

## **Making Money with Memories: The Fusion of Heritage, Tourism and Identity Formation in South Africa**

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### **Introduction**

In South Africa, tourism is currently promoted as the panacea of all ills, associated with development, employment and income generation. At the same time, since the advent of the post-apartheid period, the country has been fascinated – if not obsessed – with the identification, celebration, evaluation, reassessment and, not least, commodification of “heritage”.<sup>1</sup> Many new heritage sites, museums, monuments, memorials and statues are being erected throughout the country. The two trends synergize in the field of cultural and heritage tourism, a strongly emerging sector of the South African tourism industry. One rarely encounters a heritage initiative that is not expected to become a major tourist attraction and the catalyst for development and poverty alleviation. Reflecting the complex intertwining of socio-economic and socio-political agendas, the said heritage projects simultaneously serve to (re)define identity at community and national level, thus contributing to nation-building.

Some post-apartheid heritage projects and commemorative monuments have indeed become popular tourist attractions and indisputably benefit local communities, as will be shown below. However, in many other cases, the promised effects have not materialised. Indeed, the political importance of heritage raises the question whether the great enthusiasm for new monuments – often initiated or driven by government – does not in reality mask political agendas behind promises of economic development. This article will take a critical look at the issue of monuments and cultural tourism, highlighting the link between heritage, cultural tourism and identity formation. It will be investigated to what extent monuments and heritage sites indeed attract tourists and development; which kind of monuments tourists might be attracted to and in which ways local people might benefit. Where are the challenges in

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1. This article is part of a larger research project on post-apartheid monuments and cultural tourism, which has been made possible through funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa.

commodifying memories and what problems can occur, if the commodification of heritage becomes too successful? The article will end with a few international comparisons and suggest that South Africa might draw some useful lessons from considering how others within the global community of nations have dealt with similar problems.

### Monuments and cultural tourism

The primary sources for this article are the monuments and memorials themselves, which “speak” through their symbols, visual signifiers and textual inscriptions. All of these commemorative structures have been visually inspected and various on-site observations, notably about tourist behaviour and responses, have informed this study. An extensive review and analysis of newspaper articles and other media reports have been conducted, in which the current public debate around monuments in general and the reception of specific monuments in particular are reflected.

Heritage is always closely allied with economic agendas, as Hewison so poignantly expressed in his now widely used term “heritage industry”.<sup>2</sup> Cultural heritage, Hewison argued, has become a product – preserved, framed, marketed to “consumers”, in competition with other such products. In the socio-economic context of Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s, marked by rapid de-industrialization, heritage came to play a strategic role for economic development mostly through cultural tourism.<sup>3</sup> Heritage-induced tourism can resolve the conflict between conservation and development, as the success of the international “waterfront phenomenon” demonstrates. Following the same trend, South Africa developed the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town in the early 1990s<sup>4</sup>, which has proven so successful that it is now being replicated in other coastal cities, for instance Durban and Port Elizabeth.

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2. R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry. Britain in a Climate of Decline* (Methuen, London, 1987).
  3. J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (Sage and Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, 1998).
  4. Cape Town-based architect, Revel Fox, known for his advocacy of architectural conservation, conjures up the financial benefits of conservation through tourism for “those who remain unconvinced by the educational, cultural and aesthetic arguments”. R. Fox, “Is there a future for our past?”, *Restorica*, 28, 1994, pp 27-29. Speaking from an urban planning perspective, he advises the creation of clusters or precincts within the city in order to preserve individual objects of special significance in a larger and more meaningful context and to provide a holistic visitor experience for the tourist. Ideally these clusters should eventually become economically self-sustaining.

Unlike Britain, the conservation project in South Africa is impeded by a significant obstacle, namely the fact that monuments of the colonial and apartheid era represent “white heritage”, the preservation of which the population majority may not only consider unnecessary, but in fact undesirable. Indeed, many existing monuments are badly neglected; some are literally falling to pieces due to lack of maintenance and outright vandalism. Those who care for the conservation of colonial heritage have realised that they need to find ways of making these sites useful and financially self-sustainable to ensure their survival. “If monuments pay they stay”, quipped Leo van Schalkwyk from the KwaZulu Monuments Council in the context of the old memorial structures at Isandlwana<sup>5</sup> (see Illustration 1). Similarly, Denver Webb (1997), focusing on the Eastern Cape region, suggests that new meanings must be attached to old monuments. While some of them may be “recycled” into useful facilities for local communities (for example turning old mission stations into community centres), for others, the emerging tourism industry will do the job of making conservation “useful”.<sup>6</sup>



**Illustration 1:** Memorials commemorating members of the British forces at the battlefield of Isandlwana near Dundee (KwaZulu-Natal).  
**Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2005.

5. L. van Schalkwyk, “A New Relevance for Old Monuments: The Isandlwana Model”, *South African Museums Association Bulletin (SAMAB)*, 21, 1995, pp 40-43.
6. D.A. Webb, “New Meanings for Old Monuments”, *Bulletin of the Southern African Museums Association*, 23, 1, 1997, pp 6-11.

Can tourism indeed become a lifeline for embattled heritage in a contested landscape of memory? Are tourists, especially foreign tourists, not primarily attracted to the heritage of “the people”, that is in monuments that testify to the history of the previously marginalized sectors of the population, whose voices had been silenced in the past? This may largely be so, but there is evidence that some of the older monuments are also very attractive to tourists. With the former stigma removed, the Voortrekker Monument outside Pretoria or the Afrikaans Taal Monument at Paarl, for instance, have become popular sites for both domestic and foreign tourists<sup>7</sup>. Apart from the iconic recognition value of these commemorative structures, it seems that cultural and heritage tourists often favour a holistic, politically balanced, or contextualized representation of the past, which allows them to understand the complex realities that have shaped a country’s history and its people.

Furthermore, monuments are always multilayered in meaning, a fact often overlooked in the current debate around monuments, which is frequently characterised by simplistic dichotomous lines of argument. While the Taal Monument at Paarl, for instance, is at one level a political symbol, representing Afrikaner nationalist ideological values, it is at another level also an evocative architectural landmark, which – as Spiegel suggests – conjures up some of the magical mystery and traditionality of Africa and its people, that tourists in search of the “exotic” and the “other” are often so attracted to.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, in the post-apartheid South African context, ultraconservative Afrikaner nationalists have become a kind of “exotic other” in their own right, both in the eyes of domestic and foreign tourists. A statue of former prime minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, “architect” of the apartheid state, which had been dismantled in Bloemfontein due to its perceived offensiveness, has proudly been re-erected in the Afrikaner “homeland” of Orania in the Northern Cape. The town and its statuesque focal point have recently been featured in *Sawubona* (2002), the South African Airways (SAA) in-flight magazine, implicitly marketing the place and its people as a tourist attraction.

The Voortrekker Monument may be an interesting site to visit and tourist numbers certainly testify to this. Yet for many black South Africans it is still the most predominant and painful symbol of their oppression and anecdotal evidence shows that many ordinary people would prefer it to be destroyed. Similar sentiments must have prompted the organizers of Thabo Mbeki’s inauguration as president in 1999 to cover up the statues in the grounds of the

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7. Anonymous, “A Monumental Debate”, *Daily News*, 4 January 1999.

8. A.D. Spiegel, “Struggling with Tradition in South Africa: The Multivocality of Images of the Past”, in G.C. Bond and A. Gilliam (eds), *Social Construction of the Past. Representation as Power* (Routledge, London and New York, 1994), caption 13, paraphrase p 191.

Union Buildings in Pretoria with black cloth. Hiding the statues was criticized and indeed seen as a missed opportunity, especially with respect to foreign guests, as "... it would have been appropriate for the visitors to see the dark side of our history".<sup>9</sup> However, for the political elite and perhaps many ordinary people who came to celebrate their president, the prominent presence of the bronze images of their historical oppressors might have spoilt the occasion. These examples demonstrate the double-edged nature of heritage and the contradictory role that monuments can play in society, whereby the emotional needs of the people may conflict with the needs and interests of the tourists. Yet, as the tourism industry is in turn ultimately meant to benefit the economic needs of the people, the question really is, which needs are more important or to what extent sacrifices may have to be made for the successful commodification of heritage.

### **New heritage**

The South African government's decision against a radical iconoclastic solution for colonial and apartheid era monuments, memorials and statues, prompted the need for the declaration and development of new heritage sites and the erection of new statues to balance the country's skewed landscape of memory. At the same time, government policy stipulates that all new heritage projects must be allied to economic development objectives. As official statements and press reports insist, virtually all new monuments and memorials will without doubt attract hordes of cultural tourists, thereby functioning as catalysts for infrastructural development, employment creation and poverty alleviation to the benefit of previously disadvantaged communities.<sup>10</sup>

Virtually no research has been conducted to ascertain to what extent new monuments, once completed, indeed attract tourists and – if they do – how precisely the local community benefits. It has recently been pointed out that there still is very little ownership of new heritage projects by local people – an area of concern that the newly founded National Heritage Council is intent on

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9. E. Jayiya, "Blackout for Apartheid Statues", *The Star*, 14 June 1999.

10. To mention but a few examples of such press reports, see C. Bishop, "Reconciliation at the River", *Natal Witness*, 17 December 1998, about the Ncome monument near Dundee; K. Edwards, "Sharpeville will be one of SA's Biggest Political Tourism Sites", *Sunday Independent*, 25 June 2000, about Sharpeville; T. Mkhize, "Durban to Take on 'African City' Look", *Sunday Times*, 27 May 2001, about monuments in Durban; F.N. Moya, "Council Taps into Tourism Market", *The Star*, 6 March 1997, about Soweto; E. Koch, "Heritage must Link with Economic Growth", *Sunday Independent*, 24 January 1999, about the Samora Machel memorial. Also see C. Goodenough, "Conserving Community Heritage", *Natal Witness*, 30 January 1996.

addressing through the development of strategic policy.<sup>11</sup> Most heritage projects are still initiated and driven by government officials or political authorities, who purport to act on behalf of “the people”. As much as these officials might have economic development at heart, their motives are equally driven by political objectives, notably nation-building and forging a new identity.

The close interweaving of economic and political objectives, the connection between poverty alleviation and identity construction, was perhaps most poignantly expressed by Valli Moosa, then South African Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs. In an article entitled “Building a nation through our heritage”, Moosa links heritage, tourism, and economic development with the wider project of nation-building and identity in a post-apartheid society. Referring to three new World Heritage Sites in South Africa declared in 1998, Moosa said:

They are symbols or icons of what we as a nation can feel justifiably proud about in the world. We must take them and boldly start to project ourselves as a nation internationally whether through promoting investment or marketing tourism ... We have to start working on a consensus of how we see and want to build our nation ... The manner in which we do this cannot be separated from the process of nation building. We cannot say that our campaign to market SA to potential British tourists can be separated from nation building.<sup>12</sup>

This echoes what Themba Wakashe, national co-ordinator for Arts and Culture South Africa (ACSA), said at the very dawn of the post-apartheid era: “We also have to show and tell the world how we want to be seen, how we are forging a new nation ...”<sup>13</sup> In short, if heritage is a vehicle for nation building and for constructing a new identity, its commodification and exploitation for tourism serves to portray that identity to the outside world. The foreign tourist is looking in onto the new South African Self and helps to (re)define it.

A moving example is the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum in Orlando West, Soweto. The June 1976 Soweto Uprising is a key event in the grand-narrative of the struggle for liberation, which now serves as a foundation myth

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11. J. Wells, “Who Owns Heritage? Developing Powers to Traditional Leadership and Local Government in the Eastern Cape of South Africa”. Proceedings of the conference *Heritage in Southern and Eastern Africa Imagining and Marketing Public Culture and History*, July 2004, Livingstone, Zambia.
  12. M.V. Moosa, “Building a Nation through our Heritage”, *Business Day*, 3 December 1998.
  13. T. Wakashe, “South Africa’s Heritage needs to be Democratized”, *Restorica*, 28, 1994, pp 35-36.

of the post-apartheid state. As such the site of the shooting had to be marked appropriately and the memorial would become a “shrine of the nation”, where informal and ritualized action can take place. Simultaneously, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), the main role-player in this heritage project, recognized that the national and international status of the Soweto Uprising presents a unique opportunity to be exploited for cultural tourism.<sup>14</sup> The Department contributed major finance from the poverty alleviation fund. Tourism was expected to bring development and employment into the area, notably through the creation of small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), through craft stalls outside the museum building and through training programmes run by the museum curator. The site is in conveniently close proximity to other places of tourist interest, notably Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s house and the former Mandela residence which has been turned into a museum a few years ago.

The Hector Pieterse Memorial does indeed attract a good number of tourists (although probably far less than the Voortrekker Monument, for instance) and it forms an attractive highlight of every Soweto township tour. Although it is not always evident how local residents indeed benefit from the tourist flow, it must be acknowledged that such benefits are often difficult to measure, especially in monetary terms. It can also be anticipated that the community will in time discover new ways in which they can use the memorial and profit from the crowd it attracts. Heritage and tourism are still new concepts to many ordinary people, who have never had the opportunity to travel as a leisure activity and who may not entirely understand precisely what constitutes a successful tourist experience.

#### **What kind of heritage attracts tourists?**

As cultural heritage is increasingly being considered a key component of South Africa’s tourism “product”, one might ask, which kind of heritage attracts tourists? “Tourists do not come here to see a mini London but an African city and how its people live. We need to Africanize the city”, explains Thembinkosi Ngcobo, eThekweni’s Executive Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, when advocating the need for new monuments in Durban.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the proposed means by which to achieve this “Africanization” – public monuments and bronze statues on pedestals – is the most Eurocentric

14. “Soweto will become an even more popular tourist destination when the Hector Pieterse Museum opens at the beginning of next year. [It] is of international interest and is expected to attract many tourists”, explains the Gauteng Tourism Authority’s Newsletter. See Anonymous, “The Hector Pieterse Museum: Experience the Struggle”, *Tourism Talk* (Gauteng Tourism Authority, Johannesburg, 2001), p 9.
15. Ngcobo quoted in Mkhize, “Durban to Take on ‘African City’ Look”.

and in fact colonial commemorative practice imaginable. If monuments are to become successful tourist attractions, one might want to consider developing more creative and uniquely African or South African ways of public commemoration, especially as the country seeks to celebrate the spirit of the “African Renaissance”.

Michael Kimmelman, writing in the *New York Times*, has observed that, stylistically, minimalism has become “the unofficial language of memorial art” in the United States.<sup>16</sup> A cursory glance at recent projects in Europe and some other parts of the world confirms the wider persistence of this trend. In this context, it can be expected that a trite cenotaph or banal, realistically rendered bronze statue of a South African liberation hero on a pedestal, striking a heroic pose, is not likely to grab the imagination of a well-travelled cultural tourist. However, such statues are often very popular with South African political elites and local community audiences. Once again, whose taste and needs should prevail?

One may also argue that the aesthetic quality and visual appearance of monuments is not really all that important. Commemorative monuments and statues are almost expected to be visually boring, as they are usually highly conventional in style and banal in iconography. What matters is perhaps primarily their content and, in some cases, the experience of a certain aura emanating from the site they mark. There are a number of new monument initiatives and heritage site developments in South Africa that have become very successful as tourist attractions.



**Illustration 2:** Maximum security prison at Robben Island as an example of a successful heritage tourism site. **Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2002.

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16. M. Kimmelman, “Out of Minimalism. Monuments to Memory”, *New York Times*, 13 January 2002.



Robben Island, for instance (see Illustration 2) – recently declared a World Heritage Site – has been reported to draw well over 300 000 tourists per year, which works out to an impressive average of almost 1 000 daily visitors.<sup>17</sup>

While local communities might not always directly benefit financially from the tourism flow, new monument initiatives usually include some general upgrading of the surrounding area or become nodes of urban development. This is clearly evident at the Hector Pieterse Memorial, at the new Sharpeville Memorial, or – perhaps most notably – at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown. Here a monument is planned to commemorate the open square where a popular mass meeting was held in 1955, leading to the adoption of the Freedom Charter (see Illustration 3). This square will not only form a new “town centre”, but constitute the focal point of a substantial urban renewal project for the entire surrounding area, which includes new roads, homes and public facilities.



**Illustration 3:** Construction underway in Kliptown as part of developing the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, where the Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955.  
**Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2004.

### **Challenges of a practical nature**

Despite these successes, there are indeed significant challenges – often of a practical nature – associated with turning monuments and heritage sites into tourist attractions. Many of the historical events that warrant public commemoration – and potential commodification for the tourist – are

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17. Anonymous, “Robben Island Rakes in Tourists”, *This Day*, 15 July 2004.

associated with sites in townships or remote rural areas. This fact may pose considerable problems in terms of access and security. A few years ago, *Business Day*, for instance, reported that bustling tourism trade was going on at the Shaka Memorial in KwaDukuza, but further ventures into the interior to other sites associated with King Shaka Zulu were not exactly recommended, unless with a guide.<sup>18</sup> Similarly in Soweto, “[s]ecurity could prove to be the major test of the council’s resolve to make Soweto a major tourist destination after seven Swiss tourists were recently robbed while visiting Regina Mundi”, reported *The Star* in 1997.<sup>19</sup> At the newly established Resistance Park Monument in Durban, which is located at the fringe of the city centre, the visitor frequently encounters vagrants loitering around the park or sleeping between the pillars of the monument.

Vandalism – mostly in the form of theft of bronze pieces – is also a problem which affects by no means only older, in some people’s mind perhaps expendable, monuments. At Isandlwana, the famous Anglo-Zulu battlefield near Dundee, a new bronze memorial commemorating the fallen Zulu warriors was unveiled in January 1999. The bronze sculpture, which represents an *isiqu* – a bravery necklace, which is the Zulu equivalent of the Victoria Cross – has been presented as “one of South Africa’s top tourism icons”,<sup>20</sup> yet it was not long before one of the spikes had been sawn off and in fact, the same type of vandalism has recently happened again (see Illustration 4).



**Illustration 4:** The new memorial at Isandlwana (Gert Swart) to commemorate the fallen Zulu warriors, showing recent incident of vandalism.

**Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2005.

18. P. Lee, “Shaka’s Burial Place Rediscovered”, *Business Day*, 16 April 1999.
19. Moya, “Council Taps into Tourism Market”.
20. Anonymous, “Thieves Damage Zulu Memorial”, *Daily News*, 25 August 2001.

In the township of Atteridgeville outside Pretoria, the entire sculpture of a monument dedicated to the black soldiers who lost their lives on the *SS Mendi* during the First World War (unveiled in 1998) has fallen victim to the prevailing scourge of heritage theft. In all these cases, the resources are simply not available to protect the monument and ensure the safety and security of visitors. As tour operators are usually not prepared to take risks, many of these heritage sites may be left off the tourist itinerary – as attractive as they might be.

On the banks of the Ncome River near Dundee, opposite the Afrikaner nationalist monument commemorating the Battle of Blood River, a new monument *cum* museum was built a few years ago. This national monument initiative commemorates the Zulu victims of the famous battle and represents the historical event from a Zulu perspective. Despite expectations to the contrary, tourist numbers at Ncome are hardly impressive and the scores of begging children descending upon the visitor suggest that the development and poverty alleviation objectives associated with this project have been struggling to succeed. In fact, one may question the impact of this development, and the “rich” tourists it draws, on the moral fibre of this rural community – given that a group of begging children might be able to make more money from tourists than their mothers through producing crafts for sale.<sup>21</sup>

### **Nelson Mandela as tourist attraction**

One way of solving the tourist’s problems of access and security, is to conveniently bring the heritage to the tourist. This may involve erecting monuments that are primarily addressed at tourists, set up in places designed for tourists. The bronze statue of Nelson Mandela at Hammanskraal is an example of this type. The small town of Hammanskraal near Pretoria has recently been refurbished with a new “centre” at the town’s fringe. Here a series of solid craft stalls have been built along a new street – wide enough for tourist coaches – and around the traffic circle, where a bronze statue of Nelson Mandela forms the focal point. This arrangement allows tourists to shop for curios, watch the makers of the craft items at work, and take a picture of the statue, without having to worry about the inconveniences and security risks of “real” urban life.

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21. This is not meant to suggest that the Ncome project has completely failed in its development and poverty alleviation objectives. Even the presence of begging children is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the level of poverty in an area. A proper socio-economic study would be needed to find out precisely and objectively, to what extent the local community has benefited.

Nelson Mandela is still – ten years after the advent of democracy – South Africa’s foremost icon, much beloved and respected internationally and nationally across the racial spectrum. In the present context of South Africa’s eagerness to attract foreign investment, flashing the Mandela card serves to project an image of peace and stability to an international investor community affected by wide-spread Afro-pessimism. This is one of the functions of the latest Mandela statue, unveiled in April 2004 in Sandton Square, now renamed Nelson Mandela Square (see Illustration 5). This secluded open-air piazza inside an up-market shopping area in the heart of Sandton is frequented by the domestic economic elite (black and white), as well as an international audience of foreign public officials and private sector delegates regularly descending upon Sandton as the country’s foremost locus of international conventions and business summits. While the statue at Hammanskraal portrays Mandela in a formal posture, solemnly taking his oath of office at the beginning of his presidential term, the Sandton statue represents the popular image of the relaxed, laughing and dancing man of the people.



**Illustration 5:** Tourists photograph the new Mandela statue in Sandton (Nelson Mandela Square)  
**Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2004.

Over the past years, two major proposals have been tabled for erecting some kind of very large-scale monument to Mandela, which would pay tribute to the man, but unabashedly function primarily as a draw-card for foreign tourists. The first one of these proposals, the so-called Freedom Monument, emerged in 1995 and envisaged a giant bronze cast of Mandela’s hand, breaking through prison bars. The 23-metre (some sources say 33-metre) high sculpture, was to be privately funded by businessmen Solly and Abe Krog at a cost of

R50-million (some sources say R60-million) and sculpted, ironically, by Danie de Jager, an artist closely associated with the commemorative endeavors of the apartheid regime.

The project drew an unprecedented amount of debate and criticism.<sup>22</sup> The concept is “in the best tradition of fascist South African monumental kitsch”, commented Robert Greig<sup>23</sup>, Arts Editor of the *Sunday Independent*. With respect to the monument’s tourism potential, Marilyn Martin, Director of the South African National Gallery, added: “Tourists would indeed flock to see the monument, but to laugh at South Africans’ naïvety and philistinism, not to share in their liberation through a work of art”.<sup>24</sup>

The Mandela Hand project was eventually called off, but the idea has obviously inspired the more recent proposal – driven by a local businessman, Kenny McDonald – for an even more gigantic statue of Mandela with his arm raised, envisaged for the coastline at Port Elizabeth. Newspaper reports included preliminary sketches in which the monument was seen to imitate the Statue of Liberty in New York, exceeding this model in height by almost 20 metres.<sup>25</sup> Intended to become South Africa’s foremost tourist attraction, the statue was meant to rotate and be equipped with all the trappings of a successful, commercial tourist enterprise according to Western standards, including a restaurant, conference centre and a wax museum à la Madame Tussaud in London. These particulars might not apply to the implemented project, as it has now been decided (after the positive outcome of the feasibility study) that the design should be solicited through an international competition.<sup>26</sup>

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22. For example, see Anonymous, “Mandela Sculpture”, *The Mercury*, 2 April 1995; Anonymous, “Bronze ‘Idol’ Sheer Waste”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 12 April 1996; N. Dubow, “Arms and the Man”, *Weekly Mail*, 12 April 1996; R. Greig, “Kitsch is the Krogs’ Democratic Right – but Only if they Keep it Private”, *Sunday Independent*, 7 April 1996; Y. Vanderhaeghen, “Monumental Questions”, *Natal Witness*, 9 April 1996.
  23. Greig, “Kitsch is the Krogs’ Democratic Right”.
  24. Martin quoted in Vanderhaeghen, “Monumental Questions”, *Natal Witness*, 9 April 1996.
  25. R. Philp, “Giant Mandela Statue Planned”, *Sunday Times*, 20 October 2002; D. van Heerden, “Mandela-beeld kry Gestalte”, *Oos-Kaap Rapport*, 3 Junie 2001; L. van Niekerk, “Oorsese hulp Stroom in vir Beeld”, *Burger*, 10 Julie 2001.
  26. The monument will be built on a site in the harbour. Funding will be raised from a variety of sources within the private sector (nationally and internationally) and the Nelson Mandela Metro Municipality will play a supportive role in implementing the project. Construction is envisaged to begin in 2005 and be completed in 2008. M. Madwara, Freedom Enterprises, telephonic conversation, Durban – Port Elizabeth, 13 August 2004; R. William, Nelson Mandela Metro Municipality, telephonic conversation, Durban – Port Elizabeth, 13 August 2004.

Despite efforts to prevent Mandela from being turned into a commodity, such initiatives and their strong association with tourism and commercial enterprise implicitly serve to trivialize the man's role and personality and prepare the way for his likeness to be turned into an item of kitsch. At Sandton Square, Mandela has essentially become a kind of décor that lends a local flavour to the international-standard shopping experience. Culture, says Jameson, is the "new logic" of capitalism.<sup>27</sup>

### Cities create an image

The trend towards trivialization and commodification of national icons is to some extent replicated at regional and community level, most notably with respect to the historic figures of King Shaka Zulu and Mahatma Gandhi. Tourism has fuelled a sense of competition between cities and localities throughout South Africa, which has spurred marketing strategists to focus on – and if necessary, invent – difference and uniqueness. Much has been written about the way in which cities invent or elaborate distinctive self-images as place selling strategies<sup>28</sup> and monuments play a key role in this process. Monuments and statues narrate difference and create a perpetual visual display of the symbols and icons associated with the city's chosen self-image.

In his analysis of road monuments in Nigerian cities, Oha has observed that visuality is an important aspect of "cityness". "In fact, one can say that ... the city (re)constructs itself to be seen, and also speaks to its inhabitants and visitors through what it makes them to see".<sup>29</sup> As in Nigeria, statues as tourist attractions or "sights" in South Africa are likewise persuasive iconic elements in the (artistically redrawn) landscape of the city, serving to sell the city to tourists. Monuments and statues are a means of commodifying the city and "advertise in their mute ways the character and cultural values of the particular city".<sup>30</sup>

As indicated earlier, in the South African context, this economic dynamic is overlapped by the socio-political demand for a new contingent of monuments in order to reshape the city's skewed landscape of memory. This has fuelled a competitive race for the appropriation and exploitation of the most desirable

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27. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso and Duke University Press, London and Durham, 1991).

28. J.M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire. Postcolonialism and the City* (Routledge, London and New York, 1996), p 33.

29. O. Oha, "Signs, Cities, and Designs of Capacities: The Semiotics of Road Monuments in Some Nigerian Cities", *The African Anthropologist*, 7, 1, 2000, pp 33-47.

30. Oha, "Signs, Cities, and Designs of Capacities", p 37.

icons, the most attractive draw-cards, as different localities seek to construct a unique identity for themselves. The city of Port Elizabeth has no special association with Nelson Mandela whatsoever, but the city was quick to “grab” this foremost icon of the struggle for liberation and equality, before anyone else thought of the strategic move. The larger region around Port Elizabeth was named “Nelson Mandela Bay” in December 2000, is administrated by the “Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality” and the King George V Art Gallery, one of its older public buildings and a popular visitor attraction, is now called the “Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Gallery”. These developments not only provide fertile ground for the statue initiative, but indeed the statue becomes their logical consequence.

Such appropriation of key icons by one city may sometimes be to the detriment of another locality, which may have equal or even greater “rights” to being associated with the respective person or heritage. For instance, by erecting a life-size bronze statue of Steve Biko in front of the city hall, the city of East London attempts to establish a firm connection in the public mind between itself and this famous black consciousness leader. Politically, the statue implies that the city carries the legacy of Biko and subscribes to the values epitomized by him; economically the statue becomes a kind of trademark advertising the city. The large scale of the statue, its (debatable) attractiveness and prominent position in one of the city’s most prestigious places, once again ensures a high degree of visibility that other localities may find difficult to compete with. This applies most notably to the nearby town of King William’s Town, which might also wish to benefit from “Biko-induced tourism”, given that this is where Biko actually lived and where he is buried. Incidentally, the Biko statue has attracted an enormous amount of criticism and controversy, both as a public sculpture and as political symbol.<sup>31</sup>

In other cases, a statue might be attractive to tourists, but undesirable for local residents or vocal portions thereof. One reason why not a single statue of a black hero has yet been set up in Durban, now part of the eThekweni Municipality, is the contested nature of such an enterprise. The question of who deserves the honour of being the first hero to be commemorated in this way, easily becomes a political hot potato. Furthermore, given the pattern established in the aforementioned localities, the City of Durban might become predominantly associated with the chosen individual, especially if the statue is erected in a highly prominent place or if it is not soon

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31. For example see Anonymous, “Row over Biko Sculpture”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 4 September 1997; Anonymous, “Biko Statue Defaced – Again”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 30 September 1997; Anonymous, “Critics Attack Artistic Merit of Biko Statue”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 20 September 1997; Anonymous, “AWB Deface Biko Statue”, *Weekend Post*, 13 September 1997.

complemented by others. Which individual epitomizes what Durban stands for and precisely what is it anyway that Durban stands for?

One aspect of what makes Durban unique, is its Indian population, being home to the highest concentration of Indians outside of India. Not surprisingly, one of the first commemorative initiatives tabled in post-apartheid Durban, was a monument to the Indian community. The proposal, put forward by ANC provincial leader S'bu Ndebele and Heritage Foundation Chief, Krish Gokool, was highly controversial, notably within the Indian community itself. Most outspoken amongst the critics was the then University of Durban-Westville academic, Sanusha Naidu, who suspected that the initiative might be an attempt by the ANC to capture the "Indian vote".<sup>32</sup> Monuments can play an important role in unifying a society and building one nation, she argued, but they can equally continue to reinforce racial and/or ethnic identities. Cultural tourism thrives on stereotypes and the idea of distinctly identifiable, homogenous, preferably exotic, cultural groups on display. As Naidu and other critics<sup>33</sup> have pointed out, the post-apartheid concept of the "Rainbow Nation" with its diverse array of cultures, all too often replicates the fixed racial and ethnic categories established during the colonial era and entrenched by apartheid.

### Post-modern pastiche

In various South African cities, most notably Durban and Pretoria, proposals have been tabled in recent years for the creation of commemorative spaces in the urban landscape, where older statues could be relocated. Unlike similar initiatives in Moscow and Budapest,<sup>34</sup> the South African proposals were not meant to serve as graveyards for discarded statues, or as tourist curiosities. The idea was that the members of the "old guard", the heroes of yesteryear, would be joined by new heroes, that is new statues and busts of liberation fighters and resistance activists. Old and new heroes would thus be united in a serious, mutual site of public commemoration.

None of these "Rainbow Nation" models of commemoration have been implemented. Although various reasons have been cited in each case, it can be assumed that the real issue is at least in part a lack of interest in a potentially ambiguous, contradictory commemorative venture. Existing statues of old

32. S. Naidu, "Monumental Mistake needs to be Avoided", *Daily News*, 14 February 2000; S. Naidu, "Where do we put this 'Indian' Monument?", *Daily News*, 24 February 2000.
33. For example C. Rassool, "Cultural History in Collections", *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 25, 2, 2001, pp 43-49.
34. B. James, "Fencing in the Past: Budapest's Statue Park Museum", *Media, Culture & Society*, 21, 1999, pp 291-311.



heroes have largely been left in their accustomed places, but they are considered “silent sentinels”,<sup>35</sup> being neither considered visitor attractions, nor called upon to contribute to the city’s image. It is not the mixture of old and new, “black” and “white” heritage, but solely the new statues and monuments associated with the heritage of “the people” that most South African cities tend to flash as foundation of their newly shaped image.<sup>36</sup>

Statues and heritage more generally are of course a matter of contention almost anywhere in the world, especially in countries affected by a change of regime or fundamental reshaping of the socio-political landscape, such as post-socialist Russia and the Eastern European countries. Although in every locality, the issue is inflected by the specific historical factors that have shaped the local context, decision-makers in South Africa might find it useful to consider how other cities have dealt with it.

In St. Petersburg, for instance, the statue of Lenin that used to greet the arriving visitor at the train station from Moscow, has been replaced by one representing Peter the Great, the city’s founding father. Peter was also the tsar who has always been associated with opening Russia’s window onto the West. His intention was to pull Russia out of its isolation and to connect the country to Western Europe, foreshadowing the political intentions of the current Russian government. However, in other public places, statues of Lenin have not been removed. A gigantic example dominates the square in front of the Finland train station, associated with Lenin’s escape from Russia and his return in 1917. Behind the statue, a massive placard could be seen on the station’s façade in 2002, representing an image of Falconet’s famous equestrian monument to Peter the Great (situated elsewhere in St. Petersburg), which proudly announced the upcoming three hundred-year anniversary of the foundation of St. Petersburg (see Illustration 6).

Peter the Great – once officially despised, now re-contextualised and celebrated as an important historical figure and founding father of the city – peacefully co-exists with Lenin. Contrary to the (modernist) purist approach of the Soviet era with its quest for a radical cleansing of the memory landscape, this can be interpreted as a post-modern approach directed at creating a pastiche of memory, where different, even contradictory, signifiers peacefully exist side by side and form part of the complex meaning of the city and the history of its people. This co-existence is aided by the fact that both the heritage of the Tsarist and the Soviet period have become potentially lucrative assets to be

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35. G. Linscott, “Let Silent Sentinels Rest in Peace”, *Natal Mercury*, 13 June 2001.

36. Likewise in Orania, it is exclusively the old hero, in the form of the Verwoerd statue mentioned earlier, who is celebrated and advertised. It can safely be assumed that he will not be joined by any statues to post-apartheid heroes in the foreseeable future.

exploited by the thriving cultural tourism industry in St. Petersburg (for example, Lenin House as museum and the restored palaces of Peter the Great as popular tourist attraction), this most Western and tourist-orientated city in Russia.



**Illustration 6:** Finland Train Station, St Petersburg (Russia).  
Statue of Lenin in the foreground; poster showing equestrian statue of  
Peter the Great in the back.

**Photograph:** S. Marschall, 2002.

## Conclusion

In New York City and further afield, the events of 11 September 2001 have triggered a lively debate around memorials and other methods of commemoration. In January 2002, before the recent competition for a 9/11 Memorial was completed, then Mayor Rudolph W. Guiliani suggested that the site of the former World Trade Centre should not be looked at as a site for economic development, but rather as a site for a memorial “that just draws millions of people here that just want to see it. If the memorial was done correctly, you’ll have all the economic development you want, and you can do the office space in a lot of different places.”<sup>37</sup> In a place like Manhattan, one of

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37. Guiliani quoted in Kimmelman, “Out of Minimalism”.

the epicentres of the world of capital, the implied contention that a commemorative structure might make more money than an office tower, is perhaps the most persuasive illustration of the optimistic belief in the virtually unlimited potential of heritage tourism and the commodification of memories that has become so widespread in the Western world.

Since South Africa has rejoined the international community of nations and its economic policies have increasingly become aligned with the principles of the global market economy, memories have become a business opportunity. Certainly, in a country of scarce resources, where tourism is one of the most important growth industries, it may be legitimate to cash in on the foreign attractiveness of local heritage and iconic leaders. From a socio-political perspective, there can be no doubt that the celebration of heritage and its associated commemorative practices can be empowering for previously marginalized communities in the current post-apartheid context.

On the downside, new statues and heritage projects can equally be divisive and disruptive. Their value as tourist attractions and income generators may, upon closer examination, be much lower than South African communities are being made to believe. In fact, one suspects that the tourism argument is sometimes mobilized to justify commemorative projects that are rather politically expedient. This is amplified by the fact that – as has been mentioned earlier – most new heritage projects are initiated or driven by government.

At the opposite end of the scale, as has been demonstrated with respect to the commodification of Nelson Mandela, it may equally be problematic, if heritage becomes too attractive for tourists. If pursued uncritically and uncontrolled, the appropriation of cultural heritage for commercial exploitation may cause more harm than good for local communities and the nation. Although the prevailing attitude among many political officials appears to be that South Africa does not need to consider what other countries do, local policy and practice with respect to statues and heritage might benefit from an injection of some fresh thoughts derived from the experience of cities elsewhere in the world.

### **Abstract**

Since the advent of the post-apartheid period, South Africa has been preoccupied with the identification, celebration, re-assessment and, not least of all, commodification of “heritage”. This article explores the link between heritage, tourism and identity formation in the “new” South Africa. New monuments, statues and heritage projects are enthusiastically being promoted to become major tourist attractions in the emerging cultural and heritage tourism

industry, thus resulting in development and poverty alleviation. Tourism is also expected to become the lifeline for existing older monuments, now often ideologically repositioned. This article investigates critically to what extent heritage tourism can indeed deliver on the high expectations vested in it. While some heritage developments are indeed very successful as tourist attractions, others face a range of problems and challenges. The article also cautions that it may be problematic when the commodification of heritage becomes too successful. Lastly, it is suggested that South Africa might draw some useful lessons from considering how other countries have dealt with similar issues.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Inkomste uit Herinneringe: Die Versmelting van Erfenis, Toerisme en Identiteitsvorming in Suid-Afrika**

Sedert die aanvang van die post-apartheidsera, is Suid-Afrika besig met die identifikasie, viering, herwaardering en (nie in die geringste mate van almal nie) die kommodifisering van die “erfenis”. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die verhouding tussen erfenis, toerisme en identiteitsvorming in die “nuwe” Suid-Afrika. Nuwe monumente, standbeelde en erfenisprojekte word met entoesiasme bevorder ten einde grootskaalse toeriste-atraksies in die ontlukende kulturele en erfenistoerisme-industrie te word, en sodoende die verligting van armoede te bewerkstellig. Die verwagting word ook geskep dat toerisme die lewenslyn van bestaande ouer monumente, wat nou dikwels om ideologiese redes herposisioneer word, sal wees. Hierdie artikel ondersoek op kritiese wyse tot watter mate erfenistoerisme werklik aan die hoë verwagtinge wat daaraan gestel word, kan voldoen. Alhoewel sommige erfenisprojekte inderdaad uiters suksesvolle toeriste-atraksies is, is andere onderworpe aan vele probleme en uitdagings. Die artikel waarsku ook dat dit probleme kan skep indien ’n erfenis té suksesvol gekommodifiseer sou word. Ten slotte word voorgestel dat Suid-Afrika nuttige lesse kan leer uit die wyse waarop ander lande soortgelyke vraagstukke hanteer het.

#### **Key words**

Heritage, monuments, statues, cultural and heritage tourism, identity, South Africa, commodification, post-apartheid.

#### **Sleutelwoorde**

Erfenis, monumente, standbeelde, kulturele en erfenistoerisme, identiteit, Suid-Afrika, kommodifisering, post-apartheid.