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Decolonising the Cultural Landscape: Preserving Historical Statues in Tshwane, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The post-apartheid South African cultural landscape is characterised by complex and contradictory dynamics. On one hand, it is a space where ongoing contestations, anti-racist struggles, and resistance against dominant ideologies persist, challenging the prevailing ways of thinking and perceiving the public sphere. On the other hand, this landscape is also susceptible to political manipulation and serves as a battleground for various class interests, power struggles, and attempts to control the state apparatus. This article employs a decolonising gaze theory to examine qualitative data collected from the former Groenkloof Nature Reserve to shed light on the challenges associated with preserving historical statues and monuments. Additionally, it seeks to understand the motivations behind the construction of statues and monuments commemorating former struggle icons at Groenkloof, despite the obstacles encountered. The findings of this study reveal that the presence of Groenkloof statues and monuments is an integral part of an ongoing resistance movement and contestation of colonial history. These monuments serve as a means of reconciling the past and the present, facilitating connections and exchanges, while also exposing the ruptures, struggles, and complexities that continue to shape South Africa's deeply intertwined history.

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In the post-apartheid cultural landscape of South Africa, there are spaces characterised by contestations, resistance, and struggles against racism and dominant ideologies deeply rooted in the colonial worldview (Marschall 2006, 2010; Mbembe 2015; Miller & Schmahmann 2018; Prashad 2001; Sajnani 2015). Over the past two to three decades, South Africa and the African National Congress (ANC) have worked to decolonise cultural landscapes by constructing statues and monuments honouring anti-colonial icons (Fubah & Ndinda 2020; Grant & Price 2020; Kros 2015; Mbembe 2015; Nettleton 2020). These initiatives aim to unveil the intertwined history of apartheid, violence, contestation, resistance, and decolonisation, while promoting reconciliation between the past and the present and envisioning a diverse and unified nation.

One such initiative is the former GNR statues and monument park, where over seventy bronze statues of former ANC activists stand. Implemented collaboratively by the

government, heritage practitioners, and the population, these statues seek to create a narrative that captures the complexities of South African history (Gamedze in Rankin 2018; Mbembe 2015; Rankin 2018; Snyman 2015; Vorster & Quinn 2017). Their purpose is to foster national pride, address the missing voices that significantly shaped present-day South Africa, and commemorate activists' sacrifices for the country's freedom ('Audit of Statues, Symbols and Monuments to be Done' 2020; Gamedze in Rankin 2018; Van Dyk 2020). The establishment of a park dedicated to statues of struggle icons, like Freedom Park on the opposite side of Groenkloof, exemplifies the evolving nature of South Africa's cultural heritage landscape, where societal iconography and norms are in constant flux (Marschall 2006, 2010; Mbembe 2015; Miller & Schmahmann 2018; Prashad 2001; Sajani 2015).

However, the retention of historical statues and monuments on the cultural landscape has encountered challenges, prompting calls for their removal. President Cyril Ramaphosa has called for the removal of symbols, monuments, and activities that glorify racism and represent the nation's ugly past (2020). This has sparked considerable attention and debate among the Black population, scholars, the public, and political leaders (Fubah & Ndinda 2020; Grant & Price 2020; Kros 2015; Mbembe 2015; Nettleton 2020). While many welcome Ramaphosa's views, others question the ANC government's intentions regarding nation-building (Van Dyk 2020). These diverse perspectives reflect the multi-layered approach to addressing the retention of historical statues in South Africa and Tshwane, where the repugnant historical content clashes with the need for inclusive social transformation (Grant & Price 2020; Mbembe 2015; Snyman 2015; Vorster & Quinn 2017). Acknowledging this complexity, a decolonial perspective emphasises that dynamic interactions between dominant and subaltern groups shape history (Grant & Price 2020; Mbembe 2015; Snyman 2015; Vorster & Quinn 2017).

This paper aims to understand the challenges associated with retaining historical statues and monuments, and the rationale behind constructing statues of struggle icons at the former GNR despite these challenges. Drawing from a decolonial gaze, it re-examines the historical context of these statues and monuments and the perceptions they evoke today, particularly within the context of the GNR. This approach recognises the importance of nuanced historical understanding in navigating the intricate history of South Africa and its ongoing struggles and contestations.

Theorising the decolonial gaze

Historical statues and monuments influence present perceptions about the cultural landscape by perpetuating certain ideas and beliefs about the past. The decolonising gaze challenges these dominant historical narratives by introducing counter-monuments that disrupt established perspectives (Kaunda 2015). The public history embodied in statues and monuments is inherently mediated, and the introduction of counter-statues shifts knowledge about the past and reshapes the ontology of history itself (Grant & Price 2020; Mbembe 2015).

The decolonising gaze reconceptualises public perceptions of the past, recognising that Africans are agents in their own history and not merely victims (Maluleke 2000). It seeks to inspire and nurture the agency of ordinary Africans, acknowledging that the past and present are intertwined, and that history plays a significant role in understanding complex social and cultural issues (Grant & Price 2020; Mbembe 2015)

The focus of this study is Pretoria, the political capital of South Africa, which has undergone name changes and shifts in its cultural landscape throughout history. The city's cultural heritage is still dominated by historical statues and monuments, such as Paul Kruger's statue and the Union Buildings, which embody colonial and apartheid-era ideologies (Fubah & Ndinda 2020). These landmarks have become sources of contestation, as they symbolise racial exclusivity and white supremacy for many individuals (Madida 2020).

Similar contestations over historical statues and monuments have occurred across Africa during the colonial and apartheid periods (Arnoldi 1999, 2003, 2007; Coombes 2003; Larsen 2013). In post-independence Kenya, for example, the role of historical or colonial era statues was contested, leading to their removal (Larsen 2013). The preservation of historical statues and monuments in Tshwane (Pretoria) and South Africa's cultural landscape, and the construction of the GNR statues in honour of struggle icons, must be understood in this broader context.

While efforts to reconcile the past and the present through the construction of statues and monuments are important, the decolonising gaze acknowledges that decolonisation is a complex and contradictory process (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012). Decolonisation involves introducing counter-statues and monuments to challenge oppressive conditions and dominant narratives of history marginalising African agency (Chilisa 2012).

It is essential to explore the possibility of reconciling the past and the present using statues and monuments honouring struggle icons while addressing the retention of historical statues and monuments on the cultural landscape. Arguably, South Africa's entangled history may require embracing multiple dimensions of decolonisation within the cultural landscape.

Decolonial research methods

This study analyses qualitative data through a decolonisation approach to interrogate the challenges with the retention of historical statues and monuments. The data was collected between May and October 2016 at the former GNR Struggle Heroes and Heroines Statues and Monument Park. Some scholars call decolonising research methods as a 'soft approach to decolonization' (Stein, Andreotti, Hunt, and Ahenakew 2019, 18). According to Vanessa Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Cash Ahenakew and Dallas Hunt (2015), this approach considers decolonisation as an event with a clear beginning and an end, which can ultimately be absorbed into the colonial mode of existence. A possible response to the 'soft approach' to the decolonisation of public spaces in Tshwane is what some scholars call the 'radical reform' approach (Andreotti et al. 2015). This approach calls for a deeper critique of the cultures of the colonial and apartheid eras, especially as they apply to statues and monuments. It advocates that centring the cultures of previously disadvantaged people, such as Black people, and their icons can go a long way in nurturing and engaging with historically marginalised heroes, heroines, and other Black aesthetics. However, this approach might put more emphasis on a single story, such as that of Black heroes and heroines, and end up like the same canon that the population is calling for its removal (Andreotti et al. 2015).

Given the decolonial framework complexities, this study analysed qualitative data from a 'radical approach' since the newly constructed statues and monuments, such as those at

the former GNR and Freedom Park, are inclusive. We also drew from qualitative data gathered from the site. Through systematic and purposeful sampling, 25 students out of a total sample of 30 and 10 heritage practitioners were interviewed. These interviews provided an insider's perspective on students' resistance to the retention of historical statues and monuments and their open call for a decolonising approach to their promotion and preservation experiences (Grant and Price 2020). Purposive sampling was used to project the role that certain respondents were likely to serve in the study (Bernard 2006) given their deep knowledge of the cultural significance of historical statues and monuments. A case study strategy was deemed apt to provide context to answer the research question under study (Yin 1994). Following Russell Bernard (2006), heritage practitioners were purposively sampled based on their knowledge of historical and contemporary heritage practices. The use of multiple methods helped ensure reliability and validity (Burns 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994; Spradley 1980; Yin 1989). Although all interviews were tape-recorded for further reference, the authors made detailed notes as the interviews progressed (Stake 1995). A field diary was kept providing 'in-depth elucidation of it' (Bryman 2004, 50).

To a limited extent, the selection of the former GNR Struggle Heroes and Heroines Statues and Monument Park was based on the 'sampling logic' or 'those that are representative of the different racial groups across South Africa' (Yin 1994, 47). In this regard, the authors opted to work in one site since it meets the criteria of similarity with historical statues and monuments in South Africa. The authors, however, also extended to the Voortrekker Monument on the hill adjacent to the park, and Freedom Park on the other side of it, where they have done some work through informal interviews, casual discussions, and participant observation. Both sites seem to have been constructed to counter the narrative of the other.

Interview transcripts, informal discussion notes, and participant observation sessions were analysed thematically. Focus was given to exploring why there was opposition to historical statues and monuments, and to student and heritage practitioner perspectives on struggle icons' statues and monuments. In tandem with the concept of voluntary informed consent, subjects of research are entitled to know the nature, purposes, and implications of research and to autonomously choose whether to take part in it (Bryman 1988; McNamee & Bridges 2002). Hence, informants were debriefed (Bernard 2006). They were reminded that they had the choice not to participate and to disengage at any time from the research. In keeping with the principle of respect for the terms of participant involvement and ensuring confidentiality (Burns 2000; Reynolds 1982), pseudonym names of participants were used.

The post-apartheid gaze and the challenge of retention

Employing thematic approach, the data is presented and discussed in three major themes as follows:

Contesting the apartheid gaze

The participants in the discussions at the former (GNR) Struggle Heroes and Heroines Statues and Monument Park emphasised the importance of constructing new commemorative statues and monuments that reflect the symbols and aesthetics of the new South Africa, which is in the process of decolonisation. They expressed that the historical statues

and monuments associated with the colonial and apartheid era, such as the Paul Kruger statue and the Voortrekker Monument, should not be given prominence in the cultural landscape. The participants in the discussions argued that retaining statues and monuments associated with the colonial and apartheid era perpetuates coloniality of gaze that reinforces white heroism. As a participant argued:

If I compare the GNR statues and monuments with the Voortrekker Monument, I see myself and that of the majority of South Africans reflected at the GNR statues park than at the Voortrekker Monument. The GNR park tells me that I am living in the present and that I have a voice. I feel happy just by seeing some of our icons like Nelson Mandela, Lilian Ngoyi, and Albertina Sisulu represented in the GNR statues and monument park (interview Makitla, 33 years, 19 June 2016).

They emphasised that the act of gazing is not neutral but rather political, as what people consistently look at shapes their perspective on life. For many, these symbols were part of a system that collapsed in 1994. They are an extension of the pre-1994 cultural iconography, specifically representing Afrikaner nationalism. As one of the students observed:

We cannot continue to be welcomed into our cities, buildings, and public spaces by symbols of people we consider enemies. All statues and monuments in honour of colonial and apartheid heroes and heroines should be removed and destroyed completely so that the pain that some of our parents still have about the pre-1994 years can start to heal. It will never heal if they continue to see these so-called historical statues and monuments across the streets of Pretoria (interview Sithole, 32 years, 20 August 2016).

The participants understood the need to challenge and contest the lingering gaze of apartheid in public spaces. They believed that retaining historical statues and monuments associated with colonial and apartheid figures would hinder the healing and transformation of South Africa's cultural identity. Instead, they advocated for the construction of new statues and monuments that honour anti-colonial and anti-apartheid icons, aligning with the aspirations of a decolonised dispensation. According to Chauke:

Constructing new statues and monuments in honour of struggle heroes and heroines is desirable, while retaining historical statues and monuments in honour of colonial and apartheid heroes and heroines is undesirable to South Africa's cultural health. Retaining historical statues and monuments suggests that the government is overwhelmed by the country's cultural transformation pressures and seems to have lost a clear direction and effective answers to the growing expectations and calls by South Africans for the removal of historical statues and monuments from the cultural landscape (interview Chauke, 40 years, 10 June 2016).

There was a strong sentiment that constructing new statues and monuments to honour anti-colonial and anti-apartheid icons while simultaneously preserving historical statues and monuments amounted to not only reproducing and reinforcing the colonial nature of the cultural landscape but also validating the atrocities committed by the pre-1994 regimes. As emphasised by Mulalo, one of the informants, *'the statues and monuments of colonial and apartheid heroes and heroines must be removed and burnt to make our streets and public spaces welcoming to us and our visitors. We cannot be in the present and still living in our unjust historical pasts'* (interview Mulalo, 28 years, interviewed 15 June 2016).

Despite such militaristic calls to remove historical statues, others were more constructive. As one of the heritage practitioners observed, *'we cannot build a new society by destroying our history. The past and the present are inseparable'* (interview Ntombi,

47 years, 20 August 2016). Ntombi explained that *'instead of calling for the destruction of historical statues from the Tshwane and South African cultural landscape, I suggest we construct more statues and monuments in honour of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid heroes and heroines, such as those here at the GNR. That way, the ANC government will be creating some kind of parity between the past and the present'*. Ntombi called for a nuanced approach to retention of historical statues that resists denialism and acknowledges the complex history of South Africa. According to this argument, removing and burning historical statues may not be the most effective way to address the issues of coloniality and apartheid. Instead, searching for a balanced representation and subtle positioning of status in a way that includes both the stories of resistance and apartheid injustices. Whether acknowledged or not, these stories will forever intertwine as the narrative of South Africa. Hence, as Thandazile, argued, *'retaining historical statues and monuments is one of the best ways that South Africa can use to preserve the country's history. It is not like the government is trying to undermine the ideals of the new dispensation or that it is not listening to the calls for the removal of historical statues'* (interview Thandazile, 35 years, 11 August 2016). For Thandazile, it is about preservation, *'and I strongly believe the country's history will be incomplete without historical statues and monuments despite what they represent'*.

These discussions embody the ongoing struggle against the lingering influence of apartheid and the quest to reshape South Africa's cultural landscape to reflect post-apartheid era values and aspirations. There is no singular viewpoint regarding the destiny of historical statues and monuments in Tshwane and South Africa. Since 1994, the position of the ANC government has been to erect statues and monuments honouring anti-colonial and anti-apartheid icons throughout the nation, to address historical cultural imbalances and promote decolonising symbols. Interestingly, many post-apartheid monuments are situated adjacent to historical monuments. For instance, Freedom Park in Tshwane is positioned alongside the Voortrekker Monument, potentially indicating an effort to diminish the significance of the latter in the new era. While it may not have been explicitly designed to counteract apartheid history, represented by the Voortrekker Monument, the proximity of Freedom Park implies a strategic intention (Rankin 2018, 17). Marschall (2010, 217–218) observes that the discussions surrounding the site selection for Freedom Park resemble those of the Voortrekker Monument site. This is due not only to the eventual proximity and convenience for the ruling government, but also to concerns that local heroes and events would be overshadowed by the centralisation of the memorial.

Decolonial politics of 'addressing past cultural imbalances'

The controversies surrounding the removal of historical statues and the construction of post-apartheid ones should be contextualised within the ideals of the new political regime. The political order has struggled to fostering decolonial politics that could transform apartheid structures of power, knowledge, and representation. As one student noted regarding the placement of GNR struggle icons statues in present-day South Africa: *'we cannot over-emphasise the central place occupied by these statues in honour of struggle heroes and heroines. The GNR statues and monuments have contributed enormously in addressing past cultural imbalances that we find across our cities'* (Lungu, 46 years old male, interview, August 27, 2016). The inclusive narrative at the GNR struggle heroes'

and heroines' statues park is similar to the narrative at Freedom Park. Both include Black and white people, as well as other diasporic icons who contributed to the liberation of South Africa, such as Fidel Castro (see [Figure 1](#)). While the GNR park resembles a grassy open-air museum, Freedom Park is not entirely so. Moreover, some visitors find the former GNR statues easier to understand than Freedom Park's metaphoric approach that tells a confusing, complex and intricate story (Rankin 2018). As a participant explained, the GNR statues and monuments *'are much in line with the expectations of majority of the South African population because of the type of people represented by the statues and the story they tell'* (interview Makitla, 19 June 2016).

The challenge is that since 1994, social transformation has been carried out almost entirely by the ANC government. Because the cultural landscape and associated cultural



Figure 1. Statue of Fidel Castro. Source: Photograph by authors.

spaces are platforms where constitutional ideals take material form, the landscape became a space for the ANC government to persuade the population to support its policies. As outlined in the 2017 *Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage*, the ANC's policy is to accelerate and deepen this transformative shift. It links inherent rights of all South Africans to access and participate in art, culture, and heritage, on the one hand, and to enhance the social and economic capacities of the cultural and creative industries to contribute to development, on the other. It is important to stress also that the ANC has faced accusations of perpetuating colonial legacies and systems of inequality. As a participant underlined, *'I will never stop blaming the ANC for their failure to provide decent living conditions to majority of the previously disadvantaged communities of this country'* (interview Nchabe, 34 years, 11 July 2016). This presents as problematic the motivations and intentions of the ANC in their quest to design a public point of view through counter-statues and monuments. Does this not pose a new danger of creating an ANC neo-colonising gaze? Lungu did not seem to care about that. For Lungu:

at least [the] statues in honour of struggle heroes and heroines is telling South Africans of all races that our people – Black political activists, in particular – contributed to bringing about the change we enjoy today and deserved to be remembered through what we are witnessing in this reserve. We need more of these in all parts of the country (interview Lungu, 27 August 2016).

While Lungu might be happy with statues of Black political activists, it appears that the ANC's ideology of reconciling the past and the present has failed to take root. For instance, the call to remove apartheid statues that represent pervasive inhumanities, such as those of Hendrik Verwoerd, might indicate that the ANC has failed to produce in post-apartheid political figures worthy of using for decolonial counter political statues. The removal of the statue of Verwoerd was one typical example of iconoclasm by the post-apartheid government. Verwoerd is remembered for his harsh policies as Minister of Native Affairs and as Prime Minister following the death in office of Strijdom in August 1958. From the very beginning of his administration, he advocated for the concept of a republic as a rallying point for Afrikaners and pushed for a political program based on coercive social engineering to maintain the migrant labour system and control of the urban African workforce (Marschall 2010). Moreover, he laid the foundations for the logical racial segregation of all spheres of life and introduced a large quantity of respective apartheid legislation, including the 'much-hated pass laws, the Group Areas Act, and the Bantu Education Act' that provoked a new wave of protest and resistance (SADET cited in Marschall 2010, 137). Given that the memory of Verwoerd is offensive to most of the post-apartheid dispensation, the ANC-dominated Orange Free State Legislature voted for the 'removal of his statue as well as the renaming of the Verwoerd building, the prominent government administration high-rise, in front of which the statue was erected on a high plinth' (Marschall 2010, 137). Sabine Marschall (2010, 137) highlights the euphoria that came with the removal of the statue. However, we may ask, did this not go against the decolonial reconciliation approach to the retention of the statue that would require only introducing a parallax view of history through counter-statues?

As the ANC and the majority Black population celebrated, many white residents of Bloemfontein and conservative Afrikaners throughout the country were outraged, both due to the fact of the statue's removal and the disrespectful way it was removed (Marschall 2010). However, the ANC's call for the transformation of the cultural landscape

had less to do with the fascination with the new imagery than with fundamental changes in South Africa happening since the 1990s. These changes supposedly swept away the colonial and apartheid ideology that served as cultural tools for self-confidence and control of the population by the white minority government. They have also hampered the influence of these resources, as more and more statues are now openly challenged, destroyed, or even removed again, like the Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town in 2015. This is how unimportant some colonial and apartheid statues and monuments have become, for both the previously marginalised who are calling for their complete removal and for students and heritage practitioners who feel the retention of historical statues or monuments on the cultural landscape is counterproductive to the identity of the new dispensation. The new generation of South Africans may be in danger of neo-colonised gazing at the past through a politically engineered, imprinted, and manipulated one-sided narrative that reinforces the ANC's political ideology. It appears the ANC's agenda for decolonial politics through decolonising the cultural landscape might be a mere state apparatus for masking a neo-colonial elitist agenda of a failed state.

'We are part of the city': Desire and fascination in post-apartheid

The challenge for retention of historical statues and monuments is also connected to the post-apartheid desire for and, fascination with anti-colonial icons. For example, Nchabe, having accused the ANC of being a neo-apartheid political regime, still affirmed, *'I will support [the ANC] when it comes to issues of cultural transformation such as the GNR statues and monument park and the renaming of Pretoria to Tshwane and many other good initiatives that they have undertaken in this domain'* (interview Nchabe, 11 July 2016). Post-apartheid desire for and fascination with anti-colonial activists has reduced and canonised decolonisation into a single story rather than multiple, complex and entangled narratives about different histories (Grant & Price 2020, 10). The challenge with post-apartheid desire and fascination is that it justifies the call for the removal of historical statues in a way that makes it difficult to retain and promote them on the Tshwane and South African cultural landscape. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, 9) note, 'the easy adoption of decolonisation as a metaphor is a form of anxiety', because it is a premature attempt at reconciliation adopted by the ANC government through the construction of statues and monuments in honour of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid icons. The ANC notion of reconciliation is not about promoting a parallax view of history but about obliterating conflicting views of history. Tuck and Yang (2012, 9) continue by arguing that this desire to reconcile 'is just as relentless and vicious as the colonial fascination with erasing the native'. It is a desire to resisting dealing with a complex, entangled and conflicting history of South Africa. It was clear from the respondents that in present-day South Africa and Tshwane, most of the previously marginalised population groups are fascinated by the ANC's efforts to commemorate the lives of struggle heroes and heroines through statues and monuments. As Nchabe (interview Nchabe, 11 July 2016) stressed, *'the mixture of historical and post-apartheid statues that we see in Tshwane tells us that we are part of the city'*.

The idea of being 'part of the city' was underlined by respondents who claimed to feel emotionally attached and related to the statues in some way. More studies must be done to understand the decolonial implications of such emotional attachment to the statues.

Indeed, most respondents feel that those represented by the statues mounted at the GNR were role models for most Black South Africans. Therefore, they reflect a higher level of diversity on the Tshwane cultural landscape than the historical statues and monuments that occupy strategic places across the city. In most cases, the Oliver Reginald Tambo statue was the centre of attention for students and heritage practitioners. While his role in South Africa's liberation struggle is well known, the attention given to his statue at the GNR at the time may have also been because South Africans celebrated 2017 as the year of OR Tambo. In the bronze statue constructed in honour of Tambo, he wears eye-glasses and a Western suit and tie. His two arms are raised as if preparing to embrace someone. Tambo was officially elected to the post of President in 1969. His most significant achievement was reconstructing the organisation's underground wing inside South Africa and maintaining the unity of the ANC in exile. He also participated in negotiations for the country's new democratic constitution. In 1991, Tambo handed the ANC presidency to Nelson Mandela, and was elected the National Chairman of the ANC. He died after suffering a stroke on 23 April 1993. His contribution to South African liberation struggle remains visible through the many statues constructed and buildings named in his honour.

Interestingly, the second statue that fascinated respondents was that of Dr Beyers Naudé, founder of the Christian Institute of South Africa (Figure 2). Naudé holds a Bible and wears a white shirt, black suit, and a ceremonial cassock. He was an Afrikaner cleric who became a pariah among his own people by refusing to submit his religious beliefs to the political beliefs of the ruling party and actively campaigning against apartheid. He was ordained as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and ministered in different congregations across South Africa. He faced serious criticism from the apartheid regime during the Sharpeville Massacre when he openly challenged political pressure to use race as a prerequisite for membership of the DRC.

In 1963, he founded the Christian Institute of South Africa, which promoted non-denominational and non-racial research and dialogue. Due to his refusal to give up his position at the Christian Institute of South Africa, he was expelled from the DRC and later banned for seven years under the Suppression of Communism Act. Despite the ban, Naudé assisted the underground movement (the ANC) in various ways, including repairing cars for political escapees. In 1987, he was part of the Afrikaner group that met with ANC representatives in Senegal to negotiate the transition to democracy in South Africa. This also demonstrates that the fascination and attraction are not solely with Black liberationists but also with the story behind the statue. In other words, it is the story behind the statue that participants were emotionally attracted to, rather than the colour of the person behind the statue. This also means, as argued above, that people's perception of the story of the anti-apartheid movement appears to have ontologically erased the colour of the person behind the statue. Instead, participants recognise a fellow human extending a helping hand. As Tembileli maintained:

as you can see, most of these icons represented by the statues are both Black, whites and Indians who sacrificed their lives so that we can also enjoy the freedom that has come with the new dispensation. Such freedom is about diversity rather than the single story that was the hallmark of the apartheid cultural landscape (personal communication Tembileli, Pretoria, 13 June 2017).

As a matter of fact, most of the stories narrated by the participants and visitors at the site centred on their achievements resulting from the sacrifices of these icons. This fascination



Figure 2. Information display with statue of Dr Beyers Naudé. Source: Photograph by authors.

with the new cultural representation of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle icons raise questions: what makes the struggle icons statues and monuments at the GNR site more desirable in the new dispensation than historical statues? What kind of message does the interest in these statues and monuments convey about the decolonisation agenda? Four suggestions, attempt to answer these questions.

First, the South African government's move to change the name to Tshwane in 2005 and later to construct statues and monuments in honour of Chief Tshwane contributed to the decolonisation of the name of the city (Fubah 2018). Chief Tshwane, whose statue is constructed at the site, is famous as the leader of the indigenous people who first settled in Tshwane (Pretoria). Oral history holds that, he inhabited the area now known as Tshwane before the Boer trekkers arrived in the mid-1800s. According to the explanatory information on the statue, Chief Tshwane was the son of Chief Mushi, a Ndebele king who led his people from Maponong to what later became known as the Transvaal. It is said that they first settled to the east of the city at the origin of the Moretele River. It is believed Chief Mushi moved to the region in the early 1800s and first settled at Mokgapane (Mooiplaas, east of Pretoria) before moving to what is now Pretoria and gave an area near the present-day Apies River to his son, Tshwane. The name Tshwane was distorted following the founding of Pretoria in 1855.

Second, most participant are likely to see the GNR statues as desirable because the mere presence of struggle icons there is a recognition and preservation of their memories. It aligns with the call for decolonisation of cultural institutions and the cultural landscape. But it also points to the fact that, like the Voortrekker Monument in honour of Afrikaner heroes and events in the past, the ANC and most South Africans see the statues and monuments honouring struggle icons as a means of remembering their own past. This ensures continuity between ancestors and descendants of these icons and the new

dispensation. It reminds viewers of the sacrifices and achievements of these struggle icons for present and future generations (Fubah 2018). As a result of this belief, building of statues and monuments honouring of struggle icons has become a common practice across South Africa since most people believe they belong to 'the people'. This view was expressed by one of the visitors at the site, who maintained that 'through these statues and monuments, the souls of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid icons have been resurrected'. Their story is now part of the broader South African liberation struggle (Nettleton & Fubah 2020).

Third, struggle icons' statues and monuments are also desirable in the eyes of the students and heritage practitioners because they help give a voice to the formerly marginalised groups. For example, Gavin Jantjes has written on the one-sidedness of status and monuments across South Africa during the colonial and apartheid era. In his introduction to the Visual Century project, he describes the evolution of South African art, including statues and monuments from 1907 onwards. He demonstrates how the harsh political circumstances of the 20th-century, colonial, union, and apartheid rule often eroded facts and shaped cultural fictions (Jantjes 2011). As a result of these fictions, the majority of South Africans were rendered voiceless until 1994.

Fourth, students and heritage practitioners see statues and monuments in honour of struggle icons as an instrument of defence. For instance, several studies on Africa and South Africa note that the construction of statues and monuments across the country, today, as in the past, is essentially a political phenomenon (Coombes 2003; Dubow 1997; Larsen 2013). This holds true especially for the struggle icons' statues and monuments at the GNR since statues and monuments have formed part of an aesthetic practice that has defined South Africa's postcolonial cultural landscape (Leibhammer & Bila 2011). Nessa Leibhammer and Vonani Bila have noted that all these were clearly spelt out in the 'Treaty of Vereeniging (1902), the proclamation of the Union of South Africa (1910) and the Native Land Act (1913) that saw black South Africans forfeit all their residual franchise' (Leibhammer & Bila 2011, 226). As a result of these restrictive apartheid policies, the ANC regime and many Black South Africans see the identification and construction of statues and monuments like those at the GNR as an instrument in the counter-hegemonic project and the history of the politics of marginalisation.

Across Tshwane and South Africa, the ANC's interests and obsession in struggle icons statues and monuments fit into the country's desire to construct and promote statues as objects of status and prestige for previously marginalised and political elites. It also shows the ambition of the ANC to outshine pre-1994 statues and monuments in what Arjun Appadurai (1996) calls 'the tournament of values. This refers to the complex ways in which the pre-1994 regimes perceived statues and monuments, portraying them as instruments of power and authority, and a control of the population. In the same vein, the ANC government and Black South Africans see struggle icons' statues and monuments as an opportunity for them to make their voice heard in the wider South African community (Appadurai 1996; Brunet, Legoux & Najjar 2014; Cubit 2001). As a mark of this tendency, the ANC has tasked themselves with constructing struggle icons' statues both in South Africa and beyond. The climax of this was in Ramallah, Palestine, where the statue of struggle icon and former president Nelson Mandela was recently unveiled by the premier of Gauteng Province. There was also the unveiling of the Deville Wood Memorial in Paris in honour of the Black South African Native Labour Corps who died

during World War 1 but were never honoured in the same manner as their white colleagues. The construction of the Deville Wood Memorial in Paris shows that the structures of art-historical thought can be disrupted, reconfigured, and ultimately strengthened if previously marginalised icons are placed at the centre of the decolonisation process (Grant & Price 2020).

By placing these previously marginalised figures at the centre stage of cultural representation, the ANC intends to reshape historical narratives and redefine the post-apartheid public gaze. The post-apartheid statues represent a shift towards a decolonial gaze. The decolonial gaze could also be a form of neo-colonial gaze in the context where the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and systemic inequalities continue to shape reality. To what extent do these post-apartheid statues challenge not only past injustice and inequalities but also contemporary ANC neo-apartheid? There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of apartheid history in its entanglement with post-apartheid government from a decolonial cultural landscape perspective. The inclusion of previously marginalised figures in statues and monuments in the cultural landscape should be intertwined with the broader decolonial movement towards an inclusive and just contemporary society.

The post-apartheid desire and fascination for anti-colonial activists has resulted in the reduction and canonisation of decolonisation into a singular narrative, rather than the view of history as multifaceted, ongoing, and complex. Foluke Adebisi (2016) figures it must also critically engage with every aspect of decolonisation. Similarly, Achille Mbembe (2015) suggests that decolonisation in South Africa should not be about closing the doors to Europe but rather about creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism. This requires a radical reconfiguration of contemporary post-apartheid ways of thinking and transcendence of the political and cultural divisions that defines South Africa.

Conclusion

This article argues that the challenge associated with retaining historical statues and monuments in Tshwane and the South African cultural landscape should be analysed and understood in terms of transformation imperatives influencing the perspectives of students and heritage practitioners. They see these statues and monuments, as symbols of colonialism and apartheid extensions of regimes no longer in power. By retaining these symbols on the cultural landscape, they may perceive the ANC as promoting and preserving the memories of pre-1994 icons. The challenge of retaining historical statues and monuments is also linked to a post-apartheid desire for and fascination with anti-colonial figures.

The findings demonstrate that the retention process reveals that the post-apartheid cultural landscape remains an ambivalent site of struggle, with new frameworks for public imagination in decolonial appreciation of the complex and inhumane intertwined past. Unfortunately, the government has not adequately articulated how the cultural landscape can be intentionally decolonised without compromising the historical past, the present struggles, and a just future for South Africans. The challenge of retention lies in the ongoing contestations, anti-racist and anti-apartheid struggles, and resistance against dominant perspectives and the public's way of perceiving. In addition, cultural landscapes, like all postcolonial resources, have become vulnerable spaces for political

manipulation, class interests, power struggles, and attempts to control public imagination and response to the government.

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