

Master thesis in Cultural Studies at the Institute of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Study of Religions, at the University of Bergen

One battle, two museums

A study of cultural discourses and categorizations at the Bloedrivier and the Ncome Heritage Sites in South Africa



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*This thesis is dedicated to Albert Larkeson Nowostawski.
Bunnies and birds will never be the same again.*

ABSTRACT

I denne masteroppgåva har eg tatt for meg to sørafrikanske museum og sett på diskursar som dei er del av, og er med på å skape, endre og stadfeste. Heilt generelt handlar oppgåva om bruk av historie i ein sørafrikansk kontekst. Ho er basert på tre månader med feltarbeid gjort hausten 2008, dokumentanalyse, kvalitative intervju, deltakande observasjon og utstillingsanalyse. Dette materialet ser eg som ulike uttrykk for politiske, etniske og vitskapelege diskursar.

For 170 år sidan fann det stad eit slag mellom zuluar og afrikandarar ved Ncome Bloedrivier i Sør Afrika. Afrikandarane vann slaget mot ein tallmessig overlegen zulu hær. Denne sigeren vart etter kvart del av ei opphavsmyte for afrikandarar. Staden for slaget vart markert med to museum, begge sett opp på 1990talet, etter at Sør Afrika vart demokratisk. Det eine, Bloedrivier Museum, vart sett opp for å feire afrikandarane sin siger; det andre, Ncome Museum, vart sett opp for å markerer heltemotet til zuluane.

Musea er del av diskursar som forklarar slaget på ulike måtar, og er sjølve med på å forme desse forklaringane og meiningane. Tradisjonelt har forteljingar om slaget ved Ncome Bloedrivier framheva positive sider ved afrikandarane si oppleving. Slike forteljingar har etterkvart oppnådd ein hegemonisk posisjon i store delar av Sør Afrika, og det afrikandiske museet tek dels del i ein slik hegemonisk tradisjon. Ncome Site vart sett opp som ein reaksjon på denne hegemoniske tradisjonen, og framhevar i staden zulukulturen sin plass i denne delen av Sør Afrika. I den hegemoniske diskursen vert slaget sett som eit teikn frå Gud om at afrikandarane tilhørde dette landet, og hadde rett til å vere her. Slaget var lenge viktig for afrikandarane, men vart etter kvart også viktig for zuluar og andre 'svarte' sørafrikanarar. For eksempel såg ANC på slaget som bevis på at dei kunne bruke våpen og fysisk makt i kampen for rettferd og demokrati.

I dag blir årsdagen for slaget, 16 desember, markert på begge musea, og det er ein offentleg fridag. Den nye regjeringa etter 1994 kalla dagen *Forsoningsdagen*, men markeringane på staden for slaget ber preg av at forsoning ikkje har ein sentral plass i feiringa, med eit sterkt skilje mellom dei 'kvite' på Bloedrivier Site, og dei 'svarte' på Ncome Site.

Det same kraftige skiljet mellom zuluar og afrikandarar fann eg også i utstillingane i dei to musea. Dei bar preg av ei dikotomisering der dei to etniske gruppene spegla seg i kvarandre. Andre etniske grupper vart sett som irrelevante begge stader. Dette var særleg tydeleg i Bloedrivier si utstilling, der 'svarte' og andre som var saman med afrikandarane ofte er namnlause og utan identitet. Det var også tydeleg i Ncome si utstilling, der konfliktar mellom dei som heldt til i området og som i dag blir sett som zuluar, er tona ned, eller sett vekk frå. Dikotomisering og ekskludering har såleis ein klarare plass i utstillingane ved dei to musea enn budskapet om forsoning.

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Finally and most importantly, I wish to thank Dag, my husband, for his patience and for his presence.

Bergen, May 2009

Line Førre Grønstad

In the photograph on the front page: From the top left: Khonzile Ndlovu, and her adult niece, Phakamile Mbatha. Bottom from the left: Mickey and Sqieh Ndlovu.

All photographs in the thesis are taken by the author.

PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Cecilia Kruger was interviewed by e-mail. She participated in the making of the present exhibition in the Bloedrivier Site.

Nhlanhla Mkhulisi was interviewed at the Ncome Site. He is the manager of the Ncome Site.

Dawie Viljoen was interviewed at the Bloedrivier Site. He is the manager of the Bloedrivier Site.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Afrikaans	Originally it was a Dutch creole language spoken by slaves and servants. Today it is spoken by the Afrikaners in South Africa, as well as by a large 'Coloured' population.
Afrikaner	Ethnic group in South Africa. Their ancestors were mainly Dutch and German, but also French and 'Coloured'.
Bloedrivier Heritage Site	Name of an area west of the river Ncome Bloedrivier with two Afrikaner monuments and one museum. In the thesis it will also be called the Bloedrivier Site.
Bloedrivier Museum	The museum that is situated on the Bloedrivier Heritage Site.
Boer	Meaning <i>farmer</i> in Afrikaans, and is often used as name for Afrikaners.
'Coloured'	Usually a person with 'mixed' ancestry. It was an important category during the apartheid system, and still plays an important role.
Great Trek	Migration movement in the 1830s, where many Afrikaners (and others following them) travelled in search for new land, away from the British rule in the Western Cape.
Laager	Battle formation for Afrikaners in the 1800s. Ox-wagons were put in a large circle, front to back, and used as a movable fort.
Ncome/Bloedrivier/Blood River	These are all names given a river in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, by which a battle took place in 1838. The names are in Zulu, Afrikaans and English, respectively.
Ncome Bloedrivier Heritage Site	Name of the areas on both sides of the river Ncome Bloedrivier, consisting of both the Bloedrivier and the Ncome Sites.
Ncome Heritage Site	Name of an area east of the river Ncome Bloedrivier where a Zulu monument has been erected, containing a museum. In this thesis it will also be called the Ncome Site.
Ncome Museum	The museum situated at the Ncome Heritage Site.
Ndebele	An ethnic group in South Africa with language similar to Zulu, and originating from the same area.

Sotho	An ethnic group in South Africa. Many people living in the region where the museums in this thesis are situated, are Sothos.
Voortrekker	Meaning <i>someone trekking in front</i> in Afrikaans, and is often used for the Afrikaners trekking east in the 1830s, participating in the <i>Great Trek</i> .
Zulu	An ethnic group in South Africa, claiming origins from the early 1800s. The Zulus lived mainly in the eastern parts of South Africa.
ANC	African National Congress, political party supported by a majority of 'Blacks'.
DACST	The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in South Africa.
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party. Political party supported mainly by Zulus.
SAMA	The South African Museum Association.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Of all the documented historical events in the history of South Africa the battle at Blood River stands out as the greatest, but also the most tragic, moment of all. The memory of this great battle will live on as a marker on the path of South Africa.

(DVD at Bloedrivier Museum, 2003)

On a large, open field, surrounded by hills and small, scattered farms, is a collection of monuments. Two are situated on one side of a river, one on the other. All three commemorate the same battle between Zulus and Voortrekkers (often known as Boers, and today usually called Afrikaners), on 16 December 1838. Two of the monuments celebrate the victory of the Voortrekkers, one the bravery of the Zulus. Both the Voortrekker monuments have the ox-wagon as motif. The older of the two was inaugurated in 1947, and is situated next to a museum presenting an Afrikaner version of the battle. The newer monument from 1971 is the size of a small soccer field, and consists of 64 ox-wagons in natural size, made out of bronze, and placed in a semicircle. The monument on the other side of the river is a terracotta coloured rounded building, with big shields on the outside facing the larger ox-wagon monument. Inside the monument is a museum where the focus is on the Zulu version of the battle.



To the left: the bronze ox-wagon replicas; to the right the Ncome Monument. The picture has been stretched a little upwards in order to show more clearly the two sites.

Being less than one hundred metres apart, the two sites are divided by big fences on both sides as well as a river. The river is called *Ncome* in Zulu, meaning *praise*. After the battle, the Afrikaners gave it the name *Bloedrivier*, meaning *Blood River*, and all three names are in use today. To get from one museum to the other you have to drive three kilometres. Together the two museum areas are called *The Ncome Bloedrivier Heritage Site* (Ndhlovu & Shabalala, 2004).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On my first visit to the site in 2004, then as an exchange student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I was greatly fascinated with the place. The peace and quiet was broken only by birds, a rooster, and the occasional shouting of children chasing cattle away from their homesteads. On a

plain of dry grass the 64 ox-wagons seemed strangely out of place, and the existence of two museums focusing on the same battle sparked a curiosity that led to choosing them as focal point for this thesis. Which conditions made it possible to divide the narration of the story into one side for the winners and one for the losers?

I was not alone at the site. Now and then a tourist bus, filled with Europeans with big cameras, and 4x4 pick-ups filled with khaki dressed 'White' Afrikaners, arrived at the Bloedrivier Site¹. Some of the Afrikaners had relatives who had fought in the battle. Some of them also visited the Ncome Site. But most of them went to the Bloedrivier Site only before returning home, or heading for the next battle site, on the dusty gravel road. It seemed to me as though the Ncome Museum was not relevant to them, and its existence not important.

The existence of two museums focusing on the same subject reminded me of the strict divisions and dichotomizations that I had experienced elsewhere in South Africa. Later, when learning about the idea of *discourses* I saw it as a possible perspective that might provide some insights into what I saw as an oddity – having two museums on the same subject on the same site - and also the separations and dichotomizations characterizing South Africa. My main questions in this thesis are:

- Why are there two museums at the Ncome Bloedrivier Heritage Site?
- How do they relate to each other?
- How do they present the story of the battle at the Ncome Bloedrivier 16 December 1838?
- How can the cultural discourses that the two museums take part in be characterized?

The three main chapters in the thesis will look at these questions from different perspectives. The first question I will provide an answer to in chapter three, where I also elaborate on the relationship between two museums. The second question is dealt with in chapter four as well, where I also take a closer look at the presentations of the museums. These presentations are discussed in chapter two as well. In order to understand more about the two museums, a closer look at the historical background for the battle is needed, which is the main purpose of chapter two. Some tendencies of cultural discourses can be seen all through the thesis, and key words such as *categories* and *dichotomization* in the South African context, will be touched upon all through the thesis, but mostly in chapter four, when the exhibitions themselves are analysed.

¹ When talking about the battle site, including both museum sites, I will call them the *Ncome Bloedrivier Site*. The *Bloedrivier Site* refers to the 'Afrikaner side' of the river. The *Ncome Site* refers to the 'Zulu side' of the river. More on these distinctions and problematic categorizations further in the thesis.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH – MUSEUMS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Much work has been done internationally and locally in South Africa, on changes in the meaning of museums the last thirty years or more. Often termed ‘post-colonialism’, ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and the possibility of only one ‘truth’ or one narrative, have been challenged. This section concentrates mainly on research done in a South African context, but it will start by briefly mentioning some European research.

RESEARCH ON EUROPEAN AND NORWEGIAN MUSEUMS

The important book series *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (edited by Karp & Lavine, 1991), *The politics of public culture* (edited by Karp, Lavine, & Kreamer, 1992), and *Museum Frictions. Public cultures/Global transformation* (edited by Karp, Kratz, Szwaya, & Ybarra-Frausto, 2006), are examples of such research. Questions of ethnicity, power relations between minority and majority, and especially how European museums have treated material from previous colonies and ethnic minorities have been analyzed within the framework of the new ideas.

Some Norwegian museums and scholars deal with similar questions. Hans Phillip Einarsen is the author of *Between homes of wonder and fighting places. Museums and the multicultural reality*² (2005). He is employed at the *Intercultural Museum* in Oslo, which was put up due to the lack of inclusion of minority groups in Norwegian museums. The publication deals with the multicultural reality of the Norwegian society in relation to museums. Einarsen has done research on the role of museums amongst present day Norwegians of Pakistani and of Kurdish backgrounds. His conclusion points at the continued importance of museums (not surprisingly), but also that the meaning of such institutions differs for different individuals and groups.

Other research related to the Norwegian situation is for instance the PhD thesis *Identities, ethnicities and borderzones: examples from Finnmark, Northern Norway* by Kjell Ole Kjærland Olsen (2008). He looks at how Sámi culture is being presented in different Norwegian institutions and museums. The Sámi peoples belong to minority groups traditionally living in the northern parts of Norway³. Until recently they were discriminated with regard to language and culture by the Norwegian society. One form of Sámi life, reindeer farming, is often presented as the paradigmatic Sámi way of living. Many Sámi people, though, are engaged in modern and diverse life-forms, and an artificial line is often being drawn between the ‘real’ Sámi and those acting differently, as well as between Sámi people and Norwegians. In a South African context this is similar to those seeking proper ‘Afrikaner-ness’ or ‘Zulu-ness’, a subject that will be touched upon in chapter four.

² The title is in Norwegian: *Mellom undringshem og kamparenaer. Museer og den flerkulturelle virkeligheten.*

³ But also some smaller Sámi populations live in Sweden, Finland and Russia.

RESEARCH ON SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUMS

According to the political scientist Thomas Blaser, research on museums in a European context, has usually been done on “subordinate minorities” (2004: 182). In South Africa a previously advantaged minority has for a long time ruled the museums. In the last fifteen years, after the 1994 elections, this has slowly changed. South African museums catered mainly for the 'White' minority audience, and still do in many cases, but certain changes have occurred (Dubin, 2006; Hall, 1995; Martin, 1994; Ndlovu & Dlamuka, 2002; Wakashe, 2001). The west African based museologist Claude Daniel Ardouin has pointed out that museums need to adjust to local culture and heritage in order to be relevant (1993). Diversity is acknowledged, and many South African museums now see their role as critical practice, acknowledged for example at a Canberra conference in 2000 (McIntyre & Wehner, 2001).

Both museums in this thesis were put up with these discussions in the background. The Ncome Heritage Site was put up directly as part of this transformation process. In 1987 the South African Museum Association (SAMA) arranged a conference where a declaration was made: The museums were to cater for all South Africans, regardless of colour or ethnic background (www.SAMAweb.org.za). Not all museums agreed with this approach, however certain changes occurred. Also important was Nelson Mandela's speech in 1997 at the opening of the Robben Island Museum on the site where he had been a political prisoner for 18 years. He made a point of the lack of monuments and museums celebrating 'Blacks' and other 'non-Whites' in South Africa (Coombes, 2004; Galla, 1999; Ndhlovu & Dlamuka, 2002).

Many researchers have come up with valuable ideas and important arguments related to the developing of more inclusive museums in South Africa (for example Coombes, 2004; Dubin, 2006; Galla, 1999; Goodnow, Lohman, & Bredekamp, 2006; Martin, 1994; Rassol & Prosalendis, 2001; Rodehn, 2009; Solani & Mpumlwana, 2001; Wright & Mazel, 1991). However, the Ncome Bloedrivier Site is hardly mentioned internationally, except for a few pages in art historian Steven C. Dubin's book *Transforming Museums. Mounting Queen Victoria in a Democratic South Africa* (2006), and in the PhD thesis *Lost in Transformation. A critical study of two South African museums* by the Swedish museologist Cecilia Rodehn (2008a). Dubin has visited several museums in South Africa. Rodehn studied two museums in Pietermaritzburg. Her focus has been on transformation processes in the museums, and the multifaceted and complex transition from a White dominated heritage discourse to one of inclusion of all groups. And with a few more exception, such as the museologist Annie E. Coombes (2004), who looks at monuments, and the historians John Wright and Aron Mazel (1991) who wrote about the tendencies of KwaZulu-Natal museums to cater for 'Whites' in Natal, and Zulu nationalism in KwaZulu, the focus has mainly been on Cape Town.

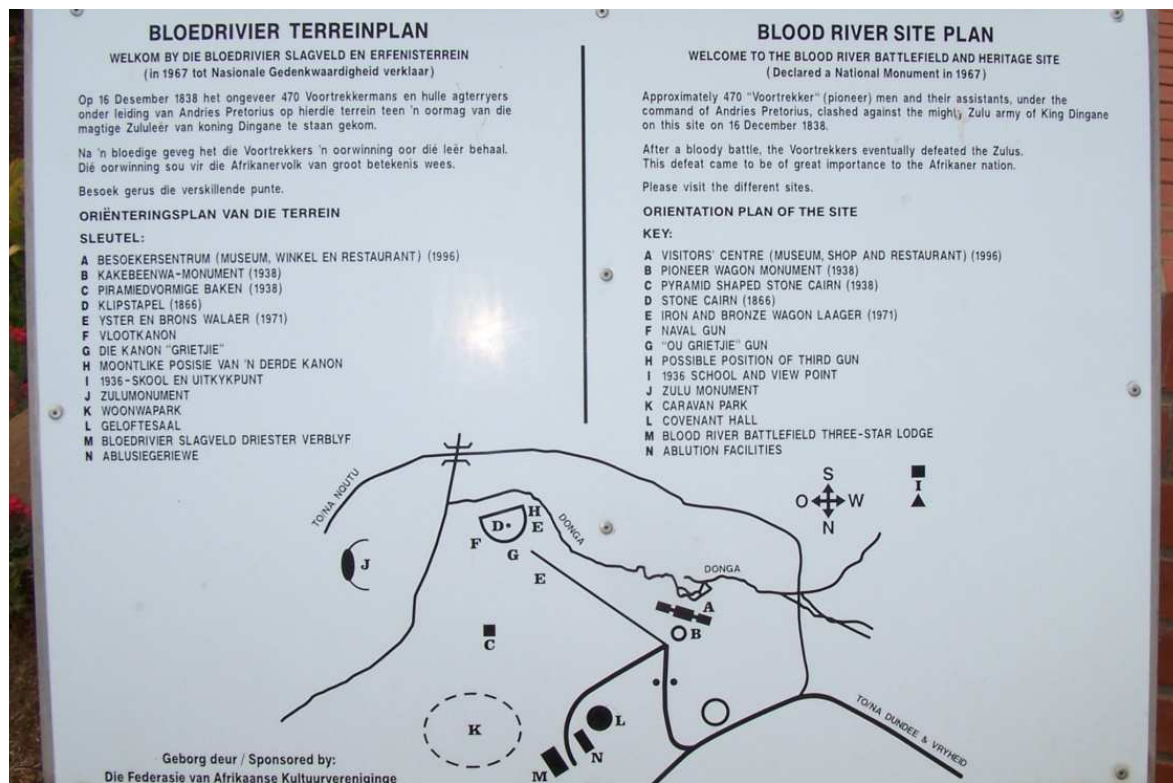
This may have several reasons. The Cape Town area offers interesting sites for museum researchers. Two of the most visited museums seem to be the *District Six Museum* and the *Robben Island Museum* (Coombes, 2004; Galla, 1999; Goodnow et al., 2006; Hjemdahl, 2004; Nanda, 2004 ; Rassol & Prosalendis, 2001; Solani & Mpumlwana, 2001). The District Six Museum was put up in the 1990s. The area District Six was situated close to the city centre of Cape Town. The non-‘White’ people were forced to move from there in the 1960s, and their homes were destroyed by bulldozers. Like the District Six Museum, also the Robben Island Museum is an example of a new way of giving meaning to a place. Previously it was a prison, now it is a museum where released political prisoners return to work as tourist guides, offering their own stories. The decision of transforming the prison into a museum was taken by ex-prisoners (field diary, 26.11.2008; Hjemdahl, 2009; Nungu, 2006).

The Ncome Site differs from both in being initiated by the South African Government. But it is similar in its attempts to alter the symbolic meaning of the site. Like the Robben Island Museum and the District Six Museum, it is part of the current transformation processes in the museums of South Africa. The Bloedrivier Museum at the Bloedrivier Site, was established by Afrikaner cultural groups with the aim of strengthening the traditional ‘White’ and hegemonic meaning of the site in contrast to both right wing extremist Afrikaner views and one-sided Zulu interpretations (e-mail from Kruger, 12.12.2008). This makes it interesting to look at the Ncome Bloedrivier Site rather than the more popular museums in Cape Town.

The journal *South African Museum Association Bulletin* (SAMAB) contains many articles on South African Museums. Often written as conference proceedings, they offer points of views from people working in museums. Since professionals from the Ncome Site have written several articles on museological aspects (for example Ndhlovu & Dlamuka, 2002; Ndhlovu & Shabalala, 2004; and Ngobese, 2003) this publication will be returned to in the thesis. Very little is written about the Bloedrivier Site, and no research is done on the site. The Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, which the museum is organised by, does some. This extends mainly towards the making of the exhibition (interview with Viljoen, 24.10.2008: 6), and the publishing of booklets on historical aspects of the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier (e-mail from Kruger, 12.12.2008). But in 2006 they also hosted a conference called *The Battle of Blood River/Ncome and its legacy: Different Perspectives*, which highlighted several more or less controversial subjects relating to the battle, such as the role of slaves, elaborated on by Jatti Bredekamp, CEO of the Iziko Museums in Cape Town (Bredekamp, 13.10.2006).

The Norwegian ethnologist Kirsti Mathisen Hjemdal has done research on the Robben Island Museum and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum north of Cape Town (2004). Her focus is on

the changing meanings of monuments in shifting political contexts. Furthermore, the philosopher Nils Gilje has written about the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria (2007). He discusses whether or not the monument could be regarded as an apartheid monument, and concludes with a 'yes'. Not necessarily because it became a symbol for the apartheid regime, but because it segregated people according to their ethnic background, and left out the 'in-between' category of 'mixed races': the 'Coloured' population. This is a point that has proved to be useful in my analysis. Even though it was published in a Norwegian journal in cultural studies, it triggered an interesting political discussion about the meaning of apartheid. The discussion also focused on the difficulty of using qualitative interviews and quotations in academic texts, where views proposed by the interviewees were understood as representing the view of the interviewer (Bech, 2008; Gilje, 2008).



A plan of the Ncome Bloedrivier Site. This is placed outside the museum building at the Bloedrivier Site. The letter *D* represents the ox-wagon monument from 1971, and the *J* the Ncome Monument. *A* is the Bloedrivier Museum, and *B* the 1947 ox-wagon monument.

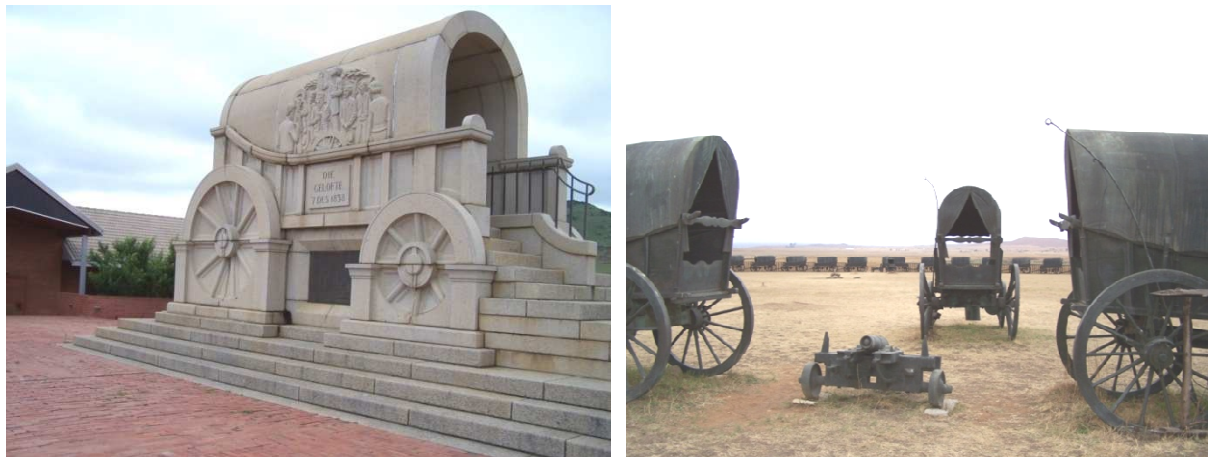
Most of what has been written on the Ncome Bloedrivier Site deals with the battle and the happenings leading up to it, as well as the consequences of the conflict. A narrative seems set, and with a few exceptions, (such as that of the cultural historian Credo Mutwa, 1977) the stories told in books and articles differ little from each other. The Ncome Site came as a felt need to react to the hegemonic 'White' dominated narratives. However, some researchers, such as the anthropologist Paula Girshick (2008), the historian Nsizwa Dlamini (2001) and the sociologist

Daphna Golan (1994), argue that it is not necessarily only the carrier of alternative messages, but uses the same stories for other purposes.

Paula Girschick (2008) has written about the Ncome Museum, and the processes that lead to its construction. Her article was printed in the *Msunduzi Journal*. The first volume of this journal came in 2008. The present manager at the Ncome Museum, Nhlanhla Mkhulisi (2008), and the previous manager Sinothi Thabethe (2008), have both written articles on different aspects of the Ncome Site and exhibition practices for this publication, articles which will be mentioned further on in the thesis. The museologist Cecilia Rodehn has also written an article evaluating certain aspects of the Msunduzi Museum (2008b), based on fieldwork for her PhD thesis (2008a).

The research done on museums in a South African context does for the most part acknowledge diversity in audience and subjects within the museums, and the museums are regarded as important and critical voices in the South African society. This thesis can be seen within such a tradition. There has been a lack of research outside of Cape Town, and this research will contribute to a balance here. Finally, the narrative of the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier lacks for the most part a diverse approach, something this thesis will contribute to balance as well.

THE BLOEDRIVIER HERITAGE SITE



To the left: The ox-wagon monument from 1947 with the museum to the left. To the right: The bronze monument from 1971.

The *Bloedrivier Site*⁴ is situated some forty kilometres east of the small town of Dundee. The museum building is made out of red bricks, and is situated behind an open gate. The large area is fenced in. In 1947 a monument, an ox-wagon in granite by the sculptor Coert Steynberg, was inaugurated on the site. Twenty four years later, in 1971, sixty four ox-wagons made in cast steel

⁴ I will call it the *Bloedrivier Site* when talking about the site, and the *Bloedrivier Museum* when talking about the museum building itself. The exhibition will be called the *Bloedrivier exhibition* in this thesis. When talking about both sites I will call them the *Ncome Bloedrivier Site*.

plated in bronze in size 1:1 was put up. The replicas were made due to a cultural and political movement amongst Afrikaners in the 1960s, which raised R800 000 with the goal to represent the ox-wagon battle formation as accurately as possible.



The exhibition at the Bloedrivier Museum.

An Afrikaner cultural foundation⁵ had the management of the site until 2002, when they faced bankruptcy, and the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria took over. The exhibition at the Bloedrivier Museum was made the same year, with research done by Cecilia Kruger and Estelle Pretorius.

Entering the museum building from 1996 you come into a curio shop. To the right is a homely café, to the left the entrance to the exhibition. Some artefacts related to the Voortrekkers, such as a miniature ox-wagon and a list of names of participants in the battle, can be seen in the hallway. The exhibition area is spacious, with a TV showing an information DVD. Several benches are lined up facing the TV, where visitors may sit watching the unfolding of events leading up to the battle. Around the walls are twenty panels shaped like Zulu shields. The exhibition gives an account of the happenings leading up to the battle, the battle itself and its aftermath. In the middle of the floor, just before the benches, two glass cases contain replicas of clothes and weapons used by Afrikaner and Zulu soldiers respectively. The sound from the DVD voice and the theatrical film music follows the visitors.

THE NCOME HERITAGE SITE

East of the river the *Ncome Monument* was opened on 16 December 1998, and the *Ncome Museum*⁶ in November 1999 as one of the cultural heritage projects of the Department of Art,

⁵ The *Foundation for the Blood River Covenant Site* was formed by several Afrikaner cultural organisations.

⁶ I will call it the *Ncome Site* when talking about the whole area, the *Ncome Museum* when talking about the institution and the *Ncome Monument* when talking about the building. The *Ncome exhibition* is of course the exhibition inside the monument.

Culture, Science and Technology. The *Legacy Project* had as its aim to “address the imbalances in the heritage landscape”, and the “Ncome Museum is therefore intended to offer a positive reinterpretation of the 1838 [Afrikaner-Zulu] conflict” (Ncome exhibition, panel 18).



The Ncome Museum building. The shields face the ox-wagon monument on the other side of the river.

The form of the Ncome Monument is inspired by Mgungundlovu, the palace of the Zulu King Dingane who ruled at the time of the battle, as well as after the battle formation used by the Zulus (see chapter two for more details). Also the Ncome Museum has a big fence around it.

Inside, the floor of the museum exhibition room is formed as a shield. The research for the exhibition has been conducted mainly by Dalifa Ngobese, who works at the Ncome Site. The eighteen exhibition panels include information on shields, war tactics and weapons. Also magical medicine used for gaining the upper hand in battle has been included. One part deals with Sotho traditional clothes. The kings are portrayed, together with the battle and the events leading up to it. Zulu daily life objects from the time of the battle, such as beer pots, jewellery, woven mats and headrests are exhibited. The exhibition uses objects, texts and background illustrations. A wide-screen TV is playing in the background. It is a tape of the celebrations of the Day of Reconciliation from 2007. Whilst dramatic music and the calm voice of a man follow the visitor at the Bloedrivier Museum, here it is the sound of drums and cheering.



The exhibition at Ncome Museum. The floor is shaped as a shield, with rounded walls. The exhibitions in the glass cases to the right had yet to be removed and renewed when the photograph was taken.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The textual material on the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier and the two sites are characterized by strong descriptions and essentialist ideas on history, race, ethnicity and culture. These ideas have a great deal of emotional values attached to them, something that will underline most of the discussions in this thesis. Based on these understandings, I have chosen to have *social constructivism* as a theoretical perspective in this thesis, and *discourse analysis* as method. In order to understand the concept of discourse, I will look at *categories* and the implications categorisation has for understanding the controversies built into the sites and the museums. I will therefore not come up with a 'truth', but I will be analysing why and how the 'truths' have been made possible.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to discourse analysts Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, social constructivism is a theoretical position based on the assumption that social institutions such as museums, and cultural artefacts, such as the annual 16 December commemorations at the Ncome Bloedrivier Site, are constructed in certain ways and do not necessarily have to be like this. By looking into how this is done, it is possible to question what is taken for granted. This also involves a critical attitude towards how we divide the world into categories (1999: 13). Everything is interpreted. The phenomenologist Alfred Schütz has pointed out that humans live in a society where meanings and relevance are organized in structures people think and live within (1963: 1). We are the result of our culture and history, but we could have been different. Human beings and social institutions do not have an inner essence regardless of history and politics (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 14). Knowledge is created through social interaction involving debates and conflicts over what is right and wrong, and common 'truths' are made, which in turn have effects on social actions. Museologist Graeme Davison shows that within new museology and post-colonialism in museums, social constructivism is visible in the challenging of standard narratives, especially with imperialist and racist contents, and previous ways of exhibiting (2001: 18-19).

CATEGORIZATIONS

The social construction of society is based on categorizations and definitions. In a South African context the categorization of people is deeply embedded in social life. In this perspective, 'truths' about someone or something are always constructed. A conversation I had with a friend may illustrate some of the ethical dilemmas related to defining people for researchers. Elisabeth is sometimes frustrated with her fellow South Africans. 'I am just I', she says, 'why do people have to know *what* I am?!' One explanation for this curiosity is that she is an attractive young woman, but more importantly, her looks are not easily recognisable as either 'Black' or 'Indian'. She does

not even fall easily into the 'mixed' category of 'Coloured', which is often seen as a mix of 'White' and 'Black' (Adhikari, 2006). She is 'in between', an anomaly that people need explanation for. Her mother is Zulu and her father partly 'Indian', an unusual combination in South Africa. By this analysis of her situation, I have categorized her according to skin colour and ethnicity, doing what she protested against, thus confirming the categories.

As research has shown, especially during the 1980s, for example by the political scientist Benedict Anderson (2006) and the sociologist Anthony D. Smith (1994) *ethnicity* and *nation* are closely connected. They are both names that can be used for the positive feelings of belonging to a cultural or regional group. But they may also be used in order to separate groups of people from each other, and they can be used to mark groups both negatively and positively, as pointed out by sociologists Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex in their reader (1997), and by the philosopher Ernest Renan (1996). But it is difficult to insist on ethnic difference without becoming an essentialist. The folklorist Line Alice Ytrehus has noted a change from an essentialist view of ethnicity to an idea of common beliefs (2007: 153). She uses a definition of ethnicity taken from the historian John Hutchinson and Smith.

A named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members (ibid.: 152).

Benedict Anderson defines *nation* as an "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". He argues that it is *imagined* since the members will never know or hear of most of their fellow members, but yet feels a communion with them (2006: 6). In the thesis, I will talk of ethnic groups based on these definitions, as people understand themselves, rather than nation. But I will use the word *nationalism* based on Smith's definition, i.e. an understanding of nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of an existing or potential "nation"" (1996: 108). This is because discourses on ethnicity for some of the groups mentioned in the thesis have led to struggles for receiving status as nations and nation states. For those in question a common belief system might be equally tangible as an essentialist view of ethnicity. In reality, such a change in scholarly views might have little impact on the Afrikaners and Zulus. Further Ytrehus notes that

[t]here is a widespread myth which supposes that people who are very different cannot peacefully coexist, and that ethnicity constitutes such a significant difference. Derived from the same kind of myth is the myth that 'ethnic conflicts' and 'ethnic cleansing' result from cultural or ethnic diversity (2007: 161).

For those involved in conflicts where ethnic differences are experienced as real, they have real consequences. The social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues that in order to create ethnicity we need not only two distinct groups, but a minimum of contact between them (1993). A group is made and gets its identity in relation to something else. The concept of 'race' is extremely controversial in a Norwegian context, and I will try to avoid using it as an analytical concept. 'Race' has, though, played a very important role in South African history, and even though the meaning and use of it is controversial also in South Africa, the word itself is not. In South Africa people are still categorized according to skin colour or visible physical features ('White', 'Black', 'Coloured' and 'Indian'), thus similar to how 'race' can be understood. The meaning of 'race' is also constructed, and its arbitrariness can be seen in that people have shifted between different 'racial' groups. But people are also divided in ethnic groups (such as Zulu, Afrikaner, Sotho, English speaking or Xhosa).

When mentioning my friend's reaction to the question of what she is, to another South African, an alternative, more positive interpretation was suggested. Ethnic classification has to do with the creation of order (field diary, 28.11.2008). It is, however, difficult to separate creation of order from power differences, which have had a lot to say in the South African context, and still do. The apartheid policy used ethnicity and race to classify 'Black' peoples and deny them South African citizenship. This led to difficulties in mobilizing ethnic consciousness amongst many 'Blacks' themselves, with certain Zulu cultural groups as exceptions. Cultural traits had long been used to show racial stereotypes and justify separate 'homelands' for different 'tribes' or 'nations'. In post-apartheid South Africa this has changed, and cultural diversity has been embraced within the symbolic construct of a 'rainbow nation', but categories of skin colour are still deeply embedded in the South African daily life as well as its bureaucracy. Discourses of 'race' and 'ethnicity' gave meaning to observed differences. As long as discourse and power is closely connected with these perceived differences, ignoring them would be impossible. But opening up for alternative versions in texts, exhibitions and actions may in the long run alter these discourses.

Categories and conceptual frameworks are necessary to use in research on society, but they are always in different ways morally relevant, and need to be used with care, as noted by the historian Francis Sejerstad (1989: 230). Some concepts and words will be ambiguous or controversial regardless of my definitions. I will use words like 'White' and 'Black', and have capital first letters since 'Indian', one of the common categories in this region of South Africa, is written with capital letter. I will also use inverted commas because of the possible fluidity in the definitions. Inverted commas will also be used for other expressions when the meanings can be fluid in similar manners. When I talk of ethnic groups in particular, I will use terms like

*Afrikaner, Zulu and Sotho*⁷. To make it easier, I will do this also when those in question, historically speaking, did not use these terms. When quoting others, I will use the words they use, but add the above terms so the reader knows which groups those in question are associated with, in a present day context.

DISCOURSE

[A]ll manifest discourse is secretly based on an 'already-said'; and this 'already-said' is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a 'never-said' (Foucault, 2007: 27).

Museologist Mieke Bal argues that "if the new museology is to be self-reflective in a critical sense [...] the questions of the political past of colonialism cannot be treated as just [...] redressing past wrongs" (1996: 63). When something is repaired, she explains, the reparation remains part of that something until one understands the reason for why the damage happened in the first place, and discourse analysis can be used to understand these reasons (ibid.). Jørgensen and Phillips define *discourses* as certain ways to talk about and understand the world, or parts of the world (1999: 9). The discourses are the limits to the conversations, and are what makes something possible to say in certain settings and not in others, according to discourse analyst Siri Meyer (2003: 16). We understand our world through and by discourses. Many will laugh at the arbitrariness of grouping people together based on favourite colour, but in some contexts skin colour is seen as relevant.

Most scientists analysing discourses agree that there are many discourses side by side fighting for hegemony (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 22). This provides the possibility of change. South Africans' views on the 'races' were never one and the same, even within the same ethnic groups. The ANC, Zulu nationalism and the ideology of apartheid existed simultaneously. Even though different meanings and different perspectives exist, the discourses limit the possibilities for understanding the world.

The discourse analyst Norman Fairclough is of the opinion that discourses, ways of talking, are only aspects of social practices, and that there is something 'true' behind them. When talking of globalization he argues that "processes of globalization" are "real", "but as soon as we begin to reflect upon and discuss these real processes, we *have* to represent them, and the ways in which we represent them inevitably draw upon certain discourses rather than others". Following from this, Fairclough says that "the problem turns into that of how we decide *which* discourses to draw upon" (2006: 5). The battle at Ncome Bloedrivier happened, but how it is presented in

⁷ Also the names of the ethnic groups have differed. For example the term *Afrikaner* has meant "half-bred offspring" and "mixed descent" previously, whilst none of these meanings are attached to the name today (Giliomee, 1987: 36).

language and exhibitions determines what it 'means'. In this thesis expressions taken from discourse analysts Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe are used, where the battle can be seen as a *nodal point* which organizes the meanings of *elements*, that is, the different happenings and symbols connected to the battle (2001). Different discourses struggle to fill the nodal point with certain meanings rather than others, giving the winning discourse *hegemony* over the other discourses, but with the possibility of change always inherent. All of these discourses, as well as the struggles, are developed within a *discursive order*, an expression termed by Fairclough (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 69). The existence of two museums at the same site might be an example of different discourses struggling for hegemony within the same discursive order. How to describe, categorize and classify nodal points such as the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier, is extremely controversial in South Africa. The French philosopher Foucault argues that the *formation* of objects through practices, the ordering of things, is what needs to be analysed (2007: 54). The main interest in this thesis will be the ordering of things and narratives at the Ncome Bloedrivier Sites and on the battle in 1838.

The exhibitions at the Ncome Bloedrivier site, as well as the commemoration of 16 December, are examples of "practices" in Foucault's sense. When Afrikaners shaped a powerful discourse where the battle became part of a 'myth of origin', it became possible, or even necessary, for Zulus to oppose the details of the 'myth'. The battle was a historical event where also Zulus played a part. By establishing the Ncome Site, new dimensions to the battle were added. In this way the Ncome Bloedrivier is strengthened as a discursive order, even though the *meaning* of the battle is a site for struggle. Discourse analysts Mats Börjesson (2003: 19) and Malin Wreder (2007: 45) has pointed out that what is relevant is how the battle is interpreted and what the consequences are. Discursive practises both reflect and actively take part in social and cultural change – such as the exhibitions and celebrations on 16 December. Discourses also give meaning, understanding and coherence for us, and are necessary in order for the world to make sense to us. Discourse analysis can thus be used to look at what is thought obvious, the taken-for-granted, to question the 'natural' (Börjesson, 2003: 23). This would be the "never-said" of Foucault.

Instead of using the term *individual*, discourse theory uses *subject position*. This is to show that what is spoken of is the place and opportunities given for making articulations within the discourse. The context decides which articulations are possible, and in this way discourses create their own subjects. But since many discourses exist simultaneously, every person can have many subject positions. I am writing this due to my position as a master student, not a woman, a 'White' or a Norwegian. But not all subject positions are possible for everyone, thus discourses can function as excluding and marginalising mechanisms (Wreder, 2007: 46).

'TRUTH'

Truth is part of power and cannot exist outside of power. All societies have their own discourses of truth which decides what is accepted as lies and truths, how these are sanctioned, and techniques and procedures that are accepted in the search for truth (Foucault, 1980: 131). At the Ncome Bloedrivier Site a 'truth discourse' of Afrikaners has been challenged by the physical presence of a new museum. By questioning details, the Ncome Site ironically confirms the hegemonic story, even though the meanings of the different elements are contested.

The folklorist Margaret Mills argues that institutions of social justice, for example truth and reconciliation commissions, need to be able to come up with something 'true'. They cannot afford the deconstruction of all 'truths' since it makes their claim to justice weaker (2007: 60). The folklorist Bente Alver and sociologist Ørjar Øyen write:

[There is a special risk] in situations where there is politically inspired conflict about who 'owns the truth' – and where politicians may be of the opinion that history is something to be determined by national assemblies rather than by historians, for example. Control of who owns the truth and of what constitutes truth becomes a matter of power and varying forms of collective interest (2007: 31).

The museums are concrete examples of how different regimes allow different perspectives. Nonetheless, the changing of regime did not eliminate all previous 'truths'. At a seminar in 1998 on the reinterpretation of the Ncome Bloedrivier Battle, the American historian J. Carruthers put the South African processes in a wider perspective:

When two societies merge, for a while there are competing memories. Sometimes these are resolved through negotiation and accommodation, and at other times resolution is attempted through suppression, repression and oppression. In the case of conquest of one society by another, the national memories clash and the protagonists of the clashing traditions accuse each other of lying (1998: 12).

This is, in fact, a very good description of some of the discursive clashes in South African museums. The museologist Per-Uno Ågren has pointed out that in relation to a museum and its exhibition, both the visitors and the museum professionals should be aware that an exhibition is "a provisional statement about history, reality and the human condition" (1995: 45).

The deconstruction of hegemonic discourses may function in a better way than the search for 'truth', and may prevent the rising of new hegemonic 'truths'. Of course, some things can be agreed upon as facts, such as certain dates, or that Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. But how these facts are given meaning, will change according to how they are integrated in different

discourses. The imprisonment of Mandela could be seen as legitimate, since he was regarded as a terrorist, or as state terrorism, since he was also regarded as a freedom fighter. Discourses can be criticized, and deeper understandings can be gained.

METHOD AND ETHICS

Early in the process the intention was to study the two museum exhibitions only. When reading about the historical background of the battle, I found that looking at historical narratives provided many points of interest as well. The same experience I had while interviewing the managers of the two museums. I had wanted to gain knowledge on the exhibitions and museums, whilst many arguments and perspectives that I had not thought of, came up during the conversations. I found it especially interesting to go deeper into the commemorations of the battle on 16 December. Thus I attended the commemorations using participatory observation. So, instead of developing a rather narrow exhibition analysis, I tried to take a broader look at context, history and practice.

Different kinds of material requiring different methods have in the thesis been put together by seeing them all as different manifestations of discourses surrounding the battle. In the texts the discourses give an impression of what is taken for granted, and what explanations are being given. In the interviews the managers show their points of departure, and what they take for granted. Similarly, the exhibitions talk to the ideal visitor, present 'facts' and explanations. These 'ideal visitors' may or may not, be similar to those attending the commemorations. The different historical narratives are mainly part of a hegemonic discourse, but some narratives are also challenging discursive 'truths'. I have seen all of them as different 'texts' coming up with different perspectives on the same phenomenon.

This section will start by looking at the material and the methods used, starting with the exhibitions, then the interviews, third, the written material used, before finishing with participatory observation. Then some ethical dilemmas that occurred in the work for this thesis will be discussed.

EXHIBITIONS AND EXHIBITION ANALYSIS

I have visited the museums on four occasions during the period of October to December 2008. By using a camera and writing notes I have documented the exhibitions in order to be able to analyse them more thoroughly when the fieldwork period was finished.

The museologist Flora Kaplan argues that "exhibitions are products of research, organized and designed to convey ideas". By communicating through different senses, processes take place which are "both cognitive and cultural" (1995: 37). Further, Kaplan argues for looking at "museums as social institutions, as arenas in which political messages in the broadest sense are

displayed, conveyed and converted into meaning by museum professionals and the audiences who view and review” (ibid.: 38). The battle of 1838 offers the opportunity of searching for such implicit political meanings. The exhibitions allow for showing messages, and analysing them proved useful, both in learning about the discourses on the battle, but also on various aspects of South African life and ‘already-saids’. The museologist Ingeborg Hauge (2008) writes in her master thesis about the connections we make between the different sentences in the exhibition texts. These connections are based on such ‘already-saids’ and perceived commonness between the maker of the exhibition and the visitor, and is based on Fairclough’s assumptions and implicitness (Fairclough, 2003: 55). This proves an important point in chapter four.

The exhibitions also provide some glimpses of the views of and discourses the museum professionals work within and in relation to. In order to find out more about these discourses, interviews provided to be useful.

INTERVIEWS

The managers Nhlanhla Mkulisi at the Ncome Museum, and Dawie Viljoen at the Blood River Museum were interviewed on 24 October 2008. Both interviews lasted for more or less one hour. The interviews were done at the two museums, Viljoen in the cafe, Mkhulisi in the closed curio shop. The interviews were taped and later transcribed, and the transcriptions were sent back to them for approval together with some follow-up questions. Cecilia Kruger was interviewed by e-mail. They were all informed about the intentions of the project, and were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time (in accordance with NESH, 2006: points 8 and 9)⁸. The questions were based on the respective exhibitions, and on how they saw their museum in a wider context. All are viewed as representatives of the museums rather than individuals, which give them lower claims to protection when talking as professionals (Alver & Øyen, 2007: 29). However, I cannot see their answers as fully representative. Others might have other answers.

It has been pointed out that “[w]ise thinking in a conversation comes out as banalities when the oral expression is lifted into the context of a written text” (ibid., 2007: 45). Interview transcriptions have been gone through in order to standardise language, since oral language may look different when it is written down, and may cause stigma. None of those I interviewed have English as a mother-tongue. Inspired by the sociologist Katrine Fangen and psychologist Steinar Kvale I have simplified complicated sentences and transcribed according to norms, aiming at making the language more standardized (Fangen, 2004: 148; Kvale, 1997: 106).

⁸ NESH stands for the *Nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora*, meaning the *National committee for ethics in research within the social sciences*.

Quotations from the interview transcriptions are done with name, date and page number. Emails are marked with name and the date they were sent.

It is not always possible to find the values of an institution through interviews. Sometimes values spoken out loud are not acted upon, sometimes operative values are 'hidden' or unspoken, according to sociologist Erik Fossåskaret (1997: 269). Researchers Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skjöldberg suggest that when interviewed, the interviewee more or less consciously presents herself in positive terms, and this is even more important to notice when talking to leaders of organisations (1994: 348). The exhibitions are more or less permanent structures, with rather fixed perspectives that transcend 'individual' views. An interview is much more adapted to the situation and the interviewer's questions. The exhibitions might therefore not always be consistent with the outspoken views of the managers.

WRITTEN SOURCES

Exhibition analysis and interviews seem to complete each other, according to the above arguments. But they are both based on previously existing discourses, which can be found in literature on the battle. The literature analysed has been accessed through different libraries, such as the University of Bergen library and that of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the library at the Natal Museum and the library at the Msunduzi Museum, as well as the Natal Archives where I accessed the *John Laband Files Ncome Project*. The KwaZulu-Natal based historian John Laband was a member of the committee putting up the Ncome Site, and the files contain minutes and plans from this process. In some cases I have also used newspaper articles.

I have used primary sources such as speeches, letters and minutes, but also articles and books by other researchers in order to learn about the usage of the battle. Both the literature and the exhibitions are sources for information as well as material for analysis. The use of historical narratives has been discussed more thoroughly in chapter two.

PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION

The site of the battle is not a place for museum exhibitions and managers only. Also other actors play part in the discourses on the battle. Every year the day of the battle is commemorated on 16 December, and many join the commemorations on each site. By using participatory observation during the commemoration, some glimpses into the different uses of the sites could be gained. I visited the museums the day before 16 December when preparations were done at the Bloedrivier Site, and a dance festival was performed at the Ncome Site, and followed the ceremonies that were taking place. I engaged in conversations and listened to the speeches as well as peoples' reactions.

In participatory observation I am my own instrument. But I am not neutral, and I have an effect on what I observe, both on what I see and how I choose to interpret it, and on other people's reaction to my presence. At the Bloedrivier Site I blended in, more or less, due to my skin colour, but at Ncome a 'White' woman is such a rarity that I was interviewed by the local newspaper solely for being present.

ETHICAL REFLECTIONS

Doing interviews and participatory observation I had to make a lot of choices. But the researcher herself is never in full control of the situation. I have ideas and pre-understandings that I am not aware of either (Fangen, 2004: 43). Since I am not a South African, I do not see the same information as commonsensical as many South Africans do, which allows me to question perceived facts and arguments differently. But this also means that I will miss out on meanings, and questions that should have been asked are not. On the other hand, this alien-ness can be used to the advantage of the researcher. Our pre-understanding will also gradually change when we are gaining new understanding, even though hidden pre-understandings can only be noticed when provoked (ibid.: 47).

In my analysis of the exhibitions, several questions came to mind that are more or less 'neutral' in a Norwegian context, but they were not so in a South African context. In an e-mail Cecilia Kruger writes: "We as South Africans know the history and take certain facts and things for granted. I have learnt that foreigners such as yourself see events in a different light, asking questions from angles that we are not used to" (12.12.2008). She had reacted to my questions, and found it difficult to answer as she believed my intentions were possibly harmful. When finally responding, she explained to me more (care)fully her answers than she probably would have done to a South African student. Professor Nils Gilje, who is my supervisor, has previously done research on similar subjects, and received very different reactions. Being a 'White' man in his sixties, with white hair and short sleeved shirts, he must have looked very similar to some of those Afrikaners he met and interviewed during his fieldwork periods. He was never assumed to be a 'liberal' researcher (2009: PC).

Ethically this reaction points at a dilemma. How much should the researcher inform about her political attitudes and values? I was prepared for such reactions, but it still started some uneasy reflections on my side. By asking questions, I wanted answers rather than wander around the subject. The person who is interviewed, can choose how to respond – or not to respond at all. If some of my 'liberal' ideas can be read between the lines, Kruger and the others interviewed, has the option of answering in such a way as to make me understand their situation and opinion better. If I seem to fully agree with the people I interview, this might lead them to take my positive attitudes for granted, and they could say things that might have been used in a negative

manner in the thesis. They would also miss out on the opportunity to argue their case. If they think I agree with everything, it might be assumed that I also understand the reasons behind their opinions, thus they do not explain the background for me. The best alternative would have been to spend more time and build trust as done for example by Rodehn (2008). This would have been another way to allow more nuances to come forth, but a period of three months where a lot of different research should be done, did not allow for that.

Another ethical and methodological aspect is the difference between an interview by e-mail and a face-to-face situation. An interview face to face opens up for understanding and sympathy. The tone of my voice, facial expression and hand movements, all add meanings to my questions. An e-mail can be very harsh; it does not offer similar contexts to the questions. The opportunity of rephrasing the questions is not offered. Also I cannot choose my words according to the person I am talking to. As I was doing research, I learnt that the subject is historically and politically complex, with more questions than answers, and full of layers and nuances. I cannot possibly have understood all of these fine nuances.

I have chosen to write this thesis in English in order to give the museums access to it, since researchers should make their results available to those participating (NESH, 2006: point 47). I have also been asked to write an article in the next edition of the Msunduzi Journal, and this is another way of making the research accessible.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

In chapter one I have aimed at giving an introduction to why I chose to do research on the two museums, what they look like, and theoretical and methodological issues related to the subject.

In chapter two I will investigate the presentations of the events leading up to the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier, the battle itself and some of its direct consequences. By this I will try to identify a hegemonic discourse concerning the battle. In order to do this, I have looked at various presentations and representations of the battle, as well as the exhibitions at the two museums. The literature used is of course not comprehensive since much has been done on the subject. I have, though, in some cases used the same texts that have been used by the museums. In the chapter I also hope to be able to tell a story that is not very well known by Norwegians, as well as critically analyse how it has been presented.

Being a foreigner, one of the major questions I asked myself was why the different versions could not be portrayed in the same museum. I suggest an answer in chapter three, where I investigate how the story of the battle has been used for the last 170 years, between 1838 and 2008. In this approach I have tried to use some suggestions by Foucault on genealogical

methods, looking at how a phenomenon has changed its meanings over a length of time. The discourses on the battle have been shaped in various ways and the meanings have changed. This genealogy can be seen as an example of why segregation and dichotomization still play a major role in South Africa.

Often diversity in museums are discussed from a perspective of employee policies and outreach programmes and other activities, and the exhibitions are ignored, as noted by Jack Lohman, director of the Museum of London (2006). In chapter four the exhibitions are in focus as concrete examples of how the battle is used according to the discursive order suggested in chapter two. I also analyse the development of new meanings attached to the battle also found in chapter three. The exhibitions show many examples of practices of dichotomization and stereotypical categorizations.

Finally, I present some concluding remarks, and suggest a way forward, both for the two sites as well as for further research.

CHAPTER 2 – THE BATTLE OF NCOME BLOEDRIVIER

“I don’t want to take you to the Ncome Museum on the other side of the river”. It was October 2004, and I visited the battle site of Ncome Bloedrivier for the first time. I was an exchange student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and had been in South Africa only three months. My guide had already taken me to the Bloedrivier Museum. “I was at the Ncome Museum when it was new, and the information in it is incorrect. You see, I believe in hard facts, the ones I can find in books”, he told me.

In this chapter I will look at the stories told today about the battle, and suggest a discursive order, where the battle itself makes a nodal point which organises the elements of the story within different discourses. These discourses are found in books and articles as well as in the exhibitions. First some sources used in this thesis will be discussed in order to put the discourses into context. Second, a version of the historical background of the battle will be presented, the event that happened, and how it is ordered or structured in different discourses. While presenting it chronologically, focus is in particular on how the versions differ from each other.

CONFRONTING THE NARRATIVES

Both museums, as well as the literature on the battle, seem to be presenting ‘the truth’ of what happened before, under and after the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier. For example Gert Opperman, the chief executive officer at the Voortrekker Monument, writes in a media release: “Although historians differ over the facts concerning the battle, there are written and oral accounts that validate certain facts, and which have been commemorated by Afrikaners through the years” (2002). In a booklet on the battle, Afrikaner cultural historian d’Assonville cites Credo Mutwa, saying: “Much of the enmity between Black and White people in Africa today sprouts directly from this emotional ‘slanting’ of history”, and d’Assonville asks: “How can one prevent this?”. He answers: “In the first place, of course, by a clear conscience from speaking nothing but the truth. In the second place it is an indisputable condition to use solely *primary, first-hand sources* [...] and not fictional stuff, fabricated to suit racial, political or some tendentious motives” (2000: 5). A group of scholars who had as their project to provide the Ncome Museum with alternative interpretations of the battle, had as its aim to “redress the lies and atrocities committed against the traditional memories of African peoples through European historiography” (Carruthers, 1998: 12).

A basic assumption in these discussions is the existence of an objective ‘truth’ concerning the battle. A similar perspective is offered by the manager at the Bloedrivier Site, Dawie Viljoen. He does not see any need to reinterpret the happenings surrounding the battle. “I think if you

believe in GOD it is not necessary to search for the truth”, he wrote me in an e-mail (19.12.2008), implying that the truth is found and shown in the exhibition.

The previous manager at the Ncome Museum, Sinothi Thabethe, is more in line with the social constructivist perspective of this thesis. “One could argue that historical events are not controversial”, he says, “they happened and they cannot be brought back to the present. The problem lies in how we interpret them” (2008: 6). But his interpretations also follow certain patterns, and in his presentation it seems as though some interpretations are more correct, represented by the Ncome Site, and some less, represented by the Bloedrivier Site.

Bongani Ndlovu and Thokozani Shabalala, from the Ncome Museum, write in an article from 2004:

The [Ncome Bloedrivier Heritage] Site gives visitors an opportunity to compare the events of the 1830s as presented by the two institutions. Visitors are then given an opportunity to systematically arrive at their own conclusion (2004: 73).

This idea sounds compelling. But the museums do not stand alone. They lean on scholarly traditions, implicit ideas, and different discourses. Often the visitors have a basic pre-understanding of the events before visiting, and see the exhibitions accordingly. These ideas are normally based on written and oral narratives. By presenting different voices from books and articles, I will try to give the reader an idea of the many controversies related to the battle.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

A common critique is often that ‘White’ middle aged males portray history in their own fashion, and that few scholars look into history from the point of view of gender, or ethnic background, for example by the South African historian Wessel Visser (2004b: 16). Most of the books I have read about the battle confirm this image. There is still a lack of ‘Black’ historical narratives. The way South African historians have told the story greatly affects the ways South Africans view historical events, and especially the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier, as noted by the historian Albert van Jaarsveld (2008; A. van Jaarsveld & Mouton, N.D.). The academic discourses also affects the ways non-academics understand and talk about the battle. Some of the younger Afrikaners I have met, who grew up in the early 1980s, remember the battle as having women and children in the laager, and that 10 000 Zulus died (field diary, 19.12.2008). These exaggerations are part of a tendency where some discourses have hegemony over others. The literature discussed in this section does, in different ways, provide valuable points for a historiographic context to the story. Many are used in the exhibitions.

The narratives discussed in this chapter come from a wide variety of writers, and take part in different discourses. Albert van Jaarsveld's father, the apartheid historian Floris Albertus van Jaarsveld's book *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974* (1975) and that of Credo Mutwa's *My People* (1977) differ radically from each other. Not only because the former was written from an Afrikaner point of view and the latter from a Zulu point of view, but also because of difference in motives. F.A. van Jaarsveld belonged to a hegemonic discourse in South Africa focusing on "military history and the deeds of past great men" (Visser, 2004b: 4). He was the most important historian in South Africa writing within this tradition, but van Jaarsveld also included history of 'Black' people, and in his later works he was more critical to the Afrikaner centred vision of the past (ibid.: 5).

Mutwa's project was to bring the records straight and make understandable actions previously misunderstood – especially those of King Dingane. He was articulating an alternative discourse. Mutwa blames uprisings, riots, killings and massacres between the 'Blacks' and 'Whites' on lack of understanding between the two "races" (as he writes), with the misunderstandings being mostly on the stronger 'White' side. Credo Mutwa's books were also recommended to me by Dawie Viljoen from the Bloedrivier Site (e-mail 19.12.2008).

F.A. van Jaarsveld's account is quite similar to the accounts given by more recent historians, but he included more value laden words in his 1975 account. He wrote about "murdering" (at Bloukrans), portrayed the Zulu soldiers as "barbarians", and the Afrikaners as "preparing [KwaZulu-Natal] for White civilisation, just as immigrants in North America had done" (1975: 123).

Both Mutwa and van Jaarsveld write during the same period of time, and have the apartheid system as a common experience. Some of Mutwa's stories correspond with the Afrikaner version, as represented by F.A. van Jaarsveld. This relates especially to the negative description of the English speaking. This suggests that also Mutwa knew well the hegemonic Afrikaner discourse, but it could also be the common experience with the British army that made them some kind of 'allies'. Probably Mutwa accepted the idea that the Afrikaners were the only 'White' 'tribe' of Africa.

In 1998 there was a seminar called *The Re-interpretation of the Battle of Blood River*. Several historians participated here, amongst others the historians John Laband (1998) and Jabulani Maphalala (1998). Both have been important in the understanding of the battle, and the Ncome Site uses both in the training of staff and the making of exhibitions. John Laband looks at the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier "within a particular context of colonial conquest" (1998: 24). Maphalala gives a more controversial understanding of the battle. He questions what others take

for granted. About the first 'White' settlers in the area of the Zulus in the 1820s, Maphalala writes:

This group of European males immediately revealed its true colours when it embarked on sexual relations with Zulu women on a large scale. This was in order to create a buffer zone of children whose loyalties were to be on the father's side [...] But most importantly, the British settlers' main concern was the **demonization** of the Zulu Kings Shaka and Dingane (1998: 55, his emphasize).

According to Maphalala this demonization – the 'White' presentation of Dingane and Shaka as bloodthirsty and cruel - was done to suit certain purposes. But it also fitted with certain political ways of thinking at the time, and should be understood in that context.

The book *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Empire* by the cultural historian Alan Mountain (1999) covers the period from Shaka's birth until king Mpande died in 1873. It has a foreword written by King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, the reigning Zulu king, and can thus be said to represent an 'official' account of the Zulu history. It leans heavily on a more interestingly written book; John Laband's *Rope of sand. The rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century* (1995). Laband puts the actions of the Zulu kings in a political context, with trading stations, the increased migration of 'Whites', and cattle raiding by other groups in the area. Laband's book is used by the Ncome Site as background material for those working there. Even though both books discuss the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, they also present the Zulu identity as strong and important, even today.

The Afrikaners. Biography of a people is written by the historian Hermann Giliomee (2003). It contrasts with for example Mountain's book in detail, thickness, appearance and time span. Covering much more than necessary for this thesis, it is brief in detail, but has several valuable points on the political understanding of Afrikaner identity. Whilst Mountain's book covers the history of the Zulu people from the early 1800s to the 1870s, Giliomee keeps on going until present day. Unlike Laband and Mountain, Giliomee belongs to the ethnic group he is discussing.

In the book *7 Battles that shaped South Africa* by Greg Mills and David Williams (2006), focus is on some important battles, including the one at Ncome Bloedrivier. In all the battles one or both parties are 'White'. The title of this book indicates something symbolic, or holy, since the number seven is important in Western cultural traditions⁹. Some of the book's comments on the

⁹ The seven-branched candelabrum used in Jewish traditions as well as in Christian Christmas celebrations. It is also found in the odd choice of seven as the number of mountains surrounding the city of Bergen resulting in various discussions on which mountains actually count since nine would probably have been a more appropriate number.

happenings are dubious and not easy to understand. They write: "At its worst, Blood River is about treachery, revenge and naked racial aggression; at its best, courage in adversity and the survival of a people" (G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 36). But whose treachery? Dingane's it may seem. Whose revenge? That of Pretorius and the Voortrekkers, or that of Dingane? Whose 'courage' and whose 'survival'? The book is part of a discourse seeing the Afrikaners as *neutral* or in positive terms, and the Zulus as *marked* or in negative terms.

The booklet *Blood River* by V.E. d'Assonville (2000) can be bought at the Msunduzi Museum, which runs the Ncome Site, as well as at the Bloedrivier Museum. Thus the account he gives is 'accepted' by both sites. d'Assonville focuses both on Zulu and Afrikaner perspectives on the battle. Kruger argues that it is good because of its use of Zulu oral history. It has also been used as a source for making the Bloedrivier exhibition.

The books are somewhat similar in their accounts, and they give important inputs to the hegemonic discourse. The books on the battle present the story as if it is unproblematic and coherent, with Mutwa's account of the killing of Piet Retief as the main one differing from the others. We do not know what people thought and the reasons for their actions. Sometimes we can get glimpses of beliefs and opinions through diaries and letters, but the Zulus did not write, and are mostly presented from a 'White' perspective. A lot of the information on how things happened and descriptions of what King Dingane said and did probably comes from the missionary Francis Owen's diary. He lived near Dingane's homestead (G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 30). It is, however, important to note that 'Black' and 'White' stories are not completely independent from each other.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What is today KwaZulu-Natal, lies on the north-eastern coast of South Africa. Previously the lands were covered by several smaller groups of people that shared the same (or very similar) language. In 1816 *Shaka kaSenzangakhona* took over as chief over the Zulu people. The Zulus then had a territory of 15 square kilometres, and an army of 500 men (Mountain, 1999: 20). Less than three years later, in 1819, the territory covered 10 000 square kilometres (ibid.: 31). In twelve years an empire was made through warfare and militant politics, which covered most of KwaZulu-Natal. King Shaka improved the army by "uniting a variety of clans, creating age regiments and by introducing new weapons and tactics" (Ncome exhibition, panel 10). For this reason Shaka has often been called the "Napoleon of Africa". In September 1828 Shaka was killed by some of his brothers (Mountain, 1999: 54). *Dingane kaSenzangakhona*, his half brother, then became the king.

POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS AND THE BRITISH

The relationship between 'Whites' and 'Blacks' in the KwaZulu-Natal area was rather peaceful until the late 1820s and early 1830s. Both Shaka and Dingane had showed interest towards the British. Trading became increasingly more important in the region, with trading ports in the south (Port Natal, now Durban) and northeast (Delagoa Bay, now Maputo). Efforts from the Zulus to engage in positive relations with 'Whites', are not mentioned in the main narrative. Instead the Zulus are described in various ways but hardly ever as engaged in extensive trading relations with the 'White' population, according to historian Dan Wylie (1995). During the same period the first missionaries came to the area.

INTRODUCING THE AFRIKANERS

So far the 'Whites' in this story have been British. But the main 'White' actors of the battle of Ncome Bloedrivier were the Afrikaners. They came to the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, a settlement founded by the Dutch East India Company (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 3). Most were Dutch and German immigrants. The Afrikaners were among the first colonial peoples "to develop a distinct sense of self-consciousness; they made the new land genuinely their own. [...]" The Afrikaners were both a colonized people and colonizers themselves, both victims and proponents of European imperialism" (Giliomee, 2003: xiii-xiv). In the beginning of the 19th century the British army took over the Cape Colony. Many migrants moved eastwards, away from the British colonial administration. In 1834 the Cape government passed the *Abolition of Slavery Act*. This, in particular, did not suit the farmers in the area. Slaves were needed to run the labour extensive farms. At the same time Afrikaners started developing a separate identity (du Toit & Giliomee, 1983: 195). The Anglicisation policy bringing English into the schools and courtrooms was regarded as oppression (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 2). In the 1830s a migration movement of the Afrikaners started¹⁰. It was later called *The Great Trek*. The Afrikaners were searching for new land.

In 1834 the first thirty Afrikaners came to KwaZulu-Natal, and found good areas for farming and cattle (Laband, 1995: 79). They did not notice the remains of homesteads that had been abandoned, some of which were deserted warfare areas. In the latter half of the 1830s several thousand Afrikaners from the Cape's eastern frontier came to the areas north and east of Lesotho, some heading for KwaZulu-Natal. "Here, far from the reach of the Cape's new laws, they could once again apply those 'God-given' laws and practices that reinforced the 'natural distinction' between white and black", meaning slavery (Mountain, 1999: 97).

¹⁰ When the number of people increased, finding new land to farm became more and more difficult. The eastern borders were populated by Xhosa people who were slowly moving westward for the same reasons, and Khoikhoi people lived in the north.

PIET RETIEF AND DINGANE

In 1837 the leader of the first Afrikaner group, Piet Retief, sent a letter to King Dingane requesting to visit him at Mgungundlovu, his capital. In the letter the Afrikaners asked to use the uninhabited land. Retief wrote that they came in peace but also that on the way they had an enemy of Dingane that he had constantly failed to conquer. The DVD in the Bloedrivier Museum exhibition describes the situation of the Afrikaners:

Two major stumbling blocks had already been overcome. The Drakensberg [Mountains] had been crossed, and the group of British settlers in Natal welcomed his arrival. But there was a third stumbling block. Dingane, king of the Zulus. He had murdered his half brother, Shaka, in 1829.

With dramatic music the DVD illustrates the dangers Retief and his people were in. "Retief had no idea that he would be negotiating with a sly, suspicious man, a man who didn't hesitate to murder his own family", it says. 5. November 1837 Retief followed by a small group of Afrikaners, visited Dingane. Retief wanted all the land south of the Thukela River, this was around half of Dingane's land. Dingane indicated that the Afrikaners would be given the right to settle in the area where Retief had defeated Dingane's enemy, which was now vacant (Naidoo, 1989: 114). But before the matter could be settled he asked for Retief to arrange for the return of cattle previously stolen by the Sotho speaking Si-Konyela¹¹.

After the visit with Dingane, Retief sent off a message to his people saying that it had been a success. Subsequently the Afrikaners moved into the land from the Drakensburg Mountains where they had resided. Soon Dingane found out that even though the cattle had not yet been returned, many 'Whites' had moved into his lands. The Afrikaners did retrieve the cattle, and in February 1838 Retief returned to Dingane.

RETIEF AND THE TREATY AT MGUNGUNDLOVU

An important element in the hegemonic discourse is a visit to Mgungundlovu by Retief in February 1838. Giliomee and Laband argue that together with seventy Afrikaner volunteers, the British trader Thomas Halstead as an interpreter, and about thirty 'Black' servants who were to look after the horses, Retief left the rest of the Afrikaners (Giliomee, 2003: 165; Laband, 1995: 85). The Bloedrivier exhibitions claim that the 'Whites' were sixty, and brought with them thirty "followers" (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 7). In 1879 it was claimed that the thirty followers were "Hottentotts" (Khoikhoi) (Mann, 1879: 26). Nevertheless, instead of a small group, like the first time, the Afrikaners were now close to one hundred, an amount sufficient for an army

¹¹ Dingane said that it was 'White' people who had stolen the cattle. Some scholars argue that this was actually so (J. S. M. Maphalala, 1998: 58), others that Dingane knew that the culprit was the Sotho speaking Si-Konyela (Mutwa, 1977: 251).

rather than a diplomatic pursuit. Laband argues that it was done on purpose to show power, and impress and intimidate Dingane (1995: 85).

The treaty between Retief and Dingane read¹²:

Know all men by this, that whereas Pieter Retief, Governor of the Dutch emigrant South Africans, had retaken my Cattle, which Sikonyella had stolen; which Cattle he, the said Retief, now deliver unto me: I DINGAAN, King of the Zoolas, do hereby certify and declare that I thought fit to resign unto him, Retief, and his countrymen (on reward of the case hereabove mentioned) the Place called 'Port Natal', together with all the land annexed, that is to say, from Dogela [Thukela River] to the Omsoboebobo [Umzimvubu] River westward; and from the sea to the north, as far as the land may be useful and in my possession. Which I did by this, and give unto them for their everlasting property (Mountain, 1999: 100).

According to the exhibition at Bloedrivier Museum, the treaty was signed on 4 February (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 7). Two days later, on the 6 February, there was to be a party in which Retief was invited to sit next to Dingane. Mountain describes what happened next:

The first dance had been in progress for about fifteen minutes, during which the dancers steadily drew closer and closer in rhythmic motion to the unsuspecting Boers. And then, without leaving his seat, the king's voice pierced the sultry air with the stark words: *Bulalani abathakathi!* (Kill the wizards!) – words that have since resounded with an undying ringing in the long corridors of South Africa's subsequent history (1999: 101).

They were all killed. "Retief was forced to watch how everybody, including his son were tortured and clubbed to death with knobkerries. Retief was the last to be killed (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 7).

But why call the Afrikaners wizards? In the hegemonic discourse, represented by most of these texts, the use of the word *wizard* is not questioned, only noted as a 'fact'. But some theories have come forward, based on Zulu oral history. According to these traditions, the Afrikaners should have tried to hurt Dingane and his wives by using witchcraft. But it could also be nothing more than the signal from Dingane to attack. Maphalala expands on the former theory:

Retief and his men moved about looking at the huts. In one of the huts there was a Zulu woman who was pregnant. The shock of seeing whites for the first time resulted in her giving birth prematurely. This incident was reported to Dingane. As superstition was still

12 It is in English. Neither Zulu nor Afrikaans existed as written languages at that time. Questions can also be asked as to whether the Afrikaners or Zulus knew how to read and write English, or if they could read or write at all.

rife in those days the king came to the conclusion that Retief and his men were 'Abathaki', i.e. people who practice witchcraft. Consequently an order was given for them to be put to death (1981, in Golan, 1994: 24).

By thinking that a 'White' man is practising witchcraft, Retief becomes part of an African magical world – and it becomes understandable why he had to die.

Credo Mutwa's version differs in several details from other narratives. In many respects Mutwa's version does not fit with either Zulu nationalist or Afrikaner nationalist discourses. According to him Retief was popular amongst the Zulu speaking people, unlike Dingane (1977: 250). Mutwa therefore comes up with another reason for his behaviour, the British is to blame: The Englishman Thomas Halstead used to ride very closely to the Royal Kraal, where all the royal wives were. Thus Dingane started thinking that the 'Whites' were out doing evil by hitting his weak spot – his wives. Hence he had them killed (ibid.: 252-254). The Ncome exhibition underlines the importance of witchcraft. It also points at the "occupation" of land in 1837, a view that is gaining more weight in a post 1994 South Africa. Here the Afrikaners are regarded as threats to Dingane's sovereignty. A third reason pointed out is the claim that the Afrikaners tried to "seize royal cattle belonging to King Dingane". A fourth reason for the attack on Retief was the refusal of the Afrikaners to "hand over all the cattle, guns and horses" from Si-Konyela (Ncome exhibition, panel 4). Other than listing these reasons for Dingane's actions, the Ncome exhibition deals very cursory with the battle itself. It is mentioned, but with few details.

BATTLES BEFORE 16 DECEMBER

Ten days later, on 17 February, "10 Zulu regiments attacked the unsuspecting Trekkers near the Thukela River at Bloukrans. In a night of grieve and tragedy, nearly 500 Trekkers and their servants were massacred" (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 8). The Ncome Museum exhibition uses less value laden words. "After the death of Retief the Zulu army marched on Nobamba to attack the Voortrekkers. This led to the battle at Msuluzi River [Bloukrans]" (Ncome exhibition, panel 4). According to Laband the Zulu army killed some 40 'White' men, 56 'White' women, 185 'White' children and 250 'Coloured' servants (1995: 91). Maphalala argues that it was not the Zulu army's intention to kill women and children, however some got caught in the cross fire (1998: 59). Many Zulus were also killed during the attack. About the consequences of this battle Mountain writes:

The Bloukrans massacre represents a turning point in the Voortrekker history. [...] The Zulu king's plan nearly shattered the Voortrekkers' sense of superiority and their belief in the divine justification of their cause. But it didn't and, instead, in time, added a sense of pious righteousness to their endeavours (1999: 105).

THE VOW – PREPARATION FOR THE BATTLE AT NCOME BLOEDRIVIER

In November 1838 the Afrikaner commandant Andries Pretorius arrived in the area together with sixty men. He started planning an attack on the Zulus, for avenge as well as for retaliation. More people joined, and finally he headed for Dingane's capital Mgungundlovu, with 64 ox-wagons carrying supplies and ammunition. The number of people in his group differs in different sources. Some say that the group consisted of 468 Afrikaners, three British and sixty 'Blacks' (for instance Giliomee, 2003: 165). It is unclear who these 'Blacks' were. Laband mentions "472 Voortrekkers, 3 Port Natal settlers and about 120 Port Natal Africans". In addition "330 wagon drivers and grooms" were there to take care of the animals (1998: 28). According to d'Assonville the Afrikaners were approximately 470 whites, and they brought 30 servants (2000: 55). The Bloedrivier Museum exhibition mentions 464 Voortrekkers, "many" wagon drivers, three British settlers from Port Natal, as well as 100 "Zulu-auxiliaries" ("Bloedrivier Exhibition", 2002: Panel 11). The DVD at Bloedrivier talks about 464 Voortrekkers of which three were British settlers, 100 Zulus, 100 wagon drivers and 120 'Coloured' men. The 120 'Coloureds' are also at one point called "others" ("DVD at Bloedrivier Museum", 2003). The DVD points out that only the Voortrekkers and British would participate in the fighting, but Laband argues that those he calls "Port Natal Africans" probably took part in the fighting. The matter of participation is important in the hegemonic discourse.

The Ncome Museum does not mention any numbers in their exhibition. Instead it presents the actions of the Zulus as defensive: "When it was heard that the Voortrekkers were advancing on Mgungundlovu a decision was taken by the King in Council to stop them before they reached the Royal Palace" (Ncome exhibition, panel 6).

On the Afrikaner side discipline was fierce, and according to the hegemonic discourse a sense of purpose was encouraged in all. Every day scouts were sent out and every night the ox-wagons were pulled into a semicircle, and made into the battle formation called *laager*. Every morning and evening religious services were held to ask for the help of God and "to celebrate the conviction that they were His chosen servants on a just and holy mission" (Mountain, 1999: 108). Laband phrases it slightly different: "in true Calvinist style they were encouraged to believe that they were the chosen servants of the Lord in a just and holy cause" (1995: 97). To strengthen the feeling of being on a holy mission a vow was proclaimed on the 9 December. It was then repeated every evening. "If God gave them victory over the Zulu army, they would commemorate that day as a Sabbath and build a church to the glory of God" (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 11). The vow as it is known today goes like this:

Here we stand/Before the Holy God of heaven and earth/To make Him a vow that/If He will protect us/And deliver our enemies into our hands,/We will observe the day and

date each year/As a day of thanks, like a Sabbath,/And that we will also tell our children/To join us in commemorating this day,/Also for coming generations./For His name will be glorified/By giving Him/All the honour and glory of victory (translation from Afrikaans in Mountain, 1999: 109)

Many Afrikaners have a copy of the vow hanging in their living-room or kitchen. The vow makes the battle into a unique event in the history of the Afrikaners (A. van Jaarsveld, 2008). There is no original written version of it, but three versions exist with the oldest being from 1876. The covenant as it is remembered today is a reconstruction made in 1919. (F. A. van Jaarsveld, 1980: 9). What matters is that it has become part of the discourses that surrounds the battle, and helps making sense of it. Together with the battle itself, it serves as another nodal point organising the elements in the hegemonic discourse where it also organizes the meaning of the battle. In Zulu discourses on the battle the vow is ignored, whilst in others it is contested and questioned.

THE BATTLE

The Zulu army and the Afrikaner army spotted each other on the 15 December, and Pretorius led his soldiers to make a laager. The general view is that the laager was formed as a large D. The circumference was approximately 400 metres, and the diameter 65 metres. Estimated 640 oxen were inside the laager and 750 horses as well (DVD in the Bloedrivier exhibition).



The buffalo horn battle formation of the Zulu army. Panel seven, Ncome Museum.

When in battle the Zulu army used the *buffalo horn formation*, as illustrated above by the Ncome exhibition. When embarking upon an enemy, some regiments go left of the enemy and some right, in order to surround the enemy, and making escape difficult. On open grounds this technique made the Zulu army hard to beat, even with guns and horses.

It was a cold and misty night with little light, and the Zulus attacked in the morning (d'Assonville 2000: 27). The Afrikaners had lanterns hanging from whip handles, and the Zulu soldiers supposedly thought that they were the ancestors of the Afrikaners protecting them. If they had

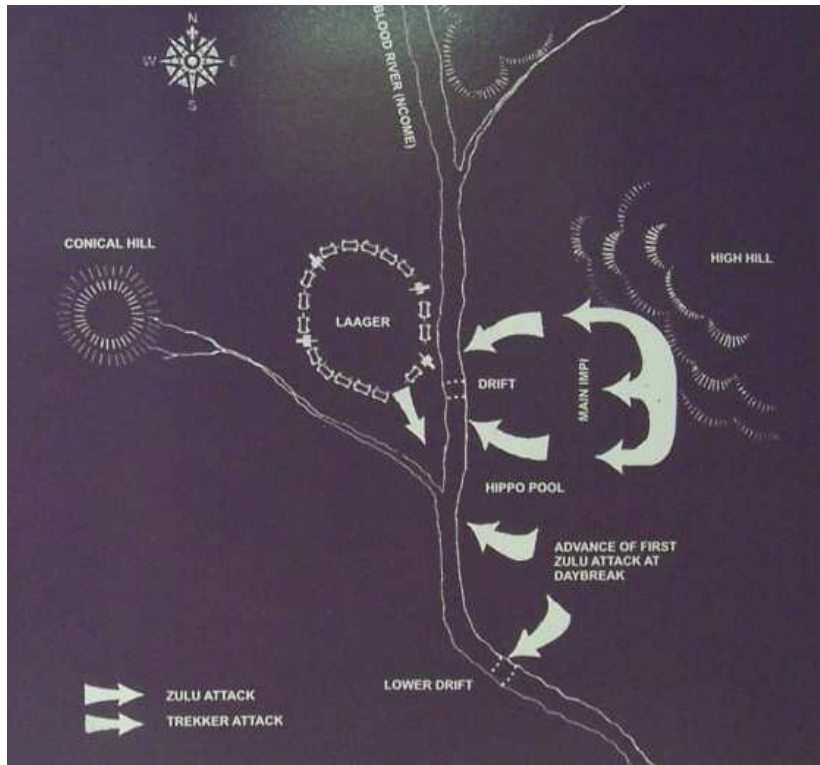
attacked the laager at night, the result of the battle might have been very different. The rifles of the Afrikaners would not have been able to fire in the wet, foggy weather. According to an old Zulu soldier: "When we saw the dim lights in the air, we said: no, we can't attack in the dark because the *Mahlozi's* [ancestors] of the white people take care of them. We have to wait until day-light" (d'Assonville 2000: 29). Maphalala argues that according to Zulu tradition, they do not go to war during the night, thus they waited till dawn 16 December 1838 (1998: 61). But this hardly fits with the attack at Bloukrans ten months earlier, when the Zulus supposedly deliberately waited for a moonless night before attacking. The Ncome exhibition says that waiting until dawn was done to prevent the warriors from accidentally stabbing one another" (Ncome exhibition, panel 7). Being a tactical error, explanations are needed for the actual actions that took place. In the hegemonic discourse Zulu 'superstition' protected the Afrikaners, whilst the vow is regarded as leading to victory due to the presence of God.

When the morning mist lifted on the 16 December, the first attack was launched by the Zulu army, and wave after wave made piles of Zulu soldiers shot dead by the Afrikaners. It was too packed with people, the Zulus could not move backwards, away from the firing. The Ncome exhibition claims that the attack was called off as soon as it was realised that it failed (Ncome exhibition, panel 7). Around one thousand Zulus hiding in the river were shot in the water. Their blood gave the river a new name, Bloedrivier, meaning Blood River (Laband, 1995: 101; Mountain, 1999: 110). Dalifa Ngobese, the researcher at the Ncome Museum, argues that the Zulus acknowledged their defeat, but he protests against what he sees as arguments that the water turned into blood (2003: 6).

The number of dead Zulu soldiers is one of the most contested 'facts' in the story of the battle. It is commonly suggested that 3000 Zulus were killed in this battle, and only three Boers were injured (Giliomee, 2003: 165; Mountain, 1999: 110). Also the number 3500 on estimated killed Zulus is used. This number turned up in a letter written by Pretorius a few days after the battle (d'Assonville, 2000: 55; G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 32). Mutwa writes that there were 10 000 dead Zulus at Blood River (1977: 255). Where this number comes from, Mutwa does not say. Maphalala argues that there were some losses, but not as many as 3 000. Besides, he says, the Afrikaners never bothered to count the dead bodies, so there is no way we can know how many they are (1998: 61). Servants, slaves and 'Coloureds' are normally not included in the discussions on numbers.

The number of Zulu soldiers is not known either, and different accounts operate with numbers between 10 000 and 30 000. By some more right wing Afrikaners the number 40 000 is used (Robinson, 19-31.12.2003). Laband argues that the Zulu army consisted of between 12 000 and

15 000 men (1995: 98). Andries Pretorius judged them to be around 15 000 in the above-mentioned letter. d'Assonville write that the army consisted of 36 regiments, and each regiment had around 900-1 000 soldiers, in other words they could have been 32 400 (2000: 28).



Panel seven, Ncome Museum.

About the end of the battle Mountain writes:

As the defeated and badly bruised *amabutho* [Zulu soldiers] disappeared over the distant hills, the Boers dropped to their knees and thanked God for delivering the enemy into their hands. [...] A church could now be built and their roots dug deep into the soils of their new land” (Mountain, 1999: 111).

It is interesting that Mountain uses ‘roots’ and ‘their new land’, phrases that says something about the ‘natural state’ of the Afrikaners in staying in that area. F.A. van Jaarsveld described the battle in 1975, during the apartheid era, as follows:

On the 16th December 1838, 470 Voortrekkers and a few English and non-White servants crushed Dingaan’s 12 000-man Zulu army during a reprisal expedition. This crushing defeat was the outcome of the well-known *Battle of Blood River* and it bound the Afrikaners to a promise they had made to God that, if they defeated Dingaan, their descendents would forever commemorate the well-known *Day of the Covenant*. [...] Encircled by 64 wagons, the Trekker commando, under the command of Andries Pretorius, bravely fought off overwhelming numbers of barbarians with primitive ‘Sanna’ rifles. The brave warriors attacked with assegais, but the victory went to the

Voortrekkers. The victory was described by them as one of God's miracles. However, for Dingaan, this defeat was the beginning of the end of his might; for the Voortrekkers it meant the opening up and colonization of Natal (1975: 123-124).

F.A. van Jaarsveld describes the Zulus as barbarians, but also as brave warriors, in this text. This has certain implications. They are not 'treacherous', and this version may easily be accepted by both Afrikaners who were even better than "brave warriors", as well as by Zulu nationalists.

THE TREATY

According to the Ncome exhibition Dingane retreated north after the battle, and his palace was burnt down by the Afrikaners (panel 7). The Bloedrivier exhibition quotes Pretorius:

[Y]esterday while we were still approaching [Mgungundlovu], Dingane set it alight, his palace was also burnt. At this murderous place or Golgotha we had to collect the bones of the worthy Retief and his followers... We buried them to the best of our abilities" (panel 15).

Because of the material and social consequences the meaning given to the treaty between Dingane and Retief in South Africa, it is interesting to discuss the different sets of meaning given to it also by other conflicting discourses. According to Mountain it was found in Retief's pouch, and Mountain describes it as "still in a remarkable (if not miraculous) state of preservation, especially when considering that all the other documents in the bag were in a deplorable condition" (1999: 112)¹³. It is not easy to know whether Mountain mentions this because he thinks it is true or because he doubts the whole story. Mills and Williams note that "[s]uch doubts are certainly not entertained in the Afrikaner version of events" (2006: 32). In the hegemonic discourse the existence of the treaty is not questioned. An alternative discourse is found in the Ncome exhibition.

Many Zulu people and writers, as well as experts in the Zulu history, have emphasized that no Treaty was signed by King Dingane and Piet Retief. Afrikaans historians disagree and state that the original document was removed from the archives in Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War [1899-1902] and then disappeared" (panel 8).

d'Assonville argues that the treaty was proven to be legal at the University of Stellenbosch in 1924 (2000: 58). Exactly how the treaty could be proven legal in 1924 when the original supposedly disappeared more than twenty years earlier is not explained. One of the above mentioned "experts in the Zulu history" is Laband, who states that the "Voortrekkers based their

¹³ Mountain might have taken this phrase from Laband, who write: "It was in a remarkable (if not miraculous) state of preservation, considering that the other papers with it were in a deplorable condition" (Laband, 1995: 103).

legal claim to Natal on this document, but its status cannot be other than problematical, if not entirely spurious” (1995: 103). One argument meeting these challenges to the hegemonic discourse is that regardless of forgery or not, the treaty was irrelevant since an oral agreement had been made between Retief and Dingane (ibid.: 87). Another argument is that Dingane did not care about the treaty, which makes the claims based on it, as well as oral agreements, irrelevant.

In 1839, a town was made as capital for the Afrikaners’ new *Republic of Natalia* (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 18). They named it Pietermaritzburg after Pieter Retief and Gerrit Maritz. Here they also built the *Church of the Vow* (finished 1841) in honour of the covenant. Political scientist Andre du Toit together with Giliomee, argue that the battle of 1838 and the traumatic experiences leading up to it, represented a shift in the justifications given by the Afrikaners for their rights to the land. Even though they bought, bartered and obtained land by treaty, it was now also paid for with Afrikaner blood (1983: 201-202). Instead of winning by conquest, sacrifices gave moral rights to the lands.

SO, WHAT’S WITH THE STORY?

Anthony Smith points at the importance of having a shared history for an ethnic group. The history must be coherent and tell a story, even though, like here, the narrative may in reality be a conflicting skeleton (1994: 26). By questioning and retelling the story, its importance is confirmed. When contesting discourses can be interpreted along lines of ethnicity division, they can also be dismissed on ethnicity grounds.

In the Afrikaner hegemonic discourse the battle is a nodal point which organizes different elements, such as the treaty, the killing of Retief and the commemoration of the day, in such a way as to make them meaningful for Afrikaners. As such, the vow plays an important role in the organizing of the battle. As shall be seen in chapter three, these meanings have changed up through the years, and other meanings have also been attached to the battle. Also Zulus have seen the battle as an important nodal point, even though many elements in the hegemonic discourse are contested, such as the number of dead Zulu soldiers and the existence of the treaty. But the contestation of the elements is done according to the meanings given them in an Afrikaner discourse, and this shows its current hegemony. Some of the contestations have to do with whether the elements belong in the story and which elements are regarded as important in relation to each other. If the treaty exists, Dingane was treacherous, and if it does not, Piet Retief and the Afrikaners must have been treacherous, and so on.

This chapter has looked at the story told about the battle, and focused on the differences in the different approaches, as well as the disagreements in it. The next chapter has these stories as its

background material, and emphasize is on how these stories came to be seen as relevant, and different manners the battle has been used.

CHAPTER 3- LONG WALK TO RECONCILIATION

At the Blood River battleground you stand on sacred soil. It is here that the future of South Africa as a civilized Christian country and the continued existence of the responsible authority of the white race was decided... You stand today in your own white laager at your own Blood River, seeing the dark masses gathering around your isolated white race (Daniel François Malan, leader of the National Party, in a speech 16.12.1938, quoted in Ehlers, 2003).

We have gathered here today to salute and thank the brave warriors of King Dingane [...] who at this very place and across this river Ncome [...] displayed unequalled bravery and paid the supreme price by defending their land with shields and spears against invading armies of cannons and rifles. They fought and died so that we could live. They fought and died so that we could have a united and sovereign country South Africa (Deputy Minister Ntombazana Botha, 16.12.2005, in a speech held at the Ncome Site)

Chapter two has provided the historical background for the battle and the present day narrations of the battle. But why are there two museums? Many reasons can be given. The battle was between two opposing parties, and having two museums may seem 'logical' in that respect. But it is not necessarily so. In this chapter I will look at how the date 16 December has been seen and used by South Africans after 1838. Analysing how '16 December' became embedded in Afrikaner culture and the minds of South Africans in general, can shed some light on the reasons for having two separate museum structures rather than one inclusive museum. Here a genealogical approach, inspired by Foucault (2006; , 1995), to the stories on the battle will be attempted at, starting with a curious incident in 1866.

'GREAT TREK' IDEOLOGY

Many Afrikaners, who had participated in the 'Great Trek' in the 1830s, attended a onetime ceremony at the site of the battle in 1866. Also attending was an old Zulu soldier who had participated in the battle. The reasons for his presence are not given. A stone-cairn was constructed in the middle of the battlefield.

Strangely enough, another detail is sometimes added to the event:

[F]rom the east, [...] came Cetshwayo, king of Zululand. With him was a great following of warriors. But this time he had not come to do battle with the Voortrekkers, but to celebrate the peace between them. Cetshwayo addressed the Boers and emphasized the

strong ties between the Zulu nation and the Boer nation, ties as strong so it was as if the two groups were living under the same roof¹⁴ (DVD in the Bloedrivier exhibition).

Cetshwayo was crowned as a king in 1873, seven years later, and was probably not present during this ceremony, even though several say so (for example d'Assonville 2000: 61; and G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 34). The ceremony was a powerful symbol of early reconciliation that fits well with the contemporary political situation. The emphasis of Cetshwayo's presence can be seen in this light, especially since literature on the relationship between Afrikaners and Zulus from 1879 did not mention such a ceremony (Mann, 1879).

The cairn of rocks from 1866 in the middle of the laager. The vow has been written in English and Afrikaans next to it.



After 1866 the 16 December was hardly commemorated. But in the 1880s Paul Kruger resurrected the day. He was a republican leader who understood the importance of the symbolic value of the battle (Giliomee, 2003: 166). Kruger turned the 'Great Trek' into a heroic myth emphasizing the Afrikaners' 'passion for freedom'. As a child he had participated in the trek (Heymans, 1986: 13-14). The battle of Ncome Bloedrivier, and the vow made before the battle, was to him symbols of the will to survive as an independent people against overwhelming odds. The commemoration of these events became a grand political and religious occasion (Giliomee, 2003: 234). Afrikaner nationalism had been generated by the British conquest of the Afrikaner republic Transvaal in 1877. In 1880 the Afrikaners revolted against the British. At a ceremony the vow was renewed. According to the historian Anton Ehlers, the Afrikaners promised themselves to fight the British domination (2003).

Kruger made well use of their victories and the religious elements, and played part in the shaping of a discourse on the battle as one about a golden age, turning it into the myth of "how we became heroic", (to put it in the words of Smith, 1994: 192). In 1881 he spoke at the

¹⁴ D'Assonville seems to be the source used in the DVD due to similar phrasing.

commemoration of 16 December claiming that the Afrikaners were a people of God, more or less like the Israelites of the Old Testament, fighting different enemies, both 'Black' and 'White', to get their promised land (Ehlers, 2003). The battle and the Great Trek were used as symbols in the sense of philosopher Etienne Balibar, to construct an Afrikaner identity while making it understood that this identity was there before the trek (1996: 132). At the turn of the century, the struggles between the Afrikaners and the British became more intense, resulting in the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902):

The Afrikaner interpreted his history as a bitter struggle for self-preservation and fulfilment in the face of the hostile forces of nature and the indigenous peoples that he found in the country. The British were seen as oppressors and opponents, as sympathizers with blacks in their struggle against the Boers (Visser, 2004b: 3).

The history of South Africa was seen as that of the conflict between Afrikaners and "British imperialism and black barbarism" (ibid.: 4). This perspective was an important element in the 'nation building' of the Afrikaners. Everything that did not fit within this nationalistic discourse was ignored (du Toit, 1980: 114; du Toit & Giliomee, 1983: xv).

1938 – 100 YEARS AFTER THE BATTLE

In 1938, on the centenary for the battle, the celebrations amongst the Afrikaners were massive. The trek was re-enacted with nine ox-wagons. Some went to Pretoria to lay down the cornerstone of the Voortrekker Monument. Historians Albert Grundling and Hilary Sapire have written about the commemoration of the battle in 1938. During this ceremony it is said that around 200 000 Afrikaners attended (Grundlingh & Sapire, 1989: 20). One wagon went to Ncome Bloedrivier. Many Afrikaners dressed in 'Voortrekker clothes' to greet the ox-wagons on the way. In this way the Afrikaners came face to face with their mythological past (Giliomee, 2003: 433). Grundlingh and Sapire argue that the celebrations in 1938 were closely related to the political situation. At that time many Afrikaners were poor. The old way of life on the farms were disintegrating, and many Afrikaners felt threatened by English language and culture (1989: 25). By having such commemorations the Afrikaners could identify with previous golden ages. 'December 16' could unify Afrikaners despite class differences and different life forms. In this way Afrikaner nationalism was strengthened (ibid.: 23). According to Alan Paton, the events in 1938 were important in the coming to power by D.F. Malan's Nationalist Party in 1948, who initiated the apartheid system (G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 35). It coincided with the rise of populist Afrikaner nationalism focusing on "'struggle', 'survival' and 'salvation'" (Grundlingh & Sapire, 1989: 27).



To the left: The ox-wagon monument by Coert Steynberg. To the right: The cairn from 1938. Tracks from the ox-wagon in 1938 in cement in front of the cairn. The Bloedrivier Museum building is in the background.

The cornerstone for a granite ox-wagon design by the Afrikaner sculptor Coert Steynberg was laid down on the battle site, on 16 December in 1938. The ox-wagon symbolises the home, stronghold and church for the Afrikaners (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 19). A new stone cairn was also erected during the 1938 commemorations, as a re-affirmation of the Vow. The ox-wagon that went to the Bloedrivier Ncome Site left its track marks in concrete to conserve it for eternity.

1988 – 150 YEARS AFTER THE BATTLE

In 1988, another re-enactment of the 'Great Trek' was done, and the tracks from the ox-wagon coming to Bloedrivier were cast in cement north of the cairn from 1938. According to Grundlingh and Sapire few attended the official festivities on this day, and they explain it with the change in the political situation. The coming to an end of the apartheid system and the pressure for reforms made the situation different from that of the 1930s (1989: 28). This resulted in the lack of interest among many Afrikaners, but those who were interested thought that the official commemorations did not go far enough, and alternative commemorations were well attended. At the end of the 1980s the Afrikaner symbols from the 'Great Trek' were often appropriated by the extreme right, and made meaningful for these marginalised groups. In this way they could "present themselves as the authentic custodians and torch-bearers of Afrikaner nationalism" (ibid.: 35).

In 2008 a third re-enactment of the battle was done, where an ox-wagon was drawn by Afrikaner men through a number of towns and cities all over South Africa, before it was taken to the Bloedrivier Site for the 16 December commemorations.

AFRIKANER AND 'BLACK'S' VIEWS ON THE BATTLE MYTHOLOGY

The 'political myths' such as the 'Great Trek' and the battle of Ncome Bloedrivier are believed to be 'true' because they make sense of people's experience of the present (Grundlingh & Sapire, 1989: 19). Since people experience their situation in different ways, the meaning of these 'political myths' change over time.

Conflicting discourses have existed for a long time. In 1961, 16 December, the military wing of the ANC was launched - the *uMkhonto we Sizwe*, meaning *the spear of the nation*. This shows that the '16 December' was important also for other groups than the Afrikaners in South Africa. For people sympathising with the ANC the day was transformed into the 'Heroes Day'. The historian Jabulani Sithole argue that it was regarded as an important day in that it legitimated armed struggle (1998: 34). According to the Ncome exhibition, "Africans" commemorate December 16, as the day on which "the Zulu nation displayed great bravery in defending their homeland" (panel 18). By "African" presumably 'Black' South Africans are meant. Dingane was seen as a freedom fighter by many 'Black' intellectuals. For them the day symbolised the struggle against racial oppression. But not all 'Blacks' participated in this discourse. Other 'Blacks' blamed Shaka and Dingane for creating ethnic conflicts in South Africa (Sithole, 1998: 33). Obviously 'Black' views also change according to the needs of the time.

In the 1970s South Africa experienced a serious economic and political crisis, due to apartheid and international isolation. In this period the Afrikaners desperately needed political and ideological support from English speaking South Africans and moderate 'Blacks', the latter often being Zulus. It was therefore important to downplay the ethnic exclusivity and divine mission of Afrikaners, which were important themes in the hegemonic discourse incorporating the battle and the vow. This led to a public debate on the nature of the celebrations of the 16 December. Three approaches crystallised. Conservative Afrikaners wanted to keep the day exclusively for Christian Afrikaners. The day, they claimed, is irrelevant for others, according to historian Jeff Guy (1998: 48). This position can be recognised in the arguments of Dawie Viljoen, the manager of the Bloedrivier Heritage Site when he argued that "[t]he Voortrekkers made the vow to God and the Zulus were not part of the Vow" (e-mail 19.12.2008). Conservative Afrikaner theologians claimed that only the Afrikaners participated in the making of the vow (Guy, 1998: 48). This point of view is still strong, and it might be assumed that most of those commemorating 16 December at the Bloedrivier Site, adheres to it. One of the few Afrikaners visiting the Ncome Site 16 December 2008 had the impression that those visiting the other side were very conservative and not representative of Afrikaners at all. He had expected more of a festival, more fun, but he had the impression that the Afrikaners were for the most part very serious (field diary, 16.12.2008).

A second view was to abolish the day as a public holiday because of its exclusivity (Ehlers, 2003). One Afrikaner woman in her forties said to me during the commemorations on 16 December 2008 that she would go back to her usual holiday celebrations next year – having a big barbeque. It was her first time at the Bloedrivier Site, and probably the last as well (field diary, 16.12.2008). One young Afrikaner in his late twenties, that I met the day before the commemorations, changed his plans to visit the battle site the next day. He did not want to be associated with such traditions at all (field diary, 15.12.2008).

A third view was to include English-speaking and 'Black' South Africans, and change the meaning of the day from confrontation to reconciliation, a position which was officially the stronger after 1994. Renaming it the 'Day of Reconciliation' is in line with this discourse. For many Afrikaners 16 December is not a day for reconciliation, but a day to commemorate a period in their history which has shaped the historical and political ideology of the Afrikaner people. The dream of a country freed from the British, but threatened by the Zulus, is similar to today's situation for some. In the 1980s, du Toit and Giliomee wrote: "Merely to raise questions concerning the position of the Afrikaners in a South Africa where they no longer have a monopoly of political power is, to many Afrikaners, fraught with the threats of loss of culture and identity" (1983: xiv). In 1994 this became reality.

The ultra-conservative Afrikaners highly oppose the post-1994 understanding of the day (Guy, 1998: 49). They also strongly opposed the movement of 'demytologization' among some historians in the 1970s. F.A. van Jaarsveld spoke in 1979 at a conference on the meaning of the battle, and questioned the authenticity of the form of the vow (as mentioned in chapter two). He concluded by saying that many other countries as well have argued that God was on their side in (1980: 49). Because such 'tampering' was done on the Afrikaner vow, members of the Afrikanerweerstandsbeweging stormed into the hall and tarred and feathered van Jaarsveld (Allen, 2002; Guy, 1998: 48).

There have been feelings of insecurity amongst Afrikaners after 1994 (Visser, 2004a). Presumably the change in government in 1999 from Nelson Mandela's *Rainbow nation* (different but equal), to Thabo Mbeki's *African Renaissance*, did not help to remove the anxiety. Renaissance means *rebirth*, and what was to be reborn were "African cultural values" (meaning 'Black'). These values should be "researched, collected and carefully stored in museums for purpose of rewriting our history and preserving our heritage", according to Sikhumbuzo Maphalala¹⁵ (2000: 58). The consequences of 'positive' discrimination also made many Afrikaners fear for their jobs. According to General Opperman there were 5000 people at the Voortrekker Monument 16 December in 2008, the highest number during his period as director,

¹⁵ He was at the time educational officer at the Ncome Museum, and is the son of the historian Jabulani Maphalala.

and Albert van Jaarsveld said there were 3000 on the Bloedrivier Site (field diary, 16.12.2008). Insecurity and fear of the future is presumably one of the reasons for the rising amount of people attending the commemoration at the Bloedrivier Site as well as at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. This fits well with the explanation given by one of the men attending the Afrikaner celebrations. It was his first visit to Bloedrivier, but not the last, he said. He had the impression that there were more people at the site than before, and he felt a rise in Afrikaner identity. Solidarity among the Afrikaners had become more important, so he would return next year (field diary, 16.12.2008). It has been suggested that Afrikaner nationalism is dead (Blaser, 2004: 192). But the growing attendance at the Bloedrivier Site on 16 December may suggest otherwise.

THE CREATION OF THE NCOME SITE



The Ncome Museum seen through the bronze monument. When the DVD at the Bloedrivier Museum mentions the new government in 1994, it shows a view of the Ncome museum, similar to this, but it does not mention the other museum at all. 15.12.2008.

The making of a Zulu monument at Ncome Bloedrivier may in many ways seem as a just cause, adjusting the message from the one-sided story told at the Bloedrivier Site. It was one of several legacy projects initiated by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST). The Legacy Projects had to link heritage with national, economic and political priorities, affirm cultural diversity, redress previous imbalances, and address inclusiveness and the needs of disadvantaged communities (Dlamini, 2001: 126). The reason for these projects was the filling of gaps in the heritage scene, where colonial history was over-represented and other kinds of history more or less left out, according to a representative from the DACST, M. Xulu (1998: 3). These distortions were also part of school curriculum where Zulus were portrayed as barbarians, also for Zulu pupils (Report, July 1998). Nhlanhla Mkhulisi, the present manager at Ncome Museum, says it like this:

So the government realised that most of our history was [...] distorted because of apartheid. Many black people's histories were not recorded. [...] When the Blood River monument was established, it was established as celebrating the Afrikaner, [...] while neglecting the Zulu perspective. [...] This monument was established just to give a more balanced account of the battle of 1838" (interview 24.10.2008: 1).

This policy aimed to reframe history to satisfy the previously disempowered, whilst not offending those who disempowered them (Girshick, 2008: 38). Few monuments put up by the Afrikaner government were removed. Instead *balance* was looked for. But balance and reconciliation is not necessarily the same. Balance can very easily reproduce the traditional view of history (ibid.: 39). To put it in the words of Dawie Viljoen: “Bloedrivier represents the Voortrekkers, and Ncome the Zulus” (e-mail 19.12.2008). The work of Dlamini (2001) and of Girshick (2008) shows that ideas of balance, rather than clearly argued views, had great effect on the formation of the Ncome Museum. To begin with it started out as a suggested addition to the Bloedrivier Site, a memorial highlighting the Zulu experience, to the dismay of some conservative Afrikaners. Soon it was taken over by the Zulu nationalists of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and its leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and transformed into a separate structure. It is argued that he has established himself as the chief interpreter of Zulu culture (Wright & Mazel, 1991: 72). Buthelezi’s perspective on museums has been criticized for showing history from the point of view of the dominant groups or classes, and for using strategies taken over from Afrikaner nationalists (Coombes, 2004: 151-152).

By changing the site from a memorial to a monument; and from an information centre to a museum, it was possible to “erase the humiliation and defeat of the Zulu army and promote instead an image of a strong, valiant people” (Girshick, 2008: 48). At Ncome only part of the exhibition deals with the battle. Here Zulu oral traditions are used as sources, and the Voortrekkers are seen as the aggressors. The presentations are a-historical, showing static Zulu culture and Zulu warriors, (more about this in chapter four). In this way “a national heritage project was transformed from a symbol of reconciliation to one of ethnic resistance” (ibid.: 44-45).

The project director, the Afrikaner Dolf Havemann, suggested the buffalo horn battle formation as an appropriate shape for a monument, and an architectural competition was subsequently won by his son. Facing the ox-wagon replicas on the other side of the river, 23 shields were painted, representing the Zulu regiments who participated in the battle. Interestingly, a newspaper article suggests that many conservative Afrikaners “saw it as a deliberate provocation rather than the right of the other side to honour their dead and their version of events” (Bishop, 17.12.2005).

The manager Nhlanhla Mkhulisi appreciates the architecture of the museum.

I like particularly the shields facing the river because it gives the museum a symbolic identity. If you remember, going back to the history it was at that time the shields against

the guns in the war. [...] So it gives us more of an identity, it was the shield, symbolic of the protection, the pride of the Zulu people (interview 24.10.2008: 5).

Zulu shields are used as symbols amongst Afrikaners and Zulus alike, for example the Bloedrivier exhibition has used the shape of shields for their panels. Dalifa Ngobese, the researcher for the Ncome exhibition, has elaborated on the meanings of the buffalo horn formation. He argues that the circle or semi-circle is an African concept meaning “collective togetherness” and “love” (2003: 6).

It is a known fact that the horn formation strategy encourages oneness, passion, collective work and responsibility to *amabutho* [regiment] in the war environment [...] [The] horn formation strategy as a unifying factor that knits *amabutho* together in battle did eventually attain its mission. A Zulu nation was built based on one culture, one king, one nation in sharing tradition, grief, happiness and heritage. It is this belief that the South African nation should adopt for moral renewal and to fight against incurable disease” (ibid. : 7).

According to Ngobese there is such a thing as a *Zulu nation*, and the Zulu nation was based on a battle formation, knowledge that should be used in order to improve the South African nation. As we know, the battle formation used by the Afrikaners also took the shape of a circle or a semi-circle, but this point is not acknowledged by Ngobese.

In the museum exhibitions Maphalala’s Zulu-centred interpretations came to play an important role, and the Ncome exhibition ended up mirroring the one-sidedness at Bloedrivier Museum. This was done also by omitting other ‘Black’ participation than the Zulu (Dlamini, 2001: 135). But the Afrikaner Dolf Havemann was also important in the formation of ideas around what Zulu-ness is. This essentialization of Zulu culture may therefore have come as a result of the combination of the Zulu and Afrikaner ideas of how to visually show the ‘essence’ of a culture (Girshick, 2008: 49-50).

Sinothi Thabethe, previously the manager at the Ncome Site, argues in an article that in most history museums “historical controversies are often disregarded [...] Each museum tends to articulate and present a certain ideology by presenting one side of the story without any acknowledgement of the other” (2008: 5). It may seem as though Thabethe points at the lack of a Zulu perspective at the Bloedrivier Museum. But the same situation can be observed at the Ncome exhibition, where Afrikaner, Sotho and other perspectives are neglected.



The shields facing the bronze ox-wagons. 15.12.2008.

The Ncome Museum has received criticism of similar kind before, Mkhulisi says:

Some people have been critical, saying ‘now, are you not doing what they did? It is more like you are now coming with your Zulu perspective [alone]. Are you not promoting the spirit of reconciliation?’ The museums are part of the national agenda of the government of reconciling these people, and slowly we are working well with the other museum. The politics of South Africa do come in even in the museums, but slowly that will start to evaporate. It is true that there were two sides, and these two sides are giving, let me not say *two* different accounts, more like *different* accounts. [...] So we hope we are also playing a role in trying to paint a picture of what happened here in 1838, but more giving that Zulu voice as well, that we think was lacking” (interview 24.10.2008: 2).

In other words, Mkhulisi sees 1838 as important in order to understand why the country is the way it is. The group organizing the commemoration at the Bloedrivier Site on 16 December 2008, argues in a similar manner. “As the history of the Great Trek is no longer taught in any government schools, an entire generation is oblivious of their history. By Commemorating events such as these” they wish to “make the children and their parents aware of important events” (e-mail from Kruger, 12.12.2008). The aims are different, however. Whereas Mkhulisi argues for remembering in order to promote change, the group argues for remembering in order to preserve. Against both view it could be argued that the *use* of the battle is more important than the actual story of the battle. The choice of promoting change or promoting preservation affects how the story is being used as well as the way the country is today.

There were 15 000 people attending the inauguration ceremony at the Ncome Site 16 December 1998 (Dlamini, 2001: 133). National and regional leadership were present, as well as the Zulu royalty and leaders of Afrikaner cultural organisations. The IFP leader, Buthelezi, suggested a

new covenant: “Let us consider this the day of a new covenant that binds us to the shared commitment of building a new country through a shared struggle against poverty, inequality, corruption, crime and lack of discipline at all levels” (speech held 16.12.1998). Minister Mtshali suggested that:

Two monuments at the site of the battle, commemorating the participation of both sides will complete the symbolism. They will unite the protagonists of 160 years ago. In so doing, they will hopefully help reconcile conflicting historical interpretations. Today’s event marks freedom from the yoke of many years of the divisive symbolism and dangerous stereotyping (quoted in Ehlers, 2003).

But on the other side of the river there was another ceremony, as usual every year, and few Afrikaners came across to the Ncome Site. It can be argued that the new museum made it even less relevant to include Zulus in the Afrikaner commemoration, since they now had their own place. What happened on the Zulu side was still irrelevant in the Afrikaner discourse on the battle.

For both sites the building of a foot bridge across the river to connect them was considered important. The bridge was planned to be part of a reconciliation ceremony on the 16 December 1998 (Havemann, August 1998). Until present time (2009) the bridge is still not completed, even though it was started in 1998. In practice it seems as though no one really want the two sites connected. Minister Mtshali’s speech about “unity” is symbolically challenged by the unfinished pillars in the river, suggesting continued difference and lack of will to communicate. The Ncome Site saw the bridge as symbolising the creation of the new nation state of South Africa (Dlamini, 2001: 131). But the difficulties in realising the foot bridge project say a lot about nationalism in

present day South Africa.



The bridge pillars. The bronze ox-wagons are in the background.

WHEN THE LOSERS DANCE AND THE WINNERS PRAY

Dancing is important in Zulu commemorations and celebrations, and the 16 December offers no exception to this. At the Ncome Site there is a dance festival with 'traditional' Zulu and Sotho dances on 15 December. Within different categories groups compete, and the winners are awarded prizes, and serve as entertainment the next day, in between speeches.

By dancing, the Zulus transform the meaning of the commemoration, and make sense of it in new ways. Not everyone agrees with the combination of dancing and commemorations. Dawie Viljoen argues that the Ncome Site's way of commemorating is 'wrong'. In his point of view they should rather commemorate the dead soldiers (e-mail, 19.12.2008). On the Bloedrivier Site there are ceremonies to commemorate those who died in the fights between Afrikaners and Zulus. "And that's everyone. Zulu, Afrikaner, there were also a few British people in the battle here" (interview with Viljoen, 24.10.2008: 4). There are religious services and singing of psalms and Afrikaner national songs. People "listen to the history of the events of December 1838 as related by historians" (e-mail from Kruger, 12.12.2008). Viljoen informs that the speaker is:

not supposed to speak anything about politics, only about the vow that was made and God because Blood River is not politics. It was a battle between black and white, but the white people made the vow to God, and everything on the 16 December is in connection with that. [...] there is nothing political in the vow" (interview 24.10.2008: 4-5).

Whether this is politics or not can be discussed, and at a superficial level it may not be. But in 2003, the reverend speaking supposedly stated: "On 27 April 1994 we lost our right to self-determination and freedom" (quoted in Dubin, 2006: 175). The commemorations seem to be part of an Afrikaner political programme. Mkhulisi argues that politics still play a part in the museums, even though in his view the museums should be politically independent (interview 24.10.2008: 2).



The three following photographs were taken during the dance festival at the Ncome Museum 15 December 2008. Here young boys and girls are dancing a battle dance.



Young girls are dancing.



Modern choir and dancing.

On the 16 December most visitors to the Bloedrivier Site are Afrikaners, according to Viljoen. But he adds that in 2007 there were a few Zulus and some English speaking people also. “Anyone is welcome here”, he says. But “what I find was happening is that you won’t go to my church because you won’t understand Afrikaans [...] so, that’s why I think most Zulu speaking doesn’t come here and I don’t want to go to their church because I won’t understand what’s going on” (interview 24.10.2008: 4).

Even though Viljoen substitutes skin colour with language, skin colour is still important. At the Ncome Site the first part of the programme on the 16 December 2008 was to join with the Afrikaners on the Bloedrivier Site. Many of the people working at the Ncome Site arrived at the Bloedrivier Site in the morning. They did not stay as long as they intended, though, because as ‘Blacks’ they felt threatened; they were told that if they went any further into the area than where the museum building stands, some of the Afrikaners might threaten them with violence. “Our intention was to stay for 1,5 hours but we could not stay for longer than 35 minutes. [...] “I am not bitter, but I am disappointed”, the programme director Mzi Mngadi says. But he adds:

“Maybe someday the other side and this side will celebrate together... maybe next year or in two years... Reconciliation... that is our dream” (field diary, 16.12.2008). Here the division between the two is still clearly described in terms of a discourse on skin colour. Also, in contrast to what Viljoen proposed, the people from the Ncome Site did not let language hinder them from visiting the Bloedrivier Site¹⁶.



On the 16 December many dress in ‘traditional’ Voortrekker clothes. From the top left: There were around 20-30 horses present under the ceremonies. Top right and bottom left: These pictures were taken during prayer. The flags belong to various Afrikaner republics and groupings from the trek in the 1830s and in the late 1800s. Bottom right: The flowers were laid down on the stone cairn from 1866 during the ceremony.



¹⁶ Some years previously several ‘Blacks’ had been made to leave the Site by conservative Afrikaners, some of whom belonged to the religious group *Daughters of Zion*. This group was banned from the Site on 16 December after this happening. But they were still present at the Site, and had their own ceremony down in the ox-wagon laager after most of the others had left (“Field diary”, 16.12.2008).

ONE OR TWO MUSEUMS IN THE FUTURE?

Mkhulisi is optimistic when it comes to the future for the country and the museums. “Yes, there is a lot that we can talk about on this subject of reconciliation. But we hope, slowly, slowly [it will happen], because the younger generations are starting to go to the same schools, whites and blacks” (interview 24.10.2008: 3). With this as a background, I asked Cecilia Kruger why there are two museums. She answered that “what you see on this battlefield and the interpretation thereof, is unfortunately symptomatic of the situation in South Africa - people still see their own histories and heritage as being exclusive, and their interpretations of events as being the only correct interpretations” (e-mail 12.12.2008).

Mkhulisi repeats his awareness of the fact that the museums seem to still be “promoting that division of the past”. For him “it is always good for [the visitors] to see these two different perspectives” (interview 24.10.2008: 11). But Mkhulisi would also prefer that the two museums join as one in the future (ibid.: 3). Bloedrivier manager Viljoen is of the opinion that combining the museums would lead to a better government subsidy situation, but to him there are also advantages in having two museums. “Because on this side we can concentrate on the Voortrekker side, and on the other side they concentrate on the Zulu side of the history so that makes it a bit easier for us and them”. Besides, Viljoen is focusing on the Afrikaners whose “great-great grand parents made the vow to God and the Zulus were not involved in that” (interview 24.10.2008: 6-7). The symbolic meaning of the vow seems to have been strengthened in a post apartheid South Africa when ethnicity and colour are no longer legitimate reasons for exclusion. A discourse promoting a ‘Black’ and ‘White’ division is still very strong, it may seem, and is strengthened by putting up the two museums at a time when cooperation and reconciliation is official policy.

SO, WHY ARE THERE TWO MUSEUMS?

In this chapter I wanted to understand more about why there are two museums on the site rather than one museum incorporating different views. Looking at the way the commemorations has changed since the battle in 1838, suggests that they follow the political climate in South Africa. Myths and other expressions of ethnicity, such as the narrative surrounding the battle, become important in moments of dramatic changes when traditional meanings are challenged and insecure (Eriksen, 1993: 11; Mali, 2003: 5). By adapting the myths to new circumstances, commemorations such as the ‘16 December’, can be used to ensure some sense of security and belonging (Smith, 1994: 3).

Repetition of rituals, such as the symbolic treks performed in 1938, 1988 and 2008 create a continuity with the past (Connerton, 1989: 45). All these re-enactments took place in times with

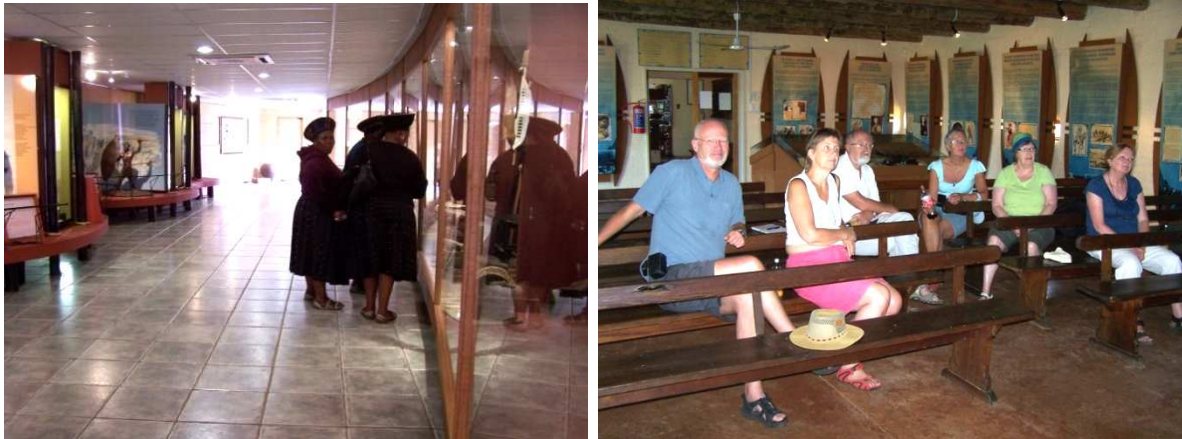
great changes. In 1938 many Afrikaners were poor, and felt oppressed by English culture and language. In 1988 the apartheid state was crumbling. In 2008 the optimism from 1994 amongst many Afrikaners has evaporated, and the future remains uncertain. By continuing to reproduce and reinterpret the Great Trek and Bloedrivier, it is possible for individuals to identify with Afrikaner symbols and myths (Smith, 2008: 19). The hegemonic discourses, and emotions generated amongst some Afrikaners in relation to the site, made it impossible for those concerned to accept the presence of Zulu interpretations on the same site.

The making of the Ncome Site happened in a period of great optimism and under a government promoting reconciliation as well as a discourse of filling out perceived gaps in the heritage scene. The battle at Ncome Bloedrivier and symbolism relevant to king Dingane were used by the ANC and other 'Black' organisations from early 20th century to make sense of the political situation in South Africa. In 1995 the '16 December' was officially turned into the Day of Reconciliation. But in the process of filling out the heritage gaps, strong groups within the Zulu community argued that the battle belongs to the Zulus, and makes sense of Zulu experiences, rather than 'Black' experiences. Combined with stereotypical ideas of 'Zulu-ness' from both Afrikaners and Zulus, the Ncome Site promote certain ideas of Zulu-ness, rather than coming up with alternative perspectives on the battle. In a search for 'balance', a dichotomized discourse with Zulus on one side and Afrikaners on the other has been promoted.

The sharp dichotomizations in the South African society made it possible to develop separate genealogies on the battle, filling it with different meanings. The discourses created through these processes have made the inclusion of other meanings impossible since separation is one of the premises for the discourses. In this way it can be argued that the Ncome Bloedrivier Site, even though both museums were erected after 1994, still promotes an idea of separation and separate development, reminiscent of the apartheid period.

CHAPTER 4 – IN SEARCH OF/ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW: THE EXHIBITIONS

In this chapter I will look at some of the discourses that are present in the two museum exhibitions. The museums are grounded in the different discourses on the battle that were presented in chapter two, and are also rooted in the genealogies of the battle discourse, as analysed in chapter three. Some lines of argument from the previous chapters will therefore be continued here, but now in relation to the actual exhibitions in the two museums.



To the left: Ncome exhibition during the dance festival 15 December 2008. A group of performers visited the exhibition in a break. To the right: The Bloedrivier exhibition. Entrance is in the back on the left hand side. The visitors are watching the DVD.

Not only the exhibitions themselves, but also the traditions the museums are part of, and the physical features of the sites are relevant to understand the different discourses. This chapter will start by looking at how the exhibitions situate themselves in relation to museological discourses. From there possible subject positions that the museum visitor is placed in, will be discussed by looking at what is taken for granted in the exhibitions, and possible restrictions on the visitor before her visit. Next, the exhibitions operate with certain categories of people, and the largest section of the chapter will look at which categories are being used, and what is done with those who do not fit the categorizations. Lastly, certain attempts that are made in the exhibitions at furthering a discourse of reconciliation will be analysed.

MUSEUM DISCOURSE AND EXHIBITIONS

As mentioned previously many changes have occurred within the museum sector in South Africa. The inclusion of previously neglected groups is attended at, and new objectives for the museums are sought. In the present situation new museology, with inclusion of all groups, and old museology, with exclusion and order, exist next to each other, even in the same museums. It can be argued that this represent discourses of form the museums situate themselves in relation to, whilst the discourses discussed in chapters two and three are discourses on the content of

the museum exhibitions and the stories on the battle. According to the South African Museum Association:

Museums are dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and education programmes that are responsive to the needs of society (www.samaweb.org.za).

Here the museum is seen as an institution which takes part in the shaping of consciousness and identity in the society it serves. This is a common way of seeing museums (Kreamer, 1992: 367). To put up these two museums can thus be seen as a felt need to mark the site of the battle for people who find the place meaningful. It has also been argued that focusing on a community approach is to make the European idea of the museum more 'African' (Dondolo, 2005). Nhlanhla Mkhulisi agrees with the community aspect of the museums: "You can see that we are located in the rural area. [We want to be] giving something back, I mean in terms of educating, especially the young generation", he says. "[I]n South Africa, and probably other African countries, and even in Europe, museums should be some sort of vehicles for empowerment" (interview 24.10.2008: 3).

Building museums is anything but neutral. The museum can be seen as a site with symbolic capital. To put up a museum is to 'gain capital', and thus improve the relative status of the group the museum is said to represent. But it can also be used to "present an alternative to the claims made by better-established museums" (Buntinx & Karp, 2006: 207). Both the Bloedrivier and the Ncome Sites seem to argue that this is the case for them. As we shall see, both claim to offer an alternative version of the battle. At the Ncome exhibition this is a basic claim: "*Ncome: Another point of view*". The exhibition ends with panel eighteen, informing about the processes which led to its making. It was a "Legacy Project", and its aim was "to address the imbalances in the heritage landscape". For that reason, the museum's intention was to offer a "positive re-interpretation" of the Ncome Bloedrivier battle, and the conflict of the 1830s between the Afrikaners and the Zulus. Adding to the many meaning of the '16 December', it says: "Africans, however, also came to commemorate December 16, albeit unofficially, as the day on which the Zulu nation displayed great bravery in defending their homeland". It was named 'Heroes Day', and the ANC chose this date to launch their military wing. The name 'Day of Reconciliation' was given to the day after "the birth of democracy in South Africa".

Cecilia Kruger agrees with the necessity of offering alternative stories on the battle due to the one-sided history writing during the apartheid government. But she argues that "some

interpretations of these events became absurd and farfetched”, and led to the decision by the Voortrekker Monument to put up a new exhibition in 2002 (e-mail 12.12.2008). She writes:

This balanced version was supposed to inform conservative Afrikaners, and even far right wing factions, as well as point out absurdities in the ‘new’ history, AND provide overseas visitors with a broad outline of the events before, during and after the battle. The goal was therefore to provide the majority of visitors to the site with an ‘objective’ account of the event (ibid.).

The Bloedrivier exhibition tries in other words to encompass everyone, both Zulu and Afrikaner, right wing and left wing, as well as foreign tourists, and manages to be called “fairly balanced” (G. Mills & Williams, 2006: 37) and as giving “an objective account” (Coan, 22.07.2003). The exhibition was put up in order to strengthen a certain discourse on the battle as a reaction to other contesting discourses. By calling it “objective” and “balanced” Kruger makes it more ‘natural’ and less contested. The hegemonic discourse always presents itself as ‘natural’.

The Ncome exhibition does not include a bibliography, and it is therefore difficult to see where the information comes from, and what the re-interpretations are based on. The Bloedrivier exhibition does include a bibliography. In this way the exhibition situates itself in a new museological and self-reflexive tradition characterized by more transparency. I have used some of the literature mentioned in the exhibition has been used in this thesis, but some is inaccessible to me due to being written in Afrikaans. But it is also interesting to see what is missing. Viljoen suggested Credo Mutwa, the Zulu historian, as source for information, but he has not been included here. Alan Mountain’s book, *The rise and fall of the Zulu empire* (1999), is used, but John Laband’s *Rope of sand. The rise and fall of the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century* (1995), which is more substantial, and written by a well-known historian, is not used¹⁷. The paper from the reinterpretation seminar in 1998 is listed, but it is difficult to see where the exhibition has used any of it. At least the exhibition tells us something about the self-understanding of those in charge of the museum.

The Bloedrivier exhibition continues with its modern and relatively transparent approach in the panel *In search for the truth*. This panel puts the ‘facts’ about the battle into perspective by mentioning the existence of alternative versions and its preference for primary sources. “Historical events are often interpreted in different ways”, it says. “The history of the Great Trek and the Trekkers in Natal is by no means an exception”. Even though it mentions that the story is contested, the rest of the exhibition presents everything as plain facts. To many visitors this panel is irrelevant. According to Cecilia Kruger they were asked to remove it by some visitors,

¹⁷ All three authors have been discussed more thoroughly in chapter two.

due to the shadow of doubt it casts over the rest of the exhibition (e-mail 12.12.2008). But Kruger chose to keep it because of the emotions attached to the battle by both Afrikaners and Zulus alike, and the myths that exist around it. According to her, the museum must “try and explain that there are different views and interpretations, and being a scientific institution, we must uphold this approach and acknowledge these differences”. Within a discourse of new museology, she continues: “No-one can really claim that their version is absolutely correct and therefore we base our display on the facts known to us. For that reason we chose NOT to remove the panel” (ibid.).

Using a scientific approach can be seen in the claim about “written (primary) sources”. In contrast, the exhibition mentions that “[b]ased on oral tradition, some historians even question the fact that the Battle of Blood River took place”. A third alternative would be the view that “the Voortrekkers’ victory [was] a miracle”. The exhibition situates itself: “Somewhere between these poles, lies the truth. The search for the truth should never be complete” (Bloedrivier exhibition, panel 1). But in the bibliography no primary sources are mentioned. To this Kruger says:

I know that primary sources actually refer to dairies, newspapers, primary accounts etc. In other words it is not quite primary sources used in the research for the display, but sources all based on primary sources. This term was used to differentiate between these sources and oral accounts (e-mail 12.12.2008).

Written sources are not the same as primary sources. But the important thing here is that written sources are given providence over oral sources. The latter are also, some way or another, primary sources, but stems from traditions of people without writing. As we shall see, neither oral traditions nor written traditions are neutral or innocent (Golan, 1994: 9).

Both the Ncome exhibition and the Bloedrivier exhibition situate themselves partly within a discourse of old museology, where museums are institutions of authority and ‘truth’ telling. Regardless of other versions, the ones proposed are seen as the correct ones, and few questions are asked about the ‘facts’. The Bloedrivier exhibition mentions the existence of alternative versions and the impossibility in ever reaching a final truth, but the ‘objective’ language in the exhibition does not show where the different ‘facts’ are contested. It acknowledges the existence of alternative discourses, but keeps its hegemonic position.

SUBJECT POSITION

These museological discourses do not only permit the opinion of the exhibition maker to be represented, but also to create the *subject position* she is placed in (Bal, 1996: 16f). It could also be said that the exhibitions situate the visitor as well, and offer her certain subject positions, rather than others. Kruger has already suggested that the exhibition is meant for everyone,

South Africans with different perspectives on the battle, as well as tourists. The re-interpretation approach of the Ncome Site suggests that the exhibition is meant for everyone who has heard other versions before, but Mkhulisi also points out that the museum is meant for the local community. The exhibitions take certain things for granted, and by looking at these assumptions, this section of this chapter four will analyse who the two exhibitions are aimed at, and what is taken for granted in the exhibitions.

PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

The physical appearance and situated-ness of the museums are means of inclusion and exclusion. The museums are situated in a rural area, and already this excludes people living elsewhere with little access to means of transport. It is difficult for Viljoen to run the Bloedrivier Site because of few visitors, he says. It is “far away, far from town, far off from the tar road” (interview 24.10.2008: 1). Indeed it is far from Dundee, the closest town. But in the surrounding area there are many people living. This says something about the target group of the Bloedrivier Site. It is not those who live close by the site, but people who have to travel to get there.

Both museums have big gates and fences, but in a South African context this is perhaps seen as a neutral state and therefore they do not exclude anyone. Whilst the Ncome Site has free entrance (they are funded by the government), the Bloedrivier charges R20 (approximately NOK15, they do not get governmental funding), in many respects very little, but not so for many South Africans. Added to the price, the idea of visiting museums is a phenomenon more commonly known in certain social classes than in others. The museum institution can be seen as part of an elite culture, not a place for the common South African (Martin, 1994; Merriman, 2000). This has not changed after 1994. Even though more visitors to South African museums are now more likely to be ‘Black’, they still come from the same middle to upper classes as before (Mathers, 2000).

Based on these physical features, it can be argued that the museum exhibitions are mainly aimed at people with access to a vehicle, with the interest in, the financial means of, and the spare time to visit museums. Outreach projects by the Ncome Site make it possible to extend access to schools as well.

LANGUAGE

Mkhulisi informs that they “organize two school debates in the calendar year with local schools where they debate a topic on present or current issues. [...] So these young kids come with all these good arguments. [...] It was nice for me because in rural areas you don't expect kids to be outspoken with this good command of English as well” (interview 24.10.2008: 9). The language barrier is anything but neutral. At the Bloedrivier exhibition the headlines are all given in

English, Afrikaans and Zulu, but the texts are only in English and Afrikaans. Situated in an area with mainly Zulu and Sotho speakers, this adds to the exclusion of visitors from the surrounding area, even though many of the young have a “good command of English”. The Ncome exhibition uses the same three languages in both headlines and text, but equally excludes Sotho.

Part of the Ncome exhibitions uses English as the main language, and includes the two others in smaller letters on the side. The Bloedrivier exhibition has put the Afrikaans text first, and the English afterwards. It could be suggested that by this they cater first for Afrikaners. The English text is of the same size, and this may suggest that also English speakers are regarded as important visitors to the site. Many are tourists. English can be understood by most South Africans and tourists alike, and in present day South Africa, it is seen as a ‘neutral’ language (Blaser, 2004: 186).

The exhibition was made “to tell the people more about the side of the Voortrekkers”, according to Dawie Viljoen (interview 24.10.2008: 2). To many of the visitors the exhibitions work as a repository of common knowledge concerning their Afrikaner background. Fellow visitors to the Bloedrivier Museum informed me that one of their forefathers participated in the battle. They have a church on their farm which is 800 km from the Ncome Bloedrivier Site, and every year on 16 December they have a service there in commemoration of this day, because their “forefathers made a vow” (field diary 03.10.2008). Even though *one* of their forefathers actively participated in the battle, they speak of the vow as one made by their Afrikaner *forefathers*, in plural. It can be suggested that the story of the battle belong to them in some way, based on ethnicity, only strengthened by the actual, named ancestor who was present during the battle.

THE ‘NEVER-SAIDS’ IN THE EXHIBITIONS

Not only the physical structure and the language in the exhibitions, but also the exhibition texts themselves, suggest certain subject positions for the visitor. Panel eight in the Ncome exhibitions suggests that “Africans” are something other than ‘Whites’, meaning ‘Black’ people. It is taken for granted. Other headlines and texts are seemingly neutral and offer information. But they are not only offering information. The information they offer is seemingly new and basic. This may suggest that in this museum the ideal visitor is a tourist, and the information given is the neutral, most important information on for example “Life in KwaZulu” (panel 3).

Other dimensions are added, though, for the Zulu visitor. The religious situation at the time of the battle is presented by a simple sentence: “Ancestors were looked after in KwaZulu”. Such a way of putting it, might imply that they are not well taken care of today, but should have been. An illustrated list of different Zulu ceremonies offers little information on what they actually entail. A Zulu-speaking visitor would probably recognize the ceremonies, and in this way the list

works as confirmation that they are important within a 'Zulu culture'. In addition to mentioning the ceremonies, the museum plays part in upholding them, for example by sponsoring "local maidens, young girls to go to the reed dance by hiring a bus" (interview with Mkhulisi, 24.10.2008: 9). Most of the ceremonies are still being performed, but information on what they are, and how and why they are performed is not given in the exhibition.

The texts in the Bloedrivier exhibition are also basic, and do not assume that the visitor has any knowledge on the subject. But many of the headlines suggest a certain subject position for the visitor in what is taken for granted. "Grief and tragedy in Natal", the headline of panel seven, tells the story of the killing of Retief and his people by Dingane. As visitors it is assumed that we immediately feel sympathy with the Afrikaners who experienced this tragic incident. We are positioned as Afrikaners, not Zulus. "Despair" is the headline for panel nine. Again it refers to the Afrikaners, and their resistance to Dingane's attempt at annihilating them. "The shoe is on the other foot", panel ten, refers to the Afrikaners gaining the upper hand. Our sympathies are directed towards the side of the Afrikaners during the conflict. The language of the exhibitions creates a social position for us (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 24). It can also be suggested that if the visitor understand whose foot the headline refers to, and identifies with this position, it shows that the maker of the exhibition and the museum visitor belong to the same group. This may help to create identity in the visitor. Just as with the Zulu ceremonies, the ideas of the visitor are confirmed.

In panel seventeen in the Bloedrivier exhibition, "The church of the vow is built", it is said: "Fund raising to build the church started, and donations were received from all over the country". It was a community project involving, presumably, all Afrikaners, who were sending donations. Incorporating Afrikaners from other parts of South Africa suggests the existence of a common identity, and the view that the victory at Ncome Bloedrivier belong to all Afrikaners. The next panel is called "Independence at last?" and mentions the republic the Afrikaners made in the area after defeating Dingane at Bloedrivier Ncome. Independence is clearly for the Afrikaners, not the Zulus or the English speaking. In this sense it can be argued that the Bloedrivier exhibition positions the visitor as Afrikaner or at least 'White' and sympathetic towards the Afrikaners, and the Ncome exhibition positions the visitors as partly tourist and partly Zulu.

SEPARATE ETHNICITIES

The exhibitions work as parts of a nation building process, by creating a feeling of community within those visiting, but they also create imaginary communities in their categorization of people. Both exhibitions are made by people who belong to the ethnic group they portray, but both also provide glimpses of other people. They work within a discourse of separate ethnicities and dichotomization.

ABOUT THE 'AFRIKANERS'

The Bloedrivier exhibition explains the existence of Afrikaners in Southern Africa in its panel three, *Who were the Voortrekkers?* It starts with 1652, when the first European settlers came to South Africa, but mainly it deals with the period 1835-1838, the period for the 'Great Trek'. The panel describes the Afrikaners as freedom seeking and God fearing, who were "hardened, self-sufficient, highly independent people. They were bound together by their aspirations to self-government and freedom, a communal language, which [were] later to become Afrikaans, and their strong Calvinist religion". A letter written by the British governor Sir Benjamin D'urban in 1837, quoted in the panel, confirms the positive description of the trekkers:

It is very sad that those farmers who have left the Colony, belonged for the most part, to the oldest and most notable inhabitants of the districts from whence they came and that the departure of these brave, patient, hard working, God fearing people will be a loss of untold proportions for the Colony... The most valuable part of our rural population is therefore irretrievably lost.



To the left: Panel three, "Life in KwaZulu", Ncome exhibition. To the right: Panel thirteen, "On the eve of the battle", Bloedrivier exhibition.



Less positive is the description given of the Afrikaners in the Ncome exhibition. In panel five the actions of the Afrikaners are described as acts of revenge: "The Voortrekkers wanted to avenge the death of Retief and they armed themselves to attack the kingdom". Little space is used to talk about the Afrikaners other than this, but it does explain the reasons for the battle as stemming from the immigration of Afrikaners to the area.

ABOUT THE 'ZULUS'

Panel four in the Bloedrivier exhibition, looks at the origin of the Zulu, and states that Zulu ancestors came to the region as early as 5-600 years ago. "According to oral history the origins of the Zulu clan can be traced back to Malandela (c.1560)". Here "oral history" is used as source. Then it traces the lineage, more or less detailed, until Shaka came to power in the early 1800s. Unlike the Afrikaners, the Zulus are described through actions instead of virtues. "Shaka's victories and subjection of surrounding clans resulted in a uniformity of language and lifestyle. Since then most black people in KwaZulu-Natal referred to themselves as "Zulu", although it is strictly speaking only the name of the royal clan". The Afrikaners are people who belong together based on language, religion and aspirations, the Zulus came from many "clans".

This could be a response to what Kruger saw as an attempt at altering the story of the battle into a more Zulu nationalist discourse. But later in the exhibition, in panel twelve, Zulus have turned into one single group, but not only a group. From the place by the river where the ox-wagons were put in laager in preparation for the battle in 1838, "the fire power of the Voortrekkers could be concentrated on the Zulu masses". The Zulus are not individual persons, but "masses" that Afrikaners need to fight to fund their own republic. It can be suggested that these two ways of describing the Zulus are resulting from two different discourses. The latter is similar to Malan's speech on 16 December 1938, in the quotation that starts the third chapter in the thesis. "You stand today in your own white laager at your own Blood River, seeing the dark masses gathering around your isolated white race" (in Ehlers, 2003). The former discourse dismiss that the Zulus were one people from the beginning, and can be seen as a reaction to Zulu nationalism. But it also points at newer academic discourses dealing with the historical background of the different peoples living in South Africa.

For some, there is no contradiction between the existence of several peoples, and the same peoples also belonging to an essentially 'Zulu' nation. King Goodwill Zwelithini writes that Shaka "brought our people together" (1999). John Wright argues that the popular view of Zulu ethnicity is that it is fixed and is dating back to Shaka in the early 1800s. But, present academic discourse has for some time argued that ethnicity is never fixed, and it is argued that Zulu ethnicity dates back to the early 20th century rather than the 19th. Zulu identities, like Afrikaner identities, has been reshaped and argued over in response to the political situation during the last thirty years (2009).

Also the Ncome exhibition uses the royal lineage from Malandela until the present king, but without mentioning whether Zulu speakers were already present in the region before this. By this a connection is established between the legendary kings of the past, and the present king. The royalty has a long history, even though for 300 years the Zulus belonged to a very small

group. Since the museum is situated by the river Ncome Bloedrivier, it could be assumed that the headline “Another point of view”, is of the battle. But beginning with the royalty, it seems that the alternative view offered is rather a positive re-interpretation of the Zulu kingdom. No questions are asked about the royal system, though, or its role in South Africa.

At one point the exhibition says in Zulu only: “Isilo samabandla, King Zwelithini Goodwill ka Bhekuzulu Bayethe!!!” This translates into: “King of the [Zulu] nation, Zwelethini Goodwill son of King Bhekuzulu”¹⁸. Since the rest of the text is in English and Afrikaans as well, it could be suggested that this sentence is seen as irrelevant for those not being subjects to the Zulu king. The text goes: “King Zwelithini became king of the Zulu people in 1971”. In other words, we have two subjects introduced in this exhibition. They are ‘the king’ and ‘the people’. Implicit is the idea that such a people exist, and that a ‘king’ can have this ‘people’ as his subjects. The impression is made that the exhibition is related to a nation building process among Zulus. By this the royal system uses the museum to legitimate itself (Gaugue, 2001: 26; Kaplan, 1995: 39).

Beginning with the present king in panel one, panel two in the Ncome exhibition deals with Dingane and his kingdom. Maps are used to show the borders of the kingdom. A drum is placed far to the left of panel two. A label tells us that it is a “Zulu drum”, and it lies on a “Food serving mat” made out of grass. These two objects may create the impression that both the king and these objects are natural for Zulus. One of the objectives for the Ncome Site was initially “to promote the conservation of the culture and cultural objects of the Zulu nation” (DACST, August 1998). Also the Department adheres to the idea of a Zulu nation. It could be suggested that the headline of panel three, “Life in KwaZulu”, fulfils this, but two thirds deals with king Dingane. This confirms the impression of the importance attached to the Zulu royalty.

Life in the old KwaZulu is portrayed in idyllic terms. Wars and conflicts among the Zulus are not mentioned. Neither is Shaka’s brutal oppression of other ethnic groups in the area, not even the existence of other groups, conflicts elaborated elsewhere by historians such as Carolyn Hamilton and John Omer-Cooper (Hamilton, 1995; Omer-Cooper, 1995). It can be seen as an essentialist approach to the idea of the Zulu nation. This way of portraying Zulus and ‘Zulu-ness’ is a widespread discourse, and can be illustrated by a statement made by the proud Zulu Spa, a man in his early thirties: “Unlike the Xhosa we are one people. Shaka did that”. He knows tales and legends about Shaka, and to him the essence of the Zulu is unique (field diary, 10.12.2008). “Before the arrival of the Voortrekkers, life went on as normal and the cultural ceremonies of the Zulu nation were observed. Poverty was rare”, the text goes. Trouble for the Zulu nation, it says,

¹⁸ ‘Isilo’, is a tiger, King Zwelethini is called ‘tiger of the nation’. ‘Samabandla’ is a possessive pronoun. It means ‘of the nation’. ‘Ka Bhekuzulu’ means ‘son of Bhekuzulu’. ‘Bayethe’ means “oh king”. Thanks to Shalott Hyde and Elsie Tobekile Hyde for the translation.

did not start until the immigration of the Afrikaners, as argued above. The text continues: “Cultural education was based on observation and active involvement in beadwork, making of beer pots, weaving, making of assegais, cutting of shields, etc.” The activities are illustrated by photographs showing traditionally dressed Zulus. The text completely ignores the existence of differences within the ‘Zulu nation’. This perspective has played an important ideological role in Jabulani Maphalala’s work. In his re-interpretation of the battle in 1998, he claimed that “Zulu religion and culture was deeply rooted in the minds of the African people” (J. S. M. Maphalala, 1998: 56). He presents an essentialist view on Zulu culture, and even identifies it with African culture.

Excluding information on when and where the different objects came from, “promotes a view of Zulu culture as unified, homogenous, and timeless” (Girshick, 2008: 48). Dlamini comes up with a similar critique, and points out that much of the beadworks and woodcarvings belong to styles that are not even from the ‘core Zulu area’, but from further south and further north (2001: 134). According to this argument, there is a region promoted as a core Zulu area, being more ‘authentic’ than the surrounding areas, and some Zulus are seen as more ‘authentic’ than others. Continuity and unity in the Zulu royal history are the dominant messages in the Ncome exhibition. It is interesting that the exhibition portrays Zulu traditional life as static, and insists on dynamic history when the kings are included.

Dingane became king after “his half-brother King Shaka, who was stabbed to death by Mhlangana and Mbopha kaSithayi. Prince Dingane was there but he did not stab him”, we are told in panel three. Dingane was by many seen as a traitor because he was said to have killed his brother, Shaka (Sithole, 1998: 39). Sithole says that “[t]he negative images of King Dingane [...] reflect the existence of a deep-rooted historical animosity between King Dingane and the descendants of King Mpande” (ibid.: 41). The present king, Goodwill Zwelithini, is a direct descendant from Mpande. In panel eight in the Ncome exhibitions, it is pointed out that Dingane was defeated by his brother, Mpande, but Mpande took no part in the assassination of Dingane in 1840. It is important in the exhibition to underline that neither King Dingane nor King Mpande killed their predecessors, even though the opposite has been suggested elsewhere. Sithole suggests that the public appearance of King Goodwill Zwelithini at the unveiling of the Ncome Monument 16 December 1998 also represented reconciliation between Mpande’s descendants and Dingane’s legacy (ibid.).

Panel five in the Bloedrivier exhibition, the *Military background of the Zulu*, deals with Zulu military power. “Shaka transformed the Zulu army into a formidable fighting force. All male youths, upon reaching manhood, would be incorporated into a regiment where they received

training”, it says. By attending military service, identity related to a larger group than the family or village, is encouraged in people, and makes ideas of common ethnicity possible (Balibar, 1996: 137). This is probably part of the reason why Shaka managed to keep his subjects together. “The bare-footed warriors formed a column, which was divided into regiments”, the panel continues. Being bare-footed was one of the major improvements done by Shaka. Wearing ill-fitted leather shoes made the soldiers slower. But according to ‘Western’ ideas it is uncivilized not to wear shoes, and it being an improvement is not mentioned in the panel. The panel calls the Zulus “warriors”. But with the highly specialized military service system Shaka had developed, it would be more appropriate to call them “soldiers”, which is what the Bloedrivier exhibition calls the Afrikaner fighters in panel six. “Soldiers” are professionals, “warriors” are ‘natural born fighters’. The Zulu army consisted of highly trained soldiers. It was not ‘natural’ for Zulus to be ‘good’, ‘bloodthirsty’ or ‘proud’ fighters. One of the consequences of using different words is that it confirms the difference between the two groups rather than highlighting similarities. Our present day idea of Zulus as warriors came from Western writers, but has been upheld by Zulu nationalists (Laband, 2009). The use of the words also has practical consequences. Conflicts in the 1980s in what is now KwaZulu-Natal, were understood in Western media as resulting from people with “Zulu warrior spirit” (Sithole, 2009: xiv). Thus, looking for alternative causes, and consequently possible solutions, were prevented by this view.

THE DICHOTOMY ZULUS/AFRIKANERS

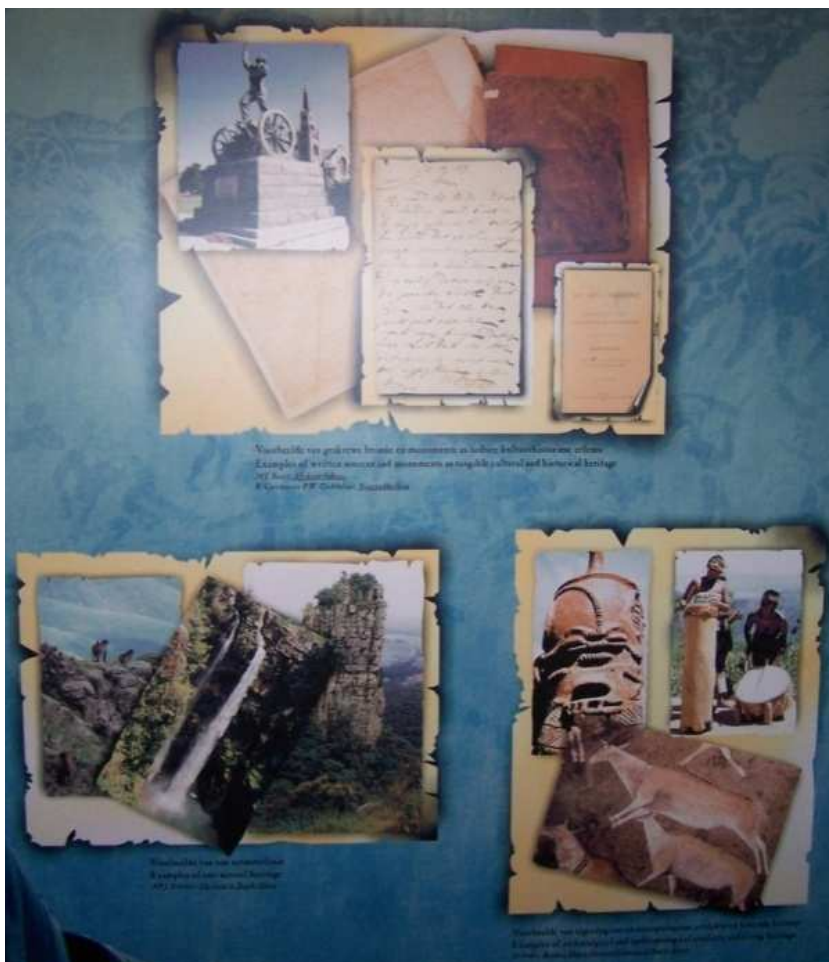
Above the Afrikaners have been described as hardworking, religious people, from a certain European background, as well as intruders. Zulus have been described as subjects of a kingdom, starting in the 16th century, but also as belonging to different clans, and they are “warriors”. But it can also be argued that the identities given them come from their relations to each other. In this section I will look at how ‘Afrikaner’ and ‘Zulu’ identities in the exhibitions have been shaped by contact between the two groups.

The importance of categorising can be seen several places, especially in the Bloedrivier exhibition, but also in the Ncome exhibition. A categorization based on clear cut differences and dichotomization can be seen for example in a media release from 2002 by Gert Opperman, the director of the Voortrekker Monument:

The Voortrekker Monument hopes to establish a museum where the Battle of Blood River will be interpreted in the broader historical context. The [Ncome] Museum that was constructed in 1999 on the other side of the river commemorates the Zulu nation and the impi [Zulu soldiers] who died there (Opperman, 2002).

The Ncome museum is obviously not seen as a site for commemorating Afrikaners, but is associated with the Zulu nation, something Opperman is not part of. An Afrikaner museum is therefore needed.

In panel one at the Bloedrivier exhibition – “In search of the truth” – there are three illustrations. The first includes a monument, some old documents and a diary. These are “examples of written sources and monuments as tangible cultural and historical heritage”. The second illustration is of a waterfall, a few monkeys and some stone formations. These are described as “natural heritage”. The third illustration includes photographs of cave paintings, a clay mask, and young women playing drums. The text reads: “Examples of archaeological and anthropological artefacts and living heritage”.



Panel one, Bloedrivier Museum.

The exhibition has thus categorized reality in three different regions. History is one group, nature another, and “living heritage” or ‘cultural expressions’ a third group. In this way the exhibition recreates and affirms a division between ‘White’ culture (dynamic) and ‘Black’ culture (static). Do ‘White’ people not have a living heritage? The existence of this site and the usage of it suggest that they do. But here the impression is given, that “living heritage” is something that was there before the arrival of Europeans, and is more or less the same today. The cave

paintings were mainly made by Khoi-San people who no longer reside in this area. They are not part of a 'Zulu culture', and are not mentioned anywhere in the exhibitions. Neither are Sotho or Ndebele people, who were also present in the region at the time of the battle. It could be argued that adding the different elements together in the same panel is something new in the South African context, where historical museums usually has dealt with 'White' history, whilst natural museums and anthropological museums have dealt with 'Black' culture. But the divisions confirm previous patterns of categorization, and an aspect of education of the visitor is added. The panel teaches her that there are many version of the story, none of which can be claimed 'true', for absolutely certain. But it is still 'natural' to categorize people and nature according to these three categories.

Traditionally in South African museums, 'White' history has been presented chronologically, and in political and religious terms, and 'Black' history has been presented as cultural history focusing on static social and cultural forms (societies without history). It can also be said that 'White' history normally is macro-history, while 'Black' history is micro history (Coombes, 2004: 179). The same seem to be the case at the Bloedrivier and the Ncome exhibitions as well. The first presents a chronological account of military and political happenings, the latter shows static culture, focusing on everyday life. There is, though, one important exception to this picture, namely the panels in the Ncome exhibition presenting the Zulu royal family. But in the exhibition there is no connection between kings and everyday static culture. The same pattern can also be seen in the other museums in the region (Wright & Mazel, 1991).

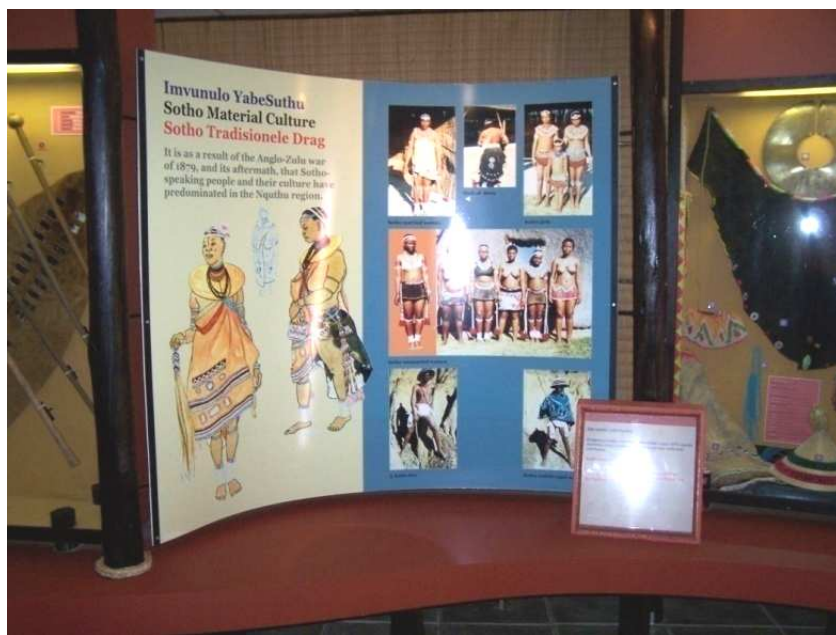
Not only the illustrations suggest a dichotomy between 'White' and 'Black'. Steven C. Dubin has pointed out that the DVD at the Bloedrivier exhibition includes film clips from old movies that "underscore the savage/civilized, Zulu/Voortrekker partition, just as scores of movies reinforced the Indian/cowboy, malicious/virtuous division that captivated generations of Americans" (2006: 175). The 'traditional' DVD challenges the understanding of the battle that Kruger and the panels are presenting, and shows that several voices are present within one institution.

"OTHERS"

Categorizing people as either Zulus or Afrikaners, and putting these two groups in opposition to each other, can be seen in both exhibitions. Zulus speak the same language, are 'Black', and follow the Zulu kings. Afrikaners were trekkers, 'White', and speak the same language. New museum discourses on the transformation of South African museums argues that all South African groups should be included, but this is not always easy or even possible. At the Ncome site the conflict is portrayed as one between Afrikaners and Zulus. So while inclusion was the founding idea, exclusion of other groups than these two, became part of the project. Dlamini argues that the prominent role given to the ideology of IFP led to this exclusion. Even though the

Ncome Project did not serve the IFP as such, it served a “symbolic purpose that the IFP is especially intent on promoting, that is, the promotion of Zulu ethnic nationalism” (ibid.: 133).

In the Ncome exhibition the only other group mentioned are the Sothos. Previously the exhibition has been criticized for not including objects and cultures from the surrounding area (Ndhlovu & Dlamuka, 2002: 47). The exhibition text informs the visitor that the Sotho people came to this region “as a result of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, and its aftermath”. Photographs and drawings of Sotho men and women take up most of panel sixteen. No names are given, only gender and marital status. How the war of 1879 resulted in the movement of Sotho people to this area is not explained, and the role of Sotho people during the battle at Bloedrivier Ncome has been ignored. The reason for including Sothos in the exhibitions was not the presence of Sotho people in the battle, but a need to cater for the present Sotho population. The exhibition also focuses on ‘traditional’ clothing, and in this respect it is similar to the presentation of static Zulu culture.



Panel sixteen, Ncome Museum.

At the Bloedrivier exhibition a list has been compiled with over 460 names of the Afrikaners joining in the battle. But as we know, there were many more present on the Afrikaner side. Cecilia Kruger explains:

The fact that there is no record of the 120 Zulu's who joined with the couple of British from Port Natal and the servants (probably all descendants of free slaves) who were inside the laager, is a true reflection of the circumstances in the world in the mid 1800s. The names of these people were never written down (e-mail 12.12.2008).

She argues that it is necessary to understand this according to the time and context. Kruger's point on judgement according to context is valuable. Frik Jacobs, the director of the War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein offers an explanation of the context: "Very few, if any, historians in this country, found the need or the time to write down the suffering of black people, the rural life of blacks, the disruption of their tribal traditions. It was not considered a no-no. It was considered unnecessary because they were writing to create nationalism" (in Dubin, 2006: 45). Implicit in Kruger's argument, however, is also the assumption that those not of European descent were not Voortrekkers. They were servants or "free slaves". Those coming along from Port Natal she calls "Zulus", but they could have belonged to different ethnic groups at the time, even though it is a Zulu dominated area today. At that time many were refugees from Shaka and Dingane's attempts at turning them into Zulu subjects.

Panel three in the Bloedrivier exhibition is focusing on the European background of the trekkers, ignoring that they also had 'Coloured' blood (Coetzee, 1998). About those participating in the trek it says that "[i]t is estimated that a minimum of 15 000 white people took part in the trek, accompanied by about 5000 servants (free slaves)". Were the "servants" not properly part of the trek? What tasks did they do? One quarter of those leaving the Cape colonies were not Afrikaners. But the story of the Great Trek is the story of the 'Whites' trekking, not the others. Calling something a 'free slave' can be regarded as a contradiction in terms. But it can perhaps be explained by the Abolition of Slavery Act from 1834. Whereas all slaves were freed by the act, they needed to stay with their 'owners' for some additional years, in reality as slaves. Others have called them "slaves". Their role in the trek is rarely included in the research on the trek (Bredenkamp, 13.10.2006; Gilje, 2007).

In panel seven in the Bloedrivier exhibition, Retief is followed by thirty "followers". Who are the followers? Are they people previously called 'free slaves' or 'servants'? In panel eleven Pretorius' party heading out in the direction of Ncome Bloedrivier included "a large number of wagon-drivers and grooms" as well as "approximately 100 Zulu-auxiliaries from Port Natal". It does not say whether the 100 Zulu auxiliaries joined the fighting. In panel sixteen, some people are called "the Port Natal blacks". Presumably the "Port Natal blacks" are the same as the "Zulu auxiliaries".

Using different names on the same people show difficulties in dealing with them. They do not fit properly into the story, and even today it is problematic to discuss the presence of 'Blacks' and 'Coloureds' within the laager during the battle. A book from 1879, mentioned previously, suggests that Retief had seventy Afrikaners and "thirty Hottentots", (Khoikhoi), servants with him (Mann, 1879: 26). No Khoikhois are mentioned in the exhibitions. Today few, if any, Khoikhois reside in South Africa. What happened to the Khoikhois who took part in the Great

Trek? Kruger did not include servants and others in the list of participants in the battle due to historical circumstances. But such circumstances are not mentioned later in the exhibition either. Only two parties are described – Afrikaners (with some followers described in different ways) and Zulus. Giving less focus to the role of the ‘Zulus’ on the Afrikaner side is probably good for Zulus and Afrikaners alike today. Such attention could blur the clear cut dichotomization of Zulus versus Afrikaners.

RECONCILIATION

Officially the meaning of the day has been changed into that of reconciliation. While keeping the different categories, the groups are supposed to live peacefully next to each other. In the Ncome exhibition, panel eight expands on the “Zulu meaning of reconciliation”. The text goes: “The Zulu people are a proud nation who knows how to reconcile with each other or with an enemy after a confrontation. [...] It is necessary for enemies to reconcile themselves with what has taken place”. Next to the new national symbol for South Africa the text says: “The descendants of the original protagonists at the Battle of Ncome/Blood River, namely the Zulus and Afrikaner of today, are no longer enemies, by jointly participating in preserving the monuments of the sites, promoting a spirit of reconciliation and building a united South Africa”. Zulus and Afrikaners are presented as separate groups living together. In this way, ironically, ‘separate development’ (apartheid) is encouraged, or put differently: separate development in two different heritage sites.

Ideas of reconciliation and transformation can be seen in the many controversial name changes in South Africa after 1994 where ‘Black’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’ names were given to places and streets previously having colonial names. It can be suggested that the new names are not very well accepted in the Bloedrivier exhibition. Here the region that was renamed KwaZulu-Natal after 1994 is mainly called by the old name: “Natal”. But when it talks about the Zulu Kingdom, it uses the post-1994 name. Cecilia Kruger has commented upon the curious choice of names:

South Africa basically went through a revolution in 1994 after which the provinces and their names, town names, street names etc has been changed to try and ‘wipe out the colonial past’. KwaZulu-Natal did not exist in 1836 and neither are the borders which define KwaZulu-Natal today the same as the erstwhile region named Natal. It would therefore be erroneous to refer to it as KwaZulu-Natal (e-mail 12.12.2008).

It could also be argued that the name *Natal* did not exist as the name of the region in 1838. The republic of Natalia was declared after the battle of Bloedrivier Ncome. Natal seems to be the ‘neutral’ answer that requires less explanation than KwaZulu-Natal. The inconsistency in the use of names when talking of Zulus and Afrikaners respectively suggests that the present name –

KwaZulu-Natal, is more related to the Zulu speaking population – in the eyes of the Bloedrivier Site.

DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW – THE SAME DICHOTOMIZATIONS

Both sites make use of discourses on museums as places for ‘truth’, as well as sites for gaining symbolic capital. By using elements from new museology, discourses on transformation, and on heritage, add value to the museums as ‘truth tellers’.

The Bloedrivier exhibition relates a moderate version of the hegemonic story about the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier, similar to the narrative presented in chapter two. In contrast, the Ncome exhibition questions the established version. It does so by offering alternative versions, but also by focusing on Zulu culture, thus paying less attention to the battle. Its agenda seems to be Zulu unity based on ‘tradition’ and an idealised past that includes the Zulu royalty. It is not unreasonable to claim that the Ncome Site is also part of the ongoing Zulu nation building process.

The museologists Noel Solani and Khwezi ka Mpumlwana write: “A person has multiple identities and therefore to stereotype people in a particular way, whether in exhibitions or otherwise, is irresponsible” (2001: 84). In the two exhibitions, the two ethnic groups of Zulu and Afrikaners are stereotyped by using certain categorizations in order to describe them, and they have been put in sharp opposition to each other. I also found that there was a tendency at the Bloedrivier Site to see Afrikaners as a ‘neutral’ category, and Zulus as ‘marked’, in the headlines of the panels as well in the choice of using written sources (which needed no explanation) and not oral (which are still used when describing Zulu ancestry), and the use of the names Natal (which needed no explanation) and KwaZulu-Natal (which originated in the post-1994 South Africa, and has generally been avoided in the exhibition, except when it deals with Zulus). A sort of ‘othering’ seemed to be taking place, where the Afrikaners are contrasted with someone ‘other’. The ‘neutral’ does not require explanations, such as the use of written sources and the name Natal for the region. This was different in the Ncome exhibitions. Even though Zulus would have many ideas of cultural traditions and artefacts confirmed, knowledge in the visitor is not taken for granted in the same way. Here both Zulus and Afrikaners are ‘marked’.

At these two sites, the Afrikaners and Zulus are the relevant antagonists. It is, of course, also possible to argue that in other monuments and exhibitions Afrikaners will confront the British. This is the case in most museums and information centres focusing on the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902). Similarly, museums and exhibitions presenting the conflict between the Zulus and the British army operate with other dichotomies. As far as I know, there are, though, no museums presenting conflicts and wars between for example Zulus and Xhosas, and so on. The

categories that are not seen as relevant in these dichotomizations, have been left out, and remain vague and unclear when mentioned. The clear division between the two ethnic groups in question would be less visible if other ethnic groups were included more clearly.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I have looked at the discourses that the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier takes part in, and the role of the museums on the site in the shaping, changing and confirmation of these discourses. This chapter will present some final conclusions and findings from the previous chapters.

In chapter two I found that the literature available on the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier offered narratives where the battle organizes the meanings of the different elements of the story. The 'alternative discourses' in both exhibitions do not really challenge the hegemonic discourse, but present 'variations' of the same dominant narrative, only coming up with conflicting details. Not only the details conflict, but also the degree of importance attached to them. For some Afrikaners the vow to God is the main principle organizing the meaning of the battle. In Zulu versions the vow is not mentioned. Both sites, as well as the literature, claim access to a 'truth', and the 'alternative discourses' therefore offered, forces the visitor to choose between the stories, rather than open up for new understandings. A dichotomy is created between different 'Zulu discourses' and 'Afrikaner discourses', where the 'Zulu discourses' are in some way or another, related to, and dependant on, the 'Afrikaner discourses', more than the other way around.

Chapter three asked why it is that there are two museums, and answered by looking at how the battle has been narrated for the last 170 years. The genealogy, or rather genealogies, of the battle showed why even today it is difficult for many people to share what they see as their own experiences, based on ethnicity, with members of other ethnic groups. There is a great deal of emotional values connected with the story and the Ncome Bloedrivier Site. Even today the '16 December' is commemorated separately, with Afrikaners mainly at the Bloedrivier Site, and Zulus (and Sothos) at the Ncome Site. The idea of 'balance' played an important role in the creation of the Ncome Site. But rather than ensuring the possibility for allowing a multitude of voices, it reduced complexity to two opposing stories in a dichotomy of 'Afrikaner' and 'Zulu' excluding other categories and perspectives.

Chapter four shows that discourses organized in dichotomies is highly visible in both exhibitions. In the Bloedrivier exhibition the hegemonic discourse on the battle is hardly contested, and most cultural categories are organized as dichotomies between Afrikaner and Zulu and thus excluding other ethnic groups. In the Ncome exhibition the hegemonic discourse on the battle is contested, but not in a very convincing way. The exhibition ignores for the most part the event of the battle, and concentrates on static Zulu culture with royalty as an important structural category. This way the exhibitions also ignore the 'fall' of the Zulu nation in the late 1800s (as well as the re-instatement of the royal house later, in which 'Whites' played important

roles). The role of Zulu royalty is important and the 'modern' element in the narrative. But the kings and the royal family is completely divorced from the panels presenting a-historical Zulu everyday culture. Its importance is assumed to be natural, and thus remains unquestioned. The Ncome Site is based on the dichotomy between Zulu and Afrikaner (excluding other ethnic groups), but also on a dichotomy between high (royalty) and low (everyday Zulu life). In the Bloedrivier exhibitions similar dichotomies take place. But a dichotomy of high versus low is instead connected with ethnicity. High is related to Afrikaners, and low, the 'Blacks', "free slaves", "Zulu auxiliaries" and so on, who travelled with the Afrikaners.

Both exhibitions can also be said to take part in nation shaping processes. Ethnicity (and thus nation) can be seen as an aspect of a relation, not an essence in a person or a group. The battle has provided an enemy that can be used to mirror oneself, a place of contact, separating 'us' from 'them'. This applies to the Afrikaners and the use of the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier in historical narratives, museums and in the yearly commemorations. In chapter three I showed that the meaning of the battle has changed according to the political situation. This is quite clear with regard to the Afrikaners. For the Zulus, Shaka and Dingane have been used in similar manners, as well as the battle. The battle has become a symbol it is possible to attach ethnic values to, thus unite people based on ethnicity, rather than for example class or gender, in nation shaping processes.

The creation of alternative discourses, and the present anxiety about the future among 'Whites', has strengthened the importance of the battle for many Afrikaners, and made more people interested in the Bloedrivier Site. One of the underlying premises that makes it possible for the battle to work in this way, is the idea of a natural dichotomy between 'Whites', represented by Afrikaners, and 'Blacks', represented by Zulus. This dichotomy can be seen in clear cut ways in both sites, and they both have the same difficulties when it comes to incorporating people not fitting in with these categories. Ethnic groups are mainly presented as separate entities, and interactions between the groups have been largely ignored. At the same time internal conflicts amongst Afrikaners and amongst Zulus are completely ignored.

Not everyone agrees that the battle discourses need to be this important. Kunene points out that we should not "exaggerate the significance of the battle of Ncome". We should rather "place it in a context broad enough to allow us to see the different perspectives which people at the time had of these events" (1998: 54). Today the battle has become more important within some right extremist groups, and is not very relevant for the majority population in South Africa. But what Kunene fails to see is that hegemonic discourses have material and social consequences. The battle has influence on the present. The victory in the battle at Ncome Bloedrivier made it

possible for the Afrikaners to legitimize their presence in the region. The meaning and importance given the Afrikaners (as religious) and the Zulus (as warrior) in the hegemonic discourse on the battle are even today used to make sense of actions done by Afrikaners and Zulus. Connerton has rightly said that “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order”, and if the memories of a past differ too much from each other “its members can share neither experiences nor assumptions” (1989: 3).

It is obviously not easy for South Africans to forget the conflicts between the various ‘ethnic’ groups in the country. The existence of two museums on one battle site suggests that it might take some time. But certain changes are happening. Dubin argues that seeing Mandela as a new freedom fighter, and Afrikaners during the Great Trek as old freedom fighters, is an “advantageous way for groups to frame their experience in the present political climate” (Dubin, 2006: 172). And, of course, the Zulus fighting at Ncome Bloedrivier could also be regarded as freedom fighters. The National Party President F.W. de Klerk, who led the democratization process of South Africa together with Nelson Mandela, called his biography *The last trek* (1998), implying that the journey from the apartheid system to democracy is related to the heroic trek of the 1830s. The title is similar to Nelson Mandela’s biography, *Long walk to freedom* (1994). Both books are using treks and the past in different ways. An understanding of the British as a common enemy for both Zulus and Afrikaners is an important element in this argument: Both Afrikaners and Zulus have been colonized by the British. This is a tacit (and in some cases explicit) presupposition in both museums. Ironically, the language of the common enemy, English, has become the most ‘neutral’ language in the country as well.

In the thesis the complexity of different ethnicities has been analysed in all the chapters. In a country with a long history of ethnic conflicts, colonialism, racism and apartheid, it seems almost ‘natural’ that ethnic dichotomies play an important role in cultural and social categorization. These dichotomies also seem to be built into South African museums and heritage sites. Even though there are new voices and perspectives (elements of a ‘new museology’) both at the Bloedrivier Museum and the Ncome Museum, the basic dichotomies in South Africa are not really ‘deconstructed’ by modern or post-modern museum discourses. The dichotomy of (‘White’) Afrikaners and (‘Black’) Zulus is present everywhere. It is also interesting to note both museums’ lack of acknowledging others than these two. A suggestion for further research for the museums would be an inclusion of all the ‘in-betweens’, and acknowledging that the supposedly clear cut difference between Zulus and Afrikaners is not so clear cut after all.

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