

**Cultural Heritage as Transformation:
a study of four sites from post-apartheid South Africa**

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Abstract

In a country undergoing political transition, cultural heritage can assume a significant role in resurrecting and preserving features from a political past that may inform and shape a nation's emerging cultural identity. This article examines the role of cultural heritage as an agent of transformation in the 'new' democratic South Africa. It considers the evolution of South Africa's national cultural heritage protection framework and its relationship to the nation's negotiated transition and transformation to democracy. By reference to four sites of historical and heritage significance, all with a powerful association to South Africa's colonial and racist past, the article analyses their enduring, revised or potential protection status and the extent to which the (re)designation of these sites is defensible or sustainable under South Africa's contemporary national heritage legislation and the values central to South Africa's 'transformative' constitution: (i) Jan Van Riebeeck's indigenous wild almond tree hedge in the Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens, Cape Town, the Dutch colonisers' barrier against co-existence with indigenous communities and considered a first execution of *apartheid*, (ii) the Voortrekker Monument - "the foundation for (Southern Africa's) white civilization" – reclaimed by Afrikaner interests to ensure its adaptation and survival in a non-racial, democratic South Africa; (iii) Museum van de Caab, developed, following archaeological excavation of the site, to depict the impact of slavery and *apartheid* on generations of farmworkers whose access to land ownership and usage has been restored; and (iv) Constitutional Hill, site of the Constitutional Court, a "physical manifestation" of the integration of South Africa's history of oppression and resistance and the principles of human rights and constitutionalism, the foundations on which a post-*apartheid* South Africa would be built.

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