The influence of the dominance of cultures on artefacts:
two case studies – Córdoba, Spain, and Blood River, South Africa

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Conflicts that took place almost three centuries apart – respectively in late medieval Spain and nine-teenth-century South Africa – are described in some detail. The Spanish example offers insight into the effect of the conflict during the Qonquista, followed by a period of Arab rule in the Iberian peninsula, which was terminated by the Reconquista of southern Spain by the Christians. The focus in this regard is the violence and counter violence manifested in the formative stages of the Great Mosque at Córdo-ba and its transformation into the church of Santa Maria. The behaviour of the Muslims and Christians at the sacred site at Córdoba during the conquest and the reconquest, through many centuries, became a theatre in which conflicting religious emotions were aroused and eventually resulted in the partial destruction of a magnificent Muslim edifice. What happened at Córdoba is an object lesson to all mul-ticultural societies in which the dominant group avenges itself upon the cultural artefacts of a subjected group. This is a common occurrence in the history of architecture, and fits the basic premise of René Girard's theory of "mimetic desire" that states that one group desires what another desires. As the envy becomes more intense, "mimetic rivalry" with a model results: admiration is transformed into violent conflict that is only diffused if a scapegoat is found. In a modification of Girard's thesis it is postulated that in the end the model – taken to be a building or monument – is most often demolished or vandalised as if serving as the scapegoat for the aggressor's animosity. In more benign cases desire results in the appropriation of the model, but with modifications to its identity. Alternatively, a new model, coexist-ing with the original, is created by the vanquished to rival the existing model, as happened at the site of Blood River, Natal. In colonial South Africa a monument was erected in 1947 and a more elaborate version of a combat "laager" inaugurated in 1977 to commemorate the battle which took place there on 16 December 1838 between the Voortrekkers and the Zulus, in which the former were victorious. In response, the Zulus established the Ncome Monument and Museum to the east of the Voortrekkers' monument, officially opened in November 1999, which offers a reinterpretation of the 1838 battle, cel-ebrates Zulu culture in general and calls for the development of empathy across the cultural and ethnic divide of the former combatants. Ironically, the layout suggests the historical Zulu combat formation.
Keywords: Great Mosque at Córdoba, René Girard, mimetic desire, Blood River Monument, Ncome Monument and Museum

Die invloed van kulturele dominansie op artefakte: twee gevallestudies – Córdoba, Spanje, en Bloedrivier, Suid-Afrika
Konflikte wat bykans drie eeue na mekaar plaasgevind het – respektiewelik in die laat middeleeuse Spanje en die negentiende-eeuse Suid-Afrika – word in 'n mate van detail beskryf. Die Spaanse voorbeeld bied insig in die effek van die konflik gedurende die Qonquista, gevolg deur 'n tydperk van Arabiese heerskappy in die Iberiese skiereiland wat beëindig is deur die Reqonquista van die suide van Spanje deur die Christene. The fokus ten opsigte van hierdie situasie is die geweld en teengeweld wat plaasgevind het in die onwikkelingsfases van die Groot Moskee van Córdoba en die transformasie daarvan in die kerk van Santa Maria. Die gedrag van die Moslems en Christene by die heilige terrein van Córdoba gedurende die eeue-lange proses van verowering en herverowering het as gevolg van die opwekking van botsende religieuse emosies uiteindelik tot die gedeeltelike vernietiging van die manjifieke Molem-gebou gelei. Wat by Córdoba gebeur het, is 'n les vir alle multikulturele gemeen-skappe waarin die dominante groep wraak uitoefen op die artefakte van die onderwerpte groep. Dit is 'n algemene verskynsel in die geskiedenis van argitektuur en strook met die basiese premise van René Girard se teorie van "mimetiese begeerte", dat een groep begeer wat 'n ander een begeer. Wanneer afguns intenser word, lei dit tot "mimetiese mededinging" met die model: bewondering word in gewel-dadige konflik getransformeer wat slegs sal eindig indien 'n sondebok gevind word. In 'n gemodifise-erde weergawe van Girard se tesis word gepostuleer dat die model – hetsy 'n gebou of 'n monument – uiteindelik gesloop of gevandaleer word asof dit as die sondebok dien om die aggressor se wrewel te beëindig. In minder geweldadige gevalle gee begeerte aanleiding tot die toe-eiening van die model, deur dit te wysig. Alternatiewelik word 'n nuwe model geskep om naas die oorspronklike te bestaan, soos by die terrein van Bloedrivier, Natal. In koloniale Suid-Afrika is daar in 1947 'n monument opgerig en 'n meer uitvoerige weergawe van 'n laer is in 1977 ingewy ter herdenking van die veldslag wat op 16 Desember 1838 tussen die Voortrekkers en die Zoeloes plaasgevind het, waartydens eersg-enoemde die oorwinnaars was. As reaksie het die Zoeloes die Ncome Monument en Museum gevestig wat in November 1999 aan die oostekant van die Voortrekkers se monument amptelik ingewy is. Dit bied 'n herinterpretasie van die veldslag van 1838, bring hulde aan Zoeloe-kultuur, en doen 'n beroep om empatie tussen die voormalige vyande vir mekaar se kultuur en etnisiteit. Ironies genoeg, stel die uitleg die historiese Zoeloe-strydformasie voor.
Sleutelwoorde: Groot Moskee van Córdoba, René Girard, mimetiese begeerte, Bloedrivier-monu-ment, Ncome Monument en Museum

"Homer was wrong when he said: 'Would that conflict might vanish from among gods and men!' For there would be no attunement without high and low notes nor any animals without male and female, both of which are opposites" (Heraclitus, c. 540-c. 480 BC).

Historically the subjugation of one nation by another after a war, or any other conflict, most often results in the denigration or destruction of the vanquished culture's artefacts of symbolic value such as ideologically motivated religious and monumental structures.[1] from which it derives its privileges" (Braybrooke 1967: 126). Politically it also happens that encounters between various groups in a multicultural society leads to the dominance of the superior group over the minority or subjected group, resulting in the confiscation, or a more subtle appropriation, of their cultural artefacts.

Violence done to a cultural or architectural environment during a war is obviously inflicted metaphorically, since stones and other building materials cannot feel te pain of defeat. Ruined buildings to which people previously related emotionally becomes fixed in the memory of a vanquished group. It is obviously a characteristic of memory that it functions in changed contexts. Even though the symbolic value of an edifice that the vanquished group or minority culture had become alienated from will remain embedded in their collective memory, but its original meaning will nevertheless fade and undergo inevitable changes over time. This phenomenon is common in architectural history. Important buildings have often been converted to functions they were not intended for because of subjugation by foreign rulers or a political or cultural transformation of the society that built them. On the sites of the ruins of classical buildings in Rome and Greece Christian structures arose with a forgetfulness of the *genius loci* of the original. For example, the Pantheon in Rome was converted into a Christian church, while the Hagia Sophia, a Greek Orthodox church in Constantinople, was converted into a mosque when the Turks overthrew the Byzantine Empire. Old buildings belonging to a former culture were used a quarries for new ones: in Cairo the cladding stones of the pyramids were used to build mosques, and the columns and other elements of Roman buildings became *spolia* for early Christian churches – sometimes with bizarre effects. The examples of functional conversion or assimilation of the old into the new and the cultural destruction or appropriation of symbolic or monumental structures can be elaborated *ad infinitum*. A final example will suffice: that of the destruction of he Buddhas of Bamyan in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001 at the orders from Mullah Mohammed Omar who declared that they were idols, forbidden by Sharia law.

First case study: the clash between Islam and Christianity in Spain[2]

I will commence by discussing an example from the Reconquesta in Spain when Muslim places in Andalucia were conquered and appropriated by the victorious Spaniards under the Castilian Reys Catolicos, Isabella and Ferdinand. The conquest and reconquest, the loss of cultural dominance and reassertion of dominance, both cultural and religious, can be interpreted in terms of the most outstanding example of the appropriation that happened to the Great Mosque at Córdoba, an analysis to be based on an adaptation of theories formulated by René Girard[3] regarding sacred violence.

Regarding ancient practice of appropriation Nigel Pennick (1979: 42) states that

The powers inherent in sacred sites have been used over the years by practitioners by many different creeds, and shrines of one religion have frequently been converted into the service of another. In a letter to the Abbot Mellius on his mission to England, AD 604, Pope Gregory wrote: "I have determined, after mature deliberation on English affairs, that the temples of that nation ought by no means to be destroyed. Rather, let the idols that are in them be destroyed

[...]. Provided the temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of the devils to the service of the true God."

No precedent comes to mind for the act of vandalism at Córdoba where a monumental building was built inside an existing one. By constructing a Gothic cathedral inside the Great Umayyad Mosque it was not only converted functionally, but symbolically violated. This curious phenomenon of a building representing a particular culture and set of religious beliefs being installed within the envelope of another representing a different culture and set of religious beliefs can be explained only by reviewing the morality and emotions which motivated the successive builders to construct their religious edifices according to their respective unique requirements on the same sacred site, but contrary to Pope Gregory's advice not to destroy the existing "temple".

In order to understand the unusual conflict between a mosque and a church at Córdoba, it is necessary to introduce the origins of edifices for worship in Islam and Christianity. M. Frishman (1994: 30) notes that both these religions were born in an "architectural vacuum". Both are monotheistic and both abhor idolatry. At their inception both preferred a humble shelter for communal prayer, putting emphasis on the assembly of believers and not on distracting structures. Frishman states: "The monotheistic religions maintained their opposition [to imposing edifices] until it dawned upon their leaders that any new faith without new followers would soon die out and that potential converts could be attracted by, amongst other things, some recognisable symbol such as an impressive building. Inevitably those who set foot on this path quickly came to realise that the more splendid they could make the sacred shrine, the greater would be the magnetism, and hence the deeper became the paradox." The paradox is that "Inventing an architectural form to provide for the worship of an invisible, non-representational deity has never been achieved, and anything that became an accepted form had to evolve through the passage of time." And, one may add, the vicissitudes of culture.

A mosque (Arab *masjid)* is a Muslim house of prayer. Even though Islam requires no physical structure for valid prayer, mosques are constructed especially for the purpose of congregational prayer at Friday noon, usually referred to as a Great Mosque, as at Córdoba. According to N. Ardalan (1980: 18) the fundamental Islamic "mandate of architecture", apart from fulfilling necessary functional requirements, should be to manifest a purposeful sense of beauty. The emphasis on beauty is a natural outgrowth of the Koran which emphasises goodness, truth and knowledge, while placing the primary concern on beautiful deeds.

A church, on the other hand, is a building for Christian worship. Since Early Christian times the basilican church underwent numerous variations in order to accommodate the liturgy, which was essentially congregational. During the Late Middle Ages the Gothic cathedral became the quintessential symbol of Christian belief, representing the heavenly Jerusalem as described in the Book of Revelation. Besides it symbolic meaning the cathedral is in many respects an unsurpassed engineering feat with its exterior defined by flying buttresses and the soaring verticality of its spires that are visible from afar. The interior is equally impressive with soaring masonry ceilings, up to 23 metres above floor level. "Though its emphasis was perpendicular," C. Lancaster (1956: 197) writes, "Gothic architecture reveals its most Western affiliation, that was brought to fruition centuries later in the American skyscraper". In contrast, the more horizontal design of the typical mosque is more attuned to a feeling of repose.

The conflicts between Islam and Christianity have been well documented, especially after the first crusade, which lasted from 1095-99. The subject is too vast to review in this limited space. I will therefore limit my comments to the medieval conflict between the religions at the architectural site at Córdoba, or Qurtoba as it was called by the Arabs, a Spanish town

of Roman origin on the north bank of the Gualdalquivier. However, a brief history of the conquest of Spainis necessary in order to contextualise the conflict between religious groupings as exemplified by the successive occupation and reconstruction of buildings representing the beliefs and cultures of the warring groups on the same site.

The Muslim invasion of Spain started in July 710 when a reconnaissance force of about 400 men crossed from North Africa to the southernmost tip of the Peninsula. During the following year an army of 7000 men, subsequently reinforced by 5000 more, invaded Spain and decisively defeated King Roderick, the last Visigoth ruler. By about 715 the Muslims had occupied all the main towns of Spain and entered into treaty relations with local rulers. Islamic Spain reached its apogee in the reign of 'Abd-al-Rahman III (912-61). By the time of his death he had established his rule over most of Al-Andalus, as Spain came to be called by the Arabs who established centres of learning, of which Córdoba was the most famous. A ruler called An-Nasir established a college attached to the Grand Mosque to which students came from afar. N. Ziadeh (1985: 36) mentions a library attached to the palace at the time of the ruler al-Hakam which contained 60000 volumes, as well as three more libraries, which had belonged to previous rulers, amalgamated by him. Many branches of knowledge flourished under the Arab rulers in Spain, especially in Córdoba. According to Ziadeh (1985: 36-7) Córdoba "was a frontier of learning, and, like many other cities in Arab Spain, was a place where cultures mingled and met, and thus produced a civilization which had a character of its own". The Mozarabs represented a blending of Muslim and Christian cultures, existing in Iberian Al-Andalus in separate but internally fractious forms.

During the eleventh century a number of petty kingdoms replaced the once large Muslim kingdom, and the Umayyad state disintegrated under 'Abd-al-Rahman's grandson. By 1031 there were some thirty independent local rulers among whom dissension was rife. Rivalries among the various Islamic rulers favoured the Christian advance of the Reconquest, which was motivated by a fervour to fight the enemy. After centuries of subjugation, but also of meaningful acculturation, a religious fundamentalist conception of their identity became established among the inhabitants of the kingdoms of Leon, Navarre and Castile as members of a Catholic Christendom. The upsurge of this basically religious drive would lead to the unification of Spain, since, as W.M. Watt (1972: 48) phrases it, there was "a close association between the new Spanish identity and militant Catholicism". After centuries of acceptance of Arab culture the Spaniards began more and more to assert their Catholic identity and deny their cultural indebtedness to the Arabs. Therefore, when Islamic Spain began to disintegrate, the independent Christian states in the north took the opportunity to expand southwards. Toledo was captured in 1085. More decisive was the occupation of Córdoba on 29 June 1236 by Ferdinand III of Castile. Seville was taken in 1248 and the Muslim stronghold of Granada fell later, in 1492.

It was during their occupation of Córdoba that the Muslims turned a section of a Christian basilica, dedicated to St Vincent, itself erected over a Roman temple (Hillebrand 1992: 129), into a mosque. 'Abd al-Rahman I, the first Ammayad to rule independently over most of the Iberian Peninsula, purchased this section from the Christian community, but not satisfied with this arrangement he ordered the church to be demolished and in 785 commenced building the Great Mosque, as it was later called, over the foundations of the church. The new edifice was repeatedly extended by his successors, the most notable of whom was al-Hakim II (961-76) who was responsible for the extant *mirhab* area and the magnificent geometric and vegetal mosaic decoration.

By the year 1000 the Great Mosque of Córdoba, called "the jewel of Islam", was considered to be one of the wonders of the world (figures 1-4). Its dimensions, planning and construct are

indications of its splendour. Its area, 198 x 137 metres (25 893 square metres) was enclosed by buttressed walls 18 metres high, pierced by 21 horseshoe arches having doors encrusted with brass decoration. In plan the Great Mosque was divided into two parts: the open courtyard on the north and the interior prayer chamber on the south. The former had an arcaded path on three sides while the latter had double arcades, 19 arcades from east to west and 31 from north to south. The roof was covered with lead and the exterior decorated with various abstract patterns.
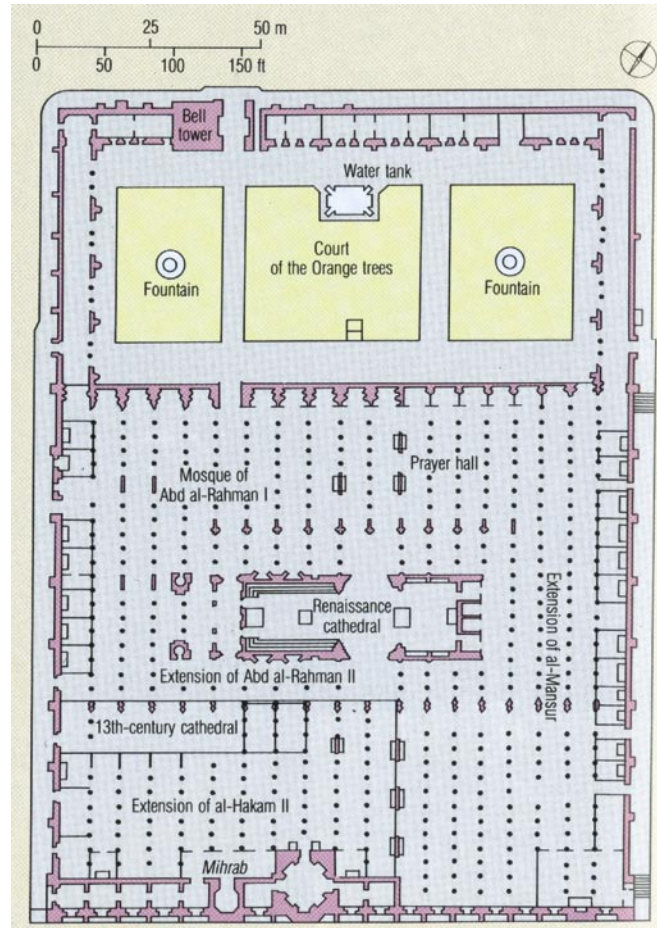

Figure 1
Plan of the Great Mosque of Córdoba with the Cathedral of
Santa Maria inserted (redrawn by the author).

The interior of the Great Mosque is unique because its system of supports is not only structurally sound, but rhythmic and decorative. The arcades originally contained 1239 columns, made of jasper, marble and porphyry, many of which were quarried from Roman ruins. These were topped by capitals coated with gold. The columns supported 360 horseshoe arches and piers that carried an upper tier of semicircular arches, constructed by alternating brick and stone voussoirs. At the intersections of the arcades lobed arches were formed which screen off the bays in front of and on either side of the *mirhab,* linked to a small octagonal room behind an open arch, the decoration around which consists of innovative arrangements that was applied in later mosques in the Western Islamic regions. This unique *mirhab* is octagonal in shape, crowned by a cupola carved from a single block of marble, its eight intersecting arches supported by elegant columns. The enclosing walls are clad in gold and the dome adorned with multi-coloured mosaics.

Figure 2
View of the Great Mosque and the Cathedral
(photograph by the author).

Figure 3
View of an arcade in the Great Mosque
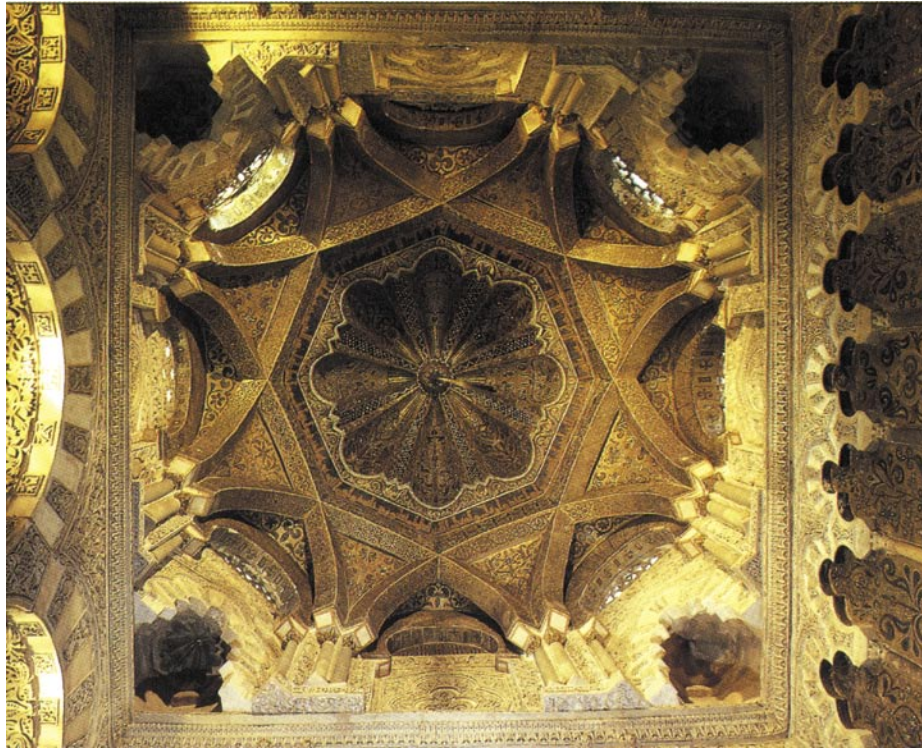**(photograph by the author).**

Figure 4
Copula over the *mirhab* in the Great Mosque
(photograph by the author).

The part of the building that was added by al-Hakim II was reserved for the caliph and his nobles. It contained three domes (still extant) where the art of Muslim builders was displayed in a virtuoso manner. The *maqsurah*, the enclosure surrounding the *mirhab*, was described as having three doors of pure gold, a floor paved with silver and columns placed in clusters of four with one capital (Salloum 1985: 147). The *minbar* (pulpit), to the side of the *mirhab*, was constructed from 36 000 pieces of ivory and precious timber, fastened together with gold and silver nails, studded with precious stones. Worthy of a special mention is the minaret, built by 'Abt al-Rahman III, that had no equal in Islamic lands and is still a landmark in Córdoba. It is 33 metres high, with two staircases, one for ascending and one for descending. The summit used to be intricately decorated with natural motifs cast in silver and pure gold.

After the expulsion of the Muslims from Córdoba in 1236 the Christians, under the leadership of the Catholic King Ferdinand and a group of bishops, purified the Great Mosque for Christian worship, consecrating it as the Cathedral of Santa Maria. Chapels were created which drastically transformed areas of the mosque. Later during the thirteenth century the Capilla Real, a pantheon for the kings of Castile, was constructed in the Mudejar style, that is a style based on Muslim influence, executed by conquered craftsmen. J.D. Dodds (1992: 24) notes that, in this way, "The Christians who conquered Córdoba understood that there was much more power to be gained from appropriating this extraordinary metaphor of their conquest than from destroying it". What was gained was the power of control and dominance over a metaphorically subjected architectural masterpiece.

During the fourteenth century *mudejar* craftsmen built the Puerta del Pardon (Gate of Pardon) from which one enters the building from the Patio de los Naranjas in which orange and palm trees grow. Most of the twelve doorways of the Great Mosque were bricked up, or converted for Christian use, such as the Portal of Mohammed I, called Puerta de San Esteban by the Christians. Another opening, called the Puerta de las Palmas, was built in a wall that did not exist in Arab times. Entering from this doorway, darkness now seems to engulf the entire

interior space, since the open archways of the Arab era were converted into walled-up chapels. However, as the visitor's eyes grow accustomed to the semi-darkness, the previous splendour of the virtual forest of 1293 columns constructed by the Muslims gradually becomes visible.

Even in Christian Córdoba, which, like the rest of Spain, came under the influence of the Flemish Gothic style of the fifteenth century, the Great Mosque was still admired, even though, by then, the Andalucian people had ceased to live in subordination to Islamic cultural values. It is therefore understandable that further alterations to the Great Mosque were made in the international Gothic style. Under Bishop Manrique (1486-96) the first major modification was executed in the form of a new choir. This extensive project is indicative of the artistic taste of Christian Córdobans in the time of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (Edwards 1982: 181).

Then during the sixteenth century, the Christians destroyed the central part of the Great Mosque, ripping out 437 of the columns, leaving only 856 standing. This destruction was necessary to build a complete Gothic cathedral inside the former Muslim space. Emperor Charles V, who had originally supported the canons' petition to build inside the Great Mosque, is recorded to have remarked upon seeing the new cathedral: "You have taken something unique and turned it into something mundane" (Dodds 1992: 25).

Not only did the Great Mosque's function change after the reconquest, but over time the structure of the mosque was partially fragmented, and ultimately vandalised by the insertion of a complete Gothic cathedral inside its vast arcaded space, as if serving as the scapegoat[4] for the animosity of the Christians who again represented the dominant culture in Spain. Even though it has been used as a Christian place of worship for 773 years, its interior and exterior retained much of its original glory and its horizontal emphasis, complemented by the verticality of the minaret – its landmark element. The Gothic intrusion caused a conflict of styles, not only in the interior, but also especially visible from the outside in the way that the minaret was modified to become a bell-tower.

In this way two religious groups, Muslims and Christians, took turns to assert their dominance by wreaking havoc on a place that both in turn held sacred. In one building the simultaneous presence of the earthly beauty of the mosque and the transcendental aspiration of the Gothic cathedral may be seen by some viewers as contrapuntal, by others as dissonant. R. Hillebrand (1992: 132) is of the opinion that "the Christian buildings within the mosque have something of the same palimpsest quality of the Muslim structure itself. Perhaps it was no accident that ... these Christian buildings definitely ruined the impact of the great sanctuary". Thus, even though the edifice as it exists presently is still referred to as the Great Mosque of Córdoba, it has lost its harmonious unity, both architecturally and in a religious sense. The conflicting styles of the tenth-century mosque and the sixteenth-century cathedral will, in their coexistence, for as long as they remain standing, evoke the memory of the reactive opposition of Christians to Islam. The of the edifices can, however, never be seen as separate, but will retain their duality and remain conflicting embodiments of rival moralities.

It should also be note that an analogous irreverence to a Muslim architectural complex was caused by Emperor Charles V who was in Spain for seven years, from 1522. While not driven by religious fervour, he chose the Alhambra, in Granada, the late Medieval palace site of the defeated Muslims, for his own secular Renaissance palace, an heroic circular building of no special architectural merit which violates the sense of place created by the original builders, however without actually destroying any part of the Alhambra's unity.

A theory of the vicissitudes of artefacts caused by encounters between different cultures

Before resuming the theme of encounters between opposing groups or nations, and more specifically the influence of such upheavals on the cultural artefacts of both sides in general, a

definition of reactive opposition should be formulated. According to W. Wink (1986: 15), one of the most profound truths in Scripture is that once an individual or a group succumbs to the urge of reactive opposition "we become what we hate". He explains: "The very act of hating something draws it to us. Since our hate is a direct response to the evil [or injustice] done, our hate almost invariably causes us to respond in the terms already laid down by the enemy. Unaware of what is happening, we turn into the very thing we oppose. We become what we hate." He also states: "It would make a fascinating story to write a history of the world from the perspective of the principle of forcible resistance transforming into its opposite. One can find instances from virtually every period" (1986: 17).

A few examples from China will prove the point of becoming the thing one opposes:

In China in the early seventeenth century. In 1629 Nurhaci, the "barbarian" Manchurian leader "– like many Manchurian candidate before him – began laying acquisitive eyes on China itself" (Lovell 2006: 234-5). The hordes under his command took many years to overcome many of the fortifications separating him from the 800 kilometres distant Beijing: "The Manchus would concentrate on making themselves appear qualified to rule China ... setting up a government that mirrored that of the Ming; ...choosing a new dynastic name, Qing, that sounded reassuringly like Ming. They even built their own, smaller-scale replica of the Forbidden City in their capital, Mukden." It is also an irony in Chinese history is that Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925) who pioneered a democratic republic to replace the repressive rules of countless emperors, was buried in a monumental mausoleum that imitates those of the rulers whose politics he wished to change. Also in China, visitors to Shaoshan, Chairman Mao's birthplace, will find "[n]ewly built shrines – resembling the sort that might have been demolished as feudal relics in Mao's day – surround the central square... (Ramzy 1009: 46).

René Girard (1987) describes the psychological cause of conflict between groups as "mimetic desire", a thesis that refers to rivalry and the emergence of the monstrous double, causing the hysteria of ecstatic experience that motivates "the violence done to history, tradition, texts, and reputations [and one may add architecture, monuments and cultural artefacts] of the 'guilty' victim [that] is obliterated in the attempt to possess its true being for oneself"(Mack 1985: 157 & 1897: 6-17). In short, "The basic idea behind the idea of mimetic desire is that imitation can play a key role in human motivational processes" (Livington 1994: 291). One group envies an object [or artefact] of another because it is an object of desire. As the envy becomes more intense, "mimetic rivalry" with the model results: admiration is transformed into conflict. The imitator becomes increasingly malicious towards the model (that is, becoming like the hated one), causing a "double bind" through which the model becomes the subject's "monstrous double" (Girard 1977: 143-68). In the end, the model is most often eliminated because of the rival group's desire to appropriate the model's identity.

Where rivalry is born of mimetic desire catharsis[5] is not possible. Where no release of a double bind with the desired model occurs, the situation of continued rivalry for the possession of the model becomes entrenched or violent.

Subjected people are slow to erase the experience of conflict from their minds. The descendants of the Spaniards who were overrun by Arabs held the Muslim invader in awe for centuries. However, in order to erase the emotions of the long-drawn out conflict from their minds, all Europeans, not only Spaniards, should acknowledge the truth of the following statement by W.M. Watt (1972: 2): "For our cultural indebtedness to Islam ... we Europeans have a blind spot." In Spain acculturation took place, notwithstanding conflict: "In fact, though, the available evidence suggests that the state of war against the Moors coexisted with continued admiration for Islamic culture" (Edwards 1982: 180). The acknowledgement of

mutual indebtedness is a step in the direction of reconciliation of cultures in conflict. What better time is there than the present – more than 900 years after the first crusade that contributed to the fuelling of the long conflict between Christianity and Islam – to acknowledge their mutual indebtedness. Dodds (1992: 25) concludes that the Great Mosque of Córdoba "was understood by Christians and Muslims alike as an intrinsically Spanish monument". However, the appropriation of the Great Mosque by Christians established a new hegemony, but not a convincing one since the sacred spaces of the mosque and the church will coexist in perpetuity, the hegemony of either remaining unresolved.

Second case study: a violent conflict in nineteenth-century in South Africa and a present-day attempt at reconciliation

What happened at Córdoba is an object lesson to all multicultural societies. Most often the ruling or dominant group asserts itself by the destroying, vandalising or appropriating the cultural artefacts of the previous dominant culture. A form of non-violent mimetic desire may also manifest, which results in the juxtaposition of the old and the new in an ideologically conflicting way (see Maré 2007).

The violence referred to under the above heading happened at the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838. The background to this battle was that the Zulu chief Dingane kaSenzangakhona treacherously killed one of the Voortrekker leaders, Piet Retief, after negotiating a treaty with him. Dingaan invited Retief into his village on condition that he and his men leave their weapons at the gate. Once inside, the Zulus proceeded to slaughter Retief and his men. Dingaan's impis had also attacked other Voortrekker encampments, killing an estimated 500 men, women, children and Black followers at Blaukraans. The Voortrekkers's intention to settle in Natal was further complicated by the isolation imposed upon them by the British administration of the Cape Colony, preventing supplies of ammunition and food to reach them overland or via the Natal harbour. They then requested Andries Pretorius to leave the Cape Colony and come to their aid against Dingaan. He was determined, as the elected military leader of a punitive commando, to revenge the murder of Retief. At Danskraal the Voortrekkers vowed that if God gave them the victory over the Zulu army a church would be built in His honour.

On 15 December, when scouting parties brought the news that the Zulu force was approaching, Pretorius chose a site adjacent to the future Blood River that offered a rear protection. As usual, the ox wagons of the 464 Voortrekkers with their 200 Black helpers were drawn into a closed circle, called a "laager" in Dutch, and two cannon were positioned. That night the Zulus, led by Dambuza and Ndlela kaSompisi massed around the camp but did not attack. The mist of the previous evening cleared and a clear dawn broke. On his deathbed thirty years later Sarel Cilliers recalled that before the battle commenced the Voortrekkers had made a vow to God that if He would deliver them they would build a church and commemorate the day as a Sabbath.

With their superior weapons and tactics the Voortrekkers beat back the assault. According to estimation 3500 Zulus were killed and three Voortrekkers wounded. A punitive commando was then dispatched to Dingaan's kraal at Mgungundlovo (near the present day Eshowe), but found it deserted and burnt down. The skeletons of Retief and his men were found and buried at a place that was later marked by a memorial. However, the victory over Dingaan at the river, henceforth called Blood River, was not decisive. More conflicts ensued until he was finally defeated in January 1840 when his brother, with a sizeable group of warriors, defected to the Voortrekkers.

Figure 5
The 1947 monument erected at Blood River in the form of a single granite ox wagon
(photograph by courtesy of Alf Casey).

Figure 6
The 1977 monument erected at Blood River in the form of 57 bronze ox wagons in laager formation
(photograph by courtesy of Alf Casey).

A church was duly built in the Natal town of Pietermaritzburg in 1841. More than a century later, in 1947, a monument was erected on the site of the battle. It was sculpted by Coert Steynberg in the form of a single granite ox wagon (figure 5). In 1977, the solitary ox wagon was augmented by 57 wagons cast in bronze and arranged in the formation of the laager, as at the Battle of Blood River (figure 6). The canon, nicknamed "Grietjie", used at the battle forms part of the ensemble.

On the other side of the river the Ncome Monument and Museum complex forms part of the Ncome-Blood River Heritage site and is situated on the eastern side of the Blood River Battlefield (figure 7). It is located 43 kilometres from Dundee, and 72 from Vryheid, in an area where a variety of African cultures intermingle and is characterised by homesteads (*imizi*) of local AmaZulu and Sotho people.

Figure 7
Side view of the Ncome Monument and Museum complex showing the displayed shields
(photograph free internet).

Architecturally the plan of the monument echoes the Zulu war horn formation which was initiated by the late Zulu King, Shaka ka Senzangakhona. A series of shields displayed along the outer wall are coloured in the way that differentiated the various Zulu regiments. Inside the monument are museum exhibits that provide general insight into the Zulu and SeSotho culture and offers the defeated group's interpretation of the Battle of Blood River.[6] It was officially opened in November 1999 as one of the legacy projects under the then Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. The speaker at the occasion of the inauguration on 16 December 1998, was Buthelezi, the then Minister of Home Affairs. He apologised to the Afrikaners for the murder of Retief and his men and at the end of his speech he appealed for "a new covenant which embraces all the people of goodwill who together in peace join efforts to build a new country and to defeat the evils of poverty and social injustice" (see website 1). It is also notable that at this occasion, General Constand Viljoen, the leader of the Vryheidsfront, left the Blood River festivities and walked the kilometre to the opposite side of the river to participate with the Zulus in the inaugural ceremony of the Nkome Monument and Museum. Clearly, Viljoen meant to neutralise the opposition of nationalistic Afrikaners to the erection of a Zulu monument in the proximity of the Blood River Monument.[7] This gesture was of intended to be one of reconciliation. Reciprocally a suggestion was made that a bridge be built across the

Ncome River, as called by the Zulus, to be a symbol of the reconciliation between whites and blacks in South Africa.

Administered by the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg, the Ncome Monument and Museum share one Council, one director and the same administration. Ncome is nevertheless an independent institution and performs most functions independently. Superficially this arrangement indicates that reconciliation has been achieved by the former enemies. Their monuments coexist; one was not built at the expense of the other, as was the case of Córdoba. However, in terms of culture – that is national sensibility – both have a separate identity. Culture in this sense found a first philosophical interpreter in J.G. Herder (1969: 313) who spoke of tradition, meaning by that a process in which collectivities adapt their inheritance to conform to changed conditions. Indeed, conditions in postcolonial South Africa changed. In determining the meaning of the Blood River and Ncome monuments a statement such as the following should be kept in mind: "Meaning is not a condition or quality of the building [and/or monument], of the thing itself; meaning arises from situations. The meaning of a building [and/or monument], then, must always be a meaning for some specific one at some specific time in some specific place" (Jones 2000: 41). The meaning of the combined Blood River/Ncome heritage site is supposed to be that it is a unity; that it binds together disparate interpretations of the combat of 16 December 1838. In this sense the monuments to the east and the west of the river are inseparable – much like the combined mosque and church at Córdoba. The Ncome Monument defies the uniqueness of the Blood River Monument because the latter no longer stands alone; it inevitably changed the meaning of the Voortrekker monument. Consequently, the two monuments seem to belong together, not to mark historical and enduring conflicting claims to the land, but they are supposed to present reconciliation in terms of multicultural coexistence in South Africa.

At this point a statement of hermeneutic theory is called for. Monuments are more aptly to be regarded as texts to be interpreted and reinterpreted rather than as artefacts or things to be perceived. Hermeneutics and not the mere description of forms and the intention with their arrangement should be the medium of access to the meaning of monuments. Both the Ncome and Blood River Monuments would fail the aesthetics test as works of art. Therefore, the fact that both were established at huge public cost by different governments points in the direction that they are meaningful to their designers and builders in a way not yet clearly critiqued.

In the end it is true that "monuments are paradoxical structures. Though erected for eternity with the intent of fixing the past permanently in physical form, they suffer from built-in obsolescence. For while monuments ostensibly are erected to commemorate some feature of the past, they actually offer a clearer image of the present's view of it" (Rosenfeld 1997: 223). This is especially true of both the Voortrekker ox wagon laager and the Ncome horns of Zulu battle formation. The fact that both monuments are so prominently symbolic in terms of battle formation layout ironically belies the belief that the new monument, erected in close proximity to the previous one, symbolises a balanced suspension of violence in the New South Africa. Paula Girshik (2004: 34) also comes to a rather negative conclusion regarding the symbolic coexistence of two divergent cultures: "The creation of the monument/museum at Ncome raises the question whether reconciliation and redress are always compatible goals and suggests that the attempt to achieve them simultaneously might equally result in a construction symbolic of conflict and resistance." Girshik's conclusion forces the question if the theory of mimetic desire applies at Blood River/Ncome where there is seemingly a balanced suspension of mimetic desire. Scapegoating in the Girardian sense does not apply to the benign situation

of the two adjacent monuments. The Ncome monument, however, is an expression of mimetic desire resulting in the appropriation of the combat model of the Blood River Monument, causing the modification of the identity of the Voortrekker original.[1] Could one call the coeval existence of Blood River/Ncome an example of "beneficial imitation"[2] Strife ("resistance", according to Girshik) remains clearly visible in the symbolic expression of both monuments and subverts the overtures made on 16 December 1999 by the groups whose ancestors fought on opposing sides on 16 December 1839.

Notes

1. Monuments are ideologically motivated and it hould therefore be kept in mind that ideology "serves the interest of the then ruling class by rationalizing the arrangements

2. This is a revised and adapted version of my 1998 essay. For an extensive discussion of the meaning of the Great Mosque at Córdoba, see Khoury (1996).

3. René Girard, born in Avignon on 25 December 1923, is a French historian, literary critic and philosopher of social science. He studied at the École des Chartes, Paris, and Indiana University. He resides in Stanford, California (United States) and has lectured at Duke University, Bryn Mawr College, Johns Hopkins University, State University of New York and Stanford University. His work belongs to the tradition of anthropological philosophy.

4. See Girard 1987: 73-105. Richard Stivers (1993: 505) explains: "Girard's hypothesis, that ritual scapegoating is a cultural solution to the contagious conflict engendered by mimetic desire, purports to be universal in regard to history and human nature, at least until the advent of an irreversible event. It is a solution that defies conscious criticism until the texts of the Old and New Testament expose ritual killing as scapegoating. Until that time human nature appears to be cast adrift in a torrent of mimetic desire only to be saved from universal spiraling violence through ritual acts of scapegoating. With the revelation of ritual killing as scapegoating, there is an opportunity for humans to confront both their violence and the violent solution to their violence.

5. Since the time of Aristotle the term "catharsis" has been notoriously difficult to define. The word is derived from *karharein*, a Greek word meaning "to cleanse". It istherefore used in the text above as simply meaning the cleansing or annihilation of mimetic desire in order to end rivalry and violence.

6. See Document.jsp?dk=%2Fdata%2Fstatic%2 Finfo.html (accessed 2008-09-30). For a more detailed description of the Ncome Museum, see Girshik (2004) and Marschall (2008).

7. Described in the *Afrikaner*, 14 January 1999, page 4.

8. Marschall (2008) avers that "perhaps the approach to commemorate at this important battle site [Blood River/Ncome] was still, if only subconsciously, infused with the ways of thinking and planning by established modes of development and planning (separate facilities for blacks and whites) carried over from the previous era." It obviously makes little sense to project outdated modes of planning to ensure the establishment of separate monuments for blacks and whites.

9. It is a contentious point that Girard seemingly left no role for "beneficial imitation" and fixates only on violence as the outcome of mimetic desire. See Adams (2000).

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