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Published online: 19 Dec 2023.

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Colonial statues in post-colonial Africa: a multidimentional heritage

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ABSTRACT

This paper employs the concept of multidimensional heritage to examine colonial statues in Africa since the era of independences through transnational, diachronic, and multi-thematical perspectives. Colonial statues are viewed as transnational phenomena, with a focus on the African continent, emphasising the complex and evolving connections to former colonial powers in Europe. To capture the complexity of heritage uses, which is often best comprehended over an extended period, a diachronic approach is employed, and three periods are considered: colonial statues at independence (1950s to 1980); revival of (neo)colonial statues (1990s-2000s) and renewed contestations (since the 2010s). The paper also delves into various ways in which the past is used and interpreted through colonial statues, discussing aspects such as public memory, identities, diplomacy, aid, and justice.

Introduction

Recent contests over colonial statues in Africa have garnered news, most notably the one involving Cecil Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town in South Africa in 2015. These contestations have also been studied in academia, which tends to focus on single case studies or individual countries. To provide more comprehensive analyses I will consider statues as multidimensional, analysing them according to transnational, diachronic, and multi-thematic approaches. The transnational approach encompasses the whole region of Africa, but it also considers its complex connections with Europe. These statues are also considered from the time of independences to the present. Finally, necropolitics, memories, identities, colonial legacies, and the use of bilateral aid by former colonial powers as direct engagement in African internal affairs are structuring themes discussed.

Such transnational, diachronic, and multi-thematic approaches will help to address the following questions: how have colonial statues been dealt with over time? Why have colonial statues been kept in public spaces in the postcolony? Have (neo)-colonial statues been built after independence, by whom and why? What have been the different contestations of these monuments and their impacts on public spaces on the African continent?

The first section of this article will justify a focus on colonial statues and further explain a multidimensional approach. Then, the paper will discuss what happened to colonial statues in public spaces at independence (from the 1950s to 1980). The revival of colonial statues and the erection of (neo)-colonial statues that characterised the 1990s and 2000s will then be considered.

Following analyses of renewed contestations of colonial statues since the 2010s, the paper will end with a discussion of key questions on the topic.

Rationale and multidimensional heritage

This article focuses on colonial monuments, understood primarily as colonial statues and memorials. The colonial world was a 'world of statues', as explained by Fanon (1963, 51–52). In other words, dead white men and a few women represented in colonial statues were central elements of the colonial world or colonial order, and used to express 'the powers of destruction and suppression' (Mbembe 2019, 43). Colonial statues played overlapping roles in territorial formation, public memory, social control, and necropolitics (Mbembe 2019). Here, 'necropolitics' is used to refer to the unbounded actual and symbolic violence that destroys bodies and the value of people's existence. This article will explain the legacies of these practices in the postcolony.

More specifically, statues were used by the Belgian, English, French, German, and Portuguese colonial powers for territorial formation. A new landscape and new associated public memory were created through the erection of statues of the male imperialists who carried out the conquest (e.g. Cecil Rhodes); the male engineers who built infrastructures (e.g. Joseph Gallieni); and the male and female rulers of empires (e.g. Leopold II or Queen Victoria). In this process, any sign of locals and their history were erased, to create the illusion that the land had been a bare terra nullius when Europeans arrived. Gone were the traces of African kings and queens, and of leaders like Aline Sitoé Diatta in Senegal (Silla 2020), or Emir Abdelkader in Algeria who revolted against colonisation. Instead, through statues the conquered territories became part of the metropole. The statues' themes did change over time, particularly with memorials to the fallen of the First and Second World Wars. These memorials tended to depict local soldiers, alone or with Europeans, for instance the statue of 'Demba and Dupont' in Dakar (Senegal), dedicated to the soldiers of the First World War. Far from celebrating brothers in arms, these reaffirmed and strengthened the allegiances of Africans to the metropole, through reminding them that they defended and served the Empire and the metropole.

These public monuments were not benign. They fulfilled the purpose of celebrating, memorialising, and legitimising the violence that accompanied the process of colonisation, and legitimised the continuation of this violence, infusing it into daily life thereafter. In addition, colonial statues played a key role in colonial domination. In other words, these statues were part of necropolitics (Mbembe 2019); the authorised exertion of political, economic, social, and symbolic violence, through exposing colonial subjects to inhuman condition of life and work; and removing basic human rights. Colonial statues were sculptural extensions of a 'racial terror' (Mbembe 2017, 175) and helped to normalise white supremacy, racism, and daily violence. For some, the colonial violence and racial terror were 'worse than death itself' (Lumumba, 1961, 44–47).

These monuments also aimed to contribute to social control, ensuring the colonised subject would obey the rules set up in the colony, restricting their movements and behaviour and dehumanising and alienating them. To be effective, colonial domination had to permeate and be inscribed in the daily routine, living space, imagination, and the very structure of the unconscious (Mbembe 2017). Public statues were daily reminders of the possibility of violence and other sanctions, if Africans did not comply with colonial rules (Njoh 2009, 301–317). By displaying and glorifying predominantly violent and racist white individuals, public statues became instruments of coercion and humiliation that shaped and controlled the behaviours of colonial subjects, and ensured that they complied with the rules of the colonies (Vergès and Vrainom 2021, 23). These statues help to transform black people into objects, who never acted of their own accord and who were devoid of agency (A. Nyamnjoh 2021).

However, this alienation encompassed both 'self-loss and self-discovery' (Nyamnjoh 2021). Recognising alienation empowered individuals to change their relationship with themselves and

others and to strive for freedom and heightened consciousness. Confronting and combating colonialism served to resist oppression and alienation. These waves of contestation have led to the challenge, and in some instances, removal of colonial statues, as well as the reclamation of public spaces.

Multidimensional heritage

This paper moves beyond the traditional analyses of single statues, specific nations, or restricted time periods (e.g. Figueira 2021; Lipenga 2019; Marschall 2010; Ouallet and Giorghis 2005). It considers heritage as multidimensional, advancing some of my previous research (e.g. Labadi 2013, 2017, 2022a). Multidimensional heritage aims to complexify the study of public monuments through adopting an approach that is 1) transnational, 2) diachronic, and 3) multi-thematic. A transnational approach is adopted, as the multi-thematic uses of the past, including for public memory, identities, diplomacy, international aid, and justice cannot be sealed within the limits of specific nations. Rather, these issues need to be understood as transnational phenomena (continuing the work of e.g. Çelik 2020, 711–726; or De Cesari and Rigney 2014). The focus here is on the continent of Africa, paying particular attention to the complex and changing links to former colonial powers in Europe. I do not deny that each nation in Africa is unique, but they do not exist as sealed entities, hermetic to external ideas and influences. How transnational phenomena circulate, are adopted, adapted, and transgressed at national and local levels must be considered (Gilroy 2022). Following on from De Cesari and Rigney, this article understands transnationalism as being multiscalar, concerning local, national, regional, and international practices (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, 3–7). These multiscalar practices are interlinked, as they are not solely local, or national, or regional. The last section of this article, for instance, considers recent local contestations of colonial statues, which can only be understood as fitting within wider transcontinental forms of activism.

I utilise a diachronic approach, complemented by a transnational perspective, to capture the intricate nature of multi-thematic heritage uses spanning from the period of independence to the present day. This method aligns with calls for understanding events in Africa in such a historically nuanced manner to grasp their complexity (e.g. Branch and Mampilly 2015; Mamdani 2012). Such diachronic approach elucidates the social, cultural, political, and economic uses of colonial statues, highlighting periods of hostility, amnesia, re-memory and grassroots contestations. It also delves into the multifaceted histories of individual public statues, including their contestation, transformation, removal, and reinstallation. I segment transnational phenomena into three periods: the era of independence from 1950s to 1980); the 1990s and 2000s, when the empires struck back; and renewed contestations of colonial statues from the 2010s. Diachrony, when combined with multi-thematic analyses, can further delineate distinct stages of public memory and national identity formation and transformations in Africa. This approach also illuminates shifts in the influences of colonial legacies, strategies of former colonial powers, their employment of chequebook diplomacy or bilateral aid, and evolving forms of activism and contestations.

Colonial statues at independence (1950s–1980s)

Three main phenomena characterise colonial statues at independence: 'nostalgic recycling' in the metropole; defacing and/or toppling; and keeping them in situ.

I call the first phenomenon: 'nostalgic recycling'. Nostalgic recycling involved relocating movable objects, including statues, from colonial territories at the time of independence. These objects were then transported back and showcased in both public and private spaces in the former colonial metropole. Nostalgia is a sense of loss, a longing for a time that is no more (Boym 2002). It is also the reluctance to accept the end of colonialism, and as such an inability to consider colonialism as having ended. Here, nostalgia overlaps with some aspects of 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy 2005); particularly the difficulty of coming to terms with the idea of white supremacy that formed the master narrative of European colonialism, and

the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence. Most of this nostalgic recycling occurred from Algeria and Tunisia to France, and from Kenya and Sudan to England. This recycling helped to keep the memory of colonism alive and fed colonial nostalgia for a time when European countries ruled massive parts of the world. Expressing a concern that the engineers, military personnel, and settlers involved in colonism might be forgotten, this form of recycling preserved the memory of these individuals in the former colonial metropole. It shaped collective memories by fostering emotional attachments to these figures, encountered daily. This recycling was also a way of avoiding the humiliation of seeing key elements of colonial world being destroyed. These recycling movements of colonial statues from African to European countries, and their re-erection in public and private spaces, also suggest a need to continue portraying colonialism in a positive light. Such re-erection also extended racial terror to the metropole (Vergès and Vrainom :€ 2021), and normalised white supremacy and racism when formerly colonised people became (im)migrants (Blanchard and Bancel 1998) in Europe.

Taking down statues in the former colonies sometimes took the form of a formal ceremony resembling a burial, demonstrating the settlers' devotion to these monuments, their reverence for them, and their genuine sense of loss over a global order that was vanishing. In 1958, for instance, after General Ibrahim Abboud's rise to power in Sudan, statues of General Gordon and Lord Kitchener in Khartoum were removed amid a ceremony reminiscent of a state burial, with both a lament and 'God Save the Queen' played. The ceremony was closed with the Sudanese national anthem, which reaffirmed the independence of Sudan (Larsen 2007, 175–176). A crowd of locals gathered around the statues and cheered and clapped when they were taken down, with the claps becoming louder when the Sudanese national anthem was played. These two monuments were later sent back to England. The bronze figure of Lord Kitchener now stands in Chatham (Kent), and the statue of General Gordon is at Gordon's School near Woking (Surrey). Some of these re-erected statues have since been contested, and such contention has been invigorated with the 2020 Black Lives Matter movements denouncing spatial and institutional racism.

The second phenomenon is the defacement, toppling, or removal of colonial statues. These acts can also be termed 'fallism', a word expressing discontent and rage in response to alienating architecture that symbolises the hostile, racist, and exploitative colonial system (Bofelo 2017; Frank and Ristic 2020, 556; Kasembeli 2020). As discussed in the third part of this article, recent fallist movements can be understood as historically connected to, and inspired by what happened at independence. Defacing and toppling statues, from Algeria to Mozambique, were necessary symmetrical acts of symbolic and actual violence, responding to the violence of the colonial order (Fanon 1963). The defacing and/or toppling of statues was supposed to symbolise the beginning of a new era for liberated nations in a post-colonial and decolonial order. It also symbolised the cleansing of public spaces, to destroy symbolically the power imbalances, racism, inequalities, and urban exclusions that defined the colonial world. One example is Algeria. Whilst in early 1962, the colonial authorities had listed monuments and collections that could be sent back to France, nothing was done until independence on 5 July 1962. At independence, colonial statues logically became target, and were desacralised, transformed, and repossessed. Statues were dressed up with flags, or tagged with the letters, of the FLN (the National Liberation Front, the principal nationalist movement during the war). Besides, on 4 July 1962, the statue of Joan of Arc in Algiers was dressed up with the white veil typically worn by Algerian women (Grabar 2014, 394–395). Later, a sign was hung around her horse's neck that read 'Hassiba Ben Bouali', the name of a female FLN militant executed by the French in 1957 (Amato 1979, 220).[1]

More than just a reappropriation, the sign 'Hassiba Ben Bouali' instilled hope that public spaces post-independence would not erase the names and history of Algerian heroes anymore. Importantly too, whilst colonial statues represented first and foremost men (with some exceptions, like Joan of Arc, who is one of the patron saints of France), the recognition and celebration of a female freedom fighter was a welcome contrast. This recognition was, however, short-lived, as an exclusionary practice of memorialising male freedom fighters in statues would soon become the norm in Africa

post-independence. As for the statue of Joan of Arc, it remained for another month in Algiers, as the French thought that it could be adopted as a symbol of liberation. However, in the night of the 3 to 4 August 1962 (with the arrival of Ben Bella in Algiers), it was toppled, and subsequently sent back to France and re-erected in front of the town hall of Vaucouleurs, in another act of nostalgic recycling (Amato 1979, 220).

Some colonial statues were thus taken down and repatriated to Europe, others were toppled, and some were even destroyed. However, across Africa, many colonial monuments remained untouched, suggesting that liberation was unfinished. This occurred even when the war of independence had been long, bloody, and extremely violent, as was the case in Algeria. Hence, from Algiers to Nairobi and Maputo, colonial statues were left standing. Some of these colonial statues have been contested in recent years, in the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter movements, as discussed below.

Various reasons can explain why some colonial statues were left untouched. Some African leaders at independence were pro-Europe, having been educated and/or having worked there during colonial times, including Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya; or Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal (Djigo 2015; Larsen 2007, 160–184). Besides, a new world order had been hoped to be created, particularly in former French colonies, where countries would be integrated into a broader Franco-African ensemble (Cooper 2014). As a result, at independence, leaders of these countries did not want to change the key symbols of the colonial world. In return, the former metropole provided unfailing support (including military assistance) to these leaders and countries, but it also kept some of its socio-economic, political, and cultural powers, a continuum that has been termed 'neo-colonialism' (Nkrumah 1980), the 'postcolony' (Mbembe 2001) and 'coloniality' (Quijano 2007).

Another factor contributing to the persistence of colonial statues in African countries was the swift evolution in how the colonial period was remembered. After initially seeking to erase the colonial past and demolish statues, some early post-independence governments opted to retain memories of this era, albeit with modifications, as occurred in some former Portuguese colonies. In Mozambique, for example, following a brief period of dismantling colonial statues leading up to its independence from Portugal on 25 June 1975, the government chose to preserve them. However, in what many view as acts of defiance against the dominance and supremacy these statues symbolised, they were removed from their pedestals and relocated to less conspicuous places (Sousa 2019, 269–286). A statue of Vasco da Gama, for instance, which used to stand on a pedestal in the centre of the city of Inhambane in Southern Mozambique, was put in the courtyard of a garage, where it is now at human height. It was supposed to be considered a detail of history. However, it is still a key stop for guided tours in this city, making it a referential point in its history.

These colonial statues retained after independence can be linked to what Toni Morrison calls 'rememory' in her novel Beloved (Morrison 1982). 'Rememory' is a process that transcends individual or time-segregated acts of remembrance. It refers to the interconnectedness of past and present. Colonial statues become interconnected as remains of a bygone time, but that is still present, still lingering on. Rememory refers to traumatic memories that always come back; that are painful, vivid, and uncontrollable; that are sometimes active and sometimes passive. It refers to the fact that in the postcolony, the colonial world still haunts many urban landscapes and people cannot, and are not allowed to forget about it.

The empires strike back (1990s–2000s)

From the 1990s onward, many colonial statues that had been taken down and stored post-independence were relocated to public spaces. The turn of the millennium also witnessed the construction of (neo)-colonial statues, often in collaboration with former colonial powers. These statues unreservedly celebrated white colonialists such as Livingstone and De Brazza. Intriguingly, this recognition sometimes coincided with commemorations of African heroes from the

independence movements. This revival of colonial legacy is not an isolated trend but occurred all over Africa in countries as diverse as Cape Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, the Republic of the Congo (the Congo), Senegal, and Zambia. Hence, it occurred in countries that used to belong to the French, English and Portuguese colonial empires. The revival and construction of statues of dead white individuals are acts of necromancy, with their power being invoked for various reasons.

Re-erecting colonial statues has been termed the 'politics of comprehensive remembering' (De Jorio 2006, 81). It aims to transform the ways in which the past was being remembered and the nation constructed. In countries like Cape Verde, the DRC, and Mali, colonial statues had been removed from public spaces during or immediately after independence. As a result, independence became the only referential point for the origin of the nation in public spaces. However, from the 1990s to the turn of the millennium, these hidden statues were put back in central squares. The reinstallation of these colonial statues has been interpreted as a benign move 'away from post-colonialism and towards a post-racial form of cosmopolitanism' (Sèbe 2014, 936). According to this view, both colonial and post-colonial figures could be celebrated indistinctly. This is certainly the way national politicians framed this shift in public memorial practices, suggesting that no-chapter of a country's history should be erased, and emphasising a duty to remember the colonial past. For other researchers, this politics of comprehensive remembering is a convenient way of concealing the failures of independence and its unrealised promises that became clear in the 1990s (Cardina and Rodrigues 2022). This might be the case in Cape Verde with the return of the statue of navigator Diogo Gomes to the city of Praia, on the Island of Santiago, in 1991; or the busts of author Luís Vaz de Camões and the Portuguese politician Marquês de Sá da Bandeira to the centre of Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente, in 1992 (Cardina and Rodrigues 2022, 66–67).

However, for me, this regional trend can be explained as the result of imposed austerity measures conditioned to financial assistance by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the associated decline in available public funding. To fill this gap, former colonial countries and other European powers provided aid packages, often for culture and development projects (see Doquet, Ndour, and Sow 2018, 151–152; Hajji and Maes 2020; Mensah 2006 for similar claims). The return of most colonial statues from hidden and dusty spaces to open and public ones were actions funded by these packages. In other words, international aid from Europe to Africa would explain the return to light of these colonial statues. This reinforces a point already made: aid is used by Europeans to further their own agenda, to shape what cultural heritage is in Africa, and how it should be used (see Labadi 2019a, 2022a). Such an approach cannot be considered cultural or heritage diplomacy due to the employment of economic tools (Nye 2004, 5). If heritage is considered fundamental for building nationhood, memory, and identity, then such European interference occurs in core and state affairs. Take Mali, for instance. In the 1990s and 2000s, strangled by the measures of the World Bank and the IMF, Mali had to accept increased international funding in culture, most of which came from France and the wider European Union. At that time, when President Konaré's approach was to rescue colonial statues from oblivion (De Jorio 2006, 79–106); 80% of Mali's national budget for culture came from aid from France, the EU, and the International Organisation of Francophonie (Doquet, Ndour, and Sow 2018; Mensah 2006). These aid programmes aimed to promote cultural heritage in its diversity for its economic (read 'tourism') development (Doquet, Ndour, and Sow 2018). The re-emergence of white European colonialist statues in public spaces was thus justified as a way of encouraging economic/tourism growth through the promotion of cultural heritage in its diversity.

Bilateral aid as direct involvement in the internal affairs of African countries is also a lens through which to understand the controversial and short lived (one-day!) reinstalment of the statue of Leopold II in front of the main railway station in Kinshasa, capital of the DRC on 2 February 2005. Bilateral aid was used by former colonial powers (in this case Belgium) to reinstall the statue of a colonialist, no matter how controversial, to prolong its colonial legacy, and impose its view of the past. It was indeed used as anti-anti-colonial propaganda (Hicks 2023); to spread the

idea of the 'benevolence' of this king and its colonial order. Here, the economic dependency of African actors led to the prioritisation of the interest of external actors over the needs and sensibilities of the Congolese population, which, for Mbembe is another aspect of necropolitics (2019). More specifically, the statue of Leopold II had been in a warehouse in the outskirts of Kinshasa for more than 30 years, since being removed by Mobutu as part of his policy on 'authenticity' in 1967. The reinstalment in February 2005 was justified by the then ministry of Culture for the DRC as a way of reminding Congolese people of their history since, for him 'a people without history is a people without soul' (cited in Malhotra and Posada Téllez 2022, 7). For others, the decision might have come directly from Belgium, as an interference in national affairs (Gewald 2006; Lagae 2013). Indeed, 3 February 2005 saw the opening of a major exhibition entitled 'Memory of Congo: the colonial era' at the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren (Brussels, Belgium). One goal of this anti-anti-colonial exhibition was to cast doubt upon the work of Adam Hochschild who in his best-seller King Leopold's Ghost (1999) exposed the atrocities of Leopold II in the Congo Free State and to restore the reputation of this king of Belgium (Gewald 2006, 473). An extension of this exhibition was to put its statue back in the centre of Kinshasa, in the heart of the former Congo Free State, as a strong sign of the 'benevolence' of Leopold II (Lagae 2013). Demanding such a move was possible thanks to the millions of US dollars in aid that Belgium gives the DRC every year, giving this European state a 'moral right of scrutiny' over the DRC's policy and decisions (Hajji and Maes 2020, 10). The statue of Leopold II was, however, taken down the following day, after facing significant backlash within the DRC and abroad. This example underscores how bilateral aid perpetuates the colonial order and directly extends its legacy, as I have also previously detailed (see Labadi 2019b, 1–14). It also sustains colonial nostalgia and disseminates anti-anti-colonial propaganda, attempting to improve or alter the image of colonialists.

More than just moving statues from hidden to public spaces, the turn of the millennium also saw (neo)-colonial statues being purposefully erected to celebrate nineteenth century explorers and missionaries. Different motivations characterise these colonial statues in the former British empire, compared with the former French one. In countries that used to be part of the British empire, such statues were built to attract white and European tourists, using colonial tropes. This is the case, for instance, for a new statue of David Livingstone erected for the 150th anniversary of his first sight of Mosi-oa-Tunya/Victoria Falls in Zambia, in 2005. This erection was the pinnacle of a four-day expedition down the Zambezi River, following the missionary's route, by canoe and on foot, led by British explorer Ranulph Fiennes. These events were sponsored by airlines, travel agencies, luxury lodges, and local authorities (Davidson 2005). They demonstrate how international tourism is framed around the tropes of colonial nostalgia, adventure, exoticisation, luxury, and a longing for a bygone era when locals were subdued and dominated for the benefits of Europeans. This case illustrates that, to appeal to foreign tourists, the memory of European colonial figures is perceived as essential to maintain, serving as a point of reference, often overshadowing local heroes.

However, this memorialisation of Livingstone, then and later (more celebrations occurred in Zambia and Malawi for the 200th anniversary of his birth in 2013), can be interpreted as a transnational event in relation to (neo)colonial statues and memorials built in cooperation with the French at the same time. This is particularly the case for the memorial to Savorgnan de Brazza built in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo (henceforth the Congo), and inaugurated in October 2006. This (neo)-colonial project mixed geopolitics and bilateral aid, heritage diplomacy, colonial violence, imperial rivalries, and necropolitics. A project of Algeria, the Congo, France, and Gabon, it saw the remains of De Brazza, his wife, and their children, being reburied in this memorial (they were previously in Algiers). Denis Sassou-Nguesso, president of the Congo, spent more than 15 million euros to build the sumptuous, air-conditioned monument that required 500 tons of white Carrara marble, flanked by a 20-foot-tall statue of De Brazza at its entrance (Bernault 2010, 369). This project involved, firstly, chequebook diplomacy with several aid packages from France to cancel a large part of the Congo's debt. In return, Sassou-Nguesso helped France with diplomatic intervention in the DRC (Bernault 2010, 369). Echoing past imperial rivalries, this

memorial and statue also served as distinct markers of France's spheres of influence, countering the wane of its dominance in the region. In the process, the French and the English re-enacted their old rivalries around the propagandistic and malleable myths of 'benevolent colonialists', crystallised in the figures of Livingstone for English-speaking Africa, and De Brazza for the French. Yet, these colonists were essential for the 'ruthless economic exploitation' of the continent, as W.E.B Du Bois (1900) reminds us. More than just replaying colonial rivalries, this mausoleum and its statue are also a case of necropolitics, the exertion of political, economic, social, and cultural violence through exposing the Congolese to inhuman living conditions. Whilst Sassou-Nguesso spent more than 15 million euros on this monument to De Brazza, most Congolese people have been stripped of everything. Necropolitics and this colonial violence are political acts by Sassou-Nguesso, who needs France's assistance in maintaining himself in power (Survie 2016, 13–21). Meanwhile, Congolese people have rejected this monument, and are not visiting it. The last section of this article considers additional contestations of colonial statues.

Renewed contestations of (neo)colonial and racist statues (from the 2010s)

The 1990s and 2000s were a blessed period for colonial statues. However, since the early 2010s, these monuments have been increasingly contested. Such contestations are not new, but have accelerated in recent years, and have become highly visible. These recent movements need to be understood in relation to previous fallist actions both in Africa and beyond (an idea already expressed by Kasembeli 2020, 316–331; and Kros 2015, 150–165). Additionally, these contestations need to be viewed considering the dissatisfaction with the politics of aid, prolonging the discussion from the previous section.

The most famous case, heavily discussed in academia, is the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement (e.g. Knudsen and Andersen 2019; Mangcu 2017; Nyamnjoh 2016; Nyamnjoh 2021). It was sparked by Chumani Maxwele, a black student, protesting against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT), on Monday 9 March 2015. Symbolising continued 'institutionalised racism and patriarchy' at UCT (The Rhodes Must Fall Movement 2015), and having been contested for some time, the statue was subsequently removed. Various theorists have highlighted the need to historicise this movement, as an extension and continuation of the fallist movements from the times of independences, presented earlier (Branch and Mampilly 2015, 70ff; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 222). This is exactly what this article does.

First, RMF identified as Pan-African, advocating for unity in the pursuit of collective liberation. It positioned itself within a historical movement that aimed to bring together all 'racially oppressed people of colour' (The Rhodes Must Fall Movement 2015). Mirroring the fallist actions of the 1950s and 1960s, RMF was also decolonial, seeking to dismantle – rather than merely challenge – symbols of colonialism. These symbols were viewed as embodiment of white supremacy, oppression, alienation, and the exploitation of black labour (The Rhodes Must Fall Movement 2015). A shared aspect of these decolonial acts was the desacralisation of statues before their removal, facilitating the transition of the individuals represented 'from untouchable icon to sentient human being' (Kros 2015, 154). Defacing these statues by tagging, throwing paint, or even faeces – like Chumani Maxwele's infamous act on the Cecil Rhodes statue – was part of this process. Such irreverential acts echoed the defacement of statues discussed at the beginning of this article. Another connection between these movements, was their intersectionality, particularly their criticism of sexism, patriarchal order, class (Chinguno et al. 2017); and the erasure and silencing of minorities. This mirrored the hanging of the sign 'Hassiba Ben Bouali' on the statue of Joan of Arc in Algiers, a strong gesture expressing the hope that public spaces post-independence would not erase the names and history of Algerian female heroes. However, these intersectional approaches were short-lived in both cases, and the RMF movement was chastised for its violence towards women (Ramaru 2017).

However, RMF was also a movement reflective of its era: heterogenous, committed to direct and participatory democracy, seeking pluriversal futures, and extending into England. It opposed neoliberal economic systems that had failed to 'meet popular aspirations for fundamental change' (Branch and Mampilly 2015, 67); especially in areas like education. It is no surprise that this protestation rapidly extended to other countries, inspiring movements contesting colonial and/or racist figures, such as '#GandhiMustFall' (which spread to countries such as Ghana, Malawi, and England), as well as the 'Faidherbe doit tomber' (Faidherbe Must Fall) in Senegal and France. These movements directly responded to the politics of austerity, the decrease in public funding, and the aid-funded projects detailed in the previous section. It is quite symbolic that these 'Must Fall' movements targeted colonial and racist statues. These monuments are part of a memorial practice that embodies the necropolitics, revealing the preservation of white and foreign privileges. Some of these movements have explicitly drawn attention to the link between the erection of colonial or racist statues and the prevailing aid system. This was particularly evident in the #GandhiMustFall movement, which prevented the construction of a statue of Gandhi in Malawi in 2018. This project was tied to an aid deal with India (OFMI 2018). For Lipenga, the absence of the statue but the presence of its pedestal are powerful evocations of current issues that need to be eradicated, including international aid as perpetuating racism and inequalities in public spaces (Lipenga 2019, 115–116).

These movements have also spread to Europe, including to Britain and France. The Faidherbe Must Fall campaign is particularly interesting. It is led by Survie, a French organisation that has long denounced and combatted Françafrique, the complex system that has enabled France to maintain its economic, political, educational, and cultural dominance in Africa post-independence, including through the aid system. In the past, Survie raised concerns about the memorial to Savorgnan de Brazza in Brazzaville, discussed previously (Survie 2016). These global phenomena, lately reinvigorated by Black Lives Matter, have also pushed for the examination and revision of Europe's prevailing historical narratives that either downplay colonial atrocities or offer a skewed perspective on colonial history. Furthermore, these movements have also challenged the lingering legacies of colonialism and persistent inequalities in Europe.

Another distinctive aspect of recent movements is that cultural activists have leveraged social media to broaden their reach and amplify their cause. They engage in digital petitions and campaigns, build communities, networks and collaboration and raise awareness. Some campaigns were local, such as the online petition to remove Curt von François' statue from Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. After years of contention, this online petition amassed more than 1,600 signatures and led to the removal of this statue. Besides, this campaign advocated for replacing the statue of von François with one of Jonker Afrikaner, from the Orlam people, who was Windhoek's actual founder, acting as redressing epistemic injustice (Becker 2022). In contrast, other approaches have a more transnational scope, aiming to challenge the necropolitics of states. Indeed, whilst defacing, and attacking statues remains a prevalent mode of action, this is criminalised. This criminalisation seeks to sideline objections to colonial statues and discourage challenges to the order of the postcolony, essentially discrediting specific social groups and individuals and their claims. Take, for example, André Blaise Essama, a Cameroonian activist and political opponent. He beheaded the statue of Philippe Leclerc in Douala, Cameroon, at least seven times. Without international solidarity networks and communities, and the reach of social media, Essama's acts in Cameroon might have gone unnoticed. While his acts of decapitating a statue led to criminal charges and imprisonment, at times he evaded jail by paying fines. Many of these fines have been covered by his supporters both in Cameroon and abroad (Olewe 2000). Hence, social media has emerged as an indispensable tool to rally support to challenge colonial statues, particularly in Africa, and support cultural activists.

However, whether organised as 'Must Fall' movements or not, contestations of colonial and/or racist statues in Africa have frequently encountered significant resistance. Multiple factors can

explain such opposition, including pressure from former colonial and powerful countries; elite connections to these countries; financial constraints, pressures, and prioritisation; tourism, and the conviction that all remnants of the past, even painful ones, should be preserved. Besides, some of these statues are associated with infrastructures for locals, such as the Gandhi wing at the University of Nairobi (Kenya). This wing includes a state-of-the-art graduate library, refurbished through an aid package from India, that also included the restoration of the Gandhi statue. Not only have European and powerful nations helped to preserve these statues but so have international organisations and international designations. Some UNESCO World Heritage sites, for instance, have been requested to retain their colonial statues, as was the case with the statue of Faidherbe in Saint-Louis /Ndar (Senegal, see Fall 2020). This confirms the Eurocentric definition of heritage promoted by this convention, as already explained (see Labadi 2013, 2022b).

Conclusions

This paper has adopted the concept of multidimensional heritage to consider statues transnationally, diachronically, and multi-thematically. Examining post-independence Africa's colonial statues, it focuses on three periods: the 1950s to 1980, the 1990s and 2000s, and from 2010 onwards.

During the first period, statues were either removed, preserved, or sent back to the former metropole . The second period saw the reinstallation of some colonial statues that had been stored away at independence, and the construction of new ones, influenced, among other factors by bilateral aid, nostalgia, tourism, and outdated colonial rivalries. This contributed to the perpetuation of colonial rule and legacy in the postcolony.

From 2010 onwards, colonial statues have faced renewed contestations, reflecting an extension of earlier fallist phases, and posing a challenge to neo-liberalism, inequalities, the aid system and waves of austerity. This section also revealed the continued construction (or proposed construction) of statues venerating racist figures in Africa, frequently tied to aid agreements. As a result, colonial and racist statues remain prominent features in African landscapes. Not only do these statues help to keep alive a colonial order but they also participate in instilling daily doses of symbolic violence in local populations, a manifestation of necropolitics.

Given the continued prominence of colonial statues in Africa, the final paragraphs of this conclusion need to focus on key questions that have dominated public debates on colonial statues.

Is history being destroyed when colonial statues are removed from public space? This paper has explained that history is often being made when they are removed. Indeed, the hidden motivations for the construction and/or upkeep of these statues can then be revealed, along with their entangled colonial or racist legacies. Besides, their removals can aid in rectifying history, exposing in some cases the Eurocentrism of public spaces, and European epistemic domination. Such removal makes space for the erection of memorials for local heroes, who might have played more significant roles than colonial or racist figures.

Then, is heritage being destroyed, when statues are removed? Heritage constantly changes and evolves, and heritage is thus not destroyed. As colonial statues become increasingly contested and their political uses in the present highlighted, they are revealed as elements that help to maintain Africa in the state of coloniality. By acknowledging that heritage is dynamic and evolves, colonial and racist statues can be removed, paving the way for heritage that better aligns with local history and its portrayal of the past.

What should be done with colonial statues that have been dismantled? Decisions need to be taken democratically locally with possible options including putting them in museums or warehouses. Yet, this article has also clearly detailed that some colonial statues removed and put away at independence or a few years afterwards were put back in public spaces in the 1990s and 2000s, for instance in Mali and the DRC. In other instances, colonial statues that were put back in public spaces at human height to reframe them have served as focal point for tourism, that might not have been originally anticipated. Being recycled and sent back to the former metropole in an act of

nostalgic recycling is likewise not an appropriate solution. In Europe, these colonial statues participate in social control and necropolitics, creating a hostile and discriminatory environment for ethnic minorities and women who are surrounded by dead and violent white men (Vergès 2020).

What could replace colonial statues? Local and pan-African heroes have been and could continue to be celebrated, helping to ensure epistemic justice in public spaces. Ethnographic research was conducted in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, in the spring of 2022, asking a random sample of individuals their opinions on what should take the place of colonial statues. One typical response was to alter the primary and secondary national curricula's content. Currently, these curricula place too much emphasis on European history and not enough on the history of Senegal and its own heroes. To understand who these local heroes are, children should learn about their own history. This can be achieved through a revision of history schoolbooks to include more local and national content, along with the recruitment of national authors. This will be a lengthy undertaking, though, as many textbooks, especially in French-speaking Africa, continue to be produced in Europe by European companies, again demonstrating a colonial legacy in education (Bureau International de l'édition française 2021).

Note

1. From 1956 to her death at the age of 19, Hassiba Ben Bouali actively contributed to the war for independence. As a European-looking woman, with her blue eyes and light hair, she did not get searched by French soldiers, and was able to walk freely through Algiers to transport raw materials for the fabrication of bombs, and even the bombs themselves. When her network was discovered, they hid in a house in the Casbah that was blown up by the French on 8th October 1957.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Sophia Labadi is Professor of Heritage at the University of Kent in the UK, Professorial Fellow at the Global Heritage Lab, University of Bonn (Germany), and the recipient of the 2023 Reimar Lüst Award from the Humboldt and Fritz Thyssen Foundations. Much of Professor Labadi's research focuses on how heritage sites and museums can address some of the most pressing global challenges, including social justice, gender equality or sustainable development. Her books include 'Rethinking Heritage for Sustainable Development' (UCL Press, 2022); 'Museums, Immigrants, and Social Justice' (Routledge, 2017); and 'UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value' (AltaMira Press, 2012). Her research is nourished by her experiences as consultant for international organisations and governments, including UNESCO or the World Bank, on issues of heritage and sustainable development, food security, local community engagement, and equality. Her work has received many prizes, including the 2022 European Archaeological Heritage Prize from the European Association of Archaeologists.

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