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In Memoriam: the Who, How, Where and When of Statues

Statues in the News

Amongst its many other claims to fame and notoriety, 2020 was quite the year for public statues. Controversies swirled around – and in 2021 are still swirling – the slave trader and philanthropist Edward Colston in Bristol, Confederate generals, soldiers and leaders in the U.S. and the sculpture in honour of Mary Wollstonecraft in Newington Green amongst many others,¹ and in some cases the attacks have been physical as well as verbal. Such moves have provoked counter-moves: in response to the attacks on statues of Confederates, on 3rd July 2020 President Trump outlined his proposal for a new statue garden, a National Garden of American Heroes. People are paying attention to and reflecting on monuments which they might normally pass by without a glance or thought, in haste to or from work or the shops. The sculpture in honour of Wollstonecraft is new, but Colston and the Confederates have been in place since the nineteenth century. In their cases, such fresh attention is a good example of what the social psychologist Michael Billig has called the move from ‘banal’ to ‘hot’ nationalism (or more generally, I would add, an adherence to a community, not just a nation).² Much of the time their statues are not much noticed or remarked upon, and thus function as symbols of ‘banal’ nationalism or other community identity; but, as in 2020, sometimes a confluence of events or changes of mood make them ‘hot’.

This focus on statues, memorials and busts has continued into 2021. On 17th January the U.K. Communities Minister, Robert Jenrick, announced that the Government was planning new laws to protect statues; in the proposed legislation there would need to be planning permission following public consultation for any removal of a statue – or indeed a street name – and the Minister would have the final say. These proposals appear in the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which at the time of writing is being scrutinized at committee stage: if passed into law in its current form, damage to statues will now receive a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. Some U.K. politicians, and sections of the U.K. press, have also been greatly exercised by President Biden’s decision to move from the Oval Office the bust of Churchill that Trump placed there (other U.K. citizens and media outlets regard it as entirely natural that the Oval Office should be graced by U.S. dignitaries, and ones, moreover, who did not share Churchill’s views on race – extreme even when judged by the norms of the time. Churchill was a great wartime leader, and it is appropriate that his statue remain in Parliament Square in front of the Houses of Parliament in London, but he was undeniably a flawed human being and in the context of Black Lives Matter it is right to acknowledge that the nature of the battle changed).

Nor is the 2021 conversation simply about the authorized – or indeed unauthorized – relocation or dismantling of statues and busts. The wave of enthusiasm for erecting new ones has

¹ The heated and on-going debate about the statue of imperialist and founder of the Rhodes Scholarship Cecil Rhodes on the front façade of Oriel College, Oxford is a notable example.

² In *Banal Nationalism* (Sage Publications 1995), Billig distinguishes active, often extreme forms of nationalism (‘hot’ nationalism) from the everyday symbols which create a sense of national identity, such as flags, songs, symbols on money or, as in this case, a statue that is normally passed by without much notice. He argues that by concentrating only on the former, ‘hot’ versions we can overlook the importance of the latter, and thus be taken unawares when some shift in the public mood – in 2020 sparked by the killing of George Floyd – makes the usually ‘banal’ symbols become ‘hot’.

continued. A statue of the palaeontologist and fossil hunter Mary Anning has been commissioned for Lyme Regis, on the Dorset Jurassic Coast where she lived and worked; the artist is Denise Dutton and the title of the piece, wonderfully, is 'Mary Anning Rocks'. On 18th January, two days before leaving office, President Trump signed an executive order increasing the number of subjects for his National Garden of American Heroes from 31 to 244 (whoever produced the list of subjects for him clearly has a fine sense of humour, as one of the proposed statues is of that scourge of totalitarianism, the political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt. However, Congress has not as yet released any funding for this Garden and the Biden administration is in any case unlikely to pursue it.).

The Purpose of Statues

It is healthy to have such vigorous debates from time to time, and a sign of a functioning democracy: free, liberal democracies will inevitably contain a variety of differing values and ideals, and sometimes these values and ideals will conflict. Whether unauthorized physical defacement and attacks are equally healthy is a complex question to which we shall return. However, before we can consider why some statues and monuments have become so controversial, and how best to manage the controversies, we first need to understand the many different reasons why statues might be erected in the first place, and why they might continue to be valued and preserved. We also need to consider secondary intentions in their creation, and indeed other social functions they might serve, whether intended or not. We need to reflect on the who, how, where and when of statues before we can understand their defacement or destruction.

A primary motive for putting up a public statue is to honour and express gratitude for the achievements and qualities of an individual or group, commemorating a life and legacy thought worthy of serious consideration: Martin Luther King; William Wilberforce; Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole; William Shakespeare; the Founding Fathers of the United States. In these cases the desire to honour the individual or group is - whether consciously or not - inextricably intertwined with a desire to make a statement about the identity of the society which erects the statue, or which keeps it in place. Very often the statement is about the particular *values* and ideals that those commemorated exemplify, or are at least thought to exemplify. The society that erects or maintains the statue is saying 'we share these values and ideals; this is who we are or who we aspire to be.' As such, the statue functions as a source of communal feeling and provides a sense of communal or national identity and pride. In other cases the sense of shared identity arises particularly from the fact that the person honoured is *local*: there is shared pride in a high-achieving local son or daughter of the place, almost irrespective of what their achievements were so long as they were considerable.

Equally important is the desire to mark an event of historic importance; and in many instances, of course, the honouring of an individual or group and the commemoration of a pivotal historic event coincide: Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square to commemorate the pivotal naval victory; Rosa Parks in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol to mark her refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a white male, in violation of Alabama's segregation laws. But the desire to mark an event can also include atrocities such as the Holocaust. It is felt vital that we continue to bear witness to such atrocities - as a sign of respect for those murdered, for our own moral health, and also to try to reduce the likelihood of such a horror being repeated. And, history being the complex ethical web that it is, the Holocaust memorials mark not only the evil of the

perpetrators but also the courage, resilience and resourcefulness of those who suffered in the camps, the millions who died and the few who survived.

World War 1 is another example of a horror which also gave rise to extraordinary courage and endurance. Such memorials do not of course have to take the form of statues: witness the beautiful and powerfully moving cemeteries established from 1917 around the world by Fabian Ware's Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), initially under the directorship of Frederick Kenyon. In his November 1918 publication *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed*, Kenyon explicitly instructs that all the headstones should be similar in design, irrespective of nationality, race, religion, class or military rank, because

‘where a sacrifice had been common, the memorial should be common also.’

All the warriors are equally valued; all are equal in death. Tragically, as was movingly demonstrated by David Lammy M. P. in a 2019 television documentary for Channel 4, these laudable intentions were not, in fact, carried out equally in all parts of the world: between 116,000-350,000 predominantly African, Middle Eastern and Indian casualties were not commemorated by name at all, and 45,000-55,000 were commemorated unequally, their names inscribed in lists but not in stone. Lammy's powerful documentary prompted the now Commonwealth War Graves Commission to set up a special committee to undertake the enquiry, which found that ‘pervasive racism’ (most often amongst the colonial administrators of the time) had been responsible for the unequal commemoration of troops.³

Nevertheless, these serious failings in implementation do not alter the fact that Kenyon's original vision was for equal memorials. And in the cemeteries of northern France and Belgium the various architects – Edwin Lutyens, Herbert Baker and Reginald Bloomfield being principal among them – gave physical expression to these principles with eloquent simplicity (although a discreet cross or Star of David, for example, could be inscribed on the uniform headstones). The cemeteries were also specifically designed to be aesthetically pleasing: the headstones, memorials and gardens of each were intended to form a harmonious whole, creating beauty out of the mud and filth, calm order out of the chaos. In this instance, the subjects of such beautiful memorials are not controversial; in the case of memorials and statues to the morally questionable or disgraced, the aesthetic qualities of the memorial give rise to some tough and interesting questions, to which we shall return.

Not all the motives for erecting public statues and memorials are so honourable. Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-un, to name but two of many dictators present and past, show how statues can also be used to subdue, intimidate or terrorize the internal population, or to indoctrinate them. The same huge and multiple images of a despot – the Pharaoh Ramesses II is an outstanding example - may also be simultaneously intended to instil fear into actual or potential external enemies.

In almost all the above examples, both benign and malign, the person or group commissioning the statue is also indicating that they have the money and power to do so. How much the commissioners care about that power will vary greatly, but the fact remains that the ability both to erect a statue and keep it maintained are signs of financial and – whether national or local -

³ See the report on the CWGC's findings by Rajeev Syal in the *Guardian* 21.4.21.

political clout. Even when the memorial is commemorating a past defeat, or past suffering, it is nevertheless put up by those who now have influence. In the cases where these include the survivors or descendants of the horror, the statue is a symbol of their endurance and at least comparative resurgence.

Finally, in almost all cases, statues and memorials are intended also to be aesthetically pleasing, to adorn their location. Their aesthetic qualities may be seen as an attractive adjunct, or in some instances as utterly central to the purpose of the memorial. As we have seen, the Commonwealth War Cemeteries were not only intended to confer equal status on all those who gave their lives, but also to create beauty and order out of the ugliness and chaos of the battlegrounds: their chief designer, Sir Edwin Lutyens, is explicit on this in his correspondence with the then Imperial War Graves Commission.

The issue of aesthetic beauty or attractiveness, however, leads us into a particularly vivid example of the ethical complexity of history. It is impossible to deny that some statues are intended by the artist at least (if not always by the commissioners) to function as soft porn. This applies particularly, though by no means exclusively, to women, and the cloak used to lend supposed respectability is often that of classical Greece and Rome. Magnificently bared breasts, diaphanous robes revealing comely naked curves – all these appear to have been acceptable so long as the woman is portrayed in classical style, perhaps even in the guise of a goddess such as Hera, Athena, Artemis or Aphrodite or their Roman equivalents. Astonishingly to a contemporary eye, artists even got away with this in war memorials: a notably startling example is the Winged Goddess Victory soaring above the World War 1 memorial in Weston Park in Sheffield.

Implicit Messages

The functions and effects of statues, of course, go considerably beyond the explicit or private intentions of commissioners and artists. We have already touched on the fact that a statue tells us a very great deal about the community that erects it, whether they are aware of it and intend it or not: their values and ideals; how they see themselves, who they wish to be. To some extent this is also true of the communities that keep the statue in place. I say ‘to some extent’ because, as we have observed, the degree to which people notice and pay attention to a statue varies greatly; yet even when the statue has faded into the background of local and national sight and consciousness, that too is significant - particularly if it *should* be seen, if people *should* be paying attention. Because whether people are aware of it or not, a statue gives prominence and authority to a particular version of history. That is why, when statues do come into people’s physical and mental vision, they can act as lightning rods for political, racial, religious and social divisions, focal points for competing communal identities.

Nor should we underestimate the importance of a statue functioning as a local landmark, its sheer physical presence offering a sense of continuity and stability almost irrespective of the particular subject. A local community can feel attached to a statue simply through its being part of their lives – something they may have clambered over as children, or by which they arranged to meet sweethearts later on. This emotional attachment – sometimes intermingled with the sense of pride in the achievements of a local son or daughter we noted above - also needs to be taken into consideration when deciding which statues should stay, which should be refaced, re-contextualized or placed elsewhere, and which should fall.

Against Statues

There is also much to be learnt from those cultures and belief sets which abjure statues. The Quran specifically prohibits the erection of statues, although this restriction has relaxed considerably outside of religious sites and there are plenty of public statues on display in cities such as Tehran (although the issue still provokes controversy: witness the outcry in Egypt when on 9.5.2006 the Mufti, the most senior religious scholar in Egypt, issued a fatwa condemning all public statues as false idols; many Egyptian liberals and intellectuals were appalled at the perceived threat to, particularly, their ancient heritage). Wariness of graven images, however, had been in existence long before the arrival of Islam. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE), a devout and practising Stoic, dismisses memorials as irrelevant in 9.30 of his *Meditations*. Our reasoning mind will be reabsorbed after death into cosmic reason, and our bodies will rejoin the earth. Caring about one's fame and what other people will think of you, including those yet unborn, is for the true Stoic to care about a trivial inessential: we should instead be focusing on the limitless sweep of all time and all space, in which our present embodied selves are mere fleeting specks. To try to fight against this reality by erecting statues is not only futile but an insubordinate resistance to divine Providence.

In his belief and acceptance that he would be swiftly forgotten, Marcus Aurelius was, of course, to be disappointed. Not only has the *Meditations* been one of the best-selling books during the 2020-21 pandemic, but there still stand in Rome both a column depicting his martial victories and the only bronze equestrian statue of an emperor surviving from ancient Rome, very possibly because it was later mistaken for the Christian emperor Constantine.

The Problem of Statues

If we turn now to the complex issue of why objections may be raised to some monuments, the critiques could focus on one or more of all of these categories: who, how, where and when. Let us begin with the controversies surrounding choice of subject. The bronze statue by John Cassidy in Bristol in honour of Edward Colston is a particularly interesting example, as it shows how societies can pay selective attention to certain aspects of a person's life while failing to see or investigate, or even wilfully ignoring, other far more troubling and downright repulsive aspects. Colston (1636-1721) was a philanthropist who made much of his money from trading slaves and slave-produced goods such as sugar: he was for 11 years a governor of the Royal African Company. When Bristolians erected a statue to him in 1895, however, it was only the philanthropy that they could see, or chose to see, even though his role in the Royal African Company was not a secret.⁴ All that was visible to them were his almshouses, hospitals, schools, workhouses and churches. The accompanying plaque reads:

'Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of the city.'

Colston's philanthropy was indeed real, if conditional: those who did not subscribe to his religious and political beliefs were not permitted to benefit from his charities. But the source of his wealth was of course vile: during his time in the Royal African Company over 84,000

⁴ The statue had first been proposed in 1893 by James Arrowsmith, President of the Charitable organization the Anchor Society, which had been founded in 1769 at a dinner in Colston's honour; in 1894 a committee was appointed to raise funds. It is significant that one of the contributors was the Society for Merchant Venturers, suggesting that Colston's trading activities were not entirely forgotten.

slaves were shipped from West Africa to the Americas, including 12,000 children; conditions on board were atrocious and at least 19,000 died *en route*, their bodies unceremoniously dumped in the sea. While it appears true that the full extent of his slave-trading activities were not widely known until 1920, uncovered by H.J. Wilkins in his biography of Colston, the question is still: why not? Why did people not think to pay attention to where his great wealth came from? Whole communities can carry blind spots for many generations; and in this case the spot remained blind even after the discoveries of 1920: his statue was designated a Grade II listed structure as recently as 1977.

Similar objections have been raised against the statues in honour of Confederate generals, leaders and soldiers in the U.S., such as General Robert E. Lee, quite literally fighting to uphold slavery. The controversy has unsurprisingly intensified in the last year in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests. We have seen how statues can become lightning rods for political and social divisions: the statues to Lee and others are notable examples. We will be returning to the fate of both the Confederates and Colston when we consider the different forms that reappraisal of statues can take.

A Matter of Style

In other cases the criticisms are not directed at the choice of subject to be honoured, but the form in which it is done. A notable recent example is the controversy surrounding the silvered-bronze 2020 sculpture by Maggi Hambling in honour of the feminist writer and activist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.⁵ Wollstonecraft was fiercely intelligent, highly (self-)educated and a strong supporter of education for women: indeed, Newington Green in North London was selected as the site of the sculpture as it was the location of a school for girls – admittedly short-lived – that Wollstonecraft, together with her sisters and friend Fanny Blood, established in 1784.⁶ Yet the sculpture, quite intentionally on Hambling's part, does not depict Wollstonecraft herself: it is of a small, naked, motionless and expressionless 'everywoman', being held up by swirling female forms. Some have found the sculpture very moving; others claim that it is not only a lost opportunity to show Wollstonecraft, but in addition the central figure appears so inappropriately *passive* – not at all the powerful and influential agent that Wollstonecraft was herself. And even those who in general have no objection to naked bodies of either or any sex in art feel that it does seem particularly ill-advised to honour Wollstonecraft with a naked female form when she fought so vigorously for women to be taken seriously as intellectual and ethical *subjects*, and not simply as sexual *objects* for the delectation of men. There are also heated debates about the aesthetic merits of the piece. Whether the aesthetics of statues and memorials is important is, as mentioned above, a topic to which we shall return.

The 2005 John W. Mills bronze Monument to the Women of World War II in Whitehall is also controversial for similar reasons of style. The issue is clearly not the subject – we plainly owe deep gratitude to them, both forces and civilian – but the way in which they are here commemorated. Critics argue that instead of a powerful embodiment of their courage, resilience and resourcefulness, we merely see seventeen sets of clothing and uniforms, hanging

⁵ The driving force behind the sculpture was the 'Mary on the Green' group founded in 2010 and chaired by the writer and journalist Bee Rowlett. Hambling's design was selected by a panel comprised of curators and the general public.

⁶ The site is also opposite the Unitarian church where Wollstonecraft worshipped.

limply and bizarrely bereft of their wearers; another lamentably missed opportunity (although at least at its inauguration it was women who piloted the military helicopters and Tornados in the flypast). In this case, too, others have found the monument very affecting.⁷

In happy contrast is the 2018 bronze sculpture of the suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst in St Peter's Square, Manchester, created by Hazel Reeves to mark the centenary of the first election in Great Britain and Ireland in which some women – those over thirty, and with considerable restrictions – were able to vote, an enfranchisement in which Pankhurst had played so fundamental a role; Reeves also designed the designated Pankhurst Meeting Circle that surrounds it. Pankhurst is shown as a strong, forceful and clothed subject, reaching out dramatically to all of us to support and continue her fight for women's political and social rights.

Acts of Protest

So what forms might objections to statues and memorials take? And in what circumstances might they be removed? Here too the case of Colston is particularly interesting. Despite having been designated as a Grade II listed structure in 1977, in the 1990s the monument became increasingly controversial, and in 2018 attempts were made to reword the plaque to include reference to his involvement in the slave trade – but agreement could not be reached on the new wording. 2018 also saw two separate, unauthorized interventions: in one, a ball and chain was attached to the statue and on the 15th October, to mark Anti-Slavery Day, an art installation was placed in front of it, depicting 100 supine and powerless figures packed tightly on a slave ship. Then, on 7th June 2020, in the wake of the brutal killing of George Floyd and the world-wide Black Lives Matter protests that ensued, demonstrators pulled down the statue, jumped on it, daubed it with red and blue paint, bound it with ropes and dragged it to Bristol Harbour, into which it was dumped as unceremoniously as the bodies of the dead slaves from the Royal African Company's ships. Bristol City Council dredged it up and it is currently being kept in storage by Bristol Museums. In 2021 it will take its place in a display in M Shed in Bristol exploring various controversial aspects of the city's history; the plan is for it to be shown with the graffiti and ropes intact, accompanied by some of the placards of the demonstrators and detailed information about its history.

In the U.S., too, there have been dramatic and unauthorized attacks, particularly in June 2020 against the statues of Confederate leaders and supporters in the wake of the killing of George Floyd: in Richmond, Virginia the memorial to Jefferson Davis - President of the Confederate States 1861-65 - was pulled down by Black Lives Matters protesters; before the American Civil War he had operated a large cotton plantation in Mississippi, claiming ownership of 113 slaves. The same fate befell the statue of Charles Linn, Confederate supporter and one of the founders of the city, in Birmingham, Alabama. In other cases, the relevant authorities themselves deemed it morally or prudentially advisable to remove statues of Confederate leaders and fighters. On 12th September 2020 the 'At Ready' statue of a Confederate soldier was taken down from its site in Charlottesville, Virginia – a site very close to the 2017 far-right Unite the Right rally at which a counter-protester, Heather Heyer, was killed. The rally had been called to protest plans to remove from Charlottesville the bronze equestrian statue of Confederate

⁷ Baroness Boothroyd, patron of the fundraising Trust, dedicated the monument saying: 'I hope that future generations who pass this way will ask themselves: 'what sort of women were they?' and look at our history for an answer.'

General Robert E. Lee; after almost four years of legal disputes, the statue was finally removed by the authorities on July 10th 2021. On 21st December 2020 the statue of General Robert E. Lee was also removed from the Capitol building; it had been one of the two – the other being George Washington - representing Virginia for 111 years. Virginia’s Commission on Historical Statues in the United States Capitol has recommended that he be replaced by Barbara Johns, who aged 16 in 1951 led a school strike in support of unsegregated and equal schooling. The Pentagon has also banned Confederate flags at military bases.

Not all protests against statues and memorials involve removal, whether authorized or not. The equestrian statue by Antonin Mercié of General Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia was initially daubed with graffiti in June 2020; subsequently images of black civil rights activists, artists and George Floyd were projected onto it. In 2014, at an exhibition in Manchester Town Hall, members of the arts, crafts and heritage initiative Warp and Weft (with the permission of local councillors) also refaced eight male portrait busts with crochet masks depicting historical women of achievement from the local area. Other statues and busts have been dressed, or adorned with flowers, or – in the case of the founder of the Boy Scouts movement Baden-Powell – draped with Gay Pride rainbow flags. And some critics confine themselves to public campaigns to get statues removed or accompanied by a more fully truthful explanatory plaque (although the case of Colston shows that such campaigns are not necessarily effectual).

The Way Forward

These are some examples of what *has* happened when people have found certain statues offensive, or contributing to a misleading historical narrative. What *should* happen? History should not be erased. It is important to bear witness to events of the past, both good and bad, and in many cases to know a little of their actors. The reasons why this matters are many, will vary from case to case, and are not mutually exclusive: it may be as a mark of respect and gratitude; or to help us understand the present - how we got here and where we might be going; or to offer us a wider range of possibilities for the future, to extend our imaginative grasp of how we might live. The U.K. Communities Minister Robert Jenrick, when announcing the new legislation on 17.1.2021 regarding the removal of statues that we noted above, explained his motives in forceful terms:

‘What has stood for generations should be considered thoughtfully, not removed on a whim or at the behest of a baying mob. At the heart of liberal democracy is a belief that history should be studied, not censored.’

Indeed; but does studying Colston require a public statue honouring him? I think not. Is it, then, enough that accounts of his life and deeds, both bad and good, exist in books, or are books not sufficiently public? Or sufficiently able immediately to engage us? I believe there is a strong case for saying that we need visual as well as written reminders of the past, and placing in a museum the statue of someone now considered morally unacceptable strikes me as often the best option. The context of a museum does not impart honour to the statue, but does impart knowledge and understanding to the viewer. The location is in most cases more public than a recondite academic book, but can easily be avoided by those whom its presence upsets; the statue does not necessarily confront and appear to mock those simply on their way to work or the shops. It can be accompanied by detailed information about who the person was; why, when and where a statue to them was originally erected; and why it was removed. In this way,

the taking down and relocation is not an erasure of its history, but an important part of it: far more people have heard of Colston now than when his statue was still in place.

However, there perhaps does not need to be more than one statue left intact of particularly controversial figures; certainly the multiple statues which despots commission of themselves and with which they litter their countries do not all need to be kept and placed in museums: most can be destroyed.

Nor does there even have to be particularly powerful opposition to the statue for it to be moved. To make space for the Monument to the Women of World War II in Whitehall, Sir Walter Raleigh was moved to the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich. This is not to deny that Raleigh's career contained many highly controversial aspects, particularly in his involvement in the suppression of rebellion in Ireland, and the Protestant colonization of Ireland and attempts at colonization in the New World; it is simply to observe that there had been no great public clamour for his statue to be removed. And most would agree that its current location in Greenwich is far better suited to the life and achievements of the sailor, explorer and sometime pirate.

There are, however, at least two circumstances – which often coincide - where the case for relocating or even destroying public statues of morally offensive figures becomes less clear. How important is the artistic merit of the statue and how much does it matter how long ago the subject of the statue lived? In my view if there is general agreement (not always easy to achieve, of course) that the monument has great aesthetic merit it certainly should not be destroyed, though whether it should take pride of place in a public square rather than being removed to a museum would still be a matter for debate, perhaps to be decided by the community's inhabitants at regular intervals. The Antonin Mercié bronze equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee discussed above is a case in point: whatever one's views of its subject, it is a fine work of art. Similar arguments apply – with similar caveats about the difficulties of obtaining agreement - to works of great historical importance, irrespective of their aesthetic claims: perhaps the statue is, for example, one of the very few remaining physical objects from a particular culture or period.

The question of whether time lapse matters is an interesting one, as here too it shows the importance of subjective as well as objective criteria in the whole debate: how much does the public presence of the statue cause current pain? Ramesses II was a tough ruler and ruthless military expansionist whose acts caused grief to many, but so long ago that it is highly unlikely that anyone gazing now on his monumental representations would feel personally affronted or have any idea whether their own ancestors had been harmed by him. As his images are undoubtedly of great historic importance and are also widely viewed as possessing artistic worth, they should surely stay. It was, after all, fear of losing such monuments of historic and aesthetic importance that so concerned some Egyptians in 2006 when the Mufti issued his fatwa against public statues.

In any event, how should decisions about the erection or removal of statues be taken? I certainly hope that in this regard the role of democratic public consultations and sometimes votes will increase. It will not be easy. Should such debates be instigated at regular intervals or only when there is sufficient public feeling? What should count as 'sufficient'? How wide should the community consultation extend? Are some statues of such national significance that there should be a national consultation or even vote? Despite the difficulties, however, we

should recognise that it is both inevitable and healthy that in a democracy there will always be debate about statues and memorials and the values and identity they appear to endorse and strengthen. I submit that it is also necessary and healthy to have open debate about how such consultations should be conducted, and decisions about statues and memorials made. Memorials are by no means simply about the past: through them we also help to shape our present and future.

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