

The 'Forgotten Double': Reflections at a Johannesburg War Memorial

Written by Peter Vale

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“Colonialism cast a cloak of western modernisation over much of the world.” Tapped from an LSE seminar called “Imagining African Futures”, this metaphor is central to an understanding of the intellectual strands that invariably pull the discipline of International Relations (IR) in opposite directions. While this tension is at the heart of what follows, we should be clear that this is not a pre-packaged ‘academic article’ – a formulaic publication that addresses a closed group of self-selected experts on a tighter and tighter point. As such, it does not aspire to be the last word on the subject; instead, what follows is informal in tone, exploratory and tentative in its conclusions, and reflects the private musings of this writer (following Quinn 1999: 10). It is essentially an essay, as originally defined by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592).

The first of the intellectual strands – as I have termed them – looks backward towards the ‘cloaking’ process used in the epigram. In its immediate eye is the centenary of the events of 1914-1918, which has provided an opportunity to reinterpret a dark moment in human experience. It has a special meaning in the history of IR because, as the discipline’s founding canard has it, IR arose from the devastation of the Great War. But, and this leads us to the second and forward-looking strand, an encounter with the history of IR is invariably located in Europe, which remains its epicentre. This is so despite the fact that the global spread of the Great War – which provided an alternative moniker, *World War I* – was the result of European colonial expansion across what is (often far too fondly) called ‘the globe’.

This second strand seeks to remove the cloak of colonialism, and hopes turned its gaze away from Europe and, indeed, the West. It seeks out ways to challenge interpretations – even reinterpretations – of history and theory in the cause of renewing social and international relationships. Its approach is to challenge Western-centred ways of knowing. It is, therefore, a project in critical epistemology. If a violation of established ‘truths’ is one of its features, it is fuelled by the belief that another way of organising the world is possible – but only outside the established claims of Western epistemology.

This essay will use examples offered by South Africa to negotiate between these two strands, with an eye to making general points about IR and its future. Why do this?

In interesting and (at times) exhilarating ways, South Africa’s past and future are conjoined in seemingly disparate ways – that is, until one thinks about the cloaking image. To illustrate this point in a deliberately reductionist way, South Africa’s past was ‘another (colonial) country’; its future is being written in ways that seek to remove colonialism’s cloak. If events in present-day South Africa provide the broad canvas for the negotiation between these two intellectual strands, the argument begins with a focus on remembering the First World War. But the question it poses is this: how can or should colonial pasts be remembered in post-colonial places? Because this question runs the course of the argument, it cannot be answered with the certainty required by the policy-end of IR. This is because, as any essayist will confess, posing a question and providing a satisfactory answer are often contradictory. Moreover, the search to ask and answer raises the difficult issue of self: as will become clear, I have intentionally placed myself at the centre of the search for an answer.

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I have adopted this approach for personal reasons because, in significant ways, I am positioned astride the two intellectual strands. On the one hand, I am captured by a European past in which the Great War was a central event in the making of Anglo-South Africans; on the other, I now – and must continue to – live in another future. And, so, to the memorialisation of the Great War.

War Memorial

Almost every morning, I walk through a decaying park on the western edge of the old city of Johannesburg. First laid out in 1925, this space was once named 'Brixton Park': like many streets in the surrounding suburb of the same name, it took its designation from the London borough of Brixton. Its renaming in 1939 as the 'Kingston Frost Park' was intended to honour a former city councillor, but this does not concern us in this essay.

White English-speaking South Africa, in which I was born, has lived under the comfort of colonialism's cloak for centuries. The closeness and familiarity of the 'old country' – to use a phrase that seems lost as new waves of migration are re-shaping the world – were reinforced by ties of language, education and culture. And, so, Anglo-centred place names appear to be as natural as the rocky scrubland out of which Johannesburg was hacked. It is no surprise that many of its park-like suburbs were efforts to build the utopias suggested by Britain's reimagining of a New Jerusalem – its "green and pleasant land".

In important ways, the longings conjured up by this 'other' land and 'foreign' language is the essence of my Anglo-South African upbringing. But because we were compelled to own this culture and its history, it came to own us, reinforcing, if anything, our place of privilege in distant South Africa. So it was that Britain brought Anglo-South Africans into their place in history. But this place was not stable, nor could it possibly be.

Equidistant from the park, but within the proverbial stone's throw of it, stand two structures which contradict the homage that Johannesburg's Brixton pays to the Anglophone world and, especially in its case, the metropolitan capital.

Towards the south, under eucalyptus trees (an unfortunate import from Australia), is a Hindu Crematorium. This site is said to have been organised by a man who would become a fervent anti-colonialist: Mahatma Gandhi. Born in Porbander, Gujarat, and trained as a Barrister-at-Law in London, he lived in South Africa – under the cloak provided by colonialism – for twenty-one years before leaving for India on the eve of the First World War. Gandhi's decades-long confrontation with (and accommodation of) British Imperial power – first in South Africa and then in his native India – continue to be interpreted by liberal and post-colonial thinkers in equal measure.

Then, to the west are two Dutch Reformed Churches which were built in the 1940s. These structures add a tension – and, indeed, another dimension – to the story of South Africa. The Afrikaners who worshipped, and built an anti-British nationalism, in these churches (and others like them) were followers of various threads of Reformed thinking. Moreover, their brand of nationalism provided a political force that is not found in any other comparative settler colonial societies.

But here, as elsewhere in this essay, the thread of the argument is marked by irony: while the struggle between Afrikaners and Anglo-South Africans is thought to be a major theme in the history of the creation of the idea of South Africa, the creation of the state itself was predicated on the principle of exclusion (Vale 2003).

To reinforce the point, the name of Johannesburg's Brixton is drawn from the country's relationship with Britain's capital. But the place is taunted by the nearby presence of cultural artifacts – the Hindu Crematorium; the Dutch Reformed churches – that are in tension with the expression of fealty to Britain. These issues also largely lie beyond the scope of this essay, but, as any understanding of South Africa's complex past and its challenging present suggest, these make South Africa different from the experience of sister Dominions – Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Beverly Street, from which I enter the Kingston Frost Park, offers a spectacular vista towards the north. However,

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from the street itself, this view is hidden behind houses – only after walking up a small rise and three crumbling steps can one look right across the northern suburbs towards the distant Magaliesberg, a range of low mountains 60-odd kilometres away.

Immediately opposite, cemented into a quartzite outcrop, is a War Memorial to a dozen men who died in the First World War. The backdrop to the structure is as inauspicious as the park that lies around it: the four derelict tennis courts and a clubhouse have seen better days. But the memorial has blended into the place like the bench that stands across the park from it. To be frank, it is quite unremarkable. The record suggests that it was initially erected on the nearby Fulham Road on land that once belonged to the Freemasons, and was moved to its present site in 1958. Why is this relevant?

The decision to enter the First World War on the Allied side severely tested the very idea of South Africa – not so much as a geographical place but as a nation in the making. This is because the declaration of war against Germany in 1914 strained the national compromise between the Afrikaners and Anglo-South Africans. This moment of reconciliation came at the end of the South African War (1899-1902), at a time when state formation promised unity, sovereignty, responsibility, and peace.

But South Africa's parliament opted for war on three separate fronts: first, in German West Africa (now Namibia); then, in German East Africa (now Tanzania); and, finally, on the Western Front. The Afrikaner Rebellion against the government's decision to enter the war was also memorialized: monuments were erected to individuals who lost their lives – most notably Jopie Fourie, an officer in the then new South African Army who joined the rebellion, and faced a firing squad as a result (see Magnus 2014).

One of the many silences in the study of IR is that about monuments and memorials. It is extraordinary that they have not featured more prominently, if only because of the link between the First World War and the emergence of the field as an academic discipline. Indeed, the only exception that I can think of are presentations made by my friend and colleague Michael McKinley. And yet, war (and other) memorials, as McKinley has suggested, construct the past (and memories of it) as well as the present.

However, memorialising the war is particularly potent because it rarifies the ideal of the nation and national identity, and draws upon the idea of sacrifice (King 1966; Moriaty 1999). So memorials, and the emotions they foster, are intimately tied to IR's ideological project, namely the stabilisation of national sovereignty as the only way to organise social relations at the 'international' level.

Monuments to the fallen emerged during the Napoleonic Wars, a full century before the erection of the Brixton Memorial. But they captured public imagination in the late 19th century at the same time that nations and nationalism were taking root across the world. (The first war memorials in South Africa appeared in the 1870s: most of these mark battles between white settlers and indigenous people.) But in the aftermath of the Great War, memorials appeared in great numbers in cities, towns and dorps (our loving term for hamlets) across the country. In Johannesburg alone, there are said to be eleven such memorials. The generic form of these monuments helped to draw the country together in both memory and belonging.

As in other settler societies, South African war memorials often served the dual role of constructing a national identity by appropriating both battle and sacrifice and, simultaneously, affirming fealty to the 'old country'. Thus, on the one hand, the nascent South African nation (read largely settler community) sought to insert itself into mainstream understandings of history, while declaring its loyalty to the British Empire on the other. Essentially, memorials – especially those to war – render the past in a particularly form, so establishing which history matters, and whose identity is important. And, so we turn to the title of this essay.

Readers familiar with post-colonial writing will recognise that the title gestures towards the work of the celebrated Indian intellectual Ashis Nandy – especially towards his acclaimed 1995 essay, *History's Forgotten Doubles* (1995). Those who do not know Nandy and his work should be told that the *New Yorker* has called him "one of India's foremost intellectuals, a clinical psychologist and sociologist who has produced some of the most original and

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important works of scholarship in independent India in his forty or more years in public life. He is also a prolific writer of essays and newspaper columns and a feisty public speaker" (Peer 2013).

In *History's Forgotten Doubles*, Nandy sets out to show that the project of Enlightenment history is not to 'record' history in the generally understood liberal sense of knowledge accumulation, but rather to bring the millions who 'live outside history' (1995: 44) 'into history' and into 'historical consciousness'. He also seeks to show, by drawing on examples from India, that while millions continue to live outside of formal understandings of history, they nevertheless know the past.

I read Nandy to suggest that institutions which mark history, like war memorials, are a way of bringing social relations into the project of Enlightenment history. But those who were excluded from South Africa's founding settlement – and so, from its identity – remain largely outside not only its immediate national history, but are rendered invisible in projects that mark its history.

In this setting, I turn to reflect on the Brixton Monument in order to explore inclusion and exclusion in South Africa. These are the circumstances, I believe, which lie at the base of the forward-thinking strand within contemporary IR.

As we remember them

To call the monument to Brixton's fallen 'unremarkable' seems both sacrilegious and cruel. It is unremarkable – but my purpose in making this statement is not to be disrespectful. Given my age and my Anglo-South African lineage, how could I possibly be so?

My mother was born at a place called Vereeniging (which means 'Unification' in High Dutch) in 1906. In 1917, her eldest brother, William Donald McKay, was wounded in France. After a ten-month convalescence, he boarded the SS *Galway Castle* for South Africa, but the vessel was torpedoed in the Bay of Biscay on 12 September 1918. He survived the sinking and twenty-odd hours in the North Atlantic, just as he had survived his wounds and convalescence. But his daughter – my oldest cousin – later told me that doctors had continued to remove shrapnel from his body until he died at the relatively young age of forty-six.

This helps to explain why the names of First World War Battlefields like Delville Wood, where the South African Brigade lost more than 2 300 men, are ingrained in the psyches of Anglo-South Africans of a certain age, in much the same way as Gallipoli in those of their Australian cousins.

Decades later, the phase 'The War' hovered over my own childhood, pulling me in opposite directions between the 'old country' and the 'new country' in which I was born. This time, it referred to the Second World War in which uncles younger than my Uncle Willie had 'Joined Up' or 'Went North', in two euphemisms of the time. Their purported individual and collective heroism seeped into my childhood games and into the everyday culture of the country through 'war comics' and the increasing power of radio as much as tales told around the dinner table, during family visits, or by the school teacher who preferred telling 'war stories' to following the syllabus.

In the wider community, beyond family and school, memories of both wars would be renewed with the annual Armistice Parade. This was an occasion when ageing men, dressed in blue blazers and grey flannel trousers, would march through our provincial town to the sound of a threadbare Pipe Band. A platoon of cadets from our school dressed in khaki uniforms would also march in the parade.

This was a powerful moment of socialisation: a re-connect through war memorialisation with the 'old country', because cadets from the Afrikaans schools would not be permitted to participate, certainly initially, in an event that commemorated a 'British War' which Afrikaner politics had opposed. (In stating this, it is essential to point out that many Afrikaners took part in the First World War, fighting – and dying – alongside their Anglo-South African countrymen.)

Black South Africans never participated in Armistice Day parades even though, as I discovered much later, they too

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had fought – and died – in the service of the Empire and the country. But their recollections, as Nandy points out, were “non-essential memories ... disregarded by individuals and societies” (1995 47); a point he reinforces by suggesting that the very act of remembering is hidden behind elaborate screening devices like race, gender and ideology.

For me, in those distant days, Armistice Day was emotionally charged, and this remains true today when I watch the wreath-laying ceremony at The Cenotaph in distant London. This is because it draws me back into the space between memory and the limitless promise associated with an Anglo-South African upbringing. Such associations present Anglo-South Africans with one of few ways — and sometimes the only way – to understand themselves in the context of their history.

The key to understanding this lies in education, particularly schooling. Most South African English-language schools, particular the older and better ones (read: formerly reserved for whites), are saturated both with symbols of the ‘old country’ and with Anglo-South Africa’s fealty to – and servicing of – the Imperial Project. This association is readily illustrated: 125 Old Boys from St Andrew’s College in Grahamstown died in the First World War, and 180 in the Second. They are commemorated with an annual ceremony at the War Memorial Clock on the school grounds. But I believe this case is best illustrated by pointing out the only historical novel written in English about a South African private school – the same St Andrew’s College – is set in the First World War (see Poland 2012).

My own school – Capricorn High School — was less esteemed than these ‘great schools’, but my (very happy) years there were infused by its British-centred ethos. (On the link between this experience and IR, see Vale 2014.) The ‘old country’ was carried into our young lives via language, the love of Victorian sport, and (often I now think) by a sense that perhaps we did not belong in South Africa at all. Instead, many learners (and several teachers) believed we were actually in exile, and would one day return to the ‘old country’. I recall this not out of nostalgia, regret or hope but as an observation.

Indeed, many of my contemporaries have left the country: they live now in the United Kingdom, or one of two places — Australia or New Zealand – that are free of Afrikaners and blacks, where the sun endlessly shines, and where Victorian sport is played (and very well it is too).

But I digress, and must return to my response to Armistice Day with another personal story: I remember once ... oh, thirty-five years ago, as an adult – going to the Armistice Day parade at Johannesburg’s King Edward VII School with an alumnus of the school. The occasion moved to me to tears: white, English-speaking men – young and old — gathered together in the school quad, reciting lines from Laurence Binyon’s poem *The Fallen*: “At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them ... ” So, like these other citizens of the Dominions-in-the-making, Anglo-South Africans were deeply touched by the First World War and its ceaseless memorialisation.

Moreover, the two minutes of silence at eleven minutes past eleven on Armistice Day is said to be brainchild of the Anglo-South African Sir Percy Fitzpatrick (1862-1931), who had served as British High Commissioner to South Africa during the Great War (see Gregory 2014). His son Nugent, who was killed in France in 1917, was an Old Boy of St Andrew’s College, Grahamstown (Poland 2008: 180). It is suggestive of the drift of this chapter that Fitzpatrick’s biography is called *The First South African* (1971). So, at risk of belabouring the point, to Anglo-South Africans of a certain age, the commemoration of the fallen of both World Wars is deeply ingrained in our identity (for a further understanding of this, see Couzens 2014).

I intend no disrespect to those who sacrificed their lives for King and Empire – indeed, as noted previously, this is simply not possible. But the Brixton Memorial is ‘unremarkable’ because it is replicated in many places across the length and breadth of this country – and indeed across the world. Surely this is a case of Nandy’s ‘historical consciousness’ owning the world (1995: 46). And its standardised form, rather than the names that appear on it, give it its unexceptional appearance – it becomes an everyday structure that readily blends into the park and into the wider city about.

The plinth comprises a base of light brown stone, a four-sided block of black granite, and an obelisk of the same light

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brown stone. The eastern side of the memorial carries this legend: "ERECTED TO THE HONOUR OF THIS WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1919. LEST WE FORGET". Above it is an engraved head of the ubiquitous South African Springbok. Springbok badges also appeared on the uniforms of white South African soldiers who fought in the First World War, but not on the uniforms of black South Africans who (as we shall see) also went to war. The Springbok head arrived on these uniforms from the social practice of Victorian sport. To briefly explain: the first 'officially representative' all-white South African sports team was a rugby team. In 1906, a South African team, made up of Afrikaners and Anglo-South Africans, toured Britain, and it was on this occasion that the nickname "Springboks" was first used. That tour was regarded as a way to unite the former Boer War foes across the language divide. South Africa's historical tragedy is that this noble effort was only partially successful. And this misfortune is captured by the motto that encircles the Springbok head on the Brixton War Memorial: it reads "UNITY IS STRENGTH", and in Dutch (the country's other official language before the official adoption of Afrikaans in 1918), "EENDRACHT MAAKT MACHT".

The north and south sides of the memorial stone carries the names of the Brixton men who lost their lives in the fighting – six names on each side – and their military units. Interestingly, the names of these units reveal the very moment when the military of the Union of South Africa was emerging and, unsurprisingly, reveals the close links with the 'old country'. Regiments like the 'South African Irish' and 'Transvaal Scottish' appear alongside the numbered South African Infantry which were hastily established as the country entered the war. These declarations of South African identities were often ambiguous, with nostalgia for the 'old country' combined with assertions of the new. It was meant to bridge the geographic divide between Britain and South Africa – an elasticity of identity and belonging through a shared history.

As noted previously, I pass the Brixton memorial every morning, and have done so for several years. For me, the place is so familiar that the site and its meaning is integrated into my Anglo-South African consciousness as much as it is into the quartzite rock on which it stands and, indeed, into the awakening city.

However, the city's insertion into global history was conditional on establishing rules of power that would ensure access to the gold which lay under the quartzite on which Brixton stands. Let this statistic illustrate the importance of gold mining to South Africa and the world: in 1886, the industry produced 0.16 per cent of the world's gold output; some three decades later, this had gone up to 40 percent (Van Onselen 1982: 1). But this progress, the rules of the power it generated, and the riches that would flow, were secured by the successive codifications of exclusion and inclusion that continued before and after the First World War.

For Anglo-South Africans, these codes reinforced the establishment of what the educationalist Peter Randall called "Little England in the Veld" – the subject and title of his study of South Africa's private schools (1985). These were utopian spaces built on the sweat of those who were compelled to labour beneath Johannesburg's British-named places and parks, and were deliberately excluded by the rules of power and control. (For how this came about, see Legassick 1995). So, quoting Nandy (1995: 55), Johannesburg was built by the "invisible refugees of development", also rendered invisible in its histories and monuments.

As the days drew in one autumn, this every-day understanding of the Brixton site and the significance of the monument (in my life and the history of my country) changed entirely: it no longer drew me back to my Anglophone upbringing, but beckoned me forward to what my country currently was, and what it was in the process of becoming. How did this happen?

The past is another country

One Monday, there was a pile of stones on the west side of the rocky outcrop into which the Brixton War Memorial is cemented. There are always loose stones in the garden, but these were piled up in a seemingly systematic and distinctive way, and the pile grew steadily in size over the next month or so.

The stacking of stones has long interested anthropologists and annoyed nature lovers in equal measure. Popular literature suggests that cairns (as piles of stones are called) appear in many corners of the world – as signposts in the

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Arctic, to mark mountain summits in Europe, and as markers of the graves of the fallen – as they do at the site of the 1879 Battle in Isandlwana in the South African province of KwaZulu Natal (the first of several armed encounters between the Zulu nation and the British Empire).

Cairns are also deeply embedded in many African customs: in the Zulu language, they are called *Isivivane*, literally 'throwing your stone upon the pile', which means to lend a hand or assist. In certain rituals, cairns are said to bring good luck – by adding a stone to the cairn, a traveller will experience good fortune on the journey. But in a more profound way, the word *Isivivane* is associated with coming together – joining together, communicating with each other – which is why this term has been used as a metaphor for South Africa's political settlement of 1994.

However, I wondered whether there was a less benign reading of this particular cairn: was it intended as a counter-memorial? Was this (to return to Nandy's essay) a protest against the disenfranchisement and oppression of South Africa's majority in the cause of history? This occurred to me because the cairn appeared at about the time that a protest movement – driven by students, and initially directed at a statue of the arch-imperialist Cecil John Rhodes – developed at the University of Cape Town (Kekana 2015). The success of the latter has sparked a wider movement to 'decolonise' higher education and knowledge in South Africa, and grew to include calls for the removal of 'symbols of colonialism' at more distant places like Oriel College, Oxford. Was this particular cairn meant to challenge the way in which this and similar monuments had constructed a history of South Africa and its link to progress which was exclusionary and discriminatory? Of course the lore of cairns, as we have seen, can have many meanings, and the stones that were accumulating at the Brixton War Memorial could mean many different things.

In the event, I continued to walk past the memorial and its counterpart for about a month, and it often seemed – certainly symbolically – that the so were conversing one with the other. I resolved to photograph both the monument and the teasing counter-monument, but, alas, never did. Then, on a sunny winter Sunday – when I walk later than usual – I found a resident of Beverley Street (and her gardener) busily tidying up Brixton Park. "It was a mess," she told me; "papers and rubbish everywhere. We've taken all the stones away too." And, indeed, she (or her retainer) had cleaned away the disorder represented by the countermonument, and 'restored' the main monument and its narrative of history to its 'proper' place. The search for order had scrubbed clean the chaos represented by any alternative renditions of memorialisation, or sign of protest.

"The past is another country: they do things different there", is the opening sentence of the 1971 film adaption of LP Hartley's novel *The Go-between*. The appeal of the line increased with African and Asian decolonisation although, in South Africa, where the sentence might be thought to be applicable, it is not in wide use; nor has it been in the twenty-four years since apartheid ended, and the 'new' South Africa was born.

The question of why South Africa is *not* another country, despite the celebrated ending of apartheid in 1994, is easily demonstrated by the use of statistics. Consider these:

- While, since 2001, the incomes of households headed by black South Africans had increased rapidly, by 2011 about 90% of households in the no-income and low-income categories were headed by Black Africans (Statistics South Africa 2015: 35)
- "[2015] employment figures for the country are not good, with unemployment hitting a decade high. Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Survey released [puts] official unemployment at 26.4 percent, climbing from 24.3 percent in December and 25.2 percent at the same time last year. The expanded unemployment rate, which includes those who have given up looking for a job, has continued to rise, reaching 36.1 percent" (Nicolson 2015).
- "Black African youth, like adults, are hardest hit by unemployment: 40.3 percent were without a job this year, up from 36.3 percent in 2008. In contrast, white youth unemployment stood at 11.2 percent this year, slightly up from 9.3 percent in 2008. Coloured youth unemployment rose to 32.1 percent this year, up by just under 4 percentage points, and Indian youth unemployment rose to 22.6 percent this year, up from 17.4 percent in 2008. Overall, more young women are affected by unemployment, with joblessness among black African women aged 15 to 34 at 44.8 percent now, compared to their male counterparts' unemployment of 36.7 percent" (Merten 2015).

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These numbers tell the tale of the unmitigated failure to move from the racial authoritarianism of the apartheid years to the overhyped liberal democracy that was championed by the idea of globalisation. Because of this, South Africa is neither 'another country' in the material sense, nor is it 'transformed' – to use a euphemism much loved by pundits – in the minds of those who were previously excluded. And this brings us full circle to Ashis Nandy's famous essay, and to a consideration of ways to rethink IR.

Nandy's purpose is to suggest that the search for 'Enlightenment history' is itself a process of colonisation. The conquest of the past through history is still not complete in South Africa, or indeed in IR. Instead, the post-apartheid experience is a flawless example of how new elites are accepting of the necessity of including themselves and the country in these sanitised forms of history.

In his state of the nation address in Parliament in February 2016, former president Jacob Zuma noted that 2016 marked the centenary of the battle of Delville Wood in France during the First World War. "Scores of Black soldiers fought in the war, but were treated badly due to the colour of their skin. A memorial that will restore their dignity and humanity is scheduled to be unveiled in July this year in France." In orthodox readings of history, this is long overdue, but at issue is not the timing, but the form that this memorial will take. Will it be a memorial in the unexceptional sense?

There have been other opportunities to remember Black South Africans who died in the Great War. They include members of the South African Native Labour Corps, who perished in the sinking of the *Mendi* off the Isle of Wight on 21 February 1917. Both lore and legend have grown around this tragedy, which – rather than any physical memorial – draw Nandy's ideas closer to the purpose of history.

What is this lore, the legend around the *Mendi*? Here is an account drawn from that often totally ignored source, oral history:

As the *Mendi* was taking in water, the Reverent Isaac Wauchope Dyobha held up his hands and loudly addressed the doomed men on the ship with these words:

"Be quiet and calm my countrymen, what is happening now is what you came to do, you came to die. Brothers, we are doing the death drill.

"I, a Xhosa, say you are my brothers; Swazis, Pondos, Basotho, so let us die like brothers.

"We are the sons of Africa! Raise your war-cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our bodies."

The *Mendi* sank in 20 minutes, and nine officers and 615 men and crew drowned or died of exposure and exhaustion.

Enlightenment history privileges facts, and provides linear and rational accounts of the past; it draws on monuments, including war memorials, to offer sanitised accounts of history. Mainstream IR – especially its aspect that harks back nostalgically to the link between the Great War and the founding of the discipline – is mostly caught up in rationality and routine. But, despite being classified into a system of purported social order via the notion of 'states', most people the world over live outside the grip of the history celebrated as 'the international'. Other experiences of 'the international' live in a place where folklore, legend, and oral history reach deep into everyday lives – a place where IR is unable to go because of its preoccupation with rationality and order. It is time this cloak is removed.

**I am very grateful to Professor Desiree Lewis for reminding me of the importance of the essay in conversations like these. See her "Neo-Liberalism, the Humanities and Feminist Intellectuals" (2016).*

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