

A spatial analysis of the Ncome/Blood River monuments/museum complex as hermeneutic objects of reconciliation and nation building

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The reconstruction of the Ncome Monument on the Blood River battle site has managed to restore the political imbalance to a certain extent. The Ncome Monument gives homage to the courageous Zulu regiments who attacked the Voortrekker laager on 16 December 1838. Before the Ncome Monument was built the bronze Voortrekker laager had been the only monument on the site apart from the main complex. During the unveiling of the Ncome Monument strong views were expressed that the new monument should add to reconciliation and peace building in South Africa. The aim of the article is to conduct a spatial analysis of the Ncome/Blood River Monuments in order to ascertain how its geographical setting and general appearance contribute hermeneutically to the goals of reconciliation and peace building in South Africa.

Key words: Ncome, Blood River, spatial, hermeneutics, monuments

'n Ruimtelike analise van die Ncome/Bloedrivier-monument/museum kompleks as hermeneutiese instrumente van versoening en nasiebou

Die oprigting van die Ncome-Monument op die perseel waar die slag van Bloedrivier plaasgevind het tot 'n mate die politieke wanbalans herstel deurdat dit aan die dapper Zulu- regimente wat die Voortrekker laer op 16 Desember 1838 aangeval het, erkenning gee. Voordat die Ncome-monument gebou is was die brons Voortrekker laer die enigste monument wat op die terrein gestaan het bo en behalwe die hoofgeboue. Tydens die inhuldiging van die Ncome-monument en daarna is sterk pleidooie gerig dat die nuwe monument tot rekonsiliasie en nasiebou in Suid-Afrika sal bydra. Die doel van die artikel is om 'n ruimtelike ontleding van die Ncome/Bloedrivier-monument te doen om vas te stel hoe hul geografiese ligging en algemene voorkoms hermeneuties tot die doelstellings van rekonsiliasie en vredebou in Suid-Afrika bygedra het.

Sleutelwoorde: Ncome, Bloedrivier, ruimtelik, hermeneutika, monumente

A strong commitment has been demonstrated in post-apartheid South Africa to advance peace and nation building after decades of turmoil and division in the country. Various leaders across the broad racial divide have launched various initiatives to enable the country to come to grips with the internal divisions by advocating strategies for reconciliation and peace building among the various racial groups. One such role player was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which, in its final report, reaffirmed its desire to leave a permanent legacy for reconciliation and to heal the nation. One of the strategies that the TRC had proposed in its report was to use museums as a means to reach the goals of reconciliation and peace building: Museums which celebrate different aspects of the past should be established and maintained (E. Doxtader and P. Salazar, 2007: 433).

The desire to unite the country during the post-apartheid era was an attempt to assist the transformation from the previous apartheid order to a new all-inclusive political regime. The strategy aligned strongly with the adoption of a broader historical, cultural and symbolic framework underpinned by a diverse multi-cultural value and belief system. The aim of the new political regime was to set a process in motion that would symbolically reconstruct society in terms of a new broader identity and adherence to the values of an all-inclusive and democratic post-colonial society.

One of the challenges, within the new socio-political and cultural-historical context of the country was to re-construct existing monuments and statues in the country to be more

representative of the broader society as a whole. The challenge was to reflect the broader and diverse history and values of the new nation and simultaneously embrace the values of reconciliation and peace building in South Africa.

The new approach was necessary, because it was evident during the pre-democratic phase that the majority of the population viewed the existing monuments in South Africa as symbols of their former alienation and disempowerment (K. Tomaseli and A. Mpofu 1993: 17). This viewpoint was not unexpected in the light of the massive historical disparity that has existed in South Africa among the racial groups regarding monuments, statues and parks that represented the various groups. Frescura in S. Schönfeldt-Aultman (2006: 17) has pointed out that 97% of all monuments in South Africa in the early 1990s reflected the white values and the interests of the pre-apartheid and apartheid era.

The major challenge in post-apartheid South Africa, therefore, was to represent and bring about a more balanced reflection of the apartheid past and how to deal with the broader challenges of competing narratives in an ever-changing political landscape. As E. Rankin and L. Schmidt (2009:78) observed, this is a difficult endeavour because, although there is a need for the disparity to be corrected, it should not be done in such a way that reconciliation and peace building are not undermined.

Within the broader context of the challenges outlined above, the central focus of the article will be an analysis of the Ncome/Blood River monument/museum complex. The challenge lies in how to interpret the changes that occurred post-1994 and the possible omissions within the broader context of peace and reconciliation. The analysis is done with a full appreciation of the inherent challenges involved in such an endeavour.

S. Ware (2008: 1) clearly stipulated that the etymological roots of the words ‘monuments’ and ‘memory’ are linked, because these words derive from the meaning to ‘be reminded’ or to be ‘mindful’. Ware’s (2008: 1) reminder summarises the intrinsic problem associated with such an investigation. The monuments on the Ncome/Blood River site were constructed to remind the visitor of a bloody battle that had taken place more than 150 years ago; and it may be a challenge to read more than the intended meaning into it.

However, the post-1994 reconstruction of the Ncome museum on the site allows the opportunity to conduct a spatial analysis to establish how the museum complex post-1994 contributes (hermeneutically) to reconciliation and peace building in South Africa. In order to achieve this goal, the following subsections will be included:

- (i) a historical background of the Battle of Blood River
- (ii) a spatial analysis of the museums and monuments at Ncome/Blood River
- (iii) an analysis of the manner in which the post-1994 changes to the museum complex hermeneutically contributed to peace and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa
- (iv) possible suggestions how alterations to the Ncome/Blood River museum complex could enhance reconciliation and peace building thereby linking to the broader overarching aim to unite in a new dispensation

Historical background to the battle of Ncome / Blood River

The basic facts about the battle of Blood River are generally speaking undisputed and accepted by most historians and the general public. The aim of this section is not to provide an in-depth analysis, but merely to historically contextualise the battle in order to provide a background to the article.

Although there may be consensus on the broader facts, it is expected that the interpretation of the facts will differ, because of the different context from which the battle is viewed. (This was noted especially in several of the papers that were presented in 1998 during the South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology seminar entitled, *The re-interpretation of the Battle of Blood River Ncome*. However, the difference in interpretation of what transpired falls outside the scope of this investigation.)

In a nutshell, the basic facts of the battle were that the Voortrekkers under Andries Pretorius launched a punitive offensive against Dingane. The punitive attack was predominantly as a result of the slaying of Piet Retief and his party at his main kraal, Umgungundlovu, in February 1838. The force under Pretorius was the strongest force assembled by the Voortrekkers up to that point in time and consisted of 450 men assisted by Alexander Biggar and about 120 black auxiliaries.

A circular route was followed from the Voortrekker encampments near present day Colenso to their intended target in the heart of Zululand (G. Preller 1938: 38). The route that Pretorius followed headed towards the open grassy country which provides access to Zululand along the upper reaches of the Ncome and Mzinyati rivers. The terrain was not as steep as the direct route, easier for wagon transport and less likely to conceal a Zulu force (Knight 1998: 39).

The long wagon train of 64 wagons, therefore, moved in a circle, past present day Ladysmith on their way to Umgungundlovu. When scouting parties warned Pretorius that a strong force of more than 10, 000 Zulu warriors were approaching them on 15 December 1838, he quickly ordered that a laager should be formed in the triangle between the Ncome River and a deep ditch. Pretorius and his wagon master, Piet Moolman, were able to construct an almost impregnable fortress which provided for enough space and time for the defenders to reload the cumbersome weapons before discharging them into the attacking Zulu formations (Preller 1938: 38).

The battle commenced on the morning of 16 December 1838 when the left horn of the Zulu warriors attacked the well-fortified laager. The packed formation of the attacking Zulus was almost instructed suicide; and the losses on their side were heavy. The majority of sources have put the number of Zulu's that fell on more than 3, 000 while the technological advantage on the Voortrekker side resulted in only three of their men wounded (I. Knight 1998: 39).

In the days leading up to the battle the Voortrekkers, under the spiritual leadership of Sarel Cilliers, made a vow that if God gave them the victory over the Zulu's, they would honour the day in future as a Sunday and they would also build a church in His name. The magnitude of the victory over the Zulu's with more than 3, 000 Zulus killed and only three Voortrekkers wounded prompted the belief that God had indeed intervened and ensured the victory. Although historians, such as B. Liebenberg (1988: 115) pointed out that the victory could be rationally explained it did not alter the general belief. Liebenberg pointed out that the victory was predominately the result of a strong defensive position with superior weaponry against suicidal

frontal attacks. Nevertheless, it motivated generations of Voortrekkerdescendents to celebrate the vow on 16 December and elevated the Blood River site as almost holy ground.

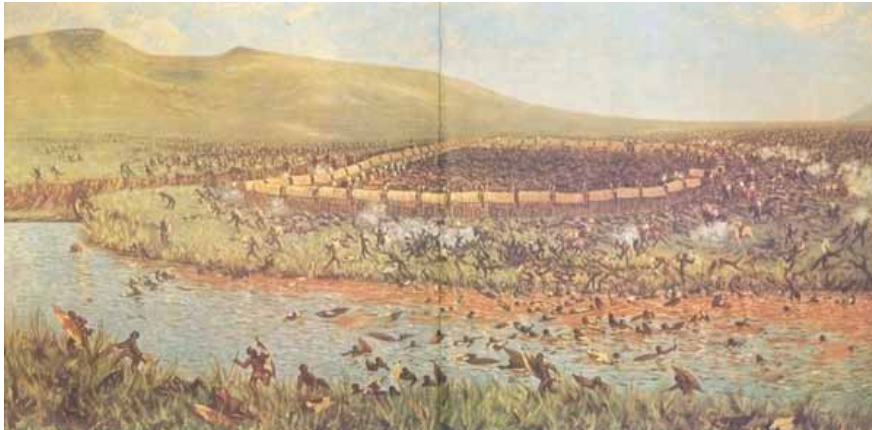


Figure 1
A depiction of the battle of Blood River by Gerhard Coetzer
(photograph by author, 2013).

The site where the Blood River battle had taken place was initially unmarked, but in later years it was marked with a stone cairn. The importance of the site was politically and culturally established early on when it was used as a place to honour the vow. The spot also served as a political platform when it coincided with the upsurge in Afrikaner nationalism early in the twentieth century. Many politicians, including the former Prime Minister, Dr Malan addressed large gatherings on 16 December (M.C. Botha 1952: 36) at the Blood River site and elevated its importance to that of a sacred site.

The construction of the bronze laager in the 1990s almost placed an Afrikaner monopoly on the ownership of the site. However, in apartheid South Africa, the significance and importance of the site for the Zulu nation remained smouldering beneath the surface. It was partly corrected when the Ncome monument/museum was erected on the site during the post-1994 era.

A spatial analysis of the Ncome/Blood River museum complex

To find an answer to the research question necessitates an *in loco* inspection of the Ncome/Blood River battle site. A spatial analysis will provide the opportunity to draw inferences and to conduct a deductive analysis of the Ncome/Blood River museum/monument complex in its specific geographical setting and in relation to the monuments/museums on the site. The spatial analysis and description of the site and the buildings will hopefully allow an understanding of the deeper imbedded meaning of the existing monuments/ museums in their geographical setting. The underlying question that underpins and spearheads the investigation is to establish and understand how the monuments/museums potentially contribute to reconciliation and peace building in South Africa.

As E. Maré (2009: 133) explains that meaning (hermeneutics), and not the mere description of forms and the intention with their arrangement, should be the medium of access to the imbedded meaning of the monuments. It is, therefore, the deeper intrinsic meaning of the monuments that need to be unveiled; and it can only be achieved after a spatial analysis of the site and the layout of the monuments and museums have been done. In order to reach this goal, a visit must be paid to the battle site to form a broad opinion of the surrounding area and the buildings and structures that occupy the space on the site.

The tarmac road between Dundee and Vryheid provides access to the rural dirt road which connects the visitor with the area where the battle of Blood River took place on 16 December 1838. One's first impression during the trip is the general flatness of the terrain en route to the battle site and an appreciation of the restricted, strategic potential to conceal a large attacking force.

It is difficult to ascertain the specific location of the battlefield during the first part of the trip because of the lack of signposts along the way. It is only after negotiating the last turn that the outer boundary of the Ncome/Blood River battlefield reveals itself.

The first noticeable structure near the entrance to the site and the first set of buildings is a solid grey granite structure in the form of a single ox wagon. The ox wagon monument was sculpted in 1947 by Coert Steynburg and creates a sombre and a formal atmosphere. The granite ox wagon had been the solitary structure on the site for many years before the bronze wagon laager was constructed. Although the monument is bedded into various granite steps, its formal facade does not encourage anyone to use these steps.



Figure 2
The granite ox wagon on the Ncome/Blood River site sculpted by Coert Steynburg
(photograph by author, 2013).

The granite wagon is situated close to a number of buildings that accommodate a visitor's entrance, reception area, restaurant, small museum and other facilities. The closeness of the building may subtract to a lesser extent the solitary value of the granite wagon within its geographical and spatial setting.

Lower down from the visitor's entrance, in the direction of the river, a dominating structure in the form of a 64 bronze wagon laager is visible. The 64 bronze ox wagons depict a replica of the laager that was formed on the fateful day of the battle – 16 December 1838. The bronze wagons have been fitted with 'veghekke' – a wooden structure that was made to protect the openings between the ox wagons. A replica of the cannons that were used so effectively on the day of the battle is also on display.

A close inspection of the laager creates a strong sense of its isolation and the solitariness on the terrain. The silence contributes to a large extent to the sombreness, but it is also reinforced by the magnitude of the event. The vast, open terrain reinforced by the solitude creates the impression that the large laager is drowned by the vast empty space. However, on the day of the battle the laager was a small island surrounded by a sea of 12 000 Zulu's who attempted to breach its defences.



Figure 3
A side view of the bronze ox wagon laager at Blood River
 (source: <http://google.images>).

Outside the bronze laager the next noticeable structure is one of the most recent constructions – the Ncome monument/museum. A road that splits off from the access road to the battle site provides access to the museum and a number of Zulu huts hidden from the view across the river.

Across the divide of the Ncome River, the pinkish Ncome monument and museum complex firmly occupy the open space close to the riverbank. The side view and outer wall of the complex display a series of shields which are coloured in the manner the Zulu regiments displayed their regimental colours on the day of the battle. The outer wall mimics the attacking ox horn formation that was introduced and implemented by their great leader, Shaka, in the early 1820s. The outer wall represents an almost impregnable outer facade and reveals little of its interior or other structures.



Figure 4
The outer wall of the Ncome museum complex displaying the shields
 (source: <http://google.images>).

The two dominant structures– the bronze laager and the Ncome monument/ museum complex– form the focal point of the battle site. However, when an aerial view on a Google map of the terrain and the buildings is studied, the Ncome monument/museum complex seemed to be dwarfed by the size of the wagon laager. The display of shields on the outer wall of the Ncome monument/museum does not give a full reflection of the magnitude of the 12, 000 Zulu regiment on the day of the battle.

The flat area devoid of vegetation accentuates the sense of isolation; the two structures are almost submerged on the vast terrain. However, at the same time, the geographical context contributes to promoting the importance of the buildings in their spatial environment without any structures to share the attention.



Figure 5

A picture of the Ncome museum provides a valuable perspective of the vastness of the terrain (source: <http://google.images>).

The bronze ox wagon laager represents the way the defensive ring was constructed by the Voortrekkers on the day of the battle, while the Ncome monument represents the attacking formation of the Zulu's on the day of the battle. The Ncome monument (constructed post-1994) also aligns with the strategic post-colonial ethos that post-colonial monuments should be in the proximity of a colonial monument (Maré 2007: 36-48). However, the construction of the Ncome monument on the site can also be historically justified as a reflection of the battle and its placement is, therefore, functional and historically correct.

The outer appearance of the facades of the two monuments are clearly 'objects to be perceived,' because they represent an event that took place in the past. The external features of the monuments are aligned with Ware's (2008:1) observation of monuments. Ware (2008:1) explains that 'the etymological roots of the words 'monuments' and 'memory' are linked, because they derive from the meaning to 'be reminded' or to be 'mindful'. The Blood River bronze wagons and the Ncome monument, displaying the shield formation, link the present with the past as visual symbols or representation of a battle that took place and the manner in which the strategies unfolded on the day of the battle.

If buildings/monuments/museums are erected with the aim to be perceived, because they represent an historical event it, aligns with Ware's observation. This equates to the notion that the perception is located on the primary or first level of interpretation, namely buildings/monuments/museums are objects to be perceived.

However, it seems that there are indications of suggestions that the interpretation of the site could also function on the secondary level. The statements by politicians and role players (after the erection of the Ncome monument) were that the monument was constructed on the site to subtract a meaning which was also situated on the secondary (hermeneutic) level. The statements of various politicians and other role players made it clear that the Ncome monument was not only intended to counterbalance the bronze laager, but that it should also contribute to reconciliation and peace building.

The reference to the secondary or hermeneutic level implies that there is a hidden meaning of both museums that exceeds that of 'objects that only need to be perceived'. When a monument/building functions on the elevated secondary level it inherently contains and allows a hermeneutic interpretation. However, a hermeneutic interpretation could only be achieved if the object contains some symbolic features, or represent something more than just a depiction

of the battle. The deeper meaning of the monuments require that the interpretation could be taken to the next (hermeneutical) level and that they are no longer simply objects that need to be perceived or spatially explained, but that they carry a deeper, symbolic message. It is, therefore, not the mere description of physical form, but the intention with their arrangement or symbolic features that should be the medium of access to the meaning of the monuments (Maré 2009: 133).

However, before going any further, a basic understanding of the concept of hermeneutics is required. Hermeneutic theory is a complicated concept with a broad spectrum of related meanings attached to it; it is:

- (a) a theory for all linguistic understanding
- (b) a methodology that underlies all social sciences
- (c) it is a phenomenology of the process of tradition
- (d) it is a theory of the processes of understanding and how they relate to the interpretation of text
- (e) it is a constructive philosophical text (A. Faure 2010: 39).

Ricoer was the main exponent of the ‘theory of the processes of understanding and how the monuments relate to the interpretation of text’(d - above) and the views of hermeneutic rationality. According to hermeneutic rationality, the aim is to seek meaning in an object. The discovery of meaning should then, as a third step, be augmented by an explanation. The confirmation of the original conjectures becomes clearer (or less clear) as the interpretation text continues (Faure 2010: 39).

A hermeneutic interpretation of the Ncome and Blood River monuments

The challenge in the analytical interpretation of the Ncome and Blood River monuments is to hermeneutically find an imbedded meaning beyond a mere functioning on a concrete primary level. The guiding question of the article is, therefore, to establish if the Ncome/Blood River monuments contain any meaning that is integrated in their structures, or directly or symbolically in their layout that could perpetuate and evaluate their function to enhance peace and nation building. This will add a powerful meaning and purpose to the monument/museum complex. As Maré (2009: 133) points out in her research on both the Ncome and Blood River monuments “although they (the monuments) would fail aesthetically as work of art, it is possible that their construction means that they are meaningful to their designers and to the architects.”

L. Jones (2000: 41) observes that the intended (hermeneutic) meaning normally arises from specific situations and must always have meaning for a specific person at a specific time, in a specific place and in a specific context. It would appear on the surface that both monuments predominantly represent a historical period and that they are linked to specific underpinning ideological predispositions and political goals and do not have a meaning that directly or indirectly relates to peace and reconciliation. The intention was never that the wagon laager should represent any other than to recollect the battle that took place on the 16th December 1838.

The two monuments in their specific spatial location on the banks of the Ncome River allow for a specific and related meaning on the primary (object to be perceived) level. The two monuments historically interrelate, ‘interact’ and accentuate each other (Schönfeld-Aultman 2010: 223). One monument, in effect, defines or even legitimises the other, because when they

are perceived in isolation, the 'battle' scene seems to be incomplete. The outer boundaries of the Ncome Monument and the shape define its appearance and function, because it represents' itself in relation to the static bronze laager across the river. On the opposite side of the river, the static bronze laager defines itself intentionally or unintentionally stronger with the Ncome monument that is now also constructed on the site. For the first time the bronze laager's defensive capabilities are defined by an attacking force which complete the scene.

Jones' (2000: 41) view that the context is important is a very valuable observation, but it only applies on the primary (non-hermeneutic level) level. On the first (object) level the observation is merely a perception and the subtraction is basically uncomplicated and it will not necessarily lead to a difference in opinion. On the surface the bronze laager and the Ncome monument/museum in their specific context are merely a depiction and a representation of a battle that took place on the site more than 150 years ago. However, when a meaning has to be extracted on the secondary (hermeneutical) level, the observer will have to interpret the words and actions of politicians and/or the symbolic features that were imbedded by the architects and designer. These could potentially provide clues, unlock and provide an answer to the hidden meaning of the monuments; and allow progression to the secondary hermeneutic level.

Although it is important to interpret the verbal confirmation of the meaning of the monuments by the various role players, because it potentially provides an important clue to augment the meaning of the monuments, it is important to approach it with caution. It is of critical importance that the spoken word be supplemented and corroborated by specific features; and that imbedded symbolism was integrated during their respective design.

The verbal and written explanation of meaning by politicians and other role players is a logic point of departure to unlock the hermeneutics of the monuments and is a valuable starting point to understand the 'hidden' meaning of the monuments. Matshali of the IFP's argued that the construction of the Ncome monument on the site will correct the (then) current imbalance (only a bronze laager) and counterbalance the monument which symbolises Afrikaner domination (Schönfeld-Aultman 2010: 223). It is evident that his observation is located on the first level and correlates and coordinates with the sentiment that monument(s) are objects to be perceived.

However, Matshali's statement is clearly an attempt to distract a meaning that is situated on both levels (primary and secondary) namely the 'object to be perceived' and the 'hermeneutic level'. However, in the final analysis it is of critical importance that a meaning could be hermeneutically subtracted from the monument to coordinate and align with the second part of Matshali's observation "that the monuments will promote reconciliation and nation building"(Schönfeld-Aultman 2010: 223)

As Schönfeld-Aultman (2010: 223) correctly indicated, "as long as the Ncome monument exists it will be attacking", and it could be added to his statement "that as long as the bronze wagon laager existed, it will be defending." The Ncome monument represents the Zulu as a warrior with apparently little effort to incorporate a reconciliatory dimension in the features or layout of the monuments. The same is true about the bronze laager, where nothing was allowed with the exception of a specific function on the primary level, namely to be observed as an object to be perceived. The two monuments are, therefore, defined by their outer appearance as "an attacking force and a defensive laager" and, in spite of the rhetoric, it is very difficult to see anything beyond that notion.

Monuments are, as Maré (2009: 133) correctly indicates, paradoxical structures "...they permanently fix the past in physical form." There is hardly any other meaning that could be

subtracted to support the notion of politicians and other role players to allow an evaluation of the secondary (hermeneutical) level. This is equally true for the bronze laager its basic essential feature is to protect and defend and it was not intended for reconciliation and peace building. Therefore, in spite of the intended meaning of the words and the noble intention of those who uttered them, the extraction of the goals pertaining to peace and reconciliation of the two monuments is very difficult to reach.

There is no escape from interpreting the existing monuments from a lofty hermeneutical level other than perceiving them as objects that represent the battle that took place on the site. It is almost impossible to subtract hermeneutically anything else from the existing constructions in spite of the noble intention of many role players. According to Jones (2000:41), the monuments must have a meaning for someone at a specific time at a specific place. It is extremely difficult to extract any other meaning from the site than that the Ncome monument served the purpose of completing the battle scene by conducting a corrective balancing act. The addition of the Ncome monument/museum completes the battle jig saw puzzle by adding the missing piece of the battle.

General appearance of the Blood River/Ncome monuments/museums

It is, furthermore, interesting that the defensive bronze laager architecturally aligns with the notion of apartheid buildings and structures which could be recognised from their formal and almost exclusive nature. The 'apartheid buildings' radiated very little energy and reflected a sombre facade with little free flowing dynamics. The architecture of public buildings in Pretoria and elsewhere in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town reflected a sombre, formal authority and in the process compromised free flowing energy in its spatial environment. Their fortress-like appearance presented a dominance which was not easy to ignore, but none of them reflected openness and free flowing energy (See in this regard the difference between the facade and outside appearance of the Voortrekker Monument and Freedom Park in P. Labuschagne 2010: 115).

Hoetzel believes that apartheid as a closed political system had a profound influence on architecture in South Africa and that the politics were reflected in the buildings' closed exclusive nature. He argues that the architecture in other countries do not reflect such vivid testimony of history, politics and social divisions than the buildings in South Africa (<http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/architecture-230805.htm>).

The intention of the architects who designed the Apartheid Museum was, therefore, to utilise space stronger as part of the new culture of planning and building to maximise the building's facade in its spatial environment. This signalled a new approach to architecture and space, within architectural design, with an emphasis on creating an energetic new, young and open society, with a style that is more spatial than visual. MphethiMorojele, of the contracting firm who designed the Museum emphasised that the idea was to emphasise the spatial rather than the visual aspects: "The design space anticipates the new ways of how people live. It reflects rural habits in an urban setting – a culture going through transition." (<http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/architecture-230805.htm>).

The Ncome museum reflects to a certain extent the free flowing energetic design as described above. It's elegant almost flat façade with a low roof radiates energy; and free flowing features within its spatial environment provide and radiate the energy of the new era. However,

the Ncome monument/museum is defined in relation to the bronze laager which restricts its functionality to a large extent.

Towards peace and reconciliation – the way forward

One of the impediments at the Blood River/ Ncome reconstructed battle site, towards the elusive goal of peace and reconciliation is its inclination towards duality. The spatial appearance equates to a ‘tale of two cities’ or rather ‘a tale of two monuments’ that share a common site.

The Ncome monument was erected to restore the imbalance that was created with the erection of the bronze laager; and its intended purpose was not to occupy space holistically in a coherent manner, but predominantly to correct an existing (colonial) imbalance. The two monuments/museums, therefore, created almost a forced paradox, because, although the narrative of the battle that is on display in both museums, does not differ substantially on the basic facts, their unison is lost within their broader spatial arrangement. The two displays in two different locations create the impression of a divided, dual and split identity which is contrary to the ideal of unity. The divided, spatial arrangement is exacerbated by the fact that the two monuments are ‘confrontationally’ arranged opposite each other and the potential unity that could be created by the monuments is lost to a great extent. The celebration of the historic battle over the years on 16 December was conducted on two sites on the same day which reinforce the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and did little to bridge the divide between the two monuments.

As Annie Combes (V. Harris 2004: 115) wrote in the publication “*History after apartheid: visual culture and public memory in democratic South Africa*” (this) reflects the complexity of competing narratives and the challenge to present a balanced picture of how to remember and (how) to be mindful. Her account demonstrates “that there is forgetting in all remembering and that all memory projects are shaped by competing narratives”. In spite of the fact that the information on display at both museums does not differ substantially, the fact that there are two sources of information which strengthens the perception of duality and which is exacerbated by the fact that, in the past, there were separate festivals on 16 December attended by different racial groups.

G. Baines (2009: 331) also suggested “memorialisation is a highly charged political process that will ultimately lead to contestation of past events.” In light of the existing monuments and buildings and what they represent it will be very difficult to build a synergy into the spatial arrangement. It is very interesting to look comparatively at the Ncome/Blood River monuments and the way the Apartheids Museum (Johannesburg) was spatially constructed. Rankin and Schmidt (2009:78) emphasise the challenge that initially faced the Apartheids Museum of representing a balanced reflection of the apartheid past. It was important for the designers to do it in such a manner that it exposes the impact of apartheid, but also that it does not undermine the process of reconciliation and peace building in the country.

The Apartheid Museum structured the interior of the display to allow for a primary and secondary interpretation by using space to recreate the restricted and oppressive nature of apartheid. This is done by skilfully directing the visitor through various passages and open areas (Labuschagne 2010:36) and (Rankin and Schmidt 2009: 78) to recreate the feeling of being restricted and manipulated. The visitor to the Apartheid Museum is spatially ‘manipulated’ through the outline and construction of a series of passages, smaller rooms and other spaces. In other words the exhibitions are initially intended to be perceived (primary level), before the

meaning is elevated to a secondary, spatial level where a deeper meaning could be hermeneutically subtracted from their appearance. The last section of the tour through the Apartheids Museum is specifically planned to allow room for reflection and deeper meaning. The visitor walks from a noisy interior to a display of ‘objects to be perceived, but then progresses from the interior to the serenity of a quiet area outside. The serenity is in the form of a small park with planting and a small lake with benches which creates a sense of serenity and reflection. It allows for a deeper non-verbal and non-physical experience which has a deeper meaning beyond the perception of objects.

It would be interesting if a similar project could be launched at Ncome/Blood River whereby organised tours visit both museums, but that the last section be manipulated and constructed in the form of a park near the river that allows for quiet reflection experiencing the history. A path with appropriate wording and messages could be displayed on the way and could then lead to an inner sanctuary where the visitor could sit down and reflect on reconciliation and peace building. The park could bridge and unite the divergent parts of the site in a meaningful manner that could be very useful for the ideals of nation building and reconciliation.

The management of the Ncome/Blood River museum complex is already taking positive steps to rectify the situation in an effort to meet the goals of peace and reconciliation and has built a pedestrian bridge to connect the two sites. If the bridge could perhaps be adapted to be more symbolical and when linked with other arrangements it could offer the opportunity for reflection and to contemplate the goals of peace and reconciliation.



Figure 6

**The newly erected bridge over the river is a very positive step towards fostering peace and reconciliation at the site. The bronze laager is just visible to the right.
(photograph: Elrica Henning, 2013).**

In conclusion, the question should be asked and it could also be argued that battlefields should not implicitly or inherently be seen as ‘launch pads’ for peace and reconciliation. Perhaps

envisaging battlefields or similar places as pivotal point towards reconciliation and peace building is inherently compromised and that the answer is that special space should be created such as Freedom Park. The application and discussion of Ncome/Blood River in the article serves as an example of the challenge to use battlefields for the purpose of peace and reconciliation.

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