

# POWER DOESN'T HAVE TO DOMINATE [1+ HOURS]

## OVERVIEW

Inspired by Starhawk's writings in *Truth or Dare*, an excellent book from the 1980s, this exercise runs people through a framework for power: **Power Over** (dominance and control), **Power Within** (spiritual fortitude and creative force), and **Power With** (non-coercive social influence). It also gives people a chance to identify and discuss individual and collective responses to Power Over: **comply, withdraw, rebel, and manipulate**.

## GOALS

- To collectively explore different modes of power that do not rely on domination
- To explore *Power With* in our bodies
- To explore *Power With* through a case study of WOZA's Zimbabwean feminist organizing

## TIME NEEDED

1 hour

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Flip charts, with *Power Over*, *Power Within*, and *Power With* headings, each on one page, before the session.
- Handouts of Starhawk quotes (optional)

## POWER MOVEMENT EXERCISE

Put some slow music on. Ask people to pair up. One person will be the lead, and one will be the follower. Ask the lead to slowly move about the room, being mindful of people and things around them, while the follower is asked to silently follow by mimicking each move of the lead. After about five minutes, ask people to pause, and pair two groups together, asking the lead from one group to follow the follower from the other group. Now ask this group of four to move throughout the space. Continue this for three minutes, then ask people to have a seat.

## DISCUSSION

- What was that experience like?
- How did it feel in your body to have the role you had?
- What did you notice?



## FRAMING

Our current realities are all grounded in *Power Over* models.

**Power Over:** “is linked to domination and control,” allowing one individual or group to make decisions that affect others, and enforce control. “Our conditioning to obey authority is the foundation of the culture of domination.” (p. 11) *Power Over* and all systems of punishment, domination, and control generate four basic responses, **which all confirm the power of the system because they respond to rather than challenge the reality the system has created.** They are:

- **Comply** (do what the authority asks of you)
- **Withdraw** (avoid or remove self or energy away from the authority/what the authority asks of you)
- **Rebel** (fight the authority on your own and lose)
- **Manipulate** (secretly advance your own agenda without the authority catching on)

While we may feel that we don’t have power, we actually have more potential for power now than in previous eras of human history. We are in a period of cascading crises and conflicts, with huge upswells in both authoritarianism and popular resistance and growing social movements. Feminist possibility shows us there are other forms of power:

**Power Within:** is linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potential. (p. 9) “Although power over rules the systems we live in, power from within sustains our lives. We can feel that power in acts of creation and connection, in planting, building, writing, cleaning, healing, soothing, playing, singing, making love. We can feel it in acting together with others to oppose control.” (*Truth or Dare*, p. 10)

**Power With or Influence:** is social power, the influence we wield among equals. (p. 9) “The power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to being something and seeing it happen. The source of power with is the willingness of others to listen to our ideas.” (*Truth or Dare*, p.10)

## WORKSHOPPING POWER

Lay these three concepts of power out for investigation and discovery, using some or all of the following exercises:

- Write up the different definitions and have a discussion
- Give people time for quiet reflection and pair shares
- Break people into small groups for theater exercises or story circles

Make sure to highlight that often **our organizations are a combination of multiple forms of power;** this needs to be expressed and agreed upon formally, and adhered to through our structures.

THESE ADDITIONAL **STARHAWK** QUOTES CAN HELP UNPACK SOME OF THESE CONCEPTS. ANY OF THESE QUOTES CAN BE WRITTEN UP, READ ALOUD, OR EXPLORED IN SMALL GROUPS WITH PEOPLE HAVING A CHANCE TO RESPOND, INVESTIGATE, DEBATE, AND SOURCE EXAMPLES FROM THEIR OWN LIVES.

“POWER OVER ENABLES ONE INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT OTHERS, AND TO ENFORCE CONTROL. VIOLENCE AND CONTROL CAN TAKE MANY FORMS. POWER OVER SHAPES EVERY INSTITUTION OF OUR SOCIETY. THIS POWER IS WIELDED IN THE WORKPLACE, IN THE SCHOOLS, IN THE COURTS, IN THE DOCTOR’S OFFICE. IT MAY RULE WITH WEAPONS THAT ARE PHYSICAL OR BY CONTROLLING RESOURCES WE NEED TO LIVE: MONEY, FOOD, MEDICAL CARE, OR BY CONTROLLING MORE SUBTLE RESOURCES: INFORMATION, APPROVAL, LOVE.” (*TRUTH OR DARE*, P. 9)

“POWER OVER IS CONTROLLED THROUGH PUNISHMENT: PUNISHMENT CAN BE INFLICTED OVERTLY IN A VARIETY OF WAYS: THROUGH THE INFLICTION OF PHYSICAL PAIN AND DAMAGE, THROUGH THE WITHHOLDING OF RESOURCES NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL OR DESIRED FOR PLEASURE; THROUGH RESTRICTION OF ACTION AND MOVEMENT; THROUGH HUMILIATION; AND MORE SUBTLY, THROUGH THE ERODING OF A PERSON’S VALUE AS EXPERIENCED BY THE SELF AND VIEWED BY OTHERS.” (*TRUTH OR DARE*, P. 73)

“POWER WITH IS ALWAYS REVOCABLE ... FOR WOMEN POWER WITH IS ESPECIALLY ELUSIVE ... WE FEAR THE ACHIEVEMENTS THAT MIGHT GAIN US RESPECT AND ADMIRATION FOR LONELINESS IS THE PRICE WE EXPECT TO PAY FOR ESTEEM. PERHAPS WE ALSO FEAR POWER WITH BECAUSE WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE IT AS DIFFERENT FROM POWER OVER. WOMEN HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF POWER-OVER, AND WE HESITATE TO STEP INTO THE ROLE OF DOMINATORS. WE ARE AWARE OF THE HOSTILITY DIRECTED TOWARD WOMEN WHO WIELD POWER. FOR WHILE WE RARELY REACH THE HIGHER ECHELONS OF POWER-OVER, WOMEN MOST OFTEN FILL THE RANKS OF THOSE WHO ADMINISTER THE DECREES OR IMPOSE THE SANCTIONS OF THE AUTHORITIES.” (*TRUTH OR DARE*, P. 13)

“IN A CULTURE BASED ON DOMINATION, AUTHORITY AND POWER-WITH ARE OFTEN CONFUSED AND BOUNDARIES CAN BE FUZZY.” (*TRUTH OR DARE*, P. 11)

## REFLECTION

Leave time for folks to reflect on these questions in a journal, small group, pair, or world cafe:

- *What is the emerging and systemic value of Power With: personally, locally, globally?*
- *What are the examples of Power Over, Power from Within and Power With in your own personal life?*
- *In your work or collective life?*
  - **For Power With, consider:** #MeToo movements, mutual aid networks, Black Mama's Bailouts, community saving circles in Black and Latinx communities (Tandas or Susu's)
  - **For Power from Within, consider:** creation of new spiritual communities outside religious institutions, Al-Anon and co-counseling or peer support
- *What are examples from the wider world?*
- *Which do you feel most uncomfortable with personally, and why?*
- *How can we reshape power?*

## POWER FISHBOWL

A fishbowl is a popular education technique that allows a group to have a focused conversation and also makes room for different voices to enter into the conversation (as opposed to a panel or lecture format). Set up the room so that there is a smaller circle of chairs (2-4 depending on the group) surrounded by a wider circle of chairs. The fishbowl participants sit in the smaller set of chairs facing each other, and everyone else sits in the outside circle, facing inwards. Start the conversation with a prompt, and offer a couple of questions at a time throughout. The participants in the inner circle will talk to each other, loud enough for everyone to hear. Everyone who isn't in the inner circle should be listening (active listening!), and when they have something to contribute they can stand up and tap the shoulder of someone in the inner circle to indicate they would like to switch places. People in the inner circle can also ask to be tapped out.

- *What are the strongest ways you have seen Power With or Power Within (requires self-reflection, responsibility, deliberate check-ins)?*
- *What are powerful ways you've seen Power Within operate within organizing? What does it take?*
- *What are 1-2 things you can do right now when you go back to your work or organizing communities to shift towards Power With and Power Within?*

## POWER WITH AND FROM WITHIN CASE STUDY: Women of Zimbabwe Arise!

After reading the case study about WOZA, bring folks together in small groups to discuss:

- *How does WOZA organize. and what can it teach us about the ways we can build Power With and Power Within?*
- *While WOZA was organizing under very different circumstances, what can we learn from them that we can apply in our own groups?*

# CASE STUDY: *Women of* ZIMBABWE ARISE (WOZA)

## BACKGROUND

Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) is a social movement organisation (SMO) led and run by women. The group was born when a small group of women came together to discuss how to change the negative odds dominating their everyday struggles and concerns.

### WOZA WAS FORMED IN 2003 AS A WOMEN'S CIVIC MOVEMENT TO:

- Provide women, from all walks of life, with a united voice to speak out on issues affecting their day-to-day lives
- Empower female leadership that will lead community involvement in pressing for solutions to the current crisis
- Encourage women to stand up for their rights and freedoms
- Lobby and advocate on those issues affecting women and their families
- Expose injustices

Like many social movements, WOZA uses **SLOGANS AND SYMBOLS** as a way to create a shared meaningful identity. WOZA colours are black and white. As co-founder Magodonga says:

"Black reminds us that we are mothers of a nation in mourning loss of life due to political violence and lack of service delivery due to love of power at the expense of the nation. The turmoil in

our communities is caused by the hate language from political leaders. White shows our peaceful stand and reminds us that even though we are hurting, we will always conduct ourselves in peace as the mothers of the nation."

WOZA uses the slogan 'Woza Moya - Huya Mweya' (Come Holy Spirit) to demonstrate their intention to serve as a healing force within Zimbabwe. The slogan forms a call and response, one leader says 'Woza Moya' and the reply from the group is 'WOZA!'

## THE SISTERHOOD BOND

All members of WOZA commit to a 'sisterhood bond' when they join the organization. In doing so, they commit to a series of guidelines (below) and 'give their word' to stand up in support of all the sisters in the movement as they struggle together towards equality and justice for women and all the people of Zimbabwe.

- To speak out and encourage other women to do the same, so that the female voice is heard. (Women should no longer suffer silently.)
- To participate in peaceful assembly to discuss our challenges and act rather than complain

- To be a comfortable shoulder to lean on or lend a listening ear. 'A problem shared is a problem halved.'
- To demonstrate love and courage in our homes and community so that people can shake away fear
- To work to restore gender equality. In Zimbabwe, women are the mothers of the nation hence they must demand dignity and respect.
- By signing this bond, I agree to be disciplined if I endanger the lives of my sisters.
- To be a promoter of non-violence so that people can see and believe that problems can be solved peacefully
- To honour and respect my religious belief and the beliefs of others so as to promote spiritual health and wellbeing
- To promote democratic participation with tolerance for differing views and opinions
- To seek out, recruit, and be in solidarity with like-minded women and to believe that 'an injury to one is an injury to all'
- To promote and protect children's rights and help children to participate in defending all rights

## BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

Historically, women in Zimbabwe had tried to organize through petitions or letter-writing, but the government ignored them entirely. The leaders of the newly formed WOZA understood that they would need to take higher risk actions to get the attention not just of the government but of the wider public. To recruit women to take public action, WOZA organized through in-person 1:1 and group meetings only. Consider this: in a country with poor infrastructure and difficult travel, WOZA leaders refused to use social media or WhatsApp as an organizing tool. Indeed, all recruitment, training, and decision-making are still done in-person wherever possible. The idea was simple: women telling women about WOZA, explaining the mission, vision, and objectives, and inviting them to join.

Once women join WOZA, they are quickly invited into the training program and from there, to take on roles within the movement. There are three levels of engagement that folks can plug into:

### SUPPORT:

This includes providing child care and other caregiving for women taking direct action or being arrested, holding prayers for women who've been arrested, and spreading news of the arrests

### LOW RISK:

Attending meetings; handing out flyers, cooking for-high risk action takers

### HIGH RISK:

Protesting, willing to take arrest



Women are organized into units (which vary in size and scope based on geography, age, etc.). Almost all organizing, recruitment, and social events (as well as many actions) take place within these units to ensure that the organizing resonates with the issues and needs of people at the most local level. To take on leadership roles within their unit, women first complete an apprenticeship. For larger actions, units may come together to form clusters. Leadership elections are held at the regional and national level of the organization.

As Magodonga says, while “WOZA has a reputation for peaceful protest and direct action, this is just 5% of our work. 95% is training, civic education, and low-risk activities.”

From an initial group of 50 members, the movement has grown to ~110,000 members, including 68,000 women who have some role in the organizational structure.

## BUILDING POWER

When WOZA first began, its new leadership approached different existing civil society organizations and NGOs to engage in partnership or find solidarity. WOZA’s leaders were at once ‘ridiculed’ and derided as ‘naive community women’ who didn’t understand the way power and domination worked in Zimbabwe and the brutality that they would face. Some gave WOZA a three-month life span. WOZA’s leadership continued, undeterred. They committed to working as a direct-action protest movement until they had the critical mass they believed was needed to run a successful inside strategy. Indeed, WOZA saw in the derision an opportunity: no one expected ‘naive women’ to lead a high-risk nonviolent movement – any actions taken would get immediate public attention.

In 2006, WOZA conducted an eleven-month listening campaign with over 10,000 rural and urban participants in 284 meetings. The People’s Charter that emerged formed the basis of WOZA’s campaigns moving forwards.

These campaigns included fighting corruption, i.e., protesting costs of government-run electricity to households across Zimbabwe, even when there were power cuts for as much as 18 hours/day, and fighting government violence, i.e., the home abductions of activists. The women used high-visibility actions such as die-ins, mock funerals, and sit-ins to gain attention and increase their membership. Once arrested, the women refused to pay the equivalent of bail for their release – they weren’t looking to enrich the police – and instead stayed in jail for up to 6-8 weeks at a time, while other members of WOZA delivered food, prayed, and continued to keep watch outside the police stations and jails. WOZA members were beaten, tortured, incarcerated, and abducted. But the women continued to organize, and the movement grew in both size and respect.

By July 2009, WOZA decided they had reached the critical mass they needed to engage in the elections with a campaign for a new people-driven constitution. They helped print and distribute over 80,000 copies of a guide to ‘helping Zimbabweans write their own Constitution’ in three languages and conducted 314 workshops for 5754 participants to help draft 90 talking points that they wanted to see included. In 2013, Zimbabweans voted YES on a People’s Constitution; the final draft included 77 of WOZA’s 90 talking points.

This case study is based on a presentation given by WOZA co-founder Magodonga Mahlangu at a gathering of international organizers in New York, April 2018.