



# ‘*Kutonga Kwaro Gamba*’: Politics and the renaming of defence cantonments in the ‘Second Republic’ in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract** Like Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa, Zimbabwe was one of the countries that the imperial mission had targeted to establish as a settler economy. The objective of creating a white settler colony was evident in the entire colonial system, including place naming. Generally, place naming served political functions of declaring power and authority over the entire colony. While white minority rule ended in 1980, it, however, left some symbolic imprints on the cultural landscape of the independent nation, Zimbabwe. Given that colonialism entrenched white identity on the cultural landscape, this article interrogates efforts by the Mnangagwa government, which assumed political office in November 2017, to dislodge Rhodesian

memory from the cultural landscape. This article demonstrates that decolonisation is not an event but an ongoing process that political elites execute whenever they want to serve present political purposes. It interrogates the dialectics of political power and remembering the past in Zimbabwe during the aftermath of the military-induced political change of November 2017. The re-inscription of the landscape that the Mnangagwa regime executed specifically targeted military cantonments throughout the country. This decolonisation process was ostensibly done to dismantle white identities from the cultural landscape. However, this article argues that the place renaming exercise served to write back the liberation war legacy into mainstream history, symbolically declared the regime’s political power, and served to legitimise the political status quo. These political purposes had roots in the succession race and the internal party politics within the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU- PF) that preceded the political transition.

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‘*Kutonga Kwaro Gamba*’: This was the title of a song by Mukudzeyi Mukombe (known in Musical circles as Jah Prayzah) which can be loosely translated as ‘The reign of a hero’. The clique in ZANU-PF that supported Mnangagwa used this song as a title track to the November coup that deposed Mugabe and installed Mnangagwa.

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## Introduction

The process of dismantling Rhodesian icons from the cultural landscape in Zimbabwe began during the

internal settlement era (1978–1979) when the coalition government changed the name of the country from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Fisher (2010) provides a detailed list of changes that the new government made to the symbolic culture of the nation. The national flag was also modified to reflect the political ideology of the interim government that was brought into being by the internal settlement agreement. The attainment of black majority rule in 1980 ushered in a series of processes of decolonising the landscape and repackaging collective memory. The new nation got a new set of holidays that replaced Rhodesian public holidays, a new flag that replaced the Union Jack, an icon that symbolised colonial rule, and a new national anthem, *Ishe Komborerai Africa* (God bless Africa). The new anthem replaced the Mary Bloom's 1975 national anthem, which depicted Rhodesia as a God-fearing country praying for Christian strength 'to face all danger' and blessed with a magnificent landscape. The new black government also embarked on a nationwide process of replacing colonial place names with African place names that, largely, celebrated the history of the liberation struggle. In the process, some indigenous place names that had been bastardised by the colonial system had their spellings altered to reflect their proper forms in indigenous languages. In 1982, the Government constituted the Cabinet Committee on Place Names to steer the process of place renaming and correcting the spellings of indigenous names that had been mangled during the colonial era (House of Assembly, 21 August 1981, col. 1218 cited in Fisher 2010: 62). The renaming process was formally marked by the enactment of the Names Alteration Act of 1983 (Chapter 10: 4). In most urban centres, streets and buildings in the central business districts were given names of fallen leaders of the African nationalist movement while some were named after regional political leaders who had supported the nationalist movement materially and logistically. Other colonial place names throughout the country were also changed.

The government's tempo of divesting the landscape of any association with the colonial past by removing colonial names is well articulated in the words of the then Local Government Minister, Mr. Enos Chikwore who characterised colonial place names as "offensive and objectionable" icons which should be removed completely (Reuter, *New Straits Times*,

March 8, 1990). Unfortunately, the process decelerated after the first decade. Fisher (2010) attributes this slack off to the fact that the Place Names Committee transferred the initiative of re-inscribing the cultural landscape to the local communities when the government issued out a directive, in 1993, that residents who found local names offensive should notify the Ministry through their local councils. While this move encouraged citizen participation in local government issues and turned a top-down process into a bottom-up one, it brought into picture several bureaucratic red-tapes that had debilitating effects on the implementation of the place renaming process. In addition to this unfortunate situation, Fisher (2010) observes that the government did not publicise nor advertise to the public the above operational policy. This development could satisfactorily explain the continued visibility of some colonial names in the country's cultural landscape. Thereafter, there were trickles of name changes by the state. For example, the Government renamed Fourth Street in Harare and Main Street in Bulawayo after the late Vice-Presidents, Simon V. Muzenda and Joshua Mqabuko Nyongolo Nkomo, respectively, through a notice published in the Government Gazette of January 23, 2015, in terms of the Schedule of Names (Alteration) Act Chapter 10:14. Given the above background, this article, therefore, interrogates the motives for the renewed vigour to remove colonial names from the built environment by the new state actors after the November 2017 political transition in Zimbabwe. The new president had served in the government of his predecessor for his entire political career. What changed was only the leader, but the system, at the party and national government levels, was inherited in their intact form from Mugabe to Mnangagwa. Rogers (2019) captures this dimension of the political change by saying what changed was the driver but the bus remained the same.

This article demonstrates that the renaming process was done to serve the present political interests of the Mnangagwa-led government. The renaming exercising selected names of liberation war heroes that had largely been left out in the memorialisation efforts by the Mugabe regime. Mnangagwa's place renaming exercise targeted military cantonments, places that the Mugabe regime never considered. Mnangagwa's government introduced aspects of novelty to the process of commemorating the past that marked a break from the Mugabe tradition. The reinscription efforts of the

cultural landscape by the Mugabe regime has received adequate scholarly attention on onomastic studies in Zimbabwe (see, for example, Mamvura and Mashiri 2016; Mamvura et al. 2017, 2018; Mamvura 2019; Mangena 2018; Pfukwa 2018). There is no study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, that has looked at the place renaming exercise by the Mnangagwa administration. Research in collective memory studies has established that political regimes recall the past in order to serve present purposes (Alderman 2002; Dwyer 2002; 2004; Gronbeck 1998; Hutton 1988; Lowenthal 1975; Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002). Accordingly, this article explores the utilitarian roles of the renaming process to the holders of political power in Zimbabwe. Emmerson Mnangagwa, the current President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, assumed the presidency of Zimbabwe through a military-led operation codenamed the 'Operation Restore Legacy' (ORL) that occurred in November 2017. While critics of the current political leadership in Zimbabwe view the operation as an outright coup, it is beyond the purview of this article to venture into the debate about the nomenclature of this political transition. For the sake of consistency, I will use the term ORL. In his terms, Mnangagwa claims to have created a 'Second Republic' in Zimbabwe. This implies that Mugabe held office in the 'First Republic.' Mnangagwa was inaugurated on the 24th of November 2017. It is not coincidental or a politically innocent move that the renaming process was launched and implemented immediately. It started in earnest on the 6th of December 2017 with the renaming of King George VI Barracks to Josiah Magama Tongogara Barracks. The renaming process was selective, purposeful, and symbolic since it only targeted defence cantonments out of several other components of the built environment that had colonial names during that time. This resulted in a form of monologic remembering. If the principal aim was to 'exorcise the colonial demon' (Rupapa, *The Herald* 06 December 2017) as the newly inaugurated President Mnangagwa declared, the place renaming exercise was supposed to be holistic targeting all places that had colonial names. However, most streets in areas out of the Central Business District (CBD), suburbs, and schools still bear colonial names. This selective nature of the Mnangagwa government-driven place renaming exercise merits scholarly attention. This study is part

of the critical toponymic scholarship on place naming. The next section discusses critical toponymy.

### Critical toponymy

Critical toponymy marks a shift towards the 'political' in toponymic studies marking a departure from the traditional approaches to the study of place names. Traditional approaches have focused on the classification and description of place names "with only occasional probes of the connections to the encompassing totality of human phenomena" (Zelinsky 1997: 465), or focussed on the toponym-as-linguistic-object (Rose-Redwood et al. 2018), or treated 'place' in mechanistic terms as an unproblematic geographical notion (Rose-Redwood 2011). Critical toponymic scholarship has shifted the focus from the place name itself and concentrate on place naming as a political enterprise and the toponymic production of place (Rose-Redwood 2011; Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). Critical toponymy is a broad field of study that has several themes, such as the politics of place naming, commodification, banality and governmentality, scalar naming, linguistic hegemony, and toponymic resistance (Rose-Redwood and Alderman 2011). The analysis in the present study is guided by one major thematic focus of this scholarship: the politics of naming places.

Most critical toponymic studies have focused on the use of street naming as a form of toponymic commemoration (for example, Adebani 2012; Azaryahu and Kook 2002; Azaryahu 1996; Alderman 2000; Gill 2005; Light 2004; Light and Young 2014; Rose-Redwood 2008a, b; Rose-Redwood et al. 2018; Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002; Yeoh 1996). While political actors assign commemorative names to urban streets due to their defining characteristic as the most banal settings (Azaryahu 1996; Light and Young 2014), this article argues that all landscapes equally qualify as 'everyday landscapes' onto which political actors can imbue political ideologies, national identities, and visions of the past. The argument of the 'everydayness of street names' advanced by earlier critical toponymic scholarship lacks empirical evidence to support it because any other place name can have that quality depending on how people interact with it. Following Rose-Redwood (2016: 192) who avers that the so-called "critical turn" in place-name

studies “emphasises the contested processes through which places are brought into being by an assortment of naming practices”, this article adopts an inclusive approach to the commemorative potency of place names by focussing on place names that are not street names. The idea of an ‘assortment of naming practices’ points to the diversity of place names that go beyond street names.

There are three primary frameworks that have informed critical toponymic scholarship in examining the politics of place naming. With respect to the urban streetscape, the three frameworks have viewed it as a “city-text”, “cultural arena”, and “performative space” (Rose-Redwood et al. 2018). As indicated above, the current study looks at names of defence establishments and these are not street names. Out of the three frameworks, this study uses the notion ‘city-text’ in a modified form. This is a semiotic analysis that has been consistently offering new dimensions to the politics of place naming (Palonen 2008; Azaryahu 2011; Sakaja and Stanic´ 2011). However, this does not imply reducing the entire city to a simple and ordinary text (Azaryahu 1996). Instead, critical scholarship views a text as similar “to the rest of the world” (Massey 2005: 54). This is the only way of circumventing what Massey describes as “the longstanding tendency to tame the spatial into the textual” (Massey 2005: 54). Rose-Redwood et al. (2018) observe:

It is precisely this taming of space and place into “text” that critical toponymic scholarship has sought to call into question by de-naturalising the regimes of spatial inscription that make up the taken-for-granted spaces of everyday life.

This dimension of the cultural landscape as a ‘text’ is critical in the current study. Ordinary and mundane cultural landscapes have semiotic qualities because they can be read as texts. Most critical toponymic researches focus on street names in a single city where streets have an intertextual and relational existence. This led to the theoretical paradigm of ‘city-text’. Following Palonen (2008) and Šakaja and Stanic´ (2011) who used the notion of a ‘city-text’ in an expanded sense by adding other categories of place names to street toponymy, the present study extends the notion of a ‘city-text’ to the grand national stage because the names analysed in this study are not found in one city but in different urban areas throughout the country. All the renamed military establishments are

found in urban areas run by town councils, municipalities or city councils. Instead of the tradition in the critical toponymic scholarship of focusing on one city, this study explores place names in several urban areas throughout the country. Thus, instead of a ‘city-text’, the names in the current study form a ‘national-text’ that the Mnangagwa government uses to communicate its desired political ideology. Just like a ‘city-text’, the ‘national-text’ is also a “spatially configured register of historical figures and events” (Azaryahu 2009: 64). While each name represents a specific referent, there is a kinship of texts that form the ‘national-text’ because each of the commemorative names for the defence cantonments derives its meaning from its relation to other such names.

In the present study, the focus is not on individual names assigned to defence cantonments but on the process of naming such military establishments. It is this process that gave birth to a ‘national-text’. This article advances that power relations are inherent in the process of assigning names to the built environment. Official place naming is controlled by political elites who determine the nature of place names to form the official toponymy of the country. Thus, official place names serve the interests of the section of the society with more access to state power. Place naming is intricately connected to the political objectives of the ruling elites. Some of the proponents of this ‘critical turn’ in place-name studies, such as Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) call for researchers to direct their focus to the politics of place naming practices. It is their wish that future researchers should explore “the political economy of toponymic practices as a step toward expanding the conceptual horizon of critical place-naming studies” (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010: 454). The current study heeds that call by exploring names of military establishments dotted throughout Zimbabwe as top-down discourses that communicate the worldview of the political elites in Zimbabwe. The next section provides a background to the internal party politics in ZANU-PF.

### **An overview of the internal politics in ZANU-PF before the November 2017 political transition**

This section discusses the internal party politics in ZANU-PF that gave birth to the political transition in November 2017. Succession politics between rival

factions in ZANU-PF engendered the ‘graceless fall of Robert Mugabe’ (Nyarota 2018) as head of state and government in Zimbabwe. Mugabe’s continued stay in power when it was visible to all and sundry that he was physically and mentally incapacitated to continue at the helm of Zimbabwean politics led to factional politics that started way back in 2004. Nyarota (2018) views the death of Vice-President Vengesai Muzenda in 2003 as having sparked succession-related activities in ZANU-PF. The person who was to take over the vacant position left by the deceased Vice-President was likely to succeed Mugabe who was 79 years old then. Mugabe had not put in place any succession plan and this created anxiety and disunity among fellow party members. The battle to succeed Muzenda saw the creation of two rival camps in the party. One faction came up with what became known as the ‘Tsholotsho Declaration’, an agreement to back Emmerson Mnangagwa as the candidate to take over the vice-presidency. On the other hand, Solomon Mujuru, a former army general, used his influence within the party and in the military to assist his wife, Joice Mujuru, ascend to the vice-presidency. Despite securing support from six out of the ten provincial chairpersons ahead of an elective congress slated for December that year, Mnangagwa could not get the post. Mugabe blocked Mnangagwa’s ascension to the vice-presidency and, instead, appointed Joice Mujuru. Eventually, Mugabe took some punitive measures against the clique that participated in the ‘Tsholotsho Declaration’, including Mnangagwa himself. The provincial chairpersons of the six provinces were suspended from the party, Mnangagwa was demoted from the powerful post of Speaker of Parliament to Minister of Rural Amenities, while Jonathan Moyo, the man believed to have masterminded the plot, was expelled from the party in 2004.

Grace Mugabe began to exhibit political ambitions in 2014. Nyarota (2018) believes that Grace Mugabe feared the consequences of regime change given the fact that her husband was exhibiting signs of senility and his health was deteriorating. Nyarota (2018) attributes the creation of a faction within ZANU-PF that supported the ascension of Grace Mugabe to take over the presidency from her husband to the ultimate objective of protecting the First Family from the party’s old guard, such as Emmerson Mnangagwa and Joice Mujuru. Grace Mugabe solicited for support from Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere, Ignatius

Chombo, and Robert Mugabe’s nephew, Patrick Zhuwao. The early phases of this faction saw it assuming the moniker, ‘Orange Crush’, a local non-alcoholic beverage made from orange juice. Accordingly, during a rally in Bulawayo that Grace addressed in 2014, crowds waved the Orange Crush drink bottles while some wore T-shirts written ‘Feel Mazoe Crush’ (Ndlovu 2014. <https://nehandaradio.com/>). It is highly probable that the name was derived from the fact that Grace Mugabe had established her business empire in Mazowe, close to where the citrus plantations are found. Grace’s faction, which later assumed the name ‘Weevils’, devised a substitution by elimination strategy which targeted Joice Mujuru first before embarking on efforts to ground Mnangagwa. Grace Mugabe went on nationwide rallies that went by the name ‘Meet the People Tours’ where Joice Mujuru was the target of her diatribes. Joice Mujuru was accused of plotting to assassinate President Mugabe among a litany of accusations and allegations. Eventually, Joice Mujuru was expelled from ZANU-PF, together with her imagined allies, such as Didymus Mutasa, the Party Secretary for Administration, Nicholas Goche, the Labour Minister, Francis Nhema, the Indigenisation Minister, Olivia Muchena, the Higher and Tertiary Education minister, Webster Shamu, the Minister of Information Communication Technology and Political Commissar for ZANU-PF, and Simbanauta Mudarikwa, the Mashonaland East Provincial Affairs Minister.

Grace Mugabe was eventually appointed the head of the ZANU-PF Women’s League at the December 2014 congress. By virtue of that post, she became a member of the Politburo, the main decision-making body of ZANU-PF outside of Congress. On the other hand, the expulsion of Mujuru saw Mnangagwa being appointed in her place as the party’s Vice-President and Second Secretary. He subsequently became the state Vice-President. At this stage, all the energies of the Grace Mugabe’s faction were directed towards Emmerson Mnangagwa, who posed as the last hurdle for Grace to assume the reins of power in Zimbabwe. Grace Mugabe aligned faction assumed a new name, Generation 40 (*G40*), while the faction allegedly led by Mnangagwa was known as *Lacoste*. In discussing the two terms, Ndlovu (2018) advances that it was Jonathan Moyo who coined the term *G40* in 2011 and claimed to have used it in an academic sense to refer to the demographics of the country, whose majority



consists of young people under the age of forty. It is his further submission that the *Lacoste* faction was named after the French international fashion brand that uses a crocodile as its symbol and logo. The ‘Crocodile’ was also Mnangagwa’s nickname as a result of his wartime experience as a member of a group that came to be known as the ‘Crocodile Group’ which committed acts of sabotage to the Rhodesian government. With her privileged position as the head of the Women’s League, Grace Mugabe’s political ambitions secured the backing of Women’s League. The Youth League was also on her side as well with the leader, Kudzanai Chipanga, using every available opportunity to support Grace Mugabe through the declared principle; ‘*Munhu wese kuna Amai*’- ‘Every person should rally behind the Mother of the Nation.’ On Mnangagwa’s side were war veterans and the military. Constantino Chiwenga, the army general, was believed to be Mnangagwa’s ally (Rogers 2019).

Using the same script that she used on Joice Mujuru, Grace Mugabe embarked on nationwide rallies that went under the name ‘Presidential Youth Interface Rallies’ and seized every available opportunity to attack and demean Mnangagwa. Grace Mugabe’s allies, Kudzanai Chipanga, Jonathan Moyo, Mandiitawepi Chimene, and Sarah Mahoka, also attacked Mnangagwa whenever they got the chance to do so. Chimene, the then Manicaland Provincial Affairs minister, asked President Mugabe to fire Mnangagwa from both the party and government. She said:

[I]f you cannot [fire Mnangagwa now], then we propose that you call for an extraordinary congress so that we can deal with these rebels... Crocodiles must go back into the water. ZANU PF is not a dam and we do not need crocodiles among people because they may harm us (NewsDay 2016).

Jonathan Moyo could not be outdone. He took to Twitter attacking Mnangagwa by calling him an ‘ambitious lizard’ (Moyo 2016. <https://www.theindependent.co.zw>). Chiwenga, the alleged Mnangagwa ally had his share of Moyo’s vitriol attacks. In July 2017, Moyo claimed that Chiwenga fraudulently got a Ph.D. from a South African university. *G40* also cast war veterans as people who were no longer relevant to modern political realities. Kasukuwere once alluded to them as ‘drunks and lunatics.’ (Rogers

2019: 64). It is, therefore, highly probable that the *G40* faction had Mugabe’s blessings. Mugabe never called Grace and her faction to order. The communiqué allegedly authored by the Mutsvangwa-led war veterans group echoed these sentiments in which they claimed that Mugabe was the brains behind *G40* and the one fomenting disunity in ZANU-PF. They claimed that it had always been Mugabe’s strategy to create factions within the party in order to preserve his leadership position (Nyarota 2018).

Mugabe had enjoyed the support of the war veterans over the years. However, the year 2016 saw the severance of the ties between Mugabe and the veterans of the liberation struggle. Mugabe expelled Mutsvangwa and his close allies in the war veterans association from the party, ZANU-PF. Mandiitawepi Chimene assumed the leadership of a splinter group of war veterans aligned to *G40* and Mugabe. Mugabe immediately replaced the void left by the war veterans with the Youth League and the Women’s League. In retaliation, the Mutsvangwa-led faction of war veterans, in July 2016, announced that it would not be supporting Mugabe for re-election in 2018, and in November 2017 it officially removed Mugabe as its patron (Rogers 2019). At one point, the Mutsvangwa-led war veterans group made moves to remove Kasukuwere as the ZANU-PF National Commissar. The group got provinces to pass a vote of no confidence to remove him; Mugabe and Grace intervened to protect him at rallies (Rogers 2019). The ultimate objective was to weaken each group by targeting personalities that were viewed as pillars of each faction. On the *G40* side, Kasukuwere “brought rock-star charisma and a massive youth following” (Rogers 2019: 103). Mnangagwa, the alleged strongman for the *Lacoste* faction was reportedly poisoned on 12 August 2017 at a rally in Gwanda, Matabeleland South Province. This move could have been motivated by the same drive of targeting strongmen in the rival factions. The *Lacoste* group accused *G40* of poisoning Mnangagwa.

*G40* had planned to have Grace Mugabe elevated to the position of Vice-President at the December 2017 congress and eventually take over from Mugabe as the President of ZANU-PF. Ndlovu (2018) observes that ZANU-PF had had its last elective congress in 2014. In terms of its constitution, the next elective congress was supposed to be held in 2019. However, bringing forward the congress by two years exposed

machinations by the *G40* to outshine *Lacoste*. The political strife in ZANU-PF came to a head in November 2017 when *Lacoste* supporters booed Grace Mugabe during the Presidential Interface Youth Rally in Bulawayo. Mugabe was incensed by the booing of his wife and threatened to fire Mnangagwa the following day. True to his word, Mugabe sacked Mnangagwa on 06 November 2017 as his deputy in government. Mnangagwa was subsequently fired from the party, ZANU-PF, through a Politburo meeting that was held on 8 November 2017. He immediately went into exile fearing for his life. The party began a calculated process of purging Mnangagwa's perceived allies from the party. In another development, *G40*, together with Mugabe, plotted to have Chiwenga arrested by the police upon arrival at the Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare on 12 November 2017 from China. This plot was thwarted by the military which is reported to have disarmed the police intending to effect the arrest of the army general (Rogers 2019). The following day, 13 November 2017, Chiwenga, flanked by military generals, issued out a statement warning ZANU-PF to stop the purging of members with liberation war credentials in the party as this was a threat to national security. He made a threat that the military would not hesitate to step in to contain the situation. In response, Kudzanai Chipanga, on 14 November 2017, held a press conference where he scoffed at Chiwenga saying that he was expressing his mind not the views of the entire command element in the military. He ordered the army to stay out of politics and stay in the barracks. Later in the day, army tanks rolled onto the streets of Harare. The early morning of 15 November saw Major-General Sibuiso Moyo announcing on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television (ZBC tv) that the operation that the army was carrying was not a military takeover of government since they were only targeting 'criminal elements' around Mugabe. War veterans mobilised people across the political divide to flood the streets of Harare and Bulawayo on 18 November to demand the immediate resignation of Mugabe as state president.

On 19 November 2017, ZANU-PF's Central Committee met in Harare and recalled Mugabe as the party leader. Further, they gave Mugabe twenty-four hours to resign from the state presidency or face impeachment. The Central Committee meeting resolved to expel from the party, with immediate

effect, Grace Mugabe, and the *G40* kingpins, Jonathan Moyo, Savior Kasukuwere, Patrick Zhuwao, Ignatius Chombo, Walter Mzembe, Makosini Hlongwane, Kudzanai Chipanga, Samuel Undenge, and Sarah Mahoka. Mugabe tendered a resignation letter as the President of Zimbabwe before the commencement of impeachment proceedings on 20 November 2017. Mnangagwa returned from self-imposed exile and was inaugurated on 24 November 2017 as the President of Zimbabwe. This section has provided the background to the succession race and factional politics in ZANU-PF up to the time when Mnangagwa assumed the reins of political power in Zimbabwe. This background provides scaffolding information for the discussion of the renaming of military cantonments that started immediately after Mnangagwa assumed the state presidency. Nyarota (2018: 182) rightly notes: "In a symbolic move, the King George VI Barracks was then renamed Josiah Magama Tongogara Barracks on 6 December, in honour of the liberation war-icon." It is from this angle that this article views the renaming process as politically functional to the Mnangagwa regime. It was not a politically innocent process, but a politically charged process. The next section presents the names used in the renaming exercise.

### The renaming of military cantonments in Zimbabwe

Upon assuming office, the Mnangagwa regime immediately embarked on a nationwide process of renaming military cantonments. The first military establishment to be renamed was the King George, the Sixth (better known as the KG1V) which was officially renamed Josiah Magama Tongogara during a ceremony that Mnangagwa himself officiated on the 6th of December 2017. The National Defence University was officially renamed in honour of the late national hero, Rodgers Alfred Nikita Mangena on 13 April 2018 while the official renaming of the Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade to Wiltshire Pfumaindini Chitepo was done on 19 May 2018 (The Zimbabwe National Army Magazine, Second Quarter Edition 2018). According to the Zimbabwe Defence Forces spokesperson Colonel Overson Mugwisi:

[t]he name changing is an ongoing exercise in line with our legacy of the national liberation. In

the renaming process, they are going to adopt names of our liberation luminaries, the likes of the late Cdes Josiah Magama Tongogara, Nikita Mangena and many others. In remembrance of the great work they did, it was agreed that the Barracks be named after them. (Rupapa *The Herald*, 06 December 2017).

Following this naming framework, the renaming exercise largely celebrated the Second Chimurenga heroes with Kaguvi and Mzilikazi representing historical figures in the history of Zimbabwe. I have added a third column to the information found in the *Zimbabwe Defence Forces Magazine*, Third Edition (2017) to indicate the city/place where each of the renamed military establishment is found. These military establishments are found in different parts of the country. A full list of renamed military cantonments is given below (Table 1).

The corpus of the names used in the renaming exercise had not been used in the toponymic commemoration efforts that the Mugabe government instituted in its bid to narrate and invent the nation in the early post-independence era. Given that collective memory is a process of inclusion and exclusion, the Mugabe administration had sidelined most heroes of the liberation struggle in the process of renaming places that bore colonial names. The entire ‘national-text’ that the Mnangagwa regime created serve varied political purposes. The next sections discuss the different political aims and agendas that the text served.

### Countering the *G40* narrative

This article treats the renaming of defence cantonments as aimed at giving a counter-narrative to the one popularised by the *G40* faction. The *G40* narrative wanted to annul the declared principle in ZANU-PF which was also supported by the military and war veterans that no person without liberation struggle credentials could assume the presidency of the country. This principle was aptly summarised by the military leadership through the words of General Vitalis ‘Musungwa Gava’ Zvinavashe who on the eve of the 2002 Presidential election said:

[a]ny change designed to reverse the gains of this revolution will not be supported ... Let it be

known that the highest office in the land is a straight jacket whose occupant is expected to observe the objectives of the liberation struggle. We will, therefore, not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone with a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty, our country and our people (Chidza, *The Standard*, 06 September 2015).

Given that Grace, the candidate that the *G40* was allegedly backing to take over from Mugabe, did not have liberation war credentials, *G40* desperately wanted to declare as invalid and inapplicable the policy that had been part of ZANU-PF’s political culture since independence in order to create a clear sailing path for Grace’s ascension to the presidency. Justifying political office based on participation in the war was no longer critical in ZANU-PF according to the *G40* scheme of things. Thus, the faction peripherises the importance of the liberation war, and all the veterans of the liberation war, who symbolised this historical period. The army was not spared as targets of *G40* attacks because they had acted as kingmakers for Mugabe, over the years, using the principle mentioned above.

Since *G40*, largely, consisted of young Turks in ZANU-PF who had no relationship with the liberation war, their main focus was to decentre the old traditions of the party and invent a new tradition that did not start and end with the liberation struggle. In order to achieve this, the *G40* clique mounted spirited efforts to discredit and denigrated war veterans and the military who were the purveyors of that principle. For illustrative purposes, I provide here some few examples of instances where members of *G40* verbally attacked war veterans and the military. At one point, Grace attacked war veterans accusing them of being entitled and arrogant, yet no one forced to go to war (Rogers 2019). It is also reported that Kudzanai Chipanga mobilised the ZANU-PF youths to violently confront members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans’ Association (ZNLWVA) for allegedly speaking against *G40* on the succession issue. In his mobilisation speech to the ZANU-PF youths, Chipanga described war veterans as “sickening rabble-rousers” who cannot stand any chance against the youths (Herald Reporter, *The Herald*, 18 February 2016). Jonathan Moyo had open verbal fights with Mutsvangwa, leader of the War Veterans Association,



**Table 1** List of names of defence establishments which were renamed. *Source: Zimbabwe Defence Forces Magazine, Third Edition (2017: 13)*

Old name	New name	City/place
All Arms Battle School	Rekayi Tangwena Barracks	Nyanga
Brady Barracks	Mzilikazi Barracks	Bulawayo
Cranborne (Commando Barracks)	Charles Gumbo Barracks	Harare
Flyde Air Force Base	Jaison Ziyaphapha Moyo	Chegutu
Gutu Barracks (4.2 Infantry Battalion)	Chinomukutu Barracks	Gutu
Headquarters 2 Infantry Brigade	Kaguvi Barracks	Harare
Headquarters 3 Infantry Brigade	Herbert Chitepo Barracks	Mutare
Headquarters 4 Infantry Brigade	Gava Musungwa Zvinavashe Barracks	Masvingo
Inkomo Camp	Inkomo Barracks	Nyabira
Inkomo Camp (Mounted Regiment)	Amoth Nobert Chingombe Barracks	Nyabira
Kabrit Barracks	Flint Magama Barracks	Harare
Karuyana Barracks (2.1 Infantry Battalion)	Chitekedza Barracks	Mt. Darwin
KGVI Barracks	Josiah Magama Tongogara	Harare
Llewellyn Barracks (HQ Bulawayo District)	Lookout Masuku Barracks	Bulawayo
National Defence University	Alfred Nikita Mangena Barracks	Harare
Umtali Cantonment	Charles Dauramanzi Barracks	Mutare
Stamford Dzivarasekwa Barracks (2 Presidential Guards Battalion)	Dzivarasekwa Barracks	Harare
Zimbabwe Military Academy	Solomon Tapfumaneyi Mujuru Barracks	Gweru
3.3 Infantry Battalion	William Ndangana Barracks	Chipinge
4.1 Infantry Battalion (4.1 Combat Group Cantonment Area)	Masvingo Barracks	Masvingo

and the military command in the mainstream media and on social media. At one point, he accused the military commanders of interfering with the governance of the state. He took to Twitter posting his invectives at Chiwenga's remarks during an interview with the state media where the army general stated that as the army, they were the 'stockholders of the country because they came with it (Zimbabwe).' In clear reference to Chiwenga's statement, Moyo posted on Twitter: "To the extent that stockholders are stakeholders, the people are the only stockholders in and of Zimbabwe in terms of the Constitution." All this was meant to decentre war veterans from the political centre of ZANU-PF, and by extension, national governance.

The internal politics in ZANU-PF made war veterans and the military natural alliance partners. Ndlovu (2018: 109) commenting on the relationship between the military, war veterans and Mnangagwa said: "There is an unwritten principle that permeates the military in Zimbabwe that: Once a soldier, always

a soldier." Given this scenario, it is not easy to draw a fine line between the military and war veterans in the face of factional fights in ZANU-PF. The command element in the military is, generally, dominated by veterans of the liberation struggle. Thus, they have common interests with former liberation war fighters who have left the military. During the ORL, Chris Mutsvangwa, leader of one splinter group of war veterans and a chief choreographer of Mugabe's unceremonious departure from office, went on a diplomatic offensive to paint the military intervention as a democratic process which was nowhere nearer a coup (Rogers 2019). In order to put a democratic veneer to the entire process, war veterans also mobilised the general public to participate in the march, which was done on 18 November 2017, that was meant to pile pressure on Mugabe to leave office. The military occupied strategic positions in Harare and their tanks rolled on the streets of Harare, put Mugabe under house arrest, attacked perceived *G40* kingpins' place of residents, besieged police camps,

and took over police duties. It was alleged that Chihuri had promised to protect Mugabe using the Police Support Unit (Rogers 2019).

Given the above background, the selection of defence cantonments as targets for the renaming exercise by the Mnangagwa-led government was consistent with the overall agenda of ORL- to restore the legacy and ethos of the liberation struggle. The renaming exercise emphasised the primacy of the liberation war to the post-colonial Zimbabwean nation. The nation's present is inalienably linked to the liberation war history. Unlike the *G40* narrative which was aimed at decentering the liberation war legacy, the renaming exercise sought to write back the liberation war into the national metanarrative. Chiwenga, as the head of the military, echoed these sentiments in the statement he gave on 13 November 2017. He categorically stated:

[w]e want to state here and now that the history of our revolution cannot be rewritten by those who have not been part of it... we remain committed to protecting our legacy and those bent on high-jacking the revolution will not be allowed to do so (<https://nehandaradio.com/2017/11/16/>).

The implied people are members of the *G40* faction. The above words spelt out the agenda of the ORL.

### Declaration of political power

The Mnangagwa administration used the renaming of military cantonments to declare political power. Place names are politically charged discourses that political regimes use to herald their presence on the political scene. New regimes usually create a new set of symbols that communicate their political orientation and worldview, such as flags, coat of arms, national anthems, national colours, and place names. The usual place renaming efforts that punctuate political transitions has led Azaryahu (1997: 479) to characterise place renaming motivated by changes in the political organisation of the state as a 'ritual of revolution':

Politically motivated renaming of streets is a common feature of periods of revolutionary changes. As a ritual of revolution, the 'renaming of the past' is a demonstrative act of substantial

symbolic value and political resonance. Introducing the political ideological shift into ostensibly mundane and even intimate levels of human activities and settings.

Place names are symbolic discourses that political regimes use to solidifying power. New political regimes usually embark on extensive place renaming exercises in order to declare their newly acquired political power and dismantle, from the cultural landscape, any relics of the deposed regimes. In acknowledging this salient feature of place renaming, Azaryahu (1990: 34) notes that place renaming has a proclamatory function in the sense that:

It serves as a political declaration in its right, displaying and asserting the fact that political changes have occurred and that the ownership of the official culture and the media for its presentation has indeed changed hands.

Colonial settlers erased the aboriginal toponymic order the world over by imposing a new set of place names that commemorated their historical figures and places in their mother-countries. Colonial processes of naming landscapes in colonies were instances of place renaming because the imposed colonial names erased names that the indigenes had given to the places. The place naming processes were deliberate acts of declaring total political control over the colonies. Post-colonial states usually institute a decolonisation process which encompasses erasing colonial names from the cultural landscape. In the case of the Mnangagwa regime, the toponymic order that the Mugabe regime created was not affected. They continued with the process of decolonising the cultural landscape, targeting colonial names for defence cantonments that the Mugabe regime did not change. It is critical to mention that the Mnangagwa continued with the efforts of declaring political power on the landscape. Suffice to say Mnangagwa, through the Cabinet Committee of Place Names, dismantled colonial identities for streets, government composite office complexes and office blocks, and referral hospitals in November 2019. Subsequently, the government published the name changes in respect of buildings in the Names (Alteration) (Amendment of Schedule) Notice, 2020 as Statutory Instrument 50 of 2020 in February 2020. The decolonisation process saw the name of the incumbent President, Emmerson

Dambudzo Mnangagwa being assigned to ten thoroughfares in different big cities and towns throughout the country (Ndebele, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa>). Foreign political figures that assisted the nationalist movement during the war of liberation were also immortalised in the process, such as the Soviet Union leader, Leonid Brezhnev, China's Chairman Mao Tsê -Tung, and former Cuban leader, Fidel Castrol. The renaming process was as inclusive as far as possible. An examination of the phases of place renaming as decolonisation efforts in the post-independence era provides information about the two political regimes that have ruled Zimbabwe up to this day. Mugabe's government targeted colonial names in the CBD of urban areas through honouring fallen heroes of the liberation war, African leaders of Frontline States who assisted the Zimbabwean revolutionary movement and had himself as the only living hero of the Second Chimurenga. The Mnangagwa administration has paid attention to military establishments in order to show a paradigm shift in terms of the definition of the past in Zimbabwe.

### Legitimizing the new socio-political order

The mission of painting itself as a legitimate political outfit was a daunting task for the Mnangagwa government. They desperately turned to their participation in the liberation war in order to justify their occupancy of political offices. The new government wanted to project the liberation war identity of its leadership in order to justify the status quo. It is undeniable that the top brass of the Mnangagwa government actively participated in the liberation war. The Mnangagwa administration which emerged as the 'winning team' in the succession race wanted to be viewed as the rightful candidates for assuming the leadership of the country because they have liberation war credentials, a quality that the *G40* members did not have. Mukudzei Mukombe (Jah Prayzah)'s song '*Kutonga kwaro gamba*' (The reign of a hero) became the new government's 'theme song' performing the role of a corporate body's payoff line because it was played at all ZANU-PF and government political gatherings.

Research on collective memory has shown that commemorative place naming is a political act since the place names used in the process are imputed with

political meanings and ideological messages which are critical for upholding the legitimacy of the political status quo (Alderman 1996; Dwyer and Alderman 2008; Azaryahu 1990, 1996). What Azaryahu (1992: 351) notes about a 'city-text' that it is a cultural construct which renders a particular social and moral order meaningful by representing the underlying "theory of the world" that endorses and authorises it equally applies to the 'national-text' that the Mnangagwa regime created in Zimbabwe. Accordingly, the use of names of liberation war heroes as sites of war memory was deliberate because it was meant to naturalise Mnangagwa's rule. Usually, the structure of the narrative projected in collective memory presents the present political status quo "as the only possible, and hence inevitable outcome of the 'objective' course of history" (Azaryahu 1996: 319). In the case of the ZANU-PF political culture, for one to assume the state presidency and any other higher political office they should have participated in the liberation war. This constitutes the sequential and causal chains that naturally lead to the present. The names that the Mnangagwa regime used to rename the military cantonments presented a form of selective remembering of the liberation war history that was purposefully chosen to justify the political status quo. Azaryahu (1996: 321) treats commemorative place names as significant mechanisms for the legitimization of the socio-political order because they:

[p]rovide a distinguished example of the intersection of hegemonic ideological structures with the spatial practices of everyday life. Their apparent dailiness and apparent insignificance as well as their recurrent and unreflected use in various contexts, both ordinary and extraordinary, renders the past they represent tangible and intimately familiar... Their power lies in their ability to make a version of history an inseparable element of reality as it is constantly constructed, experienced, and perceived on a daily basis.

Whenever people discuss issues to do with defence cantonments, they are bound to mention the names of the heroes who are commemorated there. In that case, the political ideology they represent is infused with the daily human practices and this serves to naturalise Mnangagwa's rule. Above all, the names of the defence cantonments are highly visible because they



**Fig. 1** The Josiah Magama Tongogara Barracks in Harare. *Source:* Mpofu, <https://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw> (6 December 2017)



**Fig. 2** The Herbert Chitepo Barracks in Mutare. *Source:* <https://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk> (May 19, 2018)

appear in very large fonts right at the entrances of the renamed military establishments for all and sundry to see (see pictures below). Gorter (2006: 85) who has studied the linguistic landscape noted that when people come across language in the public sphere as part of the scenery of the landscape, public signs would be “‘shouting’ or ‘screaming’ for attention” (Gorter 2006: 85). This demonstrates the power of

public signs in communicating with the public (Figs. 1 and 2).

The high visibility of these names was critical in creating a link between the past and the present. Alderman (2002: 99)’s observation on commemorative street names is that they help in weaving the past into the ‘geographic fabric of everyday lives’ is instructive in the analysis of names of defence



cantonments in this article. The past becomes ingrained into the everyday lives of Zimbabweans because people interact with the renamed places frequently. The general public places much value on what comes to them in visual form. Public signs become conduits for communicating an uncontested and objective truth. Knowing such potency of public signs, the Mnangagwa administration went beyond the usual practice of unveiling a plaque bearing the new names for places to put the public signs bearing the new names right at the entrances of the military establishments.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the holders of political power have the privilege of constituting a ‘national-text’ by selecting from the past aspects that can serve their present political interests. Political regimes exercise authority over national symbols because they have the privilege of determining the composition of public memory at any given time. The ‘national-text’ is authorised by the political elites. Usually, the trend is to select aspects of a nation’s past that can serve present political aims. It has been demonstrated that the renaming of military establishments was done in order to serve the varied political interests of the Mnangagwa regime. The renaming process saw a part of the liberation war past being recalled, manipulated, and exploited to serve present political aims and agendas. This makes public memory an aspect of ‘selective remembering.’ The past that was reified through the renaming process of military establishments served three political purposes: countering the *G40*’s narrative, declaration of political power, and naturalisation of the new political order. It should be emphasised that the selection of defence cantonments for the renaming exercise by the Mnangagwa government was purposively done. Several other components of the built environments still bear colonial names. Streets in former European urban areas, schools in the same areas, the residential areas themselves have retained colonial names. If there was a political will to decolonise the landscape, the renaming process should have targeted all places with colonial names. While this article appreciates that political regimes recall a nation’s past to construct an identity for the nation, this nationalist project, if not

handled properly or if it is overdone or abused, can end up becoming cheap political propaganda.

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