

# Monument(al) meaning making in the “new” South Africa: Freedom Park as a symbol of a new identity and freedom?

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Freedom Park was established as part of a postcolonial reconstruction of monuments to honour those who sacrificed their lives for freedom, as well as to enhance reconciliation and nation building in South Africa. The aim of the article is to investigate the geographical location, spatial positioning and skyline of Freedom Park in an effort to establish its goal and the new identity that it wishes to convey. A description of the Park from outside and inside will be given in an effort to unlock its symbolic meaning. The underpinning research question is whether Freedom Park reflects a united identity which could contribute to reconciliation and nation building in South Africa.

**Key words:** Freedom Park, Postcolonial reconstruction, Salvokop, Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria

## Monument(ale) skepping van betekenis in die “nuwe” Suid-Afrika: Vryheidspark, ’n simbool van ’n nuwe identiteit en vryheid?

Vryheidspark is as deel van die post-koloniale rekonstruksie van monumente in Suid-Afrika opgerig om eer aan diegene te betoon wat hul lewe vir vryheid opgeoffer het, maar ook om versoening en nasiebou te bevorder. Die doel van die artikel is om die oogmerk met die geografiese ligging en die ruimtelike posisionering van dié vredespark te ondersoek, asook die uitleg en die identiteit wat dit verteenwoordig. ’n Beskrywing van die Park van buite en binne sal gedoen word ten einde die simboliese betekenis te verstaan. Die onderliggende navorsingsvraag is of Vryheidspark ’n verenigde identiteit reflekteer wat tot versoening en nasiebou in Suid-Afrika kan bydra.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Vryheidspark, Post-koloniale rekonstruksie, Salvokop, Voortrekkermonument, Pretoria

Freedom Park on the outskirts of Pretoria is a strong visual symbol that serves as a powerful reminder of the new political era that has dawned on South Africa. The establishment of a freedom park to commemorate South Africa’s transition to democracy was not, however, unexpected in the light of the existing imbalance and disparity of monuments that previously predominantly represented the values and identity of the former regimes, history, struggles, heroes and heroines. The majority of the population, furthermore, view the existing monuments as symbols of former alienation and disempowerment (Tomaselli & Mporfu 1993: 17).

South Africa’s transformation to a new political regime and the adoption, of a broader historical, cultural and symbolic framework, underpinned by a diverse multicultural value and belief system represented a drastic change in the country. The aim of the new political regime was not restricted to effecting socio-political changes, but also set a process in motion to reconstruct society symbolically in terms of a new broader identity and the values of a postcolonial society. A new flag, new national colours and a new coat of arms were the first visible signs of a new nation with the intention to represent the values of the new multicultural and multi-faceted all-inclusive postcolonial society. One of the challenges within this new socio-political and cultural-historical context was how to (re)construct the existing monuments and statues to reflect the broader history and values and the future goals of the new nation in a more equitable manner that could enhance reconciliation and nation building in a new, South Africa.

However, the ad hoc postcolonial reconstruction of monuments predictably raised a number of pertinent questions:

What is the new, identity that the “new” monuments, statues and parks wish to represent in the new democratic dispensation?

Will this postcolonial reconstruction of “new” monuments reflect an objective perspective of history which will enhance reconciliation and nation building in South Africa, or will the process be subservient to a hidden political agenda?

## **From a divided past to a united future: challenges to monument(al) meaning making in South Africa.**

During the post-1994 period a strong need developed to restore the massive historical disparity in South Africa in terms of monuments, statues and parks to reflect the broader society's history and the struggle for freedom and values. Frescura in Schönfeldt-Aultman (2006: 217) points out that 97% of all monuments declared by the National Council were reflective of white values and interests of the pre-apartheid and apartheid era. Obviously, this uneven balance has improved slightly from the pre-1994 position, but the existing monuments are still predominantly representative of the history and values of the previous white regime.

In the capital city, Pretoria, the balance of monuments and statues is still skew, being hugely representative of the previous regime. During 1999, within the city boundaries, 14 monuments were still representative of the previous regime, with only three commemorating the plight of black soldiers who either perished in World War 1 or in the struggle against apartheid. One of the three monuments is in Atteridgeville, a cenotaph to commemorate the 700 members of the Native Corps who lost their lives during World War 1 when their troopship the *SS Mendi* struck a mine in the English Channel in February 1917. The remaining two monuments are a memorial in Mamelodi to honour Solomon Mahlangu who died during the civil unrest of the 1980s and the Stanza Bopape memorial in the Mandela Village Squatter Camp to commemorate his death after having been arrested by the security police during the struggle for freedom (Heydenrych & Swiegers 1999: 67). (Since 1999, as part of the postcolonial reconstruction, two more have been added, namely Freedom Park and the statue of Chief Tshwane.)

The national urge to restore the balance has, however, resulted in many uncoordinated *ad hoc* initiatives on a broad front, a process which has been predominantly politically driven. The initiative furthermore proliferated in a broad uncoordinated drive to change the names of cities and towns to replace political and historical names of the past with those of current historical figures and politicians. This name-changing process is a political strategy (neo-patrimonialism) to reward political leaders and gain political favour from constituents (Chabal 1992: 452). The name changes of towns have mainly been conducted unilaterally with little historical backing and coordinated planning, which ultimately has done little for reconciliation and nation building. The changing of the name of Louis Trichardt to Makhado serves as one example to prove how divisive the process of political and societal reconstruction can be in disturbing the complex relationship between reconciliation and nation building in a country.

In 2005, the MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation for Mpumalanga province, Ms Nomsa Mtsweni, defended the name change from Witbank to Emalaheni (formerly Witbank) as follows: "The process of name changes is about rewriting our history and preserving our heritage ... it is about reclaiming and restoring our dignity" (*The Star* 2005).

However, such a highly charged political agenda and a re-creation of history as part of a (re)construction and memorialisation of the past will negatively impact on a common heritage and on nation building in a country. If memorialisation is politicised it could easily emulate Zimbabwe's postcolonial complex with the privileged elevation of a struggle narrative in monuments and in history that will destroy any hope of reconciliation and nation building. In South Africa, such a process will undermine any hope of creating an inclusive new nation with a broad, diverse, but an all-inclusive identity.

During the post-1994 reconstruction of monuments, statues and parks, the establishment of Freedom Park was the most prominent addition. The park was erected as a result of a national initiative to restore the present imbalance in terms of reflecting the values of a new South African society. The Mbeki presidency, in terms of the *National Heritage Resource Act* No 25

of 1999, set the ball rolling for the establishment of a freedom park with an initial budget of R700 million. As a state-funded site, the original idea was that the park should honour those who gave up their lives for freedom, but should also contribute to reconciliation and nation building in South Africa.

This article aims to investigate the establishment of Freedom Park as part of the postcolonial reconstruction process intended to correct the imbalances of the past. The aim of the article will also be to analyse how the park's identity contributes spatially, visually, architecturally and symbolically to reconciliation and nation building in South Africa.

### **Freedom Park and the (re-)construction of the past: an outline of its visual impact on the spatial environment in the Tshwane Metro area**

The topography of Pretoria is dominated by three east–west quartzite ridges that protrude above the surrounding landscape and form two parallel troughs in which the city and the older suburbs are situated. The northernmost ridge is the Magaliesberg (2 527 metres above sea level and named after chief Mohale (Raper 2007: 237) which stretches from Rustenburg and runs west–east from the Hartbeestpoort Dam to Cullinan. The second ridge is Daspoortrand and the trough between the two ridges is known by the name ‘Moot’. The third southernmost quartzite protrusion consists of the Skurweberg, Kwaggasrant, Langeberge, Schanskop, Klapperkop and Waterkloof ridge which forms the southern barrier (Heydenrych & Swiegers 1999: 2).

From Johannesburg to Pretoria's central business district, the elevation drops almost imperceptibly more than three hundred metres in fewer than 60 kilometres. This altitude drop from the Witwatersrand ridges to the Fountains Valley and Pretoria's central business district is partly obscured by the ridges which form a natural southern geographical barrier.

However, in spite of this mountainous and undulating terrain, pre-colonial travellers and immigrants during the 17th and 18th century experienced little trouble crossing the geographical obstacles in a northerly or southerly direction. Travel and migration in the mountainous area was made easier by the various causeways or ports (‘poorte’) that nature has carved through the Magaliesberg and other high ground.

The present-day road network enters Pretoria's central business district through a causeway (poort) in the southernmost Waterkloofridge, called Elandspoort, which, in the modern era, bisects the University of South Africa on its eastern side on Muckleneuk Ridge, and Salvokop on the western side.

During the era of the Zuid Afrikaansche Republic (ZAR) (1852 - 1902), the high rising hills around Pretoria and the Magaliesberg range provided excellent opportunities for the placement of forts to defend the city. The military planners of the former ZAR used the high ground as part of a defensive strategy to protect the city during the turbulent last decade of its existence before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).

Two of the most dominant hills, Klapperkop (2 528 metres above sea level, named after butter rattle which grows on the hill) and Skanskop (2 528 metres above sea level, named after the fortification) were part of the third southernmost ridge and were used to built two forts during the late 1890. On the northern side of the city two more forts were erected on the Magaliesberg ridge (Daspoortrand and Wonderboom). These four hill fortifications dominated the skyline and surrounding areas and became landmarks for many years in Pretoria.

The Voortrekker Monument on Monument hill joined the two forts in 1949 when it was completed and inaugurated to commemorate the heroics of the Voortrekkers and to honour

their contribution to the creation of an Afrikaner nation (Botha 1952: 15). The geographical area south of Pretoria was therefore for decades spatially dominated by the two forts and the monument lying on a west–east axis and projecting a strong spatial and visual dominance of Afrikaner values.

The regime change in South Africa in 1994 necessitated a societal postcolonial reconstruction process and changes to the exclusive manner in which values and history had been reflected in monuments, parks and statues in the past. The dominance of the existing monument and forts from the pre-colonial era probably motivated the decision to erect Freedom Park on the neighbouring Salvokop (2 528 metres above sea level and named after artillery fire that was discharged from the hill) in an effort to counterbalance and “correct” the existing disparity. Freedom Park was therefore most probably erected as part of a “correcting” process to rectify the spatial imbalance of monuments in the area; accordingly, it was constructed on Salvokop, just above the Pretoria Railway Station, in direct line of sight with the Union Buildings and the Voortrekker Monument.

### **The geographical context of monuments; an archaeological and anthropological perspective on heritage and historical sites in the Pretoria area**

To fully comprehend the place, meaning and underlying values of new monuments requires an understanding of the terrain and the possible anthropological and historical nexus with heritage sites or historical events in the area. The challenge for the placement of monuments and parks is therefore to understand their value and meaning and then to search for an applicable nexus with historical events or sacred and religious places which could provide the contextual framework for underpinning and reinforcing these values.

An evaluation of Freedom Park’s placement requires an investigation into the anthropological, religious and historical sites in the Pretoria area. However, before embarking on such an endeavour it is important to understand what heritage constitutes. Is it the written word, music, film, visual arts, fashion, cultural expressions or, on a wider front, the struggle to express oneself politically, culturally and socially as manifested in the struggle for democracy (Ramdhan 2010)? In the end it is probably a combination of all these values, but also includes a commemoration of our forebear “footprints in the sands of time”. The “challenge” for the newly established Freedom Park will therefore be how to reflect the footprints in the sands of time, *in such a manner that it will contribute to nation building and reconciliation in South Africa*.

Therefore, in order to address the question, the history and heritage of the Pretoria area be revisited to reveal a picture of the past and those who left their footprints.

### **Footprints in the sands of time**

In the modern era the majority of visitors who enter Pretoria through Elandspoort are oblivious to the fact that they are actually tracing the footsteps of stone-age man. Archaeological evidence indicates that, as early as the late Stone Age, Elandspoort served as an access or exit point for crossing the valley to Wonderboompoort, which bisected the Magaliesberg in the opposite direction. The Wonderboompoort formed a natural causeway for Stone Age travellers to the northern region and it is no surprise that earthworks in the modern era have revealed stone-age tools that have been dated as being 70 000 to 200 000 years old (Pelser 1998: 22).

The area between Elandspoort and the Magaliesberg is rich in archaeological finds that prove that it was probably inhabited as early as the late Stone Age. Archaeological studies



conducted north of Elandsport in Sunnyside unearthed stone-age stone tools that are 130 000 years old (Pelser 1998: 22). Similar studies revealed stone tools near Pioneer House, which date back to the middle and late Stone Age period (Van Vollenhoven 2000: 42).

In the pre-colonial era the migration of black tribes into the area also happened along the north–south route from Wonderboompoort to Elandsport. A small river, which springs from the strong fountains in the dolomite ridge north of Elandsport snakes through the valley close to the north–south pathway and exits north through Wonderboompoort, was a water source for game that formed the target for the hunters and gatherers that resided more permanently along its spine. The first migrants to the area were the Ndebele who moved southwards into the region and occupied the northern section of the Moot area. Junod in Engelbrecht (1955: 64) refers to a chief with the name Musi or Mnisi who occupied the area and mentions his two sons, Manala and Mdzundaza, who ruled after his death. Another son, Tshwane, was also born in the area and his name was immortalised when the river that originated in the Fountains area was named after him.

Although there was a strong Ndebele presence in the area, Van Vuuren in Middleton and Rasan (1995: 235) states that there is no anthropological or archaeological evidence that the Ndebele settled permanently in the area south of the Magaliesberg.

A later, more significant, migration into the valley happened in 1825 when the Bakwena clan settled in the area. However, they were soon assimilated by Mzilikazi's followers, the Matabele, who settled on the eastern bank of the Entsoothule River (Apies River) close to the present day Pretoria North. Andrew Smith (1834: 101) indicates that Mzilikazi resided north of the Magaliesberg, but Becker (1962: 90) placed his settlement on the eastern bank of the river close to the present day Union Buildings.

During the next decade Mzilikazi's presence in the area was cut short when Dingane's regiments, bent on revenge, forced him and his followers to migrate further west (Andrews & Ploeger 1989: 1–3). Shortly after Mzilikazi's departure, Hendrik Potgieter and a small reconnaissance commando followed the stone-age trail from Elandsport through Wonderboompoort on their way home. Their trip through the valley prompted two of the commando, Gerhardus and Lukas Bronkhorst, who recognised the potential of the valley, to become the first whites to settle in the area (Peacock 1955: 14).

It is obvious in relation to pre-colonial historical and heritage sites that the presence of black tribes in this area was too short to establish a permanent site with a heritage or symbolic meaning. However, there is one notable exception of a site near an exceptional tree, the Wonderboom (Wonder Tree) a wild fig tree (*ficus* of the *Moraceae* family), which is more than 1 000 years old and is located northeast of the Wonderboompoort. All available anthropological evidence strongly suggests that for centuries migrating black tribes attached religious and symbolic value to the tree and its immediate surroundings. The tree was regarded as sacred and offerings were made there during north–south migrations. Evidence points to the fact that one of the first Ndebele chiefs was buried under the tree (President Burgers, the former president of the old ZAR, left one of the oldest descriptions of the tree). The Wonderboom stands out as a true heritage site and a place of specific symbolic and religious meaning for migrating black tribes in the pre-colonial era (Heydenrych & Swiegers 1999: 2, Supplement to *Rekord* 2005, confirmed by Prof C van Vuuren). This is truly a heritage site where the earliest ancestors left their footprints in the sands of time.

### **Choosing a location for Freedom Park**

To reinforce the meaning and value of Freedom Park foremost required a specific nexus to an

area which could spiritually and symbolically enhance its underpinning values. The location should have preferably had a strong existing historical, cultural, anthropological or religious link that was *not invented or artificially imposed on the area*.

However, the original decision to place Freedom Park on Salvokop bypassed the symbolic and heritage status that the Wonderboom area could have offered because political priorities were regarded as more important than spiritual and symbolic values. Salvokop, above the Railway Station, is not a heritage area and has no physical, symbolic, spiritual or sacred nexus with the past. Although some of the hills and rivers in the Pretoria were given Tshwana or Ndebele names, Salvokop has never been known under a different name.

On the contrary, Salvokop has a strong colonial link with the past because its name originates from the custom during the ZAR era to signal the arrival of the post with flags. Ploeger and Andrews (1989: 89) explain that the name Salvokop derived from the British occupation of Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War and the custom of discharging cannon fire (salvos) when a dignitary arrived or left.

The existing forts and monuments that predate Freedom Park have already established a strong historical or political nexus with the area. The museums and statues at both Fort Klapperkop and Schanskop developed as a result of the fortifications that were erected shortly before the Anglo-Boer War (1899 - 1902) to form a defence ring around Pretoria. The Voortrekker Monument was built on the furthest hill of the west–east axis close the capital city to provide a historical political link between the Great Trek and the fulfilment of the idea and values of a new nation. In addition, a strong spatial and symbolic nexus was established between the Union Buildings on Meintjes Kop and the Voortrekker Monument on Monument Hill to reflect the Afrikaner domination of the political values during the pre-democratic era.

The location of Freedom Park is officially explained as an initiative to construct a park for freedom in the centre of the existing monuments. From the highest point, directly behind the amphitheatre, a 360-degree view offers a spectacular all-round view of the Union Buildings, the Voortrekker Monument and both forts. However, the broader architectural layout of Freedom Park never suggests such an intention; no allowance has been made for a visual link with other sites in the immediate vicinity. (See map below)

It is more likely that the reason for establishing Freedom Park on Salvokop was not to form a symbolic centre point. Rather the construction of Freedom Park here, within the spatial axis line between the Voortrekker Monument and the Union Buildings, would seem to have a specific political intent to provide a balance within the already existing collection of (colonial) monuments. The placement of Freedom Park directly between the Voortrekker Monument and the Union Buildings can be seen as a visual amputation of the historic link between the cultural dimension (Voortrekker Monument) and Afrikaner control of political power, politically manifested by its supporters occupying the offices at the Union Buildings. (There were earlier suggestions that Freedom Park should expropriate and occupy the lower level of the Voortrekker Monument (Maré 2007: 44) but fortunately sanity prevailed and the eastern slope of Salvo Kop was chosen for the site.)

This placement ensured that when Jacob Zuma was sworn in as president he could turn his head from the podium at the Union Buildings and see his party's normative desires and values now formally eternalised in a new Freedom Park.

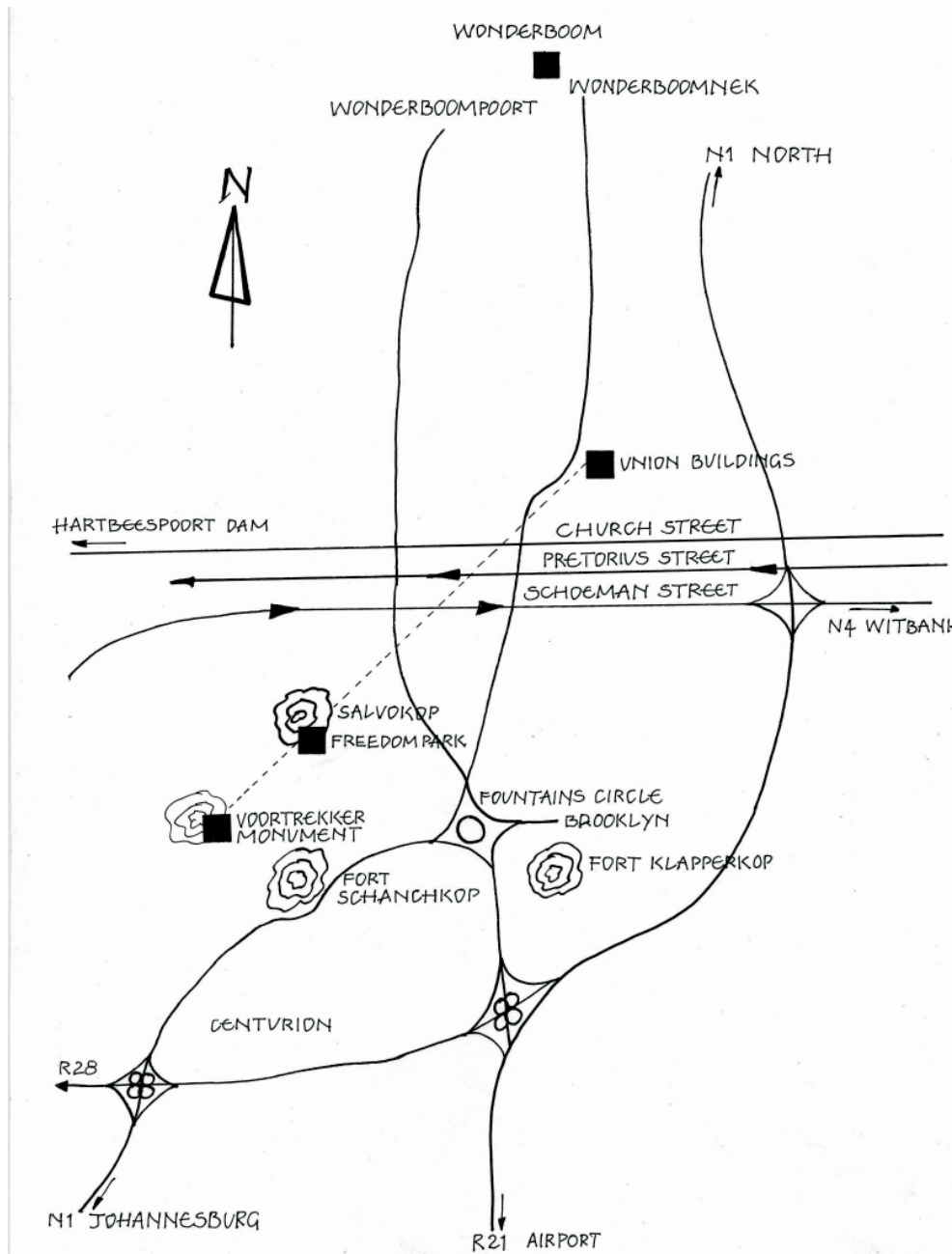


Figure 1  
Schematic map of Tshwane area (drawn by C.E. Labuschagne).

However, Freedom Park's spatial placement created a bizarre triangle which was immediately acted on by opponents from both sides. Sayagues (2009: 3) described the "new" visual and spatial environment as a conflicting triangle between democracy (Union Buildings) and freedom (Freedom Park) and oppression and white supremacy (Voortrekker Monument). He describes the Voortrekker Monument as commemorating the struggles of the white-descended Afrikaner-settlers who created apartheid (in the form of) a "fortress-like" evil house of Mordor, [a] stark example of [a] fascist architecture, Freedom Park, in contrast, is described as "a striking visual opposite to the Monument with its open, energetic sign draw by the reed poles".

The placement of Freedom Park in opposition to the Voortrekker Monument, therefore almost immediately generated conflicting emotions that were removed from the initial idea of peace and reconciliation. It is understood that the strategic spatial placing of Freedom Park was intended to restore the balance as part of reconstructing the past, but it was done in a manner that does not reflect good planning, architectural imagination or the enhancement of the values of unity and nation building.

Maré (2007: 36–48) refers to this strategic placement as the postcolonial ethos that post-apartheid monuments should be in the proximity of a colonial monument. This positing of Freedom Park seems therefore to be a deliberate action to counterbalance the surrounding monuments and forts and to share the historical entrance to the capital city.

This dual approach to correcting imbalances by placing the counter-interpretation of monuments within the spatial and visual space of existing monuments has been duplicated by similar initiatives in South Africa. Most noteworthy of these is the Ncome monument erected directly across the Ncome River or Blood River from the existing bronze wagon laager.

During the inauguration of the Ncome monument, the IFP's Lionel Mtshali argued that the monument would correct the current imbalances as far as the portrayal of the events at Blood River/Ncome was concerned and that this “added, initiative would promote future reconciliation and nation building in South Africa” (Schönfeldt-Aultman 2006: 217).

However, none of the values of reconciliation are architecturally and visually present in the outline and location of the two monuments at Blood River/Ncome River. The shape and position of the newly erected Ncome monument convey predominately architectural aggression, because it has been built in the shape of Shaka's attack formation, consisting of a head or chest with protruding arms that used to encircle the enemy (Laband 1998: 115). The museum building is round to represent a chest and extending walls point to the enemy across the river, the bronze ox wagon laager. The shields and spears on the front wall representing particular regiments contribute to the image of an advancing, attacking and protective military force and is, as Schönfeldt-Aultman (2006: 217) points out, not surprisingly facing the laager to perpetually re-present the battle scene.

Again, reconciliation and nation building imagination is lacking, because the meaning and values that the monuments reiterate are *again* a matter of “our and their” history, this time visually eternalised and embodied in two monuments. The restoration of the historical and political balance of Bloodriver/Ncome would have been better served if the whole approach had been planned in a more comprehensive and all-inclusive manner. An integrated historical site with a bridge spanning the river and a museum representing both sides would have been preferable to the existing opposing two monuments glaring at each other over the broad divide of the river.

A further example of this strategy emanates from the ongoing controversy over the name of the capital, Pretoria, where a similar dual “confronting approach” to reconstructing the past has been adopted. The ruling party's preference for the name Tshwane is reflected in their (political) approach to memorialisation which negates any suggestion of reconciliation and defies existing historical knowledge on this matter.

The City of Tshwane Renaming Task Team deliberately played a very important part in the (re-)construction or perhaps creation of the past to provide an identity and visual presentation of their history. In a remarkable approach, the Renaming Task Team in their 2005 report decided to elevate the status of Chief Tshwane, who resided in the area, but was one of a number of sons of Musi. (As indicated, historical evidence is very sketchy in revealing any significant pre-colonial occupation for long periods in the area between Elandpoort and Wonderboompoort.) The rather thin historical evidence was then used as a basis for legitimising a name change from Pretoria to Tshwane (Renaming Task Team 2005: 41).

Although this claim was heavily opposed by academics and civil society, the initiative culminated in an impressive statue of Chief Tshwane, which was subsequently unveiled in front of the City Hall. This serves as a further example of the dual approach to restore the spatial balance, as the statue shares the open area in front of the City Hall with statues of



Andries Pretorius, the Voortrekker leader, and Marthinus Pretorius, the first president of the ZAR Republic.

In line with Freedom Park's position, no historical or heritage nexus exists between Chief Tshwane's statue and the shared area in front of the City Hall. The Apies River, which apparently carried his name, provided a long spine and has offered countless opportunities for a different placement of the statue. However, as part of a political agenda, the reconstruction of the past was done in a "confrontational" manner by placing the statue close to existing "colonial" statues. In common with Freedom Park and the Ncome Monument, no integrated or holistic approach was adopted to present a united approach to history and to contribute to reconciliation and nation building.

The only logical reason that could therefore be extracted for the dual positioning of Freedom Park across from the Voortrekker Monument, Ncome Museum across from the laager at Blood River and Chief Tshwane's statue next to those of Andries and Marthinus Pretorius was a political one. As Bains (2007: 331) correctly indicates, memorialisation is often a highly charged political process that leads to contestation between competing interpretations of past events. This political and conflicting approach also leads to the contestation of the past and between the symbols (monuments) and, in the process ("postcolonial memorial complex") of the claim of ownership of history, the latter is manipulated to fit within a specific political agenda (Werbner in Bains 2007: 331).

Maré (2007: 39) maintains that it is therefore better to envisage the monuments as cultural resources with a bias towards a propagandistic intent to remember a patriotic group, past event or a heroic figure.

However, what is then the underlying meaning and value that is conveyed by the newly founded Freedom Park? In an effort to address the question Freedom Park will be visited to view its physical appearance and to try to extract the values that it expresses.

### **Freedom Park from above and the outside**

It was earlier suggested that the spatial positioning of Freedom Park vis-à-vis the Voortrekker Monument and the surrounding monuments displays little intra-harmony or visual reconciliation. However, from any vantage point Freedom Park displays a far stronger harmonious compatibility with the topography of the area than the Voortrekker Monument which forcefully protrudes into the sky. Freedom Park, in contrast, nestles snugly and unobtrusively around Salvokop's gentle incline. The footpaths linking the various areas unobtrusively synchronise and harmonise with the surrounding area which translates into the fact that the complex reveals itself in subtlety which greatly reduces the intrusive nature of the Park.

An aerial shot of Freedom Park reveals an unmistakable resemblance to neighbouring Zimbabwe's historic Great Zimbabwe Ruins near Masvingo. Freedom Park's network of walls and buildings reveals a remarkable symbolic and visual link with Great Zimbabwe's vast Great Enclosure complex. The geographical location of Freedom Park and the gentle way in which it nestles in a valley against a hill is a striking template of the Great Zimbabwe complex (Tingay 1994: 98).

The best vantage point to view Freedom Park from the outside is probably from the top of the UNISA building on Muckleneuk Ridge. From this point the most visible feature is the surrounding stone wall which reinforces the initial impression of its resemblance to the outer wall of the Great Enclosure of Great Zimbabwe. After more than five hundred years, the Great Enclosure outer wall is still remarkable in its beauty and impressive in terms of engineering

skill. The impressive structure of silent grey walls was probably built in the 13th or 14th century, and stands firm without the assistance of mortar or interlocking pieces; in some places it is 11 metres high and its circumference is an impressive 243 metres (Tingay 1994: 98). In comparison, Freedom Park's outer wall is smaller, but still strongly resembles the Great Enclosure and symbolically reaffirms its relation to its broader historical (African) roots.

On the ridge, along the spine of Salvokop, a long line of light poles with blue lights have been constructed to express freedom. However, during the day when the lights are not visible their bare "porcupine appearance" detracts from Freedom Park's beautiful simplicity without adding much symbolic substance.

The entrance gate to Freedom Park is located on the opposite (north-western) side. The main section of the park is partly obscured from the gate, but the steep path leading to the complex symbolically radiates simplicity and tradition, which has a strong link with the open veldt that surrounds the complex.



**Figure 2**

**One of the spiritual resting places inside Freedom Park (source: free internet, afriture: accessed 10 November 2010).**

### **Freedom Park from the inside**

Freedom Park is still under construction and in the interim the //hapo (San word for dream) section is not open for tours. The first stop of the guided tour is the small lake with reeds which strongly symbolises birth and growth and sets the tone for a recurring emphasis on symbolism.

Freedom Park is divided into different areas, each serving a dedicated purpose with a symbolic link that is paramount to their placement. *Isivivane* is a spiritual resting place for those who died fighting for freedom and liberation in South Africa. *S'kumbuto* is the main memorial and reflects the story of the important conflicts during the struggle for freedom. On the *Wall of Names* the names of those who paid with their lives for humanity and freedom are inscribed, unfortunately with the exclusion of the former South African Defence Force members, which again reveals the Park's political agenda and proves that the memorialisation of past events is often a highly charged political process (Baines 2007: 331). (However, in a contradictory move hundreds of names of white people who perished during the Anglo-Boer War are included.) The *Sanctuary* is a place for reflection and to pay respect for the fallen while the *Eternal flame* burns for the heroes and heroines who died without their names being recorded (Freedom Park: Information brochure/Information from a guided tour).

### **Conclusion and final assessment**

The focus of the article was to establish the identity and values that the designers and policy makers of Freedom Park wished to express through its physical appearance and layout. The intended meaning of Freedom Park could easily be detracted from on the basis of its official documentation, such as pamphlets, information brochures and press releases and on its website. The proclaimed aim was to reconnect the people to their heritage and history and each of the designated areas are therefore a link with this ideal. However, overarching the normative desire the leitmotiv was to correct perceived historical imbalances and to reconstruct the colonial past to foster reconciliation and nation building. Unfortunately, the policy resulted in exclusiveness, especially with the Wall of Names, which negates the goals of reconciliation and nation building. However, in an uncoordinated move Genl. Christiaan de Wet is included in the gallery of heroes which does not correlate with the existing policies of the Park. De Wet was a famous Boer general but did he really fight for the freedom of both white and black South Africans?

The construction of various sites and symbolic links furthermore excludes Euro-centric symbols which will alienate a large part of the white and coloured population. Although the information brochure invites visitors to walk "where their ancestors have walked" the invitation is made without any historical or anthropological basis. There are no "footprints in the sands of time" in the area and every bit of the *symbolism in the park was created, invented and enforced*. The overall impression is that the atmosphere and spirituality that the park wishes to portray is what is commonly known as "invented history".

The contradictory fact is that the decision to establish Freedom Park against Salvokop was driven by political considerations negating any symbolic nexus with ancestors in the area. It is difficult to reflect spiritually and experience inner peace while directly below Salvokop traffic is racing down a three-lane highway and the traffic noise ascends to the Park.

The increasing emphasis on the link with Africa and Pan-Africanism further undermines the Park's inclusiveness and its potential unifying role for a broader ideal of a rainbow nation. This has partly resulted in apathy and has dampened enthusiasm from the public. While Freedom Park's "rival" on Monument Hill attracts an average of 17 000 visitors per month, Freedom Park attracted a mere 3 000 visitors in June 2010 (World Cup period) (*Die Beeld* 2010).

The verdict must be that Freedom Park is not fulfilling its true potential in spite of its R716 million price tag. The involvement of politics has blurred its intrinsic potential because the wrong placement and lack of a historical basis will perpetually undermine its potential.



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