Sheilagh Ilona O’Brien

The Construction of a 'Bitter Hedge': Narrative, Nationalism, and the Construction of Afrikaner Identity in the Voortrekker Monument

ABSTRACT

During the early settlement of South Africa, the governor, Jan Van Riebeeck, grew a hedge of Bitter Almond to divide the fledgling colony from the local population. The journey of the Voortrekkers who escaped British rule into the interior would become an important focal point of Afrikaner nationalism, and the single most important event in Afrikaner history and mythology. The construction of the Voortrekker Monument, and the narrative it presents, are important for understanding how the Afrikaners constructed and used their past. Afrikaners clung to their imagined past in a present where everything seemed doubtful, and in so doing they attempted once again to cut themselves off from the world around them. Through Afrikaner nationalism Jan Van Riebeeck’s ‘Bitter Almond hedge’ returned to South Africa in the twentieth-century.

BIOGRAPHY

Sheilagh Ilona O’Brien has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons), with a double-major in History and First Class Honours, and a Masters of International Studies both from The University of Queensland. She is currently a PhD Candidate in the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at The University of Queensland. Her major fields of interest are oppression and its causes, genocide and communal violence, and history as myth: how we tell narratives about the past.
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ‘BITTER HEDGE’: NARRATIVE, NATIONALISM, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AFRIKANER IDENTITY IN THE VOORTREKKER MONUMENT

This In 1938, centennial celebrations took place upon the site of a nineteenth-century battle at Bloedrivier, in commemoration of the conflict between the Dutch Voortrekkers – who in 1838 were moving north to escape British rule – and the Zulu impiς. At the celebrations a century later, D. F. Malan, the future South African prime minister and champion of apartheid, said:

You stand here upon the boundary of two centuries. Behind you, you rest your eyes upon the year 1838 as upon a high, outstanding mountain-top, dominating everything in the blue distance. Behind you, lie the tracks of the voortrekker wagons, deeply and ireradically etched upon the wide, outstretched plains and across the glistening dragon-tooth mountain ranges of our country’s history. Over those unknown regions which stretch broadly before you, there will also be treks of Ox Wagons. They will be your Ox Wagons, symbolic as you will note, but nonetheless real...  

D. F. Malan’s speech at the Bloedrivier site in 1938 was a masterful piece of oratory that drew together the modern crisis of Afrikaner life. They found themselves in a society economically dominated by the British, numerically and economically endangered by cheap and seemingly inexhaustible African competition for employment, and - as perceived by many Afrikaners - an urban society which challenged the norms of Afrikaner social and cultural mores. The mythical linking of the Battle of Bloedrivier with other periods of heightened threat is the theme not only of the 1880-1881 Transvaal revival movement, but of the 1938 Eeufees, the centenary celebration that culminated in the construction of the Voortrekker Monument. By drawing upon the language and symbolism of Bloedrivier, Malan was likening the ‘heroic struggle’ of the voortrekkers with the struggle for Afrikanerdom in the urban ‘Bloedrivier’ of the twentieth-century. The sense of crisis within Afrikanerdom was both caused by and derived from the rhetoric of political leaders. Therefore, when D. F. Malan claimed that the cities were the “New Bloedrivier,” and that the battle there would be as integral to the survival of Afrikaners as the ‘sacred’ victory at Bloedrivier in the nineteenth century, he was using language that his audience understood. His words emphasised the shared past of the volk in a world in which Afrikaners needed to find a common bond, because the strain of their rapid industrialisation and urbanisation was driving their society apart. It was around the Ox Wagons of the Eeufees that Afrikaners of all socio-economic backgrounds would find a uniting past and language, and this, in some ways, ‘imagined’ past would be used to create an imagined community, a broad identity in which Afrikaners would be united by their fears and their past.

This study will argue that the Voortrekker Monument was constructed as part of a cultural and political process of unifying and empowering Afrikaners through their ‘heroic’ past. Therefore it will firstly outline the early settlement of the Cape and the Voortrekker’s place as a creation myth for Afrikaner nationalism; secondly the revival or creation of this myth as a source of unity in the Transvaal republic during the First Anglo-Boer War; and finally the Centenary of the Great Trek, or Eeufees, of 1938. This will enable a discussion of how these events culminate in the mythology of the Voortrekker Monument itself.

1 D. F. Malan quoted in Anthony D. Smith, Chosen Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 143.
3 Note: The Voortrekker Monument remains, and has become a focal point of some controversy since 1994. See Anton Ehlers, “Apartheid Mythology and Symbolism.”
5 Note: Afrikaner identity was fluid and plural during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, as it was divided geographically, economically and politically. Internal schisms within Afrikaner identity, and the efforts to unite Afrikaners in the early twentieth century, have been examined by many others, including: Ehlers, “Apartheid Mythology and Symbolism”; Grundlingh, “The Politics of the Past and of Popular Pursuits in the Construction of Everyday Afrikaner Nationalism,” in South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities, Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (Eds.) (Capetown: Double Storey Books, 2005), 192; Leonard Thompson, Political Mythology of Apartheid (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); Hermann Giliomee, “The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948,” Journal of South African Studies 29, (June, 2003). See these for the development of Afrikaner nationalist identities and the harnessing of a particular nationalism by the National Party in the late 1940s.
It is of critical importance to place the monument and the role that mythmaking and constructed narratives played, like those found in the monument, in developing Afrikaner nationalism within the context of a constructed separateness. The sense of election, the belief in a chosen volk, established a sense of separateness between the Afrikaners, white Africans, and their English and African neighbours. How this sense of separateness – or election – influenced Afrikaner thinking becomes important when it can be understood that this provided the cultural foundations of apartheid. Rather than disputing that there were both political and economic motivations to the creation of apartheid, this article situates itself within the discourse on the development of the Afrikaner cultural identity which was promulgated by the National Party in the late 1940s. This paper will critically examine the intersection of culture, myth and religion, and argue that, from its earliest days, there were repeated attempts to cut the burghers of the cape, the future Afrikaner, off from the ‘Canaanites’ amongst whom they found themselves.

**THE CAPE COLONY AND THE VOORTREKKERS:**

Early in the settlement, the Commander Jan Van Riebeeck planted a hedge of bitter-almond around the re-fuelling station. This was partially an attempt to keep out the local population and partially because he was against a settlement colony that went beyond the Dutch East India Company’s (VOC) needs and influence. However, this did not prevent the expansion of the re-fuelling station, and neither did it prevent further interaction with the local population.

For most of the history of the Cape settlement, the relationship between the burghers and the VOC was rocky at best, and attempts to rein in, control or punish the burghers usually ended at the point of a gun or the hangman’s noose. The colony’s history of civil unrest and violent outbursts attests to the uneasy relationship between the rulers and the ruled over a long period of time. J. A. Templin argues that this may have led to a somewhat lax rule by the VOC. In 1795-1803, and again from 1806, when the Cape was under British rule, conflict between the authorities and the burghers did not cease. If anything, it was actually intensified by the difficult relationship between the British and their new subjects. By the 1630s a number of incidents had engendered sufficient resentment and anger that some burghers decided to move beyond the borders of the Cape Colony and the reach of the British. Some of these incidents include the bungling of the hangings at Slagtersnek, the emancipation payments for slave owners having to be collected from London, and the British seeming to allow the encroachment of coloureds on ‘Christian’ rights, which fuelled fears of gelykstelling (social levelling).

The resulting Great Trek of the mid 1830s has become one of the most important parts of the mythology of Afrikaner history. The ritual of commemorating the Day of the Covenant – when the Voortrekkers claimed to have made a ‘Covenant’ with God before the Battle of Bloedrivier – became an important unifying date for Afrikaners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Trek itself, with its betrayals, slaughters (on both sides) and feeling of persecuted righteousness on the part of the Afrikaners, lent itself to myth-making and nationalist narrative. Then, following the annexation of each of the independent Boer Republics in turn by the British, and the two Wars of Independence (the Afrikaner terms for the first and second Anglo-Boer Wars of 1880-1881 and 1899-1901), the voortrekkers’ feelings of persecution could be said to have crystallised into a tenet of Afrikaner culture, and certainly Afrikaner politics.

As myth, the Trek from the Cape into the interior from 1835 onwards culminates with victory in Die Slag van Bloedrivier (Battle of Bloedrivier). But the important moment of that battle actually took place before the battle commenced, when Sarel Cilliers, according to his own account, led the Trekkers in a vow that, if God would

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6 See Thompson, Political Mythology of Apartheid.
7 Marq De Villiers, White Tribe Dreaming (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 7-8; Smith, Chosen Peoples, 81.
8 Note: It is not necessary for the purposes of this study to extrapolate on all the incidents and circumstances here. See Hermann Giliomee, The Afrikaners: Biography of a People (Charlottesburg, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2003), Chapter Three “Fractious Frontiersmen,” 58-87 and Chapter Four “Masters, Slaves and Servants: The Fear of Gelykstelling.” 88-129.
11 Note: ‘social leveling’ implies that Afrikaners feared that equality would actually result in a lowering or ‘leveling’ of Afrikaners to the level of ‘lesser’ peoples.
deliver the approximately 500 Voortrekkers under Andries Pretorius' command from the 10,000 Zulu impis (warriors), then that day, 16th December, would be remembered and commemorated as a Sabbath. Although the veracity of the Vow as an historical event is uncertain, its importance lies in the meaning it had acquired by the latter half of the nineteenth century.

**THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE – THE REVIVAL OF THE VOORTREKKERS:**

The Covenant sworn at Bloedrivier in 1838 had been somewhat forgotten in the years following. In the aftermath of the battle, the Trekkers and their leaders seem to have been preoccupied with more immediate matters of survival. For example, Pretorius never again referred to the covenant after 1839. And although the church at Pietermaritzburg was built as promised, ‘The Vow’ or ‘Covenant’ with God was mostly lost as a tradition until it was revived by the new president of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, half a century later, in 1880. Paul Kruger became a symbol of Afrikaner resistance and independence in the north. Kruger had been a part of the Trek as a child and his use of its symbolisim carried many ramifications for Afrikaner identity and rhetoric in the early twentieth century. Allister Sparks, in rather colourful language, describes Kruger thus:

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Kruger was a … man of deep piety and stubborn principle, the archetypal Boer, who believed emphatically … that the “old people” of the Trek were indeed the Elect of God who had been led out of bondage to the Transvaal. He was an Abraham to his people, and as he watched the teeming gold-reef city rise just thirty-five miles from his capital he trembled for them... it was a gift from Satan that would bring ... back the British.
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Therefore, Kruger’s revival of the Covenant in 1880-1881 could be seen to draw upon two important sources of personal belief. Kruger’s devout religious beliefs, which included a belief in the divine gift of the Transvaal to the Afrikaners, as well as their place as the elect of God, led to his acting to defend his people from the perilous encroachment of those he considered lesser peoples. This emphasis on religion and on the centrality of God in the political life of Afrikaners created a religious idiom for Afrikaner politicians. Later politicians like D. F. Malan, and movements like the Ossewabrandwag, the nascent National Party, and even the likes of the United Party’s J. B. M. Hertzog and Jan Smuts would draw upon biblical and trekker imagery in the same way as Kruger.

During the First War of Independence against the British (1880-81), the Vow and the Covenant became important symbols for the Voortrekker Republics. During a long meeting at Paardekraal from 5-16th December 1880, the covenant was symbolically renewed by between four and six thousand Boers, led by Paul Kruger placing stones on a cairn. This ceremony gave a central symbolic role to the Vow, and it gained much of its mythic impetus from these events.

The years 1880-81 are often cited as a pivotal moment in the development of Afrikaner nationalism. During this period, the Afrikaners managed, through the perceived righteousness of their struggle against British Imperialism, and their consequent defeat of the British Army, to trigger a nationalist response which was not limited to the Transvaal region alone, but spread across the whole of South Africa. H. Lemmer and Paul

14 Note: It has been suggested that the commemoration occurred in private. However, there is simply no evidence to support any claims that the Covenant played any significant role in Afrikaner society between 1838 and 1880, apart from being a holiday in the South African Republic (also known as the Transvaal) from 1865. See Leonard M. Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), Chapter 5 “The Covenant,” 144 -188.
16 Ibid., 166.
19 Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War*, 81-82.
20 Note, Hertzog had formerly been the leader of the National Party.
Kruger, speaking at a great festival at Paardekraal in 1881, drew direct comparisons between the Afrikaners of the South African Republic and the Old Testament’s Exodus. J. S. Du Plessis stated: “There can be no greater miracles and wonders than in the War of Freedom... God’s hand was so evident that even blind heathen and unbelievers had to acknowledge that it was God’s hand.”

Their perceived idea of the ‘chosen people’ placed into Africa, surrounded by an impenetrable barrier placed there by God’s providence, was central to the words and beliefs of the Afrikaner leaders of the late-nineteenth century. They still believed the British as a threat, and feared how the encroachment of non-Afrikaners into the Republics would affect their future. But it seemed, for now at least, that the hand of Providence was protecting them: a new bitter hedge which, like the Laager at Bloed Rivier, seemed to enable them to survive against the large, powerful foes surrounding them.

Their belief in their election and special status – like that of the old Israelites – was both heightened and tested by the discovery of large deposits of gold and diamonds in the Traansvaal. The ‘land of milk and honey’ the Afrikaners had found was to prove a bitter blessing. The discovery of those deposits and the resistance of the Afrikaners to increasing encroachment by the British ensured that the peace of the republics was short-lived. The Second War of Independence (often referred to as the Anglo-Boer War) from 1899-1902, saw an overwhelming British force defeat the independent Boer Republics, followed by four decades of struggle by Afrikaner nationalists against the British conquerors, who imposed a series of humiliations upon them.

The defeat significantly disrupted life in what had been the independent republics in the north. Many lost their land and livelihood, and there was a mass urbanisation after the war which furthered their sense of dislocation. The war and its aftermath were a bitter experience for many Afrikaners in the north and a confusing one for Afrikaners in the Cape Colony, who felt disconnected from the British under whom they were now living. The further humiliations of the Milner period in the first decade of the twentieth century, together with the urbanisation and industrialisation of Afrikaners, enabled a nascent nationalism upon which the Eeufees built.

### 1938 – Eeufees:

The mass public celebrations revolving around the re-creation of the Ox-Wagon trek occurred at a time when Afrikaner society was closing in upon itself. Only a decade later, the cracks within Afrikanerdom would be papered over by the National Party’s victory and the implementation of apartheid. The 1938 celebrations were seen as a sign that there was a way to unite Afrikaners of different socio-economic and political backgrounds, via an imagined past which created the community of the present. This ‘imagined community’ was constructed and drawn upon because it had features of its past which could unite it ethnically, and a present in which its very survival was threatened. The ‘Election’ myth of the Covenant allows a feeling of security, what Anthony D. Smith would categorise as an emigrant-colonialist pattern of survival through a myth that legitimises the presence and protection of the settlers.

Albert Grundlingh argues that the events of 1938 were “[c]entral to the development of popular nationalism” amongst Afrikaners. The cross-class appeal of the celebration of the Great Trek in 1938 may have provided inspiration for middle-class nationalists, both in creating their popular nationalism, and forming it to appeal to the greatest number of Afrikaners, thus papering over the socio-economic and geographic cracks that divided Afrikaners. Clearly, memories of the past appealed to most Afrikaners of all ages, classes and political allegiances, providing political capital through use of the past to shape modern Afrikaner attitudes.

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25 See Gillomée, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism.” Note: Eeufees can be roughly translated as ‘centenary celebration.’
the heroic struggles of Afrikaner history came to dominate Afrikaner political rhetoric in the 1930s and 40s, as the different parties struggled to articulate a message and project a unified identity onto an Afrikaner community which was far from unified. Leonard Thompson further argues that the Covenant and Vow became “the very heart” of the events of 1938. This central place of the past in popular memory implies that these events struck a deep chord with modern Afrikaners, focusing them upon what made them “Afrikaner” and others not.

Fredrik Barth argues that the boundaries to which “we must give our attention are ... social boundaries.” These boundaries have to be maintained in a plural community by determining membership, and by ways of signalling both membership and exclusion from the social order. Barth therefore argues that these ethnic groups maintain their identity “by continual expression and validation.” This boundary maintenance is exhibited by the maintenance and display of cultural markers. For Afrikaners, these included venerating the Trek, and its paraphernalia, including the wearing of ‘traditional’ dress and eating ‘traditional’ food.

The mass celebrations of 1938 echoed the revival of the Covenant in 1880-81 in that they occurred when Afrikaner nationalists felt threatened by forces which they perceived as endangering their community and culture. The Trek itself, and the Laager, were symbols of a freer, ‘purer,’ less complicated time, and the Battle of Bloedrivier represented Afrikaner ascendency and achievement. Pretorius and the Trekkers were a vision of a purer, rural, victorious past where God’s ‘chosen’ people defeated their enemy because of their unique qualities.

**THE VOORTREKKER MONUMENT AND ITS NARRATIVE:**

The Voortrekker Monument was designed to be a “legal text, built in stone, conferring the right to ownership of the veldt on the Afrikaners.” The Monument’s architect, Gerard Moerdijk, further stated that the Monument serves as “the symbolic resting place of Piet Retief and his comrades” (voortrekkers who had died in a Zulu ambush) – this resting place is symbolised by the cenotaph that is the focal point of the building.

The Voortrekker Monument embodies several principal myths which the Monument was supposed to instill. Elizabeth Delmont sees this as part of a “deliberate campaign to construct, foster and mobilise Afrikaner identity in the 1930s.” It achieved this firstly through commemoration of the past, and in particular through the heroism and ‘sacrifice’ of the Voortrekkers. It is this ethos of self sacrifice and struggle which lends the Great Trek its heroic motif. The Trek and its participants become visionaries: mythic heroes who fled injustice and founded a new land. Secondly, the Monument emphasised the special bond between Afrikaners and their country, Delmont utilises Norman Etherington’s argument that the myth and nationalist sentiment fostered by


32 Ibid., 15.

33 Ibid.

34 Albert Grundlingh, “The Politics of the Past and of Popular Pursuits,” 193-195; see also Chapter Two above.


36 Giliomee, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism,” 139-140.  

37 Note: For Afrikaners and the idea of the past and land in Afrikaner identity see Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land: Land, Landscapes and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006), Chapter 2 “Memory and Inscription,” 34-54; Chapter 3 “Map and Monument,” 55-72; Chapter 4 “A Failed Eden” 75-88.


39 G. Moerdijk, “Design and Symbolism of the Voortrekker Monument,” in “The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth”; Elizabeth Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument,” *South African Historical Journal* 29 (Nov. 1993):76-101: 81. Note: Moerdijk was a somewhat controversial choice. His final design was also controversial as it has been suggested that it was heavily influenced by German nationalist monuments, such as the Völkerschlachtdenkmal. See Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument.”

40 Ibid., 76.

41 Smith, *Chosen People*, 40-42.

the Voortrekker monument is a white, ‘African’ nationalism. Delmont also identifies the ‘myth of the Calvinist paradigm,’ which argues that a strict form of Calvinism was a central cause of the Trek, as its followers, who had arrived from Europe in the seventeenth-century, sought to remain pure and separate. This ‘myth’ therefore bestows divine sanction on the self-sacrifice of the Afrikaners of the Great Trek, and their claim to the land.

These three myths are intertwined as they complement each other in the creation of an heroic past and the suggestion of an heroic destiny which, like the past, is divinely sanctioned, and may require some form of struggle and sacrifice in order to ensure the continuation of the people. Therefore, the building and its mythology not only created Moerdijk’s symbolic resting place for fallen Afrikaner heroes, but also embodied an Afrikaner parable about struggle, sacrifice, election, and victory through faith.

The elevated site for the Voortrekker Monument was doubtless selected because of its visibility from the city of Pretoria and the surrounding countryside, and from that position it tends to both dominate and overlook the land. The site also links the monument to Paul Kruger and the revival during the Transvaal Republic through its being placed in his capital, and to the trek itself, as Pretoria is named for the leader of the voortrekkers who fought at Bloedrivier. The building itself is a square four level granite construction whose entrance is approached by an imposing flight of stairs. There are large latticed stone-covered window arches on each of the four sides, and its circular roof dome is supported on pendentives rising above four short barrel vaults. Gerard Moerdijk intended the building to be understood from the central point outwards. That central focal point of the building’s construction is a cenotaph on the second floor, which is an enclosed stone area measuring 34.5 meters square, and is one level below the entry level. The Hall of the Cenotaph is decorated with old Afrikaner flags representing the Voortrekkers and the Boer Republics, a painting by W. H. Coetzer, and a tapestry. Against the northern wall of this ‘mausoleum’ is the ‘eternal’ flame lit in 1938 during the centenary celebrations.

The cenotaph, which is the focal point of the Monument, has alternately been interpreted or described either as a ‘resting place’ of those, who, like Piet Retief, fell during the Great Trek, or as a symbolic altar. It is made of red granite, from the Parys region of the Free State, and is inscribed with a phrase from Die Stem van Suid-Afrika (The Call of South Africa), “Ons Vir Jou Suid-Afrika” (We for thee South Africa). The architect called the Cenotaph “The altar, i.e. the symbol of sacrifice…” thereby drawing on metaphors of both sacrifice, and religion, the second of which is further emphasised by the beam of sunlight which falls from the oculus in the dome directly on to the cenotaph’s inscription at noon on 16 December each year.

The ‘eternal’ flame, lit in 1938, which is positioned near the ‘head’ of the cenotaph, in between military flags, signifies a relationship between the monument and other war memorials. The symbolism of the cenotaph itself aligns with the idea of the ‘unknown soldier.’ It can also be seen as equivalent with an altar as it was designed to be treated as such, in that those who stood over it had to bow their heads.

The ‘Hall of Heroes,’ which is actually on the entry level of the Voortrekker Monument, is a square space, surrounding a circular hole in the floor, allowing a view of the Cenotaph below. Around the four walls, beginning on either side of the entrance, runs a marble frieze, 2.3 meters high and 92 metres long, depicting 27 ‘scenes’ from Voortrekker history. Italian marble is used in the frieze, but the rest of the marble, in particular

44 Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument,” 78.
45 Smith, Chosen Peoples, 40-41; 78-80.
46 Beningfield, The Frightened Land, 55-56.
47 Ibid., 57.
52 Quoted in Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument,” 81.
54 Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument,” 81.
the floor, which is laid in a pattern which suggests water, comes from the quarries at Marble Hall, in the Northern Province.\textsuperscript{56} The frieze surrounds the patterned floor, which in turn ripples outwards from the Cenotaph. There are, however, certain problems with its depictions of both the Volkserschlichtidenkmal, in Leipzig, the European geometry of the building and the African motifs in the friezes, had an emotional impact on its visitors. In spite of seemingly imitating a European building, the form of the Laager and the decoration point towards a fusion of Africa and Europe. Melinda Silverman argues that it is ‘almost impossible to separate politics from its design,’ stating that the ‘entire design was intended as a political statement, from its position on the skyline to its harnessing a natural phenomenon – sunlight – to fall on a certain point on a certain day.’\textsuperscript{60} In other words the mixture accurately reflected the idea of Afrikaners being both white and naturally African.

Outside the front entrance to the monument stands a statue of a woman and two children, behind whom four wildebeest are carved into the stone. The woman represents not only the sacrifices made by women during the trek, and their role as mothers of the volk, but also civilisation and morality, which she embodies as a Voortrekker vroue (woman).\textsuperscript{59} Surrounding the Monument building is a circular wall consisting of a half relief of a laager of ox wagons – 64 wagons – the number forming the laager at Bloedrivier.\textsuperscript{60}

In recent years a debate around the monument’s religious narrative has arisen, with Alta Steenkamp in particular claiming that the Monument – whether consciously or unconsciously – mimics Masonic architecture.\textsuperscript{61} However it seems likely that this imitation of Masonic forms would not have been obvious to the majority of visitors, and that the impressive and overwhelming form of the building, like the Masonic Volkerschlichtidenkmal, in Pretoria, and which also provides the entrance to the small domelike structure at the very top of the monument, detailing the history of the Trek, and the monument. The top level is a balcony permitting panoramic views of Pretoria, and which also provides the entrance to the small domelike structure at the very top of the monument, where a circular opening, like the one in the floor of the Hall of Heroes, allows the viewer to see down into the levels below, right through to the cenotaph, and if looking up, to the oculus in the roof which funnels sunlight down onto the cenotaph below).\textsuperscript{58}

Located on the level below the Cenotaph is a museum of the Great Trek itself, complete with dioramas of Voortrekker scenes, a wagon and cannon, as well as a detailed set of displays (in both English and Afrikaans) detailing the history of the Trek, and the monument. The top level is a balcony permitting panoramic views of Pretoria, and which also provides the entrance to the small domelike structure at the very top of the monument, where a circular opening, like the one in the floor of the Hall of Heroes, allows the viewer to see down into the levels below, right through to the cenotaph, and if looking up, to the oculus in the roof which funnels sunlight down onto the cenotaph below).\textsuperscript{58}

The monument’s narrative emphasises not only the ‘mythic’ past of Afrikaner nationalism but the ‘natural’ place of Afrikaners, both geographically within South Africa and symbolically within God’s favour. The ray of sunlight is not meant to be seen as a ‘natural phenomenon,’ but as a benediction from God upon the Afrikaner people and their sacrifice for ‘their’ nation. History, and in particular narrative history, is integral to any group which identifies itself as having a united or interconnected past. The ‘sense’ of that past, and the actual memories which create the ‘sense of history’ which is personal and private, influence the vernacular culture, and therefore the identity of the community.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., “The Hall of Heroes”.
\textsuperscript{59} Note: “The sculptor was Anton van Wouw. The sculpture pays homage to the strength and courage of the Voortrekker women and family who made both the Great Trek and the eventual settlement of the interior possible. Without their contribution the Trek may only have been a scouting expedition, because the Voortrekkers literally ‘emigrated’ with everything they possessed to a new fatherland. On both sides of the sculpture wildebeest are chiselled in the walls of the Monument – symbolically depicting the dangers of Africa. Their symbolic flight implies that the woman, carrier of Western civilisation, is triumphant.” Voortrekker Monument Group, Information Sheet. \url{http://www.voortrekkermon.org.za/documents/click1_mon.pdf}, 14/10/2009 Accessed 14.10.2009
\textsuperscript{60} In other words the mixture accurately reflected the idea of Afrikaners being both white and naturally African.
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\textsuperscript{60} Recent years a debate around the monument’s religious narrative has arisen, with Alta Steenkamp in particular claiming that the Monument – whether consciously or unconsciously – mimics Masonic architecture. However it seems likely that this imitation of Masonic forms would not have been obvious to the majority of visitors, and that the impressive and overwhelming form of the building, like the Masonic Volkerschlichtidenkmal, in Leipzig,\textsuperscript{58} the European geometry of the building and the African motifs in the friezes, had an emotional impact on its visitors. In spite of seemingly imitating a European building, the form of the Laager and the decoration point towards a fusion of Africa and Europe. Melinda Silverman argues that it is ‘almost impossible to separate politics from its design,’ stating that the ‘entire design was intended as a political statement, from its position on the skyline to its harnessing a natural phenomenon – sunlight – to fall on a certain point on a certain day.’ In other words the mixture accurately reflected the idea of Afrikaners being both white and naturally African.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibíd., “The Hall of Heroes”.
\textsuperscript{59} Note: “The sculptor was Anton van Wouw. The sculpture pays homage to the strength and courage of the Voortrekker women and family who made both the Great Trek and the eventual settlement of the interior possible. Without their contribution the Trek may only have been a scouting expedition, because the Voortrekkers literally ‘emigrated’ with everything they possessed to a new fatherland. On both sides of the sculpture wildebeest are chiselled in the walls of the Monument – symbolically depicting the dangers of Africa. Their symbolic flight implies that the woman, carrier of Western civilisation, is triumphant.” Voortrekker Monument Group, Information Sheet. \url{http://www.voortrekkermon.org.za/documents/click1_mon.pdf}, 14/10/2009 Accessed 14.10.2009
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Whether the events which comprise the narrative of Afrikaner history in the Monument actually took place or not is to an extent irrelevant. If enough Afrikaners believed in that particular narrative then that narrative has emotional power over any other narrative, and says much about the society in which it is perceived to be the ‘true’ narrative. The ‘imaginary’ events of Afrikaner history create a particular identity which is believed to be true because it is informed by a narrative of ‘history’.

CONCLUSION:

Those who constructed the monument were seeking to ‘dynamise’ the Nationalist movement. Christoph Marx argues that the importance of the Trek, the Eeufees and the monument ‘can be understood only when seen in the context of the claim to power that it expresses.’ And they succeeded: a large number of Afrikaners in the early twentieth century were energised by the events of the Eeufees, by the special identity it gave them as a chosen people. This identity was not ‘primordial’. It had not, as the Nationalists claimed, simply been ‘awakened.’ It had been constructed upon the myths and culture of Afrikaners, formed and altered from its original shape by ideologues who believed in a ‘pure’ Afrikanerdom.

The Chosen People had made it past the physical barriers of the Bitter Almond Hedge: they had defeated the Africans on the battlefield, and the British imperialists were in retreat from Southern Africa in the aftermath of the Second World War. But the Afrikaners were trapped by their socio-economic fragmentation. Poor Afrikaners were in danger of ‘gelykstelling’ into the urban poor, living amongst blacks, coloureds and Asians. The new middle-class of small town lawyers, domingoes and rural landowners were declining in power as their poorer neighbours flocked to the cities, and the few wealthy Afrikaners seemed to have been seduced by ‘English’ culture. Afrikaners were under social, cultural and economic assault. They could not escape the feeling of being degraded and assaulted by the strange new world of an urban, industrialised, British South Africa. They had carried the Bitter Hedge with them, a sense of separateness, taking with them a mental barrier against external threat, which, like their Laagers, could defend them from the unwanted outsiders. The Afrikaner nationalists were an ethnie calling on their ‘glorious’ past to legitimise a present in which they were struggling in the lower rungs economically, socially, and, at times, politically.

The Afrikaners found a uniting call in their special past, and their chosen status. They believed they were the true children of the land. This was expressed by Herman Charles Bosman (1905-1951) who in the late 1940s wrote: ‘We Afrikaners ... we’ve got a feeling for the country that is part of our blood. I can pick up a clod of earth, red Transvaal earth, between my fingers and crumble it. Where’s your intellect and economics then? What English-speaking South African has got that? It is only we Boers that have got it.’

Bosman’s invocation of the ‘red’ earth, and their innate, natural sense of it, rather than an intellectual or economic sense of it, places the Afrikaners within their own ‘natural’ setting. It also implies that only the Boers truly love the land for itself. They are not interested in the economic or strategic importance of the earth; they just want ‘their’ country for which they have historically sacrificed so much – ‘Ons Vir Jou Suid-Africa as it is written on the cenotaph at the monument itself. The power in the symbols of land, blood, people and destiny were important to the nationalist Afrikaner identity which developed in the first half of the twentieth century and particularly to its ability to survive and even thrive in a country economically and politically dominated by the British and their Empire, and numerically, economically and socially threatened by the Africans surrounding them.

The Monument was designed as a focal point for Afrikanerdom. It was about survival and destiny, writ large in granite and marble. The Monument became a symbol of the ability of Afrikanerdom to unify around its past triumphs and its present fears, and the resurgence as a political power within South Africa that would be built

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64 Ibid., 849.
66 Ibid., 280.
69 Ibid., 323-324.
70 Note, a dominee is a Pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church.
upon the narrative of the past, and fears for the survival of Afrikanerdom. The new ‘Bitter Hedge’ of Afrikaner politics would soon follow as the newly reformed National Party's policy of *apartheid*.