

Pointing to the Dead: Victims, Martyrs and Public Memory in South Africa

Sabine Marschall

Introduction

Memorials are never erected for the sake of the dead, who demand our respect. Rather, they are set up by the living for the sake of the living. A memorial constitutes a 'transitional object' that facilitates the process of mourning for those immediately affected by the death of their loved ones and allows them to attain a sense of closure. For those in society not directly bereaved, notably later generations, the erection of a memorial in tribute to a departed leader or a select group of deceased establishes and publicly advertises a lasting, visible link with the dead they have chosen to honour. In times of political transition, the public commemoration, especially through lasting memorials, of selected dead heroes, shooting victims or fallen comrades can be a strategic move to legitimate the emergence of a new socio-political order. The recognition of the use value of specific 'dead bodies' is part of a larger process of appropriating the past for the political, social, cultural or economic purposes of the present, which many scholars see as a key characteristic of 'heritage'.¹

This political and functionalist perspective is not meant to invalidate the sense of duty to pay tribute to the dead that many individuals and organizations may genuinely experience. It does not discount the emotional contentment that the establishment of a dignified public memorial may evoke especially in those individuals who knew the deceased or were directly affected by their death. It also does not intend to question the role of such memorials in teaching the younger generation and instilling a sense of respect and gratitude for those who lost their lives for the attainment of a better life for all. While I have engaged with the emotional significance of memorials elsewhere (Marschall 2004), in this article, I want to investigate their potential as strategic tools in the pursuit of political agendas in the specific context of the embryonic post-apartheid order.

My focus is on the Umkhonto memorial (also called the ANC monument or MK statue) in Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, unveiled in what is now called Solomon Mahlangu Square in April 1991. This somewhat make-shift commemorative sculpture appears to be the very first memorial officially erected in a public space by one of the liberation movements in South Africa. It is a product and an indication of a crucial time of transition when the end of the apartheid regime and a fundamental transformation of the socio-political order were on the immediate horizon. Nelson Mandela had been released (on 11 February 1990); many apartheid laws had been repealed; and political parties previously declared illegal had been unbanned. It was a time of negotiation – over socio-political power, but also, I want to show, over the power of representing the past. With the freedom struggle being virtually over, it was a time for the 'coming out' of the different liberation movements, for the establishment of a redefined, visible public profile. Notably for the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), who share a long history of rivalry and ideological differences, this process involved a reflection on respective achievements and contributions to the Struggle as a way of legitimizing each organization's role in the emergent new order. By

extending my discussion to the Sharpeville memorial, built roughly a decade later, I argue that institutionalized commemoration through memorials, monuments and heritage sites, plays an important and ongoing role in the competitive process of laying claim to key icons of the Struggle, demonstrating ownership of significant events, and strategically appropriating important fallen heroes and scores of victims.



Umkhonto monument, Mamelodi

Mamelodi township

The area now covered by the township of Mamelodi once belonged to the farm Vlakfontein 329JR, located about 12 miles from the city centre of Pretoria in easterly direction, and subdivided into three parts in 1874. Mamelodi was founded on 30 October 1945 when the Pretoria City Council bought parts two and three from the African and European Investment Company Ltd for the purpose of establishing a black residential area. Vlakfontein (“Vlakke”) was officially proclaimed a township in June 1953 and re-named Mamelodi, ‘place of joy’ in Tswana, in July 1962. When Mamelodi became fully occupied in the late 1950s, additional land was acquired to the east, specifically to house people who had forcibly been removed from Lady Selbourne, which was declared a white group area in 1958 (Walker et al 1991).

The township was administered by the Mamelodi Town Council, originally established as the Mamelodi Community Council in 1977 (later called Mamelodi City Council). As there were no large taxable businesses in the area, the collection of rents were the only form of income for the council and decisions about rent increases were highly unpopular, often leading to protests and tensions. In the early 1980s, the Mamelodi Civic Association was established as part of the greater Civics Association movement that spread throughout South Africa during this period, challenging the legitimacy of black urban councils. The Mamelodi Civic Association to some extent became an opposition party to the Mamelodi City Council, pushing for a concept of one-city, one tax-base. Residents were encouraged to show solidarity against the council through rent boycotts, and Mamelodi, like other townships, became increasingly run-down as a result.

As in other townships throughout the country, the period of the 1980s was marked by unrest and violence in Mamelodi. In 1985-86 riots broke out over rent increases. In 1985, a crowd of 80 000 gathered outside the Mamelodi Town Council offices with a number of grievances; shots were fired and 13 people were killed in what became known as the Mamelodi Massacre. On 9 July 1990 another rent rally was held at the local Pitje Stadium and 230 people were injured when tear gas and rubber bullets were fired. Three Councillors and the mayor, A. Kekana, resigned from the Council in 1985; eventually all councillors (except one) in both Mamelodi and Atteridgeville resigned (Walker et al 1991; Jacobson personal conversation 2004).

Umkhonto memorial

In this context of victory for the politically conscious, the Mamelodi Civic Association came forth with the idea of a memorial for the fallen cadres of MK or Umkhonto We Sizwe ('Spear of the Nation'), the armed wing of the ANC. Although the Civic Association was not officially party-affiliated, Pasty Malefo (personal communication 2004), who was then in the association's public relations office, recalls that all its members were ANC supporters at the time. Local activist, Richard Chauke, became the chair of the monument committee.² The initial plan was to set up a 'proper' monument and money was collected from the residents of Mamelodi, but as there were not enough funds, a local welder was eventually commissioned to make the present statue. The metal sculpture represents the elements of the ANC logo – the wheel, the shield and the spear, held up high by the stylized figure of a man made of square tubing.

Ideologically and visually (in terms of its somewhat make-shift nature), the Umkhonto Memorial can perhaps be seen as a belated culmination point of the 'People's Parks' phenomenon, which manifested itself in the mid 1980s in Mamelodi and several other townships in the region. The short-lived People's Parks were linked to the ANC's "operation clean-up" campaign and encouraged township residents to actively take charge of the cleaning up and beautification – through creative, artistic statements – of their environment. It was meant to reclaim public spaces and simultaneously conscientize people towards the aims of the liberation movement (Sack 1989). Mamelodi in that sense has a tradition of creatively marking resistance through sculptural productions on public display. Although Richard Chauke was still imprisoned on Robben Island at the time of the People's Parks, other committee members had been part of that experience and may have been influenced by it (Personal interview Mailula and Khumalo 2003).

The memorial was set up adjacent to the site where the 'Mamelodi Massacre' had occurred in 1985, thus establishing the symbolic significance of the place, which has recently been powerfully reinforced through upgrading and additional 'framing' of the site, as will be discussed below. The surrounding square was renamed in honour of local activist, Solomon Mahlangu, who had been executed by the apartheid regime in 1979. Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu (1956-1979) was born in Mamelodi and became involved in the liberation struggle in the context of the June 1976 student uprisings. He joined the ANC and left the country in October 1976 to be trained as a member of MK. In June 1977 he returned to South Africa and was arrested by government authorities following a shooting incident in Johannesburg, in which two whites were killed. Although the court

accepted that Mahlangu had not fired a shot, he was sentenced to death on 2 March 1978. On the eve of his hanging in Pretoria Central Prison on 6 April 1979, the United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting to protest the execution and U.S. President Jimmy Carter made a personal appeal for commutation. Mahlangu immediately became a martyr to the liberation struggle and an icon of the prevailing injustice; his execution prompted a new wave of international condemnation of the apartheid regime (Uwechue 1991:431-2; Karis and Gerhart 1997:282-286). Mahlangu was originally buried in Atteridgeville, but exhumed and reburied in the local Mamelodi cemetery two years after the unveiling of the Umkhonto memorial; his grave site is easily identifiable due to a fairly prominent memorial stone, topped by a cylindrical marker displaying the ANC logo.

The Umkhonto memorial was unveiled on 6 April 1991 by Chris Hani, who had just taken over as the new Chief of Staff of MK and Mahlangu's mother, Martha (Anonymous 1991b), although the plaque mentions only the former. The presence of the mother links the local hero to the unnamed group of fallen cadres that the memorial is dedicated to. It emphasizes the human aspect of the occasion, allowing others to emotionally identify with the victim(s) through the mother's personal grief. The presence of Hani, a ranking member of both the ANC military wing and the SA Communist Party, stresses the organizational aspect: Mahlangu's symbolic significance as a courageous member and martyr of the liberation struggle; the memorial as a tribute to him as an individual hero, but also to all those who died with him for the cause of liberation. It is a tribute to the ANC as an organization and liberation movement in alliance with the Communist Party.

Contestation

Only days before the unveiling of the memorial, Hani had publicly remarked that a continuation of the ANC ceasefire would depend on 'the behaviour of the regime'. According to a newspaper report in *The Star*, this reinforced "Hani's image among whites as that of the man to be most feared in the ANC, the dark side of the new South Africa" (Johnson 1991). Hani had replaced Joe Slovo as 'white South Africa's *bête noire*' (ibid). Only days after its unveiling, the contested nature of the new memorial, this bold affirmation of black liberation values and tribute to MK, became evident. A newspaper report in the *Sowetan* on 9 April quotes Pasty Malefo as saying that the statue had been removed for "safe-keeping".

He could not, however, confirm reports that the statue was removed following threats by right-wing elements to deface it. Reports circulating in Pretoria yesterday suggested a minibus-load of armed men had gone to the statue. ... The men were driven away by residents (Anonymous 1991).

It is not clear precisely when this happened, but Hlomane Khumalo (ANC), Chairperson of the South African Civic Organisation Mamelodi, explains that short after the unveiling of the memorial a group of opponents clandestinely approached the statue during the night and fixed explosives to its middle section (personal interview 2003). Their assumed intention to blow up or melt down the entire sculpture failed, but the circular hole in its centre remains a lasting testimony to the incident. Although the remarkable regularity of the hole almost suggests that the statue may have originally been cast with the hole, early

photographs show the statue intact (e.g. published in the *New Nation* on 12 April and *Beeld* on 10 May 1991). The hole has unintentionally become a powerful signifier supporting and dramatizing the memorial's implicit narrative. By impressively embellishing the force and extent of opposition, the statue in retrospect becomes a striking assertion of the liberation movement and 'the people' against the violent opposition of a minute, but ruthless, reactionary minority.

But the Umkhonto memorial was not only contested by white right-wingers. Clearly before the above incident happened, *Beeld* published a photograph of the memorial (on 10 May 1991) covered in spray-painted PAC slogans (the incident reportedly occurred on Worker's Day). An anonymous pamphlet had been distributed in Mamelodi, accusing Richard Chauke of embezzlement in the context of the memorial's erection. Chauke insisted that he didn't believe the PAC to be responsible for the vandalism, but rather somebody who intends to cause friction between the ANC and the PAC (Anonymous 1991a). This must be understood in the context of the two organizations' history of competition and sometimes violent outbursts of rivalry, but also in the context of persisting hopes of healing past differences at the dawn of a new era.

Competition ANC – PAC

The ANC was founded in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress to represent the interests of the marginalized African majority. From the late 1940s onwards, tensions and ideological differences within the organization came to the fore. They were partly the result of the growing acceptance of Marxist ideas in a context of increasing disillusionment with liberal humanist thought among the African elite. Some parts of the membership did not approve of the ANC's alliance with the South African Communist Party and propagated Africanist or black nationalist values. In April 1959 the latter faction seceded from the ANC and formed the PAC under the chairmanship of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and Potlako Leballo as secretary. The crucial issue of dissent was essentially over the role of whites, Indians and communists in the liberation struggle (Davenport and Saunders 2000:412; Karis and Gerhart 1997:46; Mgxashe 2006; Pheko 1994:21-27; Terreblanche 2002:349; Welsh 2000:454).

For both of the now competing organizations the mass protest action against the pass-laws, which led to the fateful shooting incident at Sharpeville in 1960, was a crucial campaign and rallying point, as will be explained below. After the Sharpeville Uprising, both the PAC and the ANC were declared illegal organizations according to new Government legislation, forcing them to operate underground. The PAC thus hardly had a year to build its organization before many of its leaders including Sobukwe were jailed; others managed to flee the country. Both the ANC and the PAC established headquarters in London and Dar-es-Salaam, and offices in various other African countries. The ANC together with the Communist Party launched its armed wing, MK, in 1961, while the PAC sponsored the underground movement *Poqo* ('We go it alone'). While the former confined violence to acts of sabotage, the latter was unequivocally engaging in terrorist activities and assassinations, often attracting more radical activists (Davenport and Saunders 2000:421; Karis and Gerhart 1997:46).

In his recently published autobiography PAC activist, Mxolisi ‘Bra Ace’ Mgxashe (2006) provides insight into the competition between the two parties from a PAC perspective, hence contributing to a fuller understanding of the South African freedom struggle. Kwesi Kwaa Prah aptly observes in his foreword to Mgxashe’s (2006:15) book that “[t]he writing of the PAC’s history is very much a poor shadow of the historiography we have seen of the ANC. Too little has been written about the PAC and much of this has to do with the relatively poor profile it has cut in comparison with the ANC.” Although more literature is gradually emerging in this field, notably from the PAC leadership (e.g. Pheko 1994, 2001, 2002), I would argue that the under-representation of the PAC story, both in the ‘writing of history’ and especially in its public representation through the heritage sector is partly a reflection of unequal power relations, but more importantly perhaps driven by a desire to protect the inspiring narrative and moral excellence of the liberation struggle as a whole from being tainted or compromised by greater exposure of the PAC’s radical stance and especially the terrorist activities of *Pogo*.

For a short while, from 1960-62, the exiled PAC and ANC were able to hold a United Front together, but this soon collapsed due to tensions within South Africa. The rivalry and ideological differences between the two organizations was further entrenched when the PAC, in opposition to the Soviet-supported ANC-Communist Party alliance, issued a pro-Peking statement in 1966 and superficially aligned itself with Maoist China. During the mid 1970s, Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, attempted to reconcile and reunite the PAC and the ANC. In his view differences over ideology and tactics should be set aside in the interest of a unified resistance movement. Despite Robert Sobukwe’s initial support for this stance, the rift between the two liberation movements continued to persist. Another ultimately unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation emanated from the ANC in the early 1990s. At the ANC’s National Congress in July 1991, the leadership was given a strong mandate to pursue constitutional negotiations and a series of meetings were subsequently held with the aim to mend the differences between the two parties. However, when the widely representative Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) assembled on 20 December 1991, the PAC refused to attend (Karis and Gerhart 1997:39/40,294,149. Davenport and Saunders 2000:448, 421. Omer-Cooper 1994:246-248). Up to the present day, the PAC has remained in opposition to the ANC.



PAC Memorial, Mamelodi

PAC memorial initiative

The idea for the Umkhonto Memorial may have originated in response to a PAC initiative for a large-scale pyramidal stone memorial set up in a prominent position in the grounds of the Mamelodi Cemetery. Although only unveiled on 1 August 1992, more than a year after the unveiling of the Umkhonto memorial, its initiator and builder, PAC leader Philemon Tefu, had begun to raise funds for this memorial some time after his release from imprisonment on Robben Island in 1986 (Khumalo personal interview 2003). Tefu, who belonged to the Mamelodi Branch of the PAC, had been arrested in 1963 shortly after attending the commemoration of the Sharpeville Uprising on 21 March and charged with conspiracy to commit acts of violence. Following a short trial in June of that year, he was sent to Robben Island and subjected to hard physical labour, but he also acquired some construction skills through his work in the Building Group. Upon his release, he built the Mamelodi memorial with stones similar to those found on Robben Island (Pheko 2002:26-31).

Sarah Mandrup (2004) interviewed Tefu (who she strangely never mentions by name, but only refers to as ‘the architect’) about the symbolism of the memorial. Tefu explained to her that the pyramid shape was meant as a symbolic link with ‘the rest of the African continent’ and that he was inspired by the PAC manifesto with its Pan-African references to one African nation stretching from Cape to Cairo. Some of the roughly hewn stones are apparently consciously positioned to cleverly allude to the geographical outline of the African continent. The similarity of the masonry work with that found on Robben Island was meant to establish a symbolic relationship between the forced labour of the political prisoners at Robben Island and the slaves who built the pyramids of Ancient Egypt (2004:16).

Unveiled by PAC president Mlamli Clarence Makwetu, the memorial is inscribed “in memory of the Poqo cadres executed by the racist minority regime and to Apla fallen combatants”, all of which are listed by name with the place and date of their death. It is significant to consider in this context, that the apartheid regime used to withhold the bodies of executed prisoners and families were often not informed where these were buried (Ali Hlongwane cited in Mandrup 2004:20). Many hanged PAC/Poqo members are apparently buried in mass graves (and without funerals) at this cemetery in Mamelodi; Tefu’s memorial is hence a collective tombstone intended to restore the dignity of those dead. But a memorial of this kind also impressively demonstrates to the families and the general public alike how the PAC as an organization cares for its comrades and honours those who sacrificed their lives in the name of the organization. With plans for such a prominent tribute to PAC members underway, the ANC may have felt the need to similarly honour their fallen combatants. Although Malefo (personal communication 2004) strongly denies that ‘the one was put up because of the other’, I believe that the history of competition between the ANC and the PAC and the unique historical circumstances of the early 1990s do support such speculation.

Verdery (1999) highlights the role of politicized funerals and reburials, the claiming of specific symbolically charged ‘dead bodies’, as a way of legitimizing a new socio-political order. The very concreteness, materiality or corporality of bones and corpses,

coffins and cremation urns, she says, can be critical to their symbolic efficacy; they can be moved around, displayed or strategically located in specific places (ibid:26). I will return to this issue below in the context of the Sharpeville memorial, where both the ANC and the PAC implicitly lay claim to the same group of bodies, namely the victims of the Sharpeville massacre. At Mamelodi, on the contrary, it was two separate groups of bodies, which were at stake: by pointing to their respective dead; by parading the sacrifices each organization has made, both the PAC and the ANC compete for credit in the attainment of freedom and legitimate a future claim to power. More than ten years after the advent of democracy, the old spirit of competition still persists and credibility is still seen to rest on the sacrifices of the past: “Our guerrillas died more than any other political party during the struggle. There were PAC members in prison long before Nelson Mandela and other ANC members,” said Motsoko Pheko, president of the PAC in refuting speculations that the PAC may join the ANC (August 2004). Similarly, much of Mgxashe’s (2006) above-mentioned autobiography reads like a personal tribute to his PAC comrades and their victimization by the security forces; in his recounting of various PAC campaigns and activities, he places particular emphasis on individually naming those who were executed by the apartheid state justice system. The ideological rift between the ANC and the PAC also still runs deeply through the Sharpeville community today and creates animosity whenever the issue is raised, concedes Eric Maringa, education officer at the Sharpeville Memorial Museum (personal communication 2006).

Recent upgrading

Although the Umkhonto memorial was always associated with Solomon Mahlangu, its visual design based on the ANC logo and its official dedication to the fallen cadres of MK represented a collective form of memorialization. Over time, the individual person of Mahlangu began to assume an increasingly more prominent role. In 1995, the Mamelodi Heritage Forum (Mahefo) was established and in 1999, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Square project was officially launched as part of the general upgrading and development of the area (Shonisani 2001). With the advent of the post-apartheid period and the emergence of township tourism, Mamelodi had become a point of attraction with a moderate flow of tourists visiting the area and the memorial. The Solomon Mahlangu Freedom Square project was integrated into the Mamelodi Tourist Route and plans for an ‘upgrading’ of the memorial emerged (Ratlou, personal communication 2003).



Solomon Mahlangu statue, Mamelodi

On 17 September 2005, an over life-size bronze statue of Solomon Mahlangu (modelled by Angus van Zyl Taylor) on a high pedestal was unveiled in place of the Umkhonto memorial. The new monument, commissioned by the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and the Mamelodi community, is dedicated “to the life of our freedom fighter, Solomon ‘Kalushi’ Mahlangu”. It shows a realistically rendered statue of the young man, dressed in combat fatigue and boots. With both feet planted firmly on the ground and a determined look on his face, the statue resembles that of Steve Biko in East London. In his hands Mahlangu holds a globe, which according to the affixed plaque, symbolizes “a combination of Africa’s riches and the world of opportunities now open to us all”.

Without wanting to engage in the contested debate about the difference between memorial and monument³, I’m quite intentionally referring to the towering new commemorative effort as a ‘monument’. It forms the centre piece of the large circular paved Mahlangu square, which visitors approach from the parking area opposite the Municipal Offices via a palm lined pathway. The approach is a staged experience, a metaphorical journey, which contains symbolic markers representing three significant phases in the recent history of the township and the country. Firstly, there are remains of the former gate-structure that once allowed security forces to control access to and from the township. These concrete pillars, now supporting text panels with information on the ‘Mamelodi Heritage Route’, represent the apartheid history of the township and more generally a symbol of oppression. Immediately in front – directly opposite the Mahlangu statue - the old Umkhonto memorial, now freshly repainted, has been re-erected, representing the first official tribute to the fallen liberation fighters and symbolizing triumph over oppression. Lastly, the new Solomon Mahlangu statue, in its very monumentality, the predominance and imposing character of its visual appearance, speaks of the confidence and firm establishment of the new order. There are no more references to the names, logos and symbols of specific political parties, although the initiated know that Mahlangu represents the ANC.

One might say that the new monument represents a shift from a collective to an elitist approach to commemoration, focused on individual leaders, martyrs, and heroes. This is arguably part of a wider trend in post-apartheid South Africa, manifesting itself in the widespread erection of bronze statues of individual (usually male) leader figures throughout the country. One might also say that through the example of Mahlangu, the struggle for freedom is personalized, allowing ordinary people to relate to it and posing a respected model of identification for the youth of Mamelodi today. This link with the community and especially the youth, ensuring the transferral of memory (and perhaps a particular ideology) to the younger generation, is further emphasized through the participation of school children in the design of the monument. Affixed to the base of the statue is a series of six small bronze relief plaques, in which local children interpret Mahlangu’s (alleged) last words, “Let my blood nourish the tree that will bear the fruits of freedom”, in the context of the new democracy and its opportunities.⁴

Through such images, children are inducted to appreciate, rather than take for granted, what their parents' generation fought for. In this context, ideological differences of the past, despite being echoed in political opposition in the present, appear petty and insignificant, being superseded by the persuasiveness of the larger liberation narrative. The younger generation's experience of the present invariably depends on its knowledge and perception of the past, because the present is always seen in a context which is causally connected to events in the past (Connerton 1989:2). In this sense, it is important how we remember and represent the past. "The way in which people choose to remember an event – indeed how they adjust to it – is as historically important as the event itself ..." notes Philip Frankel (2001:17).

Frankel's compelling book, ironically entitled *An ordinary atrocity*, presents a detailed account of the historical circumstances leading up to the Sharpeville Uprising on 21 March 1960 and the precise course of events on that fateful day. While I also want to focus on the Sharpeville massacre now, my specific concern is not with the historical facts of the event, but with the manner in which these are represented and officially commemorated. Space does not allow me to engage in an in-depth investigation of the new memorial structure (unveiled in 2002) and museum (opened in 2005) at Sharpeville; rather my specific interest, extending my earlier discussion, lies in the role of the shooting victims. I want to argue that both the ANC and the PAC attempt to appropriate the Sharpeville dead, thus carrying over the practice of memorialization as a strategic political tool into the post-apartheid period.

The Sharpeville Uprising

During the latter part of 1959, the ANC was acutely aware of its new competition in the form of the breakaway PAC movement. The commonly held view, disputed by Pheko (2001:16), is that at its annual conference in Durban in December 1959, the ANC decided to organize a mass protest action against the pass-laws, along with a national campaign for a minimum wage of £1 a day, to be held on 31 March the following year. The PAC pre-empted this plan by announcing, on 18 March 1960, its own anti-pass law campaign, to be staged on 21 March, along with a slightly higher wage demand.⁵ On this fateful day, Sobukwe and other leaders invited arrest by defying the pass-law. In townships throughout the country, crowds gathered in peaceful demonstrations and police reaction was largely non-violent. However, in Langa outside Cape Town three people were shot and at Sharpeville, a township outside Vereeniging in the Transvaal, a veritable massacre ensued when police fired into scores of fleeing protestors. Among the large crowd that had gathered in front of the Sharpeville police station that day, some people had arrived without reference books, wanting to be arrested; others were under the impression that an important announcement about the pass-laws would be made. The largely undisciplined police force inside the fenced station premises felt threatened in view of the swelling mass of noisy demonstrators and panicked. When the first shot went off, they began firing into the crowd, killing 69 people and injuring 180, many of them hit in the back as they tried to escape the carnage (Davenport and Saunders 2000:412-414; Frankel 2001; Omer-Cooper 1994:208/09).

The Sharpeville Uprising quickly became a national and international icon of the anti-apartheid struggle. The violence was widely condemned throughout the world and constituted a major turning point in international attitudes towards the apartheid regime. Economically, it led to a considerable outflow of capital from the country, eventually prompting the government to enact restrictions on currency movement. Thousands of people were detained under new emergency regulations and, as mentioned earlier, the banning of the ANC and the PAC forced the two liberation movements underground and prompted their shift towards armed resistance (ibid).

Throughout the following decades, the PAC commemorated 21 March as 'Sharpeville Day', while survivors held night vigils and engaged in other forms of mourning and remembrance of the dead. With the advent of the new post-apartheid dispensation, the ANC-led Government of National Unity decided to declare the day a public holiday, but controversy erupted over its proposed official naming as 'Human Rights Day'. This name takes the specificity out of the Sharpeville shooting incident and embeds it into a larger framework of apartheid human rights violations and anti-apartheid resistance. Molefi Makiti, one of the leaders of the PAC who was arrested in 1963 and sent to Robben Island for five years, publicly expressed his outrage in 2001, maintaining that history is being destroyed by this act and that the ANC hijacked the event (cited in Anonymous 2001). Similar comments were made by the PAC leadership on Human Rights Day of the following year (see Ndlovu 2002). Disapproval over the naming of the day was furthermore accompanied by outrage over the manner in which the day is commemorated. While the PAC leadership suggests that the day should be a one of solemn remembrance⁶, the ANC considers the public holiday a day of paying tribute but also a joyous occasion for remembering what has been achieved through this sad loss of life (Lawrence 2002:32; Frankel 2001). Similar contention exists with respect to the manner in which the Soweto Uprising is commemorated on Youth Day (26 June) each year (Anonymous 2003).

Commemorating the victims of Sharpeville

The hegemonic framing of memory through the politics of naming is extended to the actual memorial structure (accompanied by a museum), which is officially called 'Human Rights Precinct', although popularly known as the Sharpeville Memorial. The site of the shooting had been well-known within the community, but not formally marked until Nelson Mandela unveiled a small memorial stone there in 1996. The initiative for a much more prominent memorial marker and development of the surrounding site was motivated by two key trajectories. On the one hand was the increasing awareness of the unique symbolic significance of Sharpeville: firstly as locus of the 1960 massacre, secondly as the place where Nelson Mandela solemnly signed into effect the new South African Constitution in 1996, thus sealing the attainment of liberation over apartheid oppression and violence. On the other hand we find the urgent need for urban design and regeneration of this poverty-stricken, characterless township environment - for the benefit of the local community, but also for the sake of the increasing number of tourists attracted to this emotionally charged place. Following an initiative from academics at the University of Witwatersrand for the urban renewal of Sharpeville (among other areas), Gabriel Greeff, Pretoria-based architect and urban designer, became involved. At the

same time, in-depth historical research into the Sharpeville shooting incident was conducted, leading to the publication of Frankel's (2001) book. Greeff's task was to design an appropriate memorial and heritage site, which would do justice to the increasing public interest in Sharpeville and function as focal point of a new town centre, the core element that would give definition to future urban development expanding from here.



Sharpeville Memorial

On 21 March 2002, the imposing commemorative brick structure was unveiled opposite the police station, incorporating the existing small memorial. The street in front was upgraded and to the right, an accompanying, stylistically matching, museum structure was subsequently built, all of which today forms an inspiring ensemble and impressive new town centre. However, amidst the hype surrounding the unveiling, members of the local community registered their disgruntlement over the fact that they had not been consulted or involved in the project and that payments of reparations for the families of the victims were not forthcoming (Khumalo 2001). The fact that it was the ANC dominated council of Vereeniging that had pushed the project and provided funds for it may suggest an appropriation of this international icon of the anti-apartheid struggle and perhaps an attempt by the ruling party at capturing votes. The memorial was furthermore officially unveiled by Deputy President Jacob Zuma (ANC) and included Nelson Mandela (ANC) and Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa (SACP) as dignitaries.

The PAC expressed its resentment by boycotting the highly publicized function. PAC leader, Motsoko Pheko, in his publication with the telling title *The True History of Sharpeville Must be Told* (2001), sarcastically expresses his gratitude to the ANC government for building the new memorial “with the taxpayers monies of this country”, and asserts that the PAC would certainly have built “an impressive national monument in remembrance of Sharpeville” (ibid) if, he implies, his party had the same chance to help itself to such generous public funds. Pheko emphasizes that it is now “of critical importance” to let the world and the younger generation know the ‘true’ historical facts about the Sharpeville Uprising, “because there are political opportunists and mischievous mutilators of history who have a vested interest in the falsification of events ...”(2001:6).⁷

In protest of the ANC-initiated memorial, PAC officials unveiled a separate memorial at the local cemetery, where all the victims of the Sharpeville massacre lie buried (Ngidi, Mntungwa and Sapa 2002). Paralleling the Mamelodi case and almost suggesting the emergence of a geopolitical pattern of commemoration, the site of each memorial – a centrally located public place versus a cemetery at the periphery – significantly impacts on its visibility and status. The ANC-initiated memorials at both Mamelodi and Sharpeville clearly score on this point. As in Mamelodi, the memorial structure at Sharpeville marks the historical site of the massacre and constitutes a focal point within the local urban fabric. The authoritative meaning derived from the significance of the site is furthermore compounded, in both instances, by the ambitiousness, in the case of Sharpeville, outright monumentality, of the commemorative effort. The PAC’s memorial, on the other hand, draws legitimacy from the presence of the actual bodies in the cemetery. As Verdery (1999:27) points out, the presence or absence of real bodies may play a crucial role in lending authority and authenticity to any memorialization of the dead; in fact the concreteness, materiality, ‘thereness’ of actual bodies can be critical to their symbolic efficacy.



Cemetery at Sharpeville with PAC memorial and graves of Sharpeville victims

The ANC-initiated memorial, on the contrary, is only a symbolic site of commemoration, but I want to suggest that its design attempts to capture the atmosphere of a cemetery and convey an illusion of the presence of the actual dead. The most dominant element of the Sharpeville memorial is the massive red brick wall structure that serves as front entrance to the memorial precinct. Inspired by the concept of a wailing wall and monumental North African gate structures (Greeff personal communication 2004), the wall was meant to function as a clear definition, behind which lies the hallowed ground, the sacred space in which the shooting victims are eternally commemorated. A high fence with brick buttresses forms the lateral boundaries of the roughly triangular project and defines a space that is simultaneously visually accessible and physically inaccessible - respectfully extruded from ordinary street life. Inside, all 69 victims are represented and ‘present’ through individually named symbolic ‘headstones’.

Conclusion

For many members of the PAC leadership, the Sharpeville Memorial was obviously just another incident in a series of attempts by the ANC to lay claim to the sacrifices and achievements of the Struggle and take control over key symbols, sites and icons associated with it. The Sharpeville memorial arguably renews or affirms the old rivalry between the two former liberation movements and current opposition parties. I have tried to show how, from the very dawn of the emergent new socio-political era, both the ANC and the PAC have pointed to the dead in enhancing their public profile and legitimating their claims to sacrifices made in contribution to the freedom struggle. Through the institutionalized remembrance of selected dead martyrs, victims and fallen comrades in the form of memorials, monuments and statues, both organizations not only complement the existing 'white' memory landscape with 'black' commemorative markers, but also engage in a competitive process of using heritage for their own political needs.

Although this article focused on the rivalry between the ANC and the PAC, similar observations can be made in many other cases of commemorative projects established in the context of the rapidly expanding post-apartheid heritage sector. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, politically contested between the ANC and the ethnic Zulu dominated Inkatha Freedom Party, heritage is inevitably a battlefield and new monument initiatives tend to be embroiled in political debate and sometimes stalled in resultant bureaucratic processes. In the Port Elizabeth township of New Brighton, the Emlotheni Memorial Park, a heroes' acre built in honour of six ANC affiliated anti-apartheid cadres executed by the apartheid regime, is challenged by members of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), whose role in the local struggle for liberation the new memorial implicitly erases (Hansen 2003). On the surface, most of these new statues, monuments, museums, memorials and heritage sites institutionalize official discourses of black resistance to white oppression and serve as symbols of reconciliation and nation-building. Below the surface, an investigation of their development process, their design and reception often prompts a much more critical and multilayered reading, in which tensions and fissures are revealed and silenced voices of opposition suggest the emergence of new hegemonies in remembering and representing the past.

This article featured two memorials erected by competing political parties in tribute to their respective members during the final days of the apartheid era. Today one of these parties is leading the post-apartheid government and vigorously driving the construction of new memorials and heritage sites throughout the country. In this process, the interpretation of the past is sometimes shaped, consciously or inadvertently, to coincide with the ANC's own preferred reading of specific historical narratives and the significance of their protagonists. Crudely put, the ANC carries on building monuments in honour of their own leaders and their contributions, declared as the heritage of the post-apartheid nation, while the PAC – now a minute opposition party within the democratically elected government – lacks the political clout to effectively impact on the physical shaping of the emergent public memory landscape. The same counts for other minority groups and opposition political parties in different local contexts, who can only resist the prevailing hegemonic force through speeches, publications and performative action, often supported by the media. As much as it is important to build inspiring new

heritage sites of national identification to balance the bias inherited from the past order, and as much as South Africa's newly established heritage sites indisputably represent majority values, in a multicultural democracy it is nevertheless important not to forget those who have alternative stories to tell.

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ENDNOTES

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² The history of this memorial and the circumstances of its inception appear to be completely undocumented. Apart from Pasty Malefo, I am grateful to Hlomane Khumalo, Chairperson of the current South African Civic Organisation Mamelodi, and Jabu Mailula from the Mamelodi Tourism Committee, who have been very helpful in reconstructing some of this history in a personal interview in January 2003.

³ I have engaged with this debate elsewhere. See Marschall 2006.

⁴ The images interpret these words "in the context of our new democracy and opportunities that can be attained due to this freedom". Each of the images is explained in a caption, e.g. 'Through the fruits of freedom all people in South Africa are united'; 'Through the fruits of freedom all people can harvest from our land'; 'Through the fruits of freedom education will make us strong'.

⁵ Pheko (2001:16) claims that the ANC had planned no such campaign and that the PAC had already taken the decision for a campaign against pass laws at its December 1959 conference.

⁶ On 22 March 2002, PAC secretary general Thami ka Platjie was quoted as saying, "The ANC has chosen to celebrate Sharpeville by turning it into a social jamboree that involves playing gangster rap and kwaito. We think Sharpeville should be commemorated in a solemn, dignified manner in remembrance of our fallen heroes." (Ngidi, Mntungwa and Sapa 2002); see also Anonymous (2000) and Anonymous (2001).

⁷ The dispute is really about the PAC's perception that the ANC led government is distorting the history of the liberation struggle by not according the Sharpeville Uprising the significant status it deserves. As Pheko (2001:24) puts it in the concluding sentences of his book, "when one day the true history of this country is written, the Sharpeville Uprising shall assume the prominence of an historical watershed." The fact that the younger generation at present has considerable knowledge about June 16, but is only vaguely familiar with the historical events of the Sharpeville Uprising (a fact that I can certainly confirm from observations among my own students!), suggests that these young people are acquiring an historical consciousness in which ANC-initiated campaigns loom large, whereas the PAC's contribution is all but negligible.