



Must Dias fall? The politics and history of settler heritage in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ Movement and the ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests, the politics of heritage has been at the centre of new intellectual debates and political demands, especially in relation to the status of problematic historical monuments. This article examines a form of colonial heritage that has remained politically uncontested as well as unexplored in the specialised literature, i.e. monuments memorialising early modern European sea voyages, in particular those pertaining to Bartolomeu Dias, credited as the first European navigator to successfully complete the maritime route to India, through the Western Cape. The article suggests that Dias can be productively seen not only as a symbol of pre-apartheid European colonisation, but more importantly as part of apartheid’s broader settler colonial narrative of Southern African history. Drawing on the example of monuments exchanged between Lisbon and Pretoria in the early 1960s, the article argues that settler heritage making played into white South African narratives of European settler ‘pioneerism’, but also served to cement politico-diplomatic solidarity and friendship between white-ruled states in Southern Africa. By unveiling the politics and history of settler heritage in South Africa, the article hopes to convince its readers that Dias, too, must fall.

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The ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ Movement – which, in 2015, successfully campaigned for the removal of a monument to the infamous British imperialist Cecil Rhodes from the main campus of the University of Cape Town, in South Africa – has animated a global conversation over the ‘politics of public pasts’,¹ injecting new public interest and giving political momentum to long-lasting collective struggles for history- and heritage-making ‘from below’.² That such an epoch defining movement was to emerge in post-apartheid South Africa is not surprising, considering that country’s fraught democratic transition was importantly embedded in the politics of history and memory, as sites of political intervention and intellectual mobilisation actively engaged by scholars, social movements, and cultural practitioners alike.³ Yet, although rooted in the South African situation, the transformative demands raised by Rhodes Must Fall are also transnational in nature. The Black Lives Matter movement, which gained global momentum in the aftermath of

the murder of George Floyd in 2020, has also critically challenged the gendered and racialised logics of material heritage culture, adding fuel to ongoing political struggles over statues and monuments memorialising mostly male and white historical figures, many of whom directly associated with slavery and indigenous genocide.⁴ As claims for decolonisation 'of space', in general, and of heritage, in particular, have flourished around the world, from the Southern United States to European cities and several locations in the Global South, especially those shaped by settler colonial histories, it is clear that monuments are not simply about remembering a well-settled 'past', but about 'memory, experiences and imaginings' that are renegotiated in the present.⁵ Frank and Ristic coined the term 'urban fallism' to name these new forms of 'global socio-political protest' by which the insurgent act of contesting heritage – of occupying, defacing, or taking down controversial monuments – becomes a tool of resistance and a means to renegotiate collective memory.⁶

In this article, I dialogue with this literature, but I intend to interrogate, problematise, and historicise why a certain expression of settler heritage has remained uncontested in Southern Africa, even amid these current demands for the decolonisation of public space. I refer here to the monuments associated to early modern European sea travel, in particular those memorialising Bartolomeu Dias,⁷ the European 'explorer' commonly credited as the first navigator to successfully complete the maritime route to India through the Western Cape. In my view, the fact that Dias' colonial legacy remains relatively undisturbed in a political and intellectual climate increasingly committed to a decolonising project deserves further attention, from historians and memory workers alike. To be sure, as Robert Musil has argued, many monuments are 'conspicuously inconspicuous', fading into the background of the everyday, into a 'sea of oblivion'.⁸ It is not surprising then, that many never attract the same level of attention and controversy as those pertaining to particularly contested public figures, such as Christopher Columbus, whose monuments have been subject to much protest of late.⁹ Why has Dias, then, not occupied the same space in public memory and political mobilisation?

In the historiography, Leslie Witz's article about South Africa's 1988 Dias Festival and the related Dias Museum Complex set up in Mossel Bay, a small coastal town in the Western Cape, remains the most substantial endeavour at critically addressing the political uses of Dias in apartheid public discourse and heritage cultures. Witz argued that in the context of domestic unrest and widespread rebellion against apartheid in the 1980s, Dias as a global historical figure allowed the reimagination of South Africa as a 'multicultural nation', the outcome of a history of contact between Europe, Africa, and Asia.¹⁰ As Witz suggested, this celebration of 'diversity' as a national virtue was closely associated to South Africa's ambition of 'reforming' apartheid by affording limited political participation to non-white constituencies, a process then mediated by the appointment of representatives sitting either at a new tricameral parliament or in the so-called 'homelands' or 'bantustans'.¹¹ To be sure, this mobilisation of Dias as the symbol of an imagined multicultural history differed markedly from early apartheid public culture, in which the celebration of heroes and events of European colonisation and settlement intended precisely to create a racialised settler collective identity, thus cementing South Africa's constitution as a 'white nation'.¹² That Dias has been largely excluded from this earlier history may be explained by the fact that apartheid's public recourse to his name and symbology never reached the same level of political investment and

spectacle enjoyed by more prominent national personalities, especially settlers of Dutch origin, such as Jan van Riebeeck. Even then, I suggest that while Dias remained a relatively 'marginal hero' in South African national (settler) history, he nonetheless had a specific role to play in apartheid's imagined pasts and political cultures.

Adding to Witz argument, this article will explore how nearly two decades before the 1988 Festival staged in his name, Dias' historical legacy and heritage in South Africa was being researched, memorialised, nurtured, and, in sum, invented in historical books, public performance, and a few minor historical monuments.¹³ Here, I borrow the term from Ann Stoler's notion of 'minor histories'. As Stoler suggests, these are not to be mistaken by 'trivial' histories. Rather, they mark a 'differential political temper and a critical space [...] that in "major" history might be otherwise displaced'.¹⁴ Dias was, indeed, consistently placed at the margins of apartheid's 'major history', as the latter came to be more heavily predicated on a political and genealogical attachment to Northern European settlers as ancestral bearers of South African whiteness – an identity later sedimented and carried through African soil (physically and metaphorically) by the Voortrekkers.¹⁵ Yet, I argue, the celebration of Dias in apartheid's nationalist imagination served not only, or primarily, a domestic political purpose, but a transnational one. This means that Dias was less significant to white nationalism in South Africa, and more intimately associated to (white) settler transnationalism as a regional political project and imagination cutting across borders. This became particularly important in the decolonisation era of the 1950s and 1960s, when the country was increasingly isolated and ostracised internationally, due to its racist regime. In this context, Dias provided the possibility of new diplomatic alignments, serving to symbolically activate a reactionary politics of friendship by which settler states resisted the 'winds' of decolonisation and majority rule.

Thus, in this article, I argue that Dias can be productively seen not only as a historical symbol of pre-apartheid early modern European maritime exploration (which he also was), but, more importantly, as the expression of a twentieth century settler colonial mythology. My purpose is to lay out some clues for a critical interrogation of the history and politics underpinning this invention of Dias as a significant historical figure in Southern Africa of the decolonisation era (1950s and 1960s). Engaging with historical sources from Portuguese and South African archives, my aim is to demonstrate that Dias, as a settler pioneer whose legacy is scattered across borders, infused settler narratives of historical 'pioneerism' in Africa, and actively worked to promote transnational solidarities, affects, and friendship between white-ruled states in the region. Considering the undeniable evidence that Dias offered – albeit from the margins of the South African pantheon – support, legitimacy, and hope to the apartheid political project, my main goal here is to convince my readers that he, too, must fall.

A monumental friendship: heritage-diplomacy and settler colonialism's material culture

During the Great Trek, your pioneers in Portuguese East Africa extended the hand of friendship to the Voortrekkers under the leadership of Trichardt. The hospitality which they extended to our Voortrekkers at a time when the need for friendship and assistance was most urgent will always be gratefully remembered. (Mayor of Pretoria, 1939)¹⁶

As long as the history of the settlement of white civilization in South Africa will be taught, the tales of the adventurous voyages of [the Portuguese] pioneers round the Cape will continue

to thrill the hearts of the youth of South Africa and constitute a living link of sympathy between your people [...] and our own. (Administrator of the Cape, 1939)¹⁷

As part of his visit to Mozambique in 1939, the Portuguese President General Carmona also visited South Africa, where he was received with all pomp and circumstance. As it can be expected from these kinds of moments, expressions of friendship and shared purpose abounded on both sides. On a banquet offered at the City Hall in Pretoria on August 14, the Governor-General of South Africa, Patrick Duncan, stressed the 'interwoven interests' between the two nations, including a familiar vision of a shared past of settler 'pioneerism', in 'opening up the dark continent'.¹⁸ He also noted the similarities between Portuguese sailors and Voortrekkers, then described as 'those hardy pioneers who paved the way for civilisation into the interior in the same manner as your countrymen did on sea'.¹⁹ The familiar idea that Portugal's maritime 'pioneerism' set the stage for South Africa's territorial one was mobilised several times during Carmona's tour of the country. In another banquet offered on August 16, the Mayor of Pretoria thanked the Portuguese for the solidarity they had shown to the Voortrekkers who found their death in Mozambique,²⁰ and added that 'the heroes of Portugal are also heroes of our history, for in their voyages we find the birth of our own history'.²¹

Considering the symbolic role that the 'Cape of Good Hope' had to play in the performance of friendship being staged during the visit, it is not surprising that the lengthiest speech reproduced across the border, in the *Anuário Estatístico de Moçambique*, was the one professed by the Administrator of the Cape, at another banquet, on 18 August. Observing that the discovery of the sea route to India, via de Cape, had been 'the most important event of the fifteenth century', the speech proceeded to express 'a sincere feeling of admiration for [Dias'] skill and intrepidity'.²² After praising the 'dauntless courage, endurance, and sacrifices of the [...] pioneers of the sea', the speaker assured his audience that 'the tale of their achievements form part of the history of South Africa, and the names of [Dias and da Gama] are written in golden letters also in our own history'.²³ In the course of the tour, it became clear that the cult of early modern maritime voyages had the contemporary purpose of supporting a settler re-alignment in Southern Africa. In the last of the official banquets, on August 21, 1939, another speaker from the Cape described his pleasure in meeting the President of Portugal, 'the country which first discovered South Africa for Europe'.²⁴ A shared past and geographical proximity, he asserted, had resulted in 'interwoven interests [...]', combined with the spirit of mutual goodwill' between the two 'friendly nation[s]'.²⁵

Carmona's presidential tour of South Africa was remarkable, as it was the first presidential tour of Portugal's colonies in Africa, including Guiné, Angola, and Mozambique. That a few days were added to South Africa speaks to a desire of creating a closer political culture across Southern African borders. At the train station in Pretoria, Carmona was welcomed by an entourage composed of the likes of Generals Hertzog and Smuts, in addition to various high ranked administrators and officials of the state. During the tour, he paid respects to the memory of the Voortrekkers in an official ceremony, and solemnly deposited flowers by the monuments to Paul Kruger, in Pretoria, and van Riebeeck, in Cape Town.²⁶ Yet, at the same time, this was not an exceptional event. Official visits had been diplomatic acts of importance for some time, but they were to become increasingly popular with the improvement of transport communications and the proliferation of

state bureaucracies, including diplomatic services, in the twentieth century. Naoko Shimaizu's work on the iconic Bandung Conference of 1955 – which took twenty-nine heads of state of newly independent countries to Bandung, Indonesia – is instructive. There, diplomacy was conducted 'as theatre', as an distinctively performative, symbolic, and public spectacle involving not only official delegates, but also the press, the city, and the Indonesian public at large.²⁷ While Carmona's tour of South Africa is not comparable to Bandung in grandiosity and importance, the speeches and performative acts described above underline the symbolic and public nature of diplomacy as a political culture that greatly exceeds the secluded spaces frequently associated with international politics, such as, for instance, the negotiation room hidden behind closed doors.

A cultural history of diplomatic practice, thus, may help us better understand the ways in which symbols are produced, staged, and put into circulation in favour of a particular agenda or political project. In my view, Carmona's tour is interesting as an expression of a politics of settler friendship emerging in Southern Africa in the twentieth century. By looking at these instances of settler recognition across borders – as epitomised by the shared cult of settler 'pioneerism' in Africa, whether by the Voortrekkers or by Portuguese explorers – I want to avoid patriotic and national histories. Rather, my aim in this article is to explore diplomacy as a domain of politics that necessarily demands a transnational analytics, one that is able to place white-minority ruled settler colonial states in Southern Africa in the same analytical field. In doing so, I dialogue with a growing body of work exploring the ways in which economic, political, and diplomatic interests in Southern Africa colluded to shield settler colonial states – South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Angola and Mozambique as Portuguese colonies – from the 'winds of change' of decolonisation, enfranchisement, and majority rule being pushed forward by several liberation movements.²⁸ Building on previous work on the 'white redoubt' or the 'unholy alliance',²⁹ this new wave of studies has so far privileged spaces of high state politics, formal diplomacy, economic policy, and military cooperation and consultation.³⁰ At least partially, the impetus for this work was provided by the declassification of files relating to the formal, and secret, military alliance between Portugal, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia, the so-called 'Alcora Exercise' formalised in 1968.³¹

While the reality of a regional liberation war fought across borders certainly contributed to the consolidation of a shared security and military agenda between settler states in the 1960s, some historians have suggested that mutual suspicion and disagreement between white settler elites in the region persisted even amidst growing diplomatic and economic cooperation. Racial politics was an important part of this conundrum. In a schematic but elucidating description of the issue, Correia and Verhoef observed that 'Portugal viewed South Africa's apartheid policy as "morally wrong and politically dangerous", while South Africa viewed Portugal's multi-racial policy as "morally dangerous and politically wrong".³² While mutual criticism between South African and Portuguese actors certainly occurred at various levels – from diplomatic channels to the local press on both sides of the border – it is also true that the 1960s saw the proliferation of forms of recognition, identification, solidarity, affects, and friendship between whites across settler colonial states and their particular political cultures.³³ These manifestations of settler affect conveyed a sense of shared aspiration toward continued regional white rule, often coded as a defence of Christian, capitalist, and European civilisation on African soil.³⁴ In other words, the defence of the settler colonial formation as a regional and transnational reality.

In this paper, I am less interested in the politics of high diplomacy, secret military pacts, and economic entanglements, than I am in the practice of 'settler diplomacy' as a performative, affective, and memorialist act.³⁵ I suggest that cultural transfers and various forms of affective connectivity on the ground were crucial in shaping a sense of Southern African white solidarity and the shared ideology of settler colonialism in the region. Public performances of friendship, of course, could take many forms and occupy different social spaces, from highly publicised official visits – in their momentary and yet spectacular interventions in colonial public cultures – to the more perennial strategy of gifting and/or exchanging various material cultural artefacts, including monuments. Here, I engage with emerging approaches to diplomatic history after the affective and the cultural turns. As a key component of the anthropology of the state, diplomatic performance materialises state claims by activating emotional or affective attachments, as lived geopolitics.³⁶ At the same time, I also want to connect these new diplomatic histories to critical heritage studies, especially by looking at what Tim Winter has called 'heritage diplomacy'.³⁷ In my view, this term is useful as it encourages us to move away from heritage as a function of a nationally bounded past or memory, towards a more complicated and serious engagement with the transnational dimension of heritage-making. As Winter points out, diplomacy allows us to 'excavate a broader political history of heritage [...], and shed light on those entanglements of the political and economic, national and international that have received less attention than they deserve'.³⁸ In this context, 'heritage, as a non-human actor, becomes activated diplomatically because it speaks to notions of shared culture',³⁹ as well as shared memories and pasts.

Drawing on this literature, I aim to examine and historicise the transnational making of 'settler heritage' in Southern Africa, of which statues and monuments to European expeditions, explorers, pioneers, and imperialists are the best example. Figures such as Bartolomeu Dias are representative of a shared settler project predicated on the creation of a sense of racial solidarity and belonging grounded on imagined memories and histories of 'white pioneerism' in Africa. As non-human actors, these monuments evoked and materialised a settler colonial project that stressed the European origins of colonial modernity, while representing Africa as a territory of white settlement and rule. Of course, such settler discourses have distinct national implications in the contexts of apartheid and Portuguese settler colonialism, or of Afrikaner nationalism and Salazarism.⁴⁰ Rather than focusing on national particularities, I want to look at these monuments as materialisations of a politics of settler friendship cutting-across borders and taking more pronounced shape in the era of decolonisation and global anti-racist activism in the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, I contribute to a still emerging body of work reconceptualising Portuguese colonialism in Southern Africa as a settler colonial formation.⁴¹ This is important because, while Portuguese heritage in the Lusophone world has already been subject to a fruitful post-colonial reading,⁴² little has been said about the settler colonial specificities of some of this material culture.

In this article, I displace the national paradigm in heritage studies to suggest that the making of settler heritage can be seen as a part of a broader politics of reactionary white transnationalism going against claims for decolonisation and majority rule. A particularly clear example of this politics, I argue, is the exchange of monuments between Lisbon and Pretoria, which culminated in the unveiling of Bartolomeu Dias' statue in Cape Town in March 1960, and the inauguration, only a few months later, of the 'Compass Rose' to

the Portuguese maritime discoveries, in Lisbon. Both monuments were presented to the public in 1960, in a context of growing domestic political turbulence in South Africa and Portuguese territories, as well as international pressure against colonialism, racism, and minority rule. They were unveiled, too, as part of broader moments of commemoration and public performance: the 'Golden Jubilee' of the Union of South Africa, which celebrated 50 years of political unity between the colonies of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River, and the 'Comemorações Henriquinas', a series of public celebrations staged in memory of the 500 years of the death of Prince Henry 'the Navigator', a historical figure largely given credit for catalysing Portugal's maritime explorations and the subsequent 'discoveries' in the early modern period. Considered together as twin, related, monuments, I argue that they represented the monumental friendship – as well as the historical, economic, and political entanglements – between Portuguese colonialism and South African apartheid.

Dias, 1960: guiding colonialism and apartheid through turbulent waters

Henry the Navigator's efforts started a noble tradition. Even today, the Portuguese are ready to resist the forces that seek to destroy the world, and they stand firm in face of criticism and lack of understanding. At the same time, they carry on their mission to civilize and develop their peoples and their overseas provinces. (Speech by the South African Ambassador during the inauguration of Compass Rose in Lisbon)⁴³

(Today, Dias) comes for the second time to the Cape of Good Hope. This name of good omen was given by us. The feeling of hope is to-day the same as it was then. We discovered and crossed stormy seas: but we got through. Perhaps some difficulties – new Capes of Storms – lay ahead of us: but we will get through. (Speech by the Portuguese Ambassador during the unveiling of the Dias Statue in Cape Town)⁴⁴

My interrogation of Dias in South Africa started at Wits University. As so many other historians of Southern Africa, I visited the Cullen Library too many times to remember. Yet, I had never noticed the somewhat discrete display cabinet standing against the wall on the right side of the entrance hall.⁴⁵ Upon a closer look, I realised I had been ignoring the reconstituted fragments of the cross built by Bartolomeu Dias in the Eastern Cape, in 1488. Moreover, the cross authoritatively claimed to be South Africa's 'oldest historical monument', declared as such in 1939 (Figure 1). The fragments had been recovered in 1938 by the South African historian Eric Axelson, who later made his life's work to research Portuguese history and heritage in South Africa.⁴⁶ I do not want to offer here a detailed history of this cross or of the politics of Axelson's scholarship. This work is already done. As Fauvelle-Aymar has pointed out, the Dias Cross at the Cullen Library served to legitimate a 'genealogy of white presence' in a context where the political mythology of apartheid aimed to deny the anteriority of African presence in the region. The cross was of symbolic importance because it 'offered the possibility of a narrative of white domination on South African soil',⁴⁷ as it resonated with, and legitimised, apartheid's 'vacant land' myth.⁴⁸ As I will argue below, the memory of Dias – and the historical relics and material culture associated with it, including monuments – conveyed and embodied the colonial idea of 'white pioniarism' in Africa, a civilisational discourse that found resonance in political circles, academic debate, and popular culture. As part of this narrative, the Dias cross at Wits university is also embedded in a broader network of settler colonial heritage involving monuments in both Portugal and South Africa.



Figure 1. Dias Cross at the Cullen Library. Picture by the author.

Two years after the inauguration of the twin monuments I described above, the South African ‘poet, journalist, broadcaster, diplomat, and author’⁴⁹ Roy Macnab published a travel – history book, *Journey Into Yesterday*, which – as its subtitle promised – mapped South African ‘milestones in Europe’.⁵⁰ Tracing the origins of South Africa back to the time when European navigators ‘setting out from Portugal first sailed round our coasts’, the book credited Europe’s ‘questing genius’ for originating a new, descendant, nation ‘in the toe of Africa’.⁵¹ Noting that he was writing at a moment when European colonisation was ‘no longer fashionable’, Macnab argued that the continuation of Western European civilisation in Africa had ‘nothing to do with colonialism’, but was related to the ‘sacrifice’ and ‘courage’ with which Christianity had been established as a source of civilisation.⁵² As the first chapter covers Portugal, quite a few pages are spent on relics and heritage pertaining to Portugal’s early modern maritime discoveries,



Figure 2. Floor sign placed by the compass rose in Lisbon. It reads: ‘this compass rose was gifted to Portugal by the Union of South Africa at the 5th Centenary of Henry the Navigator, whose genius made possible the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope (1960)’. Photo by the author.

which includes the ‘compass rose’ in Lisbon, gifted by South Africa (Figure 2). But here, rather than a celebratory marker of Portuguese maritime explorations as an event belonging to a national past, the monument was described as representing ‘our beginnings’ and ‘the emergence of Southern Africa into modern history’.⁵³ As it will should clear by now, these discourses that early modern maritime discoveries launched South Africa into history were common, and had already been mobilised during Carmona’s tour of Africa two decades earlier.

Yet, in Portugal, the ‘compass rose’ assumed a particular meaning, as it was associated with the public celebration of the 500 years of the death of Prince Henry, the Navigator, a series of events also popularly known as *Comemorações Henriquinas*. As Campos Matos has argued, the celebrations were a performative moment in which the Portuguese regime was reimagining the country’s place in the world, both in relation to a romanticised version of its colonial history and in response to drastic changes occurring in global politics at the time, including the impending decolonisation of Africa.⁵⁴ In this context, the commemoration of an heroic history of European discoveries – as it was, embodied in the figure of Prince Henry – served to legitimise the official discourse (and the propaganda) of the Salazar regime, according to which ‘overseas expansion’ was a national vocation of the Portuguese people, but also responded to an universal imperative of spreading Christian and European ‘civilisation’ to the tropics. At a time when the presumed ‘lack of preparedness’ and ‘backwardness’ of African leaders and societies were routinely used by European powers as excuses to perpetually delay talks on decolonisation and majority rule, the celebration of the maritime discoveries as an heroic achievement made possible not only by European bravery, but also by its modern nautical

knowledge, played into familiar racialised discourses that legitimised white rule on the grounds of European technological superiority and scientific inventiveness. It is unsurprising, then, that a ‘compass rose’, as a nautical technology, was chosen to memorialise this history. Paid for by apartheid South Africa, the monument was a marble mosaic of 50 m in diameter, situated on the floor, just next to another major monument to the discoveries, the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, a ship-like structure accommodating statues of Portuguese explorers. Inside the ‘compass rose’, a world-map marked the routes of maritime exploration, with dates and names representing the colonial mapping and conquest of the world (Figure 3). But, as a diplomatic gift from South Africa, it also fed a politics of friendship that – whilst drawing symbolic power from a history perceived as ‘shared’ – was consequential to the present. During the unveiling of the monument, the South African Ambassador to Lisbon, Alfred Mertsch, paid homage to Prince Henry’s “Christian faith, bravery, dedication and strong energy”, which were all principles that South Africa had been committed to uphold ‘since the first Europeans arrived in the Cape [...]. We are, in fact, closely connected through our history and our common purpose’.⁵⁵ This suggests that the ‘compass rose’ operated at the level of both Portuguese and South African national histories and imaginaries, but also and simultaneously across a transnational dimension permeating Southern Africa’s settler colonial history.

The same is true of the Dias Statue in Cape Town. Its origins go back to a momentous occasion in South African public culture: the 1952 Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival. As Rassool and Witz have argued, the festival was an attempt to cement Van Riebeeck as an iconic ‘bearer of civilization’ and to ‘display the growing power of the apartheid



Figure 3. Detail of the ‘Cape of Good Hope’, with the date of Dias expedition (1488) indicated, in the Compass Rose, in Lisbon. Photo by the author.

state'. As such, it also raised crucial questions about 'the icons and symbols of [apartheid national] history'.⁵⁶ It was in this context that the Dias statue had been first gifted by the Portuguese government. As the Minister for External Affairs Eric Louw stated during its unveiling, the initial plan was to place Dias in the new 'Gateway to Africa Boulevard' connecting Cape Town's foreshore to the CBD. There, Dias was to feature alongside a statue of van Riebeeck. Delays in the construction of the new boulevard, however, pushed the South African government to temporarily place the Dias statue in the city gardens, in front of the National Art Gallery. The politics of location was not a trivial affair or innocent gesture. As Noëleen Murray has argued, the Cape Town gardens were shaped by Dutch and, later, British colonial cultures and political imaginations. Since its foundation in the mid-sixteenth century, this space came to embody different agendas and colonial purposes, from a scientific (botanical) laboratory and site of knowledge production, to a place of (white) leisure in an increasingly segregated urban space.⁵⁷ Likewise, the development of the foreshore in the twentieth century belongs to a broader history of apartheid urban planning, in which white ownership of and investment in the city space where predicated on black displacement and dispossession, a process only accelerated by Cape Town's connectivity to transnational circuits of capital and white mobility, including a growing tourist industry.⁵⁸ The placement of the Dias statue in the city gardens and its planned dislocation to the foreshore is situated in this longer history of spatial practices, in which architecture, planning, and the built environment more generally manifested settler colonial imaginings and – by inscribing them in the urban landscape – legitimised political claims of white ownership and occupation of space.

The unveiling of the statue in 1960 was planned to coincide with the celebrations of the Union Festival marking the Golden Jubilee of the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.⁵⁹ Described as 'the biggest and the most significant [celebrations] South Africa has ever known',⁶⁰ the festival was a moment to cement, display, and celebrate the historical foundations and the political viability of the nation at a political moment when the country was preparing a referendum to vote on withdrawing from the Commonwealth and instituting a South African republic. This move towards a republic was in large part a response to the criticism of apartheid abroad,⁶¹ which nonetheless had clear domestic implications. Breaking away from the Commonwealth demanded a renegotiation of the meanings of 'Britishness' in a republican South Africa defined in terms of Afrikaner nationalism and selective isolationism.⁶² In this context, from the British perspective it was important to participate in the Union Festival at a time when not only the position of English cultural heritage in South Africa was in question, but also Britain's ability to exert influence in South African republican politics.⁶³ This was, of course, at odds with South Africa's ambitions for the event, which was designed mostly as a moment of nationalist performance. Indeed, as a British diplomat stated: 'this was to be a "national" festival in every sense; participation from abroad, save from restricted items, was not welcome'.⁶⁴ In this sensitive political context, Dias' symbolic incorporation into the festivities – and in the future 'Gateway to Africa Boulevard', where no British historical figure was to be honoured⁶⁵ – served a double purpose. While it met Lisbon's expectations of marking its 'historical anteriority' in Southern Africa, it also fit the political narrative of Afrikaner nationalism, as it did not challenge the overwhelming centrality of Dutch and Afrikaner heritage, which, as the Portuguese Ambassador observed, took the 'lion's share' of the festival's symbology.⁶⁶ Still, the incorporation of the Dias statue into the festivities was

appropriate because it allowed claims to European modernity and embodied a shared and heroic history that pre-dated and circumvented the centrality of British imperialism.

Notwithstanding tensions between South Africa and the UK over the referendum on the withdrawal from the Commonwealth, the tone of the festival was one of national unity between 'Brits' and 'Boers', as well as between apartheid's racial communities in general. Despite these intentions, the festivities were tainted by 'shadows of national disunity', as a British diplomat described it.⁶⁷ In late 1959, the ANC secretary Duma Nokwe already stated 'there is nothing golden about the 50 years of Union, nothing to be proud of'.⁶⁸ A few months later, in 1960, the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March and the ensuing state of emergency exposed, with much publicity, the explosive political situation brewing in the country. As Tom Lodge has argued, Sharpeville elicited 'political reaction [s], both within South Africa and beyond its borders'.⁶⁹ Domestically, it led to the intensification of political dissent and state repression, as well as the radicalisation of the anti-apartheid struggle, which soon turned to violence.⁷⁰ Internationally, it precipitated a wave of criticism against Pretoria.⁷¹ Sharpeville elicited condemnation from long lasting enemies of apartheid, to a point in which South Africa became increasingly isolated and dangerously positioned to bear the brunt of the 'wind of change' blowing across Africa, as Minister Harold Macmillan had famously suggested earlier that year, on 3 February.⁷²

It is in this context of political turbulence and isolation that we must situate the symbolic powers of Dias' mythology. In its most prosaic functionality, the Dias statue, as other forms of diplomatic gift giving, embodied the special relationship between Portugal and South Africa,⁷³ at a moment in which both countries were internationally under fire for their administration of 'native affairs' and racial policies.⁷⁴ Because Dias was celebrated as a symbol of 'civilisation' in Africa, the statue served the familiar idea that white tutelage under colonialism and apartheid was a necessary condition for the social uplifting of the 'native' – an argument that both South African and Portuguese diplomats presented abroad to justify their discriminatory policies at home. The same notion also played out in the politics and performance of settler monuments and festivities. The week before the unveiling of the Dias statue, a 'torch of civilisation' was lit at the foot of the van Riebeeck statue in Cape Town to mark the opening of the Union Festival.⁷⁵ In the following months, the torch was to be carried throughout South Africa. During his speech at the unveiling, the Portuguese Ambassador connected the two events:

Looking at the fantastic achievements of South Africa in all fields of activity, I know that I am admiring a maturing, creative, progressive country. [...] I look at the statue of Bartolomeu Dias not only as a token of appreciation from Portugal to an old friend and loyal neighbour. [...] To my mind it is a symbol of the ancient, mystic light of civilization which is now being carried by hand through the immense spaces of South Africa. May this light shine for ever.⁷⁶

Besides the symbolic resort to European civilisation as a shared historical trait of settler colonial experience, the Dias statue also spoke to political and diplomatic entanglements in the present. In the words of the Minister of External Affairs, Eric Louw, it symbolised 'the bonds-ties of friendship, and of common interest, which exist between the Union of South Africa and our two neighbours, the Portuguese Provinces of Moçambique and of Angola'.⁷⁷ This linkage to Portugal's colonial territories, and not only metropolitan Portugal proper, was an important one, as the unveiling was attended by Mozambique's Naval

commander, Admiral João Moreira Rota, precisely to represent the regional political entanglement. Another message of friendship, sent by the Portuguese Prime Minister Salazar, was also read at the occasion. In his later report to Lisbon, the Portuguese Ambassador noted that this demonstration of goodwill by another head of state had, in South Africa, the 'value of water to someone lost in the desert', particularly at a time when the government had been receiving 'the ill-will and, in some cases, the hatred of almost the entire world'.⁷⁸ As the Ambassador reported, Macmillan's 'wind of change speech', which had been 'perversely welcomed by the international press', had left the National Party's government in 'a state close to hysteria, but it did not break the iron will of this people. Quite the contrary, it has hardened it'.⁷⁹ Perhaps to assuage white South Africa's sense of pride and destiny, at the unveiling of the statue, the Ambassador uttered a few sentences in Afrikaans, a language he did not know in the least. Yet, he remarked, 'it is touching to observe the wave of gratitude from the official South African audience', when a foreign diplomat attempts to speak that language. Independently of any correct pronunciation, 'the intention of speaking Afrikaans is felt and appreciated'.⁸⁰

Besides celebrating a shared imagined past of white 'pioneerism' and a present of special relations and friendship against the 'wind of change', another crucial intervention of the Dias statue, as a non-human actor, was to point towards a desired future. The very design seemed to suggest as much. As a newspaper put it, 'the courage, the endless energy, the stubbornness of this gallant explorer is portrayed here [...] This brave Dias [who] led the way [...] to new and unknown countries'.⁸¹ But the sense of Dias' timely appearance was better articulated by Eric Louw. Noting that it was a Portuguese King who named this place as 'Cape of Good Hope', he observed that throughout the centuries that followed 'the early settlers, the later pioneers, and their descendants, have been guided by hope, and confidence, [...] to overcome difficulties, setbacks and disappointments'. For Louw, it was this perseverance that allowed South Africa to experience 'tremendous growth', which was being celebrated at the Golden Jubilee. Yet, he cautioned,

In the days that lie ahead, when other winds (...) will be blowing across Africa, across Southern Africa, across South Africa – and also (...) across the Provinces of Portugal, Moçambique and Angola, in these days that lie ahead – and these other winds will be blowing – we will need the hope, we will need the confidence that followed upon the naming by King John of the 'Cape of Good Hope'.⁸²

To me, what is fascinating about this statement is the deployment of Dias not only as a relic or an icon of a shared colonial past, but also a figure that offered and embodied the promise of settler colonial futurity across Southern African borders. This is relevant because, as Andrew Baldwin has argued, whiteness is constantly reconstituted not only in relation to a colonial past, but also through particular imaginations of the future.⁸³ Rather than a separate domain of social and historical experience, the future infuses the experience of the contemporary.⁸⁴ In this sense, prognosis, expectations, and hopes about the future shape the politics of the present and set the boundaries of what is politically viable, of what one can hope for. As long as Dias was imagined as a beacon of hope to white ruled Southern Africa, he carried the promise of 'settler futurity', that is, of permanent viability of a settler political project on occupied land.

Hence, the symbolic and political potential of the Dias statue was both its lack and its excess of history. On the one hand, it was almost a timeless, or transtemporal, artefact, insofar as it projected an early modern mythology of white protagonism onto this imagined political future of perpetual minority rule. On the other hand, it was radically grounded in the 'turbulent' politics of 1960, of the 'postcolonial moment', in its international and domestic implications, with its political entanglements and emotional attachments. At that moment, one could surely imagine that the wind swinging Dias' cloak was not the volatile weather of the Cape of Storms, but rather the stormy political climate of the 'winds of change'. That year, the statue was placed in the urban landscape of Cape Town not only to materialise, embody, a white mythology of past 'pioneerism', but also to symbolically guide colonialism and apartheid through the troubled waters of decolonisation. I suggest that Dias should be seen not as 'Portuguese heritage in South Africa', but as an exemplary expression of transnational settler heritage, whose origins and symbolisms are firmly grounded in the reactionary politics of white rule. This transnational reading allows a more productive critique and a compelling politicisation of Dias' legacy, which has otherwise been sidelined in contemporary agendas for decolonisation in both Portugal and South Africa.

Conclusion

In 2021, I had the opportunity of visiting Haroon Gunn-Salie's solo exhibition *Line in the Sand*, hosted at the Zeitz MOCAA, in Cape Town's new Silo district. That exhibition also included works from Gunn-Salie's *Soft Veagance* series, earlier shown as part of the exhibition *History After Apartheid* (2015), at the Goodman Gallery, in Johannesburg. The series aimed to intervene on debates on colonial and apartheid eras heritage in South Africa, and displayed the 'bloodied hands' of several historical figures, including van Riebeeck, Kruger, and Dias. Made from reinforced urethane casts, the hands had been moulded precisely after known monuments to each of them. In the exhibition, they had been dismembered, floating on a white wall (Figure 4). To me, it was intriguing to 'see' Dias situated in South Africa's pantheon, as part of its now contested settler colonial heritage. Perhaps Gunn-Salie's location in Cape Town, where Dias' legacy is the most visible, was what promoted his inclusion in this artist project. Be that as it may, *Soft Veagance* performs a critical intervention, as it invites us to reconsider Dias in this light. No longer a marginal relic of a past that does not really fit into 'major' national history, but as settler colonial heritage that, too, requires decolonisation.

The question that remains is what kinds of intellectual critique and strategies of collective action are best equipped to carry out such a project. In this article, my ambition was to put Portuguese and South African heritage in the same analytical field in order to start an intellectual debate on settler heritage in Southern Africa. I do so in an attempt to catalyse a critique of settler colonialism and apartheid as related, intertwined, projects. In thinking of Dias, van Riebeeck, and the like – and here one could also add monuments to Mouzinho de Albuquerque and other settler icons in Mozambique or Zimbabwe – as expressions of a shared, transnational and racialized, material culture, we are better positioned to think of decolonial alternatives to settler colonialism's enduring legacies and afterlives – or, in other words, its cultural and political 'present'.⁸⁵ In my view, Dias' location in the Cape Town CBD, where it was initially intended for, immersed in a



Figure 4. 'Bartolomeu Dias', by Haroon Gunn-Salie, at *Line in the Sand* exhibition (Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, 2021). Photo by the author.

hotspot of international capital and mobility as it faces 5-star hotels, airlines' offices, and the International Convention Centre, continues to memorialise the tale that, by dragging the Cape into the global circuits of empire, early modern European explorers have brought South Africa into History (Figure 5).

I am aware that rescuing Dias from the overwhelming indifference it continues to accrue, even in the global political climate of decolonisation and urban fallism, may, in fact, be giving him (and his statue) an importance that he may not deserve. By politicising his legacy and its material culture, my goal is not to suggest that we must re-centre Dias in our political and intellectual agendas for decolonisation and urban change, but merely to propose that we more seriously engage the transnational circuits and symbolic entanglements tying various forms of settler colonial heritage in the Global South.⁸⁶ Settler colonialism is necessarily a transnational affair, tying disperse territories to networks of mobility, dispossession, violence and historical erasure. In this article, my goal was to



Figure 5. Dias Statue in contemporary Cape Town, 2021. Photo by the author.

demonstrate that, despite its marginality in the apartheid political imagination, Dias played a pivotal role in memorialising a politics of settler friendship, diplomatic alignment, and mutual recognition tying racially segregated South Africa to Portuguese colonial rule, and vice versa. Thinking of heritage-making in relation to the difficult history of settler colonial diplomacy, I argue, allows us to see, with Winter, how certain ‘discourses, imaginaries, and practices of heritage circulate and seem to stabilise in particular settings’.⁸⁷ In this reading, the Dias monument in Cape Town does not memorialise an individual historical figure, but a settler colonial heritage culture that we must undo. Seen in this light, Dias, too, must fall.

Notes

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 14. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.
 15. Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*, 129. *Voortrekkers* refers to the Boer pioneers who left the Cape Colony in the 1830s, seeking to escape the British colonial rule of the Cape in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery. They travelled to the interiors and settled in various parts of the territory, facing indigenous resistance and founding the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. These polities remained independent until the unification of the country in 1910, following the Anglo-Boer war. South Africa remained a British dominion until 1961, when a referendum established a republic.
 16. Sousa Ribeiro, *Anuário de Moçambique* (Lourenço Marques: Imprensa Nacional, 1940), 993. This source is the yearbook of Mozambique of 1940, compiled by Sousa Ribeiro and containing a plethora of information, including the transcript of speeches delivered during Carmo's visit to Mozambique and South Africa. In this particular speech, the speaker is described as 'President of the Pretoria City Hall', and no name is given. It is likely that it is referring to the Mayor.
 17. *Ibid.*, 995. In this source, the speaker is described as the 'Administrator of the Cape of Good Hope', and, again, no name is given. Considering the banquet's date, the Administrator would have been Johannes Hendrik Conradie.
 18. *Ibid.*, 992.
 19. *Ibid.*, 992.
 20. *Ibid.*, 993. Referring to the Louis Trichardt expedition, which led a group of Voortrekkers from the Cape Colony to Lourenço Marques, capital of colonial Mozambique. The majority of them died of malaria along the way, or upon their arrival in the city. A monument in their memory was built in downtown Maputo, where it still exists. See: David Morton, 'A Vortrekker Memorial in Revolutionar Maputo', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015): 335–52.

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22. *Ibid.*, 993.
23. *Ibid.*, 994–5.
24. *Ibid.*, 995. Speaker is described as the ‘President of the City Hall of the Cape of Good Hope’, and no name is given. It is likely that it refers to the Mayor of Cape Town.
25. *Ibid.*, 995.
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38. *Ibid.*, 998.
39. *Ibid.*, 1007.

40. 'Afrikaner nationalism' refers to the political doctrine of strong Christian, racist, and nationalism orientation that would become the ideological cornerstone of racial segregation under the leadership of the Nationalist Party in South Africa, after it came into power in 1948. 'Salazarism' refers to the political culture of the dictatorial regime ruled by Oliveira Salazar in Portugal. Lasting from 1933 until 1974, it was characterise by an ideological commitment to colonialism as a civilising virtue, Christian morality, nationalism, and political conservatism.
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