Article

Gestures of compensation: post-apartheid monuments and memorials

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Introduction

With the advent of the post-apartheid era, the heritage sector has been flourishing in South Africa; new museums have been built, new heritage sites, commemorative monuments, memorials, statues and busts have been set up throughout the country. Not everyone agrees that there is a need for such commemorative endeavour, especially in view of the country’s staggering levels of poverty and scarce resources. Some even suggest that there should be a moratorium on the establishment of any new monuments and memorials (eg Maré 2002). My intention is neither to justify nor to criticise the current monumental drive, but rather to help understand it.

Drawing on Human Needs theory, this article will firstly consider such sites as symbolic gestures that fulfil basic emotional human needs. Moving from needs to interests, I will present new monuments and heritage sites as gestures of compensation. This applies on two levels: first, the declaration of a site as a heritage site and erection of a monument are intended as a symbolic reparation to victims and their descendents, often compensating for the lack of ‘real’ reparations (ie monetary payments). Secondly, as with all forms of heritage, the establishment of monuments contributes to the construction of a ‘desired past’ and foregrounding of specific memories, as a means of compensating for potential shortcomings and errors that taint the ‘real past’.

Monuments as fulfilling core human needs

Most post-apartheid monuments can be considered cultural symbols that respond to a situation of conflict (resistance against colonial oppression, the anti-apartheid struggle, etc). These conflicts might be historically concluded, but their legacy continues to impact on present society both in
material terms and in terms of identity and consciousness. In fact, the memory of these conflicts – although painful – might be harnessed precisely to foster the creation of a particular historical consciousness and pass it on to the next generation. This is one of the implicit purposes of any monument. Although carrying the danger of nurturing bitterness and inciting hatred, in post-apartheid South Africa monuments are, on the contrary, meant to facilitate reconciliation. This rationale implicitly acknowledges that the desired reconciliation has not yet been achieved. In other words, prejudice, resentment, even hatred, are still dividing people as a result of a deep-seated conflict that – in some people’s minds – has not ended but simply shifted to another level.

It is useful in this context to take a closer look at some concepts of, and theoretical approaches to, conflict resolution and reconciliation. Mark Ross’s research into the role that culture – eg psycho-cultural narratives, cultural symbols (such as monuments), and ritual actions – play in situations of conflict (for instance in Israel, Northern Ireland, or Sri Lanka) is highly pertinent in this regard (Ross 2000; 2002; 2004). Cultural symbols and their associated narratives can escalate, but also de-escalate, situations of conflict. This applies particularly to what John Burton has called ‘deep-rooted’ conflicts, ie conflicts between ‘identity groups’ (national, ethnic, racial, etc) over matters of sovereignty, dignity, autonomy, group security and cultural survival (Avruch 2000:86). As opposed to conflicts over scarce resources or material interests, which can be resolved through a process of negotiation and power bargaining, these conflicts are more difficult to resolve and require an engagement with their root causes, for instance through problem-solving workshops. It could be argued that the racial divide in South Africa is an example of such a deep-rooted conflict.

Burton’s approach to conflict resolution is based on what has become known as Human Needs theory, of which he is the key proponent (Burton 1987; 1990). Human Needs theorists hold that there is a set of basic human needs that is universal, common to all people across time and space, and grounded in human nature. Due to their ontological status, human needs, unlike interests, are non-negotiable and unalterable; their satisfaction is imperative (Avruch 2000). Many conflicts are the result of the continued frustration or non-satisfaction of core human needs, and the denial of basic, inalienable values. Lack of freedom, injustice and inequality, for instance, can be said to destroy the ontological grounding of the human self, Paul Sites explains (1990:27).
There is some disagreement about the precise definition of these needs and how many there are. Sites, for instance, identifies four primary human emotions and their associated needs’ analogues: the emotion of fear and the need for security; the emotion of anger and the need for meaning; the emotion of depression and the need for self-esteem; the emotion of satisfaction and the need for latency. To this list Clark (1990) adds social bonding as an absolute physiological and psychological need. Others have identified further core needs, many of which are related, yet the recurring notions revolve around the need for identity, self-esteem and recognition, for security, the need for belonging, and the need for meaning.

Human Needs theory is particularly useful in the problem-solving approach to conflict resolution and can thus assist in resolving deep-rooted conflicts (Fisher 1990; Burton 1987). Yet, it remains an ambiguous concept and is by no means uncontented. Burton’s insistence that human needs are universal and generic, even genetic, minimises, or indeed eliminates, culture from the equation. This is problematic for two reasons. First, as Avruch (2000: 91) reminds us, our own ideas often end up determining the assumed ‘universals’ of our theory, without realising that they are themselves culturally constituted. Secondly, even if Burton is right in maintaining that all cultures have the same needs, common experience shows that different cultures may strongly vary in the importance they attach to specific needs. In an attempt to reconcile human needs with culture, Avruch (2000) and Jeremy Ross (personal interview) emphasise basic needs as general but recognise that their relative significance is culturally and contextually determined.

In that sense, the need for recognition and acknowledgement plays perhaps a greater role in South Africa today than in some other cultures. Sandole (1990:62), drawing on Podestra’s (1987) work, points out that ‘the need to express one’s group identity is particularly acute among those who have been disenfranchised through a prior colonial relationship’. This point is of particular relevance in the current South African context, where the degree of disenfranchisement of the black majority under apartheid paralleled – and probably exceeded – that of colonial societies elsewhere. Monuments are a means of asserting new group values, restoring dignity and self-esteem, expressing identity and recognising achievement. As with the recognition of African languages and other aspects of previously marginalised culture, monuments can be considered means of personal and community empowerment, which can contribute to the enhancement of self-esteem and thereby restore harmony in society. Post-apartheid monuments
could thus be understood as a strategy of resolving conflict by fulfilling basic human needs that have been frustrated for a very long time.

This perspective might explain the urgency with which the project of constructing new monuments is currently being pursued in South Africa and the willingness to allocate substantial funds to such structures in a context of scarce resources. Among the countless examples, the new Heroes Memorial in the Port Elizabeth township of New Brighton is perhaps the most illustrative. R1.7 million was initially approved for this project and an additional R510,000 was then allocated in a manner that caused a local political row. With its elegant, polished granite sarcophagi, the elaborate structure represents an icon of luxury in the midst of squalor, carefully fenced off from rubbish heaps, neglected streets and dilapidated buildings. In keeping with African burial tradition, one might say, the dead are accorded the luxury denied to the living.

Although the cost argument – frequently cited by those latently or openly opposed to new monuments – has its validity, it would be too simplistic sweeping to disapprove of new monuments because we can’t afford them. As Thembinkosi Ngcobo, Executive Director of the eThekwini Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, aptly put it (personal communication): ‘When highlighting the cost of erecting new monuments, one must also consider the cost of not doing the exercise. Monuments create a sense of belonging, which de facto many people currently don’t enjoy – especially in urban centres strutting with colonial and apartheid-era monuments.’

Acknowledging loss

Drawing on the work of Vamik D Volkan, Ross (2000) explains that the experience of conflict and trauma may become an important factor in constructing a group identity. Remembering trauma, according to Lambek and Antze (1996:xxiv), can be personally empowering for the individual victim and lead to the collective organising of a group. The inscription of trauma narratives can thus be pursued as a strategy of identity politics, a compelling means of establishing recognition. Volkan (1997) speaks of the ‘chosen trauma’ as a foundation of group identity, as for instance the Holocaust does for the state of Israel and, in part, for contemporary Jewish consciousness globally. Post-apartheid South African identity similarly rests on the trauma of apartheid oppression and the suffering and loss sustained during the long struggle for liberation.
In order to resolve conflict and achieve reconciliation, it is significant that an official recognition, a public acknowledgement of pain and losses suffered in the past, take place (Ross 2000; Volkan 1997). Such acknowledgement can take the form of ritual actions, symbolic gestures and, particularly, monuments and memorials. All of these can facilitate, or help to complete, the process of mourning, which is essential in dealing with trauma and accepting loss. In conflict situations, coming to terms with the past is an important prerequisite for forgiveness or reconciliation.

The current urge to establish ‘heroes monuments’ and ‘massacre memorials’, can thus be explained as a means to achieve public acknowledgement and facilitate private and group mourning. The commemorative structure functions as an external, material object that mediates between the past and the internal worlds of people who experienced apartheid (Ross, personal communication). Just as a gravestone constitutes a transitional object between the living and the dead and is perceived by many people as essential in facilitating mourning, so the public monument or memorial assists individual and collective mourning. The victim testimonies at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings are only one indication that the process of mourning in South Africa is far from being completed. The need for monuments and memorials in this process is compounded by the fact that many people have lost loved ones without ever having received a body or even knowing the whereabouts of their remains.

Monuments and memorials not only facilitate mourning but also form a focal point for ritual actions (eg commemorative events on anniversary days), and a site for symbolic gestures (such as placing a wreath). By constituting a public, visible, lasting recognition they affirm the group identity that is based on such trauma, help to overcome loss, and pave the way for reconciliation. Contrary to those who advocate a moratorium on new monuments, it could be argued that we might need to build even more, although one might want to consider less costly options.

**Visual appearance**

The visual appearance of new post-apartheid monuments and memorials ranges from very simple and modest to highly elaborate, large-scale and pretentious. The Vuyani Mabaxa memorial at Diepkloof (Zone 2), one of the very first memorials for ‘struggle heroes’, is a humble, steel-type structure (now sadly neglected), erected with obviously scarce resources by local
ANC youths in 1991-2. The Youth Memorial in Bethlehem (2001), set up in the heart of the town’s civic centre, exemplifies a series of memorials that take their cue from the visual appearance of older (including colonial) memorials nearby.

At KwaNobuhle township cemetery near Uitenhage, a simple memorial was originally unveiled in 1986 to commemorate victims of the fateful shootings at Langa on March 21, 1985. Yet, recently, it was felt that a more impressive structure was needed, which would give greater attention to the incident and attract tourists. The Langa Massacre Monument was erected in March 2000 on the spot where the police were positioned for the shooting. The monument is conceptualised as a viewing platform with a vertical concrete slab punctuated by a circular hole ‘through which one can look at the spot where the Langa shootings took place’ (Schoeman 2000), thus literally ‘framing’ the scene of the massacre. Here the memorial not only commemorates the dead, but it brings the event to life by encouraging visitors to imagine, to ‘see’ in their minds, what happened. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has observed: ‘Heritage and tourism show what cannot be seen – except through them […]’ (1998:166).

The same dynamic – the perceived need for a more impressive structure – also led to the 2000 erection of the large monumental structure at Sharpeville, which now incorporates the former simple memorial stone. In accordance with the significance of the Sharpeville Massacre in the meta-narrative of the ‘Struggle’, this monument clearly belongs in a different league. The same applies to the Hector Peterson Memorial in Soweto, an elaborate commemorative complex with a museum attached. Even more ambitious (and costly) are the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown (currently under construction) and the prestigious Freedom Park project outside Pretoria (currently in the design phase).

Virtually all post-apartheid monuments and memorials that have been built thus far in post-apartheid South Africa follow, in their formal language, essentially western models of commemoration. Perhaps the only memorial that could be said to draw on indigenous traditions to some extent is the Massacre Memorial at Bisho. Erected in 1997, it commemorates the ‘heroes and heroines’ who fell during the massacre on September 7, 1992. In front of a conventional memorial of sandstone and polished black granite lies a cairn, presumably to be added to over time by those visiting the memorial. It recalls the indigenous practice of *isivivane*, which African peoples in various parts of Southern Africa adopted from the San/Bushmen: a stone is
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added to the cairn by every passer-by as a gesture of respect for the ancestors or spiritual forces, thus keeping the memory of the deceased alive.

The current practice of imitating western, commemorative conventions might be questioned in the post-apartheid South African context that is purporting to create an ‘African Renaissance’. Discussions with local communities often reveal that their idea of a ‘proper monument’ is a bronze statue on a pedestal. Clearly the close imitation of western commemorative forms, and notably those derived from the colonial past, is a sign of legitimation and authenticity. Designing these important symbolic structures in any other way, especially if that implies less durability, might be a statement of their diminished importance (Ross, personal communication).

In general, it can be observed that the visual appearance of new or proposed monuments is rarely a matter of debate. Even competition briefs tend to be vague in this regard. If the aesthetic issue is raised at all – for instance, in conversation with political officials or in newspaper reports – one encounters vague statements or an expectation that the monument must look impressive or dignified.

Perhaps Human Needs theory can explain this lack of consideration for aesthetic questions. If monuments are erected first and foremost to fulfil the human needs of communities and serve to publicly acknowledge loss, their visual appearance is of secondary importance. For the communities concerned, the significant point is the mere ‘presence’ of the monument and perhaps the fact that it is appropriately dignified, ie befitting its purpose.

This point is best illustrated by the controversial Steve Biko statue, erected in 1997 in front of the city hall in East London. It constitutes one of the few cases in which aesthetic questions have become a matter of public debate. The work drew much criticism; the statue was labelled ‘anything from unrealistic, disproportionate and disrespectful, to plain ugly’ (Jonker 1997; Bentley 1997). Local artists, academics, and museum professionals deliberated issues of style, whether or not exact likeness was imperative, and whether or not the statue must be a work of art. Foreign critics dismissed the statue’s ‘colonial style’ as an unfitting tribute (Jacobson 1997). Yet, when Biko’s widow Nontsikelelo was asked her opinion, she expressed her satisfaction with the sculpture, saying she was ‘glad the statue is there’ (anonymous 1997).

**Reparations**

In October 1998, the TRC recommended that 21,000 victims of apartheid
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repression should receive reparations of between R17,000 and R23,000 annually for six years. In addition, there should be symbolic reparations like memorial gardens and reburials (Merten 2003). So far, the government has been very active in its delivery of symbolic reparations in the form of monuments and memorials, but much slower in facilitating payments to victims and their families. Although President Mbeki has most recently (after the release of the final TRC report in March 2003) announced that the reparations issue will now be tackled seriously, the lack of action thus far has drawn much criticism. Antjie Krog’s assessment of the success of the TRC in her award-winning book *Country of my Skull* puts it this way: ‘Reparation for the trauma of the victims has – by its own admission – been the TRC’s single biggest failure. Nearly seven years from the first testimony, victims have received nothing’ (2002:290).

This failure to deliver is frequently raised in the public arena whenever large amounts of money are being allocated to the construction of yet another monument. A recent press report, for instance, stated: ‘While the Budget was silent on reparations for victims of apartheid, it allocated R140 million for the construction of Freedom Park – the memorial outside Pretoria to commemorate the liberation struggle […]’ (Merten 2003). (This amount, incidentally, now exceeds R300 million). More criticism emerged at the unveiling of the new Sharpeville monument in 2002, when members of the local community registered their displeasure at the fact that they had not been consulted or involved in the monument project, and, furthermore, that they were still waiting for payments of reparations (Khumalo 2001; Magardie 2001). As a local woman, quoted in the *Sowetan*, put it succinctly: ‘It [the monument] will soothe our hearts but the government must move a step further and wipe our tears with reparations’ (Nkuta 2002).

In the case of the Langa Massacre Memorial, RD Basson, the Town Council’s secretary, sent a letter (1998) to the National Monuments Council, stating: ‘My Council is of the opinion that the erection of a Memorial for the victims of the “Langa Massacre” will be the greatest form of reparation to the families of the victims’. Monuments, it seems, are a form of symbolic reparation, officially in addition to, but in reality, perhaps, *in lieu* of tangible monetary reparations. The symbolic power of their presence is meant to compensate for the long (perhaps temporary?) absence of substantive reparations.

Thus, if one could consider monuments as ‘gestures of compensation’, this epithet refers also to another, perhaps more interesting, dimension of
monuments: their function as ideological tools. After all, one might ask why the government prefers to spend over R300 million on the development of Freedom Park, rather than allocating these funds to the commencement of reparation payments to victims of apartheid. The reason is that Freedom Park and other monuments of its kind fulfil an important role in legitimating the current socio-political order. By celebrating carefully selected memories, monuments (as well as museums and heritage sites) offer an opportunity to rewrite history, to control the representation of controversial events and persons, and to create a new national identity. Monuments, therefore, create an imagined, desired past, compensating for absences and shortcomings of the real past.

Inflation of resistance

Sidumo Ncita, an elderly township resident of Duncan Village (East London/Buffalo City), recalls the events around the 1985 Duncan Village Massacre – a story that closely resembles many others experienced in the townships throughout the country during the violent period of the 1980s. Township youths started burning schools in their revolt against Bantu Education and protests over the controversial language issue. Seeing that the situation was getting out of hand, parents tried to control the protestors. Rather than create total chaos and anarchy, the adults proposed to have meetings and organise the protest but the youths rebuffed their parents, questioning – perhaps even ridiculing – the older generation’s strategies of resistance, and implicitly blaming them for not having resisted earlier and more effectively.

How was it possible that such a small minority of whites managed to control and oppress such a large majority of black Africans for such a long time? One of the common answers to this question points to the ineffectiveness, half-heartedness or even total absence of resistance, mostly due to the lack of organisation and unity among different groups of the non-white population. Although there were, of course, always acts of resistance – ranging from warfare to civil disobedience – the impact of these actions was often localised or short-lived. Throughout the centuries, the effectiveness of black resistance against white oppression was diminished and compromised by tribal warfare, faction fighting, ideological differences and political party divisions, racial and ethnic separatism – in short, the lack of unity and well-organised, coordinated mass action. In fact, most recently the idea of an all black TRC has been discussed as a way of addressing
continued dissent within the black community today arising out of the ‘unfinished business’ of past ideological divisions.8

This lack of unity was compounded by a generational gap. Just as the 1950s had seen the manifestation of youth discontent over the resistance strategies of their parents, the rebels of the 1980s had lost respect for their elders’ method of resistance.9 Looking back even further in history, Benedict Carton (2000) has pointed out that the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1908 was as much about rebelling against oppressive measures of the colonial administration in Natal as it was about generational conflict within African society, ie an expression of dissatisfaction with the complacency and acquiescence of the older generation.

In contrast to this account, consider the representation of the past provided by the post-apartheid heritage sector. Even a cursory glance at the array of new monuments, as well as new or revamped museums, heritage sites and other forms of heritage celebrations, conveys the impression that South African history throughout the ages was marked by a continuous flow of more or less well-coordinated acts of resistance, organised by able, courageous leaders. As Nuttall and Wright observe, the current trend towards ‘producing reconciliation histories’ is particularly prominent among those who create packaged pasts for the growing heritage tourism sector: ‘Listen to the celebrated raconteur of the Anglo-Zulu War, David Rattray, portray the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift as icons of national reconciliation between heroic black and white South Africans of Zulu and British ancestry’ (2000:31). The past is shaped as a mirror image of the desired present (which, in reality, is rather a vision for the future). The glossing over of differences – notably the history of the ANC’s fierce struggles with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the 1980s and early 1990s – is furthermore part of a larger socio-economic and political dynamic, serving the interests of black middle-class solidarity (2000:32).

Does the current obsession with or, as some call it, inflation of resistance expressed in monuments perhaps compensate for the failures of the past, covering up the reality of a lack of unity and coordination, obscuring the long history of relatively ineffective resistance? In this perspective, monuments could be interpreted as appeasing a sense of guilt; they create a past as it never was, but as some would like it to have been. Many of the political officials and community leaders of the present who call for new monuments, belong to the generation of those youngsters involved in, and emotionally scarred by, the 1980s township violence. Monuments in that
sense are gestures of compensation for the unacknowledged shortcomings of the past, just as they are gestures of compensation for the acknowledged shortcomings in substantive reparations now.

**Transcending victim status**

On the one hand, while Lambek and Antze emphasise the importance of trauma (suppressed or commemorated) in identity construction, they also highlight the dangers associated with such an identity politics, in that it can ‘subjugate and immobilise victims in the very act of recognising their suffering’ (1996:xxiv).

People emerge as the products of stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms. This entails connecting the parts into a more or less unified narrative in which they identify with various narrative types – hero, survivor, victim, guilty perpetrator, etc. Danger lies in two directions – both in fragmentation, the failure to produce a narrative of minimal coherence, and in the construction of an excessively determined story in which there is an overidentification with a particular character. People can be confused about who they are, or they can get stuck in a role, or they can use the role to continue the narrative production of their lives. (1996:xviii)

Minkley and Rassool (1998:98) make similar observations. The currently fashionable emphasis on the history of the marginalised, they argue, often has the ironic consequence of deepening these people's marginalisation and perpetuating their special status. Yet, while post-apartheid memorials and monuments acknowledge loss and recall trauma and oppression, they also celebrate resistance. They are understood as stepping-stones, stages of suffering – echoing the Stations of the Cross – on a linear path towards ultimate triumph. As Ahmed Kathrada put it, in his now famous words about Robben Island: ‘While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid, we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering, we would want it to be a triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil’.

By emphasising resistance and triumph, post-apartheid South African identity transcends the mould of eternal victim. The focus on resistance and triumph functions as a powerful and affirmative counterpoint to the narrative of oppression, sadness and reproach. It offers positive subject positions and points of identification, thus theoretically preventing people from ‘getting stuck’ in the role of eternal victim and instead contributing to upliftment and reconciliation.
Gradations and ambivalences

If the foregrounding of resistance in this sense appears to fulfil a positive role in post-apartheid South Africa, there are also dangers posed by the current politics of remembrance. The heritage sector must be cautious of essentialist representations of the past as simple, good-and-evil-type dichotomies. As Minkley and Rassool (1998:94) succinctly state: ‘[…] apartheid did not always produce resistance, and … resistance was not always occasioned by apartheid’. Recent scholarship on the apartheid period has highlighted the grey areas, the spaces in between the dichotomous realms. While racial segregation was demanded by law and implemented through various spatial arrangements, the everyday reality of ordinary people – in the house or in the prison, for instance – was often marked by contact and proximity, if not intimacy, between the ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’, as Nuttall and Michael observe (2000:12).

Major historical events, too, when subjected to critical analysis, often reveal a degree of complexity and ambivalence that tends to violate the simplicity and clarity of the ‘official’ version, and even of the popular counter version. This is best illustrated by Philip Frankel’s book on the Sharpeville Massacre, which questions many of the ‘facts’ and popular perceptions around the incident, long ‘shrouded with an almost impenetrable mythology’ (2001:10). Frankel finds that both the efforts of the police and the apartheid state on the one hand, and the PAC and liberation forces on the other, to forge a coherent narrative around the events of the Sharpeville Massacre do not stand the test of objective historical scrutiny. Neither was the massacre simply a question of the white police ‘getting at’ the people, as portrayed by the left, nor was it a matter of the black community ‘getting at’ the police, as perceived by the right (2001:12).

The Sharpeville massacre typifies the fact that we cannot divide political realities into neat poles – resistors, repressors, the guilty and innocent, the good and evil. My narrative, I hope, brings out the infinite gradations of responsibility, personal weakness and moral ambivalence that are part of the Sharpeville story. (2001:19)

This focus among academic historians on gradations and ambivalence, which is frequently at odds with the clear black-and-white narratives that constitute the heritage sector’s preferred mode of representation, is essentially prompted by a critique of post-colonialist readings of culture. There is a realisation that post-colonialist theoretical perspectives might be insufficient to explain the complexities of narratives and the fluidity of
identity. Post-colonialism is now also acknowledged to be prematurely celebratory, not taking sufficient account of the persistence of continuities and the existence of contradictions.

The aim of this critique is not an erasure of difference. As Frankel (2001) emphasises there can never be any ethical equivalence between killers and the killed, but an understanding of the true complexity of reality, marked as much by affinities and connections as by difference. In this context, Nuttall and Michael make a similar point about the theoretical possibilities of the term ‘creolisation’, arguing that ‘While it may be useful and important to read difference and “resistance” into a set of cultural configurations, it is equally important to read other resonances. Resistance movements themselves may be creolised formations’ (2000:10).

**Conclusion**

In a democratic society, where freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution, all narratives – including those essential to the foundation myth of the state – are open to public scrutiny and potential contestation. While academics and politicians may negotiate the disputed content of such narratives, monuments are there to represent the ‘story’ (as chosen for remembrance by the now dominant political forces) to the people. Monuments are public, lasting, visual expressions of narratives. They are symbolic, abstracted and often reductionist statements, focusing on one or a few key elements of the narrative.

Monuments – not only those of the post-apartheid era – tend to shy away from ambiguity, preferring instead to ‘fix’ meaning (using images and text), thereby attempting to ensure the viewer will get the intended, ‘correct’ message. Monuments attempt to cast one version of history in stone or bronze. They are not an objective means of educating the public about history; they interpret history. Like historical film productions and other such popular mass media, they produce, organise and homogenise public memory (Morley and Robins 1993:11). Monuments represent what the public values or rather what the public is meant to value. It could be argued that by glossing over the complexities and ambiguities of historical reality in favour of reductionist, dichotomous narratives, monuments and memorials may in fact – unconsciously and unintentionally – contribute to the perpetuation of divisions and conflict.

This argument, however, rests on the erroneous assumption that the reception of the monument and the process of making meaning is the same
for all viewers. As all signifiers, monuments have multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings, even if they appear unambiguous and straightforward in their statement. As anyone can verify from personal experience, the intended meaning of a monument is not always necessarily identical with the received meaning. Public monuments are addressed at multiple, widely diverse audiences, who will interpret them with their own experiences, knowledge, emotional involvement and other personal factors in mind.\footnote{12}

As a consolation to those who criticise the current politics of commemoration and its associated expenditure, the urge to erect new monuments and memorials is likely to fade in due course. This will occur when a level of satisfaction is reached that the ‘other’ is sufficiently represented in the public commemorative record; that there is sufficient acknowledgement of loss, sufficient recognition of achievement, sufficient compensation. If Human Needs theory is to be trusted, the attainment of this level of satisfaction might indeed lead to reconciliation.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Marc Ross for making me aware of Human Needs theory, for his constructive feedback to this article, and for his general support of my work on post-apartheid monuments.

2. The reconciliatory function of monuments and memorials is frequently invoked and implicitly serves to justify the establishment of such structures. The Ncome Monument near Dundee, for instance, was designed to be a symbol of reconciliation between Zulus and Boers at the infamous Blood River site (see Coan 1998; Bishop 1998; Khumalo 1998). The construction of the Thokoza Memorial near Johannesburg was considered an important marker of reconciliation between the ANC and IFP (Memela 1998).

3. This conflict by no means exists only between white and African racial groups. As a result of the apartheid regime’s successful application of the ‘divide and rule’ strategy, divisions have been created and carefully fostered among all racial and ethnic groups in South Africa. One example of the persistence of racial stereotype and bias is the recent furore around Mbongeni Ngema’s song ‘Amandiya’, which supposedly expressed how Africans feel about Indians. The Broadcasting Complaints Commission temporarily banned it for inciting race hatred.


5. Examples include the above-mentioned Heroes Monument in New Brighton (Port Elizabeth), the Durban Heroes monument competition, or the memorials for the Guguletu Seven, the Cradock Four, the Alexandra Three, as well as the
ambitious Freedom Park monument project outside Pretoria. Examples of ‘massacre memorials’ include the Langa Massacre Memorial in Uitenhage, the Bisho Massacre Memorial, the Thokoza Memorial south of Johannesburg, the Bulhoek Massacre Memorial near Queenstown, the Zwelitsha Memorial near Bisho, the Hector Peterson Memorial in Soweto, the Youth memorials in Bethlehem or in Botshabelo (Bloemfontein), and the Sharpeville Memorial. Most commemorate the shooting of people by security forces in the context of protest actions during the 1980s township violence.

6. The inscription on this memorial reads: ‘In Memory of CDE [Comrade] Vuyani Mabaxa and other fallen heroes – your spirit will guide us to liberation’.

7. For instance, in the case of the recently built Hector Peterson Memorial and Museum in Orlando West, local residents had envisaged a seven-metre bronze statue of Hector Peterson, as Jeremy Rose from Mashabane Rose and Associates recalls.

8. This idea was discussed in the After Eight Debate on AM Live (SAfm 104.5) on February 2, 2004, where many listeners called in to share their opinion and some cited examples of such continued divisionism.

9. ‘But as 1960 approached, discontent took on a sharper edge. The early Fifties had seen a far more articulated (if unsuccessful) “defiance” campaign and, in mid-decade, the mass gathering known as the Congress of the People produced the Freedom Charter, in which black South Africans laid claim to political power in the land of their birth. The Fifties also saw growing impatience in the youth wing of the ANC where various factions influenced by anti-colonial struggles to the north of the Limpopo, began to question the tolerance of the ANC establishment of a system which clearly dehumanized the majority of South Africans. In the year before the massacre the ANC would split between those who still favoured a carefully deliberated and non-violent approach to an increasingly rigid racial system, and those who opted for a more spontaneous and direct approach’ (Frankel 2001:7).

10. This statement and its paraphrases have been published in various forms by the Robben Island Museum, including on the home page of the Robben Island website (www.robben-island.org.za/) and on the cover of folders and other promotional material.

11. Without intending to exonerate the perpetrators of the massacre, the PAC, which initiated the protest, was partly to blame for the tragedy, Frankel (2001) contends. The organisers demonstrated a lack of proper planning, there were no contingency plans, and the PAC forces contained criminal elements, some of whom dragged people out of their homes against their will. While newspaper report, such as the one by Khumalo (2001) represent the tragic shooting as if it had been planned, the premeditated act of brutal killers, or intrinsically evil forces, Frankel paints the police as a bunch of young, panicking men, who were
largely inexperienced in crowd control and fired out of fear or because they saw other officers shooting.

12. I have dealt with this issue in a more detailed manner elsewhere. See Marschall 2004.

References
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