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# Naming the colonized and vanquished: archiving the successes of the imperial enterprise

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## ABSTRACT

European colonialism was a well-thought-out enterprise aimed at exploiting the natural resources of the colonized. As this paper notes, it was also meant to exploit the human capital—the colonized themselves as a source of cheap and readily available labor. The paper further argues that to successfully exploit the colonized, they expropriated land and other resources under the guise and myth of the *terra nullius*. They also renamed the appropriated spaces and the colonized people themselves. Such naming, the paper posits, was meant not just for easy referencing but also as memories of home for the new settlers. It was also a seal and stamp of archived material, for through naming they were indicating their presence, indicating that they came, conquered and named. It is on the basis of renaming, the paper argues, that while in theory, they have left, from a records and archives perspective, these people's presence is still very much alive and kicking because of the names they gave that most Black Zimbabweans still carry and take pride in. The paper laments that even some of the loudest exponents of what it means to decolonize, carry these colonial labels. What the paper concludes is that the names that the formerly colonized carry, and those given by colonialists in some of their places speak to the success of the colonial enterprise, at least as far as onomastics are concerned because, through them, archives of colonial memories are kept and sustained.

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When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible – Jomo Kenyatta (Kamau wa Ngengi)

## Introduction

Colonialism is by and large the violent and hostile takeover of other people's land and registering it in the name of the conqueror. It is also characterized by a less violent but enduring form of viciousness which is naming, of both people and places as the case of Zimbabwe, among other African countries bears testimony. Colonial naming patterns were and continue to be largely through anthroponyms and toponyms. Most toponyms in Zimbabwe were apportioned in memory of home and as celebrations of conquest while personal names were as a result of the colonialists, including missionaries, especially Anglicans and Catholics giving names of their saints on the perceived pagans especially those who had converted to Christianity. In an ironic twist, even one of the heroes of Zimbabwe's early resistance to colonial rule, Kaguvi was christened Dismas. The other naming came from employers who felt that their employees had names that were difficult to call and they ended up renaming them and giving them ridiculous names like Sixpence. Such names were for the convenience of the employer but were a mark of shame on the now-renamed because the anthroponym carried no history associated with the employee

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other than that of servitude and forced labor known as *chibharo* because to the colonized, and being forced to work was like being raped.

The fact that the colonialists named the defeated and humiliated was itself a flexing of the imperialist muscle. It was and remains a statement of haughtiness and relegating others to a second-class tier on their land. This snootiness was also realized not just in the way they named but also in how they mispronounced the names, both toponymic and anthroponyms of the Indigenous and vanquished, like for instance anglicizing names of Indigenous persons and places. They also in some cases ngunized the names of some Shona people and the real meanings and significance carried in the cognomens were lost. It is in this context of outsider-imposed names (exonyms) that the paper argues that the insults have persisted even long after the demise of political colonialism. The common tragedy is now that the formerly colonized shun their autonoms and persistently produce and reproduce those of the colonizer to the extent of even coming up with blended ones of their own that combine parents' first names. They also translate Indigenous names into anglicized versions and the results are equally insulting because while these names may carry the parents' expressions, they become a burden of shame on their children as they grow older. What is however significant that chimes loudly in the names discussed here is that a place name or that of a person is an aide-mémoire of times gone by and it is largely ineradicably stamped on the location or individual. To therefore probe such a toponym or anthroponym is to rekindle recollections of the history that shaped, fashioned and produced it. In this regard, to deliberate or discourse and write about the name is to restate some of that history, and promote the development of mental images that make the memories clearer and probably more painful or sweet depending on what the appellation triggers in one's reminiscence recesses. And critical to note in all this is the reality that names are part of a people's living heritage. They are part of a continuum and chain that connects not just people, but history and place. They also link the living and the dead. Names as well are bridges that relay information between parties, those in agreement and those in conflict. They are a significant lubricant in life's wheels. For one to therefore replace or distort them is not only to break long-established chains but to also participate in a deliberate and well-calculated identicide.

## Defining colonialism and imperialism

Colonialism can be characterized as a military, political and economic situation where a given imperial power extends its control and authority over another people or area. In practical terms, colonialism is not just when one country brutally conquers and exerts control over another one; it is also a situation where it claims not just the land as its own but also its other resources in the process of dispossessing the original owners (Murrey, 2020). It does this by sending some of its people and others interested from other nationalities and races to settle, live, and invest in the land that has been taken away from the original owners. Arneil (2023) amplifies this perception of colonialism by stating that the word has its origins in Latin's *colonia* and speaks to, 'an internalized, penetrative, and productive form of power that seeks to segregate and "improve" "backward" people(s) from within and "improve" "waste" lands, overseen by colonial authorities living among and/or in close proximity to the colonized' ... (p. 3). Colonialism is however incomplete without a supporting arm. This comes in the form of what is called imperialism.

In Arneil's (2023, p. 3) view, imperialism is, 'rooted in *imperare*, animated by a sovereign form of power that seeks to dominate "naturally inferior" subjects and vast territories from above and afar, justified—at least initially—through war and conquest'. From this insight, imperialism can thus be defined as a bundle of policies and practices that the settler colonialists, assisted by their army, police and religious organizations like churches deploy to extend the power and control of the colonizing nation or imperial power (Porter, 1994). This is in most cases over the political, economic, and socio-cultural life of the colonized, and now dispossessed, although there may be cases of also policing settlers who may be considered dissident (Porter, 1994). Part of the sociocultural life is subtly driven through education and religion and it is through this that the traumatic experience that is colonialism is sustained and entrenched. It is through education and religion that some names of people and places are also changed.

What is also clear here is that imperialism and colonialism are interwoven. It is not possible to talk of one without referring to the other. Because of this entwined nature that exists between the two, imperialism can best be described as the ideology or philosophy that propels and gives impetus to colonial

enterprises (Said, 1994). This colonial enterprise then leads to settler colonialism, which is an enduring structure of power and hegemony that is geared to sustain and perpetuate the extermination and subjugation of Indigenous communities and cultures (Cox, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). Since it is practically hegemonic, settler colonialism is characterized by continuous settler occupation and the exploitation of the lands and other resources that Indigenous people have been attached to since time immemorial. In addition, the Indigenous dispossessed are relocated and only expected on their former lands as workers, a process that in Marxism is viewed as the proletarianization of the colonized (Lorenzo, 2011). Settler colonialism also consists of meshing various forms of oppression comprising racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism (Cox, 2017). It is also anchored by the settlers' deep and myopic Eurocentrism that assumes that European values concerning ethnic, and therefore moral, superiority are inevitable and natural. All this coalesces around the myth of empty lands which has cultivated the notion that Indigenous communities have no sense of ownership over land and thus deserve to be dispossessed of it (Cox, 2017). This has also led to the imposition of European cultures and traditions on the colonized, and among these are the naming patterns, that are among others sustained through Western Christianity and cultural goods like education and entertainment products like films and music. This ensures the erasure of Indigenous communities through identicide, and in the earlier days of colonialism, even genocide as happened in German West Africa (Olusoga & Erichsen, 2010).

From the above, it is therefore not an accident that the terms *colonialism* and *imperialism* are often used interchangeably. This is so because although they are not the same thing, they are twin cogs that drive external forces and powers' desire to control, own and plunder the resources of other nations, including their human capital, through even terror and extermination of most of the captive nations. Plunder and extermination are also realized through the names that most of the formerly colonized bear.

### **Aim of the study and research questions**

The research aimed to highlight the fact that colonialism's primary goal was to show effective occupation, not just through military means but also through, the giving of so-called Christian (theophoric) names, dispossession and renaming places as well as name distortion to suit colonial needs.

The research questions were therefore to answer the following:

1. In what ways do colonially named places and people carrying Western-generated and inspired designations sustain colonialism effectively in former colonies?
2. How does the Christian faith become one of the major sustainers of the colonial archival system that is perpetuated through naming?

### **Research methods**

This study is based on the desk research approach, a basic way of collecting data from descriptions of primary sources (Bassot, 2022). It is, therefore, a way of 'accessing published secondary data' (Jackson, 1994, p. 21) for purposes of comparison and also understanding primary data that a researcher would have collected. There were also informal interviews with residents of certain places in Zimbabwe, as well as bearers of certain names as primary sources of information. A desk research technique is deployed to explore data that can be accessed from existing documents such as published books and academic papers (Bassot, 2022). It can also be from people's diaries. What is critical about this method is that it has a starting point which is previous research. Desk research can provide solid arguments and help the researchers to elaborate and adumbrate a line of thought or vigorously defend ideas that one has. In the case of this paper, the researchers depended on websites and already published papers whose main focus is on anthroponyms and toponyms, especially those that originated in the colonial milieu. There was also the reading of baptismal records as well as birth and death records that the researchers had access to. As already intimated, they also relied on informal interviews for data. Informal interviews were deployed since this is an explanatory research that seeks explanations of observed phenomena that in this case are the naming practices of most Zimbabweans. From a source-critical perspective, this approach

allows for the ease of data collection in a more naturalistic setting when compared to a structured interview (Swain & King, 2022). In fact, 'informal conversations as opportunities to add "context" and "authenticity" to data' are critical in research (Swain & Spire, 2020, p. np). The combination of the two yielded results that are quite interesting as far as they relate to the topic under study.

## Theoretical framework

This paper is informed by critical heritage theory. The writers deployed critical heritage studies (CHS) for this paper since this theory goes beyond the traditional focus of heritage studies whose focus is on 'technical issues of management and practice, to one emphasising cultural heritage as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon' (Gentry & Smith, 2019, p. 1149). This theory, among others, is critical when it comes to the study of names since the act of naming is part of political, cultural and social practices. This theory thus becomes important to a postcolonial state like Zimbabwe. This is because it reconceptualizes heritage by focusing on both the tangible and intangible forms of legacy and how these interwoven forms relate to themes such as power relations, where patrimony is viewed as a contested turf of power and discourse.

The theory in addition engages with other areas of critical enquiry that include but are not limited to memory studies and sense of place, creative tourism, feminist theory, material culture studies as well as cultural geography (Nilson & Thorell, 2018; Novoa, 2022; Viejo-Rose, 2015). It also deals with aspects that may seem ephemeral like dance which under it are considered essential archival material (Nilson & Thorell, 2018). In the context of this paper, it can therefore be noted as already observed in the foregoing paragraph, that the study of toponyms and anthroponyms is intricately linked to power relations as much as it is to memory and cultural geography. Names are thus, about how those with power use their influence to name, not just people but also places. In addition to that, names are also about identity and cultural behaviors as in the case of the Enkeldoorn saga that is discussed in this paper. Through them, people celebrate and entrench memories of past experiences and therefore, to name at times is to unearth history and unveil it again. It is some type of verbal archaeology where histories of the past are made clearer and brought into the open.

## Names of spaces and people

As noted in the theoretical framework, the naming act is about hegemony. This does not matter whether it is an autonym or an exonym. It is a sign of control and ownership. So, when colonialism became the main driver of imperial expansion among Europeans, it was an act of control and the spread of hegemony. The result is that most of the formerly non-European world ended curved up among the Caucasian imperial powers notably France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain and to some extent Italy. When these countries colonized other spaces, they recreated boundaries in some cases and also renamed either after personalities or after the home country. For instance, there was Portuguese East Africa (today's Mozambique) and German West Africa (now Namibia). The country that is Zimbabwe today was named Rhodesia as an honor to the chief funder and imperial dreamer Cecil John Rhodes who founded and underwrote the British South Africa Company (BSAC). He also hired some conquistadors who were to undertake the adventure and thus named themselves the Pioneer Column. That they would call themselves pioneers in a land that had already been occupied speaks to the issue of how they perceived the Indigenous occupancy, as an act by non-people. They saw themselves as undertaking pioneering work and venturing into unknown and unexplored lands, a myth that was to persistently run through the Rhodesian narrative such that even Ian Smith, former and last Rhodesian Prime Minister also repeated it (Smith, 1997). While some countries were named after geographical features (e.g., Congo) and because of geographical locations (e.g., South Africa), there are spaces in those countries that became memory sites that celebrated conquest and appropriation as well as the metropolis (Boehmer, 2005). It is thus clear that the names were deployed as markers of ownership just in the manner that dogs and wolves mark their territories by urinating around given spaces (Pal, 2003).

## ***Naming colonial spaces***

When the colonialists decided to settle, they had memories of home. They also had memories of the places they had traversed and battles they had endured on their lives' journeys. It is these experiences that they used to name the places that they occupied or were later to expropriate. The result, in the case of former British colonies, is the spread of names that celebrate the metropolis (home country) or other colonies where the British had a presence. There were times when they tried to retain place-names as the Indigenous had labelled them but these renames were a complete distortion of the histories of the toponyms such that the memories that they carried got lost. Beck (2021, p. 5) notes that:

Indigenous, European, and settler communities each bestowed names upon places near and far whose meanings describe the place, its resources, or one's experiences there. Names define the people who occupy a place.

While these words attempt to give the impression that all parties were named, the reality is that more naming and renaming were done by the colonialists. They named more spaces and, in the process, obliterated and erased local area histories in the name of conquest and implementing a civilizing mission. The reality is that this was a mission of dispossession and othering of the colonized. Tragically, the colonialists renamed and/or distorted local names with impunity.

The first case of renaming was that of the country. While the current state is a creation of the Berlin Conference (November 1884–February 1885), its very establishment was to the whims of those who were reconfiguring the boundaries of the kingdoms and political principalities that were already in existence in Africa. They created an amalgamation of disparity nationalities and formed a country that they called Rhodesia. They even lied to the world that they had brought peace to an area that had been ravaged by inter-tribal wars. This is far from the truth because, after the arrival of the Whites on what they chose to call Mashonaland, hostilities between the Ndebele and the Shona had almost petered out. Lobengula is said to have feared a potential backlash of Shona counter-raids into his kingdom as was already being done by Chirimuhanzu's son Chizema (Beach, 1980, 1986; Mazarire, 2009). While it is a historical fact that the Ndebele raided the Shona, most historians, for their interests choose to ignore the fact that the Shona also raided one another (Mugugu, 1968; Schmidt, 1992). What should be of significance is that besides naming the area they had carved for themselves; the colonialists went on to rename the areas of the now defeated Indigenous people as Matabeleland and Mashonaland. It is out of these two administrative regions created by the colonialists that Zimbabwe gets names for her regions and these designations persist to this day.

The colonialists as the usurpers of political and economic power in what they called Rhodesia and later Southern Rhodesia initially divided the country into supposedly administrative provinces. These were Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Later the colony was divided into five provinces namely Manicaland, Matabeleland, Midlands, Mashonaland and Victoria. Over time the Rhodesian government extended the number of provinces to seven and these were Manicaland, Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Mashonaland North, Mashonaland South, Midlands, and Victoria. After Zimbabwe attained independence, Mashonaland North and South were restructured to become the three provinces of Mashonaland Central, East and West. This brought the number of provinces to eight. The last restructuring was in 1997 when the metropolitan provinces of Bulawayo and Harare were created.

What is important about the discussion of the names of the provinces in both colonial periods and today after independence is that these administrative regions have by and large retained the names given by the colonizing forces (Zindoga, 2013). This means that they remain as living archives of colonial hegemony in that they sustain the idea of colonial spaces as both cultural and political places of the exercise of power. In the case of Zimbabwe, the colonialists had the power not just to name but to also divide people along ethnic lines that in reality also denied the existence of other nationalities like the Kalanga, Tonga and Nambya that were all bunched under the Ndebele. In what was called Mashonaland, the Barwe, Hwesa and others also disappeared and were branded Manyika when they were not. The same power to name has in this day and age also had the effect of entrenching the power-play between perceived tribal affiliations as people jostle for political power. This is the result of being informed by regional names that were fabricated and fashioned by the colonial rulers. Resultantly, what Zimbabwe



experiences is sustained regionalism and tribalism that has taken the country back in terms of socioeconomic development. These very names have ensured that the late national hero Herbert Chitepo's dream of the death of a tribal man died and was interred with him (Chitepo, 1970).

### **Naming cities and towns**

While some of the names that the colonialists gave to celebrate memories of home or the immediate environment are not Indigenous, they are worth unravelling because they serve as archival material that at the time aided the interests of those who named since they had the power, and they still exist in library archives as well as online. It is in light of this that this section discusses some of these that are Enkeldoorn (Chivhu), Essexvale (Esigodini), Fort Victoria (Masvingo), Hartley (Chegutu), Melsetter (Chimanimani) and Salisbury (Harare).

Enkeldoorn (Chivhu today) is the name of a town that was in a farming area that was largely dominated by Afrikaners most of whom had rebelled against Thomas Moodie's leadership on the trek from the then Orange Free State to what was to be Melsetter (today's Chimanimani). The name Enkeldoorn itself is an Afrikaans word which means 'lone thorn' and refers to the tree *acacia robusta*. It implies that a single specimen once grew there. There were attempts in 1935 by the Enkeldoorn Town Management Board in Southern Rhodesia to change the town's name to Charter but this fell flat because of strong Afrikaner resistance (Bishi et al., 2022). The failure of the largely British and thus English-speaking colonialists of Rhodesia to impose the name Charter may be explained by the fact that there was an effort to minimize conflicts between Whites. It is also possible that the echo of the Anglo-Boer War kept ringing in the minds of the largely British Rhodesians. What is however important to note is that Enkeldoorn was largely settled by Afrikaners, although there were a few English settler-colonists who had also come from South Africa among its early inhabitants.

What also makes the toponym Enkeldoorn an important archival name is that it speaks to the cultural practices of the Afrikaners. While for the British naming was equated to memories of home, for the Afrikaners, naming places was dictated to by the fact that Dutch/Afrikaans naming systems are influenced by the local environment, especially the fauna and flora. In light of this, Jenkins (1997, p. 16) notes:

Afrikaans nomenclature is also more like Zulu than English in being more descriptive of the landscape, such as Kloof, Kranskop, and Boomlaer. English speakers were very fond of repeating place names from Britain. Sometimes this would be prompted by a perceived similarity, at other times by nostalgia, less charitably, one might ascribe this practice to arrogance or lack of imagination.

Although Jenkins is looking at the Afrikaners and the Zulu as people informed by their bio-physical environment, it is clear that such a naming pattern appears to be also common among the Indigenous Zimbabwean communities. From Jenkins' words, it is clear that the name Enkeldoorn is a celebration of the local flora.

One other interesting name is Essexvale which is today known as Esigodini. Worth pointing out is that the old name, Essexvale is not a corruption of Esigodini, the current Indigenous toponym. It is a portmanteau of two nouns, *Essex* and *vale*. The name Essex has its origins in the Anglo-Saxon (Old English) name *Ēastseaxe* ('East Saxons'), which was the eastern kingdom of the Saxons who had come from mainland Europe and settled in Britain (Hanks, Hodges, Mills & Room, 2002). A vale on the other hand is a valley that is characterized by a long depression in the land, usually between two hills and containing a river. While in the mother country (the UK), it was about people mentioning those who had come from mainland Europe and settled in Britain, in Rhodesia it had a ring of celebrating those who had come from the old country. It probably also included those who had migrated from South Africa and settled in the vale that is today called Esigodini.

The town of Fort Victoria (today's Masvingo) was founded in 1890 as part of a concatenation of forts that the Pioneer Column erected. It was additionally the first large settlement to be established by the Pioneer Column of the BSAC which makes it the oldest Western-type town in Zimbabwe. While the Zimbabwean town was named in honor of Queen Victoria (Mamvura, 2014), one can also argue that it was in honor of an already established town of the same name that was established in British Columbia, Canada, initially as Fort Albert, and later Fort Victoria (Kaye Lamb, 1943; Plasterer, 1967). This again

echoes Jenkins' (2011) words that the English have a culture of naming places after those back in the mother country or another colony. This perhaps also explains why there is another Fort Victoria in Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast).

Other significant names are Hartley (today called Chegutu), which was named after Henry Hartley, an early colonial hunter and explorer. Like other colonial settlements, Chimanimani was also named Melsetter, but unlike Hartley, it was not named after a person. Early Melsetter settlers were led by Thomas Moodie on another colonial trek into Rhodesia. A very significant name is likewise Salisbury, which has a name-sake even in the UK today. This was the Rhodesian colonial capital and was only changed to Harare in 1982. What is significant about these three names as is the case with others besides Enkeldoorn is that they are among other factors archives of memories of personages and places back in the metropolis as is the case with Salisbury. The city was named after Lord Salisbury who was UK Prime Minister when the Royal Charter for the occupation of Zimbabwe was granted by Queen Victoria. Melsetter was named after the Moodie ancestral home in the Orkney Islands. These names again point to the fact that the British settlers always had memories of home or people whenever they named places (Jenkins, 1997). What is also important to note about the naming of these spaces is the reality of political power. Lubbe (2011) notes that the naming of places is an act that is anchored on power relations, and those that have the political power can name.

### **Corruption or anglicization?**

Besides naming the regions, the colonialists attempted to retain some Indigenous names for the districts and some urban areas, as they did with Bulawayo. However, this attempt was not as successful as was intended, since some of these toponyms come out as devoid of Indigenous residents' zone records. This may be because of the spellings that were used as well as the accompanying pronunciations. The result as some of the names that are discussed here are reflective of people who were limited linguistically, or who cared less about the natives and their names (Matete, 2023; Panwar, 2022). What was important to them was that the places had names and they could call them comfortably.

Among the Indigenous communities, toponyms and anthroponyms, among other names carry memories and are their historical sites and archival depositories. In them are histories of local areas as well as of families and clans. To therefore mispronounce a name or distort its spelling is to misrepresent history and possibly obliterate it (Stevens, 2011). The following randomly selected names from those discussed and identified from online sources highlight the corruption of meaning that came with colonialism: Espungabera, Inyanga, Umtali, Sinoia, Lomagundi and Msonedi. These toponyms are not arranged in any way of significance. What is common among them is that they share the common trait of being corrupted and the result is that what they mean gets lost in the aural transfer because initially, the non-Indigenous speakers would not have heard the word properly.

Despite the fact this paper's focus is on Zimbabwean names, there is one which helps to bear testimony to the problems that come with corrupting local names. It is Espungabera which is a service center that is in the Mossurize District of Manica Province in central Mozambique. This place according to the locals is named after a nearby hill. Espungabera, according to sources in Chipinge who are related to the Ndau people who are also found in Mozambique, is a corruption of the toponym Chipunguchembira which can be translated as the cob of rock rabbits/dassies. This name is descriptive of a hill that has the shape of a maize cob and the same knoll is home to dassies. It is also common knowledge and generally accepted that wherever these creatures are, there is also the danger of *rovambira* (black mamba) attacks for those who venture into such places hunting for these small rabbits. Thus, if this story is true, it speaks to colonial arrogance. Through this corruption, the meaning and potential warning that is carried in such a name is lost.

What this corrupted name reflects is the fact that the corrupters failed to recognize, or ignored the fact that place names are reservoirs of the heritage of the community and toponyms provide stories and information on how human inhabitants of a given place experience the world and how they interpret their immediate countryside (de Lange, 2019; Henshaw, 2006). This is essential because when people name a place or a person, they are making clear certain significations. It is these that get lost when outsiders who are politically and militarily powerful corrupt a name and have it pronounced their way.



With time, the original significance is lost and the original owners of the name also end up using the corrupted version in fear of the more powerful colonizer. At times they even use such corrupted versions with pride without even being aware of their original meaning. While as an archive of information for negotiating the local terrain, the name's significance is lost; it becomes an archive of external impositions and rule and in the process becomes a celebration of the success of imperialism.

The name Inyanga is a corruption of Nyanga, which itself is also a partly corrupted version of Sanyanga, and is probably a ngunization (turning it into a Ndebele or Zulu name) of the word Nyanga. This is also observed in the case of the name Umtali (now Mutare). Nyanga is derived from Sanyanga, a term that means owner of horns. In this case, it is believed that there was a man of the Simboti-Tsoka (Leopard) totem who had powerful *makona* (medicine horns) that he used to heal an ailing King Mutasa (Mapara et al., 2011). The king was so happy that he gave the healer a space to live on, at the foot of what is today Nyangani Mountain. The place became known as Sanyanga, meaning the place owned by one who has powerful medicine/healing horns. When the first colonial settlement was established in this area, it was close to what is today Sanyanga Gardens and was called Inyanga. When it was relocated to the present place, which is under Chief Saunyama, it carried the name along with it.

Inyanga is a Nguni term used mainly among the Xhosa to refer to an Indigenous African healer. While in the Nguni sense, the idea of a healer is not lost, in the case of the local Manyika that meaning is lost because it may mean 'It is a horn' and the question could be 'So, what?' There is then the version, *Nyanga* that was brought into use in 1982. While the meaning of this name is clear in that it refers to a horn or *gona* (singular of *makona*), it does not come out clearly whether it is the direct meaning of a real horn or the figurative one that refers to the *makona* where charms and other healing paraphernalia are believed to be kept. The writers of this paper thus aver that the proper name for the town should have been Sanyanga, in memory of the place that had been given to the healer by Mutasa. They therefore argue that both versions, Inyanga, and Nyanga are sustaining the cultural imperialism that came with colonialism because all the two renderings of the name are devoid of history and significance.

Colonialism as was experienced elsewhere even outside Zimbabwe and Africa was a harbinger of toponymic misrepresentations and even erasure as is realized in the names of some of the settlements that the colonialists set up (Mapara & Mpofu-Hamadziripi, forthcoming). One urban area in which this is made clear is Mutare, Zimbabwe's eastern border city. The colonialists called it Umtali, which is a corruption of the name of a river close to Old Mutare (then Old Umtali). Important to note is the fact that what is today the City of Mutare is a later development of a settlement that was relocated from what is today Old Mutare in 1898. This settlement was initially situated close to the confluence of the Mutare and Tsambe (Tsamvi) Rivers (Mapara & Mpofu-Hamadziripi, forthcoming). As was common elsewhere in the then colony, the settlers corrupted this toponym to *Umtali*, a name that is empty of any meaning in the Manyika dialect.

This watercourse may have been rechristened in this manner owing to the colonial misapprehension and delusion that the place was a Ndebele territory or had earlier been, hence the ngunization of the designation. Information gathered from the locals reveals that the toponym Mutare means river of gold, and the mountains and hills over it may be linked to the mines where the biblical King Solomon's gold came from (Haggard, 2002). Even though in Manyika *utare* means metal (iron), this term was also used as a euphemism for gold since it is generally alleged and accepted that the Manyika people are secretive on some issues (*wangosvisa*). This ciphered word came out as meaningless to most people, particularly the younger age groups since it was substituted by an incorrectly pronounced place name. Its actual import is nevertheless grasped when it is observed that there is a lot of activity going on around the place, especially along the river's banks as well as in its headwaters that is related to alluvial gold mining.

Whereas names are said to be potent words, their force gets lost when their meanings are lost in mistranslations and mispronunciations (Ross, 2007, p. 3). This is the case of Chinhoyi, an urban settlement that colonial settlers called Sinoia, a name that has no meaning or historical significance. On the other hand, the name Chinhoyi is both a celebratory and commemorative one in that it celebrates a local Chief of the same name for the defeat of a notorious local outlaw by the name Nyamakwere. Nyamakwere is said to have murdered several people by throwing them into what is today called the Silent Pool (*Zimbabwe Connections* <http://www.zimbabweconnections.com/chinhoyi-caves/>).

The same is true with the name Lomagundi. Like Chinhoyi, this name is a serious corruption and recreation of the toponym NemaKonde. Linked to Chinhoyi, this name persists as the name of a government school and a private college. This toponym as already indicated is supposed to be NemaKonde, a word which is made up of constituents namely/ne-/which means the owner of, and/-Makonde/, the titular name of the one who will be chief at the particular time. It thus means the owner of Makonde, in the sense that he has jurisdiction over the place. Through corrupting this name, the colonial settlers were not cognizant of, or chose to ignore the fact that:

Place names or toponyms, are inextricably connected with the history of a place. They commemorate the events of the past or the people that inhabited the place. Toponyms, as carriers of the past, not only help individuals develop a sense of attachment to places long after these events have happened (Gin & Cacciafoco, 2021, p. 2).

Although the above two scholars' words focus on the Abui, a Papuan language spoken on Alor Island, South-East Indonesia, they are equally relevant to the Zimbabwean situation as is reflected in the case of Chinhoyi and NemaKonde. This is so because name distortions have the effect of destroying the histories of places and significant events that are generally commemorated through naming.

Toponymic distortions through mispronunciations can also be very disastrous because they can come up even with newly fashioned words that at best appeal to the ear of the distorter and unnerve the original owner of the name (Stevens, 2011). This is the case with the name of a small business center that is found in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central Province. It goes by the name *Msonedi*, a toponym that has no meaning in any language, neither the Indigenous Shona nor any of the languages of the former colonizers especially those who had farms in the area. This name echoes the *Umtali* toponymic tragedy but with a grosser alteration whose meaning may become permanently lost if there is no rectification. The sad part is that even on current maps the place appears with the name *Msonedi*. As unearthed from some very old informants and an academic<sup>1</sup>, the original name of the place was given as *Muswewenhede*, a combination of the noun *muswe* and possessive *wenhede* to create a complex noun (The tail of a baboon), a historical and geographical fact that is also confirmed on their travel website titled *Traveling Luck for Msonedi* on [http://travelingluck.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/Zimbabwe±\(general\)/\\_885644\\_Msonedi.html](http://travelingluck.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/Zimbabwe±(general)/_885644_Msonedi.html).

It is clear from the above miscalling exercise that the settler colonialists did not perceive in this place name something of historical and geographical significance that spoke to the locals' ownership and long occupation and utilization of the area. This is because, to them, it was *niemandsland*, the colonial myth that the land was empty or insufficiently occupied (Hendlin, 2014; Smith, 1997). What is significant to note is that through misnaming the place *Msonedi* the colonialists succeeded in scampering the social and environmental history of the local area. There is here a river whose toponym gives an identity to the whole area and entrenches the story that the river was frequented by baboons in the early mornings as they came to drink water. According to this legend, the locals do not drink the river's waters because after drinking, the primates were said to dip their tail-ends in the dingy waters. Whether the fable is true or not, what is significant is that this name points out a place that in the past had a huge population of these mandrills.

### Naming the condemned

Colonialists at all times saw the colonized as villains and thus brooked no resistance. This was even though they came preaching a gospel of peace and harmony. The reality is that what they wanted was to have the now-colonized to be subservient and not rise against them (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986). This of course was despite the cases of forced labour (Van Onselen, 1976), and other related malpractices that also included the appropriation of the local people's cattle (Beinart, 2022) and in some cases the raping of women, mainly by the native police officers. This partly explains why in the years 1896 and 1897, both the Ndebele and the Shona rose against the colonialists. When the colonialists finally pacified the Blacks, they rounded up their prominent leaders among whom was Kaguvi. Together with others like Nehanda and Mukwati, they were sentenced to be hanged; despite the existence of the gospel of love and forgiveness.

What is interesting about the Kaguvi case is that he converted to Christianity and was given the name Dismas, which means good thief (Mahora, 2017), before he was hanged. He was a thief to who? Was he stealing the joy and happiness of the colonialists? The name which is also of Greek origin is rendered in the Hellenic language as *Δυσμάς* which means 'to the west' or 'sunset'. The question is which west is this? Is it the geo-political West which to Africa and Zimbabwe was the genesis of colonialism and its myriad vicious cruelties? It probably meant that Kaguvi's sun had set given the fact that in Greek and Macedonian culture names are linked to people's behaviors (Hardie, 1923). Whatever the meanings that may come up, the name Dismas suggests a name given to create and plant fear in the hearts of the natives. What it means then is that from a peace and governance perspective, the hanging of Nehanda, Kaguvi (now Dismas) and others was a terror act meant to instil fear in the hearts of the colonized. The name is thus a celebratory one for the Catholic padre who gave it as he was together with the colonialists rejoicing in the vanquishing of the Africans and the establishment of what he perceived as permanent British hegemony.

### Naming the colonized

The colonized people were viewed as sub-human and it was the White man's burden to humanize them, and like other colonial powers, the British Empire saw its role as that of a civilizing mission (Murphy, 2010). Part of this humanization was through renaming them with biblical/Christian names as well as European ones that had no biblical significance. The colonial education system was also used as a tool for renaming the colonized, a situation that led to the reality of a place and person having two names, the Indigenous/home name and the school and church one. The naming of the colonized, as this section will show was at three levels. One, where occupied spaces had new names imposed on them, has already been discussed. However, there is a general tendency to view settlers only in terms of those on farms, mines and urban settlements. The other settlers were missionaries, and in fact, missionaries were some of the biggest landowners in the country and still are and it is a proselytizer, David Livingstone who renamed Shungu Namutitima/Mosi-Oa-Tunya Victoria Falls, peddling the falsehood that he had discovered this waterfall.

Missionaries were part of the colonial and imperial endeavor. They did not only get land but also provided in the case of the BSAC, chaplaincy services to some of the Pioneer Column members. They all got free land from Rhodes (Robinson, 1979). Missionaries also took part in suppressing the Ndebele-Shona Uprisings of 1896-97 because missionaries like Fr. Boos of the Jesuits (SJ) saw this as a war of paganism against the Christian faith (Zvobgo, 1996). It is with such thinking that missionaries did not hesitate to name, not just the Indigenous people whom they in most cases forcibly converted, but also the lands that they had got from Rhodes. It is in this context that missionaries 'dominated the Christian religious sphere and used it to name mission stations in Zimbabwe' (Masengwe & Dube, 2023, p. 1 of 8). They note that some missionaries like those of the Church of Christ, named their mission stations after names of chiefs, headmen and even natural phenomena. However, there are some, especially Anglicans and Roman Catholics who named converts and places largely after their saints and this practice persists to this day. This persistent practice is serving the interests, not of the locals, but those of an imperial power that now exercises ceremonial power over most of its former colonies. It is these two denominations that the researchers focus on because between them, they have the highest number of followers when compared to the others, and they are the most influential.

Of the Anglican Church's prominent schools, mostly all are named after saints or prominent members of the Congregation in Europe, specifically England. They are silent about the host community. The only time the name of the host community or a prominent feature comes up is as an appendage like in St. Augustine's Penhalonga, pointing out where the mission station is located, which means that there are many St. Augustines' globally. However, it is usually just mentioned as St. Augustine's. Even the students' sports attire is emblazoned with the words, Santa, not Tsambe or Penhalonga. Other prominent Anglican mission stations include St. Faith's near Rusape and St. Mary Magdalene's in Nyanga. All these are in Manicaland. In Mashonaland East, there is St Anne's Goto, Bernard Mizeki College and Christ the King, Daramombe. In the case of Christ the King, Daramombe, the more popular part of the habitation name is Daramombe. Another one named after a feature is Ruzawi School. These two appear to be odd cases

because in Mashonaland West, for instance, there is St Mark's High School. Most schools that were under this denomination before independence were prefixed with names of saints before the name of the local village head was attached.

The other denomination that has contributed to the renaming of local places, and in the process contributing to the obliteration of local histories is the Roman Catholic Church. Like its sister denomination, mission stations are prefixed by the name of the saint and suffixed by that of the local area in some instances. There are other cases where the suffixes are not even appended. A few examples are St. Barbara's Mission, St. Rupert's Meyer, Makonde and St Benedict's as well as Regina Coeli. Kutama is again one of those few that overshadow the names of saints, which in this case is St. Xavier. There is also Silveira Mission named in honor of Gonzalo da Silveira who was killed at Mutapa's court. What is interesting is that this mission station is in Masvingo and not even close to the place where da Silveira met his fate, which is in the Zambezi Valley whereinto he was thrown into the Muzengezi (Monsengece) River (Roufe, 2015).

What can be observed in these names is that they have become prominent habitation toponymic labels. They are even destination markers for transporters. This means that these toponyms were deliberately planted to draw attention to the purpose of the mission, but more importantly to overshadow local stories and in the process belief systems because through the bible, book (bible and Western education) and the bell, Africans were herded every Sunday into mass and it was an offence to fail to attend Sunday services for most students. The value of the church and the saints was further entrenched by the offering of Scripture (later Bible Knowledge) as a school subject. Through this subject, another naming track, now of the colonized person was opened.

Because of the need for education, which was largely provided by the missionaries, most students ended up converting to the new faith and adopting new names recommended by the purveyors of the doctrine. Missionaries also saw education as a powerful tool for evangelization (Zvobgo, 1996). They deployed this tool by appointing the converted as teachers not just in their mission schools, but also in what were called out schools run by the Church. Evangelization, especially through education was targeted at removing what was perceived by the missionaries as pagan influences, and may also be read to mean Indigenous religious practices. Indigenous religious practices among other acts named children after their grandfathers and other ancestors, something that the Church dismissed as ancestral worship. They thus encouraged their learners to convert to Christianity. In reality, those who did not convert were denied access to education, especially in the later days when Western Christian education became popular. After conversion one had to be baptized, and this required dropping one's home name (*remudumba* [Kahari, 1990]), and assuming that of a saint identified by the priests, or one of the early church fathers/mothers. This was the origin of how most Africans ended with so-called Christian names, some of which are not even biblical but are of Roman rulers such as Constantine I and Salomon, King of Brittany.

As noted above, missionaries, especially of the Anglican and Catholic denominations, were maidser-vants in the entire imperial project. This is realized through the fact that Christianity from the beginning was a silent oppressing and brainwashing colonial tool. When one was converted to it, s/he had to change her/his name to suit the expectations of the now-adopted Christian community. This name-changing was symbolic that one had begun a new life which is reflected in the biblical example of Paul who changed from Saul to fit in with the new role he was taking up of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 16:37, 22:25–28). By extension, anyone who converted to Christianity had to change her/his name as already alluded to in the foregoing paragraph. The name change was also part of the divide and conquer as well as rule strategy in that it marked out the converted from the so-called unbelievers which became a source of conflict in society. For the missionaries and colonialists, these divisions were important because they enabled them to manage an already divided people.

Even though the Anglicans and Catholics stuck to the names of their saints and other prominent church progenitors, the other denominations opted for Indigenous but theophoric ones that indicated the bearers' conversion to the new faith. Theophoric names are those that bear God's name either as a prefix or suffix (Stuhlman, 2004). These are names with letters of the tetragrammaton (i.e., the four-letter Hebrew theonym יהוה (transliterated as YHWH or YHVH), designations with 'el' (אל) and those with qualities of God without the actual letters from His name. For those who were converted to other faiths, examples of the

equivalent among the Ndebele and the Shona of the tetragrammaton are reflected in the suffixes *-nkosi/* (Ndebele) and *-she/* (Shona) which both mean Lord, which is generally interpreted to mean God, as understood in the Christian faith. Examples are found on theophoric names such as in *Simangenkosi* (We stand by the Lord) and *Sibonginkosi* (We thank the Lord) among the Ndebele, and *Kupakwashe* ([It is] the Lord's gift) as well as *Zvandakaitirwanashe* (What the Lord did for me) among the Shona. It is important to point out that a Shona can easily give her/his child a Ndebele name as much as a Ndebele can also bestow a Shona one on her child, as long as the forename is a reflection of the parent's faith. What is also important concerning these names is that they are divorced from Shona and Ndebele culture and are spawned by the Christian faith. They are thus names that sustain the imperial vision of effective control through cultural means and they are evidence that missionary education was meant to create subservient colonized people, those who would not challenge both the state and Church (Makuvaza, 1996).

While the Church played havoc with the names of the colonized and possibly forcibly converted some if not most, the White employers also added to this gloomy drama. They also gave their Black employees names that were easier for them to call. Names such as Hazvienzani were put aside and one could then be rechristened Bessie, a name that had no significance to the renamed, or the bearer's family. In some cases, one would be called Tickey, a coin that was later replaced by a five-cent piece. This name has no value to the named, his family or clan. What is clear here as in other cases is that the destruction of Indigenous memories suffered an onslaught that was multi-pronged and has persisted to this day as an obstinate pursuit of imperial genocidistic tendencies continues through some denominations, including Pentecostal ones.

### Small but significant

Other place names are of small centers, but for this paper, they are considered vital because they help in retaining the colonial memory. Even though the government has renamed major places like towns, army barracks and even roads, it has not done so with other significant places like police stations and hamlets. There is for instance Birchenough Bridge, a settlement next to the bridge of the same name. The bridge is named in honor of the person who chaired the Beit Trust that funded its construction, Henry Birchenough (Mauya/Welcome to Zimbabwe, <https://mauyazw.wordpress.com/what-to-do/manicaland/>). However, the issue being argued here is not about the bridge but concerns why the settlement across the bridge continues to bear his name when other bigger places have been renamed. This does not only apply to Birchenough Bridge but also to other places like Bannockburn in Matabeleland South which however is also in memory of a place in Scotland (Ross, 2007, p. 13). Others are police stations like Rhodesville in Harare, and Sun Yet Sen, a police post in Matabeleland South.

Besides the above places, it is interesting to observe that while major roads in urban areas have been renamed, with probably the exception of Mbare, which was originally Harare (Harari), there is no other residential area that has had its name changed. Highfields has remained with its name, just as much as has been the case with Borrowdale and Hatfield. Linked to all these is what may be considered the elephant in the room—Victoria Falls. To the writers of this paper, the argument is that these place names continue to give life to the imperial narrative that they did not only come, conquered and named. They also made permanent marks and these are observed in some of these toponyms.

### Conclusion

This paper has grappled with the issue of some Zimbabwean anthroponyms and toponyms and has argued that they are a form of intangible cultural heritage that is hotly contested and is a source of potential conflicts. It has been noted that although efforts have been made to rename some spaces, it is only major towns and cities that have been blessed by such a 'revolution'. The real reasons behind the retention of some of these names especially those relating to public places are best known by the government, mainly those in the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. As for the mission stations, the decisions to allow the local host communities to rename are up to them, and they now have a largely Indigenous clergy. This is especially so when they put up new structures that they can name in honor of outstanding members who have made significant contributions to the local community or even the nation. They can also rename some of their smaller mission stations. The Catholics have renamed



Makonde Mission (Harold-Barry, 2000) to St. Rupert Mayer's Mission (a German Jesuit priest). That means that they can also change mission names and replace them with Indigenous ones if they are willing. Although the government and the Church have a role to play, it is also essential that citizens civilly take up this issue. It may yield positive results. What is however clear is that the colonial naming experience has been traumatic to the named because up to this day, the effects of the shock are still very present as is perceived in the way most Indigenous people continue to name their children and even residential areas. Children are even given names like Nomatter in place of Hazvinei. In Kadoma, there is a residential area called Mushumavale because the dominant tree species there is the *mushuma* (*diospyros mespili-formis*). It is derisively called the jackal berry tree by the English. From what has been presented in the paper, it can be equally concluded that Zimbabweans still suffer from a colonial hangover that unfortunately is perpetuated by among others the entertainment industry whose main idols are those from American films and music. It recommends that even in churches, preachers should actively promote the use of Indigenous names, and not condemn those whose naming circumstances they are not aware of.

## Note

1. For ethical reasons, the names of the informants cannot be divulged. One informant used to work in a governmental ministry and that the other is based in a university in Zimbabwe.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Jacob Mapara** teaches a module on indigenous knowledge and sustainable technologies at the Chinhoyi University of Technology, where he is a faculty member in the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Living Heritage. The current paper that he has co-authored with Ethel Siamena engages with naming practices, an aspect of intangible cultural heritage. In this paper, the duo posits that this living heritage has remained entangled within the grip of colonial naming practices, and so the intangible heritage that continues to be celebrated is that of the former colonizers and not the local Zimbabweans.

**Ethel Siamena** is a doctoral student at Chinhoyi University of Technology's Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Living Heritage. Her focus is on Indigenous knowledge and living heritage with a particular emphasis on knowledge, management, and interpretation of natural phenomena. Ethel's point of entry in this particular research is on names as persistent subtle forms of colonial violence, an unsettling development that does not promote inner peace among members of communities.

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