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## BOOK REVIEW

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A Nettleton and MA Fubah (eds.), *Exchanging symbols: monuments and memorials in post-apartheid South Africa*, Stellenbosch, African Sun Media, 2020, e-book ISBN: 978-1-928480-59-4.

World over, monuments and memorials, remain at the forefront of discussions, debates and public ire from sectors of society. As we finalise this review in mid-2020, the past few months, in the wake of anti-racist protests of “Black Lives Matter” sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis (United States of America), have seen the resurgence of calls for the removal and or destruction of monuments associated with those tragic aspects of history (i.e., slavery, colonialism, apartheid), ranging from Theodore Roosevelt; Christopher Columbus; King Leopold II and Edward Colston to Cecil Rhodes in Oxford and Kimberley, South Africa, and many others. The agency and persistence of the role of monument-making in post-colonial Africa have been seen as a central part of heritage making in the post colony. Daniel Herwitz wrote that these processes, in the post colony, are “heritage at the moment of agency, poised between heritage practices of the past and the desire, need, or inevitability of breaking away from them to make something new.<sup>1</sup> In an aptly titled book; “*Monument, Ruin, and Redress in South African Heritage*”, Herwitz advises us that “South Africa is a country in search of a national narrative that can articulate and bind together official state culture and citizenry .... in response to the inheritance

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<sup>1</sup> D Herwitz, “Monument, Ruin, and Redress in South African Heritage”, *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 86 (4), 2011, pp. 232-248.

of colonial and apartheid cultures of monument and ruin, terror, violence, control".<sup>2</sup>

This edited volume by Anitra Nettleton & Mathias Alubafi Fubah contributes to the ongoing discussions on the complex role and place of monuments in independent Africa, where states make attempts to create a balance between living with the past (old and offensive monuments to some), and creating a new, inclusive visual iconography in public spaces. The book has eight essays that eloquently look into the genesis and dynamics of the #RhodesMustFall campaign that started in 2015. It explains, in detail, the narrative of the subsequent removal of the Rhodes Statue at the University of Cape Town. At the heart of this book, the dichotomy between Politics and Heritage are credibly exposed. The book looks into the political influences that are exerted on heritage in South Africa. Politics have played a role in how heritage is seen, how it is perceived and interpreted within a post-apartheid context. The book takes cognisance of people's opinions and perceptions as far as Colonial and Apartheid-era monuments and memorials are concerned. It dissects the impact that Colonialism and Apartheid had on representation, identity and memory of ordinary South Africans when it comes to monuments and memorials. The statues are a visual reminder of a bygone era, but there is some form of a co-existence with newer ways of commemoration and remembrance within the same post-democratic context and space. The book exposes the deficiencies of the *National Heritage Resources Act no.25 of 1999* (NHRA). It demonstrates how the practicalities of the act proved to be difficult when dealing with Colonial and Apartheid monument and memorials. From observations, there is no blueprint coming from the NHRA legislation that guides the removal of Colonial and Apartheid-era monuments and memorials. But according to the NHRA act, these Colonial monuments and memorials are seen as forms of heritage, and that should have been emphasised in the book. This does create a conundrum within the Post-Apartheid South African heritage landscape narrative. The implications would be that post-democratic South Africa's Heritage sector is still dealing with some dynamics of transformation, social justice and the matter of redress.

The introduction of the book explores the history of South Africa, as a country, specifically what it has gone through when it comes to cultural representation that was largely one-sided. The book argues that the demise of Colonial and Apartheid South Africa showed pitfalls within the complexities of cultural landscapes that has become problematic. But South Africa is evolving socially, politically and culturally, this does bring about a rethink into the country's cultural representation and aesthetic practices. The

2 Herwitz, "Monument, Ruin, and Redress in South African Heritage".

introduction sets the tone as to why statues and memorials are seen as forms of cultural representation of colonialism and apartheid. The first chapter details a study about public perceptions and opinions that were brought out by the #RhodesMustFall campaign. Chapter 1 takes a closer look into the perceptions of people from different races have about colonial and apartheid-era memorials and statues being removed. This chapter does raise an important issue of restitution but it does not fully explore the many sides of restitution and the implications to the South African public.

In chapter 2 Anitra Nettleton gives a western overview of memorialising in bronze statues and how that plays out in commemoration in public spaces. Nettleton does look into theoretical frameworks of Alois Reigl and Jürgen Habermas in the functionality and definition of monuments in public spaces. Nettleton talks about decoloniality and the ways to implement it. The Rhodes must fall drama is used as an example by Nettleton is able to show that within a post-democratic South Africa there is a need for inclusive memorial spaces despite the discourse and legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

In Chapter 3 of the book, Alude Mahali looks into what is commemorated in South African when it comes to memorials. This chapter touches on the debate that surrounds where commemoration takes place. This is illustrated in the chapter by engaging the framework that concerns the discourse of pain, place, and memory. Mahali also takes the opportunity to look at contestations and the establishment of monuments in South Africa. He takes an in-depth look into how memorial and monumental connotations found in buildings and public spaces could be transformed from their colonial past. The chapter explores ways on how to have inclusive access to memorialisation post-democracy.

In Chapter 4, Sipokazi Madida gives a different perspective to the debates into understanding post-apartheid heritage practice as constituting exhibitionary complexities that are almost pageantry in behaviour. In this chapter, an effort is made to better understand knowledge and meaning that lie within practices. The role and influence of the public is explored and that brings forth an important view about heritage practises being compromised in the process. The chapter critically probes post-apartheid monumentalism between 1990 and 2015. However, having had a closer look into post-apartheid monumentalism it is complex because of continued old traditions being used to understand historical narratives. But according to the NHRA, the same Colonial monuments and memorials are seen as forms of heritage, and that should have been emphasised more in this chapter. This does create a problem within the Post-Apartheid South African Heritage Landscape narrative.

Chapter 5 explores the matter of Apartheid-era monuments that can play a role in the transformation of heritage here in South Africa. This chapter delves into the issue of political practices that influence the criticism into past monuments. Thabo Manetsi looks into the dichotomy of denunciation and the enunciation of heritage resources in South Africa. At the same time, this chapter also drives the argument about how politics can be utilised in the post-colonial discourse of heritage resources management. Manetsi does expose the views that are held by the government when it comes to liberation heritage which informs the rewriting narratives and this is seen on how public spaces are reclaimed allegedly for the people.

Chapter 6 is filled with photographs and it gives a visual narrative and the author started writing it in Johannesburg in 2016 just after the #RhodesMustFall. This chapter gives a different perspective and perception from someone who does not live in South Africa. It details the journey of Guy Königstein's perceptions of commemoration in South Africa. The chapter raises issues on the visualisation of the seen and unseen when it comes to monuments. It discusses how monuments could be contributing to presences as well as them not being seen in edited digital photographs. This chapter was a response to the removal of monuments in archival photos after the #Rhodes must fall campaign.

Chapter 7 explores the debate between exhibitionary and the visual. The chapter showcases South African artists who use modern and contemporary ways to deal with matters of memory and trauma, using a built environment tactic of *verfremdung*. This points out that monuments could be seen as representations of Colonialism and Apartheid and hence artists, through their work, form responses to those monuments. Nancy Dantas deliberately chose specific artists to bring her point across. The chapter gives a different perspective of trauma histories through the chosen artists' works. This shows the interplay between cultural perceptions and the landscape we leave in.

In Chapter 8, Fubah and Catherine Ndinda study the dynamics of the newly constructed anti-colonial and anti-apartheid statues that are located at the Groenkloof nature reserve. The two authors argue that statues in the nature reserve are just a duplication of colonial memorialisation. The chapter shows how politicians have extended their grip into heritage spaces. This is highlighted by how the ruling party the African National Congress responds to redressing socio-cultural injustices of the past in the South African landscape. However, post-democratic memorialisation using statues can be problematic if it only carries the narrative of only one political movement, and that is not inclusive.

The book addresses the complexities of decolonisation, identity and memorialisation in a post-apartheid Heritage landscape. It adds to debates on

the complex issues around what to do with monuments and statues. It makes a key reading for policymakers, but it is also useful as a text to introduce the intricacies of memory and heritage making through apartheid and post-apartheid eras in South Africa. The book's writing style is accessible, and some chapters are beautifully illustrated. The theoretical rigour and critique was enjoyable and that made this book fascinating. The provocative visual questioning and reckoning as well as the provocative artistic interventions that were proposed in the book were thought provoking. The book could, however, have benefited from a robustly argued concluding chapter tying together the complex issues raised by the case studies. Yet this book remains a timely intervention.