

The march continues: A critique of The Long March to Freedom statue collection exhibited in Century City

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Abstract

At a moment in South African history that calls for decolonial perspectives on ideological and material remnants of the country's colonial and apartheid pasts, the exhibition of The Long March to Freedom life-size statue collection at Century City, Cape Town, constitutes a seemingly contestable juxtaposition. This exhibition, that opened at Century City on 15 November 2019, is seemingly intended as a commemoration of South Africa's struggle for freedom and a re-evaluation of former state-sanctioned versions of the country's history. The visuality of the space that this collection currently occupies can however be described as one with a contestable relationship with the past, in which spatiality itself signifies a call to forget the past, or rather to construct a mythological version thereof. While The Long March to Freedom exhibition seemingly encompasses calls to inclusion in the South African public sphere, Century City, as a space saturated with simulated signs, functions as a site of exclusion and privilege. This article aims to highlight tensions between "subjective" memory and "objective History" in post-apartheid South Africa, negotiating tensions of a historicity-sociality-spatiality trialectic within a site of socio-political and economic exclusion.

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Original research

On 15 November 2019, The Long March to Freedom outdoor exhibition, showcasing 100 life-size bronze statues of South African and global freedom fighters,¹ opened at Century City, a Cape Town mixed-use suburban development that includes components for residential, business/office, entertainment, and retail purposes. Before moving to this Cape Town location, the collection of 100 bronze statues, belonging to the National Heritage Monument (NHM) of South Africa, has been exhibited at a variety of other locations across the country, most recently at Maropeng, the official Visitor Center of the Cradle of Humankind in Gauteng. The NHM (2019b) describes the collection as a 'monumental celebration of South Africa's struggle for freedom and democracy', with the pivotal role of being 'a place of learning, a place of growth, and a place of self-reflection, which will forever celebrate right over might and etch South Africa's heroes in the world's collective memory'. Of the relationship between collective memory, monuments, and memorials, Martin Murray (2013:71) writes,

The erection of monuments and memorials – along with the choreographed ceremonies of commemoration centered on them and the orchestration of public participation around them – transforms particular places into ideologically charged sites of collective memory.

This relationship between monuments, memorials, and collective memory involves another dimension – the space in which monuments/memorials are *interacted with*, and in which monuments/memorials are located and invoke a collective memory that Murray refers to. Henri Lefebvre (1991:33) shows that space is not a neutral and natural entity, but one that is socially produced, containing the relations of its production, including Foucauldian relations of power, in 'the form of buildings, monuments and works of art'. Edward Soja (1989:76-93) shows that 'space and the political organization of space express social relationships, but also react back upon them' (Harvey cited by Soja 1989:76), and thus that space and sociality are in a dialectical relationship. This relationship becomes 'trialectic' when also considering the interplay of history with spatiality and sociality (Soja & Hooper 1993:200), implying that 'space is open to politics as much as are society and history ... [and that] spatiality thus has the power to alter the future course of the historical process that produced it' (Haas [sa]:19). This paper considers the historicity-sociality-spatiality trialectic of the Long March to Freedom exhibition in the context of Century City as its current location. The paper attempts to understand notions of 'history' tied to this exhibition and to this Cape Town suburb, and relations of these historicities with social and spatial aspects in a site meant to be 'ideologically charged [with] collective memory' (Murray 2013:71).

Oded Haas ([sa]:19) argues that the dialectics related to spatial production are tied to the colonising, and continuously controlling, powers of state and capitalism, but that these dialectics are also crucial in understanding processes of decolonisation. In other

words, decolonisation cannot be separated from debates around spatiality, sociality, and also, as Soja and Barbara Hooper show, historicity (1993:200). South Africa, as a country with a complex colonial and apartheid history, saw calls for the decolonisation of public space and monuments as carriers of memory, along with calls to decolonise tertiary curricula as markers of knowledge, by the 2015 #RhodesMustFall movement. This movement highlighted memory and public space as highly contested, an emphasis that extended to desires for changes in ideological structures that continue to privilege European and western modes of thinking, and changes in terms of physical structures that support these ways of thinking and keep a specific historicity alive in collective memory. These desires culminated in the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus on 9 April 2015. This removal did not only critique the place of colonial and apartheid figures in a South African present and future, but it also deconstructed the function of statues and memorials as signifiers of history, in the South African public and social space.

Brenda Schmahmann (2016:103) writes about this removal of the Rhodes statue from the UCT campus and the need for facilitating interventions with statues and objects of similar significance, she states that,

While total removal of a work associated with ideologies that have fallen from favor raises a host of difficulties, it is surely also highly problematical to continue to exhibit and display such an object without critical mediation or contextual explanation of it. Lack of any intervention to such an object may well be construed as suggesting that it continues to be venerated, and overlooks its capacity to promote feelings of exclusion as well as offense.

The permanence of statues and large-scale memorials in many ways makes permanent the discourses and ideologies that the statues or memorials carry traces of. Kim Gurney (2018:34) agrees that ‘monuments are rigid in their limited capacity to represent change’ – an attribute that becomes exaggerated when the monument itself is rigid, immovable, and permanent, symbolically extending these qualities of stability and solidity to the ideologies and histories signified by such monuments. Schmahmann (2018:147) considers performativity a ‘creative intervention’, and views performativity in relation to public art, monuments, and memorials as potentially able to negotiate meaning and significance when these objects/sites are contested, saying that ‘rather than being awe-struck and transfixed by such monuments, interventions to them establish a more “democratic” relationship with their viewers’. Schmahmann’s (2018:147) views on the materiality of monuments relate to Gurney’s:

[a] traditionalist monument will normally tend to blot out evidence that it is constructed. If including or featuring sculpture, e.g. its forms may well refuse marks or signs on its surfaces that erase evidence of changes it might have undergone during the making process. Additionally, it will not normally only be

envisaged as permanent by those commissioning it, but it will also convey a sense of its own eternalness by being in materials associated with a withstanding of the passage of time – such as marble and bronze.

The statues of The Long March to Freedom collection are made in such a material of ‘eternalness’ – bronze – with splashes of colour drawing attention to items of dress or objects in the figures’ hands. Made by 43 different sculptors, the statues are similar in style, but all carry traces of different techniques, reminiscent of the individual artist’s personal touch and artistic intervention (NHM 2019d). It may be argued that the literal movability of The Long March to Freedom collection, and its potential for actual public participation and performativity in physically moving around the 100 statues, offers a solution, even if unintentional, to the ‘creative intervention’ Schmahmann (2018:147) speaks of. This potential extends to the decolonisation of public space and the democratisation of access to sites of collective memory and a renegotiation of solidified history. Even though the sculptures are made in a solid and eternal bronze, the artistic differences and nuances between them may help to shift this connotation of solidity and stability to historicity as a plural and multiplicit concept, imbued with subjectivity and personal perspective.

While Murray (2013:71) may reason that the erection of monuments and memorials ‘transforms particular places into ideologically charged sites of collective memory’, The Long March to Freedom collection comes to a site in Cape Town that is imbricated with social constraints, and spatial and physical barriers – a space that is already ideologically and politically charged, and that shapes the social relations that sustain the existing order of consumption and capitalist commercialism (Haas [sa]:8). The development of the Century City suburb started in 1997 when a ‘250ha wasteland alongside the N1 in Cape Town was rezoned from residential to mixed use development’ (Century City [sa]c). This development almost exactly resembles Lefebvre’s (1991:49) description of the establishment of abstract capitalist space; ‘The invisible fullness of political space (the space of the town-state’s nucleus or “city”) set up its rule in the emptiness of a natural space confiscated from nature’. Century City’s Intaka Island, a 16 hectare wetland area, is ‘home to over 200 species of indigenous fynbos plants and over 120 bird species’ (Century City [sa]b). In this wetland area, nature, or what remains of it, becomes a marker of history, of a time before and in opposition to capitalist space and development, in which ‘history is experienced as nostalgia, and nature as regret – as a horizon fast disappearing behind us’ (Lefebvre 1991:51). The amusement park, Ratanga Junction,² as a specific constructed “natural” and “historical” space, opened on location in 1998, followed by the retail development of major shopping and entertainment center, Canal Walk Shopping Center, two years later (Century City [sa]c). Ratanga Junction, as an imaginary version of “natural”, “uncivilised”, and “dangerous” Africa, became a visual and experiential trope for locals and tourists alike, entrenching modernist narratives about

the continent. Effective as a space where a myth of “the real African experience” is simulated by fake rocks, a constructed Congo river, and colonial marketplaces (masking restaurants, bars, and shops), sans any ‘explicit, authentic markers and signifiers ... or any association with known individuals or events’ (Witz, Rassool & Minkley 1994:12-14), Ratanga Junction functioned as a bric-a-brac of historicity and spatiality. This function is produced in a trialectic that supports the social space of the entire Century City as discombobulating of exact meaning and location. The rest of the Century City suburb comprises of eight individual precincts that offer residential options, and a myriad of businesses, office complexes, and other commercial enterprises. Furthermore, the suburb houses a number of recreational spaces, and offers residents and visitors a variety of health, fitness, and entertainment options. In Century City’s seemingly all-encompassing provision for any daily needs and desires of its residents and visitors, the suburb paradoxically closes itself off from the “outside”. The site is marketed as a premier destination to ‘WORK, SHOP, PLAY, and STAY’ all in the compact convenience of one location (Century City [sa]a), to which access privileges either individualised motor transport or those able to match a high price tag for permanent stay (Marks & Bezzoli 2001). Rafael Marks and Marco Bezzoli (2001:27) explain this function of Century City: ‘One can live, work and shop within the same complex without having to leave the gates of the “City” gates [sic], inhabiting a fictitious space, insulated from the troubles beyond its borders’. This emphasis on a constricted sociality, insofar as ‘the social’ is tied to ‘the economic’, results in a narrowed spatiality, accentuated by the Century City website, that condenses the complexities of spatial politics associated with Cape Town urbanity, still attesting to apartheid spatial planning,³ into a compressed and singular representation of this location. A complex historicity is thus denied and brushed over by marketing attempts at positing this site as other than what it is: a space that ‘uses ideological representations such as fantasy to obscure real relations between people and commodities’ (Van Eeden 2006:42).

The seeming cohesion and physical insularity of Century City is heightened by the prominence of postmodern architecture. This feature amplifies an “inside/outside” binary between the suburb and its immediate surroundings – even exaggerating this distinction with the faux-opulence of most of its buildings, that stand in shrill contrast to adjacent built spaces and even the natural landscape of Table Mountain that can be seen from Century City. The building styles found in this suburb range from overt references to the Tuscan countryside, Classical Greek and Roman architecture, visual allusions to hybrid colonial fantasies, a Modernist minimalist use of glass and steel, references to “green architecture”, and a use of what is meant to look like natural materials. The effect of this combination of historic references and visual styles is not only one of visual exclusion and seclusion of the area, but also the construction of a residential, business, and retail “theme park” whose signifiers allude to reality, and specifically, to a real historicity, but

have little actual connection to it. Alice Inggs (2014:30) argues that this space proposes a 'link to the past, [its] architecture apparently derived from history, and in so doing lay claim to an aesthetic, a history and cultural heritage that never was'. As a 'perfectly descriptive machine' (Baudrillard 1994:2), Century City's blending of 'signs of the real for the real' (Baudrillard 1994:2), whether these are visual allusions to historical styles or an effect of the experience of the space, results in a kitsch over-signification, a total saturation of signs and 'mixing of seeming opposites ... being offered as overtly politicized, as inevitably ideological' (Hutcheon 2001:6).⁴ The spatial, stylistic, and functional paradoxes embedded in this suburb epitomise Lefebvre's (1991:129) view that 'space itself, at once a product of the capitalist mode of production and an economico-political instrument of the bourgeoisie, will now be seen to embody its own contradictions'. In its blending of allusions to inconsistent and indeterminate historical times, but no definite or concrete historical events, Century City becomes a specific kind of relic of the past, or rather of nostalgia – a compound version of mere suggestions of historicity, but reflective of a past that was not. David Lowenthal (1998:xiv) writes about the use and politics of "heritage", saying that 'debasement of the "true" past for greedy or chauvinist ends, heritage is accused of undermining historical truth with twisted myth'. Jeanne Van Eeden (2006:41) describes a similar function of blending codes in capitalist spatiality; 'Commercial and leisure spaces commonly obscure historical specificity in order to create new myths'. Perhaps such a 'new myth', constructed and underscored by the Century City spatiality, is one of an ahistorical historicity, of and in space, sans time, that may presumably last forever (Lefebvre 1991:51).

A forgetting of a history passed is not the only kind that the space of Century City encourages. It would seem that the suburb in its entirety, through its design and construction towards insularity and the closing off of its residents and visitors into a confine of consumption and economic privilege, also assists in a forgetting of the present – a historicity of current time. Entering the site of Century City, and partaking in the capitalist mode of sociality it has to offer, becomes an espousal of the inside/outside binary so carefully constructed by the space. This is especially true of the Canal Walk Shopping Center that most overtly blends the mixed use purposes of Century City – arguably all but the 'STAY', as in live, function. The mall's design is such to lure the consumer further into the mall, disorienting them with architectural ornament, layout, and a diverse array of consumption offerings to get them to 'STAY', remain, longer. Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella (2007:253) refer to this continuous loop layout as a 'line of desire', a path designed for little other than the purpose of shopping and spending. Van Eeden (2006:39) contends that 'malls are typical postmodern spaces dedicated to consumer culture that combine shopping with leisure activities such as entertainment and tourism; not only has buying become part of a new contemporary lifestyle, but it also pretends to offer a new form of community life'. The community life, or sociality, that

the space of Canal Walk calls its visitor to remain longer in is lived out in a capitalist space of consumption, a perplexing loop that encourages the consumer to walk around in perpetuity, lost to direction within a bubble of purchasing.

This process of acquiring goods and the sense of ownership involved, links with visual allusions of Century City's architectural style to a conglomerate colonial or Classical time. Achille Mbembe (2008:62) comments on the collapse of the 'racialised city' in South Africa, and writes about the architecture of spaces like Century City: '[f]aced with the sudden estrangement from the familiar resulting in the collapse of the racial city, this architecture aims to return to the "archaic" as a way of freezing rapid changes in the temporal and political structures of the surrounding world'. Building on this contention, Inggs (2014:32) shows that 'structures like Century City become attempts at completing the colonial project, rewriting history through architecture'. In the present it is not colonialism's unequal conquering and possession of territory that is re-enacted, but the unequal privilege of possession by means of mass consumption in an economy and sociality as divided as South Africa's, and the blissful ignorance of this inequality when doing so. In their research on the spatial politics of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront mall in Cape Town, Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch and Annika Teppo (2009:352) find that,

[when it comes to malls the] social and spatial practices ... involve much more than just consumption patterns. Indeed [there is a] paradox of a privately owned space devoted to consumerism also functioning as a place where racially and socially diverse people exert their 'right to the city' – a privilege that is historically far from self-evident for the residents of Cape Town.

This may be true of the space of Century City and Canal Walk too, where people who are socially and geographically excluded from the spatial privileges of these sites, may attempt, at times, to gain a 'right to the city' by means of literally purchasing it. The result is a mode of citizenship, not just of the City of Cape Town, but also of the simulated space of Century City, that is invariably tied to economic means and the ability to prove consumption capabilities. While in South Africa citizens enjoy their access to human rights based on the country's progressive Constitution, "citizens" of Century City purchase not only their 'right to the city', but also their value and rights as human beings in the capitalist economic system, and ecosystem, that Century City arguably is.⁵ Mbembe (2008:61-62) discusses the transformation of the apartheid 'racial city' into 'new spaces [that] are setting up new boundaries and distances increasingly based on class rather than race'. While the function and division lines of these new spaces, that Century City arguably also forms part of, may have transformed, their form and design still reflect the spatially bound and strictly delineated designs of a modernist city, extended by the apartheid regime to intersect these designs and functions of separation with racial

segregation and social engineering (Hall & Bombardella 2007). Such a transmission of traces of modernist, colonial, and apartheid divisions by the function of Century City's spatiality provides a harsh juxtaposition to the intentions of decolonial transformation of The Long March to Freedom exhibition. The ensuing relationship set up between past and present historicalities of the exhibition and its location relate to Soja's contention that 'space and the political organization of space express social relationships, but also react back upon them' (Harvey cited by Soja 1989:76).

The ideological and political potential of The Long March to Freedom exhibition cannot be separated from its ostensible purpose of serving as a celebration and a call to memory of previously marginalised stories and historical specificities of struggle in apartheid South Africa (NHM 2019b). When arguing that frameworks of decolonisation or postcolonial critique are wary of history, it is inevitably the totalising and absolute "History" of the "colonial victors", saturated with claims to "power" and "superiority". This rejection is instead in favour of multiple, decentralised, and subjective *histories* – with a focus on individual lived experience and memory – to give voice to the previously silenced and the marginalised, without the risk of transforming such stories into incredible and fantastical myth.⁶ In the context of a post-apartheid South Africa, in which traces of previous exclusions and inclusions are still visible and part of lived realities, even in terms of urban planning and segregated economico-spatial privileges, a repositioning of historical knowledge is a project as crucial as it is complex. Murray (2013:vii) describes this intricacy as that 'these traces of the past do not allow for an easy exit from history, standing in the way to the rush to "normalization"'. These complicated tensions between the present and traces of the past necessitate a relationship of gravitas and solemnity with history – whether this history is in the form of "subjective" memory, or other "objective" versions, especially when related to a decolonial re-evaluation of historicity. This necessary concentrated perspective is in sharp contrast to the function and use of history in the space of Century City, where history and 'signs of the real' are easily and parodically exited, entered, and rerouted for its own purposes, arguably more aligned with superficial and aesthetic ideals, than with functions of criticality, depth, and content (Baudrillard 1994:2). Lefebvre (1991:21) says about such a function of capitalist spatial production that 'what disappears is history, which is transformed from action to memory, from production to contemplation'. Mbembe (2008) writes about similar qualities in Johannesburg-based architecture, specifically that found at Montecasino and Melrose Arch – both resembling the postmodern hybridity of "unreal" allusions to a "real" history as in the design of Century City. Mbembe (2008:62) calls this built style an 'architecture of hysteria', saying that,

[this] built form has to be construed as an empty placeholder for meanings that have been eroded by time rather than remembered by it. That is why they are largely the manifestation of the failure of the racial city to assimilate the passage

of time. While bearing witness to a demand that the past be forgotten, this architecture asks the spectator to forget that it is itself a sign of forgetting.

If Century City functions as a hyperreal space in which its visual form is such a 'sign of forgetting' (Mbembe 2008:62), a site in which history itself disappears (Lefebvre 1991:21), this entire location may be incompatible with a post-apartheid emphasis on the centrality of memory and acts of remembering. Or, in relation to Lefebvre's (1991:21) contention that action and memory, production and contemplation, are oppositional to each other, acts of remembering are an impossible endeavour to begin with, and the byproduct of history disappearing instead of history being kept alive in collective memory.

Frederic Jameson (1987:125) writes about what he refers to as a 'historical amnesia' as characteristic of postmodern consumer societies – a sociality arguably perfectly confined in the spatiality of Century City,

I believe that the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism ... [This moment is characterised by] the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve.

The NHM (2019b) describes The Long March to Freedom collection as a 'monumental celebration of South Africa's struggle for freedom and democracy', and 'envisaged to be a place of learning, a place of growth, and a place of self-reflection, which will forever celebrate right over might and etch South Africa's heroes in the world's collective memory'. These functions of memory, learning, and self-reflection are presumably contrasted, arguably threatened, by the space the collection currently occupies, one that, as Jameson (1987:125) states and Mbembe (2008) concurs, already lost 'its capacity to retain its own past', as is a simulacrum sans history. This would mean, on the one hand, that the juxtaposition of The Long March to Freedom collection within its current spatiality may allow for a loss of solemnity, and perhaps even the impression of a palimpsestic exchange of 'the signs of the real for the real' (Baudrillard 1994:2), at the expense of historical gravitas. On the other hand, what is emphasised by this collection in this location, is Lowenthal's (1998:xv; 128) distinction between history and heritage:

[h]istory explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes ... History and heritage transmit different things to different audiences. History tells all who will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are. Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origin and continuance, endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose. History is enlarged by being disseminated; heritage is diminished and despoiled by export. History is for all, heritage for ourselves alone.

If heritage is exclusionary and seclusionary, the economico-spatial privileges and exclusion of Century City transplant and extend to this exhibition, emphasising a call to historical gravitas itself as an impossibility. Lowenthal (1998:112) reminds that ‘history cannot help but be different from, as well as both less and more than, the actual past ... Above all, history departs from the past in being an interpretation rather than a replica: it is a view, not a copy, of what happened’. Any call to “real history” instead in itself becomes an exchange of ‘the signs of the real for the real’ (Baudrillard 1994:2), an unattainable hyperreal, and a point of view that would disguise and present itself as a ‘copy’.

There may then be two major implications to conclude regarding this exhibition in its current space, and the broader associations of this juxtaposition to postmodern, post-apartheid views on the place and function of history in a contemporary globalised and late-stage capitalist South Africa. The first, based on the decolonial intention of the exhibition and its call to memory and history (NHM 2019b), is a reverse of Baudrillard’s (1994:13) view that ‘the imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp’. The historical emptiness of Century City may be transferred onto any possible interpretation of The Long March to Freedom as “real” and “stable” – characteristics it ostensibly enters into the space with. In this instance, the ‘opposite camp’ – the exhibition – loses its realness in connection with the simulacrum in which it finds itself, a realness not to be rejuvenated but rather sustained in a context of decolonial emphases on formerly silenced stories. The second opposing and less naïve implication is the exact view of Baudrillard, in addition to Lowenthal, namely that the juxtaposition between the site of Century City and the contents of The Long March to Freedom exhibition is set up to mask the possibility that history itself, in this instance a history of a struggle towards freedom in a historically racially unjust society, is a hyperreal collection of signs and signifiers that allude to “the real” but with little to no connection to “reality”.

The second possibility, though nearly sacrilegious to an agenda of decolonisation, is one that is arguably supported by the NHM’s website and other offerings, and the way in which these offerings are presented – an espousal that calls for compatibility between commerce and commemoration. Sabine Marschall (2009:305-306) explores such connections between commerce and commemoration, heritage and tourism,

[there is a] link between monuments and tourism, i.e. the ability of monuments to become tourist attractions, to serve as focal points of the tourist’s experience of a cultural landscape, to commodify complex historical circumstances and personalities through transformation into recognisable icons, to assist in the branding of destinations, to create memorable and reproducible visitor experiences along with the sale of merchandise, but also to create visual imaginaries of the past and of the nation, that gain authority through tourist consumption.

The NHM (2019c) website markets this specific collection as offering ‘opportunities for interaction and selfies, while accompanying labels give a snapshot of history’ – history offered as consumption of image, turned into image, to be distributed and reproduced in the digital space sans history where selfies live. Jameson (1987:125) describes such a process as the ‘transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents’. Other planned visitor attractions of the NHM include The Heroes’ Acre, ‘a space for celebration, accommodating up to 30,000 people and offering VIP and conference facilities, public amenities and a central piazza connected to the Long March to Freedom’ and Africa’s biggest waterpark, a Waterworld theme park offering ‘water-based rides, outdoor and indoor heated swimming pools, fast-food kiosks and merchandising retail outlets and will cater for up to 10,000 visitors at any one time’, amongst others (NMH 2019c). These extended offerings by the NHM become connotatively connected to notions of “heritage” and “memorialisation”, but within a specific spatiality of consumption and entertainment, or edutainment. This reflects Marschall’s (2009:307-308) contention that ‘as tourism actively appropriates the memory landscape, emphasising some memories and downplaying others, history is framed in a particular way, often in line with destination branding efforts and hegemonic political discourses’. It can be said that Century City thematises a space from a collection of visual references that overtly and mostly evidently do not belong together, to manufacture a site for the commodification of goods and economic privilege itself. In contrast, the NHM appears to set up a trope of memory and history, consuming the past for future capital gain in a theme park that commodifies not desires for material goods, but desires for justice and national belonging. The palimpsestic relationship between The Long March to Freedom exhibition and the space it currently occupies at Century City is complicated at best and contemptuous at worst, exemplifying a relationship best described by Lefebvre (1991:283): ‘The whole of the past, certainly, which has been buried by memory and forgetfulness; but the reality of the flesh is also being actualized here. The living body is present, as a place of transition between the depths and the surface, the threshold between hiding-place and discovery’. What this historicity-sociality-spatiality trialectic of the Long March to Freedom exhibition in the context of Century City as its current location highlights is the need to continuously engage with “history” and “heritage” with criticality, especially when it intersects with capitalism and commodity – the long march to freedom appears to continue yet.

Notes

1. The Long March to Freedom collection and exhibitions were visualised in 2010 by South African media personality and anti-apartheid activist, Dali Tambo. Tambo, son of the late former ANC president, Oliver Tambo, is currently the CEO of the National Heritage Project that launched this collection. The idea for

this project came to Tambo when he ‘visited the grave of his late father ... and told him, “[t]here isn’t a statue of you in this country and I’m planning to do one.” From the grave his father spoke to him and said, “[d]on’t do it for me, do it for all of them”’ (Rabie 2019). The collection features well-known figures in South Africa’s struggle for freedom, but also other lesser known and international freedom fighters linked to this country’s “freedom” narrative. Currently, the collection boasts 100 statues, but will be extended to include a total of 400 statues when work is complete. At the time of finalising this article it was still unclear as to when the exhibition will end at this location, although Computicket, as official ticket sellers to the procession, only lists visiting options until 30 November 2020.

2. The Ratanga Junction amusement park opened on the Century City premises in December 1998. Some of its best known and most popular rides included the Cobra rollercoaster, the Monkey Falls water ride, and the Diamond Devil Run train ride. The amusement park was designed to, through the arguably haphazard combination of visual signifiers, create an impression of a fantasy of the colonial African jungle – an image supported by the park’s tagline, “The wildest place in Africa”. Ratanga Junction closed its doors on 1 May 2018, and the future use of this space is still contested.
3. The African Centre for Cities (ACC 2019) explains that a ‘rapid and poorly governed urbanization in Africa points to a profound developmental and philosophical crisis ... There is hardly any sustained scholarship on the existential and cultural dimensions of African urbanism’. Owing to segregated apartheid planning, this is especially true of the complications of space in Cape Town as urban area. This city has become a monument of apartheid social and spatial engineering, that even 25 years after South Africa’s first democratic elections, still carries traces of the country’s and the city’s past. Patterns of segregation still underscore Cape Town’s spatial planning and socio-economic conditions and development, and have come to dominate current debates about the city’s use of space in gentrified and gentrifying areas, such as Woodstock and Salt River.
4. Indeed, Inggs (2014:30) describes this substitution and signification: ‘Century City – a postmodern consumer complex within the façade of a pre-modern Italian city within the Cape Town peri-urban – is a struggle of contradictions, yet as a simulation it blurs the difference between the “true” and the “false”, the “real” and the “imaginary” ... Today, says Baudrillard, simulations (the map) are no longer generated by a “real” original (the territory), but by other simulations – now it is “the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map”. As Cape Town’s historical architecture is slowly eroded and replaced, it is the architecture of pseudohistorical structures like Century City ... that remains’.
5. Rafael Marks and Marco Bezzoli (2001:27-28) discuss three prominent themes highlighted by the space and function of Century City: ‘The first locates Century City in the global phenomenon of market-led urban development that has overtaken Cape Town, where all aspects of urban life continue to be commodified ... The second theme explores the implications of this new private city, a large zone of privilege and exclusion. The third theme to be explored is that of urban identity and local heritage’. As explained above, the economic politics and exclusions inherent to the space of Century City entails an identity of the urban individual that is inextricably tied to globalised commodification and a capitalist mode of a production of citizenship, and the rights this may afford an individual.
6. Poststructuralist re-evaluations of history remind that history is a constructed, selective, and subjective representation of social, cultural, economic, and so forth, relations. Michel Foucault (1977:27) speaks to this notion in stating that ‘there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute ... power relations’. This holds true for the construction and dissemination of knowledge in the field of history too, and it is this decentralising and deconstructive view of history that relates to decolonising and postcolonial emphases.

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