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This article explores the world of the veterans of Zimbabwe's War of Independence, constructed in the rhetoric and language of valour, in which the veteran portrays her/himself through speech. The paper specifically focuses on the mouth of the veteran and the words they speak of themselves and their heroic world. I examine how a war veteran's masculinity is affirmed through speeches and fantasy in the construction of an ideologically charged masculinity in Zimbabwean politics. While the veterans portray themselves as champions of their world attained through expropriation, they are simultaneously not immune to failure in getting what was promised during the war by their generals. They are not immune to suffering. Because of their disappointment, veterans have become not only violent and apprehensive, but also creative in their quest for rewards and recognition in society. They therefore deploy a rhetoric of hostility against their generals and against those they perceive as enemies. What words do their mouths utter? I thus explore how a veteran's mouth and that of his general, both of whom have taken part in discourses

of masculinity, which in turn have served as a weapon of expropriation, are used.

Zimbabwe is a small, landlocked Southern African country with a population of approximately 16 million located between the Zambezi River and the Limpopo River (Masiiwa and Chipungu 2004). The borders of the country go back to the former British colony of Southern Rhodesia and today shares borders with South Africa, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia (Mlambo 2018: 167). The recent history of Zimbabwe is entangled with the colonial legacy mainly related to unequitable distribution of land. Expropriation or farm invasions were referred to by liberation war veterans in the native Shona language using the terms *hondo yeminda/Chimurenga* (war for land), or *jambanja* (smash-and-grab) (Scarnecchia 2006: 234). I stress the combative character of the veterans by observing that they are on an unceasing war with society. They are furious and intemperate in the way they demand recognition and respect from society.

The word *Chimurenga,* which liberation war veterans use frequently, refers to wars fought against colonial occupation, and its use connects the liberation struggle of the 1970s and the land occupations of the 2000s with the 1896/7 Shona – Ndebele uprising against the British South Africa Company (BSAC), known as the First *Chimurenga* (Mlambo 2022). The First *Chimurenga* (also known as the Shona-Ndebele rebellions) were fought to reclaim the land from the colonialists. The liberation war was thus an important historical event for the ex-liberation war fighters. The indigenous people lost these wars and the land remained in the hands of the colonizers.

The liberation war (1960s-1979) was fought to restore land and human dignity to indigenous Zimbabweans. After independence in 1980, the colonial imbalance of the distribution of land ownership persisted, as the government of Zimbabwe had gone soft on the issue of land redistribution (Mlambo 2022). This triggered violent acts of expropriation of white-owned farms and even farms belonging to fellow blacks by veterans of the Liberation War. This historical legacy provides an essential explanation for the thinking and the disposition to violent behavior and expropriation among liberation war veterans.

I also take note of the fact that not all war veterans took part in the expropriation of land. Liberation War veterans were not a homogenous group in their thinking about land expropriation (cf. Sadomba 2011: 16). Although in this movement the war veterans expropriated land in collaboration with other actors (landless rural peasants and some rural and urban working class), this article focuses its lens on liberation war veterans, to shine a light on cultural perspectives on violence in Zimbabwe. This approach also allows for highlighting how war veterans' discourses on land reclamation had a powerful effect upon how they lived through their body (cf. Mlambo 2022). This article thus examines the knowledge, behavior, practices and attitudes of war veterans in Zimbabwe's political landscape, as can be seen through their linguistic activities.

"We died for this country!"

The utterance "We died for this country" was testimony to the great sacrifices made by liberation fighters during the war. Death here does not mean the end of life per se, but the level of sacrifice, which was very deep. It is a stark reminder to Zimbabweans that no one can come close to their acts of valour and sacrifice, which

include, but are not limited to, leaving families and school and enduring the horror of seeing their fellow comrades dying on the battlefield. The utterance also justified the war veterans' unquestionable access and entitlement to land, gratuities, seats in Senate and in Parliament and the status of national or provincial heroes/ heroines after death.

In their struggle against neo-colonialism and the government's lack of commitment to attend to the issues of redistribution in the economy, the war veterans used to say "*Nyika ino hatisati taitora*" (This country, we have not yet taken it). By this statement, the war veterans meant that Zimbabwe had not yet achieved economic independence, as long as the land redistribution program was not fairly and equitably concluded. To this they added the slogan: "The land is the economy and the economy is the land.". Such slogans were chanted at political mobilization meetings, protests and even in ordinary conversations. (For more of these slogans, see Mugabe 2001). This utterance underscores the predominance of the land reform program regardless of whether it destroyed life or the economy. They thought such destruction was a phase that would pass. Their thinking was influenced by the fact that in an agrarian economy, possession of land may seem more important than whether the economy is working or not. They used this kind of thinking to justify the violent land reform that they were championing.

The land reform program had serious repercussions on the economy in Zimbabwe, as it affected productivity on the farms. It interrupted cultivation and displaced thousands of farm workers. It also caused severe food shortages, so that the land expropriations (characterized by violence and looting) that were supposed to solve rural poverty and hunger actually worsened the crisis (Logan 2007). In fact, the reform process triggered a rise in food handouts as opposed to food production. This resulted in the collapse of industries, a rise in unemployment and the depreciation of the value of the Zimbabwean dollar. Many Zimbabweans left the country to seek employment opportunities, and some went as far as to the United Kingdom. The war veterans responded, both in ordinary conversations and at political meetings, to such dynamics by coining a sarcastic statement: "*Endai ku Britain ikoko mundogeza misana yechembere*" (Go to Britain, there to wash the backs of old people). By this statement, the veterans were sending the message that they themselves had decided to stay on the land even when the economic conditions were difficult, as they noticed the impatient younger generation wanting immediate benefits, such as jobs in old people's homes in Britain. Regardless of how noble working in social care institutions in the United Kingdom could be, the statement implies that working in old people's homes was necessarily a very dirty job, which those who did not want to work on the land rushed to perform. The war veterans were therefore sarcastically comparing owning land and getting a salary for performing insignificant chores in the country of Zimbabwe's former colonizers.

The ordinary person was not to be dismissed by such arrogant utterances! Memory Chirere captured some of the sentiments of the ordinary person expressed in attitudinal and factual utterances, as they responded to the veteran's sarcastic invective:

> *Unotora farm yemurungu usina kana badza, unoti ucharima nei? Mauraya the breadbasket of Southern Africa!* (You grab a whiteman's [sic] farm when

> you do not have even a hoe. So how will you till the land? You have destroyed the breadbasket of Southern Africa!); *Purazi ndinoridii ini zvangu, I am a professional ane basa rake!* (Why do I need a farm? I am a contented professional?); *Ko nyika yose zvayave maruzevha nhaimiwe!* (How alarming that the land reform has villagised the whole country!) (Chirere 2015: 107).

Language and actions of guerrilla veterans: a description

In speaking of '"veterans", I focus on adult guerrilla soldiers who share a more or less similar ideology of the liberation war. The identities of liberation war veterans are grounded in the anti-colonial struggle of the 1960s-70s which culminated in the country's independence in 1980, and was the work of men and women from various political organizations in the country (Mlambo and Gwekwerere 2019). These men and women are the very typical examples of war heroes and heroines – the embodiments of the liberation struggle.

I must state at once that the veterans had a somewhat elaborate practical and verbal approach to describe their actions and practices i.e. practical activity and linguistic activity. The practices of war veterans controlled and provided the model for the more elaborated system of verbal representations. For example, the liberation war veterans dubbed the land expropriation movement *kutora ivhu* (taking [back] land), or the Third *Chimurenga*, as the expropriations became ideologically linked to a narrative of continuous struggle for decolonization since the 1890s (Mlambo 2018). Memory Chirere captured one very palpable utterance by guerrilla veterans who came to Bindura to expropriate farms outside Bindura town. One of their key statement was, "*Tauya kuzotora dhaga*," an utterance that came across as a physical action, as it had the image of grabbing something with one's bare hands, taking it to some other place where it rightfully belonged (Chirere 2015: 108). *Dhaga* and *ivhu* are quite different. The former is mortar, the builder's paste mixture of cement, pit sand and water, while the latter refers to the farmlands that were being expropriated from white farmers. In Chirere (2015)'s interpretation, it was as if the veterans were desperately looking for building mortar, and that whatever they had been building was in danger of not being completed because of the shortage. This was in a way true. Because of the acute overcrowding, farming space had visibly run out in the nearby Tribal Trust Lands exactly in the fashion of the running out of building mortar (ibid.).

The war veterans supplied the vocabulary with which songs were composed during the decade of violent land expropriations (1998-2008). A song sung during the decade of expropriations of white-owned farms typically demonstrates the point. In the song Zimbabwe is depicted as equivalent to the soil. The song goes thus: "*Ivhu iri ramunoona machinda, ndiro rinonzi Zimbabwe!*" (This soil you see, gentlemen, that is what is called Zimbabwe!). In addition to this, war veterans refer to themselves as *vana vevhu* (sons of the soil). Interviews conducted by this author (Mlambo 2014) revealed a common statement from liberation war veterans, attesting to their gratitude to Mugabe for giving them land: "*Mugabe wakandipa munda ini*" (Mugabe gave me a piece of land). This statement may not mean much to someone unfamiliar with the intimate spiritual connection to land that many black Zimbabweans feel. I am mindful of the fact that not every Zimbabwean received land. What I strive to demonstrate is

that in Zimbabwean traditional religion, there exists an inseparable relationship between religion, land and the people (Mlambo 2022: 54). In the traditional past, the land was intimately associated with the history of the chiefdom, with the ruling chief and with ancestral spirits who live in it, something which has not radically changed in Zimbabwe (Shoko 2006: 5; cf. McClymont and Mlambo 2016).

In framing the verbal practices of Zimbabwe's liberation war veterans, I draw upon what Coplan (1994: 8–10) has termed *auriture* (musical verbal genres, poetic songs, as the most accessible and potentially revealing of the varied forms that people create to express and describe their experiences). Contextually, I study war veterans' speeches, slogans, chants etc., in a Hymesian approach, emphasizing verbal practice, verbal art and speech events. Thus, I also strive to show the connection between speech and social relations, to demonstrate the function of linguistic anthropology in performativity (Hymes 1975).

My tentative definition of practice stems from the social sciences, which identify the activities involved in practice as those of persons; thus, practices are arrays of human activity (Schatzki 2006: 11). To speak of practices, as cultural theorist Michel Foucault (1976, 1980) observes, allows us also to depict language as discursive activity (ibid. 10). Foucault (cited in Schatzki 2006: 11) described how the constitution of present-day activity centrally consists in the fashioning of bodies (e.g., their aptitudes) within disciplinary practices. Drawing on this conception, I attend to the words with which veterans described their actions, to suggest their capabilities and validating their activities. More specifically I attend to their self-description as athletic, energetic, powerful, dangerous, triumphant, invincible etc. In describing themselves as athletic, they have given each other nicknames such as "*Mujambajecha*" (Swift Feet), "*Munzvengabara*" (Bullet Dodger), "*Musvetu*" (One who can jump), "*Masikiri*" (Skilled). Veterans also had nicknames that pointed to their energetic and powerful disposition, such as "*Masimba*" (Strength), "*Hambura*" (Stout Man). To depict how dangerous they were in the face of colonialists, a person might use the name "*Mabhunumuchapera*" (White men, you shall perish), or "*Gandanga*" (Brutal Person). The last-mentioned term was used in some of the songs sung by the veterans during and after the liberation war. For example, one song said, "*Gandanga haridye derere mukoma, rinorutsa*!" (A brutal person does not eat okra, brother, it makes him vomit!). This drew attention to the rough and violent guerrilla-veteran whose means of survival during and after the war was through expropriation of people's fields and livestock. The war veteran did not brook opposition to his demands during and after the war. They did not like to explain themselves to anybody. Their voice was in their guns – a violent rather than a reasoning disposition (cf. Mlambo 2022: 65).

These ex-liberation war fighters saw themselves as *magamba* (heroes). The chants and slogans also portray them as ever young and energetic – *vanamukoma* (elder brothers). It must be noted that most of the guerrilla fighters who went to war were either teenagers or in their early twenties. The names they gave themselves show that many veterans considered themselves as big guys; it demonstrates an element of seniority, while also serving as a way of connecting with families/masses and communities.

The appellation *vanamukoma* also helps us to understand the logic of their group actions – an

element of homosociality. In conformity with the basic nature of homosociality, veterans in Zimbabwe refer each other as fellow comrades (in Shona, *Makomuredhi* (plural), *Komuredhi* (singular)) (Mlambo 2022: 115). The word "comrade" was used to refer to a fellow fighter in the liberation struggle, and the same appellation is used among veterans after independence. All the epitaphs of the veterans of the liberation struggle buried at the national burial place, called the National Heroes' Acre, bear the title "Cde", for Comrade (See Chung 2006). The use of the word "comrade" expresses a deep history of comradeship among war veterans, who have suffered together during the liberation war. As Mlambo (2022: 115) notes:

> In spite of differences during the liberation war, they shared the same anti-colonial stance and regarded 'imperialism and everything perceived to represent it' as the ultimate enemy. The guerrilla veterans had strong bonds, captured in the powerful Shona expression, '*komuredhi ishamwari yeropa*' (a comrade is a blood friend) – an expression that speaks of the redemptive power of blood in nationalist discourses. Whatever differences they may have had with their general were minimized on the basis that they shared the same commitment towards fighting for the fatherland.

The concept of homosociality also helps us to understand liberation war veterans as a society of men, whose existence and way of operation was built on the logic of the dominant masculinities of a society of war veterans. How do we account for their coordinated understanding, as well as coordinated action, and verbal communications, which presume coordinated understanding (see Barnes 1995, 2000)? This is answered by the principle rule of collectivism (Barnes 1995). Veteran language expressed the idea of a community or society of men bound by values of war. As defined by Cohen, the word "community" would seem to imply two related suggestions: that the members of a group of people have something in common with each other, and that this distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. "Community" thus seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference. The word thus expresses a relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities (Cohen 1985: 12). This definition clarifies the ways in which liberation war veterans viewed themselves.

We may also note the veterans' modes of conversational self-reference, an expression of their group identity, which often operated in ways that undermined the weak in society while serving the self-interested goals of the strong. For example, the veterans used to mobilize communities against white capital by singing such songs as: "*Zvinhu zvese ndezva Mbuya Nehanda*" (All things in Zimbabwe belong to Grandmother Nehanda – an ancestral figure broadly representative of indigenous ancestors). The song was meant to inspire a sense of oneness and unity in the fight against neo-colonialism and the continued occupation of farmland by a white minority long after independence. In this sense, the war veterans were portraying themselves as on a mission of pursuing the common rights and common interests of black people – a strong belief of Zimbabwe as a commonwealth of the African masses. A quasi-Marxist ideology adopted through interaction, during and after the liberation war, between the Chinese Communist Party and the ruling Zimbabwe

African National Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) also imposed the terms in which issues of colonialism, race, and land were perceived and tackled in the post-colonial Zimbabwean state (Mlambo: forthcoming).

Thus, Zimbabwe emerged from the liberation struggle in 1980 with such a philosophy. Everything, including farmland, belonged to the majority of Zimbabweans. This is the reason why the veterans chanted slogans like, *"Pamberi nekugutsa ruzhinji!"* (Forward with the satisfying of the multitude!) and, *"Ivhu kuvanhu!"* (Land for the people!), and, *"Ivhu inhaka yedu tose vatema!"* (The land is the inheritance of all of us as blacks!) (Mlambo, McClymont and Zvoma 2017). It must be noted that land redistribution occurred in Zimbabwe as part of the liberation war. Most importantly, a revolutionary decolonization process also took part in the area of education. For example, between 2019 and 2021, under the aegis of the strategy of "Education 5.0", a large-scale reorganization of the University curriculum in Zimbabwean universities was undertaken, one of whose motivations was that whereas previously education had been organized according to Western priorities, now it was to be organized according to more indigenous priorities (Mlambo and McClymont: forthcoming). In these processes, cultural factors stood out in terms of how property was understood.

However, the speech of the war veteran contains what might be called a latent masculinity of looting. Behind the ideology that "All things belong to Grandmother Nehanda" lies an idea that "All things belong to us". Veterans, according to their own logic, deserve their loot on multiple grounds, which are to be found in their history, religion, culture and ideology. One might argue that because all things (e.g. the land) belonged to a common grand ancestor, they where inherited and thus not looted.[1] However, this was not true in every sense as land and property was being expropriated even from fellow blacks by war veterans. The logic of a masculinity of looting, so to speak, restores equilibrium and upholds the order of nature, whereby war veterans as the real men of valour have earned their loot (Mlambo 2022). Zimbabwean society after independence manifested rampant corruption, violence, hatred and divided families. Politicians were bent on building their personal empires at the expense of the common wealth, and the war veteran has abetted the politician by keeping the politician in a position of power, and by fighting white capital for the benefit of the politician as opposed to the poor masses.

Any talk of the unity of the liberation war veterans should be qualified. While they claimed membership in the ruling political party ZANU-PF which they supported, there were rules that governed their membership. For example, they would warn each other that, "*ZANU haikwani muhomwe memunhu*" (ZANU does not fit in an individual's pocket) or "*ZANU inopisa semoto; ukaiisa muhomwe inokupisa*" (ZANU is hot like a fire; if you put it in your pocket, it burns you). This statement was used as a way of warning fellow party colleagues that a simple mistake could cause their fellow colleagues to punish an errant member severely. Similarly, there was another statement: "*ZANU isinjonjo; itamba wakachenjera*" (ZANU is a *sinjonjo* dance; dance it carefully). This was said to make sure party cadres main-

[1] I am grateful to the reviewers of this paper for providing this nuanced perspective.

tained discipline by toeing the party line, and to make sure everyone looked over their shoulders to see if they were in tune with the dictates of the party to other people's satisfaction. This utterance is very close in meaning to another which goes thus: "*ZANU ibere; unofanira kuramba wakaritasva; ukadonha pariri rinokudya.*" (ZANU is a hyena; you must be skilful when you ride it; if you fall off it, it eats you).

Ideology and the centrality of gendered language in a veteran's identity

Among veterans, gender as a fundamental part of identity formation was crucial to the politics of the guild, and to the construction of difference between veterans and non-veterans. This allows for our understanding of the effeminacy ascribed to politicians and citizens of the opposition, who were perceived as hostile to war veterans' political goals. As a result, they were cast as "weak"/*mbwende*, "sell-outs"/ *vatengesi* and "unpatriotic citizens"/ *nhunzvatunzva*. The label "sell-out" was also sometimes used to refer to Mugabe, their former leader during the Liberation War. It may be suggested that Mugabe's dethronement by some liberation war veterans was to some degree motivated by perceived effeminate tendencies, since he was accused of having hatched a plan to have his wife Grace to succeed him (Mlambo 2022: 117). Some Zimbabwean guerrilla veterans blamed Grace Mugabe for Mugabe's loss of masculinity, a factor that led the veterans to unite to unseat their former commander (ibid.).

This rhetoric of effeminacy justified the moral superiority of the veteran. Thus, the reign of the liberation war political party called ZANU-PF since 1980 was justified on the grounds of moral superiority, and masculinity discourses were intricately implicated in all of these justifications. Anti-colonial sentiment in Zimbabwe was premised on the formation of desired notions of masculinity and spirituality, in the process of the formation of the ruling party ideology, wherein hierarchies and patriarchies sought to be maintained on both material and spiritual grounds. Thus, some kind of segregation was imposed on opposition politicians, whose identity was now to be defined in opposition to those men and women outside of the ruling party ideology. For example, in their public speeches, Zimbabwean war veterans used epithets such as *mbwende* (cowards), and *zvimbwasungata* (sell-outs) etc. which ridiculed as effeminate and weak those who did not fight to own land, while glorifying as manly and strong those who expropriated land from white people. Effeminacy was therefore differentially and negatively defined in relation to the masculine norm in the veterans' discourses on the prize of war, which was the land.

To understand the logic of liberation war veterans' language of boastful bravado and violent behaviour, I use the concept of ideology, drawing upon Giddens' (1979) theory of ideology to provide a critique of domination. The term "ideology" calls to mind habitus and hegemony, and also assumes the everyday relations of subordination and domination embedded in culture – the kind of domination that can be reflected with considerable power in seemingly innocuous circumstances (Alter 1992: 21). For a veteran, combat life and all it entails (e.g. a disposition to violence) involves an ideology (Mlambo 20222). At the locus of this ideology is the identity of the veteran – what it means, among other things, to be strong, heroic, masterful.

This view is similar to Steven Barnett's detailed and flexible model for understanding how persons act in terms of their ideological stance (in Alter 1992: 21). In my case, I go further to examine how war veterans speak according to their ideological stance. To illustrate my Zimbabwean context of war veterans' appropriation and deployment of song and chants, I frame my analysis in terms more or less similar to David Coplan's (2006) study of the appropriation of praise poetry by proud young Basotho initiates, to express and celebrate. their manhood in cattle-raiding and war, and by the young Basotho migrant workers who risked hardship and death in South Africa so that his family, community and country might survive. An ideology is a powerful cultural system, an immutable paradigm for interpreting meaning and guiding action (Geertz 1973).

In conceptualizing liberation war veterans' masculinities in Zimbabwe, I develop my argument around the feature of how Zimbabwe was organized as a patriarchal society. Thus, I attend to patriarchy as denoting the prerogatives of male privilege and power, in which actions and language of claims for land and other rewards by war veterans functioned as the loci and producers of cultural meanings that were themselves linked with ideologies of gender (Mlambo 2022: 6).

An oratorical masculinity was the masculinity through which veterans exploited the naturalized language of gender to describe and evaluate themselves, and through which the visible and verbal signs of masculinity become both evidence and a source of power (Mlambo 2022). Through speech and careful posturing and control of body, gestures and voice, the veterans were able to perform combat-related masculinities and to forcefully communicate the need for land and other material rewards (ibid.).

Performative Violence

Zimbabwe's Liberation War veterans gloried in physical heroism. Honour was not only a recognized but also a desired phenomenon, as indicated by frequent reference thereto in the speeches and actions of fighters. The assembling, marching and dancing of war veterans (clad in boots and fatigues) in the streets, clearly manifested masculine, beefy, aggressive, husky and athletic qualities, as they displayed great leaping, like wild impalas, stamped their feet, and vigorously moved their bodies; these motions all had martial and muscular connotations. Veterans perceived their *mbiri yechigandanga* (glory of brutality) as an area of superiority to the white farmers, and society at large. This attitude was made palpable by a song which they performed at their meetings and political rallies. The song includes the following words: "*Mbiri yechigandanga ndoyi mbiri yatinayo; mbiri yechigandanga ndiyo mbiri yatinayo!*" (The glory of brutality is the glory that we possess; the glory of brutality is the glory that we possess!). Many similar songs were performed, to threaten people with beatings. Another such song had the following words: "*Chenjera chenjera, vanamukoma vanorova, chenjera, chenjera, vanorova nematanda, chenjera chenjera!*" (Beware, beware, the big brothers will beat you; beware, beware, they will beat you with clubs; beware, beware!). The logic and meaning in the songs was directed at people whom they labelled as *mhandu* (enemies), and *vatengesi* (sell-outs), who were shamed as cowards. The context of the violent environment of expropriation was such that it brought to the surface the political contestations between war veterans and opposing groups of people such as farm

workers, groups of people belonging opposition political parties, and white farmers, who did not support the expropriation of white-owned farmland.

There is need to comment on the fact that liberation war veterans in Zimbabwe have advanced in age. Most of them are now old men and women. Women veterans would dance while wearing big boots, colloquially known in the Shona language as *bhutsu mutandarikwa* (the long shoes) (Mlambo 2022: 59). This shoe has a long history of association with violence from the days of Rhodesian police officers to the era of the liberation war. Guerrilla fighters during the independence war, both male and female, used the 'long shoes' to kick sell-outs, but on account of advanced age after independence, paraphernalia and military fatigues were in use in street protests and with the aim of intimidating masses, to get them to comply with their demands.

However, the words they have spoken about their valorous deeds have created images of youthful men and women, still capable of fighting. As Mlambo (2022: 139) has argued: "The symbolic importance attributed to some veterans, whose old bodies do not themselves announce anymore, are visually indicated somewhere and somehow. Things work in such a way that power is displaced from the old faces and old bodies themselves to various martial paraphernalia – guns, knobkerries, machetes, axes or clothes whose color or form attract the eye to the site of martial power and potency." Power was also displaced from the aged faces and bodies of veterans through speeches in which they exaggerated their physical abilities, especially through militant songs which portrayed the veterans as "*vanamukoma vanorova*", literally, "elder brothers who beat", that is, who can mete out corporal punishment to errant civilians. This is reminiscent of a similar usage of rhetoric by Emmerson Mnangagwa (president of Zimbabwe, and patron of the liberation war veterans, at the time of writing), in which he appealed to the patriarchate – posing as a father figure meting out punishment on errant citizens. On several occasions, the war veterans challenged the younger generation of citizens, indicating that even if they were to take back Zimbabwe to colonialism by voting the veterans' preferred government out of power, the war veterans were still capable of liberating the country again. In their understanding, opposition political parties in Zimbabwe were puppets of Western governments bent on a regime change agenda.

In addition to the above, I pay attention to the rhetoric of language and culture as appropriated by liberation war veterans' leaders in verbal practice (cf. Strecker and Tyler 2012). I demonstrate how war veterans' leaders through rhetoric articulate cultural ideas and ideals, addressing society, while expressing particular ways of thought and action. Authoritatively, Mnangagwa, a war veteran himself and president of Zimbabwe (at the time of writing), deployed verbal rhetoric presenting himself, in the process, as a strict disciplinarian who does not hesitate "*[k]urova vane misikahwa neshamhu ine munyu*", to chastise the disobedient with a sjambok soaked in brine solution (Chitando and Mlambo: forthcoming). In his eyes, wayward citizens bent on committing violence and acts of civil disobedience that undermine national peace and security are warned to be wary of "*shamhu ine munyu*" (a sjambok soaked in brine solution).

The *shamhu ine munyu* rhetoric portrayed Mnangagwa as a no-nonsense disciplinarian who would not accept lawlessness in the

country and its economic environment. On the other hand, grim and severe as the *shamhu ine munyu* sounds, the fact that he uses a whip lessens the severity of the amount of force on the citizen, so that whenever he places his hand on his people's neck, putting them at his mercy, his actions might be viewed as acceptable and understandable, the actions of a stern patriarch who has only the intention to discipline errant citizens and not to brutalize them (Chitando and Mlambo: forthcoming). In a sense, Mnangagwa sought to establish a morally upright country and political order through a conventional punitive moralism. The disobedient would be whipped into line by the president's *shamhu ine munyu.* (Chitando and Mlambo: forthcoming).

As Chitando and Mlambo (forthcoming) would argue: "In his endeavor to create an atmosphere of fear and respect for the war veteran's desired *status quo,* liberation war veterans exhibited a tough attitude in the process of adhering to performance "rules" through artistic rhetoric. In a way, the war veterans creatively inflicted the tyranny of art on civilians. This was buttressed by their trademark slogans "*Pasi nemhandu*!" (Down with enemies!) "*Pasi nenhunzvatunzva*!" (Down with social miscreants!) and "*Pasi nevatengesi*!" (Down with sell-outs!) which they used in apparent reference to political competitors. As a result of this rhetoric of violence, the war veterans constructed an authority which helped them to be perceived as strongmen."

There is also a sense in which, through speeches, leaders of the liberation war veterans invested emotional and mental energy in their fellow ex-soldiers. Speaking on global platforms, the aspect of veteran of the liberation war loomed large in Mugabe (former Prime Minister of Zimbabwe 1980-87, and Executive President 1987-2017) as his speeches were characterized by a militant and combative language. Such statements as, "Zimbabwe shall never be a colony again", and "We defeated this monster of colonialism, bring it and we will defeat it again", and "Zimbabwe is not a British colony", and "Blair keep your England, and let me keep my Zimbabwe", punctuated his speeches at United Nations Assembly Meetings. Additionally, the massing of guerrilla veterans in public spaces – in the city of Harare, for example – functioned as a force materializing the power and personal agendas of the veterans as expressed in the speeches of war veterans' leaders to their forces (Mlambo 2022). Such speeches also served to summon and/or encourage combat-related masculinities, providing the war veterans with an opportunity for generating fresh militant masculinity to brutalize their victims and to get what they wanted (Chitando and Tarusarira, cited in Mlambo 2022).

Mythology of masculinity

I must hasten to point out that in a Zimbabwe liberation war veteran's world, the image of the archetypal man – a land-owning war veteran, powerful and heroic – has not only been framed or built up by the iteration of particular slogans and songs, but has also been framed in, and mediated through, myths. The appropriation of myths in the construction of masculinities allows for an exegesis of the mechanics and mythology of masculinity (Foucault 1984: 88). Myths are tools through which people think – templates for conceptual thought about power and domination. They are interpretive templates which provide a framework for making sense of cultural experiences. Mythology in this particular case is the universe within which

war veterans found a language to express their anxieties about power and invincibility in society. The mythical worldview has reference points in tradition and everyday life, but excites wonder and reverence, in the process, helping us to understand how heroism became their world.

My argument is that Zimbabwe's liberation war veterans cast themselves in a particular light. Their various regimens, in conjunction with certain symbolic structures in each case had the effect of building larger-than-life images of men who could fight to get whatever they wanted. It must be noted that most African fighters of colonialism believed in spiritual powers, which they thought could protect them from harm when facing bullets in battle. This spiritual aspect of being was a strong belief among many precolonial African armies – something which led to many deaths of African warriors in wars against the colonial forces (Mlambo 2022: 54). Most believed themselves to possess some spiritual power. As a result, they confronted the gun in the belief that the bullet was harmless. Guerrillas who ventured on to the battlefield resorted to local diviners and spirit mediums to protect them in combat or to guarantee the success of an attack (Mlambo 2022: 203 n.32 see also Seibert 2003; Gewald 2003).

Zimbabwe veterans are also mythically constructed as giant figures of the Rhodesian civil war, who defeated colonialism. They told stories during the war of how they were supposedly perceived as possessing superhuman powers, which could make them disappear or turn into cattle or stones during combat encounters with Rhodesian soldiers – leading in most cases (as the stories purport) to the shooting of cattle by Rhodesian forces, who were made to believe that the guerrilla soldiers had changed into cattle miraculously. It must be emphasized that the Rhodesians did not actually believe that cattle were literally transformed Africans. The veterans told these stories that the whites believed cattle were Africans, but the Rhodesians did not believe literally that African witchcraft worked. There might have been cases where Rhodesian soldiers shot at people's cattle in retaliation for failing to capture guerrilla soldiers, or where they saw something moving in the darkness and thought it was a man, and so they shot it, but it was actually a cow.

The veterans' sense of invincibility during the liberation war was inspired by the oracles of a great and heroic ancestor called Nehanda, who prophesied that her bones would rise to fight colonialism. This was interpreted to imply that the guerrilla soldiers were the incarnation of Nehanda's heroic ghost/spirit. Nehanda and Chaminuka are spirit mediums that inspired the first *Chimurenga* war that occurred in 1896/7 against the BSAC (British South Africa Company) in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The spirit mediums of *Mbuya* (Grandmother) Nehanda, and *Sekuru* (Grandfather) Chaminuka and Kaguvi led the uprising.

The language of Zimbabwean war veterans in most cases was militaristic, as indicated by the higher frequency of imperatives, violent language and military vocabulary. It was in this process that the war veterans displayed a masculine superiority of speech when dealing with civilians. What is more, war veterans used, as well as responded to, the language of "can't" and "must". In line with this argument, in such situations, this exhibited the character of rule-following which demands ostensive training. Ostensive training is ultimately training in a blind response to assertions (Berns 2006).

Veterans sometimes spoke as though their demands were to be obeyed without question; for example, they might say "Land *tichangoitora chete muchida musingadi*" (Land, we will just take it whether you like it or not), or "*Hamufi makaitonga nyika ino, vatengesi*" (You will never rule this country, sell-outs) or *"2008 VaMugabe muOffice"* (Mr. Mugabe in Office 2008.)

Another popular utterance among war veterans expressed their commitment to Mugabe's leadership: "*VaMugabe chete chete*" (Mr. Mugabe only.) By this, they meant that in all their actions, they strictly adhered to Mugabe's leadership for guidance and thought. It is a very compact statement. "*Chete chete*" is a repetitive statement whose equivalent is the word "only". It was a message to everybody in the party and those who might have been nursing rebellious thoughts. "*Chete chete*" meant it was sinful and illegal to think about a leader other than Mugabe. Even one's life was less important if they dared to challenge Mugabe. War veterans venerated Mugabe's leadership to the extent of composing a song which exhorted Zimbabweans to take time to reflect on Mugabe's excellent leadership, according to the war veterans' criterion of evaluating their leader's performance in leadership. In a certain song, the words: "*Nyatsoteerera unzwe kutonga*" (Listen well, that you may hear how to lead) require some attention. The words imply that if people were to listen, they might *hear* the overriding presence of the war veterans' dear leader. The words imply that it was possible to *listen to* (not just *see*) Mugabe's manner of leading. *"MuOffice muna Bob"* (In the office there is Bob (Mugabe)) was another utterance common with war veterans, which was meant to remind Zimbabweans that Mugabe was in charge. The veterans deployed these sayings as methods for sanctioning and modifying people's dispositions to keep them in line, so as to enable the veterans themselves to do what they wanted.

Conclusion

The verbal utterances exchanged between Zimbabwe's Liberation War veterans and civilians in quotidian conversations about land expropriation are rich texts which can be made use of in order to reflect upon perspectives involving culture, land, power and politics in a post-colonial setting. The utterances analyzed in this article also demonstrate various ways in which language can be used creatively as a weapon of invective, ridicule and violence in the politics of resource distribution. Such utterances have also created powerful images relating to the struggles and contestations between generations in an agrarian economy, entangled with competing ideologies, namely capitalism, African revolutionary ideals informed by Chinese Marxism, and African traditional ways of perceiving land ownership issues.

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