Engagement with Colonial and Apartheid Narratives in Contemporary South Africa: A Monumental Debate

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Summary

This article engages with current debates around colonial and apartheid era narratives in South Africa with a focus on heritage. The heritage landscape, receptacle of the nation's dominant ideology, was the place from where current calls were made for the removal of colonial and apartheid era commemorations in the public sphere and the decolonisation of the intellectual landscape. Applying the notion of identity as exclusivist and the ideological function of heritage, the article argues that protestors calling for the removal of colonial and apartheid-era statues and the decolonisation of South African universities have their epistemic roots in a discourse aligned with a struggle for recognition of heritage and contestation for the disarticulation of certain other heritages. In this way, memory and forgetting are symbiotic, reflecting the needs of the current generation. Public attacks on the commemorative landscape voice resistance to official hegemonic narratives, constituting developing consideration of and diverse perspectives engaging with systems of power. Randomly sampled online comments provide further context to the debate.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel sluit aan by huidige debatvoering oor koloniale en apartheidsera-narratiewe in Suid-Afrika, met 'n fokus op erfenis. Die erfenislandskap, bewaarplek van die volk se dominante ideologie, is die plek waarvandaan die huidige oproepe gemaak word vir die verwydering van koloniale en apartheidsera-gedenkwaardighede in die openbare sfeer en die dekolonisasie van die intellektuele landskap. Deur die idee van identiteit as eksklusivisties en die ideologiese funksie van erfenis toe te pas, voer die artikel aan dat protesteerders wat 'n oproep maak vir die verwydering van koloniale en apartheidsera-standbeelde en die dekolonisasie van Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite, se epistemiese wortels in 'n diskoers lê wat ooreenstem met 'n stryd om die erkenning van erfenis en die verset teen die disartikulasie van sekere ander erfenisse. Op hierdie manier word herinneringe en om te vergeet simbioties en weerspieël dit die behoeftes van die huidige generasie. Openbare aanvalle op die erfenislandskap gee 'n stem aan teenstand teen amptelike, heersende narratiewe wat uit die ontwikkeling van en uiteenlopende perspektiewe betrokke by magstelsels bestaan. Aanlyn kommentaar wat ewekansig bestudeer is, bied verdere konteks waarbinne die debat gevoer kan word.

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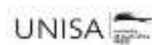

Introduction

On 9 March 2015 University of Cape Town (UCT) student Chumani Maxwele defaced the statue of English imperialist, mining magnate and politician Cecil John Rhodes with human excrement. This act led to incidents of vandalism of statuary and monuments across the country, with sections of the public voicing opposition to colonial and apartheid era statuary holding places of prominence in public spaces (cf. Smith 2015). Maxwele's actions prompted the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, which saw protesting students call for the removal of the Rhodes statue on UCT campus grounds. The statue was seen as a symbol of institutional racism and a lack of transformation at the university, representing as it did a visual history of colonial and apartheid domination (cf. rhodesmustfall.co.za). The protest quickly became a movement when it was taken up at universities across the country where students called for the removal of colonial-era statues, regarding such actions as symbolic of the removal of barriers to institutional change. Supporters called for the decolonisation of university curricula and for institutional racism amongst staff and students to be addressed (cf. Harding 2015; rhodesmustfall.co.za). It is pertinent to this discussion that the protests and debates that followed began with a monument.

From the Dutch occupation of the Cape in 1652 to the British in 1795 and institutionalised apartheid in 1948, South African society was shaped into disparate racialised segments (Magubane 1996). The country's economy was founded on cheap black labour, made part of policy as evidenced in Cecil John Rhodes' Glen Grey Act of 1884, often described as the blueprint for apartheid. By the time colonialism evolved into institutionalised apartheid, Rhodes' call to "exploit the cheap slave labor that is available from the natives of the colonies" was secured (overcoming-apartheid. msu.edu). At apartheid's end, due to increased pressure from black-led political organisations and the international community, and violence that made the country ungovernable, South Africa was democratised and the African National Congress (ANC)-led government came into power. During this period, in the mid-1990s, monuments and memorials were erected to individuals and groups who were no longer regarded as terrorists (threats to the state) but anti-apartheid liberation heroes (Marschall 2010). Thus the changing national cognitive landscape elicited change in the landscape of commemoration.

Stuart Hall's (1997, 2003) conception of identity as constructed out of difference and hence supposedly finite and complete, enables an understanding of how contestations over colonial and apartheid-era monuments and statuary constitute an urge to disarticulate heritages in favour of replacement ones. Notions of the ideological function of heritage (Marschall 2010; Hall 2005) are also useful in appreciating the symbolism underlying

the destruction of monuments and statuary, that is, how such acts reflect bitter contestations over hegemonic narratives. A random sampling of online commentary from diverse South Africans will provide accessible entry points into the debate over statuary and monuments. As Zizi Papacharissi observes, information communication technologies provide platforms for "new models of civic or citizenship engagement" (2009: 29). What is at issue in the current heritage landscape is no longer the addition of different heritage themes but rather ways in which older, controversial ones are remembered, articulated and perpetuated. The aim of the paper is to engage with the current contestations by way of exploring these monuments as texts. While much noise has been made regarding the legality of the protests, the discourse has tended to overshadow protestors' concerns, which need to be engaged in a dialectical manner. The monuments and statuary at the centre of the protests stand as texts of colonial and apartheid era narratives with which the protestors have engaged and the huge public outcry has opened up a space in which dialogue might occur.

Heritage Conceptualised

Heritage constitutes the use of history for contemporary means (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009a; Timothy & Boyd 2003; Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge 2000; Lowenthal 1997). It includes a selective choice of inherited relics and legacies influenced by and capable of influencing the politics of both past and present (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009a; Timothy & Boyd 2003). Long-standing conceptualisations of heritage as related to power and wealth, as a natural right of wealthy elites − perpetuated as such by upper-class and upper-middle-class white males − "explain how it became available to become linked to racialised discourses" (Littler 2005: 3). Heritage is a resource for establishing identities, cultivating self-esteem, well-being and quality of life (Fernandes & Carvalho 2007: 123; Ashworth 1994). Heritage is constructed as much out of a society's values as its needs. National heritage, or "the Heritage" (Hall 2005: 24), an "embodiment of the spirit of the nation …" (2005: 24), is used by states toward building a cohesive national identity, reducing threats of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity to the nation-state, and promoting a national culture (Brett 1996; Ndoro 2009).

In the intervening years of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, the subjugation of non-white groups manifested in misplaced identities, a sense of cultural loss, lack of self-determination and a greatly diminished degree of social esteem (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009b). Local heritages were "suppressed, and in some cases eliminated, in favour of replacement ones" (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009b: 25), thus hindering the evolution and dissemination of indigenous heritage and culture (Cornelissen 2005). In 1992, 97 percent of all declared national monuments related to the cultural

heritage of the white minority (Frescura 1992). The implications of such a skewed heritage landscape were that the black majority had not produced material culture worthy of conservation, that they were deficient in “a record of achievement” and perhaps most severe, that “they have in fact ‘no history’” (Marschall 2010: 21). Under colonialism, monuments, memorials and statuary were erected as visual symbols asserting imperial authority and loyalty to Britain (Larsen 2012: 55). Heritage sites and objects were similarly conceived under apartheid, documenting as they did a particular historic narrative glorifying Afrikaner nationalism.

After Apartheid

The post-apartheid government was left with the question of what to do with colonial and apartheid-era monuments. A number of global models, ranging from Eastern European to American, could have been followed. While the removal of monuments is common in post-independence government policies, “serving to highlight the break with the past” (Larsen 2012), the democratically elected South African government chose to keep colonial and apartheid era statues in order that they could serve “as a record of apartheid, and to set them in dialogue with newer, more critically inclusive sites” (Shepherd 2008: 122). This approach was proposed in a report commissioned by the Convention for a Democratic South Africa. The report stated that while “[i]t is understandable that people would like to do away with symbols associated with the nightmares of apartheid’s grand designs of racial domination … [t]he destruction of monuments will not make apartheid’s history disappear” (Tomaselli & Mpofu 1997: 74). Keyan Tomaselli and Alum Mpofu assert that the monuments landscape should “show all the warts and blemishes of the society as it really is” (1997: 74).

Similarly, Sabine Marschall states that old monuments have become necessary points of reference, juxtaposed as they are with newer ones in “the tactical appropriation and re-contextualization of older monuments for the purposes of reconciliation and nation-building” (2010: 34). In the 1990s South Africa was a global exemplar in confronting its own difficult past, foregrounding a spirit of reconciliation such that the recognition of guilt, repentance and atonement became part of national memory (Marschall 2010; Barkan 2000). Archbishop Desmond Tutu provided the country with the metaphor of the Rainbow Nation, diverse in colour and united as one. According to the 2011 census, “Africans” make up 79.2% of the population; coloureds and whites each make up 8.9%; the Indian/Asian population 2.5% and those in the designation “Other” constitute 0.5% of the over 51.77-million citizens in South Africa (<www.southafrica.info>).

The Rainbow Nation was described by state presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki as strengthened by its diversity, thus subverting the

apartheid use of ethnicity towards subjugation. Ethnicity, in terms of the New South Africa, was to be celebrated (Herwitz 2012; Barnard 2003). While officially claiming inclusivity for all South Africans, such rhetoric did lend itself "to a more fundamentalist ethnic absolutism" (Coombes 2004: 3). Journalist Max du Preez (1999) sparked a media row and came under fire following an article in which he warned against reconstructing the racial categories of apartheid, arguing that both presidents' reference to "whites, coloureds, Indians and Africans" "implies absolutely that whites, coloureds and Indians can't be Africans" (cited in Coombes 2004: 2). What followed in the press was a series of scathing responses concerning who had the right to call themselves "African" (Coombes 2004). The fragmented Rainbow Nation has carried its difficult past into a difficult present and what has emerged is a disjointed commemoration in which "diverse discourses of the past are voiced and aimed at disparate audiences" (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002: 32). In contrast to Marschall's notion of a rehabilitated (or rehabilitating) landscape of memory, the monuments and statuary of past eras, pointing to "assigned memories and identities inscribed into the landscape" by the elite (Larsen 2012: 46), unsurprisingly become contested terrains. The warts and blemishes occasionally erupt into pustules and boils that in addition to being unsightly are also extremely painful.

The Struggle over Monuments and Statuary

The Rhodes Must Fall campaign sparked a series of actions against monuments and statuary across the country. A statue of Queen Victoria outside the Port Elizabeth library was splashed with green paint. Members of the controversial political party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) daubed paint over statues of former president Paul Kruger and prime minister of the Union of South Africa Louis Botha, in Pretoria and Cape Town respectively, sparking protests from white minority parties (Smith 2015). Afrikaans singers Steve Hofmeyr and Sunette Bridges "sang the former apartheid anthem *Die Stem* in front of Kruger's statue, watched by an audience of white people, some dressed in quasi-military uniforms" (Smith 2015). Bridges proceeded to chain herself to the statue (Smith 2015). The UCT War memorial was spray painted with the phrase "fuck Rhodes", in addition a statue of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, an 1880s Cape parliamentarian, was vandalised "and its pedestal draped in white material, bearing the words 'A black woman raised me'" (Pather 2015). In Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape, the EFF necklaced and set alight a statue of a South African soldier. In Nelson Mandela Bay, EFF members destroyed a monument commemorating the horses that served in the second South African War

(Pather 2015).[1] In Johannesburg a group carrying placards that read: "Racist Gandhi must fall" threw paint on a statue of Mahatma Ghandi. It was later debated in the media whether or not the group, wearing ANC paraphernalia, acted as ANC members (Mbangeni & ANA 2015).

These and other protests, what has been described as "the symbolic shit [hitting] the colonial fan" (Fekisi & Vollenhoven), highlight the significance of monuments and the commemorative landscape. Monuments are symbolically loaded, and their presences and absences contribute to established spatial and temporal reference points, which in turn narrate a society's collective memory (Osborne 1994, 2001). Evoking specific kinds of meaning, they serve as "spatial coordinates of identity" (Osborne 2001: 4; Lynch 1972) and are linked to society through institutionalised commemoration as well as reciprocal relationships in which groups construct their identity through place, which in turn becomes an external source of identity (Osbourne 2001). Yet the terms of identity are not fixed: societies change and so too do the places which mark their identities (Massey 1995).

The poo-throwing protest came at a critical juncture in South African history. There is widespread evaluation of the twenty years of democracy that have passed and there is anger at unfulfilled promises in its wake (Grant 2014). Out of these circumstances existing socioeconomic and political arrangements are impugned (Forest & Johnson 2002). Interestingly, "the most intense and rapid change usually happens in a state's core cities, and especially in the capital" (2002: 527). Cape Town maintains a tenuous relationship with the rest of the country. History books began with the Dutch East India Company's first commander to the Cape, Jan Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape "and hence Cape Town has been called – and remains – the "mother city", the first city where "our [read white] history began" (Coetzee 1998: 114; Rassool & Witz 1993). The University of Cape Town, like its namesake, is a bastion of prestige. As gatekeeper of the intellectual landscape, universities uphold dominant ideologies not unlike the museum (Wright & Mazel 1987).

UCT is the earliest university in South Africa, and at its inception it acted as a colonial outpost (Bawa & Herwitz 2008). Twenty years into South Africa's democracy it seems that while the institution has eschewed such a role in function, it has retained it in form. American and Euro-centric curricula prescribe ways in which local African contexts are to be theorised and understood. Theory from the Global South, under-circulated and under-read, remains secondary (and by association inferior) to that from the Global North (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012). In this way Africa and Africans

1. The EFF had incited their members and the general public to deface and destroy monuments and statuary of colonial and apartheid origin. The party and its officials were later interdicted in the North Gauteng High Court against the above (cf. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Court-bars-EFF-from-inciting-people-to-damage-statues-20150421>).

continue to be identified in terms of their colonisers (wa Thiong'o [1987]1994). The call for the decolonisation of South African universities is steeped in the above and its historical (and present-day) implications. Such a call is not new. Writing in the early 1990s, Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin explore fiction from the margins and describe a "recolonising tendency" in the discipline of English literature in which "the differences and resistances offered by postcolonial literatures in English" are silenced or ignored even in the face of the popularisation of the "postcolonial" (1993: 8). The argument is that while "[t]here has been a multiplication of 'marginalisations' … [there has been] little real disturbance to Anglocentric and Eurocentric [i.e. Britain and the U.S.] curricula within the academies" (1993: 8). The statue of Rhodes, at the centre of the UCT campus, seated in an armchair, in a pose reminiscent of Rodin's *Thinker*, perhaps pondering the next move in his bid to stretch the British Empire from Cape to Cairo, is a visual symbol of assigned, elite memory in terms of historical and intellectual landscapes.

While some argue that Rhodes is long dead and his legacy, at least in terms of the Rhodes scholarship, has assisted many African scholars in the advancement of their careers, a UCT student expressed a different perspective:

> You can't silence us from speaking on injustice just because, let's say, I'm on a Rhodes scholarship. It's still wrong. Perhaps I became more conscious of this problem only after I accepted it, or maybe I was in a desperate position and I had to take the scholarship at the time. But if I think it [the continued presence of the statue on the campus] is an injustice, then I am going to speak out about it.
>
> (Herman 2015)

Another student explained that the statue dramatises feelings of alienation propagated by "[t]he systems and the processes in place here [that] have worked in such a way to exclude us from feeling as though we are part of this university" (Herman 2015). Monuments, museums, historic buildings, tourism landscapes, and other public spaces are crypts for the conservation and representation of particular ideologies (Hall 2005). Statuary of the dead, immutably cast or carved, symbolically arrest the process of atrophy thus altering "the temporality associated with the person, bringing him into the realm of the timeless, of the sacred, like an icon" (Verdery 1999: 5). In this way heritage is often purposefully used by governments to demonstrate authority "over people and places" (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009c: 44; Kim, Timothy & Han 2007; Timothy 2007; Timothy & Boyd 2003).

Many online comments gleaned from News24[2] articles on the topic show hints of racism and outright hate speech, with commentators using words such as "monkeys", "uneducated", "uncivilised", "illiterate", "idiots", "disrespectful", "these people" to describe protestors. Commentators in favour of the protesting students responded by claiming that the above constituted an attack by "racist whites", "white supremacists", and "people who were never oppressed". One comment that received 106 likes stated "I trust all the Rhodes scholarships will be withdrawn. Surely you can't have your cake and eat it?" Another comment that received 145 likes read "Seriously these brats need to get back into class and study .... his statue means nothing in this decade ... just an excuse to get out of class. Lazy brats" (see Herman 2015). These two comments express that either the Rhodes scholarship sanitises the history of the man, or that history does not need sanitising because, for some, it is so far into the past. The use of the word "brat" infantilises the students and their cause. This was a common theme in the commentary, in addition to which was the notion that the statue does not "mean anything". The latter may certainly seem true if that meaning has become normalised. In this way monuments and the whole commemorative landscape make ideology and dominant narratives "seem natural and commonsensical" (Savage: 18).

A further comment indicative of a widely held view read:

> No one is forced to attend university, let alone a specific university. If "the lectures don't represent your history or your narrative at all", why do you attend this university then? Many people are happy at UCT and find it to be very good. Does it have to change to suit YOUR particular priorities? Why not just go to one that does represent your history and narrative and build and improve that university, instead of trying to break down the UCT? Or is it just convenient to always have an excuse?
>
> (The quote in this comment is from a student cited in Herman 2015)

The response that students who are not represented at UCT (and who are asking for change in that regard) should find other universities that better represent them resembles the apartheid-era *volkekunde* tradition.[3] Similarly, another comment read: "Yes, they should find a kraal somewhere in Nkandla and build themselves a university there. Then they can say, THEY

2. Until recently, News24 had allowed for commentary on its articles and provided a popular platform for readers' opinions.

3. Serving the objectives of the apartheid state, the perspective held that mankind was divided into races/ethnic units (*volke*) and that each of these had its own particular culture (Sharp 1981). Segregation was described as a way to ensure that each race was free to develop its own way of life without the risk of miscegenation creating undesirable impurities. More specifically, this would ensure the strengthening of the white (Afrikaner) "race" (ibid).

did it. No Tommy Hilfiger jeans, no Audis and BMWs, no English-medium university. They should go and sit in Nkandla and walk to school barefoot" (Herman 2015). The writer is expressing a view, held by many commentators on the site, that civilisation and technological advancements were brought to Africa by "the white man" and that blacks disgruntled with a colonial and apartheid past should in turn eschew these advantages and return to a "primitive" lifestyle. Underlying such an argument is a notion of gratitude: blacks, in particular black millennials and "born-frees", should be grateful (to whites) for the comforts of civilisation now at their disposal. Together with the whitewashing of hundreds of years of human rights violations, this comment conflates the protest with political associations. By making reference to Nkandla, President Jacob Zuma's homestead mired in accusations of fraud and corruption, the commentator elicits similarly negative overtones and suggests that the students have a political affiliation with the ANC.

A black commentator calling for white South Africans "to become champions of justice and healing, and create a transformed identity for themselves" went on to say, "I do not know why you defend Rhodes because Rhodes was [a] perfect example of injustice. It is time for you, white people to work through the historical negative implications of 'whiteness'". Replies from white commentators were as follows:

> Comment 1: Thabile, yes, and while white people are doing all of that, will black people start working through the implications that as well as the statue of Rhodes, Eskom is also falling – as is SA Post Office, SAA, Education, Health, etc, etc? And, Thabile, your statement regarding "the historical negative implications of 'whiteness'" Naaah. I do not see it as a negative. Sorry.
>
> Comment 2: F off thabile. Only thing collective black movements do is destroy anything that's in front of them. The mob knows nothing else. Individually black people seem cool but as a group blacks come across as self-righteous, needy and stupid.
>
> Comment 3: Let's see Thabile .... nah, go FU*) [sic] yourself or one of your militant little buddies.

The engagement above highlights the point that identity involves the symbolic power of exclusion that is, "I am what I am because I'm not the other" (Hall 1997: 14). Imagination, as Anderson (1991) observes, plays a significant role in identity-formation. Such a process is grounded in fantasy, projection and idealisation (Hall 2003). When people are not able to see themselves reflected in an imagined community, especially a national identity, they are excluded from belonging (Hall 2005). This sense of alienation was voiced in comments from university students discussed earlier. Critics of the "Rhodes must fall" campaign have called it a culture

war in which the formally oppressed become the new oppressors (Laband 2015). This speaks to the function of identities as exclusive.

Even after regimes fall, the ghosts of abusive past systems of power have a tendency to haunt citizens, as Avery Gordon (2008) writes. They "make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with"; in this way they are "a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon 2008: xvi). Twenty-one years into South Africa's democracy, life for the majority of its citizens remains much the same as it was under apartheid. Taken-for-granted realities of the "New" South Africa are defunct in the face of extreme poverty and lack of basic resources, and as a museum director said in the light of vandalism and destruction of the Russian monumental landscape "… if you're not getting your wages paid, you lose interest in your ideals" (cited in Forest & Johnson 2002: 543). While university students protesting against and defacing statuary on their respective campuses (Sosibo 2015) may not be concerned with withheld wages, their protestation is steeped in deep-rooted discrimination felt in the private and public spheres of those on the disadvantaged side of the *colonial difference* (Mignolo 2002).

The trashing of a statue or monument is a disavowal, not only of the material object itself, but the narratives to which it points. Jonathan Jansen (2015b), Rector and Vice Chancellor at the University of the Free State, alluded to this when he stated that "our biggest mistake might yet be that we think these passing protests in cities and on campuses are about statues" (2015b). While Jansen does not describe what it is that the protests are about, he picks it up elsewhere in terms of cognitive rather than merely legalistic institutional transformation (Jansen 2015a, 2015c). First president of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) Robert Sobukwe captured the significance of heritage nationally when he stated that "a National struggle is a struggle for the recognition of heritage" ([1957]2013: 465). We might add that a national struggle is simultaneously a struggle for the disavowal of certain other heritages. Avowal and disavowal writ otherwise are memory and forgetting. Relationally connected, they facilitate one another and are not, as conventionally assumed, polar opposites (Legg 2007). According to Homi Bhabha, forgetting "constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative" (1994: 160), and, moreover, "[b]eing obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification" (1994: 161).

This constitutes a collective amnesia, a deliberate forgetting by entire societies (Timothy & Boyd 2003) not always led by compunction. Such forgetting is often due to the embarrassing or uncomfortable nature of that history and the exclusion is frequently racialised. This is an act of "disinheritance" whereby certain groups of people (social or ethnic) are

written out of history (Ashworth 1995). Worldwide, many diverse heritages have been excluded from conservation, representation and interpretation − examples include African/slave-related history deemphasised in the United States and Great Britain (Timothy & Boyd 2003; Robinson 1999; Powell 1997; Graham 1996; Boniface & Fowler 1993). In Nazi Germany, thousands of museums were built "to reinforce the myth of the super-race" (2003: 262). That history has now been re-written.

The process of nation building is often "as much about forgetting the past as commemorating it" (Graham 2000: 77). Lynn Meskell and Lindsay Weiss (2006: 88) describe "tactics of forgetting" as characteristic of South African heritage politics. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (1998) similarly ascribe an "erasure of the colonial past and its repressive regimes" as characteristic of South Africa in the period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Meskell & Weiss 2006: 88). Meskell imputes that post-TRC South Africa suffers from a chronic schism between a democratic, inclusivist rhetoric (or the "neutralization of difference") and ethnic recoveries after centuries of repression (or an "impossible originary identity") (2005: 74). An uneasy relationship exists between an "abstract idealised citizenship" and "the valorization of previously oppressed identity claims" (Weiss 2007: 414).

Institutionalised commemoration involves the use of memory and forgetting by the state to advance elite memory (Gillis 1994) and mark the terms of nationalism. In this way "[m]onuments attempt to mold a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest" (Savage 1997: 4). Nevertheless, in multicultural societies contestation over public space is common (Levinson 1990). When the cognitive landscape changes what is worth remembering also changes. Monuments and statuary aimed at a particular public order become contested terrains (Osborne 2001). Since societal identities change over time it is not surprising that fixed, frozen-in-time commemorations of particular identities would be contested once collective memory has changed.

Because they are fixed, geographically and ideologically, monuments and statuary are difficult to incorporate into a multivocal dialogue. Numerous heritage projects in post-apartheid South Africa have included the development of museums illustrating "that a monument alone does not in itself seem sufficient when there is a need to tell stories anew to set the record straight" (Rankin 2013: 95). Moreover, where the effort to re-narrate controversial monuments and statuary has been negated, a nagging question hangs in the air: why? Why would authorities such as institutions of higher learning not have their fingers on the pulse of a changing cognitive landscape? Why would they not recognise that it is within the domain of heritage and public history that new narratives, categories and imagery of the post-apartheid nation are fashioned (Rassool 2000)? Why, more than twenty

years into democracy, must there be a call for the decolonisation of curricula?

Moeletsi Mbeki describes independence in Africa to have worked only to entrench the "economic inequalities inherited from colonialism" (2009: 7). Mbeki writes that African nationalism, under the guise of mass liberation, began as a "movement of the small, Westernised black elite that emerged under colonialism" and fought for inclusion in the colonial system in order to benefit from its "spoils" (2009: 6). In terms of a "changed" heritage landscape, Richard Sandell argues that the South African Museum's re-presentation of its collections and displays as "indigenous heritage" and the reconfiguration of its work within the ambit of the "African renaissance" is a practice in "sleight of hand" (2002: 249, cf. Mpumlwana, Corsane, Pastor-Makhurane & Rassool 2002). This belies a late nineteenth-century division between cultural history and ethnography "and the grouping of ethnographic collections with the natural history specimens" (Sandell 2002: 249). Is a statue of Rhodes sanctified by its presence in Madiba Circle and at the centre of a university that now welcomes black students? Is the university cleansed of its treatment of black academics and students by the removal of Rhodes? Are both these examples of sleight of hand?

Writing on liberal racial denialism, Steven Friedman notes that "We cannot fight racism until we admit it exists. If our leading English-speaking universities had figured that out 20 years ago, they might not face angry black students today. If many in the national debate had worked it out then, we might be a less angry society now" (2015). Similarly, while condemning the form of Maxwele's protest, Jansen responds to the call for deeper transformations at universities, stating further that "[f]or bringing these matters to urgent public attention, we owe the UCT students a debt of gratitude" (2015a). Elsewhere he states that "here is a teachable moment, an opportunity for a sustained, national dialogue as well as action on signs, symbols and statues in our still unsteady democracy" (2015b). Certainly this moment in history is fertile for debate over prescribed hegemonic metanarratives.

South Africa's colonial and apartheid past has played a pivotal role in forming broadly hegemonic answers to questions such as: i) what constitutes heritage; ii) whose heritage; and iii) who benefits from the ways in which it is constructed. Certain globally evident motifs of power relations appear to prevail. These are partly conceived as "national, official, masculine … [and] white" (Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge 2000: 53). Further, South Africa continues to define itself in terms of colonialism and apartheid. Its history is carved up into pre, during, post and neo eras. To use the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, these terms have become a "linguistic encirclement" out of which the nation is unable to map new paths ([1987]1994: 5). Nevertheless, with matters of neo-colonialism and institutionalised racism brought to public attention, the construction of new paths is perhaps underway.

While vandalism and the destruction of monuments and statuary is arguably unjust,[4] the current unrest has sparked dialogue and it may be perhaps out of these current struggles that new paths will emerge. Commentators like Jansen believe this to be a passing turmoil such that South Africa will “auto-correct towards the middle because that is the kind of country we are” (2015c). However, Bryan Rostron cautions against becoming “distracted by exhibitionism rather than [hearing] the frustration of a younger generation” (2015). While passions might peter out and the issue temporarily disappear, Rostron warns that “it will almost certainly return − with renewed vengeance” (2015). The conversation that needs to take place should include a discussion of political symbolism, national and international contexts, memory and forgetting as symbiotic in heritage-making, evolving cognitive landscapes, elite narratives versus a changing national consciousness, and societal gain versus trauma in the commemoration of certain figures of history. It is a conversation that necessitates taking up across the colonial divide, one that needs consummate, morally incorruptible mediators. Whether or not this will happen remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Monuments and statuary are visual markers through which individuals make sense of their lives and their place in society. This speaks to the ideological function of heritage and is not always a process of positive affirmation as grand narratives are often set by dominant social groups. In this regard, the defacing of statues is a voicing of resistance to official hegemonic narratives. These alienable narratives are based on exclusivist identities essentialised through entrenched racial discourses out of South Africa’s past. While the purchase of such protest is questionable the action serves to show the presence of dissent, dissident voices and different perspectives on history.

Socio-political impacts of colonialism and institutionalised apartheid within the South African context have played a major role in the way in which heritage is constituted and engaged in the democratising state. The reverse is also true in that changing interactions with heritage are portentous,

4. Practising disavowal of certain histories may be viewed as a contravention of the nationally prescribed view of heritage as a unique and valuable resource with the potential for nation building via education (NHRA Preamble 1999). Under the National Heritage Resources Act (1999) heritage is said to have the capacity to facilitate healing, materially and symbolically, encouraging us to empathise with the experiences of others and shaping our national character.

sometimes embryonic articulations of rising debate and diverse perspectives engaging with systems of power. The recent controversy surrounding monuments and statuary in South Africa speaks to a deeper engagement with representation, national identity and transformation intrinsic to our tremulous democracy.

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