# On History and Myth-making in South Africa

## The Decolonial Quest for Truth(s) and Relevance

**Olga Bialostocka**
Research Specialist at the Africa Institute of South Africa at the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa

## Abstract

*In responding to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonial call for 'a quest for relevance', this essay deals with the issue of removal of colonial and apartheid-era monuments in South Africa as a way of creating a 'liberating perspective' and shaping a new national identity of the country. With a view to throwing light on the value and functionality of past vestiges, the paper engages with the definition of 'heritage' and its meaning for present-day communities. By examining the process of the selection of historical material and ways of assigning meaning to the relics of the past in heritage practice, it raises the question of power in historical knowledge production. By interrogating the concept of the truth of historical narratives, it discusses the plurality of interpretations of the past to stress the need for an 'ecumenical heritage' that would be relevant to the realities and self-image of South Africans today.*

African decolonial scholar, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, spoke of a need for 'a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe'.[1] He called it 'a quest for relevance'. Referring to African literature and education, the thinker distinguished two processes that are part of this pursuit of relevance: the *choice* of material and the *interpretation* of that material. The choice of what is relevant, and the assignment of meaning to that which is relevant (or to make something relevant) are not objective exercises: cultural, national, class, philosophical and other perspectives of the person who chooses and later interprets the sources must be considered, in order for the activity to be effective. This essay looks at the two processes with regard to the heritage sector in South Africa. In the quest for truth(s) and relevance of historical narratives, it discusses the purpose and the social applicability of monuments in the post-apartheid history of the country.

## Heritage – the matter of the present

The word 'heritage' is typically associated with the past. Whether it takes the physical form of a monument, a site or a group of buildings that represent a particular value from the point of view of history, art or science,[2] it refers to past events or processes that carry a special meaning in the collective memory of a group of people. This group of people – the living community – as custodians of their heritage, *chooses* what they want to inherit, what they consider worthy of preserving. Therefore, as Ndoro contends,[3] in discussions about heritage, the emphasis should be on the present rather than the past. What matters is the relevance of past vestiges to the present realities of the living.

The South African National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) recognises the embeddedness of heritage in the present, as it stipulates that the status of heritage can be assigned to any place or object that carries cultural significance or other special value for the present community and for future generations (Preamble).[4] It further acknowledges the importance of involving communities in the management of heritage sites that preserve part of their history and beliefs (section 5.4). The Act lists varied roles that heritage can play in the life of the South African nation (Preamble): it represents the latter's cultural identity, helps build the nation through respect and reconciliation, and shapes the national character of the country through, among other values, affirmation of the diversity of cultures existing within it. Given the public character of national heritage, all citizens, as its custodians, should be able to share in its ownership and identify with the memory it carries – be it a victory achieved or a suffering experienced.[5] Accordingly, discussions on heritage in South Africa, and in particular on colonial and apartheid monuments and statues, should include the question of whom or what this patrimony is honouring. Such interrogation should take into consideration the kind of memory that these monuments and statues preserve, and their relevance for present and future generations of South Africans from all walks of life.

The potential to reinterpret the monuments, to make them pertinent for people today, should also be taken into account, as meanings of symbols are not fixed but dynamic, even if a special interpretation is purposely assigned to the latter. The NHRA stipulates that no cultural group or community[6] in the country should be given preference over another with regard to the cultural significance of their heritage; it thereby acknowledges the diversity of sites and objects that can be considered as national heritage. The Act, however, also emphasises the potential of heritage to contribute to redressing past inequities (including material and symbolic restitution), as well as its role in educating and healing the nation. Accordingly, provisions were made (section 58 (11)(a) of the Act) for monuments that were erected before the adoption of this new regulation to be assessed in terms of their cultural significance or other value to the communities or cultural groups in the country for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. Strong or special association with the life or work of a person or organisation in the history of South Africa was to be taken into consideration as well. It seems that the Act anticipated the situation in which one would ask whether the Rhodes Memorial, which was erected to represent the British Empire's power and domination, is still valid today; and what is the role in the contemporary South Africa of the numerous statues representing historical figures that were once involved in the conquest and oppression of African people.

However, the said provision has long expired, as it was effective for a five-year period from the time of the adoption of the Act.

In the interim, the government in post-apartheid South Africa has employed heritage as an ideological tool in order to shape the past using specific narratives. A strong state influence over the heritage sector has enabled this process, in which arts and culture (including heritage) were envisioned as instruments of nation-building and social transformation. In line with this direction, heritage practice has entered the discourse of redress, which saw new monuments being erected, towns, cities, and streets being renamed, and the Legacy Project being conceived – all with a view to generating a coherent national programme of monument-building. The fallacy of the post-1994 government in this regard was its attempt at inventing a national core for South Africa that was based on the Western understanding of the concepts of nation and national identity, to fit the reality of the country into the existing global model of nation-state formation. The leaders of the newly liberated country tried to invent a 'utopian prefiguration that binds a nation'[7] to make South Africa a Western-like nation – an imagined community constructed through rituals and myths based on an emotional association among its members, and in relation to the non-members.[8] Consequently, to create a sense of togetherness among South Africans, the government constructed the myth of a 'rainbow nation' and a grand version of the past in which the masses became faceless and their stories were assimilated with the narrative of the elite. The national history thus became national mythology and a political project. And the new national identity of the country became rooted in a false historical narrative that was created for the sake of togetherness, but which alienated and de-historicised the subjects in all their diversity.[9] Alongside this new national myth, the old one that shaped the colonial identity of the country 'kept breathing', as the government decided to leave the existing Afrikaner and British monuments in the name of building bridges between people and creating a national dialogue.

Cases of removal of colonial and apartheid monuments have been very rare. They involved statues with clear highly offensive symbolism, such as the figure of Verwoerd that was removed from public display in Bloemfontein in 1994 or the sculpture of Rhodes, which was only recently taken away from the campus of the University of Cape Town. Meanwhile, the national dialogue that the government wanted to create, using statues and monuments, back-fired. It was conceptualised more like a debate: to balance the existing narrative of the past, the state commissioned monuments that would tell the 'other side of the story' and thus give voice to the previously marginalised. Yet, the use of narratives to counter ideologically biased accounts has not only failed to redefine the country's national heritage but also created an element of competition between the old and new monuments; for by being visually juxtaposed with the already existing 'white' memory markers, the newly conceptualised 'black' heritage may give the impression of being merely a response to the former.[10] Thus, instead of building bridges, the complex coexistence of conflicting symbols of the past seems to further fuel antagonism. Accordingly, owing to the discourse of reconciliation and cooperation, monuments in the new South Africa became a matter of *realpolitik*, where the practical or ideological use of heritage took precedence over moral reasons.[11] On a metaphysical level, this situation created an ontological space in which the identity of the nation became imprisoned between a reality of suffering brought to mind by the statues of past oppression and an imagined world inhabited by a 'rainbow nation' that has never existed. Imposed from above, this

new 'national' frame of reference has left people feeling lost, frustrated and living in a paradigm in which the power of the British Empire and the myth of Afrikaners' God-given superiority still haunt them from beyond the monuments.

The question of removing the physical legacy of the oppressors or leaving it untouched alongside new additions to the heritage sector keeps arising in discussions on monuments and statues in the new South Africa. It seems to get stuck on the issue of, on the one hand, pain that the memories associated with these monuments still evokes, and, on the other hand, the need to preserve the symbols or markers of the country's history. The debate, therefore, comes down to the relationship between memory, history and their interpretations; the cultural significance of heritage; and the relevance of heritage to the present. An additional issue of importance in the case of South Africa is the recognition of the rights of different indigenous stakeholders in negotiating national heritage within the realm of the existing socio-spatial inequalities that see the people deprived of agency.

## History and memory

The memory of foreign domination is very much alive in South Africa and the fact that the monuments of the colonial and apartheid-era still carry a symbolic meaning for South Africans and embody the pain of past events was made publicly evident across the country during the #RhodesMustFall campaigns in 2015 and 2016. Among the many divided voices, the critics of the removal of colonial and apartheid statues have used the arguments of the truth of history, respect for the heritage of others, and the impact that the historical figures represented in the statues had on the country, without regard to the ideology that drove them. In the past, damaging existing monuments had even been presented by government officials as the destruction of history itself.[12] In turn, the proponents of the removal of the monuments have seen in the fall of the statues the beginning of the process of decolonisation of spaces, and a symbolic end to the white supremacy and institutional racism that this heritage embodied. The two groups, it seems, approach the dispute from different standpoints: the first one looks at history as a continuum of cause and effect that carries the truth of past events, while the second sees it from a decolonise perspective that, through memory, assigns meaning to these events in relation to the present.

Traditionally, history has been seen as a fixed and static representation of the past, the reconstruction of what is no longer. Historical knowledge has been perceived as a product of a critical analysis of past events done by intellectuals; as such it used to hold claims to objectivity and universality. Memory, on the other hand, has been deemed dynamic, constantly changing, and as such easily deformed. Collective memory, which comprises discourses around folk history, public or popular history, myth and oral history, has been typically positioned opposite history as its more subjective counterpart.

Foucault[13] questioned the traditional understanding of history, claiming instead that it was an ever-changing process of creating narratives which did not follow the logic of cause and effect, but were fragmented, non-linear and discontinuous. Foucault's history is clearly ambiguous and conflicted, and historical truth, even if it exists, is not the sole property of a single individual or a group of scholars. Any historical trajectory can have multiple origins and produce a multiplicity

of narratives about the past that would represent different perspectives of the same event in the present. Consequently, neither (historical) knowledge nor truth can be universal, for both are constructed under specific conditions.[14] Foucault also recognised the instrumentality of historical narratives: in his theory of power, he claimed that if history cannot be objective, and thus neutral, it must be written with an ideological purpose.[15] Lorenz agreed with Foucault about the role that identity politics played in historical knowledge production, yet he maintained that while 'legitimising history' indeed sacrificed evidence and methods for its own purpose, 'scientific history' adhered to evidence and methodological rules in claiming truth and objectivity.[16] Despite the obvious flaws in the process of creating historical narratives, Lorenz contended that relative objectivity was possible, for interpretation in history needed to be guided by coherence and correctness.[17] This statement seems to echo McCullagh, who admitted that historical knowledge was a construction that was dependent on the selection and interpretation of information provided by a person with a particular background; but, if well supported by evidence, this construction could be deemed a true account of events.[18] It is noteworthy, however, that McCullagh explained 'true' in this case to mean reliable and trustworthy and not necessarily unique or universal.[19]

Historical knowledge is thus not only a construction, but also an extension of our everyday knowledge of the past. The narrative created based on historical facts is more than a chronological series of events, as the latter do not have built-in intrinsic meanings. Therefore, historical narrative is not free from prejudices of perspective. Like truth, it is bound up with power,[20] and the result of the process of creating narratives is not 'the truth' but 'an interpretation'. After all, as Finley explained:

> one can really know only one's own time (…) The past can yield nothing more than paradigmatic support for the conclusions one has drawn from the present; the past, in other words, may still be treated in the timeless fashion of myth.[21]

Myth is usually contrasted with history, the distinction being drawn 'between *mythos* and *logos*, between the contextual and the universal, between the absurd and the logical, the emotional and the rational'.[22] Foucault and Derrida tried to bridge the gap between history and myth by arguing that the ultimate truth, with which scientific history claimed to be synonymous, was, in reality, non-existent.[23] Following on from their thesis, McNeill contended that myth and history both tell a story that would be credible and intelligible to people who share the outlook and assumptions of the author of the account.[24] Thus, the scholar asserted the existence of multiple truths and proposed the term 'mythistory' as a descriptor of historical narratives.

These historical narratives are constructed through the process in which people select and arrange information, and project meaning on the facts based on their own embeddedness in knowledge and tradition, as well as the language they speak. Accordingly, like collective memory, historical accounts can also be easily manipulated.[25] Given the diversity of histories that can be produced based on the same facts, collective memory has been increasingly seen as a supplement to or replacement for history[26] – an alternative to the depersonalised historical discourse, the universality of which is indeed fictitious. In South Africa, public history based on collective memory started gaining ground in the space of historical knowledge production and public scholarship in

the 1990s.[27] It emerged as an alternative form of disciplinary practice in history and a counter-narrative, which was to challenge hegemonic interpretations of the past by using studies of oral histories. For a long time, this 'history from below' was discredited by many social historians, who claimed that it did not represent a valid source of historical knowledge.[28] Nowadays, collective memory, while partial and fragmentary, is often considered a better reflection of the fragmented world. It helps create solidarity inside groups, cementing communities and providing them with a foundation for identity and cohesion building based on common values, traditions and beliefs. However, different versions of truth that people have about themselves eventually lead to fragmentation. Therefore, an 'ecumenical history', which would accommodate human diversity, is needed, as suggested by McNeill:

> Instead of enhancing conflicts, as parochial historiography inevitably does, an intelligible world history might be expected to diminish the lethality of group encounters by cultivating a sense of individual identification with the triumphs and tribulations of humanity as a whole.[29]

Following on from this suggestion and recognising the connection between history, memory and heritage, an 'ecumenical heritage' seems a creative alternative to the existing predicament in the field. South Africa's history is a product of many contested historical imaginations – collective memories – which result from different discourses. In fact, no nation can have one standardised historical narrative, for 'writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a discontinuity of the present with itself'.[30] Consequently, multiple perspectives, based not only on official records but also on personal reminiscences, even if these seem conflicting or ambiguous, need to be taken into consideration when selecting sites and objects as 'national heritage' and erecting new monuments. 'Ecumenical heritage' sites, as places of consensus-building, would need to reflect common values shared by their custodians with different historical backgrounds. These sites would thus tell a 'new story' of the past, based on the present realities of the variety of people.

A number of examples in the South African heritage sector demonstrate the difficulty in creating new monuments, or remodelling old ones, along the lines of 'historical ecumenism'. One of the problems lies in the fact that one's relationship to heritage is both collective and personal. Monuments can, therefore, elicit a variety of emotions, depending on the 'investment' of an individual in the event commemorated. Some of these feelings, and thus also the interpretations of the monuments, can conflict with one another. An additional challenge is the risk of the political elite using heritage for their ideological agenda.

The Ncome Monument was initially sought to represent what could be called 'an ecumenical heritage' site to commemorate the 1838 battle at the Ncome/Blood River between the Zulu warriors and the Afrikaners. The monument, planned by the state as a memorial to the Zulus who died in the battle, was to balance the bronze ox-wagon *laager* erected at the site in 1971 to honour the Afrikaners who claimed victory in the clash. The state hoped to reinterpret the old monument by complementing it with the story of the opposing side, in the hope of creating a dialogue between the two narratives and, consequently, a more inclusive representation of the battle. The addition of new elements to the old heritage site was to help in reconciling different interpretations of the 1838

event, by reworking the symbolic meaning of the 1971 monument. Yet, the project failed in terms of its reconciliatory purpose. The remodelling of the site (based on the concept of complementary narratives) divided the antagonistic sides even further, instead of creating a bridge between them.

> The mythico-history that was produced in the Bloedrivier Monument is now reproduced in mirror image by the new Ncome Museum, and interpretation of the battle consists of two opposing mythico-histories.[31]

Although the intentions behind the Ncome project might have been good, Dlamini[32] argues that the concept of this government-funded monument was 'hijacked' by Zulu ethnic nationalists pursuing their own political agenda. As a result, in place of a memorial honouring the Zulus who died in the battle of 1838, the new monument celebrated the power and military prowess of this warrior nation, whose leadership did not agree with the ideology of reconciliation promoted by the state.[33]

A similar example of an ecumenical, yet highly contested monument that was to promote reconciliation, is Freedom Park in Pretoria. Freedom Park was created in commemoration of the liberation struggle; it was to honour the heroes and heroines who gave up their lives fighting for the independence of South Africa. The park was to stand as a universal symbol of freedom and humanity. Yet, its location – in visual opposition to the Voortrekker Monument – could be interpreted as an ideological response to the adjacent Afrikaner heritage site. Moreover, the allegedly biased selection of the people honoured on the site's Wall of Names has been criticised as being part of the ideological agenda of the political elite.[34]

## Cultural significance of heritage

Heritage gives form and substance to the myths of the people. Hence, side by side with those myths, it speaks to and shapes people's identity. If a myth is no longer cultivated, the memory that produced it dies and the monument that embodied it becomes a lifeless image of the past – an artistic form devoid of content and of the honour that it bestowed on the person or event represented. However, as long as a particular myth is kept alive through memory, the monuments that give it visual expression constitute 'places of memory' that escape history and stop time.[35] Such monuments do not lose their meaning when taken out of context, for their story is still locked in them, and the memory still attached to the physical form.

The NHRA seems to acknowledge as 'places of memory' all monuments that based on their cultural significance for the present community make the list of national heritage. Yet, since some meaning ((a) truth/(a) memory) needs to be attached to the sites and objects listed as heritage if they are to carry value for the people, one may ask: What message or myth does colonial heritage propagate? Given that the meaning of the colonial heritage in the new South Africa has not been adapted to the present realities of South Africans, the monuments in question still commemorate the subjugation of African people and honour their oppressors. Reinterpretation of heritage is, meanwhile, possible.[36] The Taal Monument at Paarl, for instance, which was initially created as a symbol of Afrikaner identity, has recently gained a new meaning – that of celebrating South

Africa's cultural diversity.[37] Even the iconic Voortrekker Monument has shown potential to be 'Africanised', as the new 'translation' of the granite colossus by Tokyo Sexwale suggests.[38]

In the discussion on cultural significance of heritage, the issue of public ownership of the national historic sites and monuments comes to light, for the longevity of memory markers depends on people's will to remember the events, ideas and individuals that are being commemorated; without it, 'the ruins remain little more than pieces of landscape, unsuffused with meanings and significance'.[39] The ownership of sites and objects that constitute national heritage comes with an additional challenge, namely the institutionalisation of the memory of a historical event by the state. This, Marshall convincingly argues, runs the risk of 'solidifying hegemonic narratives (…) and eclipsing other forms of understanding and remembering the past'.[40] The Trojan Horse Massacre memorial in Athlone, Cape Town, exemplifies a situation in which the state replaced a 'vernacular memorial' with an official commemorative marker without consultation with the community that claimed ownership of the initial symbol. Such a top-down approach by the state with regard to the commemoration of past events demonstrates the state's disregard for 'local' stakeholders' rights to negotiating the national heritage.

Apart from socio-political and historical dimensions, aesthetic aspects of monuments in South Africa – both old ones and new ones – have also been a matter of contestation. Through monumental form and triumphalist tone, colonial and apartheid heritage were made to represent the victory of the oppressor over the subject – African people. The same grand imagery that emphasises heroism can be observed in post-apartheid monuments in South Africa, which, with their foreign-inspired form, perpetuate the official colonial patterns of commemoration. The bronze statues of Gandhi in Pietermaritzburg or Biko in East London belong, claims Marschall, to the same family of representations as for the realistically rendered images of the political figures of the previous era.[41] However, in the new context, this way of 'reinterpretation' of European visual patterns seems problematic, given the centrality of the stereotyped image of a black subject and a white master in the colonial discourse.

The importance of the aesthetic dimension of monuments may be appreciated in the response of the public to the Duncan Village Massacre memorial in East London. The life-size bronze statue of an African warrior holding a spear, which constitutes the core of the monument, was envisaged as a universal symbol of bravery. However, the public contested the visual representation of the event. The memorial neither spoke to the people's recollection of the past experience, nor appealed to their national sense of pride.[42] The figure of the African warrior was disputed, not only due to its failed attempt at universalism, but also because of its aesthetics, which drew on the utopian vision of the pre-colonial past of the African people but cast them in the worn-out and bankrupt tradition of realistic, over-sized imagery.

The Monument to the Women of South Africa in Pretoria, on the other hand, represents a completely different visual expression; one that clearly departs from Western standards of monumental bronze sculpture. In this particular piece of art, the Eurocentric conventions were rejected, and the form of the monument was aesthetically conceptualised based on local traditions of visual representation and symbolism; an unassuming object – a grinding stone – was used to create a monument that symbolises African womanhood. Additionally, an original, alternative mode of expression – sound – was employed to complement the visual representation. The simplicity of the

memory marker and the symbolic meaning were to speak to diverse audiences and enable women of different backgrounds to identify with the piece.[43]

## Relevance – a decolonial quest

In the South African context, where nationhood cannot be legitimised by the past, the feeling of togetherness is artificially induced, and history is not a coherent continuum, Nora's suggestion to replace the discourse of the nation and the state with a narrative about the society and the state[44] is tempting. In such a society, neither a metaphysical unity nor a (utopian) past can be appealed to as a sign of belonging. What is left is the present. Eze argues that African identity should be constructed using 'the vagaries of (…) present circumstances'.[45] Depending on the ecological, political and economic realities of people, these vagaries constitute a frame of reference within which people self-identify. 'Others', with their diverse paradigms, act in this process merely as mirrors. Eze further suggests 'creative historicism'[46] – a new dynamic process of historiography – as a way that would give the African people the possibility of defining themselves within their own frame of reference, context and culture, while accounting for the different cultural memories that constitute their past.[47] The new syncretic paradigm that would be created in this process would need to be founded on the rebirth of the cultural values that are still relevant to the present, while embracing the eclecticism of both African and European worldviews – provided these are relevant to the current realities of the people. This new vision should accommodate different past historical narratives in 'an attempt to rehabilitate the goods internal to the practices of [diverse] communities, but goods that are not anachronistic to the socio-political condition of contemporary African states'.[48] At the same time, Eze warns against blindly following the Western model of nation-building that is founded on the past, as well as artificially creating Africa's imaginary past to offset or neutralise the colonial condition – the process he calls 'history by analogy'.[49] In this 'project in continuity', intellectuals are 'caught in the same disease [they are] trying to cure',[50] as their subject looks at himself or herself through the conceptual lens of the other, instead of using his or her own frame of reference. Using the visual language of the oppressor to give expression to the memory of the oppressed, as in the mentioned monumental artwork, may be seen as an exercise in 'history by analogy'. On the other hand, validating Africa's social imagery through a paradigm of difference to the Western 'other', which can be seen in the example of new monuments juxtaposed with the old ones, may not necessarily be a better solution either. In this case, one already admits to having considered the point of view of the coloniser as potentially valid. The notion of creative historicism employed in the sphere of heritage, in line with Wa Thiong'o's decolonise 'quest for relevance', seems to represent a more sustainable option.

Moreover, given the complex nature of the South African past, seen as a discontinuity, and the diverse character of the country's society that constitutes the state, it seems futile to look for a national myth that could add meaning to the leaders' attempts at feeding nationalism. Instead, the South African historical narrative could consider moving with Nora 'from a solid and steady past to fractured past; from a history sought in the continuity of memory to a memory cast in the discontinuity of history'.[51] In this move, heritage would be negotiated together with historical discourse.

In the process of *choosing* heritage, its meaning for the present society (*interpretation*) would need to be given adequate attention, so that the legacy of the past speaks to the current context of the country and to the 'new' identity it is trying to negotiate. The national heritage that would reflect the perspectives of South Africans on their 'selves' and their past would then stop being a reaction to the old discourse of the colonisers (either through negation or neutralisation). Instead, it could represent a completely new effort to 'see ourselves clearly' vis-à-vis ourselves and others; these others being there not to define us but to sustain the image we have created ourselves.

Accordingly, the decolonisation process that the #RhodesMustFall campaign calls to in the heritage sector needs to include an analysis of the adequacy of the colonial and apartheid statues and monuments for present South Africa. It needs to recognise the complexities of the country's often painful history, by embracing eclecticism, yet not at the price of socio-cultural and political anachronism. In practice, it could mean the following:

(1) Reviewing the cultural value of the colonial and apartheid-era national heritage in line with the NHRA definition of the term, and with regard to the present meaning(s) assigned to the monuments by the living communities, in order to establish the relevance of the symbols to the current condition of the country.

(2) Promoting diversity on the national heritage list of South Africa in line with the premise that multiple histories result in multiple heritages, while supporting 'ecumenism'. While heritage gives form to past histories, myths and traditions, it needs to reflect the national identity of South Africans, as seen and understood by the people themselves today. Accordingly, select-ing heritage with a decolonialisation liberating perspective in mind will not necessarily mean removing all contested monuments, independent of their meaning, as if to erase or negate the past and rewrite the history. Neither will adding a number of new 'African-type' monuments to the colonial statues solve the problem. These new monuments, being reactionary, would represent symbols of an imagined past, and, as 'soulless' devices deprived of memory, they would probably have a mostly political function.

(3) The national heritage chosen by South Africans should be relevant for the living society (not the political administration). The adequacy of the old monuments and statues for the post-liberation national identity of the country (as multi-layered as it can be), and the ability of this heritage to be adapted to present realities, in order to become relevant for the people, need to be discussed before any decision on their fate is taken. In the meantime, new heritage sites and objects considered by the people as worthy of preserving and representing the diversity of historical narratives of the country, should help South Africans connect to their past and claim ownership of the national heritage that they could identify with and feel honoured by.

South African heritage, like the country's history, should reflect the dialogue between what the West produced and what can be rehabilitated from African past historical and cultural narratives as a frame for the present, taking into consideration the existing inequalities and the need for recognition of pre-colonial populations' rights. When choosing national heritage and assigning meaning to it, it is the message that the sites and objects carry to the present, through people's memory, that needs to guide the process, rather than the desire for achieving a non-disputed his-torical accuracy. For historical narratives carry multiple truths about the past, depending on the

perspective of the 'historian'. Heritage, meanwhile, belongs in the present and the future of the people whose ever-changing cultural identity it is supposed to represent.

## Notes and References

1   Wa Thiong'o, N., 2006. *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Oxford: James Currey Ltd., Nairobi: EAEP, Portsmouth: Heinemann, p.87.

2   UNESCO, 1972. Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Art.1. Available at http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext [Accessed 10 November 2017].

3   From the presentation of W. Ndoro, delivered at the South African Heritage Resources Agency Colloquium on Heritage and Development, Benoni, 15.09.2016.

4   Republic of South Africa, 1999. National Heritage Resources Act, *Government Gazette,* 28 April 1999. Available at http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Legislations%20Files/a25-99.pdf [Accessed 9 October 2017].

5   Dubow distinguishes between monuments erected to honour the victors and memorials that are constructed to commemorate the victims: Dubow, N., 2001. *Imagining the unimaginable: Holocaust memory in art and architecture*, Cape Town: Jewish Publications. Marschall argues that the distinction between the two types is not clearly visible in South Africa. It may also be effaced through reinterpretation of a heritage site or object: Marschall, S., 2003. Setting up a dialogue: monuments as a means of 'writing back', *Historia*, 48(1), p.311.

6   The Act does not define the two terms, thus the distinction between the two is unclear. The author understands the community, in this case, to be a group of people who share a particular area or a common interest (as in 'a mining community'), but not necessarily ethnic background.

7   Eze, M.O., 2010. *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.3.

8   Anderson, B., 1983. *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, pp.6–7.

9   Eze, 2010, pp.153–155.

10  Marschall, S., 2008. Ncome – Monument and Museum as "Critical Response", *Museum Anthropology Review* 2(2), p.90.

11  Myers, S.C., 2009. Traces of Identity: Myth and Monument in the new South Africa, *intersections,* 10(1), p.668.

12  Saunders, C., 2007. The transformation of heritage in the new South Africa. In *History Making and Present Day Politics. The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa*, edited by H.E. Stolten, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, p.189.

13  Foucault, M., 1994. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books.

14  Foucault, M., 1980. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by C. Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books; Foucault, M., 1983. The Subject and Power. In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp.208–226.

15  Foucault, 1994.

16  Lorenz, C., 1999. You got your history, I got mine. Some reflections on truth and objectivity in history, Österreichische Zeitung für Geschichtswissenschaft, 10(4), p.583.

17  Ibid., p.583.

18  McCullagh, C.B., 1987. The Truth of Historical Narratives. *History and Theory*, 26(4), pp.30–46.

19  Ibid., p.40.

20  Foucault, 1980.

21  Finley, M.I., 1965. Myth, Memory, and History. *History and Theory*, 4(3), p.301.

22  Lorenz, C., 2008. Drawing the Line: 'Scientific' History between Myth-making and Myth-breaking, In *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media, and the Arts*, edited by S. Berger, L. Eriksonas and A. Mycock, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp.42–43.

23  Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1983; Derrida J., 1997 (1967). *Of Grammatology*, translated by G.C. Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

24  McNeill, W., 1986. Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians, *The American Historical Review*, 91(1), pp.1–10.

25  Probably one of the oldest accounts of such a distorted history are records of a battle at Kadesh, in today's Syria, around 1274 BC, in which an Egyptian army faced the Hittites. Both antagonists claimed a victory in this battle in their respective historical accounts. Nowadays these records are considered political propaganda, as the battle most probably ended in a draw. A parallel, more recent, of divergent historical account is given of the battle of Cuito Carnavale in Angola, where the South African Defence Force, fighting side by side with its Angolan counterpart, National Union of the Total Independence of Angola, faced the joint armies of the People's Armed Forces for Liberation of Angola and their Cuban allies. The battle that changed the balance of power in the region led to the end of the so-called Border War. Who should claim the victory in this engagement is still a matter of political debate.

26   Nora, P., 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, *Representations*, 26, pp.7–24; Klein, K.L., 2000. On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse, *Representations*, 69, pp.127–150.

27   Rassool, C., n.d. Power, knowledge and politics of public pasts. Available at https://www.nelsonmandela.org/images/uploads/PAPER_-_RASSOOL.pdf [Accessed 9 October 2017].

28   Ibid.

29   McNeill, 1985, pp.16–17.

30   Chakrabarty, D., 1997. Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts, *Perspectives on History. The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*. Available at https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-1997/minority-histories-subaltern-pasts [Accessed 10 October 2017].

31   Dlamini, N., 2001. The Battle of Ncome project: state memorialism, discomforting spaces, *Southern African Humanities*, 13, p.135.

32   Ibid., p.132.

33   Girshick, P., 2004. Ncome Museum/Monument: From Reconciliation to Resistance, *Museum Anthropology*, 27(1), p.25.

34   McDowell, S., 2014. 'Till Jesus Comes Again': Consolidating Narratives of the Liberation Struggle in Post-Apartheid South Africa, In *Commemoration as Conflict: Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes*, edited by S. McDowell and M. Braniff, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.148–167.

35   Nora, 1989, pp.7–24.

36   On the other hand, an attempt at fixing the meaning of certain monuments and restricting them to a particular interpretation in line with the national narrative did not bring positive results. The suggestion to add epitaphs that unequivocally describe the atrocious acts of the specific historical figures represented in the statues across the country (for example, adding a note to the statue of Botha that describes him as the architect of racial domination) received mixed reaction from the public, and the idea has thus been abandoned. See Marschall, 2003, p.314.

37   'A monumental debate', *Daily News*, 4 January 1999.

38   A. Unsworth, 1996. 'Tokyo's Groot Trek', *Sunday Times*, 15 December 1996.

39   Myers, 2009, p.670.

40   Marschall, S., 2010. Commemorating the 'Trojan Horse' massacre in Cape Town: the tension between vernacular and official expressions of memory, *Visual Studies*, 25(2), p.146.

41   Ibid., p.143, n10.

42   Minkley, G. and Mnyaka, P., 2015. Seeing Beyond the Official and the Vernacular. The Duncan Village Massacre Memorial and the Politics of Heritage in South Africa, In *The Politics of Heritage in Africa. Economies, Histories and Infrastructures*, edited by D.R. Peterson, K. Gavua, and C. Rassool, London: International African Institute, Midrand: Cambridge University Press African Branch, pp.52–55.

43   Becker, R., 2000. The New Monument to the Women of South Africa, *African Arts*, 33(4), pp.1–9.

44   Nora, 1989, p.11.

45   Eze, 2010, p.193.

46   Ibid., p.13.

47   The difference can be seen in the following example: Schöpflin links the national myth of redemption and suffering, so popular in South Africa, to Christian semantics: Schöpflin, G., 1997. The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths, In *Myths and Nationhood*, edited by G. Hosking and G. Schöpflin, London: C. Hurst & Company, pp.28–34. Krog understands it as being a result of traditional African values of *ubuntu*. These scholars examine the same myth from within different frames of reference: Krog, A., 2010. Introduction to *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*, by M.O. Eze, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.x–xi.

48   Eze, 2010, p.189.

49   Ibid., p.10.

50   Ibid.

51   Nora, 1989, p.17.