Nation-building-premises in Freedom Park, South Africa

Annett Schulze

Abstract

The South African Department of Arts and Culture initiated several legacy and heritage projects post-apartheid, referring to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – one of those being Freedom Park. By materialising governmentality within a monument, a certain notion of belonging is constructed: a sense of belonging to a national community which is valorised by sacrificial death and naturalised culture, embodied in the architecture of the created public space. The built environment and the guided tours both point to a performativity of spirituality: 'cleansing and healing-ceremonies' are part of a policy which tries to reconcile memories through strategic commemoration practices. With reference to Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia', I will argue that Freedom Park can be read as both an illusory space and at the same time a perfect arrangement of select societal structures as compensation for former injustices.

Key words: governmentality; national belonging; death; freedom; heterotopia; spirituality

The post-apartheid state initiated several post-apartheid legacy and heritage projects following the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which stipulated symbolic reparations like 'memorials and monuments' (TRC 1998:175). According to the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (4 June 1996), processes of nation-building have the following tasks:

> Nation building: Shall foster a sense of pride and knowledge in all aspects of South African culture, heritage and the arts. Shall further encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity (Department of Arts and Culture 2006).

Establishing legacy projects was one way of setting up nation-building processes, which had been chosen by the Department of Arts and Culture. Freedom Park is one of these legacy projects. It was envisaged as a form of symbolic reparation fostering reconciliation and nation-building. Construction began in 2001 on Salvokop Hill, situated between the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Pretoria Central Prison. The Park occupies around 52 hectare, about the size of 73 football fields, and is managed and administered by the Department of Arts and Culture.

The official Freedom Park website describes its vision and mission. Its vision is 'to be a leading national and international icon of humanity and freedom'. And its

mission is 'to provide a pioneering and empowering heritage destination in order to mobilise for reconciliation and nation building in our country; to reflect upon our past, improving our present and building our future as a united nation; and to contribute continentally and internationally to the formation of better human understanding among nations and peoples' (Freedom Park [sa]:a).

> Freedom Park attempts to tell a story spanning 3.6 billion years, a history marked by eight major conflicts as defined by the Park management, apartheid being one of them.

I will focus on the following two questions: How is national belonging constructed in Freedom Park? And how can a nation-state monument like Freedom Park be linked to Foucault's thoughts on heterotopia as illusion **and** at the same time, as I suggest, compensation for the inequalities and gaps between rich and poor outside the Park?

Freedom Park management wants to 'decolonise the minds' by 'emancipating the African voice'. Its architecture tries to embody a perfect arrangement of significant visual and textual references to specific former political claims. It is an official place of nationalised commemoration and therefore its historiography tells not only of past power relations, but also of present conflicts in national**ism**-building processes – themselves being classified, racialised, gendered, invented, and dangerous '… in the sense that they all represent relations to political power and to technologies of violence' (McClintock 1991:104).

Decolonising the mind: naturalising national belonging

The Park is divided into two main parts: //hapo[1] – an 'interactive exhibition space' and an expansive garden, a 'Garden of Remembrance' (Serote 2006), consisting of several elements. One of the tour guides (tour of 23 March 2009) explains how these elements are linked together:

> Here at Freedom Park we have three main elements. S'khumbuto is the heritage element. These are the Sanctuary, the Eternal Flame, the Amphitheatre, the Wall of Names and the Gallery of Leaders. The spiritual element is Isivivane … . And the third element is the cultural one which is represented by Moshate. Mveledzo, the spiral path, links all elements.

In an interview, Jeremy Rose (2009:13f), an architect of the firm Mashabane & Rose, explains the process of arriving at a design for the Park:

> And probably the most powerful moment in this design process was when I went to have a look at a traditional healer's house and his healing garden where people would go and see this traditional healer and talk to him and they would get advice about marriage or pains or something, AIDS, or a dispute in the community, whatever. … Integrated. … since this is for … a whole approach. … And then there were these stones, these big boulders in a circle and you could sit on the one. And he would sit on the other one. And he talks to you amongst, in this garden. So, we thought … it would make a nice idea for a building that you could make. Treat … the boulders as buildings and the garden as Freedom Park, the landscape. So it became a healing garden with these boulder-like buildings. And that was the concept.

Jeremy Rose discusses his meeting with Credo Mutwa, a traditional healer. Mutwa calls himself a *Sangoma*, High Sanusi. The design of the built park landscape cites Credo Mutwa's healing garden in Kuruman in the Northern Cape. But looking at the decision-making process, it is more than just a copy of this privately owned garden by Credo Mutwa. Rose (2009:13) adds

that the Park's management wanted Freedom Park to be different from Western ideas of museums:

> ... they're trying to reinvent a new concept of telling South African stories and exhibit space with archival research happening and exhibits been developed, so they don't want to be seen to going to Western tradition. They want to make it their own. So it comes out of, it's a new way of doing something which is thoroughly African. And they are always concerned by that.

Management chose narrations of practices imagined as 'thoroughly African, as practiced by people defined as belonging to Africa. The Park's key concept is "emancipating the African voice"' (Abrahams 2009:5f, 17). In the legacy project designed to foster nation-building with the aim of re-instituting social cohesion, 'nation' as 'empty signifier' seems to stand for 'African nation'. This assumption is corroborated by the key objectives which can be read on the website: 'Contribute to social cohesion by positioning Freedom Park as a symbol of national identity in 70% of identified target groups' (Freedom Park [sa]:b).

But how does the Park's management define 'the African voice'? And how is 'African' in 'African voice' designated? The Park management's approach to defining the concept is twofold: firstly, establishing an intellectual platform which presents an 'African reality' (see Kriger 2009:9); and secondly, the Park's management pursues an integrative approach in presenting specific 'consciousness of' an 'African reality'. Ramzie Abrahams (2009:6), manager of the Department of Heritage and Knowledge, explains the meaning of consciousness: 'a consciousness that people have whether you're black or white or coloured or Indian or whatever. This reality is that consciousness which you should have, ... Integrating history, culture and spirituality.'

Both perspectives emphasise a kind of 'consciousness' that can be learnt, in effect an educational approach. But the definition also requires that the target audience be spiritual or at least acknowledge spirituality as an integral pre-condition for membership of this group: those who do not subscribe to some form of spirituality are excluded. The physical reality of the monument incorporates an ideological force – the one of spiritualised nationalism – which is related to the political affiliations of the Park's management.

There is also a difference in the conceptualisation of the triad within the 'African voice': Whereas the tour guide speaks of heritage, spiritual and cultural elements, Ramzie Abrahams talks of history rather than heritage. Heritage seems to be a synonym for history and vice versa. Ciraj Rassool (2004:177f, 502) explains the shift from history to heritage-based knowledge in South African nation-building processes. He states that, traditionally, universities have claimed to be the production sites of historical knowledge. After the official end of apartheid, the production of historical knowledge was referred to individual memory, which signifies heritage. The contestation centred on the presupposition that history was 'objective' and memory not. But Rassool (2004:272) also shows how history and heritage can be interchangeable in this specific nation-building context of legacy projects centered on the construction of heroic memory. Rassool (2004:291) terms these projects 'hegemonic':

> Many of these constructions occurred "from above" as part of the engineering of a new nation in accord with new identifiable discursive frameworks and also involved processes of heritage commercialisation and image branding.

Moreover, Rassool (2004:51), referring to Nora's '*lieux de mémoire*', states that these national sites of memory 'seek to create ties of belonging for national subjects'.

In this sense, heritage legacy sites instantiate two kinds of valorisation: memories become valuable both national-culturally and economically. The corresponding narratives are constructions with a particular aim: through the narration a national community shall be evoked which belongs loyally to the nation-state.

But 'the united nation' itself harbours and perpetuates various identity categories. Ramzie Abrahams' specification of 'Black', 'Indian' and so forth, or the tour guides' use of the third grammatical person 'they' when referring to 'African techniques' like 'Cleansing and Healing', work to effectively perpetuate the categorisations operative under apartheid.[2] Adducing these categories in this way entails a naturalisation complicit with certain colonial and apartheid discourses. This is in conflict with an analysis of difference as a historical construct shaped by power and rule.

Nationalising strategies: linking 'the African voice' to the corporeal of the space

The call for developing a sense of belonging to the post-apartheid nation takes shape in the sculpted landscape, the bodily experience of the space and the demands of the Park's management and the tour guides.

The centrepiece of Freedom Park is a garden without walls. The environment was built with stones, trees and plants considered to be African, and materials like copper, taken from geographical places around the country's nine provinces. The naturalised material does not refer to the whole continent but to the South African nation-state. Tour guides acting as interpreters of symbols and producers of knowledge explain that the landscape speaks with an African voice through its indigenous materials. The guides explain that the trees and the stones, especially those to be found at the spiritual place Isivivane, stem from South African territory. In Freedom Park, a process of naturalisation is engineered not only through what the eyes are made to see, but also through the voice-over rendered by the tour guides. The oral text is designed to give Freedom Park a certain authenticity. This authenticity is supported by the architectural citation of historical structures like the stone ruins of Great Zimbabwe. The work that went into creating this artificial place disappears and is essentialised, taking on a historical aura.

The monument itself – its physical structure – embodies the naturalised figure of the nation. It tells of 'life' over a time period of 3.6 billion years, and legitimises the new power over the land by tracing origins. In one of the publications (Freedom Park [sa]:10), mtDNA[3] is adduced to corroborate the narrative:

> Recent Research shows that the Khoi-san have the largest genetic diversity in mtDNA of all human populations. Y chromosome data also indicates [sic] that they were some of the first lineages to branch from the main human family tree. …. The distinct characteristics of all human varieties … all have beginnings in the physiology of the Khoisan people.

The search for origins is a so-called scientific one – a genetic search for material-biological essence. The discourse of 'indigeneity' leaves its mark in Freedom Park, too. How controversial the historiographies of biogenetically construed populations are, for example, those of the San,[4] has not come up for discussion in the Park until now.

Cleansing and healing: intersecting spiritual practices

One site in the Park in particular, that named Isivivane, indicates how spirituality intersects with nationalism and governmentality.

Isivivane, one of the key elements in Freedom Park, is designated as '[a] resting place for the spirits of those who died in the struggles for humanity and freedom'. It consists of a *Legkotla* space and *Lesaka*. *Lesaka* is a stone circle made up of eleven boulders, nine of these representing past conflicts or events occurring in one of the provinces, one representing the South African government and one standing for the international community. There is no stone representing Africa as a continent. The voice-over of the tour guide explaining the arrangement invokes national belonging.

A cloud of mist rises from the midst of the stone circle, symbolising the spirits of those who died for humanity and freedom. The built environment of *Isivivane* addresses three questions essential to management as formulated by Ramzie Abrahams (2009:1): '... how do we deal with issues of distortions, with subjugation, with the redress not in the normal way it is done? How do we deal ... with the violence of our past? What is it that we must do to bring closure to that violence?'

The answer to these questions was to conduct Cleansing and Healing ceremonies ' ... as basically a means of dealing with loss. And when you deal with loss, you bring closure. If you deal with it, in whichever way it's been dealt with, ... then only you can clos[e]' (Abrahams 2009:2).

Unifying the nation through death

> And the route the Trust took in dealing with loss ... was from spiritual perspective. ... another word that we can use for "cleansing and healing" is death management. How do people in various faiths or belief systems deal with death? How do they manage death ... of a loved one? (Abrahams 2009:2).

Throughout all negotiations with the past, the Park is governed by the desire to bring closure through inclusive spiritual practices.

The invocation of spirituality relies on two presuppositions: First, people have to believe – either in the performed rituals, or in the leaders performing them in the space that provides their reference. Second, they have to believe in the transcendence of death, in *Isivivane* signified by the stone circle.

'Cleansing and healing rituals' aim to reconcile in order to build the nation. The divisions of the state, the nine provinces, and the eleven official languages of the South African nation-state plus some languages spoken by communities marked as indigenous, provide references to the political aspects of governing the nation-state.

Spiritual government is enacted in other ways. Bodily gestures of respect are enjoined by the requirements of washing hands or taking off shoes in approaching the stone circle. The space and its aura were sacralised by '[r]eligious leaders from various faiths [who] imbued Isivivane with a deep sense of spirituality by performing a number of sacred ceremonies and rituals that laid to rest the spirits of our fallen heroes and heroines' (Freedom Park [sa]:c).

This form of government is also enacted by the tour guides. During two of my Park visits, a tour guide asked me to cover my hair. He explained that I was a woman and in African culture, women show respect to their ancestors by covering their heads. The male visitors were asked to take off their headpieces for the same reason. When asking about this rule, I was told:

> I think it's whoever was just trying to be creative. (She laughs.) … I think the men normally to show respect they normally take off their hats,

> when they go to certain places but the women you can either cover or you don't. But at Freedom Park it is civil one. It's no rule. It's just that from times people will try to combine their own belief systems or what they know to what they think is appropriate (Mufamadi 2009:19f).

She also explained that it depends on the socialised habits within the communities, concluding: 'So as far as I'm concerned, in Freedom Park, you are not forced to cover your hair as a woman. But the shoes, we don't compromise' (Mufamadi 2009:21).

This incident and the interview passages show how intersecting social dimensions are produced and reproduced in interactions. The male, 'black', 'spiritual' jobholder, the tour guide, has the power – and probably the duty – to define rules, in this case racialised, gendered, and homogenising ones (in both directions: 'African culture' and 'women'/'men'). The surroundings and the practices that they enjoin produce a space of hierarchical relationships: The authorial voice-over from Park guides does not allow visitors to ascribe their own meanings. For the last three years, nobody has been allowed to officially visit the Park independently. A tour guide is obligatory. The Park's management justifies this rule by saying the Park is not yet completed. Even as a researcher, it was difficult to get permission to move around in the Park on my own. I was always followed by security guards.

Jane Mufamadi (2009:3) explains the definition of spirituality chosen for the Park, and the way it works:

> We deliberately chose spirituality and not religion because spirituality, it binds all of us. That is what we strive towards through religion. ... the emphasis is on spirituality to say: Even as we're different in terms of our religious belief systems, ... most of the values within spirituality, they're striving for the same thing: We must be sympathetic. We must respect others. ... I mean if you look at those things, you see those commonalities. So that is why we're emphasising spirituality. And through that we are hoping that it will bring about reconciliation which is what we're trying to highlight.

The function of spirituality is to 'bind us all'; it is used in the Park to establish a sense of national unity. Memorialising the dead as a path to salvation is not for the other world but for the present one. The Park is a heterochronic matrix: present and past are intersecting. At the 'cross/ing', the individual is being led to national collectivity.

> But the narrow limits of this approach give rise to another contradiction: So in telling the story of earth, we are not focusing on the scientific but we're focusing on the spiritual stories or stories that are told within belief systems about how the earth originated and where it comes from or the universe for that matter. ... And coming back to the principles of ... emancipating the African voice ... we will therefore focus on the African story of creation. Because there is an African story of creation and ... once again, it's a story that is [sic] been suppressed ... . And when people hear they say: "Ag, you know, folklore". But if you would say the same of the Bible as example, of Hindu ... (Abrahams 2009:6f).

Establishing new myths is not an act of redress but of reproducing hegemonic structures: The space speaks to and of the political project of forging a sense of belonging to the current nation-state, taking up imaginations of the African Renaissance project. The narrative in Freedom Park aims to give effect to two constructions: that of spiritualised knowledge and 'African identity'. One comes into either through redress of loss suffered in the past.

In summary, the naturalised icons, such as stones (in the Wall of Names and the Gallery of Leaders), fire (the Eternal Flame) or water in Lesaka, signify sacrifice for freedom and humanity. Nature is associated with the nation-state; the nation-state appears natural. The nation-state is the fetish and *telos* within Freedom Park.

Conflicts about loss and remembrance

As long as the dead are spirits without names who died for freedom and humanity, everyone can associate – in his or her own definition of freedom and humanity – certain figures with these two values. But as soon as concrete names are chosen, written on the Wall of Names, or selected as leaders representing social groups within the nation-state in the Gallery of Leaders, conflict becomes visible. Put differently: The more concrete the name of the loss, the more obvious are the fractions that appear as divisions of the constructed national body.

Ramzie Abrahams (2009:5) explains the decision to exclude certain names, based on the putative difference between inclusiveness and integration:

> ... we're going to get a lot of criticism. But we will stand firm in the phase of criticism. ... I mean if you talk about the inclusion of the ex-SADF[5] names on the Wall, it's based on the principle of emancipating the African voice. If we look at the Gallery of Leaders, ... where we've identified 24 leaders to be included in there. Once again there was a public outcry that we are not including Afrikaner leaders. But it is simply that we are basing it on the principle of emancipating the African voice.

Ramzie Abrahams does not only speak about the conflict between racialised groups. Indirectly, he also points to a gap. Only three women figures are represented: a queen, a communist, and the leader of the ANC-women's league. I asked Lauren Marx (2009:14) about this selection:

> What we've tried to do is we've tried to be as representative as possible in terms of gender. But unfortunately, I think we might have not failed in that respect but one has also to take into consideration there were very few female leaders throughout the history of the world. So we have representation of the women but it's very, very little compared to men. Just simply because of the politics of the day ... .

Dead-ends: governmonumental heterotopia

In his paper 'Of other spaces', Foucault (1967:3) defines heterotopias as

> ... real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.

Freedom Park as a legacy project represents the organisational structure of a nation-state hailing its citizens. The term 'citizen' implies equality. But looking at the social life of these citizens brings the inequalities to the fore. The social surrounds of Freedom Park cast a shadow over the values that it espouses – values of freedom and humanity – when spiritual time is over.

Foucault (1967:6) talks about an 'either-or,' when he defines the functions of heterotopias:

> Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory ... . Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation ...

Space and atmosphere are constituted through architecture, social goods and human beings 'in their situated spatial order/ing' (Löw 2008:25). Materialised governmentality is linked to heterotopian space: A relational concept of space makes Freedom Park not a case of 'neither-nor,' but one of 'both-and': Depending on the personal experience or political attitude of visitors, elements of the Park, or the Park as a whole, can be read as illusion. Others may perceive a space of 'perfect arrangement' within the Park, reflecting their own worldview.

In Freedom Park, freedom itself is an illusion: One cannot move free of fear under the supervision of uniformed armed security guards. Their presence recalls everyday life in South Africa with its security guards and gadgets in shopping malls, at workplaces and in the 'gated communities' enclosing those who can afford it.

Getting to Freedom Park, one cannot escape a second reality check: Those living around Salvokop are poor, and while the Park itself aspires to market-oriented liberty, the immediate environs speak of its opposite, namely impoverishment. While questions of class are not considered within the Park, they are posed by its social environment.

Another heterotopia can be juxtaposed to Freedom Park: Pretoria Central Prison, a neighbour of the Park, is one of the biggest prisons of the nation-state South Africa. During the apartheid regime, many detainees were killed in Pretoria Central Prison. Today, individual prisoners reporting experiences of torture at the hands of warders[6] attest to a crisis that calls into question the extent to which the ideals of freedom and humanity are honoured in this limited democracy. As a monument to a new nation-state, Freedom Park incorporates measures to compensate for inequalities and ruptures within the narrative of freedom and humanity. That is why tour guides refer to the University of South Africa (UNISA), to the Union Buildings, and to the Voortrekker Monument as signifiers of a past which seems to have been overcome. But they will probably not name Pretoria Central Prison as a site adjoining Freedom Park.

Freedom Park is a perfect arrangement of selective commemoration and knowledge production based on the creation of a derealised illusory space. Highlighting ruptures and contradictions, and throwing the 'nation' as a hegemonic structure into crisis, would be an opportunity to create an open, participatory and emancipatory space. It would be an opportunity to displace an illusory utopia based on nationalism, governmentality and docility.

In this paper, I have shown how Freedom Park's management has materialised nationalism by using different technologies of power, naturalising constructed identitarian and racialising categories. Freedom Park does not only speak of post-apartheid empowerment and democracy, but also of the discursive and social exclusions of the new nation-state.

Notes

1 The // indicates a click sound in the Khoi-Khoi language.

2 See for example: The Freedom Park Trust [sa] *One step backwards, two steps forward: Towards diversity, unity, reconciliation and nation building. Progress on the mobilisation of the Khoi-San, Indian, Afrikaaner and Coloured constituencies*, Pretoria: Freedom Park Trust.

3 MtDNA signifies mitochondrial deoxyribonucleic acid, which has assumed an important role in genetic ancestry tracing, indicating migration and diffusion from the African continent.

4 See Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:95).

5 SADF stands for South African Defence Force, the apartheid state's army.

6 See the press release by the South African Human Rights Commission of 20 July 2011. [O]. Available: www.sahrc.org.za/home/index.php?ipkMenuID=10&ipkArticleID=71
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