

# Patriotic history and anti-corruption activism in Zimbabwe: A case study of Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono



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## Abstract

This paper examines the use of patriotic history to silence anti-corruption activists in Zimbabwe. The paper uses Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono as case studies to achieve this. The paper arose from a lack of literature examining how discourses are used to dismiss, and silence anti-corruption activists. To contribute to the literature on discourses, corruption, and anti-corruption activism, the paper uses the patriotic history discourse to understand how it has been used to silence activists in Zimbabwe. Patriotic history proclaims the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) as the alpha and omega of Zimbabwe's past, present, and future. Zimbabweans are encouraged to be "patriotic", which means supporting ZANU-PF, and anything short of this is considered "unpatriotic". Methodologically, the paper draws from qualitative methodology where a discourse analysis of newspapers, politicians' speeches, grey literature, and academic books and articles was employed. The paper argues that patriotic history especially its elements of separating patriots and sellouts and the anti-Western rhetoric were used to discredit and dismiss Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono's anti-corruption activism. The paper has also found that while Pastor Evan Mawarire's activism happened during the Mugabe era and Hopewell Chin'ono's was/is happening in the Mnangagwa regime, patriotic history has been used consistently. The paper concludes that in Zimbabwe those who engage in patriotic acts of fighting corruption are seen as sellouts while those who loot public funds are arguably patriots as long as they support the ruling party.

**Keywords:** Patriotic history, patriots, sellouts, corruption, Zimbabwe, anti-corruption, discourse.

## Introduction

This paper examines how discourses have been used by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government officials in Zimbabwe to respond to anti-corruption activists like Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono. In this regard, the paper argues that patriotic history especially the separation between patriots and sellouts and anti-western rhetoric has been central in how the ruling party and government officials have responded to anti-corruption activism. The use of Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono as case studies not only allows us to draw a comparison in how the two were handled but also how the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes have used patriotic history to respond to anti-corruption activism. This is so given that Pastor Evan Mawarire was more active in the Mugabe era while Hopewell Chin'ono is vocal in the Mnangagwa era.

Pastor Evan Mawarire's activism can be traced to 2015 after he recorded a video holding the Zimbabwean flag and quizzing the flag for the failure of the ruling party in fulfilling its promises. Among the issues that Pastor Evan Mawarire lamented and where his activism revolved around was corruption. His activism culminated in a movement called #ThisFlag while Hopewell Chin'ono is not affiliated with any movement. Hopewell Chin'ono's work primarily focuses on denouncing corruption and the mismanagement of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Both activists rely on social media platforms like X, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *LinkedIn* to expose and criticize government official's role in corruption. The centrality of social media is confirmed by Gukurume (2017) who observed that Pastor Evan Mawarire's *Facebook* page developed into a space of citizen dissent where people articulated their displeasure with the ZANU-PF rule. In the same vein, Makombe (2022) examined Hopewell Chin'ono's *Facebook* page and concluded that it can be read as a counter archive that records the experiences of ordinary Zimbabweans and contests hegemonic narratives of the state.

Corruption in Zimbabwe is endemic and institutionalized – consisting of petty and political corruption and it is one of Zimbabwe's major developmental challenges. Zimbabwe scored

24 points out of 100 and ranked 157 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (Mundopa 2021). The 2017 ouster of President Robert Mugabe, who had ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years, resulted in higher expectations that corruption would be dealt with decisively. The late former President Robert Mugabe acknowledged that corruption existed in Zimbabwe because at some moment he claimed that Zimbabwe had lost \$15 billion in diamond revenue. Similarly, President Mnangagwa has on several occasions acknowledged that corruption exists. For instance, while speaking at the Zimbabwe Local Government Association "All Councillors Indaba" in Harare on 26 November 2024, President Mnangagwa stated that corruption was a major impediment to development. He added that:

I am deeply concerned by cases of corruption in the local government space and the entire society. This government is engulfed by corruption, and it must stop. Those perpetrating such acts must face full wrath of our country's law. No one, including local authorities, will be spared. Let us root out this menace from our society (The Zimbabwe Mail 2024).

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This acknowledgment of corruption by both the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes and pledges to combat it has yielded nothing, and a lack of political will might arguably be the reason why corruption has remained a challenge. This lack of political will is aided by patriotic history which both the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes seem to be relying heavily on. Patriotic history proclaims ZANU-PF as the alpha and omega of Zimbabwe's past, present, and future. Zimbabweans are encouraged to be "patriotic", which means supporting ZANU-PF, and anything short of this is considered "unpatriotic" (Tendi 2008, p.379). Thus, when it comes to issues of corruption anyone who has opposed and criticized the ruling party's hand in looting such as Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono has often been seen as unpatriotic citizens and sellouts. This branding of anti-corruption activists is not only motivated by greed and the need to plunder the country's resources. It is also motivated by fear that corruption can be used as a mass mobilisation to get ZANU-PF out of power especially given that it has faced strong opposition since 1999 with the formation of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Existing literature on corruption in Zimbabwe looks at the link between the human factor and the fight against corruption (Zinyama 2021); and challenges, and prospects of corruption courts (Mundopa 2021). Some literature focuses on addressing corruption under transitional justice mechanisms (Maguchu and Maja 2019), and the influence of the state-society relationship on anti-corruption management (Moyo 2014). These studies do not look at how discourses are deployed as mechanisms of repressing and discrediting anti-corruption activists. This paper closes this gap by looking at how the discourse of patriotic history has been used to repress and discredit activists like Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono. To make this exploration this paper is guided by the following research questions.

- How has the discourse of patriotic history been used to respond to anti-corruption activists in Zimbabwe?
- What are the similarities and differences between the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes' use of discourses to respond to anti-corruption activists?

This paper used a qualitative methodology where data was collected from online media sources and grey literature and analyzed through discourse analysis. Foucault (1980) argues that discourse is any text or language that carries any form of knowledge that is seen as the truth in a specific context. Van Dijk (1996, p.110) notes that "the study of news reports in the press is one of the major tasks of discourse-analytical media research". In this paper, discourse analysis allowed the reading of media texts and political speeches within the Zimbabwean context of political corruption they were produced. Therefore, discourses that "expresses, establishes, confirms or emphasizes a self-interested group opinion, perspective or position, especially in a broader socio-political context of social struggle" (Van Dijk 1995, p.23) must be scrutinized. To this end, patriotic history discourse serves to legitimize ZANU-PF's dominance and justify its abuse of power. Thus, this paper shows how ZANU-PF political texts related to anti-corruption and patriotic history discourse sought to silence, dismiss, and demonize activists.

In exploring the use of patriotic history discourse this paper is structured as follows. It will start with an overview of patriotic history discourse, followed by a presentation of Pastor Evan Mawarire's activism, followed by Hopewell Chin'ono's activism before concluding the paper.

### **An overview of patriotic history**

The discourse of patriotic history can be traced to the political division characterized by coercion of the opposition, state propaganda, a dwindling democratic space, and the emergence of MDC (Ranger 2004). Patriotic history has its origins in the liberation struggle especially in 1963 when the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) broke. The ZANU splinter group of Ndabaningi Sithole, Robert Mugabe, Leopold Takawira, Enos Nkala, and Morton Malianga were criticized and labeled as "stooges" who had "sold the country to Americans" by the ZAPU leaders Joshua Nkomo, George Nyandoro and Joseph Msika (Tendi 2008). A stooge or puppet:

belongs to a party in competition with yours. It has nothing to do with being a stooge or selling out in the real meaning of the word.

The more threatening the competition from the new party, the more vicious the response. Witness ZAPU's response to the formation of ZANU in 1963; witness the Patriotic Front's response to the internal settlement politicians in the late 1970s; now witness ZANU-PF's response to the formation of the MDC. The greater the stakes the wilder the allegations. Just as Sithole, Takawira, Mugabe, et al. wanted to sell the country to Americans in 1963 then Tsvangirai and the MDC wanted the British and Rhodesia to rule this country once more in 2000 (Tendi 2008).

This paper notes that the narrow use of the term sellout above has been used to refer to anti-corruption activists. The content of patriotic history

is narrow (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Tendi 2010, 2008; Kriger 2006; Ranger 2004). Patriots have privileges and rights, while sell-outs do not (Kriger 2006). Tendi (2010) noted that patriotic history covered four themes, namely land, race, sell-outs versus patriots, and anti-Western rhetoric. In this paper, two of these themes namely sellouts vs patriots and anti-Western rhetoric will be used. In addition, patriotic history embraces race essentialism by arguing that Africa is for Black Africans and Zimbabwe is for black Zimbabweans; whites cannot be African or Zimbabwean (Tendi 2008). The importance of race and the references to past Western ills of colonization and slavery allows ZANU-PF to dismiss any form of criticism from whites as "racist" (Tendi 2008).

Furthermore, patriotic history also played a key role in the clash between human rights and sovereignty. Human rights are seen as "Western" and a type of "moral imperialism" just like the past pretexts, such as 'the white man's burden for Western Europe's colonial machinations' (Tendi 2008, p.379). The ruling party considers sovereignty as reverse colonialism and a weapon of self-defense against interferences by foreign players that are suspiciously viewed due to the country's history of colonial exploitation by white settlers. Therefore, patriotic history uses the negative legacy of colonization to disapprove of any outside intervention (Tendi 2008).

The content of the patriotic history discourse is inclusionary and exclusionary as it excludes any form of opposition (sell-outs) and includes anyone who supports ZANU-PF (patriots) based on a narrow definition provided by ZANU-PF. This resonates well with Foucault (1978) who argued that discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot as well as what can be said. The narrow definition of patriots, traitors, and sell-outs confirms Whisnant's (2012) view that discourse generates knowledge and "truth" and that some discourses in each context can persuade people to recognize them as true. Whisnant (2012) adds that a discourse's authority is not linked to the objective correctness of the statement. Thus, this paper notes that the correctness of the meaning and content of patriotic history discourse is questionable, yet the discourse is heavily relied on in dealing with anti-corruption activists in Zimbabwe.

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This paper demonstrates that patriotic history was used to label Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono as sellouts, while anti-Western rhetoric was used to defend any foreign powers that supported them.

### **Pastor Evan Mawarire's anti-corruption activism and the #ThisFlag movement**

Pastor Evan Mawarire came to the spotlight after posting a personal video on his *Facebook* page on 22 April 2016 (Pipkin 2022). In the video, Pastor Evan Mawarire had the Zimbabwean national flag wrapped around his neck, and he quizzed values fixed to the flag (Gukurume 2017). He moved from one symbol of the flag to another, criticizing the government for deceiving the masses by its failure to address issues of corruption, economic crises, unemployment, poor governance, and police brutality (Gukurume 2017). Below is part of a transcript of the video:

This flag, this (shaking the flag), this beautiful flag, they tell me that eh the green, the green is for the vegetation and for the crops, I don't, I don't see any crops in my country, hanzi (they say) the yellow, hanzi (they say) the yellow is for the minerals goridhe (gold), diamonds, platinum, chrome, I don't know how much of it is left and I don't know who they sold it to and how much they got for it. The red, the red, the red, the red they say that that it's the blood; it's the blood that was shed to secure freedom for me and I am so thankful for that I just don't know that if they were here, if they were here they that shed their blood and saw the way that this country is that they would demand their blood be brought back. This Flag! They, they tell me that the black, the black is for-is for the majority, people like me! And yet for some reason, I don't feel like I am a part of it (Matsilele 2019).

This emotional video accuses those in power of engaging in corruption and it questions their patriotism. The video also shows disappointment in the unmet promises of the liberation struggle and claims that patriots who lost their lives have done so in vain because the masses are not enjoying the liberation gains. Pastor Evan Mawarire claimed that he recorded the video due to the challenges

he was facing which included failing to look after his family and raising school fees for his children (Pipkin 2022). When the video was posted online, it went viral, and in a day, it scored over 10,000 views, and in a week it had around 200,000 viewership (Gukurume 2017). Inspired by the success of his first video, Pastor Evan Mawarire initiated a five-day campaign where he mobilized citizens to buy and move around wearing their flags as a means of calling the government to heed and address their grievances (Gukurume 2017). This five-day campaign stretched to a 25-day campaign owing to the support it received from the citizens through social media (Gukurume 2017).

Pastor Evan Mawarire's activism culminated in a movement called #ThisFlag. On its Facebook account, the #ThisFlag movement states its vision as, "Our vision is a Zimbabwe where citizens are emboldened to speak out, ask questions and act against corruption, injustice and poverty" and its mission as "Speak, Ask, Act". This shows that anti-corruption activism was central to Pastor Evan Mawarire and his movement. To this end, they held several anti-corruption protests in 2016-2017, including a petition to have the then Minister of Energy Power and Development, Samuel Undenge fired and arrested for corruption (Langa 2016). Concerning the petition against Undenge, Pastor Evan Mawarire said:

We have realized that as people we are being shortchanged and it's our future that is being damaged. So we have started to identify ministries that are inundated with corruption and mismanagement of public funds and we are now driving citizens around such issues. So part of our job is to bring awareness to the citizens so that they know their rights..... (Langa 2016).

On 6 July 2016, Pastor Evan Mawarire called for a national stay-away called the Shutdown Zimbabwe campaign (SZC), aimed at forcing the government to take their grievances seriously (Tarusarira and Chitando 2019). Many Harare residents heeded Pastor Evan Mawarire's call and did not go to work and business owners closed their shops in protest. A week after the SZC, Pastor Evan Mawarire called for a second two-day national shutdown to send a clear message to the government to address their grievances (Gukurume 2017). In reaction, the state

panicked and arrested Pastor Evan Mawarire. He was initially charged with inciting public violence but during his hearing at the magistrate court, the charge changed to a case of treason (Tarusarira and Chitando 2019). The charge of treason meant that Pastor Evan Mawarire was a sellout planning to overthrow a constitutionally elected government. This was meant to discourage people from following him and his movement. However, the arrest seems to have achieved the opposite as it has arguably helped to “sensationalize and strengthen the support of the movement” (Gukurume 2017, p.57). This was evidenced by the thousands of followers who came to the magistrate’s court in solidarity with Pastor Evan Mawarire during his trial on 13 July 2016 (Voice of Africa 2016). After being denied entry into the courtroom, people spent the whole day outside the court with flags hung on their necks, singing church hymns and revolutionary songs dancing, joking, laughing, and praying as they waited for the court ruling.

The judge delayed the case hoping that people would go away, but the people increased with each passing hour, soldiering in the heat and the hefty presence of armed police officers (Gukurume 2017). Detecting the anger and pressure from Pastor Evan Mawarire’s supporters, the judge at around 19:30 adjourned the court and dismissed the charges releasing him to his jubilant followers (The Guardian 2016). Gukurume (2017) noted that there was ululation and singing fitting a hero as Pastor Evan Mawarire made his way out of the courtroom to address his followers. This shows that while the ruling party saw Pastor Evan Mawarire as a sellout because of his anti-corruption activism, citizens saw him as a patriot worthy to follow and support during his arrest. The then President Robert Mugabe responded to Pastor Evan Mawarire’s anti-corruption activism by accusing him of inciting violent protests. During a state funeral of Dr. Utete at the National Heroes Acre, Mugabe used the platform to intimidate Pastor Evan Mawarire in line with patriotic history discourse by calling him an agent of the West and a sellout. He was quoted saying,

The Mawarire’s ... I don’t even know him, and those who believe in that way of living, well, are not part of us in thinking, they are not part of us as we try to live together. If they don’t want to live with us they should go to

those countries that are sponsoring them. You can’t urge people to adopt violence, or violent demonstrations as the way of life, or a way of solving grievances, no. We will say no, forever no; find another environment if you are a pastor. I don’t know if he is a man of religion. A man of religion will speak the biblical truth ... beware these men of God, not all of them are preachers of the Bible. I don’t know whether they are serving God or they spell G.O.D. in reverse (*Mail & Guardian* 2016).

In this quote, Mugabe framed Pastor Evan Mawarire as a traitor, sell-out, and foreign-funded agent of regime change, and questioned his citizenship, belonging, and identity as a pastor. By doing this, Mugabe invoked the patriotic history element of separating patriots from sell-outs when he said Pastor Evan Mawarire did not deserve to be a Zimbabwean. Similarly, he invoked his anti-Western rhetoric by accusing him of being sponsored by other countries. Prof Jonathan Moyo, the then Zimbabwe Minister of Higher Education, mocked the #ThisFlag movement on his *Twitter* handle by saying, ‘Oh. Very revealing. So #ThisFlag thing is a pastor’s fart. How stinking!’ (Allison 2016). #ThisFlag activists responded to the minister’s post and the debates turned into a *Twitter* cold war against Prof Jonathan Moyo who cynically called the movement ‘Nameless and faceless trolls’ (Allison 2016). However, the movement’s support base notably grew with time, and this forced Prof Jonathan Moyo to create his counter hashtag campaign which he called #OurFlag. Moyo then tweeted saying, ‘It’s #OurFlag, the #People’s Flag versus #ThisFlag campaign founded and funded by the #US and #EU Ambassadors. Hande tione (Let’s get it on)’ (Gukurume 2017, p. 61). The idea of associating Pastor Evan Mawarire and his movement with the United States (US) and European Union (EU) aligns with the patriotic history element of anti-Western rhetoric and here it was meant to question Pastor Evan Mawarire’s intentions and motives. By associating him with the West, this would justify arresting him as a means of punishing him for selling out.

State media branded Pastor Evan Mawarire and other activists as dissidents and cyber terrorists (Buchanan 2016). This politicized patriotic history discourse takes anti-government activists as dissidents and enemies of the state which shows

intolerance of dissenting voices that are not in harmony with ZANU-PF rhetoric of patriotism. The Central Intelligence Organisation, the army, and the police, also took part in shaping patriotic history-inspired anti-corruption activism discourses. For example, the then Army Commander Lieutenant-General Philip Valerio Sibanda, said the army would deploy what he termed cyber troops on social media and other internet platforms to counter the #ThisFlag campaign because social media was now a risk to national security and sovereignty (Gambanga 2016). The idea of painting Pastor Evan Mawarire and his movement as threats to national security aligns well with patriotic history which is closely tied with issues of sovereignty. More so, numerous government officials branded citizens utilizing social media to mobilize protests as cyber terrorists an act that can only be done by unpatriotic citizens. This ignores the patriotic work of denouncing corruption that Pastor Evan Mawarire and his followers were doing and this suggests that for one to be a patriot he/she must not fight or expose the corruption done by the ruling party and government officials.

After facing multiple arrests and threats, Pastor Evan Mawarire went into exile in the U.S. for safety. The #ThisFlag movement lost momentum after his departure as state repression intensified. However, the movement inspired later activism, including the 2019 protests and movements like #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Pastor Evan Mawarire remains vocal about Zimbabwean issues from abroad but is no longer as central to domestic activism compared to the 2016 – 2017 period.

### **Hopewell Chin'ono's anti-corruption activism and whistleblowing**

Hopewell Chin'ono's anti-corruption activism came to light in June 2020, after exposing a case of corruption involving the former Minister of Health Obadiah Moyo who awarded contracts to pharmaceutical companies that were selling COVID-19 medical supplies at inflated prices. Hopewell Chin'ono reported that Drax International had invoiced the government US\$28 for disposable masks whose wholesale price was under US\$4 from reputable local suppliers (Kudzayi 2020). The inflated invoice triggered public outrage forcing the government to act. The scandal was worsened because Drax, which was initially said to be

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registered in Switzerland, and then in the United Arab Emirates, was a fraud allegedly orchestrated by Delish Nguwaya (Kudzayi, 2020). Hopewell Chin'ono's reporting on this COVID-19 procurement fraud led to the arrest and sacking of Obadiah Moyo by President Emmerson Mnangagwa for “inappropriate conduct” (BBC 2020). However, some believed that Moyo took the fall for persons closer to the president than him. This was so after Hopewell Chin'ono posted pictures showing Nguwaya with the president, his wife, and one of their sons (BBC 2020). Patrick Chinamasa, the ZANU-PF spokesperson responded to Hopewell Chin'ono's posts on social media that linked the president's family with Drax by saying the first family was a victim of a smear campaign. Below is what Chinamasa said.

We have noted the systematic targeted attacks on the first family members by unscrupulous characters like Hopewell Chin'ono targeting the president's son. The false reports that claim the president's son has an interest in Drax International have not been backed by any evidence. We are warning the public and those writing these lies to stop. We wish to advise false reporters and our detractors to desist from perpetrating desperate character assassination (Nyathi 2020).

Chinamasa's acts of questioning Hopewell Chin'ono's character and seeing him as a character assassinator paint him as an unpatriotic citizen and a sellout who has no good intentions for the country. By doing so, it was Chinamasa himself who was assassinating Hopewell Chin'ono's patriotic acts by downplaying and equating them to those of assassins.

Following the arrest of Obadiah Moyo, his case died a natural death in no time while Hopewell Chin'ono was arrested and detained on several occasions. On July 20, 2020, the police raided Hopewell Chin'ono's home in Harare and took him away, charging him with "incitement to participate in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of peace or bigotry" (Muronzi 2020). He was eventually charged with tweeting against corruption, and the charge sheet said that the tweets would lead to the removal of the government (Chin'ono 2024). Hopewell Chin'ono was denied bail three times, and he spent 45 days in prison (Chin'ono 2024). While in prison, he fell sick with COVID-19 and was denied access to proper medical care because the prison hospital did not have medication or basic equipment (Chin'ono 2024). This idea of charging both Pastor Evan and Hopewell Chin'ono with charges of treason shows the government's fear that anti-corruption activism may be used to agitate the masses and push the government out of power. Being charged with overthrowing a government means one is a traitor who wants to unconstitutionally remove a sitting president and, in this regard, Hopewell Chin'ono was seen as a sellout. Moreso putting him in prison was a move meant to discipline and punish him for his 'sellout' activities. This demonstrates a case of the narrow use of patriotic history in that Hopewell Chin'ono who did patriotic acts of speaking against corruption was viewed as a 'sellout' while Obadiah Moyo who looted public funds was treated as a patriot because Obadiah's case died a natural death.

Hopewell Chin'ono was released from prison in September 2020 after his fourth attempt to get bail. Three weeks after his release from prison, the president's niece was caught trying to smuggle six kilograms of Gold to Dubai (Chin'ono 2024). This resulted in a plan to give her bail unopposed, and an insider informed Hopewell Chin'ono who exposed it using his X handle @daddyhope. As a result, Hopewell Chin'ono was arrested again and charged with interfering with a pending case before the courts yet there was no pending case before the courts (Chin'ono 2024). This was an excuse to punish him for exposing the corrupt arrangement to give bail to the president's niece. During his arrest, Hopewell Chin'ono claims to have spent most of his time speaking to prisoners who saw him as a hero and protected him from

unsavory criminal characters (Chin'ono 2024). He also noted that most prison officers treated him well and shared with him how they were suffering living on paltry salaries. The treatment given to Hopewell Chin'ono by prisoners and prison officers which is befitting of a hero shows that they saw him as a patriot – which contradicts the ruling party and government officials' narrow view of patriots as they saw him as a sellout.

The arrest of Hopewell Chin'ono generated various responses from the US embassy, the EU, and the ruling party officials. After Hopewell Chin'ono was arrested the US embassy, said it was concerned by the threats against him. The EU also commented that corruption had the potential to derail Zimbabwe's COVID-19 response, undermine development, reinforce inequalities, and destroy confidence in those in power (Nyathi 2020). These responses prompted the Zimbabwean government to lash out at these foreign powers. Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa stated that the reaction of the US to Hopewell Chin'ono's arrests showed that they were behind his activities. She noted that Western countries were funding the protests to access Zimbabwe's resources. Mutsvangwa's utterances best explain the use of anti-Western rhetoric by linking government critics to the West. Mutsvangwa described the US and her allies as 'evil and doom-mongers' when she claimed that:

Hopewell Chin'ono and ..... belong to that camp of evil wishers. It's cruel self-enrichment from the resources that they seek. Please why can't you give Africa a break? In Zimbabwe, we are saying: 'We can't breathe'. The role of foreign powers in this plot to instigate an illegal regime change in Zimbabwe is made apparent by a set of events and statements that followed the police operation. President Mnangagwa and his government are fully apprised of this evil agenda and devilish machinations (Matenga 2020).

These claims show ZANU-PF's denial of responsibility for the suffering of the people by using anti-West rhetoric and labeling critics as regime change agents (sellouts). However, Mutsvangwa's position also highlights that some countries – particularly in Africa are often compelled to adopt such positions to safeguard their interests. For instance, since

1994, Paul Kagame has used nationalist narratives to promote unity and economic self-reliance while resisting Western political influence (Reyntjens 2019). According to Reyntjens (2019), Rwanda has refused Western aid conditionalities and has framed criticisms of human rights issues as efforts to undermine its sovereignty.

In an interview, Nick Mangwana, Zimbabwe's information secretary, dismissed Hopewell Chin'ono's claims of persecution for speaking about corrupt officials. Mangwana stated that.

Everybody talks about corruption. Open any paper, people are talking about corruption. He knows he is breaking the law. Not speaking about corruption. We acknowledge that there is corruption in Zimbabwe, that's why we have ZACC because we acknowledge that there is corruption. So he is talking nonsense (Mavhunga 2021).

Apart from labeling Hopewell Chin'ono as a sellout and a danger to society, the ruling party moved to enact a Patriotic Bill. While the Patriotic Bill has been circulating in Zimbabwe since its initial drafting in 2020 and the presentation of its motion in Parliament on 2 March 2021, Hopewell Chin'ono's activities also facilitated the speeding and reintroduction of this Bill. The ruling party's reintroduction of the Bill in 2022 occurred a week after Hopewell Chin'ono delivered a speech at a human rights summit in Geneva, highlighting the government's human rights abuses, and corruption (Mandell 2022). Hon Togarepi and Hon Mpfu who were pushing a motion for the Patriotic Bill highlighted people that the "Patriotic Act" should target, and proposed its content as follows:

The imposition of sanctions was a result of lobbying by certain individuals. Some deliberately went to ask for the people of Zimbabwe to be killed by way of denying us access to health, in other words, you are saying we should die. These are citizens of Zimbabwe, what are we doing as a country to ensure that such people pay for exposing the people of Zimbabwe, we need to do something, and it should be done now. Civic organizations that in their activities deviate from their core business and start

advancing activities that destabilize the people of Zimbabwe ... people come to this country, and they tell us that they are social welfare organizations yet they have political agendas ... if you have campaigned against Zimbabwe, the law should bar you from getting into any public office because you will have killed the people that you want to look after. If you attack the leader of this country that has an effect when that leader goes out there to source business for this country. Nobody wants to do business with a person who from his country is called so many names. So it is very important that the media, politicians, business people, and all citizens of this country understand that they are the people of Zimbabwe first before their political and business interests. We are one and it is a law that we can put down today in this House on this land that will defend the interest of Zimbabwe (Veritas 2021).

This shows that the Patriotic Bill was to be enacted to force people like Hopewell Chin'ono to speak well about the country which is legislating patriotic history. The move to enact a patriotic bill was backed up by ZANU-PF supporters who were angered by Hopewell Chin'ono's address at the human rights summit in Geneva. A pro-Mnangagwa organization called Varakashi4ED (Destroyers for the President) petitioned Attorney General Prince Machaya to expedite the drafting of the Bill. The petition read:

As Varakashi4ED, we are outraged and concerned that despite the destructive effect of the sanctions on Zimbabwe being so obvious and so acknowledged by most of the international community, there are some Zimbabweans who have proved to be unpatriotic malcontents, hell-bent on begging for the sanctions to stay on. We, therefore, call upon your (Machaya's) esteemed office to do its part pronto and assist the Government of Zimbabwe in enacting the Patriotic Act, which should be equivalent to the US's Logan Act, which in essence prohibits and criminalizes Zimbabwean citizens and residents from engaging in unauthorized foreign negotiations, parallel diplomacy, foreign lobbying, sanctions incitement and

foreign political and economic relations with countries in dispute with Zimbabwe or hostile to Zimbabwe (Masau and Muromo 2022).

This shows that the address by Hopewell Chin'ono at a summit in Geneva was seen as short of patriotism and had the potential to attract sanctions which warranted a law that would deal with people like him. This also shows that the ruling party was denying its role in corruption by using sanctions from the West as an excuse and the sole cause of citizens' misery. More so, citing the Laws from the US was a way of self-insulating the ruling party against the US criticism of this draconian Act, and this aligns with anti-western rhetoric.

While the section above noted that Mawarire and his movement have lost momentum, patriotic history and multiple arrests have failed to stop Chin'ono from exposing government corruption because currently, he is actively using social media and international platforms to challenge state corruption and repression.

### Conclusion

This paper examined how the patriotic history discourse has been used to dismiss anti-corruption activists in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, the paper has used Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono as case studies. The paper has argued that patriotic history especially its elements of separating patriots and sellouts and the anti-Western rhetoric were consistently used to discredit and dismiss Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono's anti-corruption activism. The paper has also found that while Pastor Evan Mawarire's activism happened during the Mugabe era and Hopewell Chin'ono's was/is happening in the Mnangagwa regime, patriotic history has been used consistently. This suggests that there is no difference in how both regimes view anti-corruption activists and deploy patriotic history against them. For instance, both activists were charged with inciting violence and later with attempting to subvert a constitutionally elected government. The arrests and charges of treason against Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono also point to the government's fear that corruption could be used for mass mobilisation to achieve the outstanding unresolved political

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contestation between ZANU-PF and the opposition parties in Zimbabwe, especially during that period of the MDC-T. This highlights the intersection of anti-corruption activism, state narratives of patriotism, and the enduring political contestations in Zimbabwe.

The paper has also demonstrated that ZANU-PF viewed both activists in a manner consistent with patriotic history by framing them as dissidents, cyber terrorists, sellouts, and Western-funded and founded. The hope was that these labels would prompt Pastor Evan Mawarire and Hopewell Chin'ono to self-sensor and behave in ways that escape such labels. The labels also sought to demobilize those who followed them and saw them as heroes which seems to have failed because the paper showed that some sections of the society viewed both activists as heroes and patriotic citizens. This shows the contested nature of the meaning of patriotism in Zimbabwe specifically between the ruling party and its critics. To this end, the paper concludes that in the Zimbabwean context, those who engage in patriotic acts of fighting corruption are seen as sellouts which implies that those who loot patriotic funds are patriots.

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