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## **Foucault, power and abuse of authority: Towards a sociology of corruption in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

Invoking a Foucauldian lens to understanding corruption in Zimbabwe provides interesting analysis of how power is at the centre of this phenomenon. In Zimbabwe corruption has emerged as the biggest threat to poor people's livelihoods as it impacts of spheres of live. This paper provides a nuanced analysis of how corruption is essentially a problem of power. It uses everyday examples of live in Zimbabwe to highlight the pervasiveness of power in the analysis of corruption. The paper provides a foundation for the development of the sociology of corruption in Zimbabwe by questioning how corruption and power are currently framed as individual acts without understanding the broader network of power and how it influences access and exclusion. The paper argues that removing corrupt politicians is not sufficient to eradicate poverty but what is required is a fundamental change of the relations of power based on unequal structures.

### **Introduction**

Corruption in Zimbabwe has devastating effects on the ability of poor people to access basic services. Research on corruption has tended to focus on how political leaders and administrators use their position to amass wealth. There is also a growing field of study in petty corruption occurring in all sectors of social and economic life. All these forms of corruption are intricately linked to power. Corruption can be considered as essentially a problem of power. This paper uses Foucault's perspectives on power to highlight how corruption in all its forms is intricately linked access to and exercise of various forms of power. Conventional studies (Zakiuddin, 2000) define corruption as the abuse of public

power for private gain which leads to an instrumentalist view of power. Such an analysis hides the relational and micro workings of power. In this sense, power is understood as possession, as something owned by those in power. Borrowing from Foucault power is not something that can be owned, but rather something that acts and manifests itself in a certain way; it is more a strategy than a possession. Power has to be understood as a system in which network of relations are in which individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault, 1980). This understanding of power thus provides a better analysis of corruption in which simply focusing on ruling elites in Zimbabwe as 'holders' of power hides interesting dimensions into how a change in the relations of power and not only a change of politicians is the best of fighting corruption.

Corruption is often described as an individualistic act which involves the use of authority for personal gain (Hodgson and Jiang, 2007). When building towards sociology of corruption the emphasis is on understanding corruption as a social rather than individual phenomenon. That is why a focus on power emphasises the social nature of corruption: "Corruption can be seen not so much as an objective practice existing in a vacuum, but as a social act whose meaning needs to be understood with reference to social relationships" (Harrison, 2006, p. 15). Power from a Foucauldian perspective is also defined from a social relationship perspective which allows for an analysis of corruption as social act. In this way the focus is on the social institutions and not individuals in understanding the origins, mechanisms and solutions to the problem of corruption.

### **Defining power and its relationship to corruption**

Defining concepts is an enterprise fraught with contestations. Within the context of this paper definitions of power and corruption need to be rooted within the socio-cultural systems. Power within the context of this discussion borrows from Foucault's theories on the micro physics of power. For Foucault, any study:

...of power should begin from below, in the heterogeneous and dispersed microphysics of power...where it is exercised over individuals rather than legitimated at the centre; explore the actual practices of subjugation rather than the intentions that guide attempts at domination; and recognize that power circulates through networks rather than being applied at particular points (Jessop, undated, p. 4).

Power thus has to be understood as diffuse, embodied and enacted. It cannot be understood as a concentrated at a centre or as a possession as Foucault (1998, p. 93) notes, 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.' When understanding corruption in Zimbabwe it is thus important to highlight how power understood this way transcends politics and is as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. In theorizing the decentredness of power, Foucault also provides interesting insights into how corruption is not the preserve of political elites but rather it is endemic in all relationships in society. Power and corruption thus need to be understood externally in the places where it is applied. Power, conceptualized as a network of relations requires the study of the networks of individuals who constituted a certain problem as such and subsequently managed to establish a regime in the form of localized power/knowledge. Taking this to corruption it means that corruption as an issue of power is made through localized networks.

In Zimbabwe corruption is evident in all aspects of life for example reports of bribes to traffic police, paying to get a job or basic services such as drivers license or passport. It is the use and not only abuse of power that needs further analysis in the Zimbabwean context. Islam (2001) argues that the use of power as a deployment of strategy can also be a point of analysis for corruption. Power can also be interpreted as use of strategy and in the case of Zimbabwe; corruption has been used as a survival strategy by many in different positions at the expense of the poor who often have to pay more for many basic services. Table 1 above outlines the various types of corruption. Corruption is broadly defined in this study as the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognised duty, or the unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal (Alatas, 1980). Such a definition whilst contested allows for a starting point to debate the concept as a sociological phenomenon. Emphasis on the relationship between power and corruption also highlights the social reproduction of corruption. By this I mean how power structures and social activities transmit corruption and its impacts from one generation to the next. Young people are socialized into a corrupt system and adopt norms that value corruption.

**Table 1: Forms of corruption**

Type	of Definition	Involves
Administrativ	Illicit payments required from	A wide constituency experienced by

e	users by civil servants for the implementation of existing regulations, policies and laws.	citizens as harassment in their efforts to obtain even small administrative goods. Companies typically seek tax advantages, licenses or influence on the formation of rules and law.
Petty corruption	Small acts, or rent-taking actions, by civil servants. Bribery, influencing, and gift giving are sometimes seen as different forms of petty corruption.	Public administrators, particularly those with direct encounters with members of the public, who accept bribes for expediting documents or, in the case of the police, not charging a suspect.
Graft	Small acts, or rent-taking actions, by civil servants. Bribery, influencing, and gift giving are sometimes seen as different forms of petty corruption.	Use of resources, time or facilities by a staff member (without a transaction with an external person). Often used interchangeably with corruption.
Influencing	Forcing a decision in one's favour	Political lobbying is a form of influencing and is legitimate, but secretive contacts or suspicion of favouritism or influence that is suspected to be disproportionate to public interest may be considered as corrupt.
Bureaucratic corruption		Wide constituency who pay money to get in or get on. Also a moneyless form where officials give relatives and other persons jobs that they would not otherwise obtain, also called patronage.
Political corruption	Often conflated with grand or high-level corruption: the misuse of entrusted power by political leaders. More specific meaning is corruption within the political or electoral process	The use of resources, machinery, personnel, and authority to perpetuate one's position, such as during electoral campaigns, corruption in political finance such as vote buying, the use of illicit funds, the sale of appointments and abuse of state

Political patronage (clientelism) and nepotism	Government resources are directed to patrons, clients, family or ethnic clan of office holders.	resources. [I]n many countries the 'patron' can present himself or herself as a social altruist, discharging an obligation to political supporters, family members and others.
State capture	Private payments to public officials, and the 'capture' of their area of jurisdiction, in order to affect laws, rules, decrees, regulations or capture resources for example contracts.	Firms, who need to pay, and the public in general, whose interests are sidelined
High level corruption	The misuse of high public office, public resources or public responsibility for private, personal or group gain.	This term is often used interchangeably with grand corruption, or endemic corruption

Source: Bracking (2010)

### **Scale and nature of corruption in Zimbabwe**

Corruption has become part of everyday life in Zimbabwe (National Integrity Systems, 2006/7). According to the 2012 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Zimbabwe ranks joint 163 out of 176 countries. Though there is a contestation over the use of this index, corruption remains a major problem affecting the Zimbabwean economy. According to Haroon and Heinrich (2011) report 52% of Zimbabweans have paid a bribe to a service provider. Yamamoto (2014) provides a detailed analysis of corruption in Zimbabwe highlighting how the political elite have consistently used their power to accumulate wealth without consequences. He alleges that:

...the scandals have been popping out of the bottle one after another. To name but a few, these include the Paweni scandal (1982), National Railways Housing Scandal (1986), Air Zimbabwe Fokker Plane Scandal worth \$100 million (1987), Zisco Steel blast Furnace Scandal (1987), Willowgate Scandal (1988), ZRP Santana Scandal (1989), War Victims Compensation Scandal (1994), GMB Grain Scandal (1995), VIP Housing Scandal (1996), Boka Banking Scandal (1998), ZESA

YTL Soltran Scandal (1998), – Harare City Council Refuse Tender Scandal (1998), Housing Loan Scandal (1999), Noczim Scandal (1999), – DRC timber and diamond UN reported scandals (1999), GMB Scandal (1999), – Ministry of water and rural development Chinese tender scandal (1999), Harare Airport Scandal (2001), pillaging and milking of Ziscosteel (2005-8), pillaging of diamonds in Chiadzwa (2006-present), the Airport Road Scandal (2008-2014), the perpetual milking of Zimbabwe and the pillaging of the central bank under Gideon Gono<sup>1</sup>.

What is curious is how no major political leader involved with the scandals has been arrested for corruption. According to Yamamoto this is because Mugabe has continuously protected corrupt ministers who are actually rewarded with promotions. It is only in 2014 at the peak of factional infighting within ZANU PF that chronic corrupt practices by powerful elites are being published in the government owned papers<sup>2</sup>.

Corruption has supported the creation and maintenance of neo patrimonial state which is described below:

In neopatrimonial regimes, the chief executive maintains authority through *personal patronage*, rather than through ideology or law....relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status. The distinction between private and public interests is purposely blurred....personal relationships...constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions (Bratton and van der Walle, 1994, p. XLVI).

Yamamoto believes that the “the type of corruption morphed into a patronage form which was severely backed by politicians.”<sup>3</sup> Politicians use their access to resource to build political empires and loyalty. In the case of the president it is easier to control politicians within his party by sheltering them from prosecution.

The Zimbabwe Revenue Authority estimated that in 2012 alone Zimbabwe lost US\$2 billion to corruption<sup>4</sup>. A report by the Anti Corruption Trust of Southern Africa argues that “Zimbabwean politicians perceive politics as an opportunity for amassing wealth instead of helping the people” (ACT Southern Africa, 2012, p. 7). Political corruption is thus a reality of Zimbabwean socio-economic context. This has further developed into a patronage system in which allegiance to the president is rewarded by immunity to prosecution. Corruption has become institutionalized<sup>5</sup> within Zimbabwean social systems. It is a case of normalizing the abnormal and accepting that the rules of the game demand favours, bribes

and extortion. A newspaper report quotes Transparency International researchers' arguing that in Zimbabwe corruption is involved in all manner of everyday activities including

paying bribes to pass examinations, sex in exchange of passing examinations, paying bribes to get driver's licences and passports, youths being used to perpetrate political violence in exchange of money, bribing policy officers, immigration officials, and even getting money using unorthodox means<sup>6</sup>.

Corruption is thus interwoven in all facets of daily life in Zimbabwe. This places a serious burden especially on vulnerable and poor groups. Getting tenders or contracts in both the public and private sector is predicated on the ability to provide a bribe or 'cut' responsible officials. Corruption is a criminal offence in Zimbabwe most

### **Power dynamics in everyday life in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe has since independence in 1980 increasingly become a patrimonial state based on the control of state apparatus to ensure continued grip on power by Robert Mugabe and the ruling ZANU PF party. In such a context the use of violence, political intimidation and police brutality become an important part of everyday life. Zimbabwe since 2000 has been dominated by violence, political intolerance and intimidation, economic implosion, food insecurity and general uncertainty. In many ways this crisis was an unavoidable culmination of unresolved and deep-rooted resource and race disparities, but it has been dominated by ZANU-PF's often-ruthless struggle to retain power. There was a sudden instrumentalisation of power in what Selby calls the rejuvenation of the security state:

Had ZANU PF lost power in 2000, senior officials would probably have been held accountable for a range of unresolved issues such as the genocide in Matabeleland, key corruption scandals of the 1990s, and the looting of the War Victims' Fund. Senior officials therefore had a clear interest in retaining power which clearly influenced ZANU PF's post-2000 strategies. The nature of the state changed considerably during the late 1990s with the co-option of the war veterans and the growing influence of an impatient and radical empowerment alliance (Selby, 2006, p. 3).

Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004) elucidate that this authoritarianism involved an internal reconfiguration of Zimbabwean state politics leading to the emergence of domestic tyranny. The political elite has thus developed an elaborate system to protect their power and access to resource through an elaborate security state as well as passing legislation such as Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and

Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) to protect themselves from public scrutiny and control the masses (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Access to political power is thus important to influence success in other socio-economic spheres of public life in Zimbabwe.

## **Corruption in all places and in all spaces: Foucauldian analysis of power and corruption**

In Zimbabwe corruption is pervasive in all socio-economic relationships. It has become institutionalized and part of everyday life. This has had negative impacts on the poor who now have a tax levied even on free basic services such as acquiring a birth certificate. Below are varied examples of the nature of corruption, in which the micro physics of power help illuminate how like power, corruption is everywhere. The cases are meant to provide vignettes of experiences with corruption which help cement the argument that corruption is about power. The stories are narrated in loosely and interwoven with theoretical discussions to further illuminate Foucauldian understanding of power and corruption.

### ***Political corruption***

Politicians in Zimbabwe have used their positions to amass vast wealth. There are many examples of politicians involved in corrupt activities. Below is an excerpt from a Harare City Council report on alleged corruption Minister of Local Government Honourable Chombo (MP)

Contrary to Council policy that an individual must not get more than one residential property from the Council, the Minister acquired vast tracts of land within Greater Harare and registered them in companies associated with him. It remains disturbing to note that the Minister (Dr Chombo) would identify pieces of land in the City, influence Council Officials to apply to him (Chombo) for Change of land use, and then sit over the same applications and approve the changes. He would then write to Council officials asking to buy the same stands and obviously get them. Land reserved for recreational activities would end up having Title Deeds in his company's name. A case in point is Stand 61 Hellensvale Harare, measuring almost 20 hectares. According to the Advice of Payment the Minister paid US\$2 300 for this stand (City of Harare, 2010, p. 8).

Political power in the position of minister was in this case important in acquiring land. The power is vested in the position and not the person (Foucault, 1986). This explains why removing an official will not end corruption rather the focus should be on changing



institutional relationships. It is within these institutional relationships that political power is deployed as a strategy to amass wealth.

### ***Nepotism***

Nepotism is the most common example of how corruption has been accepted as a way of life in Zimbabwe. The exercise of power to ensure one favours relatives or friends is widely accepted as a way of doing business at the expense of those who are outside such networks. In such instances power is located in the social networks that allow people access to goods and services in undeserving ways. When power is viewed within the context of networks and social capital it becomes clear how it's more a strategy than a possession. According to young people in Zimbabwe you have to know someone to get anything in this country. Accessing a job or services is not easy without finding whether you know someone who knows someone at the institution. Power of networks allows people to avoid long queues, access housing or even access places at colleges. Almost access to everything which includes tenders, business contracts and all manner of private and public goods and services require knowing someone who can influence decisions in your favour. Paying bribes to officials is also done through networks as accessing them directly is impossible. Power understood through networks of corruption in this way "must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain...Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Relationships encompass the whole society which makes corruption steeped within everyday relations. Corruption and power are thus not the possession of one class or an individual but rather are decentredness. Whilst the powerful are often involved in high level political corruption affecting a lot of people, corruption is also practiced by the majority of the people in various ways and spaces. Through social relationships for example accessing a place for your child in good high schools is made easier.

### ***Sexually transmitted degrees: Lecturer abusing students***

There are many examples in which male lecturers in universities and colleges use their position to sexually extort female students. Lecturers grade exams and determine passing marks in these institutions thus they can use the power of their positions to demand sex or money from students. According to a study by Transparency International:

...certain degrees popularly known as STDs in reference to sexually transmitted degrees. It emerged that at times male lecturers fail female students on purpose to

allow a negotiation for a better grade. This usually occurs towards one's final year where the student cannot afford to fail any course simply because it would mean that she would not graduate (Transparency International, 2014, p. 8).

Within the student-lecturer relationship we begin to see the manifestation of power as relational. Power is located within all human interactions and is subject to negotiation. Individuals use their place within the hierarchy as in such negotiations but there is scope for resistance by those below (Foucault, 1980). Lecturers thus exercise power by virtue of their position but students often also resist demands. Some students at times use their position (through money or sex) manipulate lecturers into passing them which shows that different kinds of power can be existent within relationships but all leading to some form of corruption.

### ***Traffic police and bribes on the road***

Traffic police on Zimbabwean roads have used their position to amass small fortunes through bribes especially from public transport operators in urban areas known as *kombis*. Public transport operators are supposed to be registered transporters who have regular vehicle checks and employing licensed drivers. Due to economic hardships many operators flout the rules and many of the drivers are involved in illegal driving practices. An elaborate corrupt system between the police and operators has emerged in which they pay a daily fee to operate without the police stopping them for the various offences they commit. In such scenario the police have power to arrest the drivers and detain the cars. They use this power to ensure the operators pay the bribe. The operators have realized that it is cheaper to pay the police than it is to ensure their cars are road worthy or they have the necessary permits to operate. This highlights the importance of analysing how power is exercised in specific interactions where people because of their positions can influence the conduct of others. Using a Foucauldian perspective, corruption in this instance can be understood as "the discursive strategies, techniques and apparatuses of government" in this case the police as part of government (Islam, 2001, p. 3). Corruption thus becomes existent because of the power relation that occurs between the police and motorists. This is not to say power is something that one side does to the other, it is rather the field of contestation. This is why motorists at times initiate the bribes or resist spurious charges at road blocks.

### ***Corruption and the curse of diamonds***

The discovery of diamonds in Zimbabwe led to the emergence of multiple corruption scandals as many individuals used their privileged social location to enrich themselves. Allegations include how a parallel system of managing financial proceeds from the mineral was developed by ZANU PF to bypass the Government of National Unity<sup>7</sup> through collusions with companies such as Sam Pa, Sino Zimbabwe Development (Pvt) Ltd, and Anjin Investments (Pvt) Ltd (Global Witness 2012). There was a reported discrepancy during this period in the money remitted to treasury against the amount of diamonds sold<sup>8</sup>. A report by Transparency International (2012, p. 8) notes that

Currently there is no transparent and accountable process in which concessions to mine diamonds in Zimbabwe are awarded. Basing on evidence prevailing on the ground, the study found out that all the companies that have been given mining rights to mine diamonds in Zimbabwe are those with close links to senior politicians in government and the military.

The report goes on to highlight how the then Minister of Mines and Mining Development, used discretionary powers to maintain stranglehold over the diamond mining industry. He is alleged to have used that power in amassing wealth through mineral deals<sup>9</sup>. The legal and policy framework governing control of minerals gives the position of Minister wide ranging powers which often lead to the incumbent using that power to accumulate wealth. Martin and Taylor (2012, p. 1) argued that “Minister Mpfu has presided over a ministry that has awarded concessions to dubious individuals with no prior mining experience, often under very questionable terms or circumstances.”

## **Conclusion**

Corruption in Zimbabwe needs to be understood within a context in which access to the most basic services is mediated by some form of bribery and nepotism. Using Foucault ideas we can map an emerging sociology of corruption based on analysing how various forms of power are deployed as strategies to accumulate even at the most basic levels. From petty corruption to big political scandal, it is possible to decipher how various forms of power situated in different relationships are connected to corruption. Power is not a property but a strategy. If we understand corruption as the strategic deployment of power not only to accumulate but also as a livelihood strategy for example cases of petty corruption by lower level officers such as a teacher selling exam papers to students. Power like corruption is a social process. It is not a thing that can be possessed. Through such an analysis the paper has shown how corruption has to be understood as a social

phenomenon. Corruption has become normative because of people's acceptability of these activities in the guise of survival strategies.

Using a cross section of cases, the paper has highlighted how power understood as diffuse helps in understanding the pervasive nature of corruption. The paper has provided a base point of developing the sociology of corruption in Zimbabwe. It argued that corruption is a social issue and needs to be studied within everyday relationships of people in society. Individuals are implicated in corruption scandals but they do not operate in a social vacuum. Analysis of the micro physics of power within social contexts can provide new and interesting ways of understanding corruption. The paper concludes that like power, corruption is everywhere. It is not limited to one class or group; it takes various forms from low level petty corruption to political corruption. In all these instances power is deployment as a strategy to ensure benefit for individuals. To combat corruption there is need to realize that it is beyond removing or arresting individuals but rather reforming social system that promote asymmetrical power relations.

### **Author Biography**

Dr. Manase Chiweshe is a Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Lifelong Learning at Chinhoyi University of Technology. He is a young African scholar with interest in African gender and youth studies. His other interests include agrarian studies, sport studies, urban and rural sociology. He has published on gender issues and is also an advocate for youth rights in Zimbabwe. Dr Chiweshe's work revolves around the sociology of everyday life in African spaces with special focus on promoting African ways of knowing. His recent work has concentrated on large scale land deals and youths in agriculture with a special focus on girls. He has published in journals such as Critical African Studies, African Identities, Agenda, Agrarian South and Journal of Asian and African Studies among others. He is part of a network of young global scholars who met Quito, Ecuador in 2013 and are the process of publishing a book on urban processes across 17 cities all over the world. In 2013, Dr Chiweshe was involved in writing two chapters for Transparency International Zimbabwe State of Corruption Report focusing on land and corruption. He has also contributed to the ongoing Transparency International Global Report on corruption in sport. Dr Chiweshe's PhD work which has subsequently been presented in Geneva and published with UNRISD focused on grassroots organising in farms that emerged post Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe. He has presented numerous papers international

conferences across the world. Dr Chiweshe has also won writing fellowships with Future Agricultures Consortium and OSSREA.

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