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# GEO-HISTORICAL RE-APPROPRIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: ZULU IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR MEMORIAL SPACE

Gilles Teulié<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Post-apartheid South Africa saw a shift from a one-sided glorification of the past by whites to a more balanced historical representation of the heroes and events that landmarked the shaping of the country. When Nelson Mandela was elected, people in KwaZulu-Natal acknowledged the imbalance in the distribution of tokens from the past, such as monuments and *Lieux de mémoire*, as Nora (1997) puts it, and decided something had to be done about it. Yet, if the unveiling of some of the Zulu monuments went smoothly, others were marked by problems most of which had to do with human representations. This article argues that the difficulties encountered regarding the portrayal of Zulu kings such as Shaka kaSenzangakhona or Dinizulu kaCetshwayo were triggered by a misconception of what a “Zulu” ought to be and more particularly because of what might be considered as sterile competition with “European” style monuments. This analysis seeks to shed light on the way the aftermath of apartheid was dealt with in KwaZulu-Natal, and the geo-political implications and impact of the debates that surround the construction of various “Zulu identities” within a globalising world.

**Keywords:** Zulu, identity, monument, commemoration, King Shaka, Mangosuthu Buthelezi

## 1. Introduction

The tryptic migration, territory and identity - which are key words for most Commonwealth countries - are frequently complemented by another issue, that of confrontation. Indeed, when the British Empire expanded, it often gave rise to clashes that history remembers as terrible battles and bloody massacres. The aftermath of these close encounters of a conflictual kind led to a reshuffling of the local ethnic and geographical cards. Such is the case of the deadly 19th century clashes between the Zulu nation<sup>2</sup> and British and Boer settlers. In the wake of the wars that were waged in KwaZulu-Natal, a part of Zululand was taken over by the white victors, who laid their claim through the erection of monuments to remind the world of their sufferings. The spatial segregation that was implemented under apartheid found an echo on the historical battlefields which were, until recently, dominated by white commemorative monuments. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) note that the election of Nelson Mandela as president of the Republic of South Africa

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<sup>2</sup> Defining what we mean by “Zulu people” is beyond the scope of this article. I will thus simply contend that they are the Nguni people who speak isiZulu as a first language (including some white people) who live in Zululand and recognise the king of the Zulus as their cultural and historical leader (see Schönfeldt-Aultma, 2006).

enabled the Zulu to retaliate and symbolically re-appropriate the memorial cultural space they had lost. This memorial space is linked to the land. As Edward Said puts it: “Everything about human history is rooted in the Earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation but it has also meant that people have planned to have more territory and, therefore, must do something about its indigenous residents” (Said, 1994, p. 7). He then adds that at some very basic level “imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others” (Said, 1994, p. 7). Further on in his work, he gives the *raison d’être* of his book, *Culture and imperialism*, as he underlines the importance of the occupation of a land not only physically, but also symbolically as being another way of appropriating a territory: “What I have tried to do is a kind of geographical inquiry into historical experience, and I have kept in mind the idea that the Earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces virtually do not exist. Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography” (Said, 1994, p. 7). He concludes this passage by stating that this struggle is complex and interesting as well because it does not just deal with warfare, but it is also “about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (Said, 1994, p. 7). This passage illustrates the main focus of this article. It is indeed about the migration of a people towards another one; it is about militarily occupied territories which cannot leave any person living in this defined space indifferent; and it about the visual constructions that the victors have left to symbolically mark the landscape and in a way state that this land is theirs. The struggle is therefore physical but ideological too, people fight with ideas, forms, images and imaginings. Edward Said’s words perfectly match the history of South Africa, as well as many other countries. Marschall (2008) argues that after the end of apartheid and the 1994 democratic elections, “the new Government of National Unity initiated a host of memorials, monuments, and heritage sites to redress the existing heritage landscape, which was heavily biased towards the achievements, the suffering and the victories of the white minority” (p. 88). This was part of the project to have a more balanced South African society. This article aims to examine how the Zulu people are taking possession of a memorial cultural space which had once been taken away from them by Afrikaner and British people, in order to turn it into a strong space of identity, not built at the margin of a former central colonial authority, but at the centre of what can today be defined as a cultural common heritage. This phenomenon is not specifically South African, but is a common denominator to most Commonwealth countries which share a painful colonial past as shown with the commemoration of the First World War in Australia:

The commemoration of indigenous Great War Servicemen (and to a far lesser degree, women) helps to demonstrate the ongoing tensions in contemporary Australian society and politics surrounding settler-indigenous relations and by extension, an

unresolved tension around race and Empire that undergirds Australian nationhood (Sumartojo & Wellings, 2018, p. 175).

Yet despite the similarities between the settler-indigenous reappraisal of sites of memory in Australia and South Africa, this study on Zulu nationalism and commemorative space wishes to address the issue of a Zulu specificity which can be seen as a form of resistance to globalisation: the choice of the Zulu authorities to promote European or African type of monuments, which, in turn, may shape future Zulu identity.

## 2. Wounds from the Past to Heal the Present

Philosopher Alain Ricoeur underlines the fact that the symbolic founding act of most human societies is violent, as he lists three causes that constitute what he calls the fragility of identity; the third one is, according to him, the heritage of founding violence (Ricoeur, 2004). Just like Rome was said to have been founded by Romulus who slew his twin brother Remus, Ricoeur states that war and violence participate in the founding of a nation which thus builds itself out of chaos: “It is a fact that there is no historical community that has not arisen out of what can be termed an original relation to war. What we celebrate under the heading of founding events are, essentially, violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right, acts legitimated, at the limit, by their very antiquity, by their age” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 82). He goes further in stating that “The same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation for others. To their celebration, on the one hand, corresponds their execration, on the other. It is in this way that real and symbolic wounds are stored in the archives of collective memory” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 82). This is precisely what British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared to the Zulu Royal Household at Ulundi, Natal, on 21 May 1991:

It is a very moving occasion for any one from Britain to come to this historic area of Africa. So many people in my country have heard of a place called Isandlwana: ‘the mountain that looks like a hut.’ On 22nd January 1879 Isandlwana witnessed a great and terrible battle between a Zulu army led by Chingwayo [sic] and the British Army under Lord Chelmsford (Thatcher, 1991).

She continues by saying that on that day, the British army suffered a shattering defeat and that nothing like that had happened before, but that the courage of a tiny British contingent salvaged British honour a few hours later at Rorke’s Drift (Thatcher, 1991). The former enemies’ wounds were healed, according to Margaret Thatcher who in her speech insisted on the valour of Zulu resistance to British rule, as well as against the apartheid regime<sup>3</sup>:

Today I laid a wreath at the memorial, to commemorate the brave

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Thatcher had always been a strong opponent to apartheid and stated it on many occasions, but she was mistakenly considered as pro-apartheid as she rejected all forms of sanction against the South African regime. She wanted to preserve British interests, but by doing so was against the general mood and therefore considered wrongly as defending the regime. Her speech may have been a way of counterbalancing this bad and false image.

soldiers on both sides who gave their lives on that day. Both sides were convinced their cause was just. The determined Zulu resistance to British rule in the last century has been matched in this century by a commitment to the freedom of all South Africans. Chief Minister—a thread runs through the history of black resistance to apartheid—a thread spun in Zululand (Thatcher, 1991).

Interestingly the positive message she delivered to praise Zulu fighting abilities and resistance to oppression is matched more than twenty years later by a Zulu, Qhuba Gumbi-Dlamini who, on his Facebook page, puts things into perspective when he asserted that their King, Shaka, had revived some of their important cultural events, some of which were banned by the imperial government after their [the Zulu's] defeat (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013). He added that in 2011:

the Zulu people were excited to see our King receive the future King of the United Kingdom, His Royal Highness Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall in his Palace in Ulundi. That further cemented the good relations that have developed over the years between the British people and the Zulu people (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013).

Talking about the commemoration of the battle of Isandlwana, just like Margaret Thatcher, he associated the victory of Black people against apartheid to the military quality of the Zulu warriors: “As we commemorate one of our people’s greatest victories, it should be recalled that the armed struggle and the establishment of the ANC had its genesis to the great warriors of the Zulu people” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013). He further expresses the idea that the Zulu’s qualities are to be understood as coming from good “breeding stock”, since the glory lies in the founding father of the Zulu nation, namely King Shaka: “[through the] Battle of Isandlwana and the Bambatha rebellion spearheaded by King Dinuzulu kaMpande and commanded by Inkosi Bhambambatha kaManciza and directed by Sgananda kaDlaba, a 96 year-old who had been an *ibutho* in the King Shaka army” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013). In conclusion, he pinpoints the fact that the Zulu Nation knows what it is to have victory but that it has tasted “the foul bitterness of defeat” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013), and that this has strengthened its resolve:

It has taken hold of the prize of victory and it has given birth to a solid, unshakable, immovable belief in the power of our people. The battles fought by its ancestors with spears are translated in the modern world into battles against social evils and economic distress. Its fight must be equally brave and undaunted (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013).

On the other hand, Afrikaners have built their identity around their own wounds whether real or symbolical such as the massacres of their forebears by Zulu warriors at Weenen in 1838, or the hanging of six Afrikaners at Slaagter’s

Neck in 1815. One of the exceptions is a founding event: the landing of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, marked by the unveiling of the flag of the United Provinces in order to confirm the act of taking possession of the land as well as the unveiling of a statue to commemorate his landing many years later. Hence, the monuments erected by Afrikaners and British people will symbolically manifest white hegemony over Bantu and Khoesan territory. There are a few landmarks of the important events that were commemorated when whites ruled South Africa: on 17 February 1838, the destruction of the Boer *laager* at Weenen (41 men, 56 women and 185 children were killed); on 16 December 1838, the Boers took their revenge at the Battle of the Ncome River otherwise known as the Battle of Blood River (on that day, three Boers were wounded, compared to 3,000 Zulus who were killed); the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria was erected in 1949 - it is a massive monument circled by a wall of wagons, the famous *laager* (camp). On the English side we have paradoxically a defeat, that of Isandlwana, on 22 January 1879 during the Anglo-Zulu war. We must distinguish between monuments dedicated to one person<sup>4</sup> from monuments devoted to a group of people<sup>5</sup> and commemorative monuments to those who fell during battles<sup>6</sup>. When one looks at these “white” South African monuments, one does not see much difference with monuments erected in Europe. They all represent a person (Queen Victoria is probably the monument that can be easily recognised whether in front of Buckingham Palace or in Bombay, Colombo, Adelaide, or Pretoria). For the fallen soldiers in South Africa, the monuments are generally white cenotaphs (erected obelisks on a pedestal). Boer monuments compared to British monuments are a mix of conventional European type monuments and different representations (the *laager* at Blood River). Europeans have, as we can see, marked the territory with monuments which could be seen as the token of the durability of the blood that was shed. Whether it be victories, defeats or massacres, these memorial spaces underline the importance of remembrance as an opportunity to visualize events and remind people that “we have shed our blood for this land”. As for the battle of Blood River, beyond the monuments, it became the national day of South Africa to remind (white) South Africans of what they see as the treachery of black leaders. Before the end of apartheid, the Zulu had few monuments in these historical sites.

### 3. Zulu Identity and Places of Memory

Mandela’s election in 1994 changed things. Memorial representations of South African history were previously unbalanced, which is understandable

<sup>4</sup> Jan van Riebeeck and his wife Marie de la Quellerie, in Cape Town, Dick King in Durban, Queen Victoria in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, Durban, Kimberley, King William’s Town, Pietermaritzburg, Piet Retief in Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, Graaf-Reinet, Paul Kruger in Pretoria, etc.

<sup>5</sup> British 1820 Settlers National Monument in Grahamstown, Voortrekkers in Pretoria, Women in concentration camps in Bloemfontein, deported Boers in Bloemfontein, etc.

<sup>6</sup> British soldiers at Isandlwana, Rorke’s Drift, Ulundi, Spion Kop, Magersfontein, Colenso, etc.

for a country that was emerging from apartheid. The following figures are indicative of the situation at the time. There were 180 monuments in Natal in 1991. Hall (1992) shows the hegemony of white monuments at the end of apartheid in Natal, with 84% of them white, 5% Indian, 4% Zulu, 4% “natural” and 3% “industrial”. Hall grasps the mood of the time when he explains that things will have to change as one cannot expect former African people submitted to the authority of the apartheid regime to stick to a nearly-all-white statuary in Natal: “The strategy attempts to ensure that the bulk of protections instituted in the future will adequately reflect the reality of cultural diversity in Natal and in addition introduce specific projects aimed at filling in existing gaps in the scope of present coverage” (Hall, 1992, p. 57). What he points to is the hegemony of the pre- and apartheid era white monuments which were considered by the new leaders of the nation to be too Eurocentric: “it is true when examining statutory cultural conservation and its South African record that accusations of elitism, Eurocentrism and simple racism in past practice are as justifiable as they are for most other areas of state intervention in cultural, or for that matter any other area of human experience” (Hall, 1992, p.58). Thus, many people worked to find a more balanced way to commemorate the South African past: “the only means of countering such accusations has been to rush about searching for potential monuments which are ‘relevant to Blacks’” (Hall, 1992, p. 58). Interestingly, as mentioned before, comparisons with other former British colonies can be made to shed light on common situations and attitudes such as in Australia but which could fit Bantu as well as Khoesan people in South Africa alike:

This lack of official recognition stems from the unsettling nature of Indigenous memories of conflict that do not take 1915 as their point of departure but rather 1788, the year of the arrival of the First Fleet from Britain. In Indigenous memories of conflict, 26 January 1788 was not the inauspicious start to the creation of what was to become a country with one of the highest living standards in the world and a successful multicultural society, but instead represents ‘invasion day’, the moment when dispossession began and Indigenous peoples - created as such through their encounter with Empire - were forced into a long struggle for survival. Part of this struggle took the form of the ‘Frontier wars’, a series of conflicts between incoming white settlers who benefitted from the notion that the Australian continent was *terra nullius*, and longstanding Indigenous populations with well-established cultural and political structures and highly sophisticated relationships with their surrounding environments (Sumartojo & Wellings, 2018, pp. 176-177).

The apartheid ideologists also pretended that the Cape was *terra nullius*. Obliteration of the presence of the Khoesan people and ‘Frontier Wars’ (or ‘Xhosa Wars’) also took place in Cape colony between Dutch settlers allied with British troops against the Xhosa people. Hence this survey on Zulu

nationalism partakes in a more global approach to a phenomenon that is common to many former colonised people.

The South African National Heritage Resources Act (1999) states that “Our heritage is unique and precious and cannot be renewed. It helps us to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation.” Thus, in post-apartheid South Africa, history is revised to be more balanced (in history books), names are changed (Africanised), statues are pulled down (Prime minister Verwoerd) while others remain and new ones are erected (Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Gandhi, etc.). Battlefield monuments and commemorations have become twofold, both sides being represented, not just the white perspective being displayed. This is why in 1998, a second museum was inaugurated on the battle site of “Blood River” or “Ncome River”. The African name supplanted the old white terminology which was, more than likely, an exaggeration (the river is said to have become red with the blood of the dead Zulu warriors that fell in it). Schonfeldt-Aultman (2006) argues that the Ncome “African” monument built on the other side of the Ncome river facing the older “white” monument in 1998 is different, as it has the dynamic shape of the “bull’s horn” Zulu attack tactic (the horns envelop and destroy the enemy) and the walls of the museum are covered with different Zulu regimental shields and spears which evoke the movement and charge of the Zulu warriors: “The Ncome monument’s shape in some senses naturalizes the memorial, lets it speak for and represent itself, lets it act in relation to the static laager memorial” (Schonfeldt-Aultman, 2006, p. 223). Here is perhaps the main difference between Eurocentric monuments and African ones. We can see the traditional Zulu shield made of cow hide on the walls of the museum at Blood River, or shields again on the ground with a leopard resting on them at Rorke’s Drift, a warrior necklace (an *Isiqu*) at Isandlwana and a monument on a concrete basis with a traditional beer jug surrounded by animal horns and tusks (elephant, kudu, etc.), commemorating the former Zulu kings with the “spirit of Emakhosini” monument near Ulundi. There was a strong consensus in favour of developing an African statuary which would distance itself from the European one as David Hart and Sarah Winter put it when they expressed the idea that South African heritage practices “had been imbibed from the well-established mother countries whose comparative homogeneity, identity and value systems had evolved over many generations, leaving us with an archaeological record of heritage sites which until recently, in terms of criteria, may differ little from those accepted in Europe” (Hart & Winter, 2001, p. 92). They find that because indigenous value systems have been damaged through years of cultural suppression, now “South Africa appears to be rejecting the dominance of the previously accepted traditional system of heritage value” (Hart & Winter, 2001, p. 92); the diverse peoples in the country are trying to define their own values and create their own tradition. It is indeed what we see when we come across the different attempts at honouring the Zulu past which are not consensual and demonstrate a lack of common agreement on how to commemorate Zulu history and great men. There is a sense of urgency

to bring about a new approach to heritage sites, according to David Hart and Sarah Winter, as they remind us that commemorations are a reflection on the society that performed such commemorations at a given time of its development: “Whatever the case, the Heritage List of South Africa, when viewed as an archaeological record, proves a revealing reflection of the social and political order of the time, and indicates clearly the current changes in heritage needs with which the authorities responsible are trying to grapple” (Hart & Winter, 2001, p. 92). It is therefore an important choice to submit to the general (European) pattern of statuary in order to “compete” with white monuments, or change perspective and present commemorative sites with other types of representations which define one’s identity by using traditional Zulu items, such as: shields, the warrior necklace (the *Isiqu*), or even a beer jug. These artefacts are invested with a strong symbolism which presents the members of the Zulu nation as a people who have traditions and values and who inscribe themselves in a geographical space linked to nature (see the animal horns and tusks at the Ulundi monument); they symbolise harmony between humans and nature, harmony which the Europeans lack and supposedly have destroyed, with something of the myth of the noble savage they long for, that 18<sup>th</sup> century foil the philosophers of the Enlightenment developed to criticize the loss of innocence of the industrialising Europeans. Yet it is interesting to note that some Zulu officials wanted the monument at Isandlwana to represent a group of fierce Zulu warriors. The debates took place as to what the monument should represent, either a European model featuring human beings, or a more specifically African type of monument deprived of human representation.

#### 4. Commemorating the Zulu Victory at Isandlwana

In their introduction to *Commemorating race and empire in the first world war centenary*, Welling, Sumartojo and Graves (2018, p.8) state that: “The research presented here reinforces a simple point that bears repeating: that commemorative activity is inescapably political. This fundamental fact is often forgotten amidst the bi-partisan support that war commemoration attracts in liberal democracies”. For Jay Winter, war memorials are “carriers of political ideas, from Republicanism to nationalism, imperialism, fascism, Stalinism, or the multiple justification of the call to arms” (Winter, 1995, p. 79). Thus, we know that history and commemoration are highly politicised matters. South Africa is no exception to that rule. The main Zulu personalities who frequently make commemorative speeches are the leaders of the Zulu, King Goodwill Zwelithini KaBhekuzulu, the former leader of the Inkhata Freedom Party, Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the former president of the Republic of South-Africa, Jacob Zuma. The Battle of Isandlwana was the first major battle of the Anglo-Zulu War fought on 22 January 1879. It came as a shock in Britain as it was impossible to imagine that indigenous warriors could defeat a modern, well-armed European army. The myth of the brave and disciplined Zulu warrior dates from the battle. Just three years after the Soweto massacre of 1976, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the Spear of the Nation),

the military wing of the ANC, co-founded by Nelson Mandela, declared the 1979 centenary of the battle as “the year of the spear”. In 1999, when post-apartheid South Africa was only five years old, the new monument to the fallen warriors at Isandlwana was inaugurated on Sunday 22 January, on the day of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who has hereditary connections with the Zulu Royal family, and is therefore a cousin to the King of the Zulu, delivered a speech in which he put the importance of the Zulu into perspective:

This is a great moment in the history of the Zulu nation. We are unveiling a monument which for the first time is dedicated to the brave Zulu people who fought and died for the freedom of our Kingdom. On this battlefield the Zulu nation fought for its existence and wrote one of the most glorious pages in the history of black Africa. Never before had a black nation dared to confront the full might of a European army, and never before and never since had a European army found defeat when confronted by the valour and courage of a black nation<sup>7</sup>. The courage of the Zulu people by itself triumphed over the overwhelming power of rifles. Because of the Zulu victory at the Battle of Isandlwana, the British Empire had to employ a greater number of soldiers to subjugate the Zulu Kingdom than it did to conquer the whole of India (Buthelezi, 1999, n. p.).

For Buthelezi, the monument is also a symbol of unity and reconciliation, as he says he believes that the memorial will not only be a testament to the bravery and sacrifice of their predecessors who fought the Battle of Isandlwana and every other battle during the Anglo-Zulu War, but it is also a tribute to the unity of a people who stood firm against the destruction of their culture, their existence and their way of life. It is a tribute to a co-operation which extends beyond the bounds of the battlefield to permeate the very soul of the Zulu nation (Buthelezi, 1999). Once again, the past matches the present and sheds a light on how it should be addressed. This is why collective remembrance “points to time and place and above all, to evidence, to traces enabling us to understand what groups of people try to do when they act in public to conjure up the past” (Winter, 2006, p. 5). Indeed, summoning the past to enlighten the present, or setting an example for present generations is what the process of commemorating is about.

Beyond the attractive power of a powerful king emblematic of a time when the Zulu ruled their land and were not submitted to extra-African colonisers, the desire of Zulu leaders to ascribe their history to a mythical founding father such as Shaka like Arthur, King of the Britons, or Vercingétorix, the Celtic chief of French history, as leaders who have “united” their people, it seems that Shaka’s legacy and attractive power is part of the deal. Indeed,

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<sup>7</sup> This is not totally true as the Ethiopians defeated Italian colonial troops at the Battle of Adwa in 1896.

not only is he a token of Zulu pride and unity, but he is at the origin of the powerful Zulu dynasty, all descendants of Senzangakhona (father to Shaka, Dingaan and Mpande), rulers of powerful warriors who mesmerised even white people as John Carlin explained in 1993: “The Zulu king was defeated by the British Army in 1879, but immortalised in celluloid - in a part played by Chief Buthelezi himself - in the film *Zulu*. King Cetshwayo, who stayed at a rented house in Kensington, proved enormously popular among Londoners, attracting flocks of sightseers” (Carlin, 1993, n. p.). What Carlin wants to emphasize, in the pre-first multicultural elections in 1994, is that white people might vote IKP (Inkatha Freedom Party, founded by Buthelezi) because of the myth of the Zulu warrior, which, according to him, retained a harmless hold on the minds of some Englishmen: “No less surprising, but far more dangerous, is the degree to which the myth still captivates white South Africans. The latest opinion polls show that Chief Buthelezi enjoys as much - and indeed dramatically growing - support among the white population as he does loathing among the black” (Carlin, 1993, n. p.). From what Carlin states, we may infer that both the Zulu and whites had a particular admiration for the manhood of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu warriors who, indeed, were often compared to the Spartans of ancient Greece as in Henry Rider Haggard’s novels such as *King Solomon’s mines* (1885). The release of box office hit films such as *Zulu* (1963), which dealt with the battle of Rorke’s Drift and *Zulu Dawn* (1979), showing that the British defeat at the battle of Isandlwana were part of romanticised European representations of the Zulu, adding to the myth of the gallant Zulu warrior.

These martial representation and glorification of man’s fighting and, therefore, destructive capacities raise the question of the necessity of representing pre-existing monuments: “Does a memorial to fallen Zulu soldiers need to employ and fix military imagery?” (Schonfeldt-Aultman, 2006, p. 224). The author’s answer is: “Perhaps so if to continually remind people of the loss of Zulu soldiers, but perhaps not” (Schonfeldt-Aultman, 2006, p. 224). He particularly stresses the fact that this type of representation does not match the national will for reconciliation as the militaristic monument of Zulu warriors reminds people of the fighting and suffering. He concludes by ultimately wondering what exactly is being negotiated and said about contemporary Zulu identity and how people are reading the Ncome monument (Schonfeldt-Aultman, 2006, p. 224). After Mandela’s election, there was a first simple commemorative sculpture, in praise of the Zulu by South African artist Gert Swart who had portrayed Zulu King Cetshwayo as a modest victor of the battle of Isandlwana. Instead of a triumphant king, he was represented as a sad and compassionate king lamenting the death of many of his warriors. Gert Swart was then asked to imagine and create the bigger monument that was to be erected for the anniversary of the battle in 1999. The Committee that had approached Gert Swart wanted a monument representing impressive warriors charging the enemy, with *Ikhwas* raised. Gert Swart convinced the committee that the monument should not glorify war and should reflect the spirit of peace and reconciliation sought by Nelson

Mandela. Consequently, the monument that was erected represents a giant bronze *Isiqu*, a necklace given to exceptional warriors, the equivalent of a medal for westerners. On the day of the inauguration, King Zwelithini argued that the monument had a strong Zulu symbolism, but that the medium (bronze) was a gesture towards European sculptures (Marschall, 2010). It is worthy of note that it was a white man who suggested a non-European type of military monument to Zulu people as if the latter had been submitted to white representations for too long. Of course, one may argue that black South Africans had been under white European hegemony for so long that they even had lost their own patrimonial history: “Shaka - the figure, largely propagated by white writers, familiar through novels, history textbooks and films- is a myth that has historically expressed and served the social, psychological and political needs of the white community in Southern Africa” (Wylie, 2009, p. 82). Yet, looking back at Ricoeur’s (2004) explanation of the “founding events” of nations, as quoted earlier on in this chapter, one can understand that from a cosmological point of view, the Zulu nation, just like most human societies, mythicized its original relation to war as a sort of “big bang” which unified a great people. It is during the period that started in 1815, called the *Mfecane* (the crushing), that King Shaka, after having organised the AmaZulu into a fighting nation, was able to unify other Nguni clans under his authority through military campaigns which saw many killings and population exoduses. In other words, order came out of chaos.

## 5. The Statue of King Shaka in Durban

Annie E. Coombes, in her book *History after Apartheid*, evokes the size of the statues and underlines that it is the repetition of commemorations which enables a dialogue with the past:

A number of commentators have reiterated the argument that the more monumental the scale of a public sculpture, the more likely it is to be ignored or forgotten over time. My contention is that monuments are animated and reanimated only through performance and that performances or rituals focused around a monument are conjectural (Coombes, 2003, p. 12).

For her, commemoration has to be a “living” thing, something that has to be constantly stimulated: “The visibility of a monument is in fact entirely contingent upon the debates concerning the reinterpretation of history that take place at moments of social and political transition. Their significance is consequently constantly being reinvented but always and necessarily in dialogue with the past” (Coombes, 2003, p. 12). Sabine Marschall, in at least one of her articles leans on Wulf Kansteiner’s contention that collective memory is the result of the interaction between three overlapping elements – the media of memory, the makers and users of memory (Marschall, 2013). In her book *Landscape of memory*, she recalls the process of “Africanising the symbolic landscape” (Marschall, 2010, p. 275) in post-apartheid South Africa. There is a re-appropriation of the South African space at both the symbolic

and physical levels. The visibility of monuments legitimises the right to the land for those who have erected them, and even if a river long separated the Afrikaner and Zulu monuments at Blood River, the land is theirs, and the new bridge that links the two museums, inaugurated by former President Jacob Zuma on the Day of Reconciliation, 16 December 2014, is a token that living together is possible. The size of the statue is revelatory of this phenomenon of increased visibility as in the statue of Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg or the planned one of King Shaka.

King Shaka kaSenzangkhona's reputation has been so disputed by those who admire him, Africans and Westerners alike, and those who despise him, that Professor Jean Sévry made a play on words in French, "chacun son Chaka" (Sévry, 1991, p.19) (each to his own Shaka), suggesting that there are as many representations of King Shaka as there are people interested in him. This explains why the representation of the king of the Zulu became a bone of contention when his statue was erected at King Shaka Airport in Durban as it was to be an emblematic site of memory the way Paul Ricoeur puts it when he states:

From such shared memory, we pass by degrees to collective memory and its commemorations linked to places consecrated by tradition. It is the occurrence of such experiences that first introduced the notion of sites of memory, prior to the expressions and fixations that have subsequently become attached to this expression (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 149).

In 2010, a statue representing King Shaka surrounded by a group of cows was inaugurated at King Shaka International Airport in Durban by the King of the Zulu accompanied by President Zuma. Shortly afterwards, the press echoed what was seen as a scandal, as the King complained that Shaka was portrayed as a "herd boy" and not as the hunter and warrior king he was. The statue was pulled down and a new project was planned. The idea that the statue of Shaka should represent him as a warrior and not a cattle herder recalls the project of some Zulu in 1999 to have a monument at Isandlwana which would represent glorious warriors, in the tradition of European statuary as opposed to the more African kind. Mangosuthu Buthelezi's statement on King Shaka's commemoration ceremony on 25 September 2010 ran thus:

The iconic image of King Shaka has by now been romanticized and his life beyond military conquest is shrouded in mystery. It was therefore a surprise, and almost an insult, when King Shaka kaSenzangakhona was portrayed, in a statue outside the new King Shaka International Airport, as a herdboy. One would not expect to see, at any international venue, a statue of former President Nelson Mandela as a herdboy<sup>8</sup>. We thank His

<sup>8</sup> The comparison between Shaka, a Zulu king, and Mandela a Xhosa prince may hint at a competition between Zulu and Xhosa nations, although coming both from the same linguistic (Nguni) origin, they have been opposed throughout their history. During apartheid, the Bantustan project of apartheid promoted by prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd turned Zulu and

Majesty our King for the stand that he took which resulted in that grotesque caricature of our founder being removed. Many members of the King's Nation were seething with anger at its mere sight (Buthelezi, 2010, n. p.).

The Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Zweli Mkhize, at the time, reported in the media that some people, including the king had difficulties with an unarmed Shaka (Sapa, 2010, n. p.). He added that the current statue would be taken down and would be remodelled, but whether it would have a spear and shield or not would be decided later (Sapa, 2010, n. p.). The spear and the shield (along with the knobkerrie) are on the new 2000 coat of arms of the Republic of South Africa, and therefore are a reminder of the traditional weapons used by South African warriors and serves to acknowledge their fighting spirit. This is what Mangosuthu Buthelezi wanted to underline on Shaka Day 2010. For him it was Shaka the warrior who should be remembered as he was the unifier of the AmaZulu: "This is not to deny that such a time of herding cattle formed part of their childhood, just as I too tended cattle when I was a boy. But we are not remembered for the mundane rituals that teach us discipline. Rather we are remembered for the extraordinary achievements that such discipline enables us to reach" (Buthelezi, 2010, n. p.).

Artist Peter Hall won the contest for the replacement statue of King Shaka and visibly had followed instructions as he declared to the press that the sketch that met with a favourable approval from the KwaZulu-Natal authorities showed Shaka in a victorious pose with his spear upraised (*Sunday Tribune*, 2011), even though negotiations appear to have downplayed Shaka's martial profile as it seems that, in the end, the new sketch that was praised showed "King Shaka standing on a series of raised shields, wearing a towering blue crane feather reserved for someone of his stature" (*Sunday Tribune*, 2011, n. p.). Yet even though the artist wrote that it was Shaka the ruler that prevailed instead of Shaka the warrior, the artist's intention was to give him the attributes of a king, including a weapon: "It shows him as being not so much the warrior king, as a statesman and negotiator of great stature. I had used a short stabbing spear, but they preferred him to hold the long spear symbolic of his authority as king" (*Sunday Tribune* 2011, n. p.). Indeed, the *Iklwa* (or *Umkhonto*), the stabbing spear is a combat weapon, part and parcel of Shaka's regalia but which was not invented by him and which became so much part of the material culture associated with Zulu fighting abilities that a member of the Inkhata Freedom Party claimed in 1991 that "The Zulu nation is born out of Shaka's spear" (*Weekly Mail* 1991, n. p.), and that the name

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Xhosa rulers into pseudo-allies to the apartheid regime as the latter granted them various degrees of autonomy within their realm, Transkei (for Xhosa people) was independent from 1976 to 1994, while KwaZulu was self-governing from 1977 to 1994. The years between the release of Mandela in 1990 and his election in 1994, saw fierce political and physical fighting between ANC forces led by Xhosa Prince Nelson Mandela and the Inkatha Freedom Party led by Zulu Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi. There were no direct commemoration wars between the Zulu and the Xhosa, yet the erection of statues in honour of Zulu Kings in KwaZulu Natal was part of the political project of the Zulu authorities to re-invest their territory and to assert their authority.

of the military branch of the ANC, co-founded by Nelson Mandela after the Sharpeville massacre is *The Spear of the Nation (Umkhonto We Sizwe)*. Yet detractors considered it was going to be difficult to satisfy the Royal Zulu household as expectations were high, and thus Hall's artistic freedom would be chained in order to produce "a militaristic, specifically tailored image of King Shaka" (*Sunday Tribune* 2011, n. p.).

Thus, our examples show that a manly attitude was seen as an important issue. Maybe also at the back of the mind of the Royal Zulu Household was the desire to partake in the building of a more positive image than that black South Africans were given by settlers throughout South African history and more precisely during apartheid, reviving the Black Panther movement's motto that "Black is Beautiful". Being despised and humbled in front of the white "baas" in the pre-free elections of 1994, led some black South Africans to be sensitive about the issue of height, particularly, if there was a white counterpart in the equation. This is what happened with King Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo's statue, which had been ordered by KwaZulu-Natal Premier Sibusiso Ndebele in 2005 and was erected at Durban King Dinuzulu Park (former "Botha park") but remained hidden under a protective tarpaulin for two years before being officially unveiled in September 2008. Some eThekweni municipal councilors complained that the statue of the first prime minister and former Boer general Louis Botha, was taller than that of King Dinuzulu. The statue of a Black king being shorter than that of White prime minister was a sensitive issue, as an element that conveys the idea of inferiority and superiority in a post-apartheid context is not to be neglected. Hence, the size of a monument has always been important, as shown by Pharaoh Ramses II's gigantic statues in Abu Simbel, that of the Colossus of Memnon, also in Egypt, or the Rhodes Colossus and the statue of Zeus in Olympia, two of the Seven Wonders of antiquity. It is from this perspective that we should mention the aborted project of a huge statue of Shaka Zulu "holding a spear" which would have been bigger than the Christ in Rio or the Statue of Liberty. According to the Natal Tourism board, the Natal government seemed to have ordered a statue of "significant size to reflect our Zulu heritage" (*The Mercury*, 2013, n. p.). The project had been running since 2008:

The Municipality and Tourism sector further revealed their plan to develop a statue of King Shaka, to reflect the iconic Zulu heritage, and they believe that such a statue will incorporate visitor facilities and cultural related experiences. Following the controversy of a King Shaka statue when it was built at the King Shaka International Airport, the MEC of Economic Development and Tourism, Honourable Michael Mabuyakhulu, said that it "was clear that this statue will be different from the figure at the Airport, but it will be large in size". "This project will start soon, and this statue will be huge in such a way that you can see it far away, it won't look similar to the one that is currently at the Airport or at the Harbour," said Mabuyakhulu (Blöse, 2013, n. p.).

Michael Mabuyakhulu explained what was going to be different about this gigantic new statue: “We will reach a consensus. There will be no issues after the statue is built. I won’t debate the issues of design. Ideally, Shaka will be holding a spear...” (*The Mercury*, 2013, n. p.). Yet the announcement of this pharaonic project came in an adverse context as the previous year the provincial government had been blamed for spending more than six million Rands on the two statues of King Shaka, one put away, the other one not yet on display. Shaka’s giant statue was also seen as a difficult project and the ambitions of the sponsors was far from realistic: “A similar announcement was made by former KZN premier S’bu Ndebele five years ago but, despite the fanfare, not even a bush has been cleared for the development” (*The Mercury*, 2013, n. p.). Edward Said’s perception of the importance of geo-strategy and the occupation of land to prove that you own it, as quoted earlier on in this chapter, is present here with the will of the Zulu authorities to have a huge statue that can be seen from a distance, just like the Rhodes Colossus would signify to sailors that they had reached a territory that belonged to the builders of the huge statue. Likewise, King Shaka’s statue was to embody the greatness of the people who built the statue (and glorify the represented king like Ramses at Abu Simbel), but as well as to specify who the territory belongs to.

Zulu nationalism is of course behind the different attempts at representing their glorious past. South African historian Nsizwa Dlamini argues that Mangosuthu Buthelezi was among the first Zulu leaders to seize the opportunity to use history’s federating power (Dlamini, 2009, p. 383), just like the Afrikaner ideologists had done in the 1870s with the construction of Afrikanerdom. He emphasises that Buthelezi made personal choices that lead him to choose Shaka and Cetshwayo as the top Zulu heroes while Dingaan was not celebrated by Buthelezi except in 1998 with the opening of the Ncome River museum. He shows that different Zulu forces are at stake behind the commemoration process to celebrate the Zulu (military) past: “It is fitting to propose that the newly constructed monuments to Zulu history in post-apartheid KwaZulu-Natal reveal the broader input of Zulu nationalists who have their own vision of the public reification of what Buthelezi has called ‘Zuluness’” (Dlamini, 2009, p. 391). South African artist Andreis Botha, who had made the first statue of Shaka for Durban Airport that was removed, declined the invitation by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Zweli Mkhize, to join in 2011 a team that was to find a better representation of King Shaka, believing the situation was inextricable “due to the complexity of political perceptions of the artwork, and notions of ownership and nationalisation” (Attwood & Hlongwane, 2011, n. p.). Indeed Shaka, nicknamed the Black Napoleon, is a manifold figure as shown by a document produced by the Mpumalanga Provincial House of Tradition Leaders which states the different facets of the king which are honoured on Shaka day: “Shaka Zulu as the founder of AmaZulu - Shaka Zulu as a refuge - Shaka Zulu as a teacher - Shaka Zulu as a change agent - Shaka Zulu as a leader - Shaka Zulu as a strategist - Shaka Zulu as a negotiator - Shaka Zulu as a fighter - Shaka Zulu

as a human being. The above are the characteristics that one could describe Shaka Zulu with” (Mpumalanga, 2013, n. p.). But Nsizwa Dlamini warns that the will to counterbalance the one sided white vision of South African history produced in pre-apartheid and apartheid eras offers opportunities to “create new myths that echoed a period of myth-making in which black people, regardless of their Zuluness, were silenced in the name of white supremacy” (Dlamani, 2009, p. 392).

Qhuba Gumbi-Dlamini, posted on Facebook (on 14 January 2013) that the commemorations of the battle of Isandlwana were important for Zulu people:

The victory at the Battle of Isandlwana was not erased by the defeat at Ulundi. It was not diminished by the subsequent years of subjugation and artificial splits. The victory at Isandlwana lives on in our collective consciousness because it was a physical manifestation of the spirit of our people (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013, n. p.).

He then adds that that spirit lives on and that although “we live in a time of relative stability and peace the spirit of the Zulu people has not faded. Although our traditional structures and ways of life are marginalized, we have not forgotten who we are and what we are capable of when we rise, united in purpose” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013, n. p.). Hence, unity is what is at stake because “united we stand, divided we fall”; this is why leaders such as Shaka are first and foremost seen as the unifiers of the nation: “Commemorating events like the Battle of Isandlwana offers us a reminder of the value of unity. We no longer have a common enemy made of flesh and blood. But we do share common challenges, which can only be met if we are united in purpose” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013, n. p.). The values and achievements of the past must therefore set an example to fight the modern wars that are to be fought socially: “Our present challenges are poverty, unemployment and disease. They are social evils like criminality, violence against women and children, and substance abuse. We face insecurity over our economic circumstances and our future prospects” (Gumbi-Dlamini, 2013, n. p.). Other elements can be found to corroborate this Zulu will to exist through its martial past and especially its commemorations: the numerous political speeches which were delivered by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, President Jacob Zuma or Zulu king Zwelithini, on several military commemorations or *Shaka’s Day* which was integrated into *Heritage Day* after the controversy of the representations of Shaka as a warrior and not as a cattle herder, or the (pseudo) scandal involving the King of the Zulus who supposedly said in his Battle of Isandlwana commemoration speech in January 2013 that homosexuality was a shame and that it did not exist amongst Zulu warriors. One may wonder then why such project of a gigantic statue of King Shaka more than a hundred meters high should be promoted. This is not to accuse Zulu leaders of having delusions of grandeur, yet, one sees a desire on their account to define the memorial space in Zululand with relevant symbols

which convey the spirit of Zulu fame.

The long awaited second statue of King Shaka was meant to erase the offence produced by the first one in 2010. A project which was started in 2012 has been kept a secret for many years. On 26 January 2018, the *Daily News* in South Africa published an article by Chris Ndaliso entitled “Airport Statue Mystery” which explained that in 2014, the General Manager in the Heritage Division of the Premier’s Office, Dr Vusi Shongwe, reported that the new statue of King Shaka was in a foundry where the bronze coating was to be applied prior to finalising the project. But the article, published in January 2018, also reported that the artist Peter Hall, who had been commissioned for this second statue, “confirmed this week that the statue had been completed, but would not comment further” (Ndaliso, 2018, n. p.). By October 2019, nothing had been heard of the new statue, which at least proves that there is no rush to erect the new one, and one may assume that Zulu authorities were overcautious about the event, as shown by the Premier’s spokesperson Thami Ngidi who, referring to the fact that the Zulu royal household had not been consulted when the first statue of Shaka (with cattle) had been commissioned, contended that “we want to make sure that previous mistakes are not repeated” (Ndaliso, 2018, n. p.) and that they will make an announcement regarding the statue’s unveiling “in due course” while the royal household’s spokesperson, Prince Thulani Zulu, said they were waiting to be consulted on the new statue (Ndaliso, 2018, n. p.). In 2011, South African artist Bernice Stott expressed great reservations about this second Shaka statue while Greg Streak, another South African Artist predicted it was also headed for disaster (*Sunday Tribune*, 2011, n. p.).

## 6. Conclusion

Zulu authorities have managed, thanks to the re-memorialisation of KwaZulu space, to federate Zulu identity around the tutelary figures who were the heroes of Zulu resistance to white invaders (Gumbi-Dlamini, quoted above, shows that he claims that part of his culture). They have re-appropriated South African history as well as the territories that had been taken away from them through “the struggle over geography” (Said, 1994, p. 7). Because appropriating land is not just a physical process, but is also rooted in representations or “images and imaginings” (Said, 1994, p. 7), Zulu memorial policies have taken important proportions particularly when the original relation to war, defined by Ricoeur (2004) as the heart of the founding process of a nation, seem to have been put aside. This is exemplified by the case of King Shaka’s statue at Durban airport portrayed as a herd boy. Glorifying King Shaka as the unifier of the Zulu nation through the *Mfecane* (the crushing), and therefore as a warrior king, in a context of post-apartheid South Africa, where the master word was “reconciliation”, explains the tensions aroused by the first representation of the king as a peaceful man.

Yet representing a person is not the same as commemorating an event such as a battle. It seems that Zulu authorities have had problems with

the “European” model of statuary, as figurative monuments, setting aside their aesthetic value which may not have pleased everybody whereas the indigenous Africanist values and representations used in the Rorke’s Drift monument (a leopard resting on Zulu shields) or the Isandlwana monument (an *Isiqu*) to the fallen Zulu warriors presented no such bones of contention. There was no competition with white statuary as with King Dinuzulu statue in Pretoria or feeling that one representation (that of King Shaka as a herd boy) would diminish the prestige of the founding father of the Zulu nation. When one looks at the various King Shaka projects that are not consensual, it seems that the time is not yet ripe for appeased representations of past conflicts which would help the nation to come to terms with apartheid and to construct what some call “reconciliational identities” (Schonfeldt-Aultman, 2006, p. 224), which are necessary for the country to move forward (Teulié, 2013, 295). Yet, the Rorke’s Drift monument to the fallen Zulu warriors might be more consensual for future projects because the shields on the ground symbolically belong to dead men (unlike the Ncome ones which are symbolically “on the move” to attack whites) and the leopard is resting peacefully on top of the shields, as if to protect the sanctuary. This feline is African, yet it is neither black nor white but both as we know from Kipling’s story “How the Leopard got his Spots”: “Ethiopian changed his skin to black and marked the Leopard’s coat with his bunched black fingertips” (Kipling, 1902) and because of that they could both hide [to hunt] and they “lived happily ever after, and will never change their colouring again” (Kipling, 1902). But beyond this metaphor, one can only assess that for the Zulu, like for most Bantu groups in South Africa, coming to terms with apartheid means getting rid of a European type of statuary inherited from years of white domination. Re-appropriating the memorial landscape in KwaZulu-Natal is therefore not an easy task as shown by the failed attempts at commemorating King Shaka. Yet ceasing to compete with white representations of past events and people devoting energy to more Africanised sculptures and accepting African aestheticism might be a step in the right direction to resolving the Zulu memorial crisis.

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