

## Gilles Baro (University of the Witwatersrand)

*Gilles Baro is a lecturer and researcher in sociolinguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. He holds an MA in language education from Paris Sorbonne University and a PhD in sociolinguistics from the University of the Witwatersrand. His work is located in linguistic and semiotic landscape studies, focusing on multimodal signs in particular environments. One of his primary interests is to understand ways in which changing urban settings create, erase or reclaim meaning. He has studied and published on the recent redevelopment of the inner city of Johannesburg and has shared critical views on the strategies used by the private sector to shift the urban discourse away from the city's apartheid past to one of global 'gentrification', consumption and heritage. More recently he has published on the globalised ideologies contained in typography and used to make places more tourism-friendly.*

## Gentrification, colonial heritage, Marshalltown

On Freedom Day 2015, an *Instawalk* was organised in Marshalltown, a historic neighbourhood of Johannesburg's inner city, where users of the online photo-sharing platform *Instagram* were invited to document the urban landscape. At the end of the walk, the organisers took a group photo in front of the BHP Billiton headquarters building on Main Street. The street and the rest of Marshalltown have been privatised and turned into an outdoor museum of mining, with relics of the industry – such as a stamp mill, a headgear or air vents refurbished as rubbish bins – put on display all over the neighbourhood. What the group did not realise, most likely because of their search of an authentic urban setting, is that the façade of the building in front of which the group photo was taken still contains a frieze ordered by the apartheid government to celebrate Afrikaner nationalism, and representing Europeans conquering the land and native people as uncivilised.

This paper looks at how the developers were able to create a heritage spectacle as part of their vision to increase the property value of the area in search of long-term profits since the late 1990s. As such, some parts of the European colonial heritage are celebrated and inserted within a contemporary urban discourse, whereas traces of apartheid are simply left out, erased, or eclipsed by the feeling of urban authenticity. The paper analyses signs found in the landscape of Marshalltown, such as street signs, relics, billboards or building façades, all meticulously chosen by the developers to create their idea of post-apartheid Johannesburg. The author concludes that the white developers have selected rooted parts of their past to reshape contemporary Marshalltown, because of the colonial history of the country, whereas spaces and narratives of social significance involving indigenous populations have largely been dismissed and erased.



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