

Comparing altars and agendas - using architecture to unite?

Ariane Janse van Rensburg

School of Architecture and Planning,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
E-mail: Ariane.jansevanrensburg@wits.ac.za

In this explorative comparison between the Voortrekker Monument (G.L.Moerdijk, 1949) and the Freedom Park project (Mashabane Rose Architects, 2003 ongoing) on opposite hills south of Pretoria, the obvious differences in language and ideology of these monuments may be outweighed by the similarities in their conception and history. Both projects aim to unite disparate factions into new national identities, using architecture with reinforcing religion and ritual to facilitate this. These strategies are examined and compared and the monuments are evaluated to determine whether they can be considered to be spiritual altars. In the case of the Voortrekker Monument, the described strategies were used to promote Afrikaner "Christian Nationalism," a religio-political agenda that was restrictive and divisive. This raises the question whether Freedom Park's similarities imply similar potential.

Key words: architecture, Voortrekker Monument, Freedom Park, spiritual, altars, religion, ritual

Autels et objectifs politiques- l'architecture comme trait d'union?

Dans cette comparaison entre le Monument des Voortrekkers (G.L.Moerdijk, 1949) et la Place de la Liberté (Mashabane Rose Architects, 2003, en cours) sur des collines au sud de Pretoria, il semble que les différences frappantes de style et d'idéologie sont peut-être moins importantes en définitive que leur ressemblance en termes de conception et d'histoire. Les deux projets visent à unifier des groupes disparates en de nouvelles identités nationales, en utilisant un symbolisme architectural fondé sur les rites et la religion. Ces stratégies sont examinées et comparées; les deux monuments sont examinés en termes d'autels spirituels. Le Monument des Voortrekkers a servi à construire le nationalisme Afrikaner «chrétien», avec les résultats qui ont désuni et limité. Ses ressemblances avec la Place de la Liberté impliquent-elles des objectifs similaires?

Mots-clés: architecture, Monument des Voortrekkers, Place de la Liberté, spiritualité, autel, religion, rite

The artefacts of architecture are buildings. They are in the first place experienced as concrete and functional, but can have a strong sub-text of meaning and influence which has, throughout architectural history, been deliberately used by those in authority, the commissioners of great building projects, to manipulate political will.

This was generally done by expressing political or religious power and authority, demanding submission, which does not actually unify. Ironically, true unification has more often been achieved by the symbolic destruction of architecture representing an immoral force, e.g. the Bastille (Paris, 1789) or the Berlin wall (Berlin, 1989). An example such as the Reichstag in Berlin (additions Norman Foster, 1999, original Paul Wallot, 1894) expresses a re-unified Germany by using a strong previously shared symbolic basis, but in contrast to the architecture under discussion, it does not aim to "unify"; it expresses pre-existing common ground.

This exploratory study will compare the Voortrekker Monument, designed by Gerard L Moerdijk (1890-1958) between 1936 and 1938, and completed on a hill south of the Pretoria CBD in 1949, with Freedom Park, designed by Jeremy Rose of Mashabane, Rose Architects, from 2003 onward, which is taking shape on the hill opposite.

On 21 June 2006 these icons' mutual controlling bodies announced that "a memorandum of understanding had been concluded between the Freedom Park Trust, the Voortrekker Monument and the Heritage Foundation," (Anonymous b) To many people this came as a surprise as, on the face of it, these are opposing monuments that stand for conflicting ideologies, using differing architectural language (figure 1).



Figure 1

Left: G.L.Moerdijk, *Voortrekker Monument*, 1949. Right: Mashabane Rose Architects, *Sikhumbuto, Freedom Park*, 2008 (Janse van Rensburg, 2008).

The Voortrekker Monument

The Voortrekker Monument is a formal, massive art-deco granite icon of Afrikaner Nationalism, consisting of an outdoor amphitheatre, indoor ceremonial gathering space with a heroic frieze, sacrosanct memorial space, a museum, recent archives of Afrikaner culture and a columbarium.

The Freedom Park

The plan of the Freedom Park is organic, weaves through the landscape and incorporates and refers to natural elements which represent a dynamic interaction with the spiritual world, e.g. the slender “reeds” of the Sikhumbuto, punctuated with lights. (In Zulu culture, reeds represent the conduits to the spirit world.) It was commissioned to represent an icon of freedom and humanity and is now described as “a monument to democracy, which was founded on the values of human dignity, rights and freedom” (Anonymous k)

The Freedom Park consists of the following main elements, some of which are still to be constructed:

Isivivane: The resting place for the spirits of those who died in the struggles for humanity and freedom, containing ceremonial trees and boulders from significant places.

Sikhumbuto: A memorial wall that commemorates those who died in the major conflicts that shaped South Africa, containing a gallery of leaders and a sanctuary for ceremonial events, and wraps around a major public amphitheatre.

Moshate: A high-level hospitality suite for presidential guests, signing of treaties, etc.

Uitspanplek: A picnic site.

Mveledzo: A spiral path linking the different elements

//hapo: A major interactive exhibition space (museum), housing under it the Pan African Archives

Tiva: A large body of water. (Anonymous k)

Defining concepts

Before comparing these two structures, certain concepts should be clarified:

Afrikaner - taken in the pre-1994 context to mean Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans, usually also members of one of the three traditional Dutch-Reformed churches (Bunting 1964), as opposed to Giliomee's corrected present definition (Giliomee 2004).

African - pertaining to indigenous African cultures (Morris 1969).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems - "Indigenous knowledge can be broadly defined as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge – technologies, know-how skills, practices and beliefs – that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment." (Anonymous e) In the context of Freedom Park, local is taken to be African, and includes African traditional belief systems.

Nationalism - devotion to the interests and goals of a particular nation or larger cultural grouping including aspirations for independence if this nation is under foreign rule. (Morris 1969) Such a nation can be ethnically based or constitutionally combine different ethnic groupings. If an ethnic nationalism develops within a constitutional nation, this leads to the marginalization of certain groups.

Religion – a contentious concept to define, but broadly a community's expression of its search for transcendent meaning, through an integrated system of beliefs, practices and language. In some belief-systems religion and spirituality are almost indistinguishable; in others a strong distinction is drawn between **religion** as the formal, institutional, cognitive and authoritarian manifestation of belief within a culture, as opposed to **spirituality**, which is personal, psychological, emotional and universal. Religious traditions can, in binding a particular group together, isolate it from others, being potentially divisive and alienating (Chattopadhyay, 2007; Vaillant, 2008).

Spiritual - to do with spirit or deity, not tangible or material; sacred. (Morris 1969) to do with a person or group's relationship with the transcendent (Chattopadhyay, 2007). This can relate to individuals' personal search for meaning in this regard (Anonymous d).

Altar - narrowly defined as any elevated place or structure upon which sacrifices may be offered or incense burned, or before which religious ceremonies may be enacted, (Morris 1969). It can be more broadly anthropologically defined as a place of sacrifice, prayer and devotion (Thompson 1993).

Ritual - narrowly defined as the prescribed form or order of a ceremonial (religious) act or acts, but more tellingly Ouaknin (1996) describes ritual as a personalization of meaning through gestural enactment using one's own body.

Differences

There are of course the obvious differences in architectural style and the cultures that are being represented in the Voortrekker Monument and Freedom Park, and there is a great disparity in the scale of reference: The Voortrekker Monument played a role in the uniting of a single "tribe" while Freedom Park not only strives to unite all the different tongues of South Africa into one nation, but to express an African continental identity. It describes its vision "To be a leading national and international icon of humanity and freedom." (Anonymous c) The Voortrekker Monument cenotaph symbolizes the death of Piet Retief's party of 63; the Sikhumbutho can eventually accommodate 120 000 names, of which 75 000 have already been verified (Anonymous n).

Similarities

Historical context of the Voortrekker Monument - Looking at the historical context, after the Great South African War the Afrikaners were in an acute state of economic depression and disenfranchised 9% of the Afrikaner civilian population had died in British concentration camps. The survivors were politically divided between Smuts and Malan (Giliomee 2004). In this context, the Afrikaner Broederbond was founded in 1918 to unite and promote the interests of the Afrikaner (Bunting 1964). They strongly supported the idea of centennial celebrations of the Afrikaner 'Voortrekker' migrations in 1938. It was a way to remind Afrikaners that they had sacrificed and stood together to become emancipated from British rule in the past and could rise again; that God had protected them in extraordinary circumstances in the past, (from which many concluded that they had a divinely sanctioned destiny ahead) and it built up the mythology of the "heroic dead" in a way that swelled feelings of superiority, all fanning Afrikaner Nationalism.

In 1931 the Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (under auspices of the Broederbond (Bunting 1964)) decided that the different memorials to heroes under discussion should be consolidated into a flagship monument to be inaugurated at the high point of the centennial events, (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) becoming a permanent, visual reminder and symbol of heroic Afrikanerdom. They held an architectural competition and in 1936 chose the design of Gerard Moerdijk, a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, with the addition of one idea from another entry (Vermeulen 1999). It was too late for completion by 1938, but the cornerstone was laid on 16 December 1938 as the culmination of the celebrations with extensive involvement of all strata of the Afrikaner population through countrywide rituals and festivities. (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) There was a symbolic collection of messages from individuals throughout the country by despatch riders for delivery to the monument, and a re-enactment of the ox-wagon migrations along all the routes that had originally been travelled, stopping in every town to engage the local Afrikaner population (irrespective of political persuasions) in celebrations. These even included church sacraments such as marriages and baptisms, and the memorialisation of this event by leaving ox-wagon tracks in fresh concrete on significant public ground.

The building process was delayed by the Second World War, during which Nazi German Nationalism reached its full stature in Europe and significantly influenced the modus operandi of the Broederbond (Bunting 1964). This, together with the seeds of Afrikaner unification sown in 1938, certainly contributed to the fact that by 1948, an Afrikaner Nationalist government had been elected (Giliomee 2004).

In 1949 the Voortrekker Monument was completed and inaugurated (again on 16 December) with massive festivities involving most of the Afrikaner population at a personal level, regardless of political persuasions. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Dr. D F Malan with full participation of the three main Afrikaans churches. (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) The fusion of state, religion and nationalist emotion was complete, and during the Nationalist regime, this was the site of official national celebrations. Even today the Voortrekker Monument is the site of annual memorial church services on 16 December and a site for public gatherings.

Historical context of Freedom Park - The history of Freedom Park followed a similar route. With the birth of a democratic South Africa in 1994, there was the critical need to build one nation out of hitherto conflicting factions. The first attempt to address the deep pain and division perpetrated under Apartheid was through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings. It was felt that this should be concretized into a built memorial (Serote 2004) and the decision

to build Freedom Park was formalized in a Cabinet memorandum of 10 June 1998 as Pres. Mandela's personal initiative (Freedom Park Trust (South Africa) 2004).

New heritage sites had to be developed for previously marginalized events and cultures. Freedom Park would be the 'flagship heritage site' to draw together the whole story. It was to recognise those who had sacrificed to obtain this freedom, using the conflicts of the past for the purposes of nation-building. An international architectural competition to design this project was announced in December 2002. (Freedom Park Trust 2003) Five final entries were selected to participate in a second round. After the second round, the jury decided in November 2003 that there was no winner. They had the option to ask one of the runners-up to develop their design further or to appoint their own architect, and followed the latter course.

Mashabane Rose Architects, who had been involved with the briefing, were appointed to design the project under close guidance of the Freedom Park Trust with CEO Dr Wally Serote. In retrospect one can see that none of the competition entries expressed the desired African cosmology which has been carefully concretized in the Freedom Park design over these past five years.

The official launch of Freedom Park by Pres. Thabo Mbeki took place on 16 June 2002, (Mbeki 2002) before the competition. The garden of remembrance was handed over on 16 December 2004 while the Sikhumbuto was handed over on 16 December 2006 and opened to the public in early 2008. Freedom Park is the site of national celebrations on public holidays and other public events, drawing in all sectors of the population. It is also an official site for receiving visiting heads of state (Anonymous j).

Since the decision not to pursue the international competition route, there has been a noticeable development in the site's African ethnicity and increase in emphasis on the spiritual significance of the design, which were only hinted at in the original competition brief.

The present design was specifically conceived as a "site of healing", with the full rituality of spiritual "healing ceremonies" and the function of transferring these traditions to new generations. To this end, the architectural design process happened under the mentorship of Dr. Harriet Ngubane, expert in indigenous knowledge systems, and "Sanusi" Credo Mutwa, (Curator of Freedom Park 2007) who is described as "visionary, seer, prophet, sculptor, painter and unique individual with an uncanny ability to clearly understand the universe, the world and humanity" on the Freedom Park website. (Anonymous m) Chidester (2006:180-197) describes him much more critically as an adaptive survivor, reinventing African culture within western constructs, which is exactly what Freedom Park embodies.¹

Although the Freedom Park has many public functions, its overarching function has become that of a national spiritual place. It does not just symbolize an African identity which can unite a nation; it is the embodiment of the literal belief that violent death opens up a passage for the flow of catastrophe to the living unless the spirits of the dead are ritually brought "home", so that the ancestors will be able to bless this nation (Ngubane, Freedom Park Trust 2004), and that rituals doing this can restore harmony and prosperity to the country at a spiritual level as well as facilitating the processing of past pain. The aim is also to be able to consult the spirits of the ancestors on national matters (Anonymous n).

Identity icons - The Voortrekker Monument was built to re-establish and express the marginalized identity of the Afrikaner after the Great South African War. The Freedom Park states that one of its strategic thrusts after the pain and division of Apartheid is to "Contribute to social cohesion by positioning the Freedom Park as a symbol of national identity" (Anonymous i) but further emphasizes a new African identity, saying that symbols are for "Forging a new nation, a new consciousness, a South African consciousness.... However, one need not over-emphasise the

nation, as we are in a continent” (Anonymous f). Each of them is thus an iconic structure built to express a re-emerging identity after suffering and suppression.

Physical structures - As already mentioned, each is a monument - a western concept - on a hilltop overlooking the capital city - a position of authority. Each comprises a public amphitheatre, ceremonial gathering space, heroic memorials linked to sacrosanct spaces as well as museums, archives and public recreation spaces. For each project, a design competition was held (Vermeulen 1999; Freedom Park Trust 2003) and an architect was selected who could best express the ruling culture.

Memorialisation of the dead - The cenotaph of the Voortrekker Monument specifically memorializes the death of Piet Retief and his party, but extends the concept to all who have died “for South Africa” (“Ons vir jou, Suid-Afrika”) while the Sikhumbutho of Freedom Park records those who died in eight main areas of conflict in the history of South Africa (Anonymous n). The Monument has a columbarium for the dead while the Isivivane “houses the spirits of the dead” (Anonymous h). Each is a memorial to the sacrifice of lives to reach a point of emancipation.

Government involvement - In 1935 a Cabinet decision ruled that the Government would help to fund the Voortrekker Monument project, matching the amount that the Afrikaners could raise privately pound for pound, while demanding full authority in this project. (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) In the case of Freedom Park a Cabinet memorandum approved the building of Freedom Park as the flagship national heritage site from government funding on 10 June 1998. (Freedom Park Trust 2004) It is specifically described as a “Presidential Legacy Project”. (Anonymous q) Each project was specifically approved, promoted and supervised by parliament, built with tax-payers’ money and opened by the head of state at that time.

Political objectives - This high-level interest and involvement can be understood since this architecture had expressed ruling-party political aims. The reason for the 1935 Cabinet decision on the Voortrekker Monument was given that the building of a such a monument would be in the national interest (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) (not yet the Nationalist Government). “The Freedom Park is the product of the many processes engaged in by Government since 1994 to create and foster a new national consciousness of the common legacy that binds the people of South Africa” (Anonymous q).

A stated key agenda of both these projects has been the unification of fragmented groups under a single new identity, using the architecture to facilitate this.

In the case of the Voortrekker Monument, the Broederbond’s agenda was to use the Voortrekker Monument to unite the hearts of the politically divided Afrikaners by appealing to all commonalities: a shared pride in their history (the frieze), shared pain and loss (the cenotaph) and a common Calvinistic religion (church services linked to the Voortrekker covenant). This was reinforced in very specific ways by inviting identification through personal participation in the opening ceremonies.

In the case of Freedom Park, different political, language and culture groups are, amongst other devices, united by symbolically bringing all the children into “one house”, as the overall site-plan is symbolically based on that of an African royal homestead (curator of Freedom Park 2007). The design also gives each group recognition while drawing them together under the greater entity of the spirit of Africa, e.g. naming each component of the design in a different official language, such as “*Uitspanplek*” (Afrikaans) for the picnic site, “*Sikhumbuto*” (siSwati) for the memorial and “*//hapo*” (Khoi) for the museum-archive. The design itself disseminates information on previously marginalized culture and tradition, so that people may start to develop a common cultural heritage which will be especially promoted in the children’s play area. (Rose

2007) It also attempts unification directly through dealing with perceived disruptive spiritual forces through ritual, e.g. healing ceremonies (Serote 2004).

In the case of the Voortrekker Monument the aim was unashamedly Afrikaner Nationalist: “As ‘n trotse en dankbare volk het die huidige Afrikanernasie hierdie monument opgerig.. met die onwrikbare voorneme om te ... verwesenlik dié ideale waarvoor die emigrante-boere gelewe en gesterwe het: ‘n eie, suiwer volk, aangevuur deur ‘n grootse roeping”² (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949: 98). According to Dr Serote, our common legacy is African and the aim of Freedom Park is to unify this nation under the Spirit of Africa. He stated that only when the African voice and spiritual being is emancipated, freed and given expression in South Africa, will any other voice will be real or heard in our country or from our country into the world (Serote 2004).

Each is a symbol of a culture striving to unify its own; Afrikaner and African. Promoting this, by definition, constitutes a nationalism.

National ceremonies - Each has been the site of ceremonies conducted by representatives of the national government “on behalf of the nation”, whether this actually represented the population or not.

Regional involvement - Apart from the commemorative ox-wagon journeys and the messages collected from throughout the country, the Voortrekker Monument also invited every Afrikaner family to bring a stone from their place of origin and to build it into the surrounding ring wall. (Woods 2006) At Freedom Park, boulders coming from the nine provinces and were prepared to present these regions at regional healing and cleansing ceremonies before being brought to Freedom Park to be symbolically incorporated in the Isivivane (Anonymous h). In each case the custodians of the structure organized a series of participatory events at regional levels which led up to a national event at the site, and as an emerging system or points of organization” referring to each other, setting up “a visible syntax linked to the collective historical memory of an identifiable group”.

A strategy of symbolic reference - According to the curator of Freedom Park (2007) a condition for selecting a site for Freedom Park was that it should be “close to another heritage site.” Freedom Park has consciously aligned itself with significant sites from previous dispensations and incorporated their meaning into its own context. This alignment was in fact prescribed in the brief for the original Freedom Park design competition in January 2003 (figure 2) (Freedom Park Architects in Association 2003).

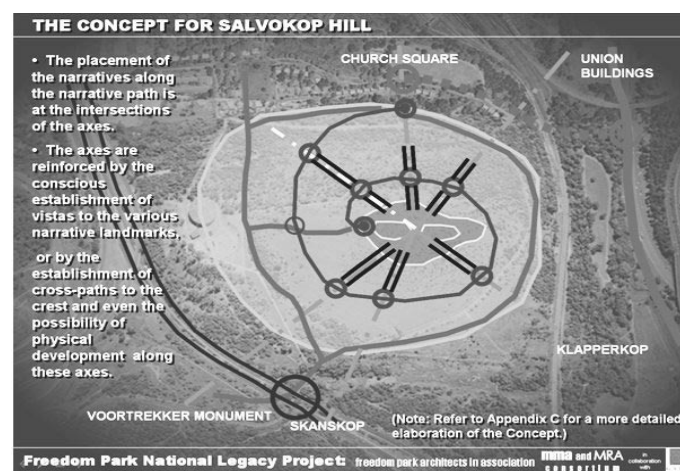


Figure 2
Diagram showing prescribed alignment of Freedom Park to surrounding significant heritage sites (Brief for the Freedom Park competition, 2002).



Figure 3

Left: G.L.Moerdijk, *Oculus, Voortrekker Monument, 1949*. **Right:** MRA, *Solar focus of oculus, in front of the sanctuary, Sikhumbuto, Freedom Park, 2008* (Janse van Rensburg, 2008).

The principle is also applied in the detailed design symbolism, of the oculi (figure 3) and the eternal flames. The solar focus in the Voortrekker Monument commemorates the Voortrekker covenant of 16 December 1838. The date commemorates the pledge of a much-outnumbered group of men to give recognition to God if they should survive a battle, which they did, and in fact achieved a victory at Blood River / Ncome, which led to the establishment of an independent Afrikaner state. This symbolically significant date, 16 December in 1961, became the date chosen for the launch of umKhonto we Sizwe in order to fight the later Afrikaner government. (Anonymous h) When Freedom Park also chose an oculus focusing on an eternal flame at noon on 16 December to mark the fact that this control was indeed dismantled in 1994, alluding to the oculus in the Voortrekker Monument strengthens this statement with a constant reminder of the extent of the former power that has been eclipsed. These monuments thus use some of the same physical symbols, but in different strategies.

Religious and spiritual components - Finally each has a strong spatial and functional religious and spiritual component, supported by rituals at a national level, which will be examined in more detail.

Religion and spirituality in this architecture

One of the strongest tools that can be used for unification is religion, since it can generate respect, awe and even guilt. This was certainly used in the case of the Voortrekker Monument. Moerdijk himself saw this as a type of “church” and his daughter describes it as “the greatest church that he built, the sanctuary of the Afrikaner nation”. (Vermeulen 1999:x) Villa Vicencio says that “the Afrikaner churches saw their primary role to lie in maintaining Afrikaner unity, providing extensive moral and ideological support for the Afrikaner cause” (Hofmeyr 2001:132). The Monument encouraged the churches in this by involving them in the organization of religious services at the Monument, implying that the building and associated activity served God. Rev. Kestell used the inaugural festivities of the Monument to promote his plea for Christian charity to fellow-Afrikaners (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) and this was in turn used to forge the concept that this Nationalism was “Christian”, culminating in the term “Christelik-Nasionaal”, as unpacked by Nico Smith in his descriptions of the Broederbond (2009).

Freedom Park uses religious activity to promote national spiritual unity by inviting representatives of all religious groups in South Africa to participate in its spiritual rituals

according to their own cultural traditions, but still subservient to the Spirit of Africa. There is a sanctuary which can be used by any religious grouping for personal memorial rituals. The Isivivane is specifically identified as a “sacred space” and the participatory ritual of taking off shoes when entering it is prescribed to all religious groupings. A person who does not wish to do this, may only view it from outside. In its representation of different cultures within South Africa, languages and concepts that are African in origin are used for the more spiritually significant components and there has been a noticeable increase in the spiritual significance of the components as the project progresses. This can be observed in the official communications issued by the Freedom Park.

In the original design brief (Freedom Park Trust 2003), the closest “spiritual” agenda was that “Freedom Park aims to become a place of pilgrimage and inspiration” (in the context of the struggle of humanity in South Africa). The brief was for a long list of practical facilities, including a memorial area, which was mentioned as a “sacrosanct” space on the crest of the hill. It specified that the design should include a space for spiritual reflection and referred to the significance of the hilltop in African culture :

“High ground on a rock is symbolic of Africa.

Essentially, the rock is our home – African people used to live in mountains where they constantly listened to the voice of silence. Mountains and hills also served as a seat of governance for many of the royal kraals. In addition, mountains were considered sacred by some groups who used to go to the mountains to pray for rain, or to bury kings on rocks or caves in the mountains, thus believing that ancestors resided there – a step to the heavens and to our humanity.” (Freedom Park Architects in Association 2003)

By 2004, Freedom Park was describing itself as follows: (Freedom Park Trust 2004)

“The Three Pillars of The Freedom Park:”

Isivivane: The Garden of Remembrance - symbolises the spiritual unification of the South African nation.

Sikhumbuto: The Memorial - depicting all freedom fighters who fell during our various struggles that gave birth to the current democratic South Africa.

//hapo: The Dream - a centre of knowledge capturing South African history from as far as 3,6 billion years ago to date. Objective: to create a deeper understanding & respect of South Africa and its people.

Now it has progressed from symbolizing certain things to being certain things:

Isivivane: “The resting place for the spirits of those who died in the struggles for humanity and freedom” (Anonymous h).

Sikhumbutho: “The concept of Sikhumbuto is drawn from siSwati nomenclature and signifies a place of remembrance for those who have died and also a place for invoking their assistance in current and future affairs” (Anonymous n).

Tiva: (not previously described) “traditionally seen as an area of deep mystery that provides for cleansing and healing as well as communication with the spirit world” (Anonymous o).

It is also obvious that the spiritual significance of these elements is designed to be read on many levels. For example, the website explains “The name //hapo means ‘dream’, which has been drawn from a Khoi proverb that translates into ‘A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community’ “. (Anonymous g) It is, however, also the word for the trance state into which the Shaman enters to communicate with the spirit world. In San rock art, this is symbolically depicted as entering through the rock face into the rock and indicated by the thin line of white dots which disappears and reappears into breaks in the rock in rock art (Thompson 1993). The architectural concept for the //hapo was conceived as an arrangement of boulders, based on the boulders in Credo Mutwa’s transcendental healing garden (Rose 2007): the idea being that one enters into the boulders to access the deep knowledge and memory of the archives and collections of indigenous knowledge systems. This is at a conceptual, metaphorical level. There are also deeper layers at which the designs can be read by those who have been initiated into indigenous knowledge systems, since these aspects of the design are closely supervised by the Freedom Park Trust.

Do they qualify as altars?

Since both monuments accommodate religious activities one should also consider whether either of them would qualify as a spiritual altar, according to the definition earlier in this article.

Conceptually, an altar is the meeting place of the heavenly and the earthly, “a crossing of two realms” (Thompson 1993:28) where a spiritual exchange takes place. It can be a site for the making or renewing of covenants; and it may or may not be serviced by a priestly intermediary. The power of an altar to facilitate spiritual communication in any religious system is reinforced by worship, pilgrimage, regular ritual and libations or sacrifices done or symbolically brought there, the most significant being human life.

These monuments are both situated on elevated places, both contain sacrosanct spaces and are both symbolic of the sacrifice of human life. They are both sites of prayer. This happens in church services conducted at the Voortrekker Monument, and Freedom Park has been the site of specific prayer events such as the National Peace and Healing Prayer Day on 24 November 2005. (Anonymous 1) These have been presided over by recognized religious leaders (Dr D F Malan was an ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church; both Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Credo Mutwa have led prayer at Freedom Park). The Afrikaner Calvinist churches never burn incense, but it is done regularly by different religious persuasions at Freedom Park (Serote 2004).

Moerdijk described his architectural concept for the Voortrekker Monument as the altar of Afrikanerdom. (Vermeulen 1999) His own reference to the patriarch Abraham’s building of altars during his wanderings seems to imply a similar spiritual intent. Moerdijk however describes this as claiming the land, (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) implying that the offering of life memorialised on the altar (cenotaph) “bought” the land. Abraham actually never claimed the region politically: his altars were built to proclaim the authority of God over all land.³

The Monument is the site of an annual covenant-renewing ritual on 16 December. Although the date commemorates a covenant under which no Voortrekker blood was shed, the solar focus on the cenotaph around which everyone gathers with bowed heads (Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949) on this day highlights a pledge of sacrifice of life to “Suid-Afrika”. During its history, the Monument has attracted large crowds to these ceremonies, the most dramatic being the 240 000 Afrikaners who attended the inauguration (figure 4) (Vermeulen 1999:97), as well as many more who were involved in the month-long build-up to the inaugural event; a considerable proportion of the Afrikaner population of the time. All these facts would qualify it as an altar, but it should be seen as an altar to nationalism and not to God.

In the case of Freedom Park this site (as in the case of the Voortrekker Monument) did not have a previous spiritual history. Its spiritual significance was also carefully constructed. The fact that the Sikhumbutho can list up to 120 000 dead, backing each one up with a researched history, can still be regarded as a function of memorial and respect. The fact that special expeditions are arranged to fetch the spirits of those who died violently or in exile (sacrificial deaths) and bring them to rest at Freedom Park, is however very specifically a spiritual ritual. After four years of this type of build-up, the site has become a chosen venue for global events with spiritual significance such as the global unity award to Archbishop Desmond Tutu on 18 April 2009 at which “the spirit of Ubuntu would be released” (Anonymous, a). These examples of use clearly show that both these structures meet all the conditions to qualify as altars.

The role of ritual

The role of ritual in reinforcing not only the religious significance but the political aims of these two sites is significant. While ritual reinforces the memory of the original event by adding a new layer of meaning with each re-enactment (Ouaknin 1996), this is often linked to cosmic events or powerful external symbols for further reinforcement, strengthening the experience of the ritual. This is usually done by alignment to the movements of heavenly bodies, the use of powerful elements such as water, wind and fire or by physical reminders that trigger personal / collective memories of events that fuel emotions, be they historic or mythological.

In the case of the Voortrekker Monument, one of the inaugural events was a torch relay from Cape Town with sun-ignited fire modelled exactly on Hitler's first modern revival of the Olympic torch run to Berlin in 1936 (Woods 2006). Apart from the evocative power of fire, this created links of association with this other nationalism.

In the 16 December ritual where the ray of sunlight falls on the cenotaph, that light actually falls through a hole in the dome which is punched through Blood River on a relief map of South Africa on the top of the dome, not accessible to the public (Vermeulen 1999). This implies that (at least in the mind of the designer) there is more meaning attached to this occurrence than that visible in the participatory ritual below.

At Freedom Park, apart from the cleansing and healing rituals, public burnt offerings are brought on behalf of the nation (figure 4) for specific events such as the award of the 2010 soccer bid, but also on an ongoing basis, which is not necessarily public, since it is indeed currently used to invoke the assistance of the ancestors in ongoing national affairs. This flagship national heritage site has in fact, over the past decade, without any debate, firmly established indigenous African belief systems as the representative national religion.



Figure 4

Left: The inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in 1949 (Woods 2006) Right: Rituals in the Isivivane at Freedom Park during the visit of Credo Mutwa on 31 July 2009 (<http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms>).

The Voortrekker Monument was built in a Calvinistic culture where the injunction: “thou shalt have no other gods before Me, or bow down to them”⁴ is repeated weekly from the pulpit. An injunction to “worship Afrikaner Nationalism” would have been absurd. However in architecture one can create associations of ideas through spatial placement which are not specifically challenged, because they are subliminal. When also reinforced by ritual, these can become the new mythology. What happens in the architecture of the Voortrekker Monument (figure 5) is that the sun shines on the cenotaph (symbolizing the violent death of Piet Retief, eight months before and totally unrelated to the Covenant) on 16 December (the date of the Covenant, drawing God into the picture) and onto the words “Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika”⁵, highlighted in the context of a church service, creating an idea that these are the terms of the covenant, and that offering one's life for the South African political state is some sort of offering to God.

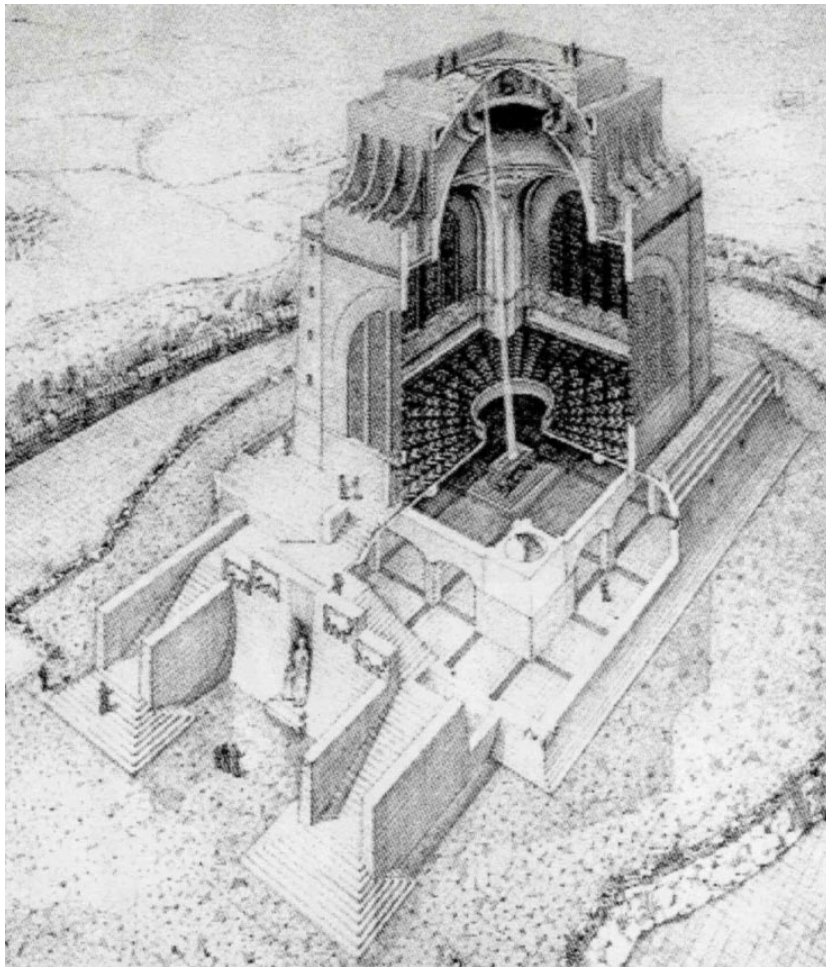


Figure 5

Gerard Moerdijk, Concept for the Voortrekker Monument, 1936 (Vermeulen 1999).

When any group promotes itself, it is unavoidably at the expense of others (Smith,2009). This makes “Christian Nationalism” a contradiction in terms; a lie. The divine sanction of religion was warped into feelings of superiority in one group which “justified” the marginalization of others. It was called Apartheid. This was done so effectively that the Afrikaans churches (and church-going populace) were drawn into making policy decisions in conflict with the Scriptures to which they claimed allegiance, until they eventually had to come to a point where they recanted and confessed Apartheid as a sin. It was called a crime against humanity.

The Voortrekker Monument is an architectural expression of a political strategy in which religion was used as a political tool. When a nation starts to use religion to promote nationalism it is at the expense of spirituality and truth. Given the unlikely factors that the Afrikaner population was so small and disenfranchised in the period preceding the building of the Voortrekker Monument, and its ascendancy coincided with the building of the Monument, raises the questions:

To what extent did this artefact play an (extra)ordinary role in this process?

To what extent did it serve and empower the “spirit” of Apartheid?

Whether the Voortrekker Monument merely expressed Afrikaner ascendancy or specifically empowered it, the fact that the current regime has retained it and incorporated it into the Freedom Park concept, confirms that it came to symbolize united Afrikanerdom and can still be used to connect with Afrikaners. This was however the ethnic unification of one group, at the expense of those who were not included in this unification. In effect it sowed division.

Conclusions

In retrospect, the Voortrekker Monument's Afrikaner developing nationalist agenda is clearer. It called itself "national", but authority was vested only in the group who subscribed to its agenda. It used architecture and religion to manipulate.

Freedom Park is considered as significant post-apartheid architecture. It is not, like some other heritage projects, a living museum to communicate the beliefs of a specific cultural group: It claims to represent a national moral and spiritual position on behalf of every citizen, built on the constitutional freedoms. What does its architecture represent?

Like the Voortrekker Monument, its stated function is to unify a nation, and to speak on behalf of the nation. Both structures are, in effect, religious altars. The Voortrekker Monument invited all Afrikaner groupings to participate, but united a minority under a restrictive agenda of "Christian Nationalism", marginalizing all others. Freedom Park has invited all South African groupings to participate. It is also using architecture and religion "to unify". The architectural clues however seem to indicate that the majority African Traditional belief-construct has been singled out to achieve this unification. Religious beliefs are fundamental. This criterion potentially excludes differing groupings as was illustrated in the case of the Voortrekker Monument.

It would be essential for Freedom Park to address the potential marginalization, albeit of minority groupings, if it is to achieve its stated objective of being an icon of freedom and humanity.

Notes

1. David Chidester's chapter on Mutwa explains the context of Mutwa's rise to this position in some detail (Stier 2006: 181-197).
2. As a proud and grateful people the present Afrikaner nation erected this monument with the unbending resolve to ... realize the ideals for which these emigrant farmers lived and died: an own, pure people, fired by a great calling (tr. Janse van Rensburg)
3. Lev.25:23 (KJV) The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.
4. Ex.20:3-5(KJV) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.
5. "Us (i.e. our lives) for you, South Africa (tr. Janse van Rensburg).

Works cited

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu accepts global Spiritual Leadership Award | NGO Pulse a, Available: <http://www.ngopulse.org/press-release/archbishop-emeritus-desmond-tutu-accepts-global-spiritual-leadership-award> [2009, 8/24/2009] .

Cape Town International Jazz Festival 2007, Voortrekker Monument & the Heritage Foundation: briefings | Parliamentary

Monitoring Group | Parliament of South Africa monitored b, . Available: <http://www.pmg.org.za/minutes/20071008-cape-town-international-jazz-festival-2007-voortrekker-monument-heritage-foundation> [2009, 8/24/2009].

The company c, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=4 [2009, 8/22/2009] .

- Discussion forum d*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_kunena&Itemid=75&func=view&catid=11&id=6 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Discussion forum e*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_kunena&Itemid=75&func=view&catid=21&id=8 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Discussion forum f*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_kunena&Itemid=75&func=view&catid=23&id=26 [2009, 8/24/2009] .
- //hapo . g*, Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29&Itemid=35 [2009, 9/1/2009] .
- Isivivane h*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24&Itemid=30 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Key objectives i*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=5 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Moshate . j*, Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=32 [2009, 9/1/2009] .
- Overview of elements k*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=26 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Search for a document 2005-11-24 _National peace and healing prayer day, l* . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=17&Itemid=3&limitstart=10 [2009, 8/24/2009] .
- Search for a document: 2009-07-31 _Doyen of African culture, Credo Mutwa's historic visit to the Freedom Park, m*. Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=5&Itemid=3 [2009, 8/24/2009] .
- Sikhumbuto n*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=31 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Tiva o*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=37 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Umkhonto we Sizwe - The ANC and the turn to armed struggle - organiastions | South African History Online . p* Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governence-projects/organisations/MK/MKframeset.htm> [2009, 9/1/2009] .
- What is the role of the South African Government in the development of The Freedom Park? q*, . Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49:what-is-the-role-of-the-south-african-government-in-the-development-of-the-freedom-park&catid=15:faq&Itemid=39 [2009, 8/22/2009] .
- Bunn, D. 1998. Monuments and meaning in Judin, H. & Vladislavic, I. (ed.), *Blank: Architecture, Apartheid and After*. Rotterdam: Nederlands Architectuurinstituut.
- Bunting, B. 1964. *The Rise of the South African Reich*, Penguin Books, London.
- Chattopadhyay, S. 2007, "Religion, spirituality, health and medicine: why should Indian physicians care?", *Postgrad Med* 53(4): 262-266.
- Curator of the Freedom Park 2007. *GIFA tour*.
- Freedom Park Architects in Association 2003. *Freedom Park National Legacy Project - Final Draft Urban Design and Development Framework*, Department of Arts and Culture, Pretoria.
- Freedom Park Trust 2003. *Freedom Park Architectural Competition - Brief and Conditions*, Pretoria.

- Freedom Park Trust, 2000. *The Freedom Park : A Dream is not a Dream Until it is Shared by the Entire Community*, Pretoria: Freedom Park.
- Freedom Park Trust (South Africa) 2004, *Freedom Park : Garden of Remembrance*, Freedom Park Trust, Pretoria.
- Hofmeyr, J. W. , Lombaard, C. J. S. & Maritz, P. J. 2001. *1948 Plus Fifty Years – Theology, Apartheid and Church – Past, Present and Future*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Giliomee, H. 2004, *Die Afrikaners - 'n Biografie*. Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers.
- Mbeki, T. *Search for a document: 2002-06-16_President of South Africa launch of The Freedom Park*. Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=17&Itemid=3 [2009, 8/24/2009].
- Morris, W. (ed.). 1969. *The Heritage Illustrated Dictionary of the English Language*, 1973. New York: American Heritage Publishing Co. Inc.
- Ngubane, H. & Freedom Park Trust 2004, *An African Perspective on the Management of Life and Death and its implications for Nation Building and Reconciliation in South Africa*. Pretoria: Freedom Park Trust.
- Ouaknin, M. 1996, *Symbols of Judaism*. Paris: Editions Assouline.
- Rose, J. 2007, *GIFA tour*.
- Serote, M.W. , *Search for a document: 2004-11-13_University of Pretoria - Faculty of Health and Science*. Available: http://www.freedompark.co.za/cms/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=17&Itemid=3&limitstart=20 [2009, 8/24/2009] .
- Smith, N. 2009. *Die Afrikaner Broederbond - belevinge aan die binnekant*, Pretoria: Lapa Uitgewers.
- Stier, O.B.L.,J.S. (ed.) 2006, *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, 1st edn, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Thompson, R.F. & Museum for African Art. 1993. *Face of the gods: art and altars of Africa and the African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art.
- Vaillant, G. 2008. *Spiritual Evolution - How we are wired for Faith, Hope, and Love*. USA: Broadway Books.
- Vermeulen, I. 1999. *Man en monument: die lewe en werk van Gerard Moerdijk*. Van Schaik, Pretoria.
- Voortrekkermonument-inwydingskomitee 1949. *Amptelike Program en Gedenkboek van die Fees ter Inwyding van die Voortrekkermonument 13 tot 16 Desember 1949*. Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers.
- Woods, D. 2006. *Reaping the Whirlwind*, Cape Town: Struik Christian Books.

Ariane Janse van Rensburg graduated in architecture from UCT. With some years of architectural experience under Peter Hattingh and later Revel Fox, she started her own practice. After winning the EPIA competition to design stained glass windows for the Feathermarket Hall she had the opportunity to train in glass painting under Debora Coombs at the Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle. On her return she received her first large stained glass commission in Botswana and extended her design partnership to include a glass studio. She has actively practiced in architecture and stained glass ever since. After some years of part-time lecturing at the University of Johannesburg she joined the full-time staff of the University of the Witwatersrand in 2008 where she teaches in Architectural Design and History. Her research interests and publications are mainly in the field of symbolism and stained glass, but include the design of mental health facilities.