

Mnangagwa and the “New Deception”

“The more things change, the more they stay the same,” goes an adage.

However, in Zimbabwe things change and get worse.

That seems a logical conclusion to make following the recent arrest of Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin’ono and the opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume over allegations of inciting the [public to commit violence](#).

Chin’ono and Ngarivhume were leading the call for demonstrations on 31 July over a number of demands, namely calls for accountability, good governance and a general dissatisfaction with Zimbabwe’s comatose economy.

Last week, the duo who appeared in court separately were denied bail.

Their choice to stage the demonstrations on 31 July was symbolic.

On this day in 2018, Zimbabweans went for a poll, [which had 23 presidential contestants](#).

The election was however, a two-horse race between Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and the popular opposition leader Nelson Chamisa who led the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance. —

The other 21 presidential contestants were largely figureheads of fringe political formations.

On 1 August 2018, security forces opened fire on protesters who were calling for the urgent release of results of the election.

[Six people died](#) while scores were injured. Results were later announced with the ruling Zimbabwe Africa National Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) as the winner, an outcome which MDC [Alliance leader Nelson Chamisa disputed](#).

31 July, therefore, serves as a day in which the people's dream was deferred, which explains its place in protest politics. The economy, by the way, is now in worse shape.

Everything has gone wrong. Which explains why citizens are complaining about everything, even to the point of coining an online #ZanuPfMustgo movement, which was supposed to be the goal of the foiled 31 July demonstrations until the arrests of the frontrunners-Chin'ono and Ngarivhume.

A little background about the duo might help to put things into perspective, especially considering Mnangagwa's hard talk about a "New Dispensation" and "Second Republic", based on which he declares being "Open for Business" at every given turn.

Chin'ono is a freelance investigative journalist and filmmaker having worked in various capacities at ITV News Africa, BBC, New York Times and South Africa's eNCA as a foreign correspondent.

Ngarivhume, on the other hand, is an opposition leader of [Transform Zimbabwe](#), one of the parties which joined forces with MDC Alliance led by opposition leader Nelson Chamisa during the 2018 elections.

Between May and July, Hopewell Chin'ono exposed a \$60 million Covid-19 scandal, which involved the unprocedural tender process surrounding the supply of drugs and Personal Protective Equipment to a local shadowy company called Drax International run by one [Delish Nguwaya, a former convict](#).

While Mnangagwa's son Collins who was reportedly involved in the deal supported by evidence, denied involvement in the

[scandal](#), pictures later surfaced of Drax International representative Nguwaya with President Mnangagwa and his wife Auxillia, [which suggests a close and personal relationship](#).

In early June, the ruling party apparatchiks led by the acting spokesperson Patrick Chinamasa denounced Chin'ono's activities calling them ["unscrupulous"](#) while youth leader Tendai Chirau argued that the journalist was putting the name of the first family into ["disrepute"](#).

Evidently, Chin'ono's investigative journalism unsettled the corridors of power.

Although Zanu PF had dismissed Chin'ono's utterances, Mnangagwa later responded by firing Health Minister Obadiah Moyo over corruption allegations, which should have vindicated Chin'ono!

New Dispensation or New Deception?

The arrest of Chin'ono and Ngarivhume constitutes a systematic attack on anti-government critics and abuse of human rights in general.

Mnangagwa's new dispensation was expected to put an end to Zimbabwe's chequered human rights abuses, for which the "New Dispensation" routinely blamed the late former President Robert Mugabe.

Three days ago, the Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa egregiously claimed that the duo were arrested for their ["ploy to destabilize the country and unconstitutionally seize power"](#).

This language, which appears to have been plucked from Robert Mugabe's rulebook of legitimising state-sponsored violence on targets, is however ironic considering the state's culpability in becoming a security threat to its own citizens. That is the problem.

This explains why Chin'ono sent alarm bells on Twitter when he said;

["They are breaking into my home. Alert the world."](#)

["Police and state agents are harassing my workers."](#)

Although the distress call drew concern in Zimbabwe and across the world, trolls and establishment figures in government and the ruling party Zanu PF quickly jumped to their rhetoric, alleging this was "faked abduction", which was a ploy to get attention.

Unfortunately, the government has overworked this inconsiderate claim following similar allegations raised by three MDC ladies, MP Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimbiri and Netsai Marova, who were arrested for carrying out a flash [demonstration during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) despite the no-gathering order.

That Chin'ono recorded a video of heavy-handed state operatives directing him to stop filming the whole ordeal, provided a glimpse of the excesses of the state.

Here the glare of the state's iniquities was being laid bare in the [24-second clip](#) which went viral.

Apart from human rights, how else would people believe Mnangagwa's talk about respect for private property, when operatives vandalised Chin'ono's door to get [entry into his house?](#)

Sadly, Mnangagwa brazenly muzzles the key voices who are exposing the grand-scale corruption in Zimbabwe.

The public no longer has confidence in Mnangagwa simply because of a "catch and release" approach in which high-profile arrests are carried out without conviction.

What is even sadder is the fact that Mnangagwa now sees

shadows everywhere. Chin'ono, a sworn Mugabe critic, was one of the key voices to back a Mnangagwa ascendancy which materialised in 2017 and continued until some time in 2018.

For this volte-face, Chin'ono, of course, drew much criticism for backing Mnangagwa, who was perceived as a pragmatist then.

This is the problem with Zimbabwean politics. It is binary. Things are either "black" or "white".

Either one is a "revolutionary" or a "sell-out". Either a "patriot" or a "puppet".

Mnangagwa's rise to the presidency on the back of a military coup was cemented by the Zimbabwean electorate who marched onto the streets in November 2017.

It is ironic that when citizens intend to demonstrate, they are now told in uncharacteristic terms about their unholy intentions to topple a "constitutionally elected government" which ironically got into power not through elections but through a de facto military coup.

It is disingenuous to accuse citizens of fronting Western interests whenever they ask the real questions, or demand Mnangagwa's resignation owing his inability to lead the country on the path of progress.

Was it not Mnangagwa who said that the Voice of the People is the Voice of God?

Instead of engaging with the progressive voices of Chin'ono, Ngarivhume and others, the government's needless resort to brazen arrests has become a threat to the values of the "New Dispensation".

Or is it "New Deception"?