



**Stellenbosch**  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

## Professorial Inaugural Lecture

Place, power, and the past:  
Memorialisation and  
monumentalisation of religion as a  
challenge to South African history

The Cathedral of St Michael and  
St George, Grahamstown, 1992 - 1996

**Prof Henry Mbaya**

Faculty of Theology

# 2023

## Professorial Inaugural Lecture

**Place, power, and the past: Memorialisation and monumentalisation of religion as a challenge to South African history**

**The Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Grahamstown, 1992-1996**

**Plek, mag, en die verlede: Die herdenking en monumentalisering van godsdiens as 'n uitdaging vir die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis**

**Die Katedraal van St Michael en St George, Grahamstad, 1992-1996**

Inaugural lecture delivered on 26 September 2023

**Prof Henry Mbaya**

Faculty of Theology

Stellenbosch University

ISBN: 978-0-7972-1906-9

Copyright © 2023 Henry Mbaya

## Biography of author

**Prof Henry Mbaya** completed a diploma in Sacred Theology at St Paul's Theological College in Grahamstown (Makhanda) in 1985. Continuing his theological studies at Rhodes University, he graduated with his BThHons in 1988. He was ordained priest in the Anglican Church in 1990. Henry went on to obtain his master's degree and doctorate in Theology in 1997 and 2005, at the University of Natal and the University of KwaZulu-Natal respectively. His professional academic career started as lecturer at the University of Fort Hare in 2009. In January 2012, he joined Stellenbosch University's Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, and moved to the Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology in 2020.

Henry's research focus spans two areas, namely Anglican mission history and African culture in Southern Africa in the late 19th and the 20th century. In his research on mission history, he critiques an Anglican missionary approach to African culture in Southern Africa, while simultaneously illuminating the complex nature of Anglican missionary work in the region at the time. Over the past 11 years, his research has also focused on the historical development of indigenous Christianity in South Africa.

Since 2005, Henry has participated in 12 international and ten national conferences. He has supervised six masters students and five doctoral candidates and is currently the promotor of another six PhD students. A recipient of the Rector's Research Excellence Award in 2020, he has a C-rating from the National Research Foundation and has produced 45 peer-reviewed and five non-peer-reviewed articles and papers. Henry is also the author of two monographs, with another one on the way.

### **Prof Henry Mbaya**

Faculty of Theology



# Place, power, and the past: Memorialisation and monumentalisation of religion as a challenge to South African history

## The Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Grahamstown, 1992 - 1996

Prof Henry Mbaya

### Abstract

In this inaugural address, Prof Henry Mbaya discusses the controversy that occurred in Grahamstown (Makhanda) in 1992 involving a group of black students and staff of the then St Paul's Theological College and members of the Anglican Cathedral of St Michael and St George. The controversy centred on the term 'Kaffir' used on five 19th-century English colonial memorial plaques in the cathedral with reference to the amaXhosa, as opposed to the heroic depiction of the English in the context of the wars of subjugation of the amaXhosa. Using the concepts of history, memory and power, Prof Mbaya explores the significance of the plaques and proposes that the historical narratives of the amaXhosa be included and placed alongside those of the English colonial settlers.

## **Place, power, and the past: Memorialisation and monumentalisation of religion as a challenge to South African history**

### ***The Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Makhanda<sup>1</sup>, 1992-1996***

Cathedral Tower (Photograph by William Martinson)



### ***Colonial expansion, memory, and history***

According to David Lowenthal, "the past is a foreign country"; "they do things different there"<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, the past is a foreign territory, for it includes contours of memories that appear to have been lost in the mist of history. It remains unfamiliar because its ways of doing are buried in memory. As Lowenthal says: "The past is a foreign country whose features are forged by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges."<sup>3</sup> The past is alien because it is largely buried in the myths of history. And yet, the past lives with us. It stubbornly refuses to let go, as it keeps reminding us where we come from. Signs, symbols and signifiers of history seem to serve as beacons of the long shadow of the past. Nevertheless, the past keeps inviting us to revisit it so that we might understand ourselves better in the present. It cannot be completely ignored, precisely because it defines the present moment and shapes and determines the future.

In the 1990s, as South Africa moved towards an open society, a part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historic past of the Cathedral of St Michael and St George in Makhanda, formerly Grahamstown, appeared to rear its head. Like an unplacated ghost, it had come to haunt some white and amaXhosa members of the cathedral. The controversy that arose centred on the historic narratives that were installed in the cathedral and the John Graham monument, next to the cathedral in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, it revolved around the derogatory name of "kaffirs" that was used to refer to amaXhosa and their role in the English colonial wars.

---

1. Grahamstown was renamed Makhanda in 2018. Luke Daniel 2018 "Breaking: Grahamstown officially renamed as Makhanda" 3 October <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/grahamstown-now-makhanda-eastern-cape-south-africa/> Accessed 22/07/2023.  
2. David Lowenthal, 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, xvi.  
3. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* xvii.

In this respect, this address precisely seeks to address the issue of the relationship between history, memory, religion – in this case, Christianity – and national identities in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. From this viewpoint, the aim of the address is twofold: First, it seeks to highlight the impact of colonialism and apartheid on the amaXhosa in Makhanda, specifically in relation to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century narratives installed in the Cathedral of St Michael and St George. Secondly, to address this challenge, the lecture proposes a more inclusive and diverse approach to memorialisation and monumentalisation, where the oral narratives of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century amaXhosa are considered through whatever is left of some of their traditions today.

The address has been structured as follows: The first part highlights the European colonial expansion into the Cape Colony in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent years, focusing on the then Eastern Frontier (Makhanda and the surrounding areas), the centre of the English colonial wars, and the erection of the Cathedral of St Michael and St George in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second part deals with the controversy that arose at the cathedral in Makhanda in the 1990s with regard to the memorial inscriptions. The third part situates the debate within the theoretical concepts of history, memorialisation, monumentalisation, and power. Finally, the address makes some proposals for the consideration of the oral narratives of the amaXhosa pertaining to that colonial episode, as a missing link to be installed in the cathedral alongside those of the colonial settlers.

## **Modernity and coloniality – the Cape Colony**

In his book *Local Histories/Global Designs*,<sup>4</sup> Walter Dignolo notes that in the period between 1500 up to the 2000s, Western history has dominated global histories, belief systems and knowledges. He states that “one local history, that of the Western civilization, built itself as the point of arrival and owner of human history.”<sup>5</sup> This local history and knowledge, Dignolo asserts, presumed the totality of all knowledges. It projected itself as the final expression and fulfilment, and the arbiter of other knowledges and belief systems. It claimed to own local knowledges and belief systems. It was a systematic attempt not only to own, but to obliterate these knowledges.<sup>6</sup>

According to Dignolo, prior to the occupation of geographical space, the process of the colonisation of non-Europeans was first conceived epistemologically. “In the sixteenth century,” so he asserts, “Spanish missionaries judged and ranked human intelligence and civilization by whether the people were in possession of the alphabetic writing. This was an initial moment in the configuration of the colonial difference and the building of the Atlantic imaginary, which will become the imaginary of the modern/colonial world.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, literacy (writing) was elevated as a special tool to build the colonial imaginary.

As time passed, space and geography became a determining factor in the configuration of coloniality.<sup>8</sup> Dignolo writes: “Towards the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, the measuring stick was history and no longer writing. ... People without history were located in a time before the present. ... People with history could write the history of those people without.”<sup>9</sup>

In both principle and practice, colonial epistemology formally legitimised and reinforced relations of supremacy between those who perceived themselves to occupy the “centre” of the European metropolis and the subservient on the margins. In this discourse and European framework, “[t]he native would be brought into the European world, but as a recipient of a gift he [she] could never return – except by acknowledging, gratefully, his own subordination. And in this colonizing project the Christian missionary would play a special role as agent, scribe, and moral alibi.”<sup>10</sup>

---

4. Walter Dignolo, 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs, Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

5. Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

6. Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

7. Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

8. Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

9. Dignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

10. Jean & John Comaroff, 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution, Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* Vol 1 Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 88.

The Dutch East India Company, or Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), was a capital-driven multinational mercantile corporation with a number of Dutch commercial interests, supported by the Dutch government and military.<sup>11</sup> By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, it had grown into one of the largest and most profitable commercial companies at the time.<sup>12</sup> Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape in April 1652 to take charge of the VOC as a staging post.

With the occupation of the Cape, Europe, as a geographical space, encountered Africa, vice versa. Henceforth, the Cape (Africa) would be caught up in a matrix of relationships with Europe. Within the space of two centuries, the English would capture the Cape from Dutch rule twice, in 1795, and again in 1806.<sup>13</sup>

## English colonial wars of conquest – the Eastern Frontier

### *The Cathedral of St Michael and St George*

The first European contact with amaXhosa, a Nguni tribe, took place in 1770, in what was then called the Eastern Frontier (today, Eastern Cape), the coastal belt between the Sundays and Kei rivers.<sup>14</sup> This became the scene of armed clashes between the English and amaXhosa.<sup>15</sup> However, the first encounter between amaXhosa and a missionary, Johannes van der Kemp, of the London Missionary Society, took place in 1799 (150 years after Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape) when he visited and settled at Chief Ngqika.<sup>16</sup> This was after the British first captured the Colony from the Dutch in 1795.<sup>17</sup>

In the aftermath of the Boer trek (1835 to the 1840s)<sup>18</sup> and the expulsion of Chief Ndlambe and some 20 000 of his followers from Zuurveld in 1811, the British government proceeded with their plans to colonise the region.<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to maintain "order", Cape governor John Cradock decided to station Cape Hottentots in the Zuurveld. In 1812, Cradock proclaimed the territory as Grahamstown, named after John Graham. It became the seat of the magistrate of Albany.<sup>20</sup>

- 
11. Oscar Gelderblom, Joost Jonker & Abe de Jong, 2013. "The Formative Years of the Modern Corporation: The Dutch East India Company, VOC, 1602-1623" <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254453227> Accessed 16/07/2023.
  12. Gelderblom, Jonker & de Jong, "The Formative Years of the Modern Corporation: The Dutch East India Company, VOC, 1602-1623."
  13. Richard Elphick, 1991. "Introduction" in Richard Elphick & Rodney Davenport (eds) *Christianity in South Africa* Oxford: James Currey., 2, 3.
  14. Janet Hodgson, 1997. "A Battle for Sacred Power: Christian Beginnings among the Xhosa" in Richard Elphick & Rodney Davenport, (eds). *Christianity in South Africa* Oxford: James Currey, 69.
  15. Hodgson, "A Battle for Sacred Power", 69.
  16. Hodgson, "A Battle for Sacred Power", 69.
  17. Richard Elphick, 1991. "Introduction" in Richard Elphick & Rodney Davenport (eds) *Christianity in South Africa* Oxford: James Currey. 2, 3.
  18. See Gideon Roos, 1950. "The Great Trek" *The Australian Quarterly* 22(4):35-40 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20633301.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A70e90aaed266b11be0bd1cb0b03865d6&ab\\_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20633301.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A70e90aaed266b11be0bd1cb0b03865d6&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1) Accessed 28/07/2023.
  19. See Henry Mbaya, 2021. "History, Memory, Space and Power: the controversy over memorial plaques-Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George, Grahamstown, 1992-1996" *Anglican Theological Review* 1-19 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00033286211025950>. Accessed 22/07/2023.
  20. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 6.

The arrival of the 1820 settlers marked a significant phase in the colonisation of the ancestral land of amaXhosa. It is said that at his personal instigation, then Cape governor Lord Charles Somerset convinced the colonial government to pay "for the building of the church" on the farm De Rietfontein,<sup>21</sup>

where there is a British population of 3 000 persons (including military) totally destitute of any place of worship whatever ...<sup>22</sup>

This marked the start of the establishment of what is today known as the Cathedral of St Michael and St George. Initially starting as a military church, – it took 128 years.<sup>23</sup>

To amaXhosa, the imposing building represented an invasion by a "foreign land", an "alien people", and a "strange culture". It constituted what the French philosopher Michel Foucault calls a *heterotopia*, "a strange place within a normal place"; an "abnormality" in a "normal place".<sup>24</sup> To amaXhosa, that which had been familiar to them was now unfamiliar. It was the start of the long process of colonising their consciousness. In this respect, amaXhosa history had been invaded. In 1910, a century later, the prominent missionary Archdeacon G Woodroffe stated:

It is said among the natives that upon this very spot was placed a kraal of a popular chief, Ndlambe, who claimed authority over all the country from the Keiskama to the Sunday Rivers.<sup>25</sup>

On the very place that once stood Ndlambe's kraal now stood the cathedral. The amaXhosa's space had been colonised by the English. This space gave the settlers the identity of conquerors. From Foucault's point of view, the location of spaces and structures is critical to the process of knowledge generation and has implications for power relations. In his view, "space is interconnected with the notion of geography, the location of spaces (structures), their distribution, and interrelatedness; how these are managed and controlled; hence, knowledge and power is implied".<sup>26</sup>

## **Contestations of colonial history in the cathedral in the 1990s**

In the 1990s, as South Africa was transitioning towards an open society, some facets of the history preserved in the cathedral came to be highly disputed, "reminding Blacks of the oppression of their ancestors, and of theirs too in the recent years".<sup>27</sup> The contestation "related to the wider debate on the national level of replacing, or transforming colonial symbols, giving them new meaning in the new democratic era. It was an attempt to 'decolonise' symbols".<sup>28</sup>

---

21. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 6.

22. Richard Marshall, 2009. *A Social and Cultural History of Grahamstown, 1812-c1845* MA thesis Rhodes University, 95. See Mbaya "History, Memory, Space and Power", 7.

23. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 7.

24. Johan Cilliers, 2013. "Power, Space, and Knowledge: Theological-Aesthetical Perspectives on Michel Foucault's Contribution to Post-Colonial Theory" *Scriptura* 112:1–13. <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC148120>. Accessed 22/07/2023.

25. Sermon preached by Archdeacon Woodroffe in St George's Cathedral on 6 Nov 1910. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power" citing MS AB 1009 "The Centenary Naves Memories of the Past", 7.

26. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 7.

27. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 9.

28. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power". For more on this issue, see Henry Mbaya 2018 *Resistance to and Acquiescence in Apartheid. St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, 1965-1992*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press 213–215.



Memorial tablet to Gordon Nourse (Photograph by: Roger Fisher)



Memorial tablet to Thomas Charles White (Photograph by: Roger Fisher)

Chichele Hewitt, who served as the warden of St Paul's College in 1992, states that the issue of the memorial plaques "had been raised on previous occasions within the diocese but this time [in 1992], the issue was more focussed".<sup>29</sup> He recalls that a series of meetings led to an extraordinary meeting of the church council on 12 October 1992. According to Hewitt, there were five plaques that contained the offensive term "kaffir".<sup>30</sup>

One memorial commemorating Robert Bambrick, John Norton, Gordon Nourse, FD Howell, TC White and John Graham ... [was] found offensive.<sup>31</sup>

The debate surrounding the memorial plaques inside the cathedral was significant from another perspective as well. Though the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT) would occur only 23 years later, in 2015/16,<sup>32</sup> scholarly insights on that movement seem to share many of the points raised during the 1992 controversy. Writing from the perspective of the debate on national statues, specifically in the context of the #RhodesMustFall movement, Vhumani Magezi<sup>33</sup> cites British philosopher Thomas Carlyle: "It is in and through symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being: those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognise symbolical worth, and prize it highest." Magezi then goes on to argue:

The [UCT] students ... interpreted the statue in their context of marginalisation and a sense of alienation from a white-dominated university and its alienating culture ... Placing Rhodes at a prestigious public university in Africa symbolised approval of the ideas and ideals that the imperialist stood for. And if that is the case, then the university's position was open to be questioned.<sup>34</sup>

29. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 11.  
 30. For further details about these artefacts, see "Cathedral church of St Michael and St George" [https://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldframes\\_mob.php?bldgid=6472](https://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldframes_mob.php?bldgid=6472) Accessed 01/08/2023.  
 31. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", citing MS 18062 "A Memorandum from staff and students, St. Paul's College, Frontier War Memorial Plaques in the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George, Rhodes University Cory Library, Makhanda", 11.  
 32. <https://za.boell.org/en/2018/02/19/rhodesmustfall-it-was-never-just-about-statue> Accessed 22/07/2023.  
 33. Vhumani Magezi, 2018. "A public practical-theological response and proposal to decolonisation discourse in South Africa: From #YourStatueMustFall and #MyStatueShouldBeErected to #BothOurStatues ShouldBeErected", *HTS Theological Studies* 74 (1), as cited in Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 11-12.  
 34. Cited in Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 11-12.

Another example relates to the Voortrekker monument in Pretoria, which has been treated with some suspicion. Dolf Britz cites Alta Steenkamp asserting:

The Voortrekker Monument is aesthetically suspect because it is tied to an architectural language that equates order with the 'civilised'; politically suspect because it is seen as a representative of apartheid totalitarianism; socially suspect because it is seen as a privileged mode of expression that excluded the 'other'; and ethically suspect in its size and attempt to overwhelm the visitor by its grandiosity.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, by the 1990s, memorial inscriptions in the cathedral, as well as the building as a monument, had become objects of suspicion, similar to some of the other monuments in South Africa. Siyabulela Gidi, an Anglican priest, was a student at St Paul's College in 1992. He and fellow student Themba Philips refused to be ordained in the cathedral by Bishop David Russell in protest against the monuments. The students' refusal to be ordained was significant, being "an act of defiance that symbolically had significant power implications".<sup>36</sup>

But there is yet another layer of significance to the issue of memorial inscriptions and the cathedral as symbols and signs. Paul Tillich highlights the significance of a symbol, stating that it transcends itself, pointing to the ultimate reality.<sup>37</sup> He argues that "[symbols] point towards the infinite which they represent and towards the finite through which they symbolize", hence they are "double-edged".<sup>38</sup>

However, Tillich draws a distinction between a symbol and a sign. He asserts that "while the sign bears no necessary relation to that which it represents, the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands".<sup>39</sup> The symbol is a "medium of revelation"; "a bearer of the mystery of being" that becomes part of the meaning of the reality it seeks to convey; hence, it can open up reality on different levels, with which one enters into a relationship either emotionally or spiritually.<sup>40</sup>

While symbols can evoke positive or negative emotions, signs cannot. This renders symbols more powerful than signs. In light of Tillich's explication, the historical inscriptions in the cathedral had more to them than being mere objects and materials. Situated inside the cathedral, they had acquired a quasi-religious aura and mystique. Consequently, it is possible that they conveyed a deep mystical religious meaning to some white members of the cathedral, to the extent that some members entered into some meaningful fellowship with them, having developed some attachment. This would explain some of these members' reluctance to part with the symbols: The symbols had become part of their worshipping framework and environment.

It is evident that what Gidi and others were fighting against were these deep-seated cultures, ethos and systems that undermined black dignity. There (is) was something of a contradiction here: blacks "celebrating" ordination in the very space where the messages on the plaques insulted them and undermined their dignity. In this regard, Hewitt states:

Black people found these [plaques and inscriptions] offensive in a place of worship, and some white people wanted them retained as these were their ancestors and part of their history.<sup>41</sup>

---

35. Dolf Britz, 2018. "The religious statement of the Voortrekker Monument as a site of Afrikaner memory: Origin, composition and reception" *HTS Theological Studies* 74(3), citing Alta Steenkamp 2006 "Apartheid to democracy: Representation and politics in the Voortrekker Monument and Red Location Museum" *Theory* 10(3/4):254. Accessed 22/07/2023.

36. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 10.

37. Paul Tillich, 1951. *Systematic Theology* Vol 1 Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 240.

38. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 240.

39. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 240.

40. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 240.

41. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 13.

According to the cathedral's newsletter *The Spire*, the commission of inquiry, having met in March and June 1993, recommended as follows in November 1995:

The Parish Council give serious consideration to the removal of the plaques which have been identified as offensive. A point has been reached in the history of our country at which symbolic acts of reconciliation have been welcomed by all sectors of the community and have become commonplace and unifying places in the result.<sup>42</sup>

## History, memorialisation, monumentalisation, and power

Great War memorial (Photograph by William Martinson)



The preceding discussion foregrounds the issue of the relationship between history, memory and power – how historical narratives, as inscribed on the plaques and inscriptions in the cathedral, related to history and memory, and how “memory” influenced the process of documenting and installing “historical” narratives in the cathedral in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

From a conceptual point of view, the relationship between history and memory is very complex. This paper is far too limited in scope to do it justice; instead, it engages with the concepts in very broad strokes. In this regard, I follow Robert Vosloo's engagement with the work of Paul Ricoeur.<sup>43</sup> According to Vosloo, the relationship between history and memory is dialectical in nature; there is tension between them; the two are neither exclusive, nor completely harmonious; they entangle and disentangle; neither do they necessarily overlap. However, they exist in a reciprocal relationship.<sup>44</sup>

Vosloo further asserts: “Memory is the matrix of history, and as such one cannot conceive of history without memory.”<sup>45</sup> While Vosloo cautions against the assumption “that history is merely an extension of memory”, he also states that “the stance that memory and history are antithetical should be rejected.”<sup>46</sup>

42. Chichele Hewitt, 1996. “The Dean's view on the cathedral plaques” *The Spire* November Cathedral Offices, Makhanda.

43. Robert Vosloo, 2012. “Memory, History, and Justice: In search of conceptual clarity” *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 53 <https://doi.org/10.5952/53-0-235> Accessed 24/07/2023.

44. Vosloo, “Memory, History, and Justice,” 218.

45. Vosloo, “Memory, History, and Justice,” 221.

46. Mbaya, “Memory, History, and Justice,” 221.

The debate and contestations at the cathedral in the 1990s centred on the issues of "memory" and "history" and their relevance to the context at the time. During the contestations, each group interpreted these inscribed historical narratives from their own worldviews and historical perspectives. For some whites, the inscriptions constituted part of their English legacy, of which they were proud. The narratives were designed to commit to perpetual memory the legacy of their ancestors. This led Michael Whisson, one of the prominent members of the cathedral, to state the following in November 1996, representing the position of the conservative group:

We too have inherited a great and precious trust from those who have worshipped before us and built our cathedral – it is ours to love and preserve for the generations yet to come. Let them, like us, marvel at the ages of faith in Europe and Africa as they stand at the west end and look towards the morning sun glowing in the east window. Ours is not a lineage of blood, but a lineage of faith.<sup>47</sup>

Whisson makes a crucial point: The legacy of the cathedral, the visible power of British supremacy, was an enduring sign of the European faith, which starkly contrasted with the amaXhosa relationship, which was based on blood lineage. In other words, in his view, European civilisation was in every way most superior to the amaXhosa culture and religion. The structure was meant to be preserved intergenerationally to legitimise the English defeat of the amaXhosa. In this regard, Francois-Xavier de Vaujany *et al*, defined the role of memorialisation in legitimising power as follows:

Memorialization, as organizational production of discursive accounts as claims to legitimacy ..., generates cues that strive to manage audiences' perceptions of the organization ..., as well as the creation of material *aide mémoire*, signs interpreting the past in the present, ranging from discursive inscriptions such as plaques to materializations cast in statues and buildings.<sup>48</sup>

With regard to the cathedral, therefore, it was no ordinary monument. It was an assemblage of civil and religious signage and symbolisms. Symbolically, to the colonial settlers, it epitomised British supremacy and power, and to the amaXhosa, British brutal thuggery and violence that had led to the dispossession of their land and the destruction of their property and culture.<sup>49</sup> In this process, the English colonial church worked hand in glove with the colonial state. The inscriptions and plaques proclaimed historical narratives that portrayed the English as "victors" in the wars that they had coined as the "Kaffir Wars". The English assigned to themselves the role of "heroes", while amaXhosa were made out to be the "villains". This is what provoked anger among some amaXhosa in the 1990s, as Hewitt also remarks:

The offensive nature of the plaques was two-fold: references to the Xhosa in derogatory manner, such as "barbarous enemy" ("kaffers") in contrast to the "heroic" acts and death of TC White. Then the second was the derogatory naming of places such as the SB Abye plaque that used "Caffre Drift" as a name of the place.<sup>50</sup>

Johan Cilliers states: "Monuments more than often have a spiritual character and iconic value, in the sense that they offer a space for the formation or discovery of meaning."<sup>51</sup> Monuments represent a longing for meaning beyond signs of the transcendent. Talking about monuments, Leonard Bell states that they are "cultural products" that "manifest in their material forms and the responses they generate, and, in the changing circumstances of their ongoing use, the complexities of their purported identities and relations".<sup>52</sup>

---

47. See Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 16.

48. Francois-Xavier de Vaujany, Emmanuelle Vaast, Stewart Clegg & Jeremy Aroles, 2020. "Organizational Memorialization: Spatial History and Legitimation as Chiasms" *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* [https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/27078643/Organizational\\_Memorialization.pdf](https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/27078643/Organizational_Memorialization.pdf) 6. Accessed 22/07/2023.

49. Denver Webb, 2014. "The war took its origins in a Mistake": The third war of Dispossession and Resistance in the Cape of Good Hope Colony, 1799–1803" *Scientia Militaria* 42(2) <https://doi.org/10.5787/42-2-1094> Accessed 22/07/2023.

50. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 13.

51. Johan Cilliers, 2015. "God in Granite? Aesthetical-theological perspectives on the Monumentalization of Religion" *Scriptura* 114:1–13.

52. Leonard Bell, 2006. "Auckland Master Centrepiece: Unsettled Identities, Unstable Monuments" in A.E. Coombes (ed) *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa* Manchester: Manchester University Press, cited by Sue Kossew 2010 "Re-Reading the Past: Monuments, History and Representation in Short Stories by Ivan Vladislavić and Zoë Wicomb" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36(3):571–582.

However, the occupation of space posed some inherent contradictions. In the very spot where Chief Ndlambe and his people had once performed rituals for their ancestors, the same practices that the missionaries condemned as "heathen" rituals, the English now commemorated their own heroes ("martyrs") who had died in the "Kaffir Wars". Foucault demonstrates the existence of a link between space, power and knowledge. In his view, space is never neutral, but is associated with creativity: "[It] is both productive and negative, locally defined and yet immanent within particular fields of technology and action. ... Space is a vital part of the battle for control and surveillance of individuals, but it is a battle and not a question of domination."<sup>53</sup> The cathedral was never a neutral space. The presence of the historical narratives turned it into a "space of alienation", a "heterotopia", for amaXhosa because the narratives evoked the memory of trauma of their ancestral past. It perpetually reminded them of the English subjugation, control and disdain of their ancestors centuries ago.

## **A quest for more inclusive historical narratives – amaXhosa**

In conclusion, the foregoing discussion demonstrates that historical narratives in the cathedral were part of what could be called a Hegelian view of history, which invokes "a totalitarian historical consciousness in support of the status quo".<sup>54</sup> This perspective of history sees the rise of a national consciousness coterminous with a view of "progress" to subdue the "Other." Aspects of colonial history appeared to justify the colonisation of amaXhosa, painting them in a very negative light. It bordered on propaganda. In other words, it denied amaXhosa their "proper" role in colonial history. The narratives appeared to clash in spirit with some marginal historical narratives that suggested that amaXhosa were an independent-minded people. In 1847, for example, Reverend William Shaw, a Methodist missionary at the Cape, stated:

The border Kaffirs know that the white nations apply this name to them, and many of them regard it as a term of contempt.<sup>55</sup>

Or as Dunbar Moodie observed in another context:

[AmaXhosa] are a reasoning and independent people who have no prejudices in favour of Christianity, and have no immediate interest to serve by adopting our religion; and it is only by argument that they are to be convinced of its truth.<sup>56</sup>

To put it in Ricoeurian perspective, the memorial inscriptions in the cathedral told but one of many sides to the story. There were many gaps or grey areas. As Ricoeur cautions, memory can indeed be abused, which is why it must be viewed "with both suspicion and trust".<sup>57</sup>

Karl Marx, in turn, drew attention to the moral dimension of history:

True history begins only when humanity breaks with its irrational prehistory and learns to act collectively and freely – and that means with full historical consciousness of its past and future. Of course, this last thought – the need to develop historical consciousness in order to become fully free and human – today seems rather quaint by the eyes of contemporary postmodernists for whom there was never a history to be conscious of.<sup>58</sup>

---

53. Stuart Elden & Jeremy Crampton, (eds) 2007. *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* Aldershot: Ashgate.

54. Theodor W Adorno, 2006. *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965* Polity Press.

55. Mbaya, "History, Memory, Space and Power", 11.

56. J.W.D Moodie, 1835. *Ten Years in South Africa: Including A Particular Description of the wild sports of that country*. vol. 2. Richard Bentley: London, 1835, 278-279.

57. Vosloo, "Memory, History, and Justice", 223.

58. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*.

From this perspective, recording and narrating history entails the process of dealing with human behaviour and freedom, which implies issues of human dignity. In other words, the fact that history is concerned with *meaning*, experience and historical consciousness is not irreconcilable with the issues of equality and human dignity. Ojukwu Chijoke<sup>59</sup> takes the discussion further in stating: "It is memory that affirms the dignity of the oppressed and the humanity of the enemy whilst recollecting the act of injustice." Memory, history and identity are intrinsically intertwined with human dignity because they relate to humans' sense of being.

Perhaps part of the solution to attempt to restore some dignity for amaXhosa lies in rebalancing the act by "retrieving" some of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century memories that are still alive in amaXhosa's oral traditions. In this respect, oral history as a methodology might help "unravel" some stories of the local people in and around Makhanda, as conveyed to them by traditions that have survived.

Once retrieved, these could form historical narratives that could be placed alongside the narratives of the colonial settlers. In other words, there is a need to hear the Other side of the story. Put differently, a "dialogue" or "conversation" between the oral histories of amaXhosa and those of the colonial settlers is crucial. There ought to be a dialogue of "truth" between these local stories, and the colonial narratives that came to be canonised.

I suggest erecting memorials in the cathedral precincts, the place where Ndlambe's kraal once stood, to his memory, and alongside it, narratives relating to the wars and the expulsion of amaXhosa in 1811. A similar initiative started to some extent when government renamed Grahamstown after the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Xhosa military leader Makhanda.<sup>60</sup> The post-1994 era has also seen the erection of some important monuments, such as Freedom Park and the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum in Soweto.<sup>61</sup>

Performing a symbolic "ritual cleansing ceremony" in and around the cathedral might also be something worth considering. Wielenga affirms that the "new narratives we form, as individuals and a society, are crucial in terms of our identity and our relationship to others and the world around us".<sup>62</sup> New narratives and identity are crucial to fostering the spirit of reconciliation in a country previously polarised along racial lines. This is the foundation of our human dignity.

Here again, one is not oblivious, whether consciously or otherwise, to the dialectical nature of the relationship between memory and history, or to its implications for documenting history, as cautioned by scholars such as Ricoeur.

I also take cognisance of the critique raised by Wielenga<sup>63</sup> that new memorials could merely create other official narratives that exclude; that one official narrative could merely displace another.<sup>64</sup> Wielenga further cites Charles Villa-Vicencio, who raises a similar challenge, namely that "the stories that emerge in testimony are incomplete, as memory is incomplete".<sup>65</sup> At the same time, however, Villa-Vicencio calls for "a listening to the incompleteness, the silences, the body language, and the complexity of emotions that accompany telling narratives of the past".<sup>66</sup> This, in my view, is a plausible sentiment, particularly also in the context of the controversy that arose in the Cathedral of St Michael and St George.

---

59. Ojukwu Chijoke, 2013. "Collective memory and nonviolent resistance" [https://www.irenees.net/bdf\\_fiche-analyse-998\\_en.html](https://www.irenees.net/bdf_fiche-analyse-998_en.html) Accessed 31/07/2023.

60. "Makhanda (Nxele)" <https://dacb.org/stories/southafrica/makhanda/> Accessed 22/07/2023.

61. Cori Wielenga, 2012. "Remembering together in Rwanda and South Africa" Paper delivered at symposium "Conflict, Memory, and Reconciliation: Bridging Past, Present and Future" 10-13 January Kigali Rwanda 15. [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=conflict\\_reconciliation\\_symposium](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=conflict_reconciliation_symposium) Accessed 22/07/2023.

62. Wielenga, "Remembering together in Rwanda and South Africa," 5.

63. Citing Gail Weldon, 2009. *A comparative study of the construction of memory and identity in the curriculum in societies emerging from conflict: Rwanda and South Africa*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria.

64. Wielenga, "Remembering together in Rwanda and South Africa," 11.

65. Wielenga, "Remembering together in Rwanda and South Africa," 15.

66. Wielenga, "Remembering together in Rwanda and South Africa," 15.

## ***Thank you for listening!***

Ndza khensa! Enkosi! Thank you! Baie dankie! Kea leboha!



Submitted by William MARTINSON. (Photographer: Scanned image)

Church Square Grahamstown, showing Cathedral (Photographer: Unidentified)



Church Square Grahamstown, showing Cathedral.

Interior view of the nave (Photographer: Unidentified)



Cathedral, The Nave,  
Grahamstown.





**Stellenbosch**

UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT