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Nation-Building and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe's National Anthem: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

African national anthems function as powerful socio-political instruments embedding aspirations for future progress. While previous studies focused strictly on identity and nationalism, this study investigates the unexamined intersection of nation-building, sustainable development, and ideology within Zimbabwe's national anthem through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Methodologically, Fairclough's 'three-dimensional' model unpacks the lyrics across textual, discursive, and socio-cultural levels. Moving past purely descriptive readings, the findings reveal that the anthem functions as a tool for ideological legitimation, leveraging patriotic history and liberation heritage to enforce a homogenized nationalism. Lyrical emphasis on environmental stewardship and social justice possesses significant potential to stimulate community-led collective action. However, the analysis highlights critical exclusionary tendencies. Through framing state-centric policies as universal national interests, the anthem's dominant discourse silences alternative developmental perspectives and marginalizes multicultural realities. Ultimately, the study contributes a novel theoretical framework to nationalism studies, demonstrating how highly ritualized state symbols are deployed to manufacture civic compliance, trivialize class contradictions, and tightly control contemporary macro-economic agendas in post-colonial Africa.

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1. Introduction

National anthems in Africa play a significant role in the continent's development discourses, functioning not just as ceremonial musical compositions, but as powerful socio-political instruments that shape collective identity, articulate historical narratives, and entrench aspirations for future progress (Onditi, 2018). Emerging largely during the mid-20th century as central markers of sovereignty following formal independence from colonial rule, these anthems embed discourses of resistance and liberation to reconcile fragmented colonial pasts with visions of self-governed futures (Yeboah, 2016; Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2022). In tandem with their anti-colonial character, they serve as core prerequisites for steady development, nurturing emotional attachment, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging among diverse citizenries, thereby supporting the political stability essential for sustained economic and human development (Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2022; Yende, 2023).

Existing scholarship has largely examined Zimbabwe's national anthem, *"Blessed Be the Land of Zimbabwe"*, as a marker of national identity, collective memory, and political biography (Vambe & Khan, 2009; Mutemererwa et al., 2013; Ndimande & Moyo, 2018). Specifically, Mutemererwa et al. (2013) demonstrate that the anthem serves as a mirror image

of national identity, concluding that its core themes reflect a profound sense of nationalism. Similarly, Ndimande & Moyo (2018) emphasize its unifying role, framing the anthem as a historical custodian that unites the nation through the collective performance of lived experiences. Shifting focus to political utility, Vambe & Khan (2009) argue that the anthem functions as a political biography or memoir, carefully profiling ideologies and themes deemed of national importance by the ruling elite. However, little attention has been paid to how the anthem discursively constructs sustainable development alongside nation-building, and how these discourses function ideologically within contemporary Zimbabwe. This study addresses this critical omission by analyzing how these concepts are decreed in the anthem's lyrics to advance national development agendas. It analyzes how the anthem's lyrics and symbolism shape national identity, cultivate unity, and drive development aspirations by addressing three central research questions:

1. In what ways does the national anthem foster nation-building and social cohesion?
2. Which thematic elements and linguistic features in the text support or constrain sustainable national development?
3. What are the broader ideological implications of utilizing the national anthem as an instrument for driving state agendas in contemporary Zimbabwe?

This study holds multi-disciplinary significance across three core fields. First, it contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by demonstrating how highly ritualized, state-sanctioned musical texts function as potent vehicles of ideology and power dynamics. Second, it advances nationalism studies by shifting the focus from purely historical or emotional dimensions of patriotism toward the pragmatic deployment of national symbols for post-colonial state reconstruction. Finally, it enriches sustainable development discourse by illustrating how environmental stewardship and economic progress can be discursively institutionalized within a nation's foundational cultural artifacts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 National Anthems and Nation-Building

The utility of national anthems as foundational tools for nation-building and state cohesion is widely documented across postcolonial African scholarship. Following the collapse of colonial regimes mid-century, newly independent states faced the monumental task of unifying deeply fragmented ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups within arbitrarily drawn borders (Englebert & Tull, 2008). In this socio-political landscape, anthems emerged as vital instruments of collective representation and state legitimacy. According to Onditi (2018), African national anthems function not merely as ritualistic musical arrangements, but as active, powerful instruments that shape a shared national consciousness, articulate historical triumphs over oppression, and project standard aspirations for future economic progress. By embedding specific state-sanctioned values into citizen routines, these sonic symbols foster a sense of belonging and civic duty essential for political stability (Onditi, ibid.).

Building on this structural necessity, Dlodlo (2019) notes that the institutionalization of an anthem serves to bridge deep-seated societal divides, operating as a macro-level communicative tool that binds diverse citizenries to the developmental agendas of the postcolonial state. The recurring lyrical focus on land, unity, and collaborative work acts as an emotional and ideological anchor designed to inspire national pride and multi-ethnic alignment. This aligns with earlier conceptual frameworks by Cusack (2005), who highlights that the systematic invention and dissemination of national symbols are core components of creating an "imagined community." Anthems establish an ongoing symbolic dialogue between the state apparatus and the populace, converting raw state power into deeply felt cultural patriotism (Abril, 2016). Consequently, Abril (ibid.) notes that the literature positions

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anthems as primary psychological infrastructure necessary for sustaining the political stability required for human and economic development.

2.2 National Anthems as Ideological Texts

Beyond their unifying socio-political function, national anthems serve as highly concentrated ideological texts that mirror, reinforce, and validate the power dynamics of the ruling elite (Ayinuola, 2020). Thus, language within these state-sanctioned compositions is rarely neutral; rather, it is deliberately curated to naturalize specific political philosophies and historical interpretations. Mwinlaaru and Nartey (2022) observe that African national anthems heavily utilize semantic patterns and discursive strategies that prioritize themes of territorial repossession, anti-imperialist resistance, and collective agency. Through these linguistic constructs, the state establishes an official collective memory that defines the modern citizen's moral obligations based on historical struggles, explicitly framing contemporary civic compliance as a direct extension of the liberation war (Mwinlaaru & Nartey, ibid.).

This ideological manipulation often establishes a selective historical profile that serves contemporary elite interests. Vambe and Khan (2009) critically analyzed the Zimbabwean national anthem, *"Blessed Be the Land of Zimbabwe,"* demonstrating that it functions effectively as a political biography or memoir. They argue that the anthem's lyrical choices and symbolic allegories carefully prioritize specific ideologies and themes deemed vital by the ruling establishment, effectively defining the parameters of acceptable patriotism. By institutionalizing these values within a sacred national hymn, dissenting views are subtly coded as unpatriotic or anti-national (Vambe & Khan, ibid.). The literature thus demonstrates that anthems act as discursive battlegrounds where state hegemony is continually reproduced and naturalized through regular, ritualized public performance.

2.3 Sustainable Development in Political Discourse

The inclusion of sustainable development within state political discourse has undergone a marked transformation, evolving from a strictly ecological concern into a complex socio-political imperative (Kambites, 2014). This paradigm shift is driven by the global adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which demand that modern states integrate environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic resilience into their core institutional frameworks (De Jong & Vijge, 2021). In developing regions, and across Africa specifically, the discourse surrounding the SDGs has shifted from global policy recommendations to localized mechanisms for state survival (Sénit, 2020). Hence, according to Sénit (ibid.), political elites increasingly employ the language of sustainability to secure international development financing, build domestic political legitimacy, and frame national resource extraction as a collective, forward-looking responsibility.

However, the operationalization of sustainable development in state rhetoric often exposes a tension between policy aspirations and actual socioeconomic realities. Merino-Saum et al. (2018) point out that while the conceptual definitions of sustainability indicators are abundant in political literature, their translation into national discourse often suffers from ideological fragmentation. As such, governments regularly appropriate the terminology of sustainability to mask deep-seated structural inequalities, framing development as a harmonious national endeavour while sidelining localized ecocide or uneven resource distribution. Within political texts, sustainable development is frequently used as a rhetorical tool to project an image of modern, responsible statehood, making it imperative to critically analyze how these environmental and economic mandates are discursively constructed in foundational state symbols (Kambites, 2014).

2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideology

To uncover the hidden power dynamics and ideological structures embedded within state texts, scholarship relies heavily on the theoretical and methodological frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA operates on the premise that language is a form of social practice that is both shaped by and shapes the social world, dialectically reinforcing or challenging unequal power relations. Norman Fairclough's (1993) model of discourse and society, which connects textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, provides a robust foundation for understanding how macro-level state ideologies are systematically reproduced in micro-level linguistic choices. Fairclough emphasizes that language is used by dominant groups to manufacture consent, transforming contingent political positions into universally accepted 'common sense'.

Complementing this perspective, Teun van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach introduces a vital link between text and society, arguing that power structures manipulate discourse by shaping the mental models and social representations of the populace. Through this lens, state discourses control not just what people hear, but how they cognitively process national identity and civic responsibility. Ruth Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach further deepens this analysis by insisting that all text must be understood within its specific historical and socio-political context. Wodak's framework is particularly useful for analyzing national symbols, as it traces how historical narratives of liberation and state formation are continually recontextualized to justify contemporary political structures. Together, these foundational CDA scholars provide the necessary analytical tools to deconstruct ideological views, unearthing how elite power is institutionalized through language.

To systematically move beyond a purely descriptive reading of the text, this study operationalizes Van Dijk's (2006) multi-level functionality of ideology to analyze the discursive mechanics of the Zimbabwean national anthem. First, the analysis interrogates the representation of social reality by assessing how social actors, historic liberation events, and modern development goals are selectively framed within the lyrics. Second, it exposes the underlying power dynamics and social relations, uncovering how the anthem's embedded ideologies legitimize the ruling establishment's authority while marginalizing alternative socio-political perspectives. Third, the study targets the naturalization of beliefs and values, deploying CDA tools to denaturalize lyrical assertions that make partisan political agendas appear as common-sense, unassailable, or universally shared civic duties. Finally, it examines the text's influence on discourse and social practices, tracking how the anthem defines the boundaries of acceptable patriotic speech and marginalizes dissenting viewpoints within contemporary Zimbabwe.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Description

The data consisted of the three-stanza lyrics of "Blessed Be the Land of Zimbabwe," the country's official English national anthem adopted in 1994. To ensure a granular evaluation of the text, the dataset explicitly comprises the specific words, phrases, and sentences directly extracted from the anthem. This textual material serves as the primary empirical evidence for tracking underlying ideological assertions and representations. By treating the linguistic syntax as the core unit of observation, every line across the three stanzas was treated as an active discursive carrier of state values. This thorough extraction allowed the study to capture repetitive lexical patterns, pronoun shifts, and specific noun-verb pairings that might otherwise be overlooked in a macro-level reading. Consequently, the finalized dataset provides a reliable linguistic repository from which deeper socio-political motives and institutional goals can be empirically mapped.

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3.2 Analytical Approach

Drawing from CDA, this study adopts Fairclough's (1995) 'three-dimensional' model for textual analysis, which examines a communicative event through the interrelationship between discourse and social structures. This model is compressed into three interconnected analytical levels that are employed to determine how the national anthem constructs nation-building and sustainable development discourses. At the primary textual level, the approach focuses on internal linguistic design, specifically analyzing the vocabulary, grammar, and metaphors, to determine how specific linguistic features construct or reject ideological schemes and power inequalities. The second level examines discursive practice, focusing directly on how the anthem's text is produced, distributed, and consumed, thereby highlighting how it becomes a contested site of collective identity formation. Finally, the third level evaluates socio-cultural practices, situating the anthem's language within the broader post-colonial struggles, economic goals, ethnic dynamics, and political tensions of Zimbabwe. This three-dimensional lens links local text properties to global societal structures, uncovering how the anthem's words actively negotiate, reinforce, or challenge dominant national ideologies.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

To systematically transition from theory to operational analysis, this study followed a rigorous six-step qualitative analytical procedure executed entirely within a unified process. First, during data collection, the official text of the national anthem was retrieved from authoritative national archives and verified across multiple institutional publications to guarantee absolute textual accuracy. Second, text segmentation was performed by systematically breaking down the three stanzas of the anthem into smaller, manageable units of analysis, specifically focusing on individual lines, clauses, and key phrases. Third, a structural coding protocol was applied to the segmented text, where open codes were assigned to recurrent linguistic patterns, specific word choices, grammatical markers, and underlying metaphors. Fourth, for the identification of nation-building discourse, the generated codes were grouped into thematic clusters that explicitly targeted concepts of national cohesion, historical remembrance, patriotism, and collective identity construction. Fifth, during the identification of development discourse, a simultaneous round of thematic sorting was conducted to isolate concepts linked to socio-economic growth, environmental stewardship, prosperity, and future-oriented sustainable development. Finally, through ideological interpretation, these identified discourses were analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to reveal how specific linguistic choices reinforce, negotiate, or challenge dominant post-colonial ideologies and existing power structures in Zimbabwe.

3.4 Reliability and Trustworthiness

To establish the scientific rigor of this qualitative discourse analysis, three core principles of qualitative verification were systematically maintained within a continuous narrative format. First, interpretive validity was achieved by anchoring all textual interpretations directly to empirical linguistic data within the anthem, such as explicit word choices, metaphors, and sentences, ensuring that conclusions are structurally grounded rather than speculative. Second, methodological transparency was preserved by presenting a clear audit trail that documents each phase of the research from the initial segmentation of the three stanzas to final thematic aggregation, allowing external validation of the analytical trajectory. Lastly, researcher reflexivity was intentionally integrated by actively monitoring the author's

own socio-political positioning, cultural assumptions, and academic views regarding Zimbabwean history, which allowed the researcher to critically manage personal biases throughout the analytical process.

3.5 Methodological Critique and Defense

While CDA has faced criticism, it remains a valuable methodology for examining power dynamics in language. Rogers (2003) and Widdowson (1995) argue that CDA lacks clarity in its balance of linguistic and social analysis and neglects context. However, CDA proponents counter that context is inherently considered in the analysis of communicative events, and that the methodology's focus on power relations and social critique is a strength, not a weakness (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010). Critics such as Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999) and Hammersley (1997) accuse CDA of being overly moralistic and ambitious in its pursuit of criticality. Nevertheless, CDA scholars argue that their work is grounded on empirical research and aims to uncover hidden power dynamics, rather than simply proclaiming the truth (van Dijk, 2011). Blommaert's (2001) critique of CDA's assumptions and hypotheses can be addressed by acknowledging that all research methodologies rely on some assumptions and that CDA's transparency about its critical agenda is a strength (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009).

4. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the national anthem of Zimbabwe, '*Blessed Be the Land of Zimbabwe'*, provides a rich ideological text through which themes of nation-building and sustainable development can be explored. Rather than serving as a neutral expression of statehood, the anthem uses powerful messages and symbolisms to convey national cohesion and progress in the post-independence era in Zimbabwe. To unpack these dynamics, the subsequent sections systematically employ Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA framework. This micro-linguistic toolkit, isolating lexical choices, modality configurations, pronominal selections, transitivity structures, and conceptual metaphors, demonstrates how these themes are discursively engineered, revealing underlying power dynamics about historical sacrifice, national identity, and aspirations for the future.

Crucially, this analysis moves beyond a singular, hegemonic reading of the text to engage in a dual critical interpretation. It demonstrates that while the anthem's linguistic configurations can actively foster social cohesion, environmental stewardship, and a shared civic vision, they simultaneously function as tools of state hegemony that naturalize the ruling elite's authority, mask material inequalities, and inflict symbolic violence on alternative narratives. Consequently, the discussion is organized into three interconnected subsections: 'Discourse of Nation-Building', which explores how imperative commands, inclusive pronouns, and selective historical lexemes construct a forced unity of purpose; 'Discourse of Sustainable Development', which critically deconstructs how romanticized natural metaphors and optative modalities shift accountability from state policies to divine or seasonal providence**;** and 'Ideological Implications', which synthesizes these findings to expose the overarching power relations, top-down transitivity processes, and systemic exclusions that shape these national narratives.

4.1 Discourse of Nation-Building

The Zimbabwean national anthem's discourse has deep roots in nation-building, emphasizing symbols, sacrifices, and divine providence, as also noted by Dlodlo (2019). The opening lines "Oh lift high the banner, the flag of Zimbabwe / The symbol of freedom

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proclaiming victory" celebrate the national flag as a compelling badge of sovereignty and harmony. Linguistically, this opening relies on a striking imperative transitivity process ("lift high"), which functions as an unmitigated command. This imperative structure constructs a strict civic obligation rather than a passive suggestion, compelling the citizenry to actively participate in the physical and ideological elevation of the state. This supplication of the flag corresponds with the nation-building initiatives, denoting the importance of national symbols in constructing a collective identity and solidarity of a nation. Normally, the national anthems of African states anchor national identity on nation-related natural and public artifacts such as flags (Mesbah, 2019). Alternatively, the discourse of unity, also symbolized by the flag, is ideologically linked to discourses about the history of colonialism and the liberation of Black Africans from colonial rule (Onditi, 2018; Muneri, 2012). Thus, the ideas of national identity and independence reflect a stepping stone to nation-building in the post-colonial era, through advocacy for political and economic reforms for the majority. Mawere (2015) also emphasizes that the flag embodies nationalism and citizenship in the nation-building enterprise.

However, from a critical perspective, this state-centric discourse of unity can simultaneously operate to obscure systemic political inequality and suppress internal dissent. The act of demanding unconditional reverence to the flag through imperative formulations, establishes a singular, homogenized national identity. This overarching narrative of solidarity risks marginalizing minority groups or political opposition movements whose grievances are effectively silenced beneath the forced consensus of a uniform national symbolism.

The anthem's reference to "heroes' sacrifice" acts as a reminder of the struggles faced during Zimbabwe's liberation war. Through specific lexical choices such as "heroes" and "sacrifice," the text deploys high-status vocabulary loaded with emotional and moral capital. The discourse here presents these sacrifices as foundational to the nation's identity and, therefore, renders the present state and its governance legitimate, as a continuation of the fight for freedom. This legitimacy is further cemented through the strategic deployment of the first-person plural possessive pronouns "our" and "us" throughout the verses. The recursive use of these pronouns, for example, "our heritage", performs crucial ideological work. It forces a construction of collective identity and shared ownership. The text syntactically binds the individual citizen to the historical legacy of the liberation struggle, leaving no linguistic space for alienation.

The veneration of heroes is consistent with a typical nation-building strategy in which historical narratives are utilized to unify the populace and construct a shared national vision (Lin, 2024). It epitomizes the discourse of patriotic history, which centers on affirmative approaches to history and celebrations of past achievements, as a basis for nationalism and nation-building (Kończal and Moses, 2023). For Zimbabwe, national liberation heroes represent the utmost degree of patriotism, national unity, and nation-building spirit (Mawere, 2015). Mawere (ibid: 1) asserts that Zimbabwe "is often constituted in a discourse of anti-colonial war, and its present and future are imagined as a defense of what has already been gained from previous wars in the form of 'chimurenga'". Hence, Woolf (2006: 71) notes that; "National histories are deeply implicated in the nation's construction and defense."

Despite this unifying intent, a counter-interpretation reveals that this discourse may also serve to naturalize state authority and privilege dominant historical narratives. Through framing the current ruling elite as the sole, organic heirs to the "heroes' sacrifice," the anthem constructs a partisan historical continuum. This selective historical narrative privileges the ruling party's liberation credentials while delegitimizing contemporary post-colonial civic

struggles, effectively treating any critique of state hegemony as an act of betrayal against the foundational dead.

Moreover, the call to "keep our land from foes" underlines a protective position, implying that nation-building involves not just celebrations of success, but also defense against some form of threat. This defensive posture relies heavily on a foundational metaphor of the state as a vulnerable "motherland" requiring masculine protection, balanced by natural metaphors where "rain" represents divine economic prosperity. Culturally, the land is metaphorically conceptualized not as mere real estate, but as a living ancestral heritage. Mawere (2015) argues that the land or nation-state of Zimbabwe should be protected, and its reproductive capacity upheld as an obligation for nation-building. This aspect speaks to the wider discourse in which national security and independence are deemed vital in achieving stability and integrity in the emerging nation. To solidify this protective stance, the anthem shifts toward a religious modality, calling for blessings, specifically utilizing the deontic and optative modal verb "may" (for example, May rain abound / May we be fed, our labour blessed / And may the Almighty protect and bless our land / May leaders be exemplary). This specific choice of modality shifts the source of authority from secular governance to transcendental mandate, constructing an unassailable framework of divine legitimacy that shields the state's security apparatus from public scrutiny.

Check (2020) enlightens that, to facilitate nation-building in post-colonial African states, security concerns must be addressed, thereby safeguarding national sovereignty. Solomon (2015) submits that, despite Africa being home to an emerging regional and international security consciousness and activism, it is overwhelmed by a broad spectrum of traditional and new security threats. The approach by the African Union (AU) to promote peace and security on the continent can be framed as a constructivist-inspired cooperative security stance to support nation-building (Solomon, ibid). Kiplel (2008) highlights that human security has an impact on overall national security, and African governments have to make policies that ensure safety of their citizenry so as to achieve the broad national security objectives and to ensure sustainable nation-building.

Nation-building is a pervasive theme in most African states' national anthems, reflecting the complex history of colonialism, independence, and the ongoing struggles for unity and development (Cusack, 2005). Most anthems invoke a sense of shared identity and collective purpose, through which citizens are urged to work together toward a specific common goal (Cusack, ibid). For instance, the Ghanaian and Nigerian national anthems emphasize the importance of unity and solidarity toward constructing a strong and prosperous country (Cosmas et al., 2019). Similarly, the South African and Rwandan anthems, in conjunction with memorials, monuments, ceremonies, education, the media, and social discourse, stress the need for reconciliation and healing since the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda (Wielenga, 2012). Similarly, Zimbabwe's national anthem prioritizes nation-building, using lyrical expressions that celebrate the country's freedom, promoting national unity, and envisioning a better future for all citizens (Dlodlo, 2019). Through a shared focus on nation-building, these anthems accentuate the continuously important role of collective identity and shared purpose in the path of national development. They also seek to inspire a sense of national pride and purpose, promoting a shared vision of a better future for all citizens (Onditi, 2018).

Beyond the textual design, the theme of nation-building manifests through the Zimbabwean national anthem's discursive practices and consumption patterns, reflecting the country's complex power dynamics. As Fairclough (1995) notes, discursive practices are integral to shaping and reflecting social relations, and the anthem's institutionalization in all

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national sectors in Zimbabwe, including education and politics, and its performance at national events and media reinforcement, exemplify this process. Through its widespread performance, the idea of nationalism and nation-building is cultivated, based on shared identity and collective consciousness among Zimbabweans. Fairclough's notion of discursive practices is evident in how the anthem's ubiquity naturalizes its message, rendering it an undeniable aspect of Zimbabwean identity. This process, as Wodak et al. (2009) argue, contributes to the construction of a national narrative, emphasizing unity, shared history, and collective purpose through recital. For example, the anthem's performance at political events such as Independence Day celebrations, further cements its role in mobilizing support for the leaders' vision of nation-building, reinforcing the dominant ideology and power structures (Van Dijk, 2008). Through permeating various aspects of the Zimbabwean society, the anthem becomes a powerful tool for shaping public political opinion and influencing national discourse.

The reproduction of the Zimbabwean national anthem in 1994, more than a dacade after independence in 1980, is deeply ideological. It serves as a deliberate mechanism for inculcating a shared national identity that aligns with the ruling party's vision of nation-building. Vambe and Khan (2009) concur, and note that the reproduction of the anthem was not a mere task; it was carefully composed to endorse the views of the ruling elite, and the final version was one of many compositions. Linguistically, this institutional selection process can be analyzed through its restrictive lexical choices, which systematically favoured specific legalistic and historical terms over more revolutionary or ethnically diverse vocabularies. This process sheds light on the complex power dynamics involved in shaping the national vision, as the leaders sought to impose their own narrative and values on the nation. Kelen (2014) argues that national anthems can be tools for reinforcing the dominant ideology, legitimizing the government's authority, and masking social and economic contradictions.

The anthem's discursive practice illustrates how language is used to construct and maintain power relations, highlighting the intricate relationship between discourse, ideology, and power (Foucault, 1972). An evaluation of the structural transitivity of the text reveals that the state is consistently positioned as the primary active agent, while the citizenry is relegated to passive recipients of state-led benevolence. As a site of ideological struggle, the anthem reflects the tensions between competing interests and values, highlighting the need for critical examination of its discursive practices and consumption patterns. Furthermore, the anthem's reproduction and consumption can be seen as a form of symbolic violence, imposing a particular worldview and suppressing alternative narratives and identities, as submitted by Bourdieu (1991). Through this mechanism, the text employs a highly specific institutional modality that frames elite political preferences not as temporary policies, but as permanent, naturalized components of national identity, rendering any political counter-narrative grammatically and ideologically unthinkable.

4.2 Discourse of Sustainable Development

The sustainable development discourse is encoded implicitly in the Zimbabwean national anthem through references to natural resources and prosperity. An example is the stanza where it says, "Oh lovely Zimbabwe, so wondrously adorned / With mountains, and rivers cascading, flowing free", which celebrates the beauty of the country, revealing a deep-seated connection between the land and national pride. Through a structural CDA lens, these specific lines heavily rely on romanticized aesthetic metaphors ("wondrously adorned", "cascading, flowing free") to personify the geographical landscape. This personification

functions as a discursive strategy to construct an idealized view of the nation-state. It can be understood as reinforcing a dominant ideology that links environmental conservation with national wellness and progress. CDA thus reveals the underlying power relations and ideologies that inform the discourse on sustainable development in the national anthem. This also aligns with the arguments put forward by Merino-Saum, Baldi, Gunderson & Oberle (2018) that natural resources represent the primary input to economic and social development. In addition, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with its 17 SDGs, does acknowledge the critical role of natural resources in attaining sustainable development.

However, as Zaharia and Suteu (2010) note, it is crucial to critically examine how the exploitation of natural resources for sustainable development is framed in the anthem, given that it can perpetuate unequal power dynamics and unsustainable practices. A counter-interpretation shows that this highly aestheticized depiction of natural beauty serves an ideological function; it obscures ongoing material environmental degradation and masks corporate or state-sponsored resource exploitation. By linguistically framing the land as a wonderous space that flows "free," the text actively diverts public attention away from the contentious political realities of unequal resource distribution, land disputes, and ecological mismanagement (Marambanyika & Musasa, 2023).

The lines that follow, "May rain abound, and fertile fields; / May we be fed, our labour blessed", poignantly capture the concerns surrounding agricultural productivity and food security. From a micro-linguistic standpoint, this passage operates through a dual reliance on low-affinity optative modality ("May...") and the collective first-person plural pronouns ("we", "our"). The repetition of "May" establishes a protective, supplicatory tone, while the phrase "our labour" syntactically collapses class distinctions by implying that all citizens share identical relationships to material production. This text acknowledges the role of agriculture in the country's economic growth, and emphasize the importance of environmental factors in attaining prosperity. The invocation of rain and fertile fields highlights the complex relationship between environmental management and economic stability, resonating with the enduring sustainable development goals in Zimbabwe and the African continent broadly. Kapone et al. (2014) note that there are strong linkages between food and nutrition security, responsible environmental management, and equitable food distribution, resulting in sustainable development of communities. Zimbabwe, similarly to many other African countries, has conventionally supported the agricultural sector, given its strategic forward and backward linkages with other economic sectors (Saungweme and Matandare, 2014). Agricultural production in Zimbabwe has indeed been identified to have a long-standing positive impact on its economic growth (Runganga and Mhaka, 2021).

A critical evaluation of this discourse, however, suggests that the emphasis on agriculture and environmental factors serves to entrench a hegemonic ideology that espouses economic growth and land productivity as a panacea to the attainment of sustainable development. This alternative reading demonstrates how the text utilizes the metaphor of "rain as prosperity" to naturalize economic outcomes. By grammatically shifting the responsibility of food security from policy-making bodies to seasonal weather patterns, the text minimizes state accountability. This specific transitivity pattern constructs food security as a passive state of being "fed" by natural providence, rather than an active citizen right achieved through equitable agrarian reform.

The national anthem's appeal for divine protection and blessing, "And may the Almighty protect and bless our land," can be interpreted as a plea for sustainable governance, recognizing national well-being as determined by not only human initiative, but also kindness from higher powers. Linguistically, this relies on high-affinity religious modality and a specific relational transitivity process that links the "Almighty" directly to the "land." This

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serves as a potent tool for divine legitimacy, projecting an unassailable moral authority over the state's territory. This perspective resonates with traditional views in which spiritual and moral considerations are fundamental to all sustainable practices (Fukuyama, 1996). The invocation for divine protection thus places great importance on responsible stewardship and moral leadership towards sustainable national development. Further, the emphasis on the land as a source of livelihood and economic emancipation underscores the importance of sustainable land management and equitable resource allocation (Ngomane, 2016).

A critical engagement with the content of the national anthem suggests that the lyrics reinforce a dominant ideology that focuses on national development over individual interests, while also recognizing the role of moral and spiritual guidance in national governance. This discourse may thus be said to perpetuate a collective responsibility and shared values, crucial for sustainable development. However, a counter-interpretation suggests that this spiritualization of the land functions to depoliticize economic inequality. By subsuming class and social conflicts under a generalized, divinely sanctioned "collective responsibility," the anthem effectively pathologizes socioeconomic grievances. Under this discursive framework, structural poverty or protests against poor governance are implicitly framed as spiritual failures or acts of defiance against a divinely ordered national fabric, thereby shielding state actors from systemic critique.

Literature indicates that the theme of sustainable development is embodied in most African national anthems, reflecting aspirations for economic growth, social justice, and environmental stewardship (Onditi, 2018). Through lyrics that emphasize unity, resilience, and hope, these anthems inspire citizens to aim higher for a brighter future, balancing development with the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage (Cusack, 2005). Studies also indicate that African national anthems encapsulate ideologies and power dynamics which have informed the continent’s sustainable development agenda strategy, thrusting collective action towards a more equitable and sustainable future (Ayinuola, 2020; Cosmas et al., 2019). Concurringly, Onditi (2018) highlights that patterns of lyrics framing the philosophy of 'African potentials' to realize sustainable development are common in national anthems. In essence, Dlodlo (2019) perceives the language used in national anthems as a source of identity, nation-building, and sustainable development, citing the Zimbabwean national anthem as a pertinent example. Studies of national anthems from West African nations such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia, revealed that aspects of unity, religion, freedom, and modesty form the basis for sustainable development in these discourses (Cosmas et al., 2019). Likewise, the national anthem of South Sudan prioritizes peace, harmony, and sustainable development, as inspired by the country’s experiences and aspirations (Okal, Yakub, & Kodak, 2016). These findings highlight and reinforce the importance of national anthems in fostering sustainable development and shaping the future of Africa. Yet, when viewed through a comparative CDA framework, this pan-African alignment shows that many post-colonial state anthems deploy identical linguistic features, such as collective pronouns and environmental metaphors, to engineer a superficial consensus. This universalized rhetoric of development often operates globally to naturalize state authority, systematically prioritizing macro-economic development metrics while marginalizing localized, indigenous approaches to environmental stewardship and human security.

4.3 Ideological Implications

Using the national anthem as a channel for advancing sustainable development and nation-building carries several ideological implications. First, the unity and national pride expressed in the anthem may function to legitimatize state policies and practices under the

pretext of national interest, silencing opposing or alternative views of development. This may limit critical debate or hinder civic engagement with diverse perspectives on sustainable development strategies. As emphasized by Nonet, Gossling, Van Tulder and Bryson (2022), there is need for multistakeholder engagement and inclusivity for the common goal of sustainable development. In relation to this, Ronoh (2020) recommends that African states should raise public and leadership awareness about the significance of public participation, in order to improve attitudes, increase willingness to contribute, and promote political goodwill. Drawing on these perspectives, such efforts could create a sense of shared ownership and responsibility among citizens, enhancing the legitimacy and efficacy of Zimbabwe's sustainable development initiatives, as enshrined in the national anthem.

Secondly, the anthem's emphasis on liberation history and national heritage as central ideologies for nation-building can incite exclusionary views in instances where certain groups may feel that their histories or contributions lack representation. In a multicultural and multilingual society such as Zimbabwe, using the national anthem for nation-building clearly demands considerable attention to how its themes resonate with diverse groups and whether or not they serve to marginalize certain communities or points of view. This will ensure that the proposed nation-building values do not go against empowerment for all or raise social justice concerns, as noted by Melkote and Steeves (2015) who argue that development discourses must be critically examined for their potential to either reinforce existing power structures or promote equitable engagement and social transformation.

Overall, to effectively harness the symbolic power of the national anthem, stakeholders ought to consider approaches that promote inclusive narratives and encourage wide-based engagement in the development discourses. These may include promoting critical engagement with the anthem's themes, by encouraging public discussions about the messages of the national anthem, ensuring that its themes are interpreted in ways that foster inclusivity and sustainable development. Another strategy is to integrate the anthem themes into participatory approaches to development so as to provide the stimulus for community-led development initiatives through the use of themes of unity and collective effort. This can help in creating shared ownership and responsibility for sustainable development outcomes. Furthermore, representation and inclusivity may be ensured through a consideration of how themes in the national anthem resonate with the diverse cultural and linguistic groups of Zimbabwe, thereby minimizing the chances of excluding any community from this development narrative. Ultimately, a reflexive CDA framework reveals that unless the anthem's rigid grammatical structures, exclusionary lexical choices, and top-down transitivity processes are critically unpacked in public and educational spheres, its consumption will continue to reproduce elite hegemony, masking systemic inequalities under a superficial guise of divine blessing and national solidarity.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Zimbabwe's national anthem operates as an ideological, double-edged sword, using specific linguistic structures, such as imperative transitivity, inclusive pronouns, and religious modality, to promote elite-driven development narratives while fostering national identity. Through a critical discourse analysis, the research reveals how themes of unity and patriotism function to enforce superficial consensus and marginalize alternative viewpoints, necessitating more inclusive, critical interpretations for authentic nation-building. To illustrate these dynamics**,** Table 1 below summarizes the CDA findings on the linguistic structures of the Zimbabwean anthem, their conflicting ideological

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interpretations, and actionable recommendations to enhance the efficacy of this national discourse.

Table 1
CDA Findings, Ideological Interpretations, and Recommendations

Linguistic Category [6]	Textual Example	Dominant / Hegemonic Interpretation	Critical Counter-Interpretation (CDA)	Recommendations for Action (CDA-Driven)
Imperative Transitivity	"Oh lift high the banner"	Construction of active civic obligation, patriotism, and shared pride.	Imposition of top-down state commands; demands uniformity and leaves no room for dissent.	Promote civic agency: Reframe patriotism in educational curricula to allow for constructive dissent and diverse expressions of national pride.
First-Person Plural Pronouns	"Our land", "Our heritage", "May we be fed"	Construction of a unified collective identity and shared common destiny.	Inflicts symbolic violence; collapses socio-economic class differences and masks political inequality.	Acknowledge material disparities: Design development policies that target specific socio-economic inequalities rather than present a blanket identity.
Lexical Choices	"Heroes' sacrifice"	Commemoration of liberation history as the baseline of national unity.	Privileges dominant historical narratives; legitimizes the current ruling elite while suppressing opposing views.	Decentralise history: Integrate marginalized regional and post-colonial historical narratives into the national discourse for inclusive nation-building.
Metaphors	Land as "motherland"; "Rain" as prosperity	Cultivation of deep environmental stewardship and natural national abundance.	Depoliticizes material inequality and degradation; shifts food security from a policy right to seasonal chance.	Institutionalise rights: Shift development narratives from natural luck to accountable, policy-driven rights regarding food security and land distribution.
Modality	"May rain abound", "May the Almighty protect"	Plea for sustainable governance and recognition of divine guidance.	Establishes an unassailable divine legitimacy; insulates state actors and security apparatuses from civic audit.	Enhance civic evaluation: Encourage collaborative partnerships between civil society organizations and public institutions to evaluate state performance based on measurable socio-economic outcomes.

This study contributes to CDA scholarship by demonstrating how national anthems function as ideological texts that simultaneously promote collective identity and legitimize state-sanctioned development narratives. To broaden the scope of this field, future research should expand into several critical methodological and empirical avenues. First, comparative African anthem studies are necessary to evaluate whether other post-colonial states employ similar discursive patterns to centralize executive power and legitimize state authority. Second, multilingual analyses of anthems translated into various indigenous languages could unearth hidden discrepancies in ideological framing, as linguistic nuances often alter macro-intentions. Third, audience reception studies would shift the focus from purely textual analysis to empirical fieldwork, capturing how everyday citizens, civil society actors, and minority groups actively decode, resist, or internalize these state-sanctioned narratives. Finally, integrating corpus-assisted CDA tools would allow future scholars to analyze larger datasets of national rhetoric over time, to further understand these discursive mechanisms.

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