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THE VOORTREKKER MONUMENT: MONOLITH
TO MYTH

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AFRICANA

The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth

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This paper aims to address the way in which the architectural and sculptural vocabulary of the Voortrekker Monument was used to perpetuate and entrench certain central myths about Afrikaner history in order to convey the ideological interests of the group which the monument was intended to serve. I argue that whilst the past may be used to commemorate a history by documenting and recording, in the Monument the past is recalled selectively as part of a deliberate campaign to construct, foster and mobilize Afrikaner identity in the 1930's.

The conscious purpose of the Voortrekker Monument is clearly set out by S G J van Niekerk in the foreword to the official guide of 1954:

"... the Monument will arouse the pride of belonging to a nation of heroes who saw the Great Trek through; it will arouse and strengthen a love for the country for whose sake so much was sacrificed; and it will strengthen a faith in God whom the people trust.

It will induce them to devote their lives to the duty and the privilege of building a nation."¹ [my emphasis]

Thus the monument both commemorates so-called heroes of the past and looks to the future in terms of conscious nation-building. Leroy Vail notes that:

The ideologies of nationalism have often been described as "Janus-like". They are in one aspect profoundly reactionary, looking backwards to a Golden Past, they concentrate upon its heroes, its historical successes, and its unsullied, cultural purity, and are decked out with the mythic "rediscovered" social values of the past. ... Yet these ideologies [are] also clearly products of the present, concerned with current conditions, and they typically [exhibit] a forward-looking concern for the future.²

Van Niekerk in the foreword to the guide mentions a cluster of myths that construct the glorified past viz the nation of heroes, love for the country and faith in God. He refers to

the "nation of heroes who saw the Great Trek through". Pelzer in "The Historical Background to the Voortrekker Monument" writes that the Great Trek "was the climax of a gradual development towards national independence spread over a period of more than a century." [my emphasis]³ Much has been written however, about the fact that the Voortrekkers did not regard themselves as a nation and did not see the Great Trek as a conscious expression of Afrikaner identity. Giliomee writes that "Before 1850 membership in an Afrikaner ethnic community was seldom invoked as a political claim".⁴ However the construct of the Voortrekkers as a self-consciously defined nation clearly serves the interests of those working towards fostering an Afrikaner identity.

The second myth implicit within the foreward is that of the connection between the Trekker and the land: "a love for the country for whose sake so much was sacrificed". Etherington notes that

"in the conventions which govern the narratives of nationalism the nation is conceived as a happy innocent child of the land who is denied his patrimony by sinister forces which must be overcome before the adult can come into his rightful inheritance. An essentialist premise underlying the master narrative is that the nation is a fact of nature on its own soil".⁵

Thus he argues that the myth of the trekker as "a child of the South African wilderness ... answers the challenge of black African nationalism with a white nationalism which claims to be equally African".⁶ This construct clearly serves to legitimize the Afrikaner's right to the land.

Embedded within the reference to "the faith in God whom people trust", is the third myth - that which du Toit labels "the myth of the Calvinist paradigm". He questions the construction, in certain writing, of the Afrikaner's strict Calvinist belief system as a central cause of the Great Trek.

According to this view the Afrikaner founding fathers brought with them to the Cape the basic tenets of seventeenth century Calvinist thought [which] ... then emerged to renewed historical prominence in the early nineteenth century and provided much of the rationale for the central event of Afrikaner history, the Great Trek. ... This ... constitutes a historical myth that I call the "Calvinist paradigm" of Afrikaner history.⁷

This myth fabricates divine sanction of both the Trekkers' journey and battles, and their foundation of an ideal independent state. In this paper I will illustrate how the perpetuation of these myths is given visual form in the architectural and sculptural vocabulary of the Monument.

Preparation for the building of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria began in 1931 when the Central National Monuments Committee (C.N.M.C.) was formed at a meeting called by the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuur vereniging (F.A.K.). At this meeting the committee was asked to supervise the building of a

monument in honour of the Voortrekkers with the hope that it would be completed for the centenary celebrations due to take place on December 16th 1938.

Funding of 'many thousands of pounds' was collected from quasi-state sources when the Government gave permission for the sale of postage stamps. "Substantial other contributions were received." In 1935 the Hertzog-Smuts Coalition Government asked to be involved in the building of the monument as it was regarded as "an undertaking of such national importance". Clearly this was an attempt by the Government to win support in appearing to serve the cause of national unity in South Africa. The Government contributed on a pound for pound basis and several representatives of the Government were appointed to the C.N.M.C.. The plans for the monument indicated that the initial budget as proposed by the C.N.M.C. would be exceeded but the Government agreed to fund the excess.⁸ The total cost of the Monument was R719,200 of which the Government contributed R676,000.⁹ It was ironic that the Government should be heavily involved in funding a project which was ultimately instrumental in its own downfall.

The foundation stone was laid on 16th December 1938 but the official opening of the monument was delayed until 16th December 1949 as the monument took eleven years to build from 1937-8 and 1940-9.

In order to contextualize the Monument as a symbol of Afrikaner identity it is necessary to sketch briefly the background of the F.A.K. and its relationship to the Broederbond. The Broederbond was established in 1918 and was initially, according to the then secretary, "little more than a semi-religious organization with no clearly articulated purpose".¹⁰ However during the late 1920s and into the 30s, the Broederbond developed into a "highly disciplined vanguard organisation of Northern Afrikaner Nationalism".¹¹ This directed focus in the Bond's agenda had come about amongst other things, as a result of the change in the nature of the members for, by the late 1920s a significant number of academics from Potchefstroom University had joined - men who "brought to the Bond a developed and vigorously conservative Calvinist Weltanshaung".¹² Vail notes that one of the various forces involved in "the creation of ethnicity as an ideological statement of popular appeal",¹³ is an intellectual elite involved in formulating the notion of ethnicity. It was these culture brokers who established the F.A.K. in December 1929 as the Bond's public front in the cultural arena. "With token exceptions the two bodies shared the same executives and officials who publicly implemented the F.A.K. policies secretly decided upon in the Bond."¹⁴ O'Meara quotes the chairman of the Bond who in 1932 said "We find the A.B. [Afrikaner Broederbond] is slowly handing over the cultural work to its much bigger son the F.A.K. ... [But] national culture and the welfare of the folk will only flourish if the South African people break all foreign bonds. After the cultural and economic needs, the A.B. will have to devote its attention to the political needs of our people".¹⁵

After the coalition Government in 1933, the Bond embarked on its political programme when it "progressively assumed for itself the role of the directing body - or in its own words - 'war council' - of Afrikaner Nationalism".¹⁶ It was during 1934 that the Bond began to actively recruit Afrikaans national political leaders and that it established close ties with the newly formed Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party which had broken away from the coalition after Hertzog's "betrayal". It seems somewhat ironic therefore that the Monument, which served the ideological interests of the opposing Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party (via the F.A.K. and its connection to the Broederbond), should have been funded by the Government in power, which was supporting a cause that was eventually in 1948 to lead to its downfall.

The site outside Pretoria was chosen by a sub-committee selected by the C.N.M.C. who, after visiting ten other sites in Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, settled on the present location. The site was consciously linked by Lombard, a member of the sub-committee, to the first South African republic as Kruger, whilst president of the S.A.R. had lived in Pretoria.¹⁷ It was also "here [in Pretoria] that the Voortrekkers temporarily achieved their aim after years of wandering and the train of events known as the 'Great Trek'"¹⁸ Thus the choice of siting links the mythology of the Great Trek with the temporary triumph of the independent republic in the nationalist narrative. The very obvious notion of dominance in the choice of the site high on a hill is further emphasized by the many steps leading up to the Monument. Both result in a sense of control over the surrounding terrain which takes on added implications in the light of the fact that the Monument is built in direct line of sight of the Union Buildings - a symbol of South Africa's dominion status within the British Empire.

The final plans of the monument were based on two designs, one from Stellenbosch from Prof E.C. Pienaar and Professor A.C. Bouman who suggested the laager surrounding the monument with 64 wagons made from granite¹⁹ and one from Moerdijk in Pretoria who designed the main structure of the Monument and was in charge of the production of the frieze.²⁰ The choice of Moerdijk was fairly predictable as his execution of the large-scale public commission of the Johannesburg Railway station (1926-32)²¹ makes clear that he had already been approved by the hallowed ranks of officialdom. Furthermore, as he was both fiercely involved in furthering the cause of Afrikanerdom and had had experience in designing religious buildings,²² he was eminently suited to designing a religious shrine for Afrikanerdom. Finally he had had international training, having been the first South African to become an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects,²³ and had travelled through Europe.²⁴ Thus he had direct experience of monuments constructed in the cause of European nationalisms.

He wrote three chapters in the official guide book and in these his writing reveals a concern with perpetuating the same myths discussed at the outset of the paper. He states that

architects normally have a precedent in the nation's historic building but that in the case of the Monument there were no precedents as the Voortrekkers had developed no characteristic architecture.²⁵ Not only does this reinforce the construction of the Voortrekkers as a nation but it also signals the "birth" of a national monumental architectural style with Moerdijk as its creator.²⁶ This is more than ironic for, as will be seen, the building relies heavily on a German monument in Leipzig. Furthermore, as critics have noted, the decorative elements are not innovative but are typical of the Art Deco building style in South Africa in the 1930s.²⁷

In referring to the scale of the Voortrekker Monument Moerdijk mentions a number of different buildings: the pyramids, the Zimbabwe ruins, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus,²⁸ Les Invalides, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, and the Volkerschlachtendenkmal. Apart from an extraordinary eclecticism, the invocation of these buildings reveals more than simply a comparison of scale.

By invoking buildings from India, China, Asia Minor and Europe, there is an implication that the building and hence "Afrikaner" culture will take its place amongst so-called great civilizations. By invoking buildings from the past, three of which are mythologized as three of the seven wonders of the ancient world, there is the implication that like them the physical structure of the Monument will survive for centuries and the culture and values it embodies will be remembered and recorded. Moerdijk states this explicitly in his discussion of the material used for the monument. It is granite from the Zoutpansberg and according to Moerdijk, is "of the same quarry as that found in the Egyptian quarries at Aswan". He argues that as the structures in Egypt have stood for 4,000 years "in the case of the Voortrekker Monument the possibility of the granite succumbing to the forces of nature is also remote. As far as can be seen, the monument will stand forever."²⁹ Furthermore by associating the Monument with buildings from disparate past civilizations, there is the implication that like them, the Voortrekkers have a long established history. Thus the myth of nationhood is subtly communicated.

Despite the fact that Moerdijk denied any precedents, the Volkerschlachtendenkmal in Leipzig has clearly provided direct source material. Like the Voortrekker Monument it is a vast block-like rectangular structure with four huge arched windows on each face of the building. A towering statue of St Michael stands in a position equivalent to the Van Wouw Mother and Children in the Voortrekker Monument. The words "Got mit uns" are carved on the parapet above the statue of St. Michael. Sixteen sculptured figures encircle the top of the building. In the local building these were reduced to four figures of so-called national heroes lower down on each corner. The similarities of the interior design are obvious. The interior of the German monument is covered by an enormous dome with an oculus at the top and has a vast opening in the floor of the main hall, revealing a lower hall. Around the

wall of the lower hall are sculptured figures of warriors weeping for the dead heroes. In the upper hall there are four colossal figures symbolizing sacrifice, religion, bravery and national strength. The Volkerschlachtdenkmal was commissioned by the founder of the Deutschen Patrioten Bundes (German Patriotic Movement), Clemens Thieme, who was supported by Kaiser Wilhelm II and was built to commemorate the 1813 Battle of Nations at Leipzig when Napoleon³⁰ was defeated by a combined allied army including German, Polish, Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Swedish troops. It took 15 years to build and was completed in 1913, the centenary year of the battle.³¹ A book devoted entirely to the Volkerschlachtdenkmal (no author no date) is entitled Deutschlands Denkmal der Volkerschlacht das Ehrenmal seiner Befreiung und nationalen Wiedergeburt (Germany's monument to the people's war in honour of the liberation and rebirth of nationalism.) The visual imagery communicates quite clearly the conscious programme of building a nation of heroes which would have taken on added significance during the revival of nation-building in the 1930s in Germany. It therefore provided an eminently suitable prototype for the Voortrekker Monument. In addition it was also appropriate that a fiercely anti-imperialistic group in South Africa should symbolically ally themselves with Germany who were also mobilizing anti-British sentiments during the 1930s.

The second myth which Moerdijk perpetuates is that of the Afrikaners' connection to the land. By referring to the pyramids of Egypt and the Zimbabwe ruins he is clearly constructing a connection with these African cultures and thereby asserting the claim of the Voortrekkers' (and hence the Afrikaner) to their place in Africa. Elsewhere he refers to "the Afrikaners proprietary right to South Africa".³² He expands on this when he writes: "It is nonsensical to suppose that the interior of Southern Africa belonged to the Bantu and that the white men took it away from him. The Bantu penetrated from the north almost at the same time as the white man entered from the south. They had equal title to the country."³³

By constructing a monument around a symbolic altar, Moerdijk foregrounds the centrality of religion within the Trekker culture and entrenches its significance for contemporary Afrikaner nationalists. He maintains that the Voortrekkers, had they wanted to erect a monument, would have looked to the Bible for inspiration. He invokes the Old Testament patriarch Abraham who was called by God from Ur of the Chaldees to found a new state in Canaan, where he built an altar. Like Abraham, he argues, the Voortrekkers would have made a religious monument and thus Moerdijk constructs a monument around a symbolic altar, the cenotaph of Piet Retief, which is "the symbol of sacrifice ... the central point from which the structure would rise in widening circles."³⁴

Du Toit notes that the Old Testament passages:

tended to be given a literal reading and a fundamentalist interpretation, and that they were often understood as

Israelite parallels to the Afrikaner's own nomadic and pastoral mode of life. The Old Testament thus informed and inspired their self-conception. ... Early Afrikaners then only had to take a small - but crucial! - step to identify their own history with that of Israel in the Old Testament. This was to view themselves like Israel, as a Chosen people with a divine mission.³⁵

In conflating the spiritual symbol of altar with the symbolic grave of a war hero, and the opening words of the national anthem, the connection between God and Country is overtly made. This is restated in figurative terms in panel 20: Making the Vow. By inserting himself as model for the architect of the Pietermaritzburg Church of the Vow, Panel 22, Moerdijk's contemporary role as architect of an Afrikaner Shrine is directly linked with the historical precedent of the Pietermaritzburg church. Thus the connection between Christianity and Nationalism is legitimized by the "truth" of the past.

The religious shrine-like nature of the monument is further communicated by architectural features such as the dome as well as the way lighting is manipulated. The domed structure dates back to Roman times, the best known example being the Pantheon in Rome, a temple to the Gods built by Hadrian in the second century A.D.. The circular wall of the Pantheon was hollowed out into niches which contained statues of the Gods and at different times during the year the light shining through the oculus in the dome would fall on a different statue. The dome was adopted by the Christians and was imbued with connotations of the dome of heaven often with the highest point containing a reference to God or Christ in the form of a mosaic cross, for example. In the Voortrekker Monument, as in its predecessor the Volkerschlachtdenkmal, the oculus of the Pantheon and the highpoint of the dome of heaven, have been conflated, for the ray of sunlight that shines through the oculus is said to "symbolize the blessing which rests on the work and efforts of the Trekkers."³⁶ This further entrenches the notion of the Trekkers as Chosen People.

Lighting is manipulated to convey a sense of holy religiosity as the sun shining through the glass (imported from Belgium) of any one of the four arched windows casts a golden glow, emphasizing the notion of sacred shrine. This awesome atmosphere is further emphasized by the dress codes; no barefeet, no shorts, removal of hats by men, etc, as well as the rule of silence that is enforced.

The so-called historic frieze which runs from left to right around the wall of the "Hall of Heroes" consists of twenty-seven panels illustrating different episodes. Although the panels are not individually framed and form a continuous frieze each is self-contained by formal compositional means of closure.

A committee "of experts"³⁷ was appointed to decide which scenes should be included. In 1942 the committee, who had wished to appoint Afrikaans sculptors, selected Peter

Kirchoff, Laurike Postma, Frikkie Kruger and Hennie Potgieter. As in the choice of a German monument as prototype, it would seem significant that a German sculptor should be accepted as appropriate to work on this monument to Afrikaner nationalism. It is perhaps also significant that, given the important role of women's movements in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism,³⁸ a woman sculptor should have been appointed.

The final life size plaster models of the panels³⁹ were completed in 1946 and sent to Italy to be carved in marble by Italian stone-masons.⁴⁰ The official reason for sending the panels to Italy to be copied was that South Africa did not have marble of a sufficiently high standard for carving in large scale.⁴¹

However Moerdijk makes clear that he admired the technical excellence of the work of the Renaissance sculptors Donatello and Verrocchio.⁴² Furthermore Moerdijk associates the frieze with classical sculpture when he refers to the scale of the battle of the Giants and the Gods on the altar of Zeus at Pergamos: the only frieze which is larger than the Voortrekker monument frieze.⁴³ Thus, by invoking Renaissance and Classical Greek sculpture and the Western canon of naturalism, Moerdijk situates the cultural ideals of Afrikanerdom firmly within the heritage of European civilization. This parallels a similar trend in the Afrikaans language struggle in which emphasis was laid on "the links between Dutch and Afrikaans, which made the latter a 'white man's language', and gave it an entree via Dutch into that font of civilization, the Graeco-Roman tradition."⁴⁴ "By about 1910 D F Malan was linking Afrikaans to Dutch, German and French, 'the natural inheritors of the civilization and art of the Old Greeks and Romans'.⁴⁵ The carving of the panels in Italy was therefore perhaps not merely a pragmatic solution but an ideological one as well.

Furthermore, Moerdijk called upon the style of Renaissance sculptors to consciously entrench another myth of Afrikaner history. Rather than acknowledge the separateness of the four treks illustrated in the frieze, he stresses the importance of unifying them. There is thus a conscious portrayal of the Great Trek as a monolithic event rather than as a somewhat haphazard series of disparate emigre departures from the Cape Colony. He writes: "By following examples of the work of these masters ... the four sculptors succeeded in submerging their own individuality and achieving an harmonious whole."⁴⁶

Returning to the design of the panels: Moerdijk stresses W.H. Coetzer's role in the design of the first set of sketches for the panels.⁴⁷ According to Potgieter however, the sculptors did not avail themselves of Coetzer's designs but did use his knowledge "as undoubtedly the greatest authority on Africana subjects."⁴⁸ The extent to which Gustav Preller influenced Coetzer's drawings, the four sculptors' final versions and Moerdijk's verbal description of the friezes, is the topic of a separate paper in itself. Preller, who was a member of the Committee responsible for the selection of episodes for the

frieze, was a very significant figure in fostering the cult of the Great Trek. Hofmeyr writes: "The serious elaboration of an Afrikaner past was stated by that ubiquitous linguist, Preller, and his work on Retief which he soon turned into a full-scale Voortrekker industry."⁴⁸ Hofmeyr notes how Preller was largely responsible for the institutionalization of the Great Trek. She continues:

"He started his series on Piet Retief in 1905, a few days before Dingaan's Day and linked his writing to the preparations leading up to that event. The first article opened by regretting the fact that people knew too little about Retief, and Preller declared his intention to right this absence. But he did so in a demotic fashion and set out to create a cult of personality around Retief and other 'Trekker' leaders (De Volksstem 9 Dec, 1905). Preller's articles were to be serialised in a host of other papers and subsequently appeared in a book form which went into ten editions and sold 15,000 copies. The book itself was unabashedly emotional, affective and colourful and probably made most readers feel that Retief was a member of their family."⁵⁰

In 1916 Preller made a film entitled De Voortrekkers in which much emphasis was placed on the lifelike scenes.⁵¹ Hofmeyr argues that "the principles of the personal, the episodic and anecdotal were to become hall marks of Preller's work and [that] all of his Voortrekker texts are dominated by an obsessive concern for the visual detail of what people were, ate and drank."⁵²

The same principles observed by Hofmeyr in Preller's writing, are apparent in Moerdijk's concept of history and in the continual emphasis on the accurate recording of detail. Moerdijk stresses the notion of history as truth: the frieze depicts "all the most important phases of the Great Trek"⁵³ and the frieze gives "a complete and faithful picture of the important events connected with the Great Trek".⁵⁴ The selective recording of the past is therefore denied. Furthermore there is a continual stress on the authenticity and accurate representation of everyday objects and details of the past. Panel 9 depicts the everyday chores performed on the Great Trek: shoemaking, needlework, hunting and making riempies; Panel 10 shows the children in cosy domesticity with rag dolls, knuckle bones and ox-wagons. Of the first panel Heymans writes "This panel shows the Voortrekkers' household items, farm implements and musical instruments [gesin, land and kultuur]. Thorough research ensured that each item was depicted accurately and in the finest detail."⁵⁵

This stress on research and authentic detail validates the "truth" of historical "fact" and shows the Afrikaner his past with apparent accuracy and immediacy. This immediacy is also communicated by the naturalistic style which ensures easy access to the everyday detail, the "realia of history",⁵⁶ in which objects and people are represented in a recognizable comprehensible and familiar form. Preller is said to have arranged for old trekkers to be photographed and the

photographers "were given express orders not to touch up the wrinkles on the head-and-shoulders-portraits they took".⁵⁷ Potgieter reflects this same interest in familiar detail when he reveals that he was in awe of the carvers who, in Panel 2, could reproduce "the thousands of wrinkles of our little granny Stoffberg".⁵⁸ [my emphasis] This emphasis on intimate detail encourages the viewer to identify with the characters on a personal level. The canon of naturalism is thus an ideal political tool particularly suited to a propagandistic message.

Whilst naturalistic observation of minute every-day detail is an appropriate way to enliven the past and make history more "real", in the process of nation-building, an heroic history also needs to be constructed. This entails selective recording of the past, the creation of heroes, and manipulation of events in the cause of inspiring the nation. The selective recording of the past is perhaps nowhere so clearly exemplified as in the absence of representations of servants in the frieze. The builders of the monument acknowledged both the presence of servants on the Trek, (The Voortrekker "took with him his wife, his children, his servants")⁵⁹ and the death of many in battle ("Retief was kept alive to the last, so that he might watch the martyrdom of his son, his friends and his servants").⁶⁰ Yet there are only two representations of servants in the entire frieze. Both are depicted in the background, one from backview (panel 9) and one from side view (panel 20) and they perform menial tasks - making riempies and leading a horse. Hence their position within the realm of bravery is marginalized, their status as servants within the social hierarchy is entrenched, and their role in the Great Trek is sculpted out of history.

The creation of heroes is clearly illustrated by Potgieter who recalls that there was a great deal of confusion about the story of Dirkie Uys. He records:

"Whatever the true facts ... Laurika [Postma] decided to depict him in an heroic pose, kneeling beside his father and shooting at the enemy. Whether it is a myth or not, it is an inspiring narrative, and deserves its place in the Monument, because it could also be taken as symbolical of many children [sic] heroes."⁶¹

The heroism of Dirkie Uys' deed is communicated by his visual and metaphorical isolation against a stark backdrop, the numerical superiority of his opponents, their dramatic stances and the emphasis on their muscular strength. Moerdijk notes: "throughout the frieze natives ... are always represented as worthy opponents, very well developed as far as their physical characteristics are concerned".⁶² [my emphasis] Thus by representing the Zulus as physically powerful and emphasizing their numerical strength the heroism of the Boer's ultimate victory is emphasized.

In order to inspire, events of the past need to be enlivened and dramatized. Moerdijk writes: "It was necessary to dramatize the material available and to present a story with a

beginning, a climax and a conclusion [and] ... to arrange the various episodes with an eye to the dramatic effect."⁶³

Panel 18 depicts the men as dejected and downcast whilst the women stand erect looking into the distance in stoical and heroic fashion. They spur their men into action with grandiloquent sweeping gestures. The connection between Susanna Smit's gesture (in the centre) and Sarel Cillier's gesture in panel 20, communicates visually and dramatically the success of the women's moral support. Panel 18 refers to the episode that occurred in the office of the landdrost in Pietermaritzburg when Susanna Smit is said to have told the British representative that the Trekkers would rather return barefoot over the Drakensberg than bow down to the British Government. The panel does not depict an interior space but rather stresses a backdrop of steep mountains. Thus the 'bravery' and 'steadfastness' of the Trekkers who had already crossed this formidable range of mountains and were now prepared to return back over them, is visually expressed by the manipulation of the so-called authentic setting.

Potgieter further mythologizes the women's role by stating that the panel symbolizes two episodes⁶⁴: the resistance to the British and the encouragement to retaliate against Dingaan. Thus their opposition to the British and the Zulu is conflated in one dramatic scene. Victory against the Zulu is depicted in panel 21 and temporary victory against the British is portrayed in the final panel before the visitor leaves the monument inspired by the heroic deeds of his ancestors to strive for the ultimate ideal of an independent republic in the future.

In literature on the monument, attention is continually drawn to the accurate rendition of individual likenesses and the constant use of life models in the service of authenticity. Potgieter notes that drawings of the Voortrekker leaders were used where possible viz Pretorius, Trichardt and Erasmus Smit.⁶⁵ In cases where there were no extant drawings of the personalities, descendants of the leaders were used as models e.g. Dr. Carel Potgieter, grandson of Andries Potgieter; and Kruger's grandson.⁶⁶

In this way the past is conjured up in a direct and immediate way and mythologized heroes from the past are injected with a contemporary 'reality' emphasizing their accessibility. Again Preller's demotic style is very influential:

The likeness [of Piet Retief] is based on the character as portrayed in the [1916] film [by Preller] on the Voortrekkers in which Piet Retief appears more or less as he is shown at the monument. One of his descendants Mrs. G. Preller has said [sic said] that the family likeness can be clearly recognized in the figure.⁶⁷

Conversely, friends and family of Moerdijk and the sculptors who served as models are immortalized in stone and, by their integral association with the "heroic" deeds of the Voortrekkers, are imbued with an active role in the building

of the Afrikaner nation. The present is sculpted into history and the proud heritage of contemporary figures is valorized.

This is exemplified by the inclusion of the sculptors of the frieze. In Panel 1 the three male sculptors served as models: Peter Kirchoff for the man on the extreme left, Frikkie Kruger for the horserider and Hennie Potgieter for the man tying up the sack on the extreme left.⁶⁹ The sculptors did not sign the panels of the frieze at the time of installation⁶⁹ but their claim to authorship is foregrounded by their inclusion in visual form in the first panel which signals the start of the frieze and the unfolding of "history". In the case of Postma, however, it is her role as woman rather than as sculptor that is emphasized, for she is represented in the panel (number 18) which "pays tribute to the women of the Great Trek who stood by their men in spite of all the tribulations and dangers of the Trek, giving their moral support in moments of crisis and danger".⁷⁰ Postma was the model for the standing woman on the extreme left who looks back to her husband and urges him forward. Her directional gesture to the right climaxes in the heroic rhetoric of Susanna Smit who significantly was modelled on Moerdijk's wife.

Thus, whilst the emphasis on the use of specific contemporary models valorizes living people, it also stresses the individuality and hence so-called "reality" of the representation of Afrikaner heroes of the Great Trek. Furthermore, by stressing ethnic difference, e.g. Portuguese, Sotho, Zulu, Italian, Swazi and English, the Afrikaners' own identity is consolidated. Potgieter writes: "We went out of our way to get a model of the nationality that was being depicted".⁷¹ Whilst therefore, Afrikaners define their identity not only by the way they represent themselves, but also by the way they represent others, to explore the depiction of the other is the topic of a separate paper.

A further myth of Afrikaner history that is given visual rendering in the Voortrekker monument is that of the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers. Moerdijk writes

"The Voortrekker did not come as an adventurer, still less as a conqueror. ... The Voortrekkers wished to partition the country and to live in peace because they had already experienced enough trouble in the Cape. But the Bantu were not amenable to reason. He respected one thing only and that was force. Hence the many wars between Bantu and European".⁷²

The episodes from the past that have been selected emphasize this myth of the Voortrekkers spirit of co-operation and non-violence. Whilst the 'savage barbarians' fight amongst themselves; the Matabele and the Baralong and Bataung (referred to in the description of panel 7); the Batlokwa and the Zulus (referred to in the description of Panel 9); the Swazis murdering Dingaan (panel 25), the Trekkers are depicted receiving the British 1820 Settlers blessing (panel 2),⁷³ trading with the Portuguese (panel 4) negotiating with Moroka,

Chief of the Baralong (panel 8), signing a treaty with Dingaan (panel 12), and even directing the course of the Zulu 'nation' by appointing Mpanda as king of the Zulus (panel 24).⁷⁴ Mitchell emphasizes the irony of this inversion: "Public art has served as a kind of monumentalizing of violence and never more powerfully when it presents the conqueror as a man of peace."⁷⁵

Moerdijk constructs the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers when he states that the first panel "reflects a serene calm".⁷⁶ Thus the idyllic pastoral tranquillity of the Voortrekkers setting out from the Cape lends credence to the myth of their peaceful intentions. The Trekkers are depicted as a group in search of a home⁷⁷ who obtained land by reasonable negotiation rather than force.⁷⁸ Pelzer reinforces this historical construct when he writes:

At the time the Trekkers left the Cape Colony, there were no Europeans living in the vast interior and ... no power had laid claim to any portion of the hinterland. As a matter of fact it can be stated without contradiction that the whole area north of the recognized colonial boundary was a vast no-man's land. It is true that the native communities had established themselves at various places but they were quarrelling among themselves and were waging destructive wars in which they were exterminating each other on a large scale. The vast, open stretches of no-man's land which the Voortrekkers found wherever they went, must in part be ascribed to these wars. To the numerous smaller tribes continuously living in the shadow of death the arrival of the white man meant salvation. Not only were they given protection but peaceful relations were also established with the larger tribes.

In addition, whenever an opportunity presented itself, treaties were entered into with them so that no native tribe was ever arbitrarily dispossessed of land.⁷⁹

In conclusion, I would like to address one of Afrikaner history's most central myths that is entrenched within the ideology of the writing about the monument as well as in its visual imagery, viz. the formulation of the Great Trek in terms of the spread of civilization and order. Etherington writes:

The Trek as the march of civilization (or, in the words of Albert Grundlingh), 'resilient Afrikanerdom marching inexorably to its predetermined destination as the legitimate rulers over non-Afrikaners in South Africa' is pictured not just in the works of historians but in the very bricks and stones of the Voortrekker Monument.⁸⁰

In the Lower Hall of the monument against the side wall is a shrine-like structure housing the eternal flame. "This flame was chosen to symbolise European civilization which was carried into the dark and dangerous interior by the Voortrekkers."⁸¹ This flame was lit from the sun's rays at

the foot of the Jan van Riebeeck statue in Cape Town⁸² and was carried from Cape Town to Pretoria by torch bearers who arrived on the eve of the laying of the foundation stone in 1938.⁸³ The heroic connotations continually foregrounded in the Monument are here communicated through association with the ancient Olympic torch carrying tradition.

Embedded within the construct of civilization as foregrounded in the ideology of the Monument is the notion of order, control and dominance over the natural environment and over the local inhabitants. "To achieve his ideal, [the Voortrekker] had to tame nature, conquer the savages and establish his state."⁸⁴ The theme of panel 23 contrasts the orderliness of a cultivated domestic world inside the boundaries of the laager, with the wilderness of the natural environment beyond these limits. The idea of control over the natural environment that is conveyed visually in panel 22 by the rectilinear structuring, and conceptually by references to measuring, is repeated in actual terms in the architectural design of the Monument itself with its "geometrical precision and symmetry."⁸⁵

Possession of the land is symbolically encoded in the Monument in the use of maps, one which was planned for the dome and the other which was executed in the gardens. The convention of mapping makes permanent claims to land which has been physically controlled. Thus, as Harley notes, maps are used to "legitimize the reality of conquest".⁸⁶

Moerdijk writes that the dome in the monument "represents the globe with South Africa on top [ie in the centre]." Harley refers to the "omphalos syndrome",⁸⁷ "where a people believe themselves to be divinely appointed to the centre of the universe".⁸⁸ This syndrome is clearly evident in the ideology of the Monument for Moerdijk continues

It is planned at a later stage to map out South Africa in bas-relief on this dome. On this map a silver thread will terminate at the small aperture in the dome which permits a ray of sunlight to pass through.⁸⁹

The mapped route of the Great Trek was to terminate physically in the oculus through which pass the sun's rays associated with divine blessing, and it was to terminate in the abstract sense at the end of the Trek i.e. when the Trekker had founded his own state. Thus by association the ultimate ideal state of the Afrikaner would be divinely appointed.

The claim to territory symbolized in the mapping of trek routes on paper (see page 16 of the official guide) is reinforced by the physical imprint of the Trek routes on the land itself. On the eastern side of the Monument, the physical terrain of the trek routes are reconstructed with pathways signalling the Trekker's routes. The possession of the interior is thus replicated in permanent form.

The notion of control and dominance over the indigenous people is constructed in terms of an opposition between the

"civilizing" force of the Voortrekkers as opposed to the "barbarism" of the Zulus and Matabele. "The granite tomb [sic cenotaph] ... represents the rock of civilization that has fallen into the pool of barbarism".⁸⁰ The statue of Mother and children symbolizes "civilization" and Christianity as opposed to the adjacent wildebeest which symbolize the "barbarism" of Dingaans warriors.⁸¹

This oppositional construct is echoed in several panels of the frieze. The repetition of the same motif of horse and rider representing the ordered and disciplined ranks of Boer soldiers in the Battle of Blood River (panel 21) is visually contrasted to the crowded and confused meleé of falling and retreating bodies representing Dingaans warriors. This symbolizes "the war between civilization and barbarism".⁸² A similar visual device is used in The Murder of Retief and his men (panel 13) where the steadfast and stoic heroism conveyed by the stiff vertical of Retief's body, is directly contrasted to the activated diagonals employed in the representation of Dingaans men. This "symbolizes the victory of civilization over barbarism".⁸³

The various constructs embedded within the notion of civilization as fabricated by builders of the Voortrekker Monument are crystallized in the last panel of the tapestry, aptly titled Symbolic Resumé.⁸⁴ On the left three Voortrekker women stride heroically and triumphantly bearing the "flames of civilization" through the physical danger and moral evils of the wild and dark interior. The results of their "civilizing" influence are seen in the right of the image in the ordered rows of cultivated orchards, in the idyllic harmony of the classically styled buildings and in the factory chimney stacks belching forth thick black smoke, symbolizing technical accomplishment and progress. The torch bearers on the left, pioneering through darkness, climax visually in their movement from the left to right in the providential angel on the right whose body is echoed by the rainbow, with its symbolic message of hope for the future. The Afrikaner represents him/herself as having left the Cape (the sea and the gable), conquered the 'savages' (the shields) to arrive at a divinely ordained ideal state of independence embodied in the flag of Natalia on the left, the Potgieter flag on the right and in the icons of nationhood, the protea and the wagon wheel.

The last panel of the tapestry therefore, synthesizes retrospectively the ideology of the Monument with its visual re-presentation of certain central myths of Afrikaner history which I have argued, were deliberately perpetuated to foster a sense of Afrikaner identity in the 1930s and to reinforce the superiority of White Afrikanerdom at a crucial point in its history.

1. The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria Official Guide Pretoria Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument 1954 p12.
2. Vail, L. (ed) "Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History" in The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa California James Currey 1989 p14.
3. Pelzer, A.M. Chapter 1 The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria ibid p14.
4. Giliomee, H. "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850-1915" in Vail, L. (ed) ibid p22.
5. Etherington, N. "The Great Trek in Relation to the Mfecane: A Reassessment" South African Historical Journal 25 (1991) p8.
6. ibid.
7. du Toit, A. "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology."
8. The information about the history of the building and its funding comes from Jansen, E.G. "The Growth of an Idea" The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria Official Guide ibid pp24-5.
9. Moerdijk, G. "The Sculpture and Architecture of the Voortrekker Monument" Chapter 6 The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria ibid p58.
10. O'Meara, D Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism Johannesburg Ravan Press 1983 p60.
11. ibid p61.
12. ibid p60.
13. Vail (ed) ibid p11
14. O'Meara ibid p61.
15. Rand Daily Mail 8.11.35 quoted by O'Meara ibid p62.
16. O'Meara ibid p62.
17. Lombard, I.M. "The Choice of a Site for the Voortrekker Monument" The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria Official Guide ibid p28.
18. ibid pp27-8.
19. Moerdijk Chapter 6 ibid p55.
20. Potgieter, one of the four sculptors notes that Moerdijk was "head of the enterprise" Potgieter, H. The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria Pretoria 1987 p41.

21. Pierneef, another artist who served the causes of rising Afrikaner Nationalism painted the panels for the Johannesburg station. See Coetzee, N. "The Land Belongs to us: An interpretation of Pierneef's Johannesburg Station Panels" Lecture at Wits under the auspices of the South African Association of Art Historians May 1992.

22. In 1918 he was awarded first prize for the design of a church in Bothaville. Ferreira, O.J.O. "Die Geskiedenis van die Sentrale Volksmonument komitee" Unpublished M.A. dissertation University of Pretoria 1970 p65.

23. Die Volksblad Byvoegsel 12.2.1949 quoted by Ferreira ibid.

24. He attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and the British School of Archaeology in Rome.

25. Moerdijk, G. "Design and Symbolism of the Voortrekker Monument" Chapter 4 ibid p32.

26. Moerdijk further emphasizes his role as creator by foregrounding the technical originality of the building. He refers to the Hall of Heroes, 100 square feet of overhanging construction which "does not exist anywhere else in South Africa". Chapter 6 ibid p55. He also refers to the dome "which was constructed on hanging shuttering without a single support on the floor [sic] - a unique venture." ibid p57.

27. Picton-Seymour notes: "All typical of the 30s are the zigzag ziggurat outlines of the granite structure, each course of blocks diminishing in size from the coarse base to the refined heights; the shining marble halls; and the geometric tracery of the huge rounded windows." Picton-Seymour, D. Historical Buildings of South Africa Cape Town Struik 1989 p162.

28. Mausolus who died in 353 BC began building, during his life a colossal tomb in Halicarnassus on the coast of Asia Minor. It was a rectangular structure topped by a pyramid and is now no longer extant. According to traditional knowledge each face was decorated by a different sculptor. Two relief friezes showing combat scenes, (between the Lapiths and the Centaurs and between the Greeks and the Amazons) ran around the base. Lullies, R. and Hirmer, M. Greek Sculpture London Thames and Hudson 1960 pp90-92.

29. Moerdijk Chapter 6 ibid p55.

30. It is an ironic twist that the Volkerschlachtendenkmal, a building which celebrates Napoleon's defeat, should have an interior design that recalls a building which now glorifies Napoleon. Napoleon's ashes were brought back from St. Helena in 1840 on the instructions of King Louis Philippe and they were interred in a sarcophagus in the lower hall of the Church of Les Invalides in Paris. It is clear too, that Moerdijk drew on this design of the opening in the nave of the church revealing Napoleon's sarcophagus below. Les Invalides. like

the Volkerschlachtenkmal and the Voortrekker Monument, is domed.

31. Brockhaus Enzyklopadie die Wiesbaden Brockhaus 1974 p688. The building is 91 metres high and was designed by Bruno Schmidt. The sculptures were executed by F. Metzner and Ch. Behrens.

32. *ibid* p31.

33. Moerdijk Chapter 4 *ibid* p31.

34. Moerdijk Chapter 4 *ibid* p32.

35. du Toit *ibid* pp924-5.

36. Moerkijk *ibid* p34.

37. Moerdijk "The Historical Frieze" Chapter 5 *ibid* p38 The members of this committee consisted of Dr E G Jansen, the Reverend Paul Nel, Dr Gustav Preller, Professor I D Bosman and Professor S P Engelbrecht.

38. For the role of women in the fostering of Afrikaner ethnic consciousness and the role of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging established in 1904, see Butler, J. "Afrikaner Women and the Creation of Ethnicity in A Small South African Town 1902-50" Vail (ed) *ibid* pp52-7, 62-5. The depiction of women in the Monument, and the role of women in the 1938 celebration and in the tapestry production is an extraordinarily rich topic which lies outside the scope of this paper.

39. After the drawing for a panel had been made, a panel one third the size of the final version was modelled in clay and then a plaster cast was made of it. Work on these proceeded for almost a year. After completion of the small panels, work began on the large panels which were completed in the same manner. See Potgieter *ibid* pp43-4.

40. Romano Romanelli was in charge of this project and he hired four other workshops in Florence. A total of fifty masons worked on the panels. Postma and Potgieter were sent to Italy for a year to supervise the carving and "guard against any Un-Afrikaans elements stealing into the work". Moerdijk, G. Chapter 5 *ibid* p39, Potgieter was employed to instal the panels.

Thick blocks (30cms thick) of quercetta marble were used.

41. Discussion with R. Heymans, official guide of Voortrekker Monument.

42. Moerdijk Chapter 5 *ibid* p38.

43. It is no longer extant.

44.Hofmeyer "Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity 1902-24" in Trail (ed) ibid p105.

45.Schoonbee, P.C. Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging Pretoria 1922 p13 quoted by Hofmeyer ibid p119 footnote 48.

46.Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p38.

47.Moerdijk ibid pp38, 41.

48.Potgieter ibid p83.

49.Hofmeyer ibid p109.

50.ibid pp109-10.

51.Hofmeyer, I. "Popularising History: The Case of Gustav Preller" Seminar presented to African Studies Institute University of the Witwatersrand July 1987 ppl-3.

52.ibid p15.

53.Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p38.

54.ibid.

55.Heymans, R. The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria Pretoria Board of Control of Voortrekker Monument 1986 p8.

56.Hofmeyer 1987 ibid p20.

57.ibid p15.

58.Potgieter ibid p48.

59.Moerdijk Chapter 4 ibid p31.

60.Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p47.

61.ibid p46.

62.Chapter 5 ibid p51.

63.ibid p38.

64.Potgieter ibid p30.

65.ibid p42.

66.ibid p53. Moerdijk however states that the figure of Andries Potgieter on one of the outside corners of the monument is "based on the appearance of Potgieter's great-grandchildren." Chapter 6 p53.

67.Potgieter however writes: "I had unfortunately to reconstruct Retief from a conception that Frikkie [Kruger] had of him" ibid p47.

68.Potgieter ibid p11.

69.Potgieter carved the names of the relevant artists on each panel in 1985.

70.Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p49.

71.Potgieter ibid p42.

72.Moerkijk Chapter 4 ibid p31.

73.du Toit points out that "the whole climate of colonial thinking had been profoundly changed, above all by the controversy surrounding the publication of Philip's Research in South Africa in 1928 ... which highlighted the colonists' violent conquest and continuing exploitation of the original and rightful inhabitants. Such organs of (British) settler opinion as the Grahamstown Journal construed these activities as a direct challenge to the very moral and political bases of colonial society. ... The Great Trek got under way at the height of this controversy". The Trekkers and the British frontier settlers would have been allies in a common cause: the repudiation of "Dr Philips and his humanitarian allies' critiques of colonial society." ibid pp936-7.

74.This construction of the connection between "the Zulu nation" and the Afrikaner ancestors, the Voortrekkers, lays the foundation for the privileging of Zulu culture which has particularly sinister implications in the present day.

75.Mitchell, W.J.J. "The Violence of Public Art: Do the right thing" Critical Enquiry Vol 16 1989-90 p886.

76.Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p39.

77.Panel 10 depicts a "happy childhood scene which ... symbolises the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers, a community in search of a new home who laid emphasis upon the family and its ties." Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p46.

78.The episode depicted in panel 8 "serves to emphasize the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers. They consistently tried to obtain land from the natives by means of negotiation and not by force of arms. There were no conquerors among the Voortrekkers, no Cortez, no Napoleon, no Genghis Khan no Tamburlaine." Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p46.

79.Pelzer Chapter 1 ibid p18.

80.Etherington ibid p5 quoting Grundlingh, A. "Politics, Principles and Problems of a Profession: Afrikaner Historians and their Discipline 1920-1965" Perspectives in Education vol 12 1990 pp1-19.

81. Moerdijk Chapter 6 ibid p55. See also: "[The Voortrekker Monument] was to serve as a tangible tribute to a group of people who through their stupendous efforts had laid the foundation of white civilization to be built in the interior of Southern Africa." Moerdijk Chapter 4 ibid p29.

82. Moerdijk identifies Jan Van Riebeeck as the founder of white civilization in Africa. He equated the sun's rays shining through the oculus with God's blessing (see p7 above). Hence, by association the divine origin of the flame of civilization is implied. This links to the myth of the Afrikaners as Chosen people. (See p7 above).

83. The Voortrekker Youth Movement and the Transvaal Teacher's Association, paid the expenses of this symbolic re-enactment. The flame was housed at the University of Pretoria from 1938 until the Monument was completed in 1949. The links between education and Christian Nationalism are undisguised.

84. Moerdijk Chapter 4 ibid p31. This directly contradicts the statements that the Voortrekkers did not come as conquerors (See footnote 72 above).

85. Heymans ibid p6.

86. Harley, J.B. "Maps, knowledge, and power" in Daniels, S. and Cosgrove, D. (eds) The Iconography of Landscape Cambridge University Press 1988 p282.

87. This is Edgerton's term. Edgerton, S.Y. "From mental matrix to mappamundi to Christian empire: the heritage of Ptolemaic cartography in the Renaissance" in Woodward, D. (ed) Art and Cartography Chicago 1987 p26 quoted by Harley ibid p290.

88. Harley ibid p280.

89. Moerdijk Chapter 4 ibid p32.

90. Potgieter ibid p40.

91. Heymans ibid p6. See also Moerdijk Chapter 4 ibid p36.

92. Moerdijk Chapter 5 ibid p49.

93. Moerdijk ibid p48.

94. In 1952 the Vrou-en-Moeder movement of the Afrikaanse Taalen-Kultuur vereniging (the Broederbond cultural wing of the South African Railways and Harbor) decided to produce a giant tapestry. The final product funded by women's organizations consisted of 15 panels.