RE-EXAMINING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN INQUEST INTO THE DEMOLITION OF COLONIAL AND APARTHEID STATUES

Malesela Edward Montle

University of Limpopo Department of Languages: English Studies

School of Languages and Communication Studies E.

mail: edward.montle@ul.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The ending of apartheid in 1994 saw the democratic society of South Africa implementing measures for social transformation. This comes after the apartheid regime had institutionalised autocratic attitudes, racial tension, political and socio-economic inequality in the country during its rule. The abolishment of apartheid policies came with a mandate to discard the remnants of imperialism and foster social transformation in South Africa. This noted, the quest for social transformation in the country escalated to a point of ravaging statues that are postulated to be of colonial and apartheid forces from 2015 headlining the renowned case of #RhodesMustFall. This qualitative study sought to explore the recipe for social transformation in South Africa through the analysis of the vandalism of colonial and apartheid statues. It has probed into the rationale for the removal of these statues and the degree of influence that they possess in the democratic period. The study has discovered controversies that involve some South Africans assuming that these statues do not deserve a place in the post-apartheid South Africa and the call for their removal being justified while others claim that this initiative is bureaucratic and not problem-solving.

INTRODUCTION

The democratic corps, upon taking reins from apartheid, set out to reconstruct the South African society. The country embarked on a quest for social transformation and acquisition of an identity depicted by democratic notions. This meant that the newly democratic South Africa had to break away from colonial and apartheid identities. Montle (2020: 7) avers that "the democratic

regime aimed at reconstructing a South African society that cherishes peace, equality, oneness and human rights." More than twenty years since the inauguration of democracy in South Africa, the country is still marginalised by the enduring legacies of apartheid such as racial division, socio-economic exclusion and debasement of standards. These maladies intensified the tussle for social transformation which saw the vandalism of statues believed to be of colonial and apartheid forces. This is an initiative condemned by scholars such as Knudsen and Andersen (2019) who opine that apartheid legacies such as structural racism could be fought without destroying these statues. Contrariwise, on African News Agency (2015), Mabongwana said, "the fact that these statues, which are symbols of white supremacy, are still found in this city is a crime against our people. We are going to remove everything that represents apartheid and white supremacy from this city." Given the refuting views above, it becomes critical to scrutinise the meaning and degree of influence that statues may have in a society. Resane (2018: 2) notes that "statues play an important symbolic role in people's lives, with each monument being built for specific reasons and intended to serve particular purposes or interests," whereas, Bobou (2015: 4) holds a notion that statues are more than just monuments of admiration as "their cost, quantity, and placement, as well as the types used for the representation of gods and mortals, show that their role was far more important than that of a decorative object that could be admired for its technique, style, or subject." It becomes pertinent to surmise that statues do not only serve as a representation of people, animals and materials but also as a delineation of certain cultural practices, doctrines and ideologies. For instance, the statue below is one of the tallest statues in Africa from Senegal at 161 feet.

Figure 1. Tallest statue in Africa

From:https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food-travel/among-the-7-tallest-statuesin-africa-nigeria-shows-up-twice/dl8418t.

This statue is considered to be one of the esteemed establishments of Senegal and has been unveiled in 2010. According to Onyeakagbu (2019), the construction and existence of this statue is for the purpose of heralding a new period of African Renaissance, which asserts "social cohesion, democracy, economic rebuilding and growth, and the establishment of Africa as a significant player in geo-political affairs" (Mbeki, 13 /08/ 1998 speech). In the South African context, the establishment and presence of colonial and apartheid statutes in the democratic period are brought into inquiry (Fubah, 2020). Equally important, Resane (2018: 2) avers that the statutes of Cecil John Rhodes and Hedrick Francois Verwoerd have been vandalised due to their representation of "ensuing colonial dominance and power, apartheid history and its anomalies." Moreover, social transformation movements and spirited debates regarding the fate of these statues heightened in 2015 with the case of #RhodesMustFall forming part of the major headlines of the year. In an article on IOL News by Nkosi (2016), Vuyani Booi postulates that the issues haunting South Africa could be dealt with through the removal of colonial and apartheid statues. He said, "Where colonialists found a place to settle, they put up tools of dominance which are these monuments." It is the shackles of colonialism in the country that are believed to be a hindrance to social transformation. The call to remove the statues was advocated by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) where its spokesperson, Ndlozi in a debate on colonial statues (2016) said, "these statues do not have a place in the post-apartheid imagination...we cannot remember, re-memorize and commemorate a colonial and apartheid past through people who have committed crimes against humanity…" The fundamental assumption is that the presence of the colonial and apartheid forces' statues perpetuate colonial dominance and white supremacy. Headley and Kobe (2017: 2) depict the statue of Rhodes to be of a man that ushered "a history characterised by land conquest, the quest for cheap labour, political oppression, white supremacy, discrimination and domination which were often legitimised in the name of Christianity." It is the evil historical influence that the statues are thought to still possess, thus, they are vandalised and not welcomed into the democratic era. Hence, Kirsten (2020: 2) notes that the "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."

Theoretical lens underpinning the study

This study is undergirded by the post-colonial theory, which usually underpins studies that crystalise on the status quo of the previously colonised. South Africa, like many other African states, endured hardships under the rule of colonialism where European forces invaded Africa between 1880 and 1900 and conquered the continent (Montle, 2020). The anti-colonial movements in the African continent relentlessly fought against the colonial force and ultimately emerged victorious. This marked the birth of democratisation in the African continent. However, in the South African context, the British colonial office was succeeded by the apartheid government that perpetuated the colonial policies of racism, separation and inequality. The apartheid government ruled in South Africa until 1994 when the democratic forces triumphed and took leadership.

This democratic corps set out to reconstruct the identity of the country, which meant breaking away from colonial and apartheid identities. Consequently, calls emerged for the removal of the statues of former colonial and apartheid leaders to an extent of violence. Scholars such as Sall (2016) hold the perception that the post-colonial South Africa is yet to be utterly free from colonial influence to the enduring remnants of colonialism such as the statues.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The first democratic government of South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela tasked itself with social transformation in the country. This meant the eradication of colonial and apartheid principles through the inception of reconciliation, equality and unity amongst South Africans (Jansen, 2019). Mandela said, "From the beginning, the African National Congress set itself with the task of fighting against white supremacy" quoted in (Tharoor, 2016: 1). The vexing white supremacy in South Africa "had its beginning in the initial Dutch colonial settlement of the Cape. The first Dutch settlers brought with them a vision of colonialism in which Europeans were superior to nonEuropeans and could behave in colonies in ways that were not tolerated at home" (Guelke, 2008: i). This colonial office consisted of emperors such as Cecil John Rhodes whose statue was unveiled in 1934 and prolonged until 2015 when some South Africans came to agree that Rhodes' statue symbolised oppression, racism and white supremacy (Kamanzi, 2015). As a result, the statue of Rhodes at the University of Cape Town (UCT) was sprinkled with human faeces in 2015, twenty-one years after the dispensation of democracy in South Africa.

Figure 2. Cecil John Rhodes statue

From: http://enculturation.net/sytem/file/pictures7.png

The South African activist who threw human faeces on Rhodes' statue, Chumani Maxwele, quoted in Goodrich and Bombardella (2016: 7) said, "as black

students, we are disgusted by the fact that this statue still stands here today as it is a symbol of white supremacy." It is Rhodes' recalled participation in the colonisation of (South) Africa that sparked concern for the existence of his statue in the democratic era. Pather (2015) notes that the vandalism of Rhodes' statue came after there were also concerns from some of the staff of UCT about transformation in the university, particularly, pointing out the lack of black people amongst the academic staff. The researcher claims that it was only when "the statue of Rhodes was defaced on 9 March, that the university – and indeed the country and beyond – sat up to take note of why there is an urgent need to acknowledge and tackle the transformation-related challenges facing the university" (Pather, 2015: 1). These incidents seek to declare Mandela's impulse for social transformation a dereliction as racial tension is still a prime concern in South Africa. The EFF president Julius Malema affirms that white supremacy has no place in the democratic South Africa. Quoted in Maphanga (2018: 1), Malema said, "They [white people] viewed us [black people] as subhumans and they will not live among sub-humans…when you empower subhumans that is a threat to white supremacy, they will disappear." The mandate to combat white supremacy led to the demolition of other statues such as

Hendrik Verwoerd's. Like Rhodes, Verwoerd also had a role to play in the perpetuation of white supremacy in South Africa and was dubbed the "Architect of Apartheid" (Allighan, 1961: xi). That is why the "wave to dismantle all statues attached to the history of colonialism, apartheid and white supremacy; it is not just a battle for public space but one for identity and belonging" (Mashau & Mangoedi 2015: 1).
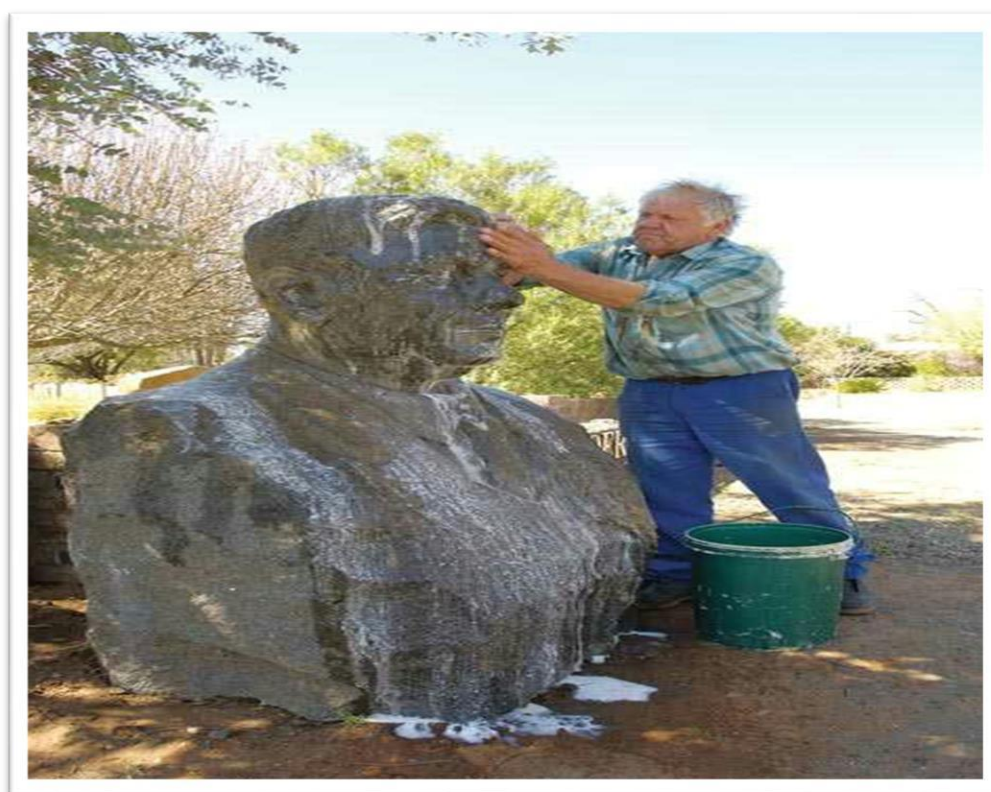

Figure 3. Statue of Hendrik Verwoerd

From: vqronline.org

The vandalism of Verwoerd's statue came to be understood "for most obvious reasons, as the man who within 8 years served as a Minister of Native Affairs" under apartheid in South Africa (Resane, 2018: 2). Verwoerd is renowned for his decisions in legislation, law enforcement and public policy areas that left most of the non-white population in South Africa discriminated based on their skin colour, subjected to loss of civil rights and disenfranchised. The demolition of his statue was even welcomed by his grandson who stated that "his grandfather and other apartheid leaders should no longer be honoured in public spaces… since, honouring his grandfather rubbed salt in the wounds of black South Africans" (Resane, 2018: 2). It appears to be blatant that the presence of the statues of colonial and apartheid bodies do not make a significant contribution to democratic imagination and social transformation. The removal of the statue of Verwoerd was also advocated by the Democratic Alliance party (DA) that reportedly removed his statue in Midvaal, south of Gauteng on Wednesday night after it felt that Verwoerd's statue does not deserve to be celebrated (Sibeko, 2011). Furthermore, Nathi Mthethwa, the arts and culture minister, said in The Guardian newsletter by Smith (2015), "For far too long our heritage landscape has been viewed through the prism of our colonisers and we have got to challenge that." The challenging of colonial undertones in the county escalated to the dismantling of statues associated with white supremacy which Nathi Mthethwa also commented to and said, "But to come up with a blanket ban is not helpful. Each statue has to be examined on its own merits because each history is not the same. We want to keep them in a museum, not destroy them, because our policy of reconciliation is that we should forgive each other, but never forget" (Smith, 2015: 1), Furthermore, there is also a concern about the presence of the statue of Paul Kruger, a proclaimed racist which was ultimately vandalised as well.

Figure 4. Statue of Paul Kruger

From: publicnewshub.com

In a statement issued on 24 September 2015 by the EFF, the party called on the removal of all colonial and apartheid symbols, and declared Kruger a racist who cemented discriminatory policies of apartheid against non-white South Africans: "There must be no public celebration and valuation of racists who presided over oppression and mass murder of the black majority." In this manner, the statue of Kruger seems to be a reminder of the harsh conditions meted out to black people by the apartheid regime than to advance social transformation and democratisation. Davison Zwane said, "I feel insulted as a black person, every time I drive along Paul Kruger Street. The EFF is right. The ANC-led municipality should have taken decisive action ages ago. I would assist in destroying the Paul Kruger statue" (African News Agency, 2015).

METHODOLOGY
This qualitative study that probes into the removal of statues that are postulated to symbolise white supremacy is guided by an exploratory design. It has explored the cases of the vandalism of states of colonial and apartheid icons such as Cecil Rhodes, Hendrik Verwoerd and Paul Kruger, and examined the degree of influence that these statues pose to social transformation in South Africa. It has predicated on the views expressed in the South African colonial statues debate with Vuyo Mvoko on April 17th of 2015 on SABC Digital News by three debaters. The debaters' opinions were collected, presented and discussed intently discussed.

RESULTS
The South African colonial debate (2015) on SABC Digital News featured three debaters, of which, are all South Africans. It included a white male, black male and black female South Africans. They were invited to the programme to respond to the vandalism of statues assumed to represent white supremacy. Their opinions and views are transcribed below:

Black male debater:

It is late, these statues must go down. No one should be taken to prison for them. No one should be jailed. Statues, particularly, human statues serve as a symbolism of how a people or a country self-imagines its self. How it thinks of itself. Its image of its self constantly enters into an interrogation of the status of itself and surely if we are thinking about the post-apartheid imagination, it cannot be represented by these statues that in their being formed celebrated a specific South Africa that was exclusive to white people.

White male debater:

If we say let's remove these statues (colonialists), then certain people like the Sothos should go and say let's remove the statue of Shaka in Durban who also represents a massacre of a lot of African people in this country the chasing away of tribes in this country. We need balance and inciting violence, inciting criminal action like vandalism is not solving the problems, also blaming one group for

all other groups' problems is not solving the problems either, it will not eradicate poverty, it will not solve unemployment, that is actually what we need, we need to move forward and we need reconciliation and not this type of incitement.

Black female debater:

I think we all agree that transformation needs to happen, I think we all agree that there are monuments that are already making people feel uncomfortable. I think as long people go about it and the right kinds of means and open up dialogue spaces to discuss that then if statues must fall then statues must fall. I think that's the mature way to do and this shows real leadership and courage. Statues are symbolism, at the end of the day in South Africa no one is going to be eating statues. We need a real transformation in this country so that people are to rise and can forge their own identities and futures and ready not be constantly to reminded of the past and conversations about the past and empathise and truly agree that there are grievances to be said and to hear about certain symbolic or monuments in our country that are hurtful to our people.

DISCUSSION
The removal of colonial and apartheid statues saw intense debates in the postapartheid South Africa. The debaters above, representing different racial groups in South Africa seem to agree with each other on the depiction of colonial and apartheid statues in the country and the meaning of social transformation. However, all three of them express different approaches and conditions for this matter. As the country reported alarming cases of the vandalism of statues, the black male debater amongst the trio expresses a preference for radical action against the statues and maintains that no one should be imprisoned for vandalising these statues. Contrariwise, the white male debater argues that the vandalism of these statues is not a perfect solution and attaches conditions to the removal of the statues by emphasising consistency, thus, declaring that the statues of the likes of King Shaka should fall within the same company of removal. Furthermore, with her emphasis on the urgency for social transformation in South Africa, the sole black female debater in the discussion concurs that there are monuments that symbolise the painful colonial past which may have detrimental effects on the post-apartheid South African society such as identity-crisis. She also prefers the matter to be brought to the table for a discussion rather than vandalism. A similar thread along the three debaters is the reservations that they demonstrate about the presence of colonial and apartheid statues in the democratic South Africa. It is their common view that the statues in the era of democracy do not deserve veneration.

CONCLUSION
The enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa such as white supremacy and racism pose a menace to social transformation in the country. This paper has identified, examined and maintained that the statues of colonial and apartheid forces aid the perpetuation of colonial undertones. The clarion call for their removal also serves as a snow-bowling element that unearths other remnants of colonialism and apartheid, thus, necessitating further research on colonial legacies. This involves other issues in the same company

that have yet to garner plenty of attention and scholarship such as the colonial naming of streets and places in the country. Knudsen and Andersen (2019: 254) assert that "decolonial practices and thinking do not form a programme or coherent ideology to which all participants subscribe." The exorcism of colonial and apartheid ghosts remains a controversial matter condemned by others while advocated by others. The portrays the need for intense criticism, examination and scholarship regarding social transformation in the country.

REFERENCES

African News Agency. (2015). EFF to remove Pretoria's statues. http//.iol.c.o.za. Accessed: 09/04/2020.

Allighan, G. (1961). Verwoerd – The end: A look-back from the future, Purnell & Sons (SA), Cape Town.

Bobou, O. (2015). Children in the hellenistic world: Statues and representation, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Fubah, M. A. (2020). The changing nature of statues and monuments in Tshwane (Pretoria) South Africa. Ethnography, 21(4), 438–460.

Goodrich, A. & Bombardella, P. (2016). What are Statues Good For? Winning the Battle or Losing the Battleground? KOERS – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship, 81(3), 1–10.

Guelke, L. (2008). The origin of white supremacy in South Africa: An interpretation. Social Dynamics, 15(2), 40-45.

Headley, S. & Kobe, S. L. (2017). Christian activism and the fallists: What about reconciliation?, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 73(3), a4722.

Kamanzi, B. (2015). "Rhodes Must Fall" – Decolonisation Symbolism – What is happening at UCT, South Africa?". The Post Colonialist. http://postcolonialist.com.Accessed: 09/04/2020.

Kirsten, M. (2020). The arch continues: A critique of The Long March to Freedom statue collection exhibited in Century City. Image & Text, 34(1), 1-16.

Knudsen, B.T & Andersen, C. (2019). Affective Politics and Colonial Heritage, Rhodes Must Fall at UCT and Oxford. International Journal of Heritage Studies, 25(3), 239–258.

Jansen, J. (2019). Making sense of decolonisation in universities, in Decolonisation in universities: The politics of knowledge, edited by J Jansen. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 1-12.

Maphanga, C. (2018). Malema tells black professionals: 'Before we crush the white system, let's build our own'. https//m.news24.com. Accessed: 06/04/12.

Mashau, T.D. & Mangoedi, L. (2015). Faith communities, social exclusion, homelessness and disability: Transforming the margins in the City of Tshwane, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 71(3), Art. #3088, 9 pages.

Mbeki, T. (08-13-1998). The African Renaissance Statement. Archived 200210-20 at the Wayback Machine Office of the Executive Deputy President.

Montle, M.E. (2020). Rethinking the rainbow nation as an exponent for nationbuilding in the post-apartheid era: A successful or failed project? Journal of Nation-Building and Policy Studies, 4(2),7-20.

Nkosi, N. (2016). Apartheid symbols 'must go'. http//.iol.c.o.za. Accessed: 09/04/2020.

Onyeakagbu, A. (2019). Among the 7 tallest statues in Africa, Nigeria shows up twice. https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food-travel/amongthe-7-tallest-statues-in-africa-nigeriashows-up-twice/dl8418t Accessed: 08/04/12.

Pather C. (2015). #RhodesMustFall: No room for ignorance or arrogance. S Afr J Sci. 111(5/6), Art. #a0109, 2 pages.

Resane, K.T. (2018). Statues, symbols and signages: Monuments towards sociopolitical divisions, dominance and patriotism?, HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies, 74(4), 1-20.

Sall, T. L. (2018). The rainbow myth: Dreaming of a post-racial South African Society. Occasional paper 73. Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD). https://www.igd.org.za. Accessed: 08/04/2020.

Sibeko,D. (2011). DA 'removes Verwoerd statue'. http//: iol.co.za. Accessed: 06/04/12.

Smith, D. (2015). Vandalism of apartheid-era statues sparks fevered debate in South Africa. The Guardian. http//: guardia.co.za. Accessed: 06/04/2020.

Stoddard, E.d. (2016). First known TV interview with Nelson Mandela comes to light. Ed. T. Mark https://in,reuters.com. Accessed: 08/04/2020.

Tharoor, I. (2016). Nelson Mandela talks about the injustice of white supremacy. https://www.washingtonpost.com. Accessed: 08/04/2020.