

New Chapters in the Life of the Ancestors: A Reflection on Heritage and Religion from Africa

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Abstract

The European models of museums and heritage that seem to have dominated the global scene since the nineteenth century have usually relegated religion to the past: to a sphere of tradition that was no longer relevant for a modern secular future. However, the North Atlantic dichotomy between the religious and the secular never applied to African countries in exactly the same way that it did in Europe or North America. I use a detailed critical reflection on aspects of South Africa's Freedom Park and its curation to discuss both the novelty and the potential pitfalls of recognizing such friction between the globalization of a nation-state model based on secularism, and the actual results of the "Rainbow Nation" attempt to reinvent its own past after the abolition of Apartheid. The transition from the anthropological category of "ancestor worship" to the spirituality now labeled as "indigenous knowledge" plays a central role in these reflections: on the one hand, it generates a different, less secularized engagement with the past as compared to previous nation-states' cultural politics – something that, indeed, invites serious consideration in what has been called an "Age of Restitution". On the other, it thereby potentially contaminates the "indigenous" – and therefore also things "given back" – with global influences that raise the question whose futures are being installed here as models to emulate.

Introduction

The combined models of museums and heritage that emerged in Europe and became the point of departure for global musealization and (art) marketing during the long colonial century (1820-1960) *secularized*, in one way or another, the knowledge they put on display.¹ Prefigured by revolutionary France, as Alexandre Lenoir put together the *Musée des monuments français* in the 1790s, objects collected were denuded of their sacrality, whether of aristocratic birth or priestly blessing (Shorto 2008). In Britain, the invention of the nation resorted to an imaginary category of secular history – the quasi-medieval 'Olden Times' – that could promise to bring elite and lower classes together (Mandler 1997). Across the North Atlantic, such commitment of museum space to the education of the nation, or to workers in particular, drew on the secular categories of 'nature' (as in "natural history") and the human (as in the equality of the nation's citizens) – categories which had themselves been divested of a large part of their sacred Christian roots in the course of the Enlightenment.² This became apparent in the divisions that were increasingly manifested by late nineteenth-century North Atlantic museums and "world" exhibitions: the conceit of global and historical completeness that characterized the period from the Renaissance *museum* until the great

¹ I do not want to argue here that secularization is a single, linear process (as often assumed by sociologists studying modernization). Secularization processes are diverse, depending on whether bureaucracies, monetarization, cross-cultural exchange or memorialization are involved; nor are they restricted to modernity. I am also aware that combining museums and heritage into one "exhibitionary complex" may gloss over differences that museum professionals cherish; but even if, in the North Atlantic, an "expositionary complex" may rub nauseatingly against an "experiential complex", both share the "nervous preoccupation ... with exhibition as a practice" of colonizing culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 35).

² Cf. Asad (2003: 192): one should trace the secular by the categories of nature, history and the human.

universal survey museums (the BM, the Louvre) gave way to a division of labor in which art and science museums ritually celebrated the new, modern and universal (an end-point of history, identified with the North Atlantic itself), while museums of history and ethnography performed the intellectual ownership of 'tradition', whether ancestral or exotic. In that division of labor between museums, religion was usually relegated to the past, since there was little room for it among the harbingers of the future – science and modern art.

Neither the North Atlantic conception of museums and heritage, nor the opposition of the secular and the religious that provided these museums with an epistemic background in modern nation-states, were ever whole-heartedly adopted in countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Chidester 1996; Engelke 2015). This implies that the provincial North Atlantic relationship between heritage and the secular applies to musealization and heritagization processes south of the Sahara in two peculiar ways – firstly, that the secularity of African heritage may have to be studied as a (partial) legacy of (the secularity of) colonialism; and secondly, that it would continue to reproduce that colonial legacy if we would exclude religion or the spiritual from our considerations of African museums and heritage. These two insights into postcolonial forms of musealization and heritagization in sub-Saharan Africa can also be seen as manifesting themselves in a kind of historical sequence: immediate post-independence forms of publicly displaying national identity often remained restricted to either the ubiquitous trade fair (in Tanzania, significantly opened on Independence Day – *Sabasaba*, the 7th of July) or the open-air museum with its replicas of “tradition” in the form of indigenous architecture. This by itself mirrored the opposition of modern and traditional cultivated by World Exhibitions and ethnographic and colonial trade museums in Europe – if without the ethnographic ‘live shows’ that mostly came to an infamous end at the Brussels Expo in 1958.³ These early national forms were – with significant exceptions, such as national textile industries – insufficiently hospitable to the kinds of creative reinvention of indigenous pasts in the present that were, for example, manifested by African writers or street artists. However, it is possible to discern different performances of indigenous pasts and spiritualities in countries where immediate post-independence public culture, and the legacies of its colonial predecessors, are in the process of being significantly modified or overhauled – in countries like Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, or South Africa.

For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on certain manifestations of this second phase in South Africa, because their efforts to renew national commemoration produced what seem (from my parochial European perspective) to be some of the most conspicuous innovations in the African context. This happened not only because the break with the immediate Apartheid past in 1994 was so drastic, but also because of influences from either histories originating in the century before Britain became South Africa’s sole colonial power, or global reworking of spirituality. Before moving on to South Africa’s national commemorations, however, I have to clarify my use of the term “spiritual” here. As students of religion have argued at some length, the term “religion” may not be the most appropriate term for the phenomena that I am trying to understand, largely because it comes from a colonial world that opposed religion to the secular - not least by positing the secular, with its connotation of providing a “natural” foundation for scientific knowledge, as the dominant value. This meaning of ‘religion’ was invented by an already well-secularized comparative human science (Masuzawa 2005). It was not directly applicable to many African circumstances, especially where ‘world religions’ played a lesser public role, and so-called ‘traditional religion’ was more

³ This reference to ethnographic museums begs many questions that I cannot address here, mostly since they involve a debate between critics of ethnography as a discipline of ethnic classification with colonial roots, and proponents of ethnography as a post- or decolonial methodology of studying human differences (see Modest and Pels, forthcoming).

important (Chidester 1996). To a considerable extent, this irrelevance of ‘comparative religion’ to African circumstances can be attributed to the fact that ancestral and ‘nature’ spirits were and are routinely experienced as mundane, intimate forces that cannot be expelled to an other-worldly realm of the ‘supernatural’, if only because they are experienced in everyday life as one’s progenitors and may shape both health and reproduction (cf. Engelke 2015). Such presences can be better compared to the inspirations experienced by modern secular people, who also recognize the presence of deceased ancestors, a secular *Zeitgeist*, the whisperings of a ‘true self’, or other occult influences. This makes it easier to interpret how and why South African national commemorations have taken the turn they did. It does not make them any the less innovative, when compared with modern North Atlantic museums.

Freedom Park, Pretoria: Contexts

If, in the following analysis, I privilege certain parts of Freedom Park in Pretoria, I do not want to pretend that Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance – which informed a large part of the FP’s memorialization – can somehow represent what happens in Africa, or even in South Africa alone. Mbeki’s own effort at developing Nelson Mandela’s Rainbow Nation and his desire to make “diverse people unite” was already being challenged while it was executed (Barnard 2004; Mbeki 1998; Rassool 2000). For my purposes, it is crucial to emphasize, firstly, that heritage and popular history in South Africa are not, as the professional South African historian Jane Carruthers echoed David Lowenthal in 1998, “incorrect, incomplete, biased, in fact, totally ahistorical” (cited in Rassool 2000: 4) – to me, academic history (or anthropology, or museology) is a reflection of social practice, and its attempts to control what counts as historical truth are feeble if not misguided. Secondly, the discourses that the powers that be enunciate should be regarded neither as monolithic nor as particularly consistent: even the supremely ideological “spectatorial lust” of colonial exhibitions did not prevent the display of Africans as modern (rather than ‘other’) subjects, as witnessed by the “Diamond Zulus” at the 1886 London Colonial and Indian Exhibition and the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair (Kruger 2007: 21). Taken together, these two principles imply that – rather than simply aiming to replace ideological taints of power in (post-) colonial practices - it is an important task of academic research to critically interrogate the past for the future possibilities it has on offer (what Walter Benjamin once developed as “immanent critique”: Caygill 1998).

I therefore applaud Duane Jethro’s framing of Freedom Park in terms of a complex relationship between heritage and the sacred – the fact that heritagization *both* seems to sacralize what it (“meta-culturally”) classifies as heritage, *and* that this often reclassifies things that were sacred in the first place (Jethro 2013; cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Meyer and De Witte 2013). My only quarrel with this perspective would be that it could address the legacy of secularism more insistently – a legacy that long argued that certain things *ought not to be sacralized*. This may, at times, be justified: in Europe, German authorities struggled with the elevation of Hitler’s National-Socialists’ parade grounds in Nuremberg to heritage status in the 1990s: they felt a need to “profane” a material culture that would otherwise threaten to sacralize the intangible heritage of its racism (MacDonald 2005). However, the colonial background of many African heritage sites implies that racism informs – perhaps more often than not - their intangible heritage.⁴ Even more, as colonial governments tried to come to terms with indigenous spiritualities, such racism inevitably informed the introduction of secularist ideas – in particular, when it conflated such spiritualities as irrational ‘belief’ under notions

⁴ This seems particularly true of African natural heritage: in the case of Mount Kenya, for example, its World Heritage inscription seems a clear case of “blackwashing” the former white hunter’s privilege by putting a postcolonial nationalist spin on it (Van den Akker 2016).

of “African magic” or “African witchcraft”.⁵ Freedom Park raises a comparable, equally convoluted question: The *S’khumbuto* (derived from the siSwati word for Place of Remembrance) is not just national patrimony of the post-apartheid state, but has been described as a “holy place”, sacred material, understood as South African cultural heritage (Jethro 2013: 372, 373). Indeed, indigenous innovations of material culture that “remember the present” can potentially liberate the recognition of histories suppressed by colonial rule (Fabian 1996; 1998). Yet, one has to ask whether anything performing as sacred in an African landscape can escape the racism of an epistemic violence that declared large parts of indigenous thinking to be “belief” – that, in other words, banned it from the realm of reliable knowledge, whether through the intervention of colonial Witchcraft Ordinances or by anthropological treatises (Evans-Pritchard 1935; Melland 1923; Fields 1982). In South Africa, this early twentieth-century ban is predated by another seventy years of reinventing indigenous thought, making the question whether (and if so, how) suppressed histories have been relieved from their colonial ballast even more pressing. Finally, the example of Nazi Germany suggests that there may be indigenous histories that one does *not* want to dignify with elevation to national heritage: even before 1994, the ANC faced this dilemma in dealing with popular “witch-hunts” (Niehaus 1998).

After outlining Freedom Park’s position in Mbeki’s nationalism, I want to concentrate, in particular, on its *Isisivane*, a place of reparation by the symbolic reburial of fighters who died during the anti-Apartheid struggle; and on the museum space of the *//hlapo*, since both bring out some of the tensions discussed in the previous paragraph most clearly. The originality of Mbeki’s doctrine of an African Renaissance should not be underestimated: his reframing of the notion of “freedom” with the help of archaeology – symbolized, in particular, by David Lewis-Williams’ contribution of a Khoisan phrase to the new South African coat of arms (Barnard 2004) - turned Africa into a place where humanity liberated itself from the forces of nature by learning to walk, use its hands, and revolutionizing technology, long before socio-economic changes were required to shed colonial overrule (Mbeki 1998; Jethro 2013). Moreover, to become “the jewel in the crown of Mbeki’s African Renaissance” Freedom Park was not only situated on Salvokop Hill, commanding a view of the competing nationalisms of the Union Buildings (designed by Herbert Baker in 1910 to mark the unification of Boer and British) and the Voortrekker Monument (designed by Gerhard Moerdijk and unveiled a year after the election victory of the National Party in 1948); it also had to appropriate the Hill to indigenous religion by having a traditional healer call upon Generals and other ancestors, across color lines, and in the presence of the Freedom Park’s CEO, so they could preside over the process of creating the heritage site. Note that this already identifies potential friction between the national scale at which the project had to be executed, and the smaller scale of the South African constituencies that make up the “Rainbow”: white colonial, Afrikaner, as well as the different ethnic units that are usually deemed more “indigenous” than both. More importantly, we should likewise note that Mbeki’s insistence on the centrality of “indigenous knowledge systems” *both* continues the colonial tradition of essentializing ethnicity and traditional culture (by, among others, projecting the “African” Renaissance back into prehistory),⁶ *as well as* indexing a potential challenge to central ideas of modernity (Green 2012: 48).

Freedom Park, Pretoria: Exhibitions

Such contestations also characterize the *Isisivane*, despite the efforts to make it into a place of reparation and reconciliation. Consecrated by religious leaders from various faiths on the day of its

⁵ I have no room here to rehearse this argument, but spelled it out elsewhere (Pels 1998; 2003: 9-17).

⁶ Which partly explains Mbeki’s disastrous failure to distribute anti-retrovirals to HIV-AIDS patients – a distrust of virus science that puts him well ahead of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and other right-wing leaders dealing with COVID-19 today.

unveiling, it gathered samples of soil from places where freedom fighters had died abroad, and water for cleansing, in order to lay to rest the spirits of fallen heroes and heroines (Jethro 2013: 381). Parliamentarian and anthropologist of Zulu customs Harriet Ngubane advised that African tradition preferred that individuals who died of unnatural causes (as in the case of battle) should be laid to rest immediately in foreign soil to prevent the living from being afflicted, while those who returned home from war were cleansed before being reintegrated (cited in Jethro 2013: 382). This makes one wonder why Freedom Park was supposed to become a resting place for spirits who died away from home: the rituals, thus summarized, seem designed to keep such spiritual war traumas firmly away from the native soil of the combatants.⁷ More importantly, some of the doubts about efficacy that accompany such rituals – doubts exacerbated and transformed since the rise of secularism and “comparative religion” – also cropped up after the Isisivane ceremonies: Dr. Nokuzola Mndende, a *sangoma* with a PhD in religious studies, argued that ceremonies conducted by sacred specialists from clans other than those of the deceased – she specifically targeted the Freedom Park ceremonies – made them null and void, precisely because they should involve actual ancestors. When Freedom Park Trust sent sangomas to Zambia to fetch the spirits of ANC fighters who were buried there, a Zambian priest was outraged because no one should disturb the dead (both cases reported by Postel [2010: 114]). Even more, the fact that a majority of South Africans is Christian and may object to ancestral communication shines through in the objections to the Isisivane voiced by Reverend Abraham Sibiyi, who thought the return of spirits from Tanzania or Zambia “brought back ... not the departed, but the demons of those lands” (cited by Jethro 2013: 383). Clearly, the translation by Ngubane of “African” (Zulu?) customs to the national scale failed to work in the eyes of these two spiritual experts.

I skip the “Wall of Names” section of the memorial for now, to concentrate on the *//hlapo* or museum, a name derived from a Khoi proverb meaning “a dream is not a dream until shared by the entire community”.⁸ Jethro records how in this section the incorporation of a museum element – precisely because of the latter’s association with colonialism – became particularly challenging (2013: 387). The solution that officials and architects tried to adopt was to privilege and decolonize “Indigenous Knowledge Systems” rather than seeking out an ‘African’ architecture, and architect Jeremy Rose came up with a winning design after a research visit with the FP Management Team to Sanusi Credo Mutwa’s “healing garden” at Kuruman in the Northern Cape. Enlisting Credo Mutwa as consultant, the FP and Rose followed his suggestion that African cosmology gave special significance to stones, boulders and rocks (as in the Isisivane), and materializing this in an exhibition space “where the narrative of South Africa going back 3.6 billion years was unfolded”. Rather than stressing the scientific theory of the Big Bang, it put forward an “the African story of creation”, again supported by the research of Harriet Ngubane. Jethro rightly notes that both these contributors to the design of the Freedom Park museum can raise people’s eyebrows: whereas Mutwa was treated by the FP Management as a traditional ‘Sanusi’ and a “unique individual with an uncanny ability to clearly understand the universe, the world and humanity” (cited in Jethro 2013: 388) his self-fashioning as the foremost expert in Zulu indigenous knowledge had a checkered history – not least since he was canny enough to put this knowledge at the service of the Apartheid authorities before such a career move became less opportune, and Mutwa sought out other sources of authority and authenticity instead (more about that shortly: see Chidester 2002, 2005). Jethro also questions the authenticity of Ngubane’s sources, especially since she seems to rely predominantly on the Catholic

⁷ This is but one example of my lack of access (so far) to primary sources: relying on secondary literature implies that my argument is more hypothetical than that it can be relied upon as a representation of fact.

⁸ *//hlapo ge //hlapo tama/ haohasib dis tamas ka I bo*. I find the semiotic route from this proverb to “museum” (or vice versa) hard to reconstruct from Jethro’s account (see 2013: 387-8).

missionary-turned-Zulu ethnographer A.T. Bryant, whose late 19th- and early 20th-century work has been critically interrogated by John Wright, among others (Jethro 2013: 389; Wright 1991, 2012). I suspect that there may be more to this, however, than noted by Jethro in his article.

It is important to note, firstly, that the *//hlapo*, like Mbeki's African Renaissance, tried to achieve something new and subversive in relation to museum models: rather than bringing South Africa into the grand frameworks of evolution or geographical encompassment – the usual “ethnological” (and universalist, and secularist) strategy of European museums – it “incorporated a museum element” and made it subservient to a narrative of a near-perennial ‘African’ identity (Jethro 2013: 387). One may object that national museums have essentialized self-identity ever since they emerged in Europe – but here the second friction with European colonial assumptions (one that Jethro does not address) comes in: the need for the presence of (Zulu) traditional spirituality and story-telling. Rather than memorializing the constitutive events of the nation-state (such as the Union, or the Great Trek), it emphasized an “African story of creation” gleaned, to a considerable extent, from Zulu sources. In that context, the reference to a “dream shared by the entire community” is particularly intriguing. As elsewhere in African contexts – and, obviously, in other parts of the world as well - dreams are privileged means of communication with ancestors. However, as David Chidester has brought out in a number of innovative studies, the ethnography of Zulu dreams, in particular, has transformed them under colonial rule and afterwards, not least by being reclassified in essentialist ways as “Zulu religion” and “indigenous knowledge”. This reclassification obscured that both dreams, ancestors, and other ingredients that identified “Zulu religion” for colonizers after their 19th-century violent encounters with Africans reflected these encounters more than a perennial cultural reality (Chidester 2008a). Just like A.T. Bryant adopted his image of Shaka as reflecting a perennial native despotism from Native Commissioner Theophile Shepstone (rather than from any original research he did himself: Wright 1991), just so did Henry Callaway's reinterpretation of “Zulu” dreams (in terms of a “mentality” inherited from times immemorial) delete how these dreams responded to contingent forms of colonial duress – effectively feeding into the racist evolutionism of anthropologists like his correspondent Edward Tylor (Chidester 2008a). These versions of Zulu or primordial African religion, therefore, only retain their authenticity if one accepts the racial distinction between colonizer and native that was the sine qua non of all colonial anthropology. Even more, the predominance of “Zulu” examples at the FP invites the consideration that it was influenced by a “Zooluology” (i.e. the cultivation of a generic image of Africa by Zulu exemplars: see Davis 1996) originating in the exoticist pastime cultivated in Europe since at least H. Rider Haggard (who preceded Bryant in being inspired by Theophile Shepstone: Etherington 1977).

Credo Mutwa's consultancy at the FP compounds this striking set of translations of (Zulu) dreams to the “entire community” of the South African nation (and beyond). Jethro fails to note that, at the same time that the FP Management sought out Mutwa at his “healing garden”, he was also spreading his fame as a “shaman” across the Atlantic, retracing routes that were pioneered by Helena Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society in the 1870s. Mutwa's newly found global reputation as a shaman was new in the sense that African ingredients of Western-inspired esotericism had never before been treated as equally valuable and authentic as the Tibetan and Indian influences that were globalized by Madame Blavatsky. However, this renewal made his “indigenous knowledge” take on unexpected features, at least in the South African context: Mutwa adopted science-fictional conspiracy theories that had fused with Blavatsky's esotericism in 1950s North America, and that boomed in “New Age” popular consciousness in the 1980s (Roth 2005: 48-9; Stewart and Harding 1999). Mutwa authenticated, in particular, the gnosticism of David Icke – for whom global leaders are extraterrestrial ‘Reptilians’ in human disguise, who blind us for the world's true constitution – by claiming he had been abducted by such aliens himself (Chidester 2005, 2008b). He we encounter a

partial secularism that was ‘flipped’ into an anti-colonial and antinomian doctrine already around the time of Blavatsky, who combined an esoteric spirituality with conveniently selected bits of science - a combination that had its (dangerous) attractions for anthropologists, or novelists like H. Rider Haggard or John Buchan, as well (see Pels 1998; 2000). Here, the combination of colonialist essentializations with challenges to some of modernism’s central conceptions that was noted by Leslie Green for the South African “Indigenous knowledge – science wars” reappears, if with a Victorian spiritual ancestor.

Conclusion

What can the preceding analysis of parts of Freedom Park tell us about innovations in “exhibitionary complexes” in present-day Africa? It is still a “complex”: like the jingoist image of Africa cultivated by the emerging museum scene of Edwardian Britain, it displays anxiety (Coombes 1994; cf. Kirshenblatt 2006: 37). The anxiety, however, is rather different: not racist but an anti-racist racism, as indicated by the fact that, so far, the Wall of Names has no room for the Afrikaner fighters of the South African Defense Force (although they have been ‘admitted’ to the FP’s digital database; Jethro 2013: 387). However, the tensions that I find indicated by Jethro’s representation of Freedom Park are more subtle. They derive, firstly, from a simple conclusion: that despite the claim to be built on “African” stories or “indigenous” knowledge, the accounts of both Isisivane and //hlapo show that they are entangled with national and global influences, and thus, by forms of institutionalization that carry aspects of their source – North Atlantic cultural forms – with them. Secondly, however, they do not leave these aspects intact: by insisting on an African story of creation, and indigenous knowledge, Freedom Park clearly incorporates a spiritual dimension into memorialization that seems absent in precisely that form in the North Atlantic exhibitionary complexes that have at least partly been used as its model. This is exactly because in circumstances on the African continent, what anthropologists called “ancestor worship” and subsumed under “religion” was not interpreted as such by many Africans: it often remained in the mundane sphere of “custom” (what my Swahili interlocutors called *mila*) which stood in contrast to their understanding of “religion” (in Swahili: *dini*). Often, one’s identity as a Christian or Muslim did not replace but supplement what one owed to one’s ancestors. Taken in isolation, this has serious consequences for the way one treats those things that are put on display, whether they are new, copied, or authentically old, for a spiritual presence (re-) vivifies dead matter – just as many healers or members of source communities insist that their objects in a museum have to be treated with the respect that ancestors deserve. The point, of course, is precisely that one *cannot* take these things in isolation: as the responses to the Isisivane show, the translation of such spiritual values to a national scale may affect the efficacy of ritual, as Dr. Mndende argued; or it is confronted by a more powerful version of Christianity (in its Pentecostalist version, now widespread, and sometimes even ‘nationalized’, in many African countries) that declares such efficacy to be diabolic – as the Reverend Sibiya shows.

Surprisingly, however, I did not see accusations of fraud or evil design in the spiritual uplift of Freedom Park arriving (in Jethro’s account) from South African secularist circles. This may be because “indigenous knowledge” has a strong secularist ring to it: it became especially popular where, for example, advocates of traditional medicine challenged the dominance of Western biomedical science (just as Mbeki scoffed at virus science). This turned – justified, at least in part, by its use of far more accessible healing practices - what had long been regarded as religious quackery into a medical asset.⁹ However, this reversal is, as the inspired contribution of Credo Mutwa to Freedom Park shows, not without its potential drawbacks. Not only is Mutwa’s contribution allied to theories that

⁹ However, it can also allow the pharmaceutical industry to appropriate indigenous herbal knowledge.

many people would regard as fraud and quackery, they are also difficult to describe as “indigenous”. Yet, I suspect that the real sting lies not in the globalization of the “indigenous” to an audience that prefers to hear ‘shamans’ and Reptilians being authenticated by an African healer, but in the far more innocuous term “knowledge”. As Mbeki’s recourse to the archaeology and linguistics of Lewis-Williams suggests, the term can dignify the products of human thought with the secular permanence of natural science. However, one of the colonial legacies of such conceptions of knowledge is its positivism – a character it acquired precisely during the first instalment of colonial knowledge-gathering in the 19th century, when doing ‘natural history’ assumed that the appropriation of an object by European observers amounted to learning the laws of nature too.¹⁰ Such conceptions of knowledge, fixed on permanence, deny precisely the mutability of the kind of “indigenous knowledge” that is presumably on display at Freedom Park, and therefore introduce an essentialism into these performances that is the more misleading because of its implicit secularism. “Indigenous knowledge” may, therefore, be the more subtle disguise under which colonialism continues to inform South African forms of museum display and heritage.

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¹⁰ Georges Cuvier, for example, when directing the national museum of natural history in Paris, assumed that he could muster a more encompassing kind of knowledge in his museum than Alexander von Humboldt during his travels and field research in Latin America.

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