(Post)colonialism as ideology and power's grip on material culture: the Shangani Battle Site/ Pupu Memorial in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Chris Gosden advanced the very influential idea that colonialism is the grip which material culture has on people. Using the case study of the Shangani Battle Memorial site, we flip this idea. We explore and demonstrate how colonial and postcolonial material culture used to memorialise battles was influenced by who had power and control over ideology in colonial and postcolonial times. In 1893, a battle was fought at Shangani River between King Lobengula's forces and the British during the Anglo-Ndebele War. The British contingent lost Alan Wilson and 33 others. The colonial government erected a memorial to commemorate and honour the British soldiers who lost their lives at Shangani. The victorious African forces and their commanders were marginalised from official memories. After independence, the postcolonial government kept colonial monuments but was slow to honour the marginalised Africans soldiers. Recently, the Zimbabwean government has invested resources in building a memorial to honour the African victors and foster the reinterpretation of the Shangani Battle site on ideological grounds. We argue that the memorial is configured in, and by, structures of colonial and, more importantly, local postcolonial meanings. However, the "incorporation of memory" through African agencies still retains elements of colonial enterprise and shows that ideology and power can grip the material rather than the material gripping the (post)colonialist's mind.

KEYWORDS:

Anglo-Ndebele War; colonialism; ideology; memorials; monuments; power; Shangani Battle site

Introduction

Colonialism and postcolonialism are neither new phenomenon nor processes without consequences and controversies. The history altering character of colonialism and its postcolonial aftermath to a large extent shapes, and continues to shape, the past, present and future (Lyon and Papadopoulos 2002; Gosden 2004; Kohn 2006; Jordan 2009). World making through ideology and memorialisation is often part of power and control tied to colonialism and postcolonialism. Often, what colonialism did, postcolonialism continues or seeks to undo. However, those in power seek to perpetuate their hold through ideology and material culture, often using monuments to do so. Sometimes, postcolonial regimes use the same tactics and techniques used by the colonial to the extent that colonial continuities dictate postcolonial realities. Despite this, there has been little reflection on how ideology and power produce and shape material culture often with the inadvertent result that colonial practices continue into the post colony. The agents may be different but ideology and power work to elicit the similar

responses by those in power. Monuments are instruments of propaganda which recapitulate and legitimate the past in the present (Clack 2020: 5-6). They are vehicles through which societies remember and, with wider forms of material culture, have a role in the construction of national and other identities (Connerton 1989; Viejo-Rose 2023; Winter 2015). These observations about aspects of the relationship between ideology, power and monumentality furthers a body of scholarship in Africa and elsewhere which explores colonial and postcolonial memorial practices and continuities and changes between the two (De Jorio 2006; Fisher 2010; Marschall 2010; Chipangura 2017; Becker 2018; Chirikure *et al*. 2022; Magadzike 2024). They also have implications for understanding the ways monuments might choreograph meaning-making around identities in more distant timeframes (see e.g. Bender 1993; Brück 2001; Stanish *et al*. 2024; Voutaski and Cartledge 2017).

What is the best way of handling material culture and heritage associated with colonial power such as statues and memorials in the post colony? Answers to this question have often bordered on the polemical. Some scholars have questioned the rationale for the continued display of colonial symbols and memorials in Africa, decades after colonialism was defeated on the continent. As such, one of the interesting research threads has been on the need to fully decolonise the continent by removing memorials that remind of Africa's colonial past (Chirikure *et al*. 2022; Magadzike 2024). This is against a background of post-colonial governments' reluctance to muddy the waters and alienate their erstwhile colonisers by removing colonial vestiges in the form of memorials from public spaces. Furthermore, taking down material culture such as statues is equated with altering history and yet when colonial monuments were erected, the marginalisation of the colonised was not considered as creating biased histories.

As noted by Chirikure *et al*. (2022), African countries responded in different ways to public colonial memorials at independence, ranging from embracing elements of the colonial heritage, selective removal of certain memorials deemed too offensive, to total destruction of colonial memorials. This can all be enveloped with the archaeology of colonialism where ideology and power often dictate what is selected, deselected or recreated to suit the new (Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Ferris *et al*. 2014). The archaeology of colonialism concerns itself with the investigation of the material consequences of colonialism and postcolonialism. This is aptly seen in parts of Africa, where colonialism manifested in the ideology and practice of construction and erection of memorials and monuments in the lands of the vanquished, thus transforming physical spaces and landscapes. Such transformations of the landscape, through the construction of memorials, also served as a way to assert authority and control over the colony and the colonised. They were thus also involved in processes of cultural transformation. Colonial statues often commemorate figures or events associated with colonisers and have thus become focal points for debates about historical memory and identity. This precipitated the decolonisation movement aimed at removing or recontextualising statues seen as symbols of the colonial past. Such calls led, for example, to the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town in South Africa in 2015. In the United Kingdom, the statue of seventeenth-century slave trader Edward Colston was toppled in June 2020 and thrown into the harbour in Bristol city (Nasar 2020; Moody 2021). With decolonial parallels, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Soviet monuments have also been taken down in Ukraine and many other Eastern European and Baltic countries, including Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (Dunkley 2023; Parish 2022).

In much of Africa, the post-colonial state opted more for continuities in memorial and heritage management practices. Sometimes, this created a burden on how to manage what are regarded as effigies of the colonial past and whose national significance might not be widely shared in the post-colonial state. To explore these contradictions, this paper engages with the Shangani Battle Monument located in Lupane, Zimbabwe to show how the colonial and postcolonial administrations mobilised ideology and power to memorialise and interpret what transpired at the battle. In fact, the memorial came to be recognised as the Allan Wilson Memorial in both popular and official literature rather than Shangani Battle Monument, its official name, a recognition of its attachment with the Allan Wilson Patrol rather than the whole battle. As in many other instances, colonial monuments and memorials constructed in various parts of Zimbabwe, as in other parts of the world, sought to commemorate and glorify a certain powerful and controlling elite. As a result, the post-colonial period has seen intensifying calls for the re-presentation of the events that transpired at the Shangani Battle to include the contributions of Africans.[1]

The Shangani Battle of 1893: ideology, power and memorialisation through material practices

Following the British colonisation of Mashonaland in 1890, they set to conquer the Ndebele state and finish the colonisation of the area between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers (Figure 1). In 1893, a number of battles were fought on the way to Bulawayo, the Ndebele capital where King Lobengula was based (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). King Lobengula abandoned his capital ordering that it be burnt down as he fled in a north-westerly direction towards the Zambezi River. On the 4th of December 1893, Major Allan Wilson and his men, who had tracked King Lobengula and were cut off from the main column, fought at the Shangani Battle where the British army was defeated. Allan Wilson and 33 other members of his mounted patrol lost their lives. Victory ensured that King Lobengula evaded capture. Allan Wilson and his Shangani Patrol were made heroes by the colonial state. Their defeat and death coincided with the collapse of the Ndebele state and entrenchment of British power. The battle was memorialised and reimagined as a 'victory', with numerous posthumous honours for Allan Wilson and his men. These included commemorative burial at Great Zimbabwe and later at Malindidzimu in the Matobo Hills and memorialisation of the battle site as a national monument (Fisher 2010). Over time, the Battle became a buttress of the colonial state's origin narrative, with Shangani Day becoming a national holiday in the country until 1920 (Snape 2021). The colonial state was motivated by an ideological framework which comprised domination and control. Demonstrating the inextricable association that existed between the colonial state and the Battle, it is worth noting that the Shangani Battle Memorial was itself constructed on the same place where the architect of the colony Cecil John Rhodes was buried.

Figure 1. Map of Zimbabwe showing the location of the Shangani Battle site and other places mentioned in the text.

As Mushonga (2006: 21) has noted, "settlers irretrievably altered the physical and mental landscape of the [African] continent". This was done, in significant part, through the deployment of colonial symbols which configured memorialisation. The memorialisation of

the Allan Wilson Patrol has involved a process which has been at once lengthy and complicated. Initially, the remains of Allan Wilson and his men were buried two months after the incident by James Dawson under a large mopane tree in the vicinity of the Battle site. Dawson carved out a cross on the tree trunk and also inscribed the words, "To Brave Men". The 'bravery' of the Allan Wilson Patrol, according to Dawson and the settler community, emanated from their 'heroic' fight in their attempt to capture King Lobengula and take him back to Bulawayo. Whilst Allan Wilson and his men were defeated, the settler community praised them for their bravery and resilience in the fight for the expansion of the British Empire (Barczewski 2016). This was also recognised by the architect of the colonisation process, Rhodes, who ordered that the remains of the men of the Allan Wilson Patrol be reburied at Great Zimbabwe where he himself initially intended to be interred (Figure 2). This was done in 1894 and was yet another effort at ensuring that the heroic feat of these colonialists would forever remain etched in the lives of future generations of the colony.

Great Zimbabwe is a highly venerated religious centre of the local Shona people and a former capital of the once powerful Zimbabwe state between the eleventh to eighteenth centuries in southern Africa (Ndoro 2005; Chirikure 2020). The groups' remains were interred on a dry-stone walled platform midway between the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure (Ndoro 2005). This was a bold decision, which speaks volumes about the high esteem that the Rhodesian authorities had of the actions of the Allan Wilson Patrol. Decisions around the location of military burials were likely shaped by localised factors, but also by public debate in Great Britain. Ashbridge describes the development of British military burial traditions and cemetery design in the long-nineteenth century (Ashbridge 2021: 37-92). Whilst memorials and grave markers were typically funded by the family and/or community of the deceased, newspaper reports of neglected, damaged and even desecrated graves fuelled public debate about the role of the state in protecting the legacy of the war dead. The creation of the national military cemeteries to commemorate the American Civil War placed further pressure on Britain to find similar approaches to acknowledge the sacrifice of their men. This raises the possibility that Rhodes and his associates considered how the burial of the Allan Wilson Patrol might be reported in Britain and the impact upon his own reputation. Burial, of course, also attaches people to a place physically and symbolically. In burying the men of the Patrol at these venerated places, ideas of long-term belonging and possession were being expressed to different communities in the locality and beyond it. These colonial acts of burial were symbolic performances of territorialism. Archaeology is replete with examples of mortuary activity being used to stake claims to places in a diversity of timeframes (e.g. Littleton and Allen 2007; Maddrell *et al*. 2021; Thomas *et al*. 2021).

Figure 2. The second burial site of the Allan Wilson Patrol at Great Zimbabwe (Zimfield Guide).

The decision to bury the members of Allan Wilson Patrol at Great Zimbabwe was aligned with Rhodes' personal decision to be buried in the same location, a decision he rescinded when he later opted for the Matobo Hills. The remains of the Allan Wilson Patrol were once again exhumed and reburied at Malindidzimu, in 1904, after Rhodes himself had been consecrated there in 1902 (Figure 3). In fact, Rhodes decreed that Malindidzimu be christened "Worlds' View" and that it be reserved as a burial ground for those who would have served their country (Rhodesia) with distinction. Rhodes' vision was that the Matobo Hills become a "Rhodesian Valhalla", a place embodying his ideals about the country. "Valhalla" was used to describe the locality in guidebooks, ballads and literature for many decades after Rhodes' death in both the

colony and in Britain (Lowry 2004). The past is often deployed to give depth, foundation and legitimacy to ideology and power relationships. The resonances of this "heroic foundation" symbolism, which equates the then colonial present with Norse mythology, is thus worth noting as is the fact that the episode has been and, in some contexts, continues to be referred to as Rhodesia's Thermopylae (480 BCE), Alamo (1836) or Little Big Horn (1876) (Fairbridge 1928: 49-50; Lowry 2004: 198-200; see also Ranger 1989). To this day, there is an inscription at the foot of the Hills, which speaks to the desire by Rhodes to have the hill consecrated as a burial space. The interred bodies of Allan Wilson and his men remain in their present resting place in a monumental shrine made from cut granite at Malindidzimu. Pointing to the ideological grip of colonial material culture, Mushonga (2006: 25) suggests that these shrines and graves, "domesticated, modernized and civilized" the Malindidzimu, with these men, "even in death" replacing the indigenous peoples "as master of the land".

Figure 3. The Allan Wilson Patrol Memorial site in the Matobo Hills. On this same hill are the graves of Cecil Rhodes, Leander Jameson and Charles Coghlan key leaders in the formative years of the Rhodesian colony.

Colonial memorialisation was championed by the Rhodesian Pioneers and Early Settlers Society (RPESS) which was formed in September 1904. One of the objectives of the RPESS was to, "record and encourage the preservation and publishing of the history of the early occupation of the country together with the names of those men and women whose struggles against almost insurmountable difficulties enabled Rhodesia to become a valuable addition to the British Empire" (quoted in Olden 2002). To this end memorials and monuments such as the Rebellion Memorial in Bulawayo were commissioned and dedicated to whites who died during the Matabele wars of 1893/1894 and the *Umvukela* of 1896. Similar monuments were developed and erected including the Filabusi Memorial, Mambo Memorial, and Battle of Bembesi (Gadade) Memorial (Figure 1). In the same vein the land between the Zambezi and the Limpopo Rivers that was colonised by the British through the British South African Company (BSAC) was christened Rhodesia in honour of Rhodes. The naming of places is of course a powerful socio-political act tied to memory. Names possess and dispossess through their mnemonic and priming effects. Indeed, from name-associated retrieval cues, communities intuit familiarity, association and knowledge from locales without explicitly performing acts of remembering. This is made more potent through the enactment of commemorations and rituals (Connerton 1989; Morphy 1993; Schama 1996; Tilley 1994). It is unsurprising then that similar "reciprocal" memorials were also established in the colonising territories of Europe to honour men such as Rhodes. For instance, Rhodes has a statue in his honour at Oxford University, where he was intermittently a student between 1873-81, which was erected largely as a celebration of his colonial project in Africa on behalf of the British Empire (Knudsen and Andersen 2019). In reference to shifting meanings, it is significant to note that, since 2015, the statue has been the subject of a number of protests, with repeated calls for its removal. It has also become a focus for "public debate on racism and the legacy of colonialism" (Oriel College 2024).

The Shangani Battle and the "heroics" of the Allan Wilson Patrol became a key part of the Rhodesian colonial foundation narrative and, as such, various initiatives to memorialise it were put in place. A number of major streets in Bulawayo and Salisbury (now Harare) were also named in honour of Allan Wilson. Wilson's compatriots were also memorialised by having streets named after them in the new white-only suburbs of Bulawayo. Moreover, in 1940, the

Rhodesian Government completed construction of a Technical and High School in Salisbury that was named Allan Wilson High School (Figure 4). The naming of the hostel at the school was also intertwined with the memories associated with the Shangani Battle as it was named Shangani House. Shangani House has four dormitories known as Wilson, Burnham, Borrow and Robertson (Mamvura 2014). Burnham, Borrow and Robertson were also members of the patrol. Meanwhile an obelisk was erected in the vicinity of the battle site to memorialise the bravery of the Allan Wilson Patrol in their defeat. A metal plate engraved, "To the memory of Allan Wilson and party" was mounted. The names of the 34 men were also engraved. Showing the significance that the colonial administration placed on the memorial, it was part of the pioneer heritage places accorded National Monument status, in 1937, under the 1936 Monuments and Relics Act. A portion of the mopane tree trunk that had been inscribed with a cross by Dawson, in 1893, was later moved to the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo and is now kept as a relic and as part of the permanent display at the museum, a reflection of the importance that the settler community attached to the patrol's actions. As noted above, in 1895, the 4th of December was declared a public holiday known as the "Shangani Day". It remained an annual Rhodesian public holiday until 1920, when it was included as part of "Occupation Day", which itself commemorated events associated with the occupation of the colony.

Figure 4. The Administration Block at Allan Wilson Technical High School.

The immediate post-colonial period did not bring any solace to the locals either as the memorial continued to be part of their landscape without any effort by the new government to offer an alternative presentation of the battle that took into account both sides of the story and in particular the role of the Ndebele army in protecting King Lobengula from capture by the colonial forces. The new government in the independence era set up a Cabinet Committee on Monuments, whose major task was decolonising symbols of colonial domination in the new nation-state. However, this Committee focused its work on renaming cities, towns, roads, dams among other landmarks. There was no deliberate attempt to reconfigure the narrative on the Shangani Battle site, which continued to be colonial in character through its glorification of Allan Wilson and his patrol while at the same time remaining awkwardly silent on the Ndebele army that emerged victorious from the battle. This scenario persisted as attempts at monumentalising the anti-colonial struggle were to focus largely on the Second Chimurenga / Umvukela (1966-1979) which was temporally more proximal and freshest in most people's minds. This is witnessed through the development of the National Heroes Acre, Provincial Heroes Acres and the monumentalisation of massacre sites in Mozambique and Zambia, such as Chimoio and Mkusha (Mpofu 2015; Maritz 2007). These material memorialisations have also not gone without contest around meaning, including in the digital sphere (Mpofu 2016).

The result of the oversight by the new post-colonial administration was vandalism at the Shangani Battle site in the 1980s, immediately after independence. The vandalism included the removal of the information panel with the names of Allan Wilson and his men. The memorial was also disfigured with black painting. It is likely that the vandalism was a reaction to the lack of any action by the post-colonial government to redress the representation of colonial period memorials particularly in the countryside. While the colonial administration lauded the perceived heroics of their kith and kin, the post-colonial government took a long time to recognise the heroic effort that locals played in fighting the advance of the colonial forces. When it comes to identity construction, the past is effectively propaganda and heritage and memory shape and enable rhetorical strategies (Anheier *et al*. 2011; Clack and Dunkley 2022).

Post-colonial attention on the memorialisation – often through heritage – of the Second Chimurenga/Umvukela created an incompleteness which was itself tantamount to an erasure or silencing of the past. It should not be overlooked that the events of the early colonial encounter, such as the Shangani Battle, were major rallying cries that invigorated the Second Chimurenga/Umvukela that was to finally usher independence in 1980.

Following the realisation that there were serious discrepancies in how the official narrative of the Shangani Battle has been presented over the years, various stakeholders got together to develop ways in which the memory of the Shangani Battle could be memorialised in an inclusive manner. This meant considering the efforts of the two warring parties and, in particular, the Ndebele who had defeated the Allan Wilson Patrol and ensured that King Lobengula was not captured. The stakeholders included various interest groups from the local community, political leadership of Lupane and the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. The local communities made representations, through their Member of Parliament, for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe to reconsider the presentation at the Shangani Battle Site Memorial. In the main, they argued that the existing memorial only told one side of the story, i.e. that of the colonisers as if there were no people in the area which they colonised. A major point of discontent among the local community was the inscription of the names of the Allan Wilson Patrol on the memorial with no effort by the post-colonial administration to broaden the significance of the memorial by incorporating other narratives into its presentation. As such, the local community argued that in its present state there was no reason to promote tourism to the site or educational visits by local school children. Furthermore, they argued that local children would learn nothing from visiting the site other than a perpetuation of the historical narrative of white colonial dominance over the black people of Zimbabwe. Based on these arguments, it became apparent that there was a need to revisit, re-develop and re-present the memorial with a holistic approach that took into account the actions of both warring parties. Other stakeholders included the Kusile Rural District Council, ZANU-PF Matabeleland North Province, politicians from the province and individuals who expressed interest in the representation of their past. Following widespread consultation, the NMMZ was challenged to develop a new memorial structure that would take into account the contribution of the Ndebele in the Shangani Battle.

The new memorial that was conceived, and has since been developed and commissioned, is in the form of two curved walls that form a semi-circle around the existing memorial (Figure 5). This concept was conceived from the traditional Ndebele fighting tactic known as the cow-horn formation. Mirroring the shape, the cow-horn formation involved having three different units attacking from three different directions. The centre, usually comprised of more experienced warriors would crash into the enemy's front whilst the horns, comprised of younger warriors, would converge on the flanks in a double-envelopment (Gann 1965; see also Knight 1995). The planned curved walls of the memorial thus symbolise the use of the cow-horn formation in the Battle and the fact that the Ndebele emerged victorious, killing all the members of the Allan Wilson Patrol. On the frontal sections of the two walls are six murals depicting various scenes associated with King Lobengula's abandonment of his capital up to the Shangani Battle where the Allan Wilson Patrol was massacred. This new memorial replaces the old Allan Wilson Memorial, which memorialised exclusively the colonial patrol. The new memorial recognises both sides that were involved in the Battle but also, in doing so, shows how colonial forces continue to shape postcolonial narratives.

Figure 5. The new reimagined memorial Shangani Battle Memorial, depicting the Ndebele cow horn fighting formation, encircling the Allan Wilson Patrol represented by the colonial obelisk.

A key element of the re-imagination of the Shangani Battle Memorial site was the consideration of the name of the memorial site. When the site was commissioned as a National Monument during the colonial period it was named the Shangani Battle Memorial National Monument. However, the name Allan Wilson Memorial was a popular name, particularly in the colonial settlers' circles as it was felt to directly associate with the people commemorated there. In so doing, the colonial administration developed a new and exclusory memorial landscape associated with European toponym, that the locals could hardly associate with (see Mamvura 2022). However, as part of the reimagination, the site was renamed Pupu Memorial after the geographical name of the place where the memorial is located. The term Shangani was also seen to be confusing as there was another battle that was fought on the headwaters of the river in the central parts of the country. This was the first contact between the colonising army and the Ndebeles in their attempt to capture the capital of the Ndebele state in December 1893. In addition to the new memorial, the memorial space has also been used to provide a presentation on the events leading to the Shangani Battle and its subsequent memorialisation. The Government of Zimbabwe has also recognised, recently, the role played by the Indunas that commanded the Ndebele army that defeated the Allan Wilson Patrol. General Mtshana Khumalo was posthumously awarded the status of a National Hero (Tshuma 2020; Ziwira 2020).

Discussion

A close examination of the biography of the Shangani Battle Site recently renamed Pupu Memorial demonstrates the entanglement between local and national politics with heritage places in both the colonial and post-colonial periods in Zimbabwe. The colonial state sought to develop new narratives and toponyms that celebrated the colonial regime and disregarded the local narratives and experiences. However, what was disturbing to local Ndebele communities was the slow pace at which the post-colonial state redressed the imbalances, misrepresentations and exclusions in the historical narratives projected by these monuments. While the Zimbabwean government eventually reconfigured the narrative of the Shangani Battle beginning, in 2017, there are many more colonial memorials dotted around the country that do not speak to the realities of what transpired at those sites nor the wider project of the postcolonial state. While the Names Alteration Act was prioritised politically and legally to replace names that were colonial and offensive in character after independence, this was not followed by activities designed to address similarly problematic colonial symbolism bound up with monuments, statuary and other material devices. As such, the narratives associated with most Anglo-Ndebele War and First Chimurenga/Umvukela memorials in the country are still colonial in character, glorifying the colonial settlers, with no effort made to provide an alternative interpretation of the events associated with these places (Mataga 2012).

The hegemony of colonial narratives in the colonial state was not isolated to Southern Rhodesia. This can be noted in many other colonies particularly settler colonies such as South Africa and Kenya (Marschall 2010; Madida 2019; Larsen 2012). Colonial administrations focused on memorialising their efforts – glorifying both successes and, to a lesser degree, failures – in the colonisation process. As such, local settler societies such as the Rhodesian

Pioneers and Early Settlers Society advanced the cause to remember the heroics of early settlers particularly the Pioneer Column, which gave birth to the colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1890. This strategy was intimately linked with the colonial philosophy of domination and saw the deployment of assorted material culture, such as monuments and burial sites, to commemorate, express and perform the domination. As a result, one notes that in all areas where there were battles between the Ndebele army and the advancing British colonial forces it tended to be only the exploits of the British force that were materially and ceremonially recalled. History is written by those in power but, as Foucault (1977) made clear, power is not a stable phenomenon and has changed its character through time and in space. Power is about relationships and always two-sided as it is met with multiple forms and scales of resistance. This holds as much for the postcolony as the colony for power produces the social reality and the objects of discourse within which people and communities are situated. Here we note, for instance, the second battle in the colonisation of the Ndebele state was christened Battle of Bembesi by the colonial administration. However, the locals in the area prefer the term Battle of Gadade as it references, more appropriately, the area in which the battle took place (pers. comm., L. Nyoni).

During the post-colonial era the independence government has also been influenced by the prevailing socio-political environment in their attitudes towards these colonial "fortresses". In the immediate aftermath of independence and seeking to develop a united Zimbabwe, the government appeared reluctant to reconfigure the historical narratives associated with sites of major battles associated with the occupation of the country and the First Chimurenga / Umvukela. Hence, in spite of protestations by some local communities on the inappropriateness of maintaining colonial memorials and the polemics and politics inherent therein, these have continued to exist with a sense of perpetuity – as was intended by their colonial constructors – both as landmarks and historical primers across much of the country. In the former Ndebele state area, there are no less than twenty memorials that have been maintained with no effort at rewriting or better complicating their historical narratives. It is noteworthy that, in South Africa, the need to develop a united Rainbow Nation by the post-apartheid government also resulted in the keeping of most colonial era memorials and monuments, including those that celebrated apartheid (Coombes 2003; Nettleton and Fubah 2019; cf Fubah *et al*. 2024).

Post-colonial administrations in Africa have been slow to bring more historical balance by developing and contextualising historical narratives. In the colonial aftermath, the Zimbabwean government, as noted, was more focussed on memorialising battles – irrespective of whether it won or lost – associated with its own path to power. In fact, and in no small part as a consequence of the attention that has been given by the postcolonial state to memorialise it, the liberation struggle against colonial rule has become synonymous with the Second Chimurenga /Umvukela. The second Chimurenga gave power to the current government just as battles such as Shangani had – even those where their forces were defeated – given power to colonial forces. This is aptly seen in efforts to commemorate the Second Chimurenga / Umvukela war dead in countries such as Mozambique and Zambia as well as locally at sites such as Kamungoma (Mujere *et al*. 2017; Fontein 2022).

The National Heroes Acre, the key liberation heritage site is the burial ground for "heroes" and "heroines" associated with the Second Chimurenga / Umvukela. It was built by the ruling ZANU-PF to complement and further its postcolonial state-making ideological agenda. The prominent figures from the First Chimurenga such as Mtshana Khumalo, who played important roles in the early fight against colonial rule have now been accorded the status of national

heroes. However, speaking to prioritisation, this happened long after various others, such as Kaguvi and Nehanda, were memorialised through streets, buildings and much more. The postcolonial ideology has evolved again, and now is to forge a united postcolonial state that recognises the contributions of everyone including, for example, the Ndebele who have felt neglected in the postcolonial project in the past. Processes of memorialisation tied to monuments have proven impactful and inclusive means to develop postcolonial collective identities.

Conclusion

History is written by the victors and their ideologies, which are often memorialised through material culture. Colonialism and postcolonialism often represent a mix of continuities and changes but with each dominant group aiming to use ideology to support its claims to power and dominance. The Shangani Battle Memorial site later renamed Pupu shows this powerfully. However, the "incorporation of memory" through African agencies still retains elements of colonial enterprise and shows that ideology and power can grip the material rather than the material gripping the (post)colonialist's mind. In the postcolonial context, this "gripping" is a form of colonialism from within, where postcolonial agencies and ideologies take hold of colonial monuments and other material forms and reproduce and reimagine through symbolic and memorial processes and power dynamics.

Notes

1. It is noteworthy here that, as seen in correspondences with the Monuments Inspector based in Bulawayo, the Officer in Charge of Lupane Police Station was concerned in the immediate post-independence period about the safety of the memorial (Shangani Battle Memorial Monument File at the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo).

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