The politics of memory and heritage:
Public Art and Museums post 1994.

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When myself and Christopher first decided to collaborate on this paper we thought about the numerous memory and art projects we had worked on individually and collectively since the 1980's in our capacity as artists, cultural specialists and heritage practitioners and how these practices had both changed over the years, and yet stayed much the same. Although significant strides had been made, the issues and conversations of the early 90's[1] on reimagining our postcolonial future in the African present still remain as intense as ever. It seems than that the renewed focus on how we remember and how these acts of recalling the past are made visual, and the question of 'what to do' with outdated and "unrepresentative" and possibly even 'offensive' forms of inscriptions occupying prominent public spaces, require a frank and open introspection.

In our individual capacities we are often asked to serve on various reference groups and memorial and public art projects where we have witnessed first-hand the "add-on" approach taken to heritage, as contended by Minkley (Minkley, 2008), regarding not only pre-1994 institutions of memory but also in the way new initiatives are being conceptualised. They had pointed to this approach noting that outdated museum exhibitions and collections were simply appended instead of being reconceptualised as part of the transformation project that began at the end of Apartheid. As representing a "museum" and 'university', two institutions that share more than a similarity in how they construct, package, transmit and consume

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[1] See policy debates on the transformation of heritage management in South Africa in the mid-1990's in Restorica; "New Meanings for Old Monuments" by Denver Webb, no. 29 (1996) and "In step with the Future", no. 30 (1998), also "Culture and Custom" by W.F. Kuse, no.30 (1998)

knowledge, but also an "educative" and "civilising" priority as part of developing the nation-state suggested by Tony Bennett (Bennett, The Exhibitionary Complex, 1999), we observe both institutions are experiencing significant challenges in their transformation at present. In addition Caroline Hamilton (Hamilton C. , 1994) suggested that museums specifically but also galleries and archives have adapted to this time period in South Africa's history by employing a "chameleon" like approach to their legacies of collecting, classification and representations. However this methodology is indicative of how many institutions are capable to, not only survive in the post-1994 democracy, but we argue that this is how they maintain their cultural hegemony and dominance by subjugating the post-apartheid transformation narrative to a colonial account. We have taken note, more specifically in this Metro, how the focus advanced by the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG)[2] in the mid-1990's on "intangible heritage, living heritage and living traditions" in order to 'portray a socially cohesive' and "holistic" South African culture and history, had quickly digressed. Instead, projects adopted an "add-on" strategy as a 'quick fix' that relied on tangible commissions with emphasis on the built environment. This approach has often had disastrous consequences. We see a number of post 1994 museums and memorials that are subsidised by the state, and in some cases civil society, are increasingly finding itself in serious distress either through a lack of funding, continued acts of vandalism and neglect, poor programming or because their priorities are incompatible with the socio economic conditions of a specific site.

The conservation of colonial architecture and history was the primary concern of the old National Monuments Council (NMC)[3] mandated by the National Monuments Act of 1969.

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[2] Arts and Culture Task Group, Report of the Arts and Culture Task Group: *presented to the South African Minister of Arts, Science and Technology* (Pretoria: Dept. of Arts, Culture Science and Technology, 1995), 55

[3] A Hall and A Lillie, "The National Monuments Council and a Policy for Providing Protection for the Cultural and Environmental Heritage", *South African Historical Journal, 29* (November 1993), 102-117

This agency was replaced in 2002 by the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). It is however, ironic that today we find the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality's (NMBM) Architectural Department mandated with the conservation of primarily colonial architecture and to some extent new monuments, although these are normally outsourced, whilst its Museums and Heritage Department drive the Metro's name changing and repatriation agenda. The historical productions of these commissions are almost always informed by the Port Elizabeth Historical Society, a body that has to a large degree maintained a pre-1994 outlook on the preservation of colonial heritage.

We offer that the "add-on" to heritage alluded to earlier and the "chameleon" like approach signalled by Hamelton has found its way into all spheres of visual representation especially in the increasingly problematic arena of Public Art. As a practise that sits comfortably alongside the discipline of architecture, public art assignments have drawn on the "expertise" of "professional" consultants and architects that are frequently unconnected and unfamiliar with the intrinsic nuanced memory and underlying tensions of that specific site. These 'professionals' are commissioned to conceptualize legacy projects often at the expense of local black voices and artist who are perceived by them as inexperienced, inept and in need of guidance and who are then subsequently relegated to the carpentry of their creations. These 'professionals' entrusted with the new democratic narrative are often white males advocating the transformation of significant public spaces by making visual intangible models that are deemed to give voice to the voiceless. Communities are then encouraged to take 'ownership' of these creations.

We have found that many Black artists, some who played a significant role during the struggle for liberation, have fallen by the way side, dying in poverty and obscurity.[4] Even

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[4] Mpumi Melani and Mzwai Gotyana are examples of artists who died in obscurity and poverty amongst many others.

today many black artists especially in the Eastern Cape and in particular the Nelson Mandela Bay arena have continued to be marginalized by these processes. Access to exhibition spaces and the broader art discourses being developed and experienced in the rest of South Africa have eluded many black artists some of whom have either lagged behind or become completely disenchanted by art. Thumelo Mosaka asserts that;

> "Despite the years of struggle for freedom, it is apparent that many black artists are still finding themselves being manipulated and suppressed in terms of their own cultural production and processes."[5]

We are therefore concerned to understand how local artists and communities significantly benefit from these interventions, be it in a "spiritual or material" sense as proposed by Denver Webb in the mid 1990's (Webb, 1996). One of the pitfalls he then cautioned against was the "danger" that lies in when "attempting to redress imbalances, we create new institutions that reflect the prevailing ideology in a crass and insensitive manner." These nuanced complexities are particularly exposed in the heritage and public art agenda of Nelson Mandela Bay. In her work Naomi Roux uncovers how public history and memory projects developed in the NMB metro are 'resisted, appropriated and at times rejected' (Roux, 2015).

In a recent article in Times Live, entitled "Destructive Force: Vandals at the gate of culture"[6], David Goldblatt expressed his concern following a spate of art vandalism at the University of Cape Town about the "lack of cultural debate" among the art community. He was particularly 'perturbed' by what he described as "incidental witnessing" by the people present who seemed, according to him, more concerned with "getting the photograph of themselves that

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[5] Tumelo Mosaka,1998, "Land History and Self – Exhibition Curator"

[6] Sean O'Toole; "Destructive Force: Vandals at the gate of culture", Times Live, 29 March 2016

counted" instead of being active participants. This is possibly a result of digital technologies of the information age and the advancements made in mobile technology and a trend in social media. However, this apparent apathy or 'spectatorship' points to a much larger and more complex issue facing post-1994 art and cultural institutions in South Africa. In 2009 Janine Steven expressed the same concern in an article on the Ernest Cole Exhibition.[7] She noted the issues facing contemporary heritage institutions especially government-funded memory projects and the lack of "public outcry" to the withered conditions in these institutions. She further noted that the majority of museums and galleries nationally with this governance model, to one degree or another, all face similar issues in respect of their management and maintenance.

In an account that echoes Goldblatt's concern, the displaced staff of the Red Location Museum also noted alarmingly the lack of outcry at the Museum's closure[8]. It seems as if this symbol of memory and artistic expression and all the Museum's valuable content are forgotten by its stakeholders after the Museum's forced closure in 2013. Apart from the occasional news article on its vandalism over the past two and half years the issue of its closer has been strangely subdued. This after the Museum had 'successfully' operated for close to a decade.[9] The issues facing Red Location Museum and the current predicament it finds itself in should not be underestimated as it poses a real test for similar initiatives planned and developed in community settings around the country and in the NMBM[10]. It is a problem that can briefly be framed under three questions;

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[7] See article by Janine Steven on the Ernest Cole Exhibition, Art Times, 2009

[8] See 2014 report by du Preez on "The role of architecture in South Africa's unequal society: the closure of Red Location Museum as a case study".

[9] Note "REPORT ON RED LOCATION MUSEUM'S PROGRAMING ACHIEVEMENTS, VISITOR NUMBERS AND PRODUCT GROWTH, July 2011 to March 2012", C du Preez, Acting Assistant Director RLM , 16 April 2012

[10] Barry, M. (2016) "A living memorial in the Northern Areas", Port Elizabeth: Eastern Province Herald.
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1. South Africa's transition party politics and its reliance on, and conflation of, memory, seems to be re-imaged or made visual using outdated colonial platforms that places representation at the centre of concern.

2. Administrative and governance models that echoes this narrative and that draws on a bureaucratic service delivery agenda rather than a discursive process.

3. Finally the specialist or professional interventionist role, especially that of the professional historian in the conceptualisation and advocacy of these projects. A role that Witz and Rassool maintain are "subject to manipulation and amnesia" (Witz & Rassool, 2008)

At a recent symposium in Cape Town, hosted by the Biko Foundation and District Six Museum[11], the challenges facing a number of memory institutions in South Africa were again pushed to the front. The symposium took place against the backdrop of student protests at the Parliament buildings over the high costs of academic fees, the drive for free education and the de colonisation of the curriculum. Similarly a conference arranged in 2013 by the Northern Areas History and Heritage Project (NAHHP) in collaboration with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and the NMBM's Museums & Heritage Department also interrogated the notion of "Healing" by using "Heritage and Memorialisation" as a key strategy. NAHHP, a civil society group that established themselves in mid-2006, aimed to bring attention to what they considered the exclusion of "longer histories" in the current Metro's narrative. This narrative is framed nationally as one of "struggle, resistance and triumph through reconciliation.[12] However, the group further aimed to debunk the divisive stereotypes written into the public history specifically with regard to the so-called "Northern Areas" of Nelson Mandala Bay and "townships"

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[11] Symposium: (23 - 24 October 2015). "Memory in a time of freedom", Cape Town: District Six Museum & Steve Biko Foundation.

[12] Witz & Rassool. (2008). Making histories. Kronos, 6 - 15.

At the 2013 Conference Noelene Murry, amongst others, expressed concern with the continued building of public cultural projects that draws on large, "lucrative'" architectural commissions, specifically funded by the state.[13] The number of extensively vandalised monuments and memorials bears testament to the difficult community priorities that concerns the present, whilst at the same time 'old' colonial and apartheid designed memorials and monuments seems relatively unscathed and even to some extent flourishes in post-apartheid South Africa (Marschall, 2009), this in spite of actions generated by the Rhodes Must Fall Movement.

In the Eastern Cape region creations such as the Cradock Four Memorial/Monument in Cradock, the Kouga Cultural Centre in Humansdorp, Langa Memorial in Uitenhage, Emlotheni Memorial Park in New Brighton and the Cradock Four Memorial at the Couga complex in Motherwell suggest we need to find new ways of thinking about our memory projects as this type of memorialisation is fraught with complex tensions. Monuments have a profound emotional and political significance for families of victims and for society that wants to mourn a brutal past however, moulded in the form of cenotaphs' they tend to recast the deaths of victims as heroic and is subdued by grand architectural designs with the promise of tourism at the centre of concern. This form of representation often undermines the memory that society is supposed to mourn.

The Cradock Four Memorial is a case in question. When we first visited this imposing site located on a hill in Cradock in 2009, politicians and those championing the project were optimistic about the significance of its architecture and symbolism. Yet, subsequent visits in 2010 and 2013 had revealed an abandoned structure overgrown by weeds. Likewise, the

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[13] Murray, N. (19-20 March 2013). Architecture Dreaming: Forms of practice in the architectures of new museums post 1994. "Healing through Heritage and Memorialisation", Port Elizabeth: NMMU, Missionvale Campus.

Kouga Cultural Centre in Humansdorp that are immersed in symbolism and considered 'architecturally unique', were put out on a Public Private Partnership tender for a revised approach to the Management of the Kouga Cultural Centre project in 2007[14]. It was designed to provide the "community" and "tourists" with an opportunity to experience and participate in the diverse cultures of the Kouga region. It was also conceived to be a symbol and showcase for African Renaissance that would provide a catalyst for synergistic co-existence for diverse cultures through active revival, promotion and preservation of arts, culture, custom and heritage. Its aim was than to support 'sustainable' development and related economic activities for the betterment of the rainbow nation. Today the Centre remains defunct.

Professor Enver Motala in his summation of the NAHHP Conference noted that these concepts needed serious rethinking. He asserted that "mere frozen, static records of traumatic events" and "monuments made of concrete and steel" have great symbolic value but are not enough. He further concluded that "a single traumatic episode or event of pain and violence" and "an invitation to invoke sanitized versions of poverty and suppression" is problematic and outdated. Instead he suggested that the "long view (i.e. from colonization to post-apartheid): they are better viewed as dynamic, enlivening and complex processes seen against an historical background of conquest and colonization, resulting in continuities of pain" be taken. He emphasised that; "We need a new vocabulary: there has been too much 'museumisation', too many stereotyped notions, too many simplified iconic figures."[15]

The tensions at work on South Africa's new modern Heritage and Public Art are therefore multifaceted. "Public art" for example is complex and seems to be a continued evolving

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[14] See Kouga Municipality Tender 152/2007 – THE KOUGA CULTURAL CENTRE PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

[15] Motala, E. (19-20 March 2013). Summary of Conference: "Healing through Heritage and Memorialisation". Port Elizabeth: CANRAD, NMMU.

notion with various mutations and intersections in different disciplines that creates significant difficulty. Terms such as "interventions, political activism, service art, site-specific works, community produced projects, spatial practice, interdisciplinary activism, contextual practice, and social practice art" (Cartiere, 2008) are commonly associated with the term. Cartiere maintains "the lack of a clear definition for public art is one of the greatest obstacles to fully understanding public art's place in the field." He argues that there is no clear definition because public art is simply too difficult to define. (Cartiere, 2008) In the South African context this definition is further complicated by its colonial epistemology.

It has been pointed out in numerous studies that regardless of the scale and type of intervention, the installation of public art within the urban fabric is inevitably a political exercise. Key to the creation of social cohesion is the belief that public art, or the processes through which it is produced, is able to create a sense of inclusion. By this token, public art should be able to generate a sense of ownership forging the connection between citizens, city spaces and their meaning as places through which subjectivity is constructed. In the deployment of public art it is the processes through which it becomes installed into the urban fabric that are critical to inclusion.

"The play of inclusion in public art operates at two interconnected levels in the ways in which it is read as part of city space and the processes through which it is implemented. Sufficient experience exists to demonstrate that the two are connected, suggesting that a sense of ownership is a key component of inclusion"[16].

It is thus of vital importance that the installation of any public art project needs to be sensitive to local diversity both at the level of conceptualisation and at the processes of installation. It needs to be aware of inclusive democratic practices, which need not necessarily produce consensus but which should at the very least not become a socially antagonistic process.

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[16] Joanne Sharp, Venda Pollock and Ronan Paddison- Just Art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration

The standard view of what constitutes the roles and function of public art are then: that it is able to commemorate, to improve the visual landscape, to assist with economic regeneration, to help artistic and cultural regeneration , to identify a community , to help people to manage public space and generally to improve the quality of life. Joanne Sharp, Venda Pollock and Ronan Paddison (Joanne Sharp, May 2005) state that public art can be read in different ways but that there is not necessarily a universal consensus on the role public art plays. In this respect, public art is no different from art in general where matters of taste and preference become paramount. For public art, these issues become magnified precisely because of its visibility and hence its 'inescapability', although reactions to it can vary from the highly vocal and oppositional to the unaffected.

Today public art seems to engage more abstract concerns and more ephemeral and transient interpretations of site, memory, and meaning. Space and time continue to play an important part, but like most theoretical categories, their meaning has grown attenuated. Public art no longer refer simply to "where" and "when," as was the case with the memorials of the past, rather it has become symbolic and relational indicators and far removed from the land marking role it played to situate things. There is also a contention that public art is not the public experience of space alone (the passive viewing of an art work) but rather the debate that the work generates. That debate becomes the work of art. The argument is that the art works make manifest an important truth about public space, however if these debates are not embedded in a larger public sphere, then public art will always be just a decorated ornament that has no meaning and purpose no matter what art is put into the space.

The capacity of public art to nurture inclusion is at best partial and more able to address symbolic rather than material needs. Whether this means that public art has become an unwitting agent in the over privileging of cultural justice at the expense of socioeconomic redistribution is a moot point. However, this argument not only exaggerates the influence of

public art on economic regeneration, but is itself an over economistic interpretation of the meaning of urban citizenship. What the experience of urban regeneration continues to repeat is that the uses to which culture has been employed as part of the process of revival can be socially divisive leading to what Mitchell (2000) has described as 'culture wars'.

The current and on-going inner city development projects in the NMBM have utilised public art as a tool for regeneration and as a means to inscribe new meanings into a landscape that is beset with colonial and apartheid imagery and symbolism.

Research further indicates that developers, such as the MBDA, do not develop in order to construct the 'city beautiful', rather they construct the city beautiful in order to conceal the incompatibility of their development with a free society (Miles, 1997,) From such a perspective, any sense of involvement with the process then is inherently linked to collusion with forces that are fundamentally more interested in capital investment or maintaining social order than with improving the lives of residents of a city.

Cultural hegemony operates both at a conscious and unconscious level and it is Gramsci who draws our attention to the ways in which power is both consolidated and contested within taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. In many cases throughout South Africa and specifically in the NMBM the insertion of public art into the urban landscape has conscious or subconsciously been appropriated into the processes of Minkley's "add-on" or Hamilton's "chameleon" strategy found in post 1994 heritage projects. The development of public art as part of the repertoire of a city's gentrification and regeneration processes, such as is in case of the Nelson Mandela metro's route 67, is not a politically neutral exercise but one which is filled with political and more importantly cultural hegemonic intent.

Route 67 begins its journey at the British settler's monument, the 'Campanile ', the supposed site of the landing of the British 'settlers' in 1820. The journey ends at the Elizabeth Donkin reserve overlooking the city. This urban space was set aside for recreation and for the 'people of Port Elizabeth' by the colonial government of the time. The history of both these prime markers, the campanile and the Donkin reserve, are steeped in colonial and European settler symbolism. Squeezed between these two British imperial markers is the narrative of Nelson Mandela and the 'struggle history' associated with the fight against apartheid in South Africa. The route which travels from the campanile upwards towards the Donkin has various markers along the way each of which alludes to a specific historic time slot within the struggle narrative. One of the prime markers along the route is the statue of Queen Victoria, a powerful icon of British imperialism and a prime symbol of western cultural, political and economic hegemony. The post 1994 struggle narrative is stitched onto this colonial edifice in much the same way pre 1994 museums have added on to their original narratives.

The initial conceptualisation of route 67 was undertaken by the MBDA (Mandela Bay Development Agent) an entity created by local government and given as one of its mandates the revitalisation of the inner city. Besides the fact that the project largely excluded meaningful Black voices into its conceptualisation processes, the end product, route 67 , although seemingly directly related to the National narrative of struggle and reconciliation, cleverly masks an agenda of colonialism in much the same way the "add-ons'" have done in post 1994 South Africa. By superimposing the National narrative over the built environment and tangible heritages of the colonial heart of the city Route 67 has managed to reinforce a particular cultural hegemony.

To be fair to the MBDA and its processes of consultation, it can be conceded that it is debatable whether public art can ever be wholly inclusive, especially within urban regeneration where complex factors of public space, commercialisation and

commodification, and cultivating an iconic cultural cityscape are intimately entwined. In this environment, public art, rather than participating in an inclusive agenda, can function as an oppositional or resistant force, highlighting excluded groups and visualising protest to dominant regeneration schemes. However, we should remind ourselves, as alluded to earlier, that the processes of adding-on are entrenched and intertwined with colonialism.

Conclusion

The lens through which South Africa's heritage transformation project can be viewed is one that relies primarily on addendums or "add-ons". These transformation interventions often exclude black voices at the conceptualisation point and further relegate them to minor participants and by players in the creation of public spaces and memorials. We argue that similar to how museums created 'add-on's' to its pre-1994 narrative so too has art in public spaces, monuments and memorials in South Africa been able to add on to an existing colonial and apartheid landscape disguising in the process a deeper exclusive cultural hegemony.

There is a fissure in the national narrative regarding the longer histories of a pre colonization period to post-apartheid South Africa. There is an urgent need to incorporate these into our national narrative in order to avoid the many stereotyped notions and too many "simplified iconic figures" which do not always reflect the complex processes of conquest and colonization and its resulting "continuities of pain".

These longer histories have now thankfully been unearthed by our students in the "Rhodes Must Fall Movement" and the "de colonisation of the curriculum" movements. Prof Motala states that "We need a new vocabulary: there has been too much 'museumisation', too many stereotyped notions, too many simplified iconic figures."

We have observed that because South Africa's public art projects are located in a western cultural paradigm it is dominated by institutions and individuals who serve as 'consecrators' and 'gate keepers' to many of its processes as maintained by Mbembe. (Mbembe, 2015) Professionals and the role of the academy also come under the spotlight as many historians and academics are too eager, not only in support of, but are active participants in these forms of heritage and knowledge production that promotes exclusivity narratives.

On notion of "ownership" Mbembe suggests; "Such a right to belong, such a rightful sense of ownership has nothing to do with charity or hospitality. It has nothing to do with the liberal notion of 'tolerance'. It has nothing to do with me having to assimilate into a culture that is not mine as a precondition of my participating in the public life of the institution. It has all to do with ownership of a space that is a public, common good." However we have noted that the notion of "ownership" affectively used by promoters for public art and heritage intervention also needs further deconstruction as it has become 'politicized'. In the context of economically difficult settings like townships this meaning does not suggest "custodianship" but have a literal meaning. The closure of Red Location Museum by that community is a case in question.

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