reflects on how Zimbabweans in the diaspora use the frame of religion to interpret the changing politics back in the country.

## Conclusion

Mnangagwa's rise to power and performance in politics cannot be separated from religion. Whereas Mugabe sought to project a more intellectual outlook (while sponsoring a flourishing personality cult), Mnangagwa has been less restrained in utilising the God vocabulary in his politics. In turn, his major political rival, Chamisa, was not hesitant to disclose his conversations with God in relation to Chamisa's "divine right to rule." As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, this resulted in the political space being saturated with religious and theological concepts. This Zimbabwean case study provides valuable material to the global discourse on politics and religion. When there is a change of political players, there is a decisive shift in the extent to which religion features in the political discourse. However, these changes also confirm the reality that the more things change, the more they remain the same: politics and religion remain constantly conjoined!

## Notes

- 1 Due to the ideological and contested nature of the terms, "Second Republic" and "New Dispensation," we have struggled with whether to retain the quotes or jettison them. In some instances, authors have used the quotes. In other instances, however, the quotes have not been used. This does not suggest an endorsement of their deployment, but only signifies that there was a change of guard in Zimbabwe in 2017/2018.
- 2 Derived from a Christian hymn.
- 3 [www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/zimbabwes-president-leads-prayer-against-covid-19/1878194](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/zimbabwes-president-leads-prayer-against-covid-19/1878194)

- 4 Chamisa at Sakubva, Mutare, 14 July 2018, [www.facebook.com/ZimEye/videos/1925605387500650](http://www.facebook.com/ZimEye/videos/1925605387500650) (accessed 14 July 2018).
- 5 An umbrella organisation bringing together the Heads of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa. For an essay focusing on the first three, see for example, Manyonganise (2020).
- 6 The number of women contributors to this volume is, sadly, very low. A number of factors contrived to have this clearly untenable outcome.
- 7 These two concepts are inventions by those with political power and are heavily contested. Some contributors place them in quotes, while others do not. Not placing them in quotes should, however, not be read as an open or tacit endorsement of their deployment by the state propagandists.
- 8 In the Zimbabwean political landscape, whereas stakeholders participate in an enterprise with a degree of being outside, stockholders are fully immersed in the enterprise. The term was popularised by war veterans (those who fought the 1970s armed liberation struggle) to underscore the fact that they had a direct and abiding interest in who presides over national affairs.

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