

# Mapping the Sacred in the Mother City: Religion and Urban Space in Cape Town, South Africa

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On 9 April 1998, Thabo Mbeki, who was then Deputy President of South Africa, spoke at the United Nations University in Tokyo on the topic, "The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World". As a slogan in search of a reality, the African Renaissance was a theme that Thabo Mbeki placed at the centre of his political programme, speaking frequently about this promise of rebirth, recovery, and renewal in Africa. The phrase "African Renaissance" was clearly a hybrid term. By appropriating a term that referred to the fifteenth-century rebirth of civilisation in Europe, a recovery of the arts, culture, and learning associated with the urban centres of Greco-Roman antiquity, Mbeki intentionally challenged the conceptual opposition between the "primitive" and the "civilised" that Europeans had long projected onto Africa. Significantly, the African city was at the centre of Mbeki's understanding of an African Renaissance. In his speech in Tokyo, Mbeki began by reviewing three crucial moments in a two-thousand year history of representations of Africa that we can reconstruct here in terms of the presence or absence of African cities.

First, in the ancient account provided by Pliny the Elder, Africa was characterised by the absence of cities, as a region populated by strange creatures—people without noses, tongues, or heads; people with dog's heads; people who ate human flesh; and so on—who for all their "diverse forms and kinds" had one thing in common: They lacked any rational system of urban governance (see Friedman, 1981). In one part of Africa, Pliny maintained, people did have a king, but that king turned out to be a dog, "at whose fancy they are governed". In Greco-Roman antiquity, we might recall, the very notion of religion was embedded in the life of the city. Through public sacrificial ritual, citizens participated in a religious affirmation of the integrity and solidarity of a human society that was centred in the Greek *polis* or the Latin *civitas*. That society was ritually carved out of the world as a distinctive kind of human space that could

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be located between animals and deities. As Aristotle put it, whoever “is unable to live in society must be either a beast or a god” (*Politics* 1253a9-12). In ancient Greece, the middle space of humanity was defined by those who shared the cooked meat of the sacrificial ritual. In relation to that middle ground, however, other options were available: Pythagorean speculative philosophers ate no meat like the gods, while Dionysian devotees ate raw meat in their ecstatic rituals like wild animals. These religious options represented extreme positions around the central rituals of the city. From the perspective of the city, they acted out the spiritual or wild alternatives to the civic rituals that constituted a human society (Vernant, 1979). Without the city, however, the very notion of religion made no sense and the basic religious classifications of the city—gods, animals, and humans—fell into the kind of disarray that Pliny imagined in Africa. As Thabo Mbeki observed, “These images must have frightened many a Roman child to scurry to bed whenever their parents said: The Africans are coming! The strange creatures out of Africa are coming!”

Second, during the era of the European Renaissance, Africa had its own glorious city, the royal court of Timbuktu. In his Tokyo address on the African Renaissance, Thabo Mbeki emphasised the importance of this African city that was located in what is now Mali. “As Africans,” he reported, “we recall the fact that as the European Renaissance burst into history in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was a royal court in the African city of Timbuktu which, in the same centuries, was as learned as its European counterparts.” The early sixteenth-century report of the traveller Leo Africanus had related that Timbuktu was an African centre of arts, culture, and learning, ruled not by a dog king but by a rich and powerful king, a king ruling over a city as magnificent as any in Europe. Of course, medieval legends of the African kingdom of Prester John presumed the existence of a splendid African city (Slessarev, 1959). But Timbuktu was not myth but history, an African historical counterpoint to Rome, Paris, or London. For Mbeki, this precolonial African city was important evidence of past African glory. Like the pyramids of Egypt, the stone buildings of Axum, and the ruins of Zimbabwe, the very existence of the city of Timbuktu proved that Africans were capable of great urban accomplishments. More significantly, however, those accomplishments put to rest the stereotypes about Africans that had been perpetuated in different guises ever since the fantasies of Pliny. Looking back to Timbuktu, Thabo Mbeki concluded, “What this tells me is that my people are not a peculiar species of humanity!”

Third, in the contemporary postcolonial era, Africa was again being represented as the absence of cities. As evidence, Mbeki cited the recent book, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*, by Keith Richburg, an African-American journalist who had spent many years covering Africa. According to Richburg, sub-Saharan Africa was a region of civil war, political corruption, and urban destruction. “I’ve seen cities bombed to near rubble,” Richburg reported, “and

other cities reduced to rubble, because their leaders let them rot and decay while they spirited away billions of dollars—yes, billions—into overseas bank accounts.” Different than the original absence of cities related by Pliny, this secondary absence reported by Richburg allegedly resulted from Africans wasting the urban inheritance of colonialism. Africans had been given the cities, he suggested, but they had lost them through a reversion to tribal conflict and primitive accumulation. Where once there was urban civilisation, now only rubble remained. Distancing himself from that chaos of African urban destruction, Keith Richburg concluded, “Thank God my ancestor got out, because, now, I am not one of them” (Richburg, 1997). Once again, however, as Thabo Mbeki observed, strange images of Africans as a different species of humanity were being generated, but “this time, in the place of the Roman child, it is the American child who will not hesitate to go to bed when he or she is told: The Africans are coming! The barbarians are coming!” (Mbeki, 1998: 239-40).

In the history of religions, the ancient city was a religious production. The primary urban generation of the ancient world, as Paul Wheatley demonstrated, produced cities that were centred not in the commercial activity of the market or the military power of the fortress but in the ceremonial complex that orchestrated religious relations of ritual (Wheatley, 1971: 225-26). As both human habitation and abode of the gods, the ancient city was founded and maintained as a religious space. In the modern world, however, the human has increasingly been constituted in and by cities. While only 10 percent of the world’s population lived in cities at the beginning of the twentieth century, over 50 percent had been urbanised by the century’s end. Urbanisation, according to a recent history of the twentieth century, has been “the most powerful of the world’s demographic trends” (Bulliet, 1998). If religion refers to ways of being human, to the symbolic resources and strategies deployed in negotiating a human identity, orientation, and habitation, then religion has increasingly been situated in urban environments. During the twentieth century, therefore, the religious meanings of urban space have become critical to the human project, product, and problem of religion.

In South Africa, the original city, the “Mother City,” as it is fondly called in the tourist brochures, is Cape Town. According to the earliest European navigators, the southern tip of Africa was a site of contradiction, the Cape of Good Hope, but also the Cape of Storms, where the spirit of the fearsome monster Adamastor, as recounted in Camoens’s *Lusiads*, was deeply offended by European incursions into its waters (Camoens, 1952: 130-31). Although the Dutch East India Company had no intention of establishing a permanent settlement when it secured its refreshment station at the Cape in 1652, a city nevertheless developed under Dutch sovereignty until brought under British control during the nineteenth century and eventually incorporated within the Union of South Africa of 1910, the Republic of South Africa of 1961, and then the “New

South Africa" born out of the first democratic elections of 1994. Throughout its history, Cape Town has remained a site of contradictions. The urban space of Cape Town extends from the wealthy central business district to the impoverished and wind-swept Cape Flats, from the white suburbs to the black townships, embodying the old memorials of a colonial past and the new monuments, such as the recent waterfront development, to a global future. All of this urban life is situated under the awesome majesty of Table Mountain, itself a site of contradiction, since it has been experienced so differently by residents of the city. For example, while trade-union organiser Pauline Podbrey reflected in her autobiography in 1993 that Table Mountain held the city "in a warm, protective embrace," the journalist Sandile Dikeni countered her interpretation by observing in 1996 that Table Mountain "looked monstrous and scary like an ancient ghost guarding over some evil" (Podbrey, 1993: 97; *Cape Times* 9 April 1996; both cited in Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen, and Worden, 1999: 7). As the central symbol of the city, Table Mountain could therefore register as an emblem of both the protective embrace and monstrous evil experienced within the urban space of Cape Town.

In this essay, I propose a preliminary mapping of the religious meanings of Cape Town by dwelling specifically on a series of four contradictions that operate within its urban space. First, in the colonial construction of Cape Town, the contradictory project of colonialism itself was revealed in its mandate to simultaneously exclude and incorporate indigenous people. As this dual mandate was enshrined as the central logic of apartheid, which excluded Africans from citizenship, but incorporated them as exploitable labour, the apartheid city emerged as the culmination of a long history of European colonialism in Africa. In Cape Town, the legacy of the colonial city remains inscribed in statues, monuments, and memorials to this contradictory exclusion and incorporation of Africans. Arguably, religious meanings continue to be negotiated within that colonial space.

Second, during the twentieth century, African urbanisation has been driven by the profound contradiction that building a rural homestead required urban employment. Since building a home was essentially a religious project, a project centred in the production of a ritual space for sacrifice, healing, protection from evil, and ongoing spiritual relations with ancestors, the linkages between rural and urban space have inevitably been negotiated in religious terms. As a result, new indigenous religious meanings have been produced, a migrating sacred moving between city and countryside and a hybrid sacred situated in urban townships, that have recast the religious significance of urban space.

Third, relations between centre and periphery in the city involve not only structural contradictions but also ongoing struggles over position and power within the urban landscape. While a European Christian architectonics seems firmly established at the city centre, most Christians have been relegated to the

periphery, the urban townships around Cape Town, where the so-called African initiated churches in particular have redefined the religious meanings of urban space by sacralising not only ordinary homes but also what might be called the leftover spaces of the city. At the same time, alternative Muslim mappings of the city have emerged from the periphery to make claims on the neighbourhoods, municipal politics, and religious life of Cape Town.

Fourth, and finally, these religious meanings of Cape Town—colonial and indigenous, central and peripheral—can be located within what I will call an urban political economy of the sacred that is driven by its own inherent contradiction of scarcity and surplus. While the scarcity of space generates struggles over position, power, and the ownership of the sacred in the city, the immediate and infinite availability of materiality for interpretation and reinterpretation, for ritualisation and consecration, but also for desecration, creates a surplus of signification in urban religion. Along these lines, I will conclude with some brief observations on scarcity and surplus in the political economy of the sacred in Cape Town, South Africa.

### A World of Statues

While a tour of religious Cape Town might visit churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples of the city, seeking out those sites of religious gathering, community, and tradition, any tourist must certainly be struck by the sacred urban geography that has emerged out of the history of the city itself. According to one rendering, a narrative is embedded in that sacred urban geography, tracking an epic journey from colonialism, through apartheid, to liberation, that can be read in the stones and scars of the city. Although the stones of colonial statues, monuments, and memorials still stand, the scars on the landscape, such as the empty space of District Six or the prison of Robben Island, are being reclaimed as sites of sacred memory. The city itself, therefore, operates as a certain kind of sacred space, as an intensively interpreted, regularly ritualised, but also intensely contested zone of religious significance (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 9-16). In mapping that urban world, we can begin with the traces left by the legacy of colonialism.

On the foreshore of Cape Town, the bottom of Adderley Street features a statue of Jan van Riebeeck, the 23-year old ship's surgeon who led the Dutch expedition in 1652 to establish a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope. Although apparently commemorating the Dutch colonisation of the Cape, the statue was donated in 1899 by the British mining magnate, politician, and imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, suggesting that the statue could symbolise a broader white European myth of origin. Like any sacred site, however, the statue of Van Riebeeck has been subject to multiple interpretations. During the mobilisation of white Afrikaner nationalism in 1938, for example, the ritual re-

enactment of the Great Trek that proceeded in ox-wagons all over South Africa began at Van Riebeeck's statue in Cape Town, thus appropriating the statue donated by the British imperialist for an explicitly anti-British nationalism (Grundlingh and Sapire, 1989). After the electoral victory of Afrikaner nationalism in 1948, however, the ruling National Party tried to consolidate a new white nationalism, which was celebrated in Cape Town during the 1952 Van Riebeeck tercentenary through exhibitions, pageants, and parades that revolved around the Van Riebeeck statue (Rassool and Witz, 1993). In 1968 the statue of Jan van Riebeeck was joined by the statue of his wife, Maria, an addition that arguably also served to solidify the myth of a white nation, since it could be read to signify the racial (or sexual) purity of the earliest white settlement.

Although he would have preferred to go on to Japan, Van Riebeeck remained at the Cape for ten years, securing the viability of the Dutch settlement. In the European imagination, the "Cape of Good Hope" emerged as the nexus linking Europe and Asia, the midpoint in a vast network of global exchange that connected Atlantic and Pacific worlds. As Adam Smith observed in 1776 in his *Wealth of Nations*, the "discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope are the two greatest and most important events in the history of mankind". As a nodal point in this global economy, the European settlement at the southern tip of Africa was instrumental, according to Adam Smith, in "uniting, in some measure, the most distant parts of the world" (Smith, 1976: 2:626). The settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, therefore, could be imagined as a global nexus that was in Africa but not of Africa; the Cape was global but not local.

Around 1660, Van Riebeeck enacted this denial of African location by ordering the construction of a dense hedge of bitter almond and hawthorn that was intended to encircle the settlement, creating a zone "enclosed as in a half moon," as Van Riebeeck put it in his journal, a zone of protection, safety, and security, as if such a wall of thick bush and thorns could keep out the rest of Africa from the Dutch station in the Cape (Thom, 1952-58: 3:185-86, 23-25; Schutte, 1989: 292). By erecting this hedge, Van Riebeeck defined the colonial frontier as a boundary and thereby constituted the emerging white settlement as a defensive formation. The supreme symbol of the colony's defence, the Castle, was established at the centre of this symbolic zone of protection. In laying the foundation stone for the permanent stone structure of the Castle in 1666, Commander Zacharias Wagenaer invoked the familiar rhetoric, simultaneously military and Christian, of European "ceremonies of possession" (Seed, 1995). "Our conquests are extending further and further and all the black and yellow people are being suppressed," Wagenaer declared. "Now we can boast of stone against [Khoi and] other enemies. In this way we frighten off the Europeans, as well as the Asians, the Americans and the wild Africans. In this way holy Christendom is made known and finds a place in wild, heathen lands" (Böesaken, 1973: 238;

Hall, 1992: 381; Hall, et al., 1990).

As the centre of a global vision, the Castle promised to scare off everyone else in the world, but especially the “wild, heathen” Africans who lived beyond the perimeter outlined by Van Riebeeck’s hedge. Securing a place for Christianity at what Wagenaer called “the end of the world”, the Castle, like the hedge, constituted the Dutch colonial settlement as a defensive formation. While remains of Van Riebeeck’s hedge have been preserved at the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, the image of this wall of protection has continued to inform political memory in South Africa. As Thabo Mbeki recalled in February 1999, “Planted by Jan van Riebeeck, this thorn hedge was intended to ensure the safety of the newly arrived white European settlers by keeping the menacing black African hordes of pagan primitives at bay” (Mbeki, 1999a). More than merely a botanical curiosity, therefore, Van Riebeeck’s hedge generated a striking metaphor for representing the colonial frontier as a bounded opposition between Europe and Africa that was not only military, political, and economic but also religious because it ostensibly divided and separated European Christianity from African paganism.

At the top of Adderley Street, the Gardens of Cape Town display a statue of the British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, who is depicted striding boldly forward, gesturing expansively beyond the city, and embodying the motto, “Your hinterland lies yonder”. Erected in 1908, this statue of Rhodes was intended by the architect Herbert Baker to be the spiritual axis of the city, with the city centre realigned to radiate out from the “restless spirit” of the archetypal British imperialist. While this statue was placed at the centre of the city, a monumental memorial to Rhodes was erected above and beyond the city on the slope of Devil’s Peak. Regarding the construction of the Rhodes Memorial as a “sacred duty”, Herbert Baker adopted an ancient Egyptian style, in part because, as his associate Francis Edward Masey observed, “although far distant, Egypt itself is part of Africa” (Keath, 1992: 130), but also as a way of embodying in stone Rhodes’ imperialist vision of a British Africa that extended from the Cape to Cairo. Guarded by two rows of lion-sphinxes modelled on the avenue of the sphinxes at the ancient Egyptian Temple of Karnak, the Rhodes Memorial houses two statues. At the top, a contemplative bust of Cecil John Rhodes gazing out across Africa from the Cape to Cairo is captioned with the words of Rudyard Kipling: “The immense and brooding spirit still shall order and control. Living he was the land, and dead his soul shall be her soul.” In counterpoint to this representation of spirit, soul, and colonial control, the lower section of the memorial is dominated by an equestrian statue, “Physical Energy”, in which the rider seems poised to carry out the colonial projects of order and control in the service of that immense imperial spirit (Wittenberg, 1996).

The architects of the Rhodes Memorial were clear that they were building a temple. Masey even insisted that the memorial was so sacred that no one

should be allowed access. "I cannot see what necessity there is for allowing people to walk on the top," he wrote to Baker. "Would it not vulgarise, and also desecrate it?" (Massey to Baker, 28 August 1905; cited in Keath, 1992: 130). Creating such a zone of exclusion, however, would have been contrary to the memorial's representation of the colonial frontier, not as a defensive formation, but as an expansive extension of European order and control over Africa. Like the statue of Rhodes in the Gardens, the Rhodes Memorial pointed beyond the colonial boundary that had been outlined in thornbush by Van Riebeeck's hedge. Not the force of exclusion, therefore, but the power of expansion and incorporation were displayed by these British colonial monuments.

As I tried to show in a book on religion and colonialism, *Savage Systems*, the very terms, "religion" and "religions" in southern Africa have been entangled in the conflicts and conquests, the displacements and containments, of specific colonial situations. In brief, I tried to situate the denial and discovery of indigenous religions in the contested frontier zones in which European intruders entered by denying the existence of any indigenous religion, in the process denying indigenous people rights to land, livestock, or control over their own labour, but suddenly "discovered" religious systems after people had been placed under the colonial administration of a magisterial system, a location system, or a reserve system designed for their containment (Chidester, 1996). A similar analysis of these frontier dynamics of denial and containment could be directed towards urban religion and religions, especially in a city like Cape Town that bears such indelible traces of its colonial past.

At the bottom and top of Adderley Street, the statues of Van Riebeeck and Rhodes exemplify this dual mandate—denial by exclusion from a colonial settlement, containment by expanding the scope of colonial domination—in the colonial management of space. As such, these statues are nodal points in the local urban geography of Cape Town that fix the colonial past in the present (see Žižek, 1989: 87; Soja, 1989: 149, 151). The various religious groupings in the city—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, indigenous African, and other religious formations—must manoeuvre within the denials and containments, the exclusions and expansions, the enclosures and commands of this colonial production of urban space. At the same time, however, the basic strategies exercised in the colonial production of urban space – exclusion, containment – assumed an inherently religious aura, generating an urban political economy of the sacred with its highly-charged symbols, myths, and rituals, its memorials, monuments, and temples, that animated urban space with a distinctively religious character.

Like any religion, this religion of the colonial city has been an exercise in worldmaking. In a complex reflection on the colonial city, the psychoanalyst and philosopher Frantz Fanon described that world as segmented into separate compartments and reified in stone monuments. According to Fanon, the colo-



nial city was a “world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaeistic world, a world of statues: the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge; a world which is sure of itself, which crushes with its stones the backs flayed by whips: this is the colonial world” (Fanon, 1990: 40). On the one hand, like the enclave marked out by Van Riebeeck’s hedge, urban space is segmented by the multiplication of boundaries and barriers, turfs and territories, with their tangible markers—a hedge and a fort, or a highway, railroad track, open field, or razor-wire fence—that establish the physical separation of people from people. In the colonial city, as Fanon argued, this segmentation assumed a dualistic character that political analyst Mahmood Mamdani has identified as the basic structure of the colonial “bifurcated state” in which urban space is experienced very differently by racially defined “citizens” of its centralised rule of law than by ethnically defined “subjects” of its decentralised despotism (Mamdani, 1996). On the other hand, like the immense spirit enshrined in the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and the Rhodes Memorial, urban space is expansive, continuously extending its scope of containment by monitoring, regulating, and integrating everyone and everything within its growing domain. The monumental stones, as Fanon suggested, are not only barriers that separate but also weights that crush, both alienating and oppressing the colonised. Not only dividing but also conquering, therefore, the colonial city embraced a totalising project, exemplified in the Rhodes Memorial, that encompassed both spirit and matter, the immense soul and physical energy, in the urban merger of force and care that Foucault identified as the “pastoral power” of the modern state (see Bunn, 1999).

### Apartheid City

Between 1948 and 1994, the South African state was controlled by a regime that brought the notorious term, *apartheid* (“separateness”), into the international political lexicon. As Fanon observed, however, “apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world” (Fanon, 1990: 40). Certainly, the architects of apartheid carried out the divisions and containments of colonialism to methodical extremes, investing apartheid in the process with an explicitly religious significance, but their general project was consistent with the strategic design of colonial cities throughout Africa. In the overarching myth of apartheid, in its Christian theology and its biblical exegesis, God was the “Great Separator,” separating the light from the dark and commanding human beings to be fruitful and divide into separate groups (Loubser, 1987). Such Christian legitimization of apartheid, however, was linked with an Afrikaner religious nationalism, with its own myth of origin that was located on the frontier battle lines of the nineteenth-century European expansion in Africa. According to this nationalist myth which was first related during the 1870s, the

heroic ancestors of white Afrikaners entered into a covenant with their God that enabled them to defeat the Zulu forces on 16 December 1838 at the Battle of Blood River (Du Toit, 1983; Thompson, 1985).

During the 1930s, apartheid ideologues transposed this rural myth of origin to the city. On the centenary of the Battle of Blood River, D. F. Malan, former minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and later the first Prime Minister of apartheid South Africa, made a stirring speech that celebrated the glory of the Afrikaner ancestors. "They received their task from God's hand," Malan declared. "They gave their answer. They made their sacrifices. There is still a white race." Shifting quickly to the concerns of 1938, however, Malan told his audience that "today black and white jostle together in the same labour market". Therefore, he concluded, "your Blood River is not here. Your Blood River lies in the city" (Pienaar, 1964: 128-29; Chidester, 1992b: 7). Reinterpreting this rural myth of origin in terms of the city, Malan suggested that just as black warriors had been sacrificed in covenant with the Afrikaner nationalist God in the nineteenth century, black workers would be sacrificed in the urban labour market of the twentieth.

After Malan's National Party came to power in 1948, the mandate to create the apartheid city, although anticipated by earlier patterns of racial segregation in the colonial city, was pursued with all the fervour of a religious mission. While serving white interests, urban apartheid was justified as if it served the interests of all religions. In drawing up the legislation for the Group Areas Act of 1951, for example, the authors insisted that residential segregation was necessary for both racial harmony and religious integrity in the space of the city. While the legislation proposed "to reduce to a minimum racial points of contact and therefore possible racial friction," it also promised to ensure the religious integrity of all by allowing "each racial group to develop along its own lines, according to its language, culture, and religion" (Anonymous, 1950; Mabin, 1992a; 1992b; Mesthrie, 1993; 1994). In the myth of apartheid, therefore, what was good for the one was supposedly good for the many religions.

In Cape Town, racial segregation before the 1950s has been characterised as more exclusive than divisive, seeking to exclude blacks from positions within the dominant class, but not systematically dividing urban places of residence, occupation, and ownership along racial lines. As historian Vivian Bickford-Smith has characterised the attitude of urban planners in Cape Town prior to 1950, "it mattered [to them] that the dominant class was white, but it did not, as yet, matter that whites were numbered amongst the lower classes" (Bickford-Smith, 1989: 48; 1995; Maylam, 1995: 23). In the urban ideology of sanitation that came to be established in Cape Town by the end of the nineteenth century, the exclusion of blacks from the city was justified by associating black Africans with dirt and disease. During the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1901, for example, as white citizens in Cape Town identified the presence of blacks in the city

as the cause of the “black death,” the municipality moved about seven thousand blacks from the central city to the temporary location of Ndabeni (Swanson, 1977: 392; Saunders, 1978: 47). With the outbreak of the influenza epidemic of 1918, the municipality was moved to destroy Ndabeni in order to relocate its inhabitants even further from the centre of Cape Town (Saunders, 1984b: 194-95). While white urban property owners, merchants, and workers had economic interests in removing black Africans from the centre of Cape Town, this segregated ordering of urban space was conceived in the highly charged imagery of purity and danger that represented the protection of public health as the exclusion of the dirt, defilement, and danger of contact with infectious disease.

With the implementation of the Group Areas Act in the 1950s, this urban ideology of purity was reinforced by the power to segment urban living space along racial lines. While black Africans were confined to the remote townships through housing policy, pass laws, and influx controls, and the Muslim “Malays” of central Cape Town were restricted to the residential area of the Bo-Kaap, mixed residential areas were destroyed through forced removals and relocations. In the most notorious case of forced removals in Cape Town, the destruction of the vibrant multi-racial community of District Six drove over sixty thousand people from their homes into the Cape Flats. Although the mosques and churches that remained standing suggested one layer of religious significance for District Six in their testimony to the interreligious character of the neighbourhood, the ground itself of this scar on the landscape became sacred, a process of sacralisation initiated during the demolitions as dirt from District Six was ceremoniously transported to churches and mosques all over South Africa. During the struggle against apartheid, District Six was celebrated in art and literature, in music and drama, in myth and memory as a site of racial and religious harmony, a sacred space that stood as a counter-site to the apartheid myth of separation (Jeppie and Soudien, 1990; Bezzoli, et al., 1998).

The ultimate site of colonial exclusion and containment, however, was the prison of Robben Island (see Deacon, 1996). In his inaugural address as the first president of a democratic South Africa on 9 May 1994, Nelson Mandela spoke at the Grand Parade in Cape Town. “When we look out across Table Bay,” Mandela observed, “the horizon is dominated by Robben Island, whose infamy as a dungeon built to stifle the spirit of freedom is as old as colonialism in South Africa” (Mandela, 1994). Here also specific religious sites stand out on the island—the interdenominational Christian church originally established for lepers, the Muslim shrine, or *karamat*, that marks the tomb of a Sufi saint brought in chains as a political prisoner from Indonesia—to suggest one layer of religious significance. Like District Six, however, Robben Island itself emerged as a sacred space of resistance to colonialism. As former prisoner Ahmed Kathrada explained to U.S. President Bill Clinton in March 1998, the “universal symbolism of Robben Island . . . symbolized a triumph of the human spirit over evil, a

triumph of good over oppression, in short a triumph of the new South Africa over the old" (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 1998). As the cell of Nelson Mandela became a "virtual shrine," Robben Island attracted tourists from all over the world on pilgrimage to this sacred space that celebrated the triumph of the human spirit over the forces of colonial oppression.

In the colonial constructions and counter-productions of sacred space, religious meanings of urban space were generated not only out of Christian, Muslim, or other conventional religious resources but most potently out of the history of the city itself, especially as that city was inscribed in the statue or the monument, the razed neighbourhood or the island prison, that marked out a human geography with multiple sacred significance. In October 1997, the Deputy Tours Manager of Robben Island, Buyiswa Jack, organised the performance of a religious ritual of purification for the island. Over one hundred *sangomas*, indigenous African ritual specialists, gathered to conduct this ritual, sacrificing a goat, sharing consecrated beer, and invoking the spirits of the ancestors. A *sangoma* herself, Buyiswa Jack explained that the ritual was performed not only for cleansing the island but also for reviving the spirits of great African leaders who had been incarcerated there over the past three hundred years. "The ritual will cleanse Robben Island of all the bad things which happened here in the past," she observed, "and pave the way for a brighter future on the island" (Sapa 3 October 1997). In this ceremony for purifying a horrible past and empowering a better future, African ritual specialists drew upon indigenous religious resources and strategies for sanctifying space. As Van Riebeeck's hedge and apartheid influx controls turned out to be porous boundaries, indigenous African categories have increasingly been drawn into defining the religious meanings of urban space.

### The Migrating Sacred

As reconstructed in the anthropological literature, the basic cosmology of indigenous religion in southern Africa is based on a structural opposition between "home space" and "wild space". Among the Xhosa-speaking people of the eastern Cape, for example, the home is a sacred space, a domestic order that is built up not only through social relations of production and reproduction but also through ongoing ritual relations with ancestors. As the "people of the home" (*abantu bekhaya*), the ancestors perform vital functions—guiding, protecting, and sometimes chastising their descendants; reinforcing the authority of elders; and representing a spiritual reality beyond death—in a domestic religion designed "to make the homestead right" (*ukulungisa umzi*). While certain parts of the home, such as the hearth, the back wall, and the top of the door, are particularly associated with the spiritual presence of ancestors, the entire homestead is marked out through regular rituals as an ordered space of communica-

tion and exchange with ancestral spirits, with the cattle enclosure, or *kraal*, representing the most important site in this sacred architecture of the homestead.

The sacred space of the home, however, is also marked out in opposition to the wild, chaotic, and potentially dangerous region of the forest. In stark contrast to the space of the home, with its ancestral spirits, structured human relations, and domesticated animals, the forest contains not only wild animals but also witch familiars, the dangerous spirits deployed by witches, those anti-social agents who act to disrupt the harmony or stability of the home. The sacred space of the home, therefore, must be sustained by rituals that both invoke ancestors and protect against witches who draw their power from the wild space. In between the home space and the wild space, the river represents a liminal space—sometimes good, sometimes evil—in which the spiritual “people of the river” (*abantu bomlambo*) play an ambiguous role in mediating between the domestic order of the homestead and the wild forces that threaten to disrupt it. Diviners, healers, and other ritual specialists have a distinctive relationship with this liminal space of the river, since they also mediate between the spiritual order of the home and the dangers associated with the wild space (Hammond-Tooke, 1975; Chidester, 1992a: 9-13).

By this account, therefore, the indigenous Xhosa religion of the eastern Cape is based on a kind of symbolic mapping, a spiritual geography grounded in the dichotomy between home space and wild space. A similar symbolic mapping has been identified in Tswana religion in the northern Cape in the distinction between the domestic order of the human settlement (*motse*), which is organised and reinforced through ritual relations with ancestors, and the wild, chaotic, and dangerous forces associated with the bush (*naga*), the domain of wild spirits and witch familiars (Comaroff, 1981). In the terms established by these indigenous religious categories, however, what is a city? How does urban space register in this symbolic mapping of home space and wild space?

Research on African urbanisation in South Africa has used religion as a significant category for distinguishing between what anthropologist Philip Mayer identified as “tribesmen” or “townsman” (Mayer and Mayer, 1971). As Mayer argued, Xhosa-speaking Africans in the eastern Cape could be divided into two broad groups, the rural “Red People”, identified as “Red” by their decorative and ritual uses of paint made from red ochre, who maintained a traditional, indigenous religious lifestyle in the countryside, and the urban “School People”, who had converted to Christianity, formal education, and wage labour in adapting to new conditions of urban life. According to Mayer, Red “conservatives” and School “progressives” were both responding to the challenges of urbanisation, with the Red People retreating into tribal tradition while the School People embraced the religious, educational, and employment opportunities associated with the city.

Although Mayer also argued that both Red and School could provide avenues for resistance to white domination (Mayer, 1980), his research has been criticised for drawing too stark a contrast between “tribe” and “town” in the Xhosa experience of urbanisation. In critiques advanced by Magubane and Mafeje, for example, the very notions of “tribe” and “tribal” are situated as products of the advance of racial capitalism, the migrant labour system, and processes of exploitation and class differentiation. These processes linked rural and urban spheres in very specific ways so that, for example, in the townships around Cape Town the most relevant distinction was not between “Red” or “School” but between migrants (the *amagoduka*, “those who return home”) who lived in hostels and urbanised people (*abantu baselokishini*, “the people of the location”) who lived in houses (Mafeje, 1997: 9-10). Rather than postulating a division between “tribalised” and “detrivalised” Africans, this distinction between “those who return home” and “the people of the location” called attention to crucial differences of social class, economic activity, and human habitation in the city that affected both Christians and adherents of indigenous religion.

For migrant labourers, indigenous religious resources could be recast to make sense of the city as a space of transition, a liminal space, like the river, that represented both dangers and opportunities. As anthropologist P. A. McAllister has shown, migrant labour was formally marked out as a rite of passage, in the classic sense outlined by Arnold van Gennep, with its distinctive rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of reincorporation. This ritual process was developed in response to a profound irony: The production of the sacred space of the rural homestead depended upon urban employment. “For a man to marry, establish a homestead, develop into a community asset, acquire the livestock and grain needed for the performance of the rituals and the holding of beer drinks,” McAllister recounted, “he has little alternative but to go out and work as a migrant labourer” (1980: 210). In the rites of departure that marked the separation of the migrant from the homestead, ritual activities included a ceremonial beer drink, the invocation of the ancestors, admonitions delivered by ritual elders, the provision of food for the journey, and a visit to a herbalist for medicines to protect the migrant while away from home. Adapting ritual techniques of consecration, spiritual protection, and preparation for war, the migrant labourer was treated as a warrior going off to battle. In the rites of return that marked his reincorporation into the homestead, the migrant invoked the ancestors, gave thanks for his safe return, and formally bestowed gifts on elders, both to acknowledge their authority and to effect the assimilation of alien symbols of wealth within the rural community. Through these rites of departure and return, the religious meaning of urban space was defined not within the city but in the countryside. The city was defined as a space of danger, a kind of “wild space,” where a man risked being lost, defiled, or killed. At the same time, however, because the homestead depended for its spiritual production as a sa-

cred space on the material resources acquired through wage labour, the city was necessarily an intimate enemy of the homestead, more like the liminal space of the river in its ambivalent mediation between the domestic space and the wild space of the forest or the bush. Although certainly shaped by the harsh realities of the migrant labour system, these indigenous categories played a significant role in shaping the religious meanings of urban space, suggesting at the very least that the meaning of the city can also be produced outside the city.

The religious experience of migrant labourers during their sojourn in the city, however, remains to be further explored. In his research published in 1980, McAllister confessed, "I lack data on the transition phase of migrant labour, particularly with regard to the rituals of transition" (1980: 238). Although he assumed that migrants performed indigenous rituals of protection, such as washing with medicines or invoking the ancestors, McAllister was unable to provide detailed descriptions of indigenous religious life in the urban setting. Following Victor Turner, he could only speculate that such indigenous religious practices would necessarily respond to the liminal situation of migrants who "fall in the interstices of social structures, are on its margins, or occupy its lowest rungs" (Turner, 1969: 112). While much more work needs to be done on this question, we can also conclude that the indigenous religious resources drawn upon by migrants have to make sense out of an urban space of transition. In this respect, the religious knowledge and practices of diviners, healers, and other ritual specialists have proven to be particularly portable in urban settings. While the indigenous religious life of the homestead or the polity have tended to be anchored in specific places, ritual specialists have been able to move fairly easily between rural and urban contexts, thereby, in a sense, replicating the movements of migrant labourers. Operating within the liminal space of the city, however, ritual specialists seem to be especially suited to mediating the social tensions experienced by people in the gaps, at the margins, or on the lowest rungs of urban society. In her research on diviners in the Cape Town township of Guguletu, for example, Mills concluded that diviners acted as "social healers", mediating the social tensions arising in urban life (Mills, 1987; see Soul, 1974). For migrant labourers, the work of such ritual specialists evokes a migrating sacred, a portable sacred space that mediates between social domains—the rural, the urban—that might otherwise be in opposition.

### **The Hybrid Sacred**

As indigenous categories are transported and translated between rural environments and urban spaces, they assume the fluid character that cultural analyst Homi Bhaba has identified as "hybridity," the mixing of cultural practices at the margins and intersections of cultures. Not merely producing cultural mixtures, or "syncretisms", as an earlier analytical vocabulary might have suggested, hybridity

arises out of creative interventions, appropriations, and rearticulations that take place in the power relations of specific colonial situations. In analysing colonial situations, as Homi Bhabha has suggested, we certainly cannot help but hear “the noisy command of colonialist authority” while we struggle to listen for traces of indigenous voices that have been submerged under “the silent repression of native traditions”. Between the extremes of colonial command and native repression, however, the cultural productions of hybridity, the innovations arising from intercultural contacts, relations, and exchanges, are located within the “*in-between* space”, as Bhabha has proposed, at “the cutting edge of translation and negotiation” (1994: 112). What kinds of translations and negotiations of indigenous African categories, we might ask, have given religious meaning to the urban space of Cape Town?

Based on fieldwork that was conducted beginning in 1961 in the Cape Town township of Langa, the anthropologist Archie Mafeje analysed relations of both social class and religion among the *abantu baselokishini*, the “people of the location” who had made the city their home. Under the Group Areas Act, making a home in Cape Town was particularly difficult for Africans, since the entire Western Cape had been declared by the apartheid government of the National Party as a Coloured Labour Preference Area, a region in which Coloureds, people of “mixed race”, would be employed at the expense of black Africans. In announcing this policy in 1955, the Director of the Bantu Administration, W. M. Eiselen, who had been a leading Afrikaner anthropologist, and, not incidentally, an “expert” on African traditional religion before becoming an apartheid bureaucrat, stated that Africans in the Western Cape would eventually be repatriated to homelands in the Eastern Cape. According to this legislation, therefore, Africans were formally defined as being out of place in the city. By legal definition, Africans were cast as temporary residents, subject to pass laws, influx controls, and forced deportations, while they lived in a township such as Langa. From the 1930s, however, with its single entrance, multiplying restrictions, and constant police surveillance, Langa had been experienced by many residents as a prison (Saunders, 1984: 219). By the time Archie Mafeje conducted his research in the 1960s, the confinement of Africans in the township was structured by what historian Paul Maylam has called “the most fundamental contraction of urban apartheid”, the impossible imperative of incorporating Africans as labourers while excluding them as residents. As Maylam put it succinctly, “The ultimate objective of apartheid was to achieve the unattainable—to maximise the exploitation of cheap black urban labour, while minimising the presence of the labourers in white urban areas” (Maylam, 1995: 35).

Within that contradictory space of temporary incorporation and ultimate exclusion, however, Africans living in Langa found ways to create homes, as Archie Mafeje discovered, in ways that drew heavily upon religious resources. In his analysis of social class in Langa, Mafeje correlated class and religion by



distinguishing three basic formations—European mission churches, African independent churches, and African indigenous religion—that represented the descending order of class positions within the social network of the African township. At the top of the hierarchy, members of European mission churches, the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and so on, who belonged to churches with their historical roots in Europe, generally had greater access to employment. At the bottom, members of various African initiated churches, such as the Zion Christian Church, with their emphasis on faith healing, ritual purity, and ethical discipline, were generally regarded as lower class, as the poorest of the poor, who were looked down upon by African Christians of the European mission churches. Adherents of African traditional religion, however, tended to be held in contempt by members of both European mission and African initiated churches, rendering them outside of the social hierarchy that had been constructed in Christian terms by Africans in Langa. As Archie Mafeje concluded, the process of urban class formation was being worked out in religious terms, in terms of an urban encounter between what he called an “African pagan cosmos” and a “monotheist European religion with a high level of theoretical self-consciousness”. In that encounter of religious worldviews, three class positions had emerged—converts, syncretists, and nativists—that were also religious positions. Based on his research during the early 1960s in Langa, therefore, Archie Mafeje raised the crucial question of the relation between religion and social class in the city. Does living in the city, being “urbanised”, or achieving the social status of the “civilised”, Mafeje asked, necessarily entail assimilation into the “white middle-class cosmic view” associated with European Christianity? (Mafeje, 1975).

At the end of the twentieth century, Africans in Cape Town continued to confront that religious challenge of the city, the challenge of articulating urban social class with religion. The religious and social terms, however, had changed in profound respects that can only be suggested here by broad generalisations. First, people that Mafeje identified as “converts” to European mission churches did not regard themselves as converts but as Christians who had grown up in the religion of their birth, their family, and their home, often in the process regarding Christianity as the indigenous religion of South Africa and therefore as a religious way of life that accommodated the veneration of ancestors of the home. In other words, the Christianity derived from Europe had been converted into African Christianity. Second, members of African initiated churches, who had been conventionally identified in the earlier scholarly literature as syncretists because they supposedly mixed “pure” Christianity with elements of indigenous African religious tradition, were often adamantly opposed to any contact with indigenous spirituality, healing, medicines, ritual specialists, or even ancestral spirits. Ironically, therefore, African Christians of the European churches in many cases turned out to be more sympathetic to indigenous religion than the

porting and sustaining the common good of the city. During 1999, a local Cape Town newspaper, the *Cape Times*, championed this project of creating urban unity out of diversity by publishing a series, "One City, Many Cultures", that explored the different religions, cultural practices, and forms of life in the city. Explicitly designed to promote respect for diversity, this daily series of journalistic features, profiles, and interviews was supported by a public campaign to encourage people of Cape Town to sign a pledge that committed them to intercultural and interreligious toleration. In this instance, toleration was premised not on suspending but on celebrating religious difference in public. However, like the African Renaissance, this formula for interreligious harmony—one city, many religions—was also a slogan in search of a reality. The distinction between the one and the many was also difficult to sustain, not so much because of conflict between different religious groups, but because adherents of different religions in Cape Town had developed alternative religious ways of mapping the city as a whole and therefore did not necessarily live in the same city. Since each religious map provided an orientation to Cape Town in its entirety, rather than merely demarcating a segment of the city, the different religious mappings of Cape Town had effectively produced not one city but many, a Cape Town with multiple and multiplying religious significance.

Nevertheless, the space of the city also has a history, a spatial history of power relations between centre and periphery in which different religious orientations have been negotiated. In the city centre, prominent Christian churches anchor the central religious architectonics of Cape Town. Representing the only religious body allowed by law in the Cape Colony until 1780, the *Groote Kerk*—the "Great Church"—of the Dutch Reformed Church was constructed in the cruciform pattern of the Greek cross to mark out the religious centre of Cape Town. With the purchase of a theatre on Riebeeck Square in 1839, the Dutch Reformed Church established a second church for recently freed slaves, St. Stephen's Church, the only church of the denomination to be named after a saint because, according to legend, an angry group of former slaves stoned the building while a service was in progress. Excluded from the *Groote Kerk*, people of colour who attended St. Stephen's called it *Die Ou Komediehuis* (the Old Comedy House). By the middle of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Christian architecture at the centre of Cape Town had enshrined the religious commitment of the Dutch Reformed Church to dividing both church and society along racial lines. The church's policy of excluding other religious groups from the city, however, could not be maintained. Having gathered in an old barn on Strand Street from 1774, German Lutherans were finally granted legal permission in 1780 to hold services and convert the barn into a church, as long as the church had no steeple or bell that would extend its influence in the city. With the establishment of British control over the Cape at the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the churches of various Chris-

tian denominations proliferated, especially Anglican churches, the most important being situated in a central position in Cape Town at the top of Adderley Street as St. George's Cathedral.

While the interiors of these churches were dominated by prominent and often ornate pulpits, making each church, as one historian has observed, basically a "preaching box" (Radford, 1997), their exteriors mixed and matched a range of European architectural styles—Classical and Gothic, English and French—in ways that gave substance and weight to the central position of European Christianity in Cape Town. By the late twentieth century, however, most Christians in greater Cape Town practised their religion not at the centre but in the peripheral neighbourhoods, black townships, and informal settlements. In the Coloured residential areas of the Cape Flats, Christian churches flourished. As already noted, in the black townships of Cape Town, European mission churches were essentially converted to African Christianity, while a variety of African-initiated churches developed distinctive ways of understanding urban space. According to a recent review of South African architecture, African-initiated churches have practised their religion in the "leftover spaces in the city", establishing their own "cosmological centres" in open lots, under motorways, or on a beach, where a "line on the ground is often the only edge between sacred space and the city" (Judin and Vladislavic, 1999, "Positions A to Z: ZCC"). Often, as anthropologist James Kiernan has shown, an ordinary home is transformed into a sacred space, the sacred centre of Zion, by ritually marking it off from the surrounding township environment that is perceived to be dangerous and defiling (Kiernan, 1974; 1984). Although it might appear to be anchored at the city centre, therefore, Christian space in Cape Town was actually dispersed through multiple centres that had emerged on the city's periphery.

During the political conflicts of the 1980s, relations between centre and periphery were intensely contested, often in explicitly Christian terms, in struggles to liberate Cape Town. On the periphery of the city, the political funeral for victims of the police or security forces became an important public ritual of resistance to the apartheid state. Combining religious sermons and prayers with political speeches and slogans, these funerals were highly-charged acts of defiance, anticipating the liberation of all of South Africa by claiming a local cemetery as a liberated zone for religious and political ritual. Frequently, the sacred space of the cemetery became a battlefield, as police tried to enforce legislation prohibiting flags, banners, placards, pamphlets, or posters at funeral services. For example, at the 1987 funeral held in the Cape Town Coloured neighbourhood of Bonteheuwel for political activist Ashley Kriel, who had been assassinated by the police, the service was disrupted by police ripping an African National Congress flag from the coffin and shooting tear gas at the mourners and clergy in attendance (Chidester, 1992b: 104). As political funerals

ever, anticipated the urban segregation of the living. As an editorial in a Cape Town newspaper declared in 1882, “the sooner the Malays are made to reside in a separate district the better for all concerned” (Davids, 1984: 73). During the twentieth century, the “Malay quarter” of the Bo-Kaap was established as a separate Muslim district in Cape Town. Within the apartheid city, the Afrikaner intellectual, member of the secret society of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and “friend of the Malays”, I. D. Du Plessis worked diligently to solidify this separate religious, cultural, ethnic, and residential position of Muslims in the city (Jeppe, 1988). Although they lived, worked, and worshipped in the immediate proximity of the city centre, when they were defined as “Malays” by apartheid ideologues like Du Plessis, Muslims could be imagined as if they lived in another world far away from Cape Town. While Muslims were establishing their sacred geography in Cape Town, therefore, with its periphery of holy shrines and its central institutions of mosques, madrassahs, and cemeteries, the apartheid city was redefining Muslims as aliens from Southeast Asia.

In the struggle against apartheid, Christians and Muslims could often find common cause in rejecting the racial division and racist domination of the city. At political funerals, on protest marches, and in prisons, interreligious cooperation between Christians and Muslims was apparent during the 1980s. After the first democratic elections in 1994, the role of Islam as a spiritual resource in the struggle for political liberation continued to be acknowledged by political leaders of the African National Congress. At an Eid Celebration in 1998, for example, President Nelson Mandela recalled that political prisoners on Robben Island, regardless of their religious backgrounds, had looked to the example of an earlier Muslim political prisoner on the island, Shaykh Matura, “from whose karamat on Robben Island, as prisoners we drew deep inspiration and spiritual strength when our country was going through its darkest times” (Mandela, 1998). Within the changing political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, however, different Muslim claims began to be asserted in the streets of Cape Town. In July 1996, a new religious movement calling itself Pagad—People Against Gangsterism and Drugs—marched on the home of a local drug-dealer, Rashaad Staagie, shot him dead, and set his body on fire in the street. As one leader declared, “We are going to take back the streets tonight” (*Mail and Guardian* 8 August 1996). Claiming to be an interreligious organisation, Pagad was clearly driven by a small group of Muslim leaders, with a very specific religious agenda, but the movement initially gained grassroots support from people who felt that their lives, families, homes, and communities were under threat from gangsters (Tayob, 1996).

As a distinctively urban religious movement, Pagad deployed not only compelling religious rhetoric but also rallies, marches, and processions through the streets of Cape Town. Allegedly, Pagad also utilised paramilitary techniques—armed guards, mobile defence units, pipe bombs, and assassinations—to ad-

vance its religious cause. Hundreds of attacks against suspected drug dealers, but also against Muslim critics, academics, former members, and public places, such as the Planet Hollywood bombing at the Waterfront, were generally attributed to Pagad but vigorously denied by the movement's leadership. By February 1999, President Nelson Mandela was compelled to address this movement, even if indirectly, since he never explicitly named Pagad, in a speech before parliament, observing that "what started off expressly as a campaign against gangsterism has now become a violent and murderous offensive against ordinary citizens." Although portraying itself as "moral and god-inspired", President Mandela observed, this religious movement "has assumed the form of terrorism to undercut Cape Town's lifeline and destabilise a democratic government" (Mandela, 1999).

In the struggle over defining the religious meaning of urban space in Cape Town, however, Pagad had gained not only a considerable support base but also a certain purchase on setting the basic terms of engagement in the city. In response to the president's speech in parliament, Pagad issued a press statement that praised Nelson Mandela's political contribution to the struggle against apartheid but condemned his religious position. "He is using our churches, mosques, and synagogues," Pagad declared, "to try and gain support from religious leaders to back political parties that stand for ungodly laws such as abortion, prostitution, gay rights, etc." Insisting that in the spiritual politics of the city the personal is always political, Pagad attacked Nelson Mandela for being "the leader of a party that has consistently and deliberately violated the laws of God" (Pagad, 1999). As this struggle over the city continued, Pagad persisted in defining Cape Town as the site of a moral drama, a conflict between the forces of good and evil, that was local, national, and international, with its international scope highlighted on the internet by the Pagad website that displayed the logo of the movement against the background of a Mercator projection of the entire globe. According to Pagad, therefore, the local neighbourhood in Cape Town was a microcosm of the world, a local battlefield on which a cosmic war was being waged between global forces of good and evil. As this conflict over the meaning of the local neighbourhood intensified at the end of the 1990s, the Muslim leadership of Pagad struggled to reposition Islam, or a certain version of Islam, from the periphery to the centre of the city by defining the religious significance of urban space in Cape Town.

In trying to assess the religious meanings of urban space, we have to recognise that relations between the centre and the periphery, whatever that conventional distinction might mean in the city, are always structural and historical. They are architecturally constructed and historically positioned. But the spatial dynamics that constitute the centres and peripheries of urban space are also fluid and mobile, situational and relational, negotiated and contested. In Cape Town, as I have tried to suggest, the spatial dynamics of the city cannot easily, conveniently, or inevitably be contained within the colonial construc-

tions, the indigenous categories, or the religious assertions of churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and other religious groupings in the urban landscape. Defying every particular and specific religious attempt at definition, the city defines itself indefinitely as a religious space, as an urban sacred space of exclusion and expansion, of segmentation and confinement, of migration and hybridity, of regularity and resistance, and of local and global extensions. Cape Town, like any other city, but especially like itself, has been a locus for generating such complex, contradictory religious meanings of urban space. In conclusion, based on the preliminary religious mapping of Cape Town that I have attempted in this essay, I would like to highlight very briefly some of the more general features of the urban political economy of the sacred that might be noticed by touring through Cape Town, South Africa's "Mother City".

### The Urban Political Economy of the Sacred

As I will use the phrase here, political economy refers to the power relations at stake in the production of values and the dynamics of scarcity and surplus in their ownership and alienation, their distribution and exchange, their consumption, preservation, or destruction. In the political economy of the city, "the sacred" can refer to a range of cultural values that are produced through the religious labour of formal ritualisation and intensive interpretation. While classic theoretical approaches in the history of religions have proposed substantial definitions of the sacred, such as Rudolph Otto's "holy", Gerardus van der Leeuw's "power", or Micrea Eliade's "real", more recent research has emphasised its situational production, following Emile Durkheim, as "that which is set apart". In this respect, the sacred is situated within specific material processes, social contexts, and political relations as a notional supplement to the work of sacralisation, the ritual and interpretive labour involved in setting apart certain persons, objects, places, or times. Following the dynamics that Arnold van Gennep called the "pivoting of the sacred", anything can be invested with sacred meaning and significance, with sacred purity or power, through the ongoing work of ritual and interpretation that marks out with meticulous attention to detail that which is set apart (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 5-6).

In South Africa, of course, this definition of the sacred has a particular resonance, not only because apartheid was developed as a kind of sacred science for setting people and places apart, but also because the sacralised separations that I have traced in this essay—the divisions between colonial and indigenous, domestic and wild, centre and periphery, and so on—remain inscribed in its urban landscapes. Within the urban space of Cape Town, the sacred has operated, not as an integrating force in the formation of what Durkheim called a "single moral community", but as a multiple, fragmentary, and divisive constellation of forces that set people apart. As we have seen, these sanctified divisions

have been established, not only by the church or mosque, but also by the structural history of the city itself, a history that remains evident in the monuments and scars of its urban landscape. Sacred space in Cape Town, therefore, has been generated out of a long history of setting apart.

Within any political economy, however, the sacred is an inherently ambivalent locus of value, since it points to a category that is simultaneously empty and full of meaning. As Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed, the sacred should be regarded as “a value of indeterminate signification, in itself empty of meaning and therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning whatsoever” (1950: xlix; J. Z. Smith, 1978: 107). In the urban political economy of the sacred, this ambivalence results in the inherent contradiction of the scarcity and surplus of sacred space. On the one hand, sacred space is a scarce resource. As geographer John Urry observed, space is limited because no two objects can occupy the same point in space. “Hence,” as Urry concluded, “space is necessarily limited and there has to be competition and conflict over its organisation and control” (1985: 30). In any political economy of the sacred, therefore, conflicts over space are inevitable because spatiality itself is a finite, limited, and scarce resource.

On the other hand, due to the surplus of signification in human engagements with materiality, which is immediately available and infinitely susceptible to being invested with any meaning whatsoever, sacred space is also a surplus. By signifying nothing and everything, the sacred significance of materiality represents a surplus that opens space for both interpretation and appropriation. Not only open to alternative “readings”, this surplus of signification in sacred space is also available (or vulnerable) for appropriation, for the assertion of competing claims on its ownership. Although they are conventionally underwritten by intensive interpretations of the meaning of a space, these claims on ownership are assertions of power within the cultural process of stealing back and forth sacred symbols that I have elsewhere defined as religion (Chidester, 1988). In trying to elaborate this definition within the city, I would like to propose in conclusion that the term, “religion”, can be recast to designate a category of human activity that comprises not only beliefs and practices, whether in relation to transcendent forces, sacred objects, or ultimate concerns, but also resources and strategies—the resources that are appropriated and the strategies that are deployed—within an urban political economy of the sacred.

In Cape Town, the cultural process of stealing back and forth sacred symbols is perhaps most clearly revealed in the work of gangsters, the leaders and followers of the many urban gangs—the Americans, the Hard Livings, the Sexy Boys, the Mongrels, and others—that claimed the loyalty of an estimated 400,000 people, primarily in the Coloured residential areas of the Cape Flats. These gangs illustrated the process of stealing sacred symbols, not only because they were engaged in the kinds of criminal activities suggested by the term “stealing”,

but also because during the second half of the 1990s Cape Town gangs were central to the struggles over religious legitimacy, the legitimate ownership of the sacred, within the religious terrain of the city. As products of advanced urban marginalisation, the growing alienation, impoverishment, moral despair, and criminal activity at the periphery of urban life that has directly resulted from the progress of urbanisation, Cape Town gangs were also exemplars of advanced urban globalisation, since their success depended not only on generating local loyalty but also on participating in the global network of narco-capitalism by trading in illegal drugs. At the intersection of the local and the global in Cape Town, these gangs featured prominently in negotiations over the religious meanings of urban space at the end of the twentieth century.

The gangs of the Cape Flats operated like religious organisations by appropriating and reinterpreting sacred symbols, generating, in the process, distinctive myths and rituals that invested urban space with religious significance. In the case of the Americans gang based in the Coloured township of Mannenberg, for example, the impoverished working class neighbourhood was transformed into a sacred centre of power through the strategic use of highly-charged symbolic resources. Calling their territory "America", the gang invoked a divine right of possession by rendering "Americans" as an acronym—"Almighty Equal Rights is Coming And Not Standing"—that claimed local empowerment in the name of a distant superpower. Like the "Christendom" of Van Riebeeck, Wagenaer, and other seventeenth-century colonial conquerors in the Cape, the foreign symbol of "America" could be drawn into local "ceremonies of possession" by gangsters as a sacred warrant for the colonisation of space. Certainly, they colonised space by creating defensive formations, by defending turf and territory. But the Americans also demonstrated the expansive spirit of Rhodes in extending their influence over space. In their religious symbolism, the gang celebrated that expansive spirit in symbols of blood and money.

As cultural analyst Harvie Ferguson has observed, money is "the 'space' of the capitalist world", producing an empty, infinite extension through which, in principle, all commodities can pass and freely circulate (1990: 61). The Americans gang proudly displayed the flag of the United States, but interpreted that material symbol as a sacred icon that revealed the truth of money. "In the mythology of the Cape Flat's Americans gang," as journalists Chiara Carter and Marianne Merten reported, "the six white and seven red lines on the stars and stripes flag represent crisp bank notes stained in blood" (*Mail and Guardian* 11 January 1999). More specifically, the Americans distinguished between the white and red stripes on the flag, understanding the white stripes to signify the clean work—not wage labour, but organised criminal activity—that generated money, while the red stripes designated the dirty work of blood, the work of violence, killing, and coercion that was required to support the clean work of making money. In addition to appropriating and reinterpreting the US flag, the Ameri-



cans adopted the symbols of the bald eagle, the Statue of Liberty, and the motto of the United States, altered slightly, however, to read, "In God We Trust, In Money We Believe". Gang initiations, as criminologist Don Pinnock has shown, deployed these symbols of blood and money in rites of passage, which were performed at the "White House". According to one initiate, the ritual process involved learning the secrets of the Statue of Liberty, killing an eagle to take the dollar bill from its claws, and finally entering the White House where 13 presidents handled money, six counting and seven wiping the blood off the bank notes (Pinnock, 1997: 27-41; see Pinnock, 1984). Incorporating young men into the Americans gang, this ritual also initiated them into the truth of money and thereby certified their claim on urban space.

Asserting competing claims on urban space, rival gangs also developed sacred symbols, myths, and rituals. For example, one opposition gang, the JFKs, which could be rendered as "Junky Funky Kids", "Join the Force of Killers", or "Justice, Freedom, and Kindness", maintained that they were enemies of the Americans gang because an American had killed their original president, "John Frank Kennedy". As the most powerful rival to the Americans, the Hard Livings gang adopted the British flag, called themselves the "Chosen Ones", and countered the Americans' emphasis on the sacred mystery of money with their own motto, "Rather Wisdom than Gold". In all these local symbolic manoeuvres, Cape Town gangs deployed global signs of power, wealth, and value, producing, in the process, migrating, hybrid forms of sacred space. In this respect, the gangs invested urban space with religious meaning that was consistent with postmodern analysis of the city as a "space of flows", a space through which people and capital, but also signs, symbols, and images, migrate freely, or at least unpredictably, thus superseding the local "space of places" (Henderson and Castells, 1987: 7). According to many analysts, the postmodern city has been subject to global processes—"time-space compression" (Harvey, 1989); the stretching of "time-space distantiation" (Giddens, 1984: 110-44); the flow of "intersecting scapes" (Appadurai 1990)—that have rendered any fixed sense of place obsolete. Arguably, Cape gangsters have been at the forefront of recasting the city as a space of flows, a space in which the sacred migrates freely from global to local and is rendered locally in hybrid myths, rituals, and claims on the ownership of urban space.

After 1994, two developments, simultaneously global and local, altered the urban landscape for Cape gangs. First, a new consortium, the Firm, was established to coordinate the drug trade. Perhaps resulting from pressure applied by international suppliers to resolve local conflicts, the Firm looked more like business than religion, even though it could be interpreted as the acronym, "For It Requires Money", that recalled earlier attempts by gangsters to capture the secret, sacred truth of money. By putting their activities on a business basis, however, the Firm substantially reduced inter-gang rivalries and expanded the

scope of organised crime in Cape Town (Schärf and Vale, 1996). Second, as the anti-drug campaign of Pagad placed local pressure on gangsters, new strategies emerged, often explicitly religious, for redefining the place of gangs in the city. While the Firm announced in October 1996 the formation of CORE—Community Outreach Forum—as a political initiative of reform but also as a religious initiative, as Pastor Albern Martins explained, “to provide a haven for reformed gangsters” (*Mail and Guardian* 4 April 1997), gangsters who survived the “open season” of 1998 that resulted in the violent deaths of leaders of the Americans, Hard Livings, Mongrels, the 28s, and other gangs increasingly embraced the strategy of religious conversion to redefine their place in the city.

In the case of the boss of the Hard Livings, Rashied Staagie, whose brother Rashaad had been killed in 1996 by Pagad marchers, conversion from Islam to Christianity offered one way of repositioning his gang in the city. Rashied Staagie underwent this widely publicised conversion to Christianity after he had been wounded in a drive-by shooting in March 1999. “I must reinvent myself,” he announced (*Mail and Guardian* 2 July 1999). Staagie’s conversion was certified not only by his personal reinvention but also by the transformation of his gang’s headquarters, a township drinking establishment known as a shebeen, into a Christian church. As a local newspaper reported, “This one-time symbol of gangsterism on the Cape Flats has been ‘reborn’ as a church hall.” On behalf of the Shekinah Tabernacle Church that conducted services there, Debbie Lamb observed, “This place was a place of darkness and of all things negative but since Staagie converted we have been changing it into a place of hope where most of the people who were gangsters can mend their ways” (*Cape Times* 2 July 1999). Staagie’s personal religious conversion, therefore, could be interpreted as a significant conversion of urban space, suggesting that not only a gangster but also a “place of darkness” could be “born again”.

In the religious history of Cape Town, the conversion of secular places—a barn, a theatre, a lost neighbourhood, an island prison—into sacred sites has been crucial to the production of the religious meanings of urban space. At the end of the 1990s, this process of spatial conversion continued, not only at Staagie’s headquarters, but also in the expanding activities of new religious movements, such as the charismatic Christian group, His People, that every Sunday converted two theatres in Cape Town into sacred places for religious services that attracted as many as 6,000 celebrants each week. With their own global connections to Christian organisations in the United States, these charismatic churches—Shekinah Tabernacle, His People, the Lighthouse, and the Rhema Church—actively worked to redefine the religious space of Cape Town. At a secret meeting held at the end of April 1999, leaders of these four churches entered into an agreement with leaders of Pagad “to rid society of the evil of drugs, crime, and corruption on all levels” (*Mail and Guardian* 30 April 1999). Announcing the formation of the Cape Peace Initiative, these religious leaders

bypassed the older, established structures of religious authority in Cape Town, whether Christian or Muslim, to negotiate their central place in the city on the basis of their interventions with the gangs of the Cape Flats.

Representatives of the Christian churches insisted that they had received no money from the gangs. "We are not receiving cash from the gangsters," Shekinah Tabernacle pastor Vivian Rix asserted, "because it would compromise our initiative" (*Mail and Guardian* 30 April 1999). Like Pagad, however, the Christian charismatics had clearly appropriated the gangsters as a kind of symbolic capital, a symbolic surplus that could be used to advance their religious interests within the city's political economy of the sacred. In a joint statement invoking the "divine law of the Creator", the Muslims and Christians in the Cape Peace Initiative announced that gangsters had to be "genuinely transformed" through their sincere and public acts of reformation, renunciation, and restitution. Clearly, there were different ways of "transforming" gangsters, whether by killing Rashaad Staagie or converting his brother Rashied, for example, that could be justified in terms of the "divine law" of urban religion. As competitors in the urban political economy of the sacred, however, Pagad and the charismatic Christian churches could only form the most tenuous religious alliance through the Cape Peace Initiative. On Easter Sunday in 1999, when yet another gang leader was murdered, the boss of the 28s, Glen Khan, the rift between the Muslims of Pagad and the Christians of the charismatic churches was exposed. According to his wife, Khan had told her before his death, "If anything happens to me, don't let me be buried as a Muslim because of what Pagad has done to the faith" (*Mail and Guardian* 9 July 1999). Accordingly, under the name of Glen Johnson, he was buried as a Christian. In the urban political economy of the sacred, therefore, even the dead add value.

If the African Renaissance means anything, it must mean a rebirth, recovery, and renewal of the city. In his keynote address to a conference in Johannesburg on the African Renaissance in September 1998, Thabo Mbeki suggested that the African city could be refounded as an urban space that was centred in neither the market nor the fortress but rather in what Paul Wheatley called the "ceremonial complex" that organised ritual relations between the living and the dead, the heroic ancestors, or the gods of the city. With respect to global market forces, Mbeki urged, "We must be at the forefront in challenging the notion of 'the market' as the modern god, a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates everything human must bow in a spirit of powerlessness." Turning to military power, he rejected "the deification of arms, the seemingly entrenched view that to kill another person is a natural way of advancing one's cause" (Mbeki, 1999b: xviii, xv). In these potently religious terms, therefore, Thabo Mbeki decentred the market and the fortress—the capitalist "modern god", the nationalist "deification of arms"—as legitimate religious grounds for founding a city. How, then, can an African Renaissance city be founded? Invoking the originating absence

that was the condition of possibility for Cape Town, South Africa, Thabo Mbeki has declared, "I am an African," because "I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape—they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and independence" (Mbeki, 1998: 31). In recovering the religious meanings of urban space, therefore, even the dead, perhaps especially the dead, add value, because they embody the truth of both blood and money that lies at the heart of the urban political economy of the sacred.

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of space in the land reform debate greatly enhances our understanding of what land meant to people who lost it, and how land affected their livelihoods and security and their emotional and spiritual well-being. On the one hand, working a conception of land as sacred into the land reform discourse expands our understanding of why land is important to South Africans, and prioritizes human ties to the land above legal and bureaucratic issues. Conversely, we may find that incorporating land as sacred space negatively impacts the efficiency and delivery of land reform. This article examines the role and relevancy of sacred space in the land claims process and the positive and negative implications of its incorporation.

### **Land Reform: Restitution and Redistribution**

Before turning to the notion of the sacred in specific land claims, we must first examine the political and ideological intentions behind the democratic government's land reform policies. Under colonialism and apartheid, more than four million people lost their land through forced removals, mass evictions of farm workers, and the razing of black or multi-racial urban areas. The creation of the homelands, or bantustans, and the introduction of the pass laws divided innumerable black families, and the migrant labour system compelled thousands of men to move to urban areas and mining centres in search of work. These legislative measures, as one part of a system of social engineering to "rearrange" the population, created massively disproportionate land holding based on race, with the white population in possession or control of over 87% of the land. The post-apartheid government has sought to make reparations for these discriminations, an agenda reflected in the Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994, one of the first laws passed after the 1994 elections. This act acknowledges the importance of specific pieces of land to people's identity by allowing for the reclamation of land lost under racially based acts or practices since 1913. In this way, the restitution act is an implicit acknowledgement of the sacrality of space and its undiminished importance in the lives of the dispossessed. Ideally, restitution can rectify the injustices—in terms of land—of the previous system. While these intentions are clearly warranted based on the extent of past wrongs, striking a balance between justice and social equity becomes difficult, particularly in the face of limited resources and intense pressure for the rapid delivery of tangible progress.

While restitution is based on delivering justice through the return of expropriated land, redistribution centres on social and economic reform through the allocation of land to the millions of landless or near landless people across South Africa. Redistribution entails resettling people on state-owned or underutilized land acquired through government transfer or purchase through a combination of state and beneficiary funds. Many people who qualify for redistribution

cannot make a claim to a specific site, and are thus unable to partake in the restitution programme. Applicants for redistribution include some of the country's poorest residents, including peri-urban dwellers in under-serviced areas, and rural poor living in the former homelands or "closer settlements". Although not always the case, many who make rural restitution claims have a higher standard of living than their counterparts in the redistribution programme. Lodging a restitution claim requires a certain level of community organization, literacy, access to information, and unified leadership, characteristics which are often linked to a better economic and social position. Although the programmes were not intended to have this bias among beneficiaries, it appears that the redistribution programme is better suited to assist the poorest of the poor, and is thus a more effective provider of social equity. This consideration must be taken into account in comparing these two aspects of land reform policy.

At the 1994 launch of the land reform programme, the government proposed a reallocation of 30% of the land within five years through a combination of redistribution and restitution. This goal has not been met due to lack of inter-departmental coordination, problems within the Department of Land Affairs, the difficulties in identifying and releasing land for redistribution, and the unexpected flood of restitution claims. Marianne Merton reports that of 63,455 claims lodged by the restitution deadline at the end of 1998, only 785 predominantly urban cases have been finalized (Mail and Guardian, 18 February 2000). A deeper problem is the ideological incompatibility between the two goals of land reform. In formulating policies to address discrepancies in land ownership and access, the transitional government strove for both justice, through restitution, and social equity, through redistribution. While these goals both appear necessary and practical in light of South Africa's history, achieving both simultaneously has proven extremely difficult. While the ability to reclaim land lost under white rule is extremely important, and is in itself a recognition of the sacrality of space, the inclusion of this aspect of reform has hampered the effective reallocation of land across South Africa.

### Case Studies

Let us examine two rural land claims motivated by a desire for justice and the primacy of the families' connections to land they consider sacred. The first case, a relatively straightforward restitution claim by the Ndunge family of the Elliot district of the Eastern Cape, has not reached resolution after nearly five years. Although the Ndunges remain determined to return to the land, their case exemplifies the slow bureaucracy and large expenditure of resources involved in many restitution cases. The second case involves the Ntulis, a family of former farm workers evicted in the 1950s from a farm in the Middleburg district of today's Mpumalanga province.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Ndunges, the Ntulis have little hope

of reclaiming the farm, as they never had ownership of the land. The possibility of restitution and return to the land that they consider sacred, however, has prevented their participation in redistribution programmes that might have granted them land and the chance of self-sufficiency as agriculturalists. As these cases illustrate, including a conception of the sacred in the land claims debate has not helped the families obtain land. In fact, the very prospect or possibility of restitution has hindered the expediency of these families' return to the soil, any soil, that can accommodate their economic needs. While an understanding of how and why space is sacred is central and cannot be overlooked or ignored if South Africa is to heal and attain a just post-apartheid society, hindsight reveals that the incorporation of the sacred in terms of land ultimately hampers the timely realization of social equity and a better life for all.

### *Ndunge family*

In 1963 the Ndunges were forcibly removed from their land at Maxongo's Hoek, outside the town of Elliot in the Eastern Cape. The Mfengu patriarchs of the family, Jacob and Willem Ndunge, had been granted formal title to the land in the late 1880s after supporting the British in one of the many wars on the eastern frontier.<sup>2</sup> Although few records exist of black land occupancy in this time period, the Ndunge family had most likely lived on the land for several decades or more before receiving formal title, as often the bequests of the British simply formalized existing land holdings. The colonists set about solidifying their rule in the region through both territorial conquests and the settlement of British immigrants and missionaries. These early British settlers established towns, farming communities, mission stations, and schools throughout the region, imposing their standard of living and ideology on both the landscape and its inhabitants.

The native Xhosa-speakers of the region responded to the colonial imposition in different ways. The Mfengu adopted many attributes of the British system and came to represent the African "elite" in British eyes. Although not an entirely uniform response, the Mfengu were more likely than other groups to attend mission schools, purchase durable goods, convert to Christianity, and collaborate with the British in the frontier wars. Furthermore, many Mfengu adopted western agricultural methods, acquired ploughs, oxen, and wagons, and began to transfer responsibility for agricultural production from the women to the men. In several eastern districts, Mfengu peasants were so successful that they were said to be out-producing their white counterparts by the end of the 1800s. Such competition did not sit well with many leading British colonists, including Governor Grey himself, who found the Mfengu "haughty and insolent . . . a source of danger rather than strength to us" (cited in Mostert, 1992: 1171).<sup>3</sup> Although the Mfengu had largely conformed and assimilated to a Brit-

ish lifestyle, and although most Mfengu farmers were relatively small-scale producers with minimal access to resources, there was little room for even moderate black success in the increasingly "white" landscape of South Africa. As a result, the threat posed by the black peasants was systematically reduced and destroyed by increasingly harsh legislation in the twentieth century.

The town of Elliot was the market centre for a group of moderately successful black peasants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although once a part of the nearby Trans-Kei Territories, the district of Elliot was deemed to be part of white South Africa just prior to the passage of the Natives Land Act in 1913.<sup>4</sup> The exclusion of Elliot from the reserve territories, later the Transkei bantustan, was presumably due to the high quality of agricultural land and the relatively large percentage of white settlers in the area, both aspects that boded poorly for the future of independent African holdings in the region. The Natives Land Act began the legislative process that would eventually allocate less than 13% of the land to the black population, and the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act listed additional "scheduled" areas for black use. The eight farms still owned by Africans in the Elliot district were not among those deemed acceptable for African occupancy. These farms, and others owned by Africans across the country, became known as "black spots" in an otherwise white landscape, and the authorities designated them for appropriation.

The Ndunges received word of their impending removal in 1961. The Notice of Expropriation did not come as a surprise, as it followed several years of random late-night weapon searches and other acts of intimidation. The authorities took no action against the Ndunges until 1963, when they were told to vacate their land. The family initially sought legal representation, but there was little hope of halting a legislatively mandated and widespread process, and non-compliance could result in the loss of compensatory land. In 1963 the Ndunges and their belongings were loaded into trucks and moved fifty kilometers away, to the edge of the Engcobo district of the Transkei.<sup>5</sup> The Ndunges had never set foot in the area prior to being deposited on the land that was meant to be their new home.

The land provided in compensation for Maxongo's Hoek consisted of two farms that came to be known collectively as Mhlwazi. Living conditions on the new land were not nearly as good as at Maxongo's Hoek. Prior to their removal, the Ndunges had fields for crops, grazing land, and easy access to water. Elliot was only eight kilometers from Maxongo's Hoek, and the family could take advantage of the town's educational and market facilities. In comparison, Mhlwazi is over fifty kilometers from Elliot, and the roads are in extremely poor condition and entirely impassable after rain. Although the legislative guidelines for relocation stipulated that education was to be provided at the compensatory site, there was no school at Mhlwazi, and the Ndunges built the primary school themselves, receiving government funds for an expansion only many years later.<sup>6</sup>

Mhlwazi has no medical clinic, electricity, or running water. A tank at the school holds water during the wet season, but in the dry winter months the nearest water source is over 20 minutes away. Although housing was supposed to be provided at the relocation site, the Ndunges were left to build their own dwellings, and building materials could not be salvaged from the razed structures at Maxongo's Hoek. Patricia Ndunge describes the situation her family faced when they arrived at Mhlwazi: "There was absolutely no houses, no structures, their furniture was all destroyed because they could only place it in the fields until they built their houses."<sup>7</sup> Another serious problem for the family was conflict with other residents in the vicinity. The Ndunge's arrival at Mhlwazi meant increased competition for the limited natural resources of the area, including grazing lands, water, and firewood. This tension was mostly played out in the form of cattle raids, and the Ndunges soon lost most of their livestock that had survived the move from Maxongo's Hoek.

Life was difficult at Mhlwazi. The Ndunges lost their position as independent producers, access to schools, medical care, and proper housing, and they experienced a pronounced scarcity of resources and violent conflict with their neighbours. The most devastating aspect of the expropriation of Maxongo's Hoek, however, was the family's separation from the ancestors whom they had buried on that land. Although the Ndunges consider themselves Christian, they retain a deep-seated belief in the importance and primacy of their ties with their ancestors.<sup>8</sup> Based on this worldview, death is not a barrier to communication between the living and the dead, and the ancestors are the family's most senior elders. The living are obligated to maintain contact with the deceased and inform them of significant events in their lives. Respect for the dead and their continued inclusion in important decisions are demonstrated through ceremonies invoking the ancestors' presence and ritual offerings made at the gravesites. In return, the ancestors provide physical and spiritual well-being and protection for the living. If ties with the ancestors are severed, the living not only lose the guidance and wisdom of their elders, but also the protection and positive influence in their daily lives.

Communication between the living and the dead is believed to be most effective at the burial sites of the ancestors. Although this ritualized rapport is possible to a lesser degree when people are separated from the graves, the ancestors must be kept informed of the whereabouts of their descendants if interaction is to be maintained. For instance, if a household relocates by choice the ancestors can be informed of the imminent move and invited to follow the living to their new home. Likewise, because so many young people must leave rural areas to partake in migrant or domestic labour, a set of rituals has been created to inform the ancestors of such departures and to request continued guidance for the family member while he or she is away (McAllister, 1980: 205-50). If, on the other hand, the family is forcibly uprooted with little time to

properly convey the move to the ancestors, a rupture in inter-generational relations is likely to follow. In the case of the Ndunges, there was ample time between receiving the notice of expropriation in 1961 and removal in 1963 to alert the ancestors. The family, however, did not want to invite the ancestors to accompany them to Mhlwazi, as they believed that Maxongo's Hoek, as their rightful home, should remain the resting place of their ancestors. The impending relocation was a move by coercion, not choice. The decision not to inform the ancestors may have brought increased hardship to the family, but it did allow them to maintain some dignity and to refuse to acquiesce in the face of dehumanizing legislation.

Before the forced removal of the Ndunges from Maxongo's Hoek in 1963, an estimated 115 people had been buried on that land. In attempting to stave off their removal, the Ndunges argued that they could not be separated from the place of their ancestors. In response, the authorities said that if proximity to the deceased was critical, the Ndunges should exhume the bones and take them to Mhlwazi. The Ndunges, however, felt that moving their ancestors would violate their history of legitimate ownership of Maxongo's Hoek and effectively nullify any future claim to the land. The Ndunges' actions also reflect their hope that the relocation would not occur, or would perhaps be temporary. The refusal to inform the ancestors or to exhume and transport their bodies was the only path of resistance open to the Ndunge family. An absolute refusal to move would probably have resulted in violence and the loss of compensatory land. Resistance, if it were to exist at all, would therefore have to be both quiet and personal, a symbolic refusal to abandon the land in entirety. The act of leaving the ancestors behind made the land forever central to Ndunge family history and identity. Only access to the graves could restore ties with the ancestors and the physical and spiritual health of the living; thus returning to the land became the focus of the family's future ambitions.

Leaving Maxongo's Hoek without the ancestors had major repercussions for the living, and the separation from the graves did not prove to be short-lived. Separation from the ancestors was especially difficult for the family elders, who had effectively lost touch with their nearest family members. This alienation, coupled with the physical and emotional hardship of the relocation, was too much for many of the elders to bear. Miriam Ndunge, nearly seventy herself, remembers:

As soon as we moved, most of them [elder Ndunges] started dying. . . . and they died crying, wanting to go back. They never let go of that place. . . . They died because of the spiritual separation with the ancestors. They couldn't bear the pain of being cut off from them.<sup>9</sup>

Maxongo's Hoek was essential to the physical, spiritual, and material well-being of the Ndunges, and was linked to the very existence of the family. The land was the centre of health and life for the family, and the family could be neither whole or healthy as long as separation from this core space continued.

The death of the elders was a sharp blow to those at Mhlwazi. It intensified all the feelings of dispossession and isolation; and highlighted the centrality of the land at Maxongo's Hoek to the family's identity. The Ndunges lost two generations, the ancestors and the elders, in rapid succession, and the elders died before fully transferring the knowledge of the family's rituals and traditions to the living. The incomplete transmission of such valuable information further hampered the family's ability to establish themselves at Mhlwazi, as they lacked the ritual knowledge that would have enabled them to rebuild their previous way of life. As Miriam Ndunge explains, the surviving family members were left with little choice except to "conform to the rituals that were being done by other people in the area," although these were the very people who were raiding the Ndunges' livestock and crops. "We adopted the rituals of the area to try to fit in."<sup>10</sup> The loss of knowledge and subsequent assimilation of external traditions would not have occurred on the original land, even if most of a generation had suddenly passed away. As the final resting place of the ancestors and the Ndunges' true home, Maxongo's Hoek held the knowledge and wisdom of the previous generations. The deceased could in effect preside over rituals performed near their gravesites, ensuring that such traditions were done correctly. The family's ritual knowledge and collective history were inherent in the space and soil of Maxongo's Hoek. In the years after their removal, however, the Ndunges were effectively prevented from visiting their former land. The removal and subsequent prohibition on returning prevented the Ndunges from accessing the land they believed to be the repository of their history and traditions. The elders who died at Mhlwazi were buried there, along with many more family members after 1963, but this land was never seen as their final or rightful resting place. Even nearly forty years after their relocation and the birth and burial of many family members on the land, Mhlwazi has little significance to the family, as described by Miriam Ndunge: "This land is nothing to us."<sup>11</sup> The Ndunges hope someday to move the remains of those buried at Mhlwazi back to Maxongo's Hoek.

Dreams are one of the main methods of communication between the living and the dead. Ancestors appear to individual descendants in dreams that are then shared with and interpreted by family members, who in turn decide how best to respond to the ancestors' wishes (see Bührman, 1978). The ancestors continued to come to the Ndunges in dreams after their relocation to Mhlwazi but, because of their separation from the gravesites, the family could not enact the required rituals. As time passed and the Ndunges were unable to return to their land, the frequency of dream visitations by the ancestors decreased. As



Nompucuko Ndunge explains, "This communication is broken through removal, is not as effective when we have been removed from the site. Ancestors do not [now] come as readily in dreams."<sup>12</sup> The Ndunges felt the presence of the ancestors in their daily lives gradually abate, and they believed that the ancestors felt abandoned. "We need to speak to them, show them respect, ask for guidance, show our love for our parents."<sup>13</sup> But this communication with the ancestors can be achieved only by returning to Maxongo's Hoek. More than thirty years after their relocation to Mhlwazi, Miriam Ndunge says, "When we dream we dream only of Maxongo, never of this place."<sup>14</sup>

The Ndunges have tried to reestablish communication with the ancestors in the years since they left their land. On several occasions, they petitioned the town magistrate and the white landowners to allow them to visit the graves for maintenance purposes. This process, however, was not only time consuming and difficult, but also extremely humiliating, because the family was told repeatedly that Maxongo's Hoek was no longer their land. Even when visits were granted, the family was "threatened with being shot" by the white land owners, who the Ndunges believed "did not want black people going on the land, regardless of the purpose."<sup>15</sup> Because of the difficulties surrounding approved visits, the Ndunges have sought such permission only three times since 1963. These occasions were used primarily to clear brush from the area of the graves, and were insufficient to reestablish proper communication with the ancestors. Legislation designed to protect the sanctity of white property, such as the Trespass Act of 1959, made it both dangerous and illegal for the Ndunges to enter the land without explicit permission. There were occasions, however, when the need to contact the ancestors took precedence over caution, and several family members made covert trips to the graves in the years following removal. Miriam Ndunge's father undertook one such foray in the last years of his life, believing that it was essential to speak to the ancestors before he died. She recalls her father going to the graves to share the traditional beer drink with the ancestors in an effort to show his respect in spite of his long absence and apparent neglect. Miriam Ndunge says she cannot know if her father was able to explain the situation to the ancestors, as she has been too long removed from the ancestors to feel their presence in her daily life. Only after returning to Maxongo's Hoek and seeking their forgiveness for the years of abandonment will she know if her father's attempt at appeasement was successful.

The sacrality of Maxongo's Hoek lies both in its position as the resting place of the ancestors and as the representation of the way of life the Ndunges lost. The forced removal from this land damaged the family on a social, economic, and spiritual level, and their continued sense of loss has not dwindled over time. In fact, stories of life at Maxongo's Hoek become more powerful as they are passed from one generation to the next, and even people born at Mhlwazi speak of wanting to return "home". Memory plays a central role in the

formation of the sacred, as the unattainable is revisited time and time again in the individual mind or collective family narrative. The desire to return to Maxongo's Hoek shapes not only the identity of the older generation, but also of the young, who imagine a better life once they return to their family's true home.

In November 1995, the Ndunges filed a restitution claim for the land at Maxongo's Hoek. Based on the Restitution of Land Rights Act, the claim for the expropriated land is lodged against the state, as the agents of the dispossession, not the present owners. The Land Claims Commission investigates and arbitrates the claim, which is ultimately settled or approved by the Land Claims Court.<sup>16</sup> The protection of private property is upheld by South Africa's 1994 constitution, and the present owners of any land slated for restitution or redistribution are entitled to market-value compensation. The money for the purchase of such land comes from a combination of the claimants' settlement/acquisition grants, a lump sum of roughly R16,000 provided per poor household to acquire land, housing, or improve their security of tenure. There was some initial disagreement with the white farmers over the purchase price of the land at Maxongo's Hoek, but agreement on a price was eventually reached outside of court. In theory, this move paved the way for the Ndunges to return to their land.

In June of 1998 the family was extremely excited about the prospect of their return, and were planning a large family gathering to discuss how best to manage the restored land. At the time, the extended Ndunge family consisted of 155 members, all of whom would have the right to return to Maxongo's Hoek. The Ndunges wanted a school to be built at Maxongo's Hoek, and felt that the existing infrastructure, including the access roads and water pipes, should be expanded and improved. Many new houses would also be needed, as would agricultural implements. Funding for such improvements would have to come from whatever was left over after the settlement/acquisition grants had been put towards the cost of the land. The purchase of the land at market value, however, would leave little money for development following the family's return.

Some members of the Ndunge family also hoped that there would be money to exhume and transport the bodies of their ancestors buried at Mhlwazi to Maxongo's Hoek. Other family members, believing exhumation to be prohibitively expensive, wanted instead to "invite" the ancestral spirits to return to Maxongo's Hoek. The Ndunges' willingness to perform such rituals is an interesting parallel to their refusal in 1963 to use similar means to move the ancestors from Maxongo's Hoek to Mhlwazi. The different attitudes to these otherwise comparable rituals illustrate the centrality of Maxongo's Hoek to the family's spiritual identity. According to the Ndunges, calling the ancestors "home" to Maxongo's Hoek is very different from uprooting the ancestors from their land four decades earlier. The family's refusal in 1963 to perform parallel actions

exemplifies their taciturn refusal to abandon the land in entirety.

Although the family was told that they would be back on their land by Christmas of 1998, as of February 2000 their case had still not been finalized. Attributing this delay to any one factor is difficult, and the problems with this single case are indicative of the obstacles facing the land reform process at the national level. The East London office of the Land Claims Commission, which has been handling the Ndunges' case, was responsible for both the Eastern Cape and the Free State, and they were overloaded with claims early in the restitution process. Poor management within the office, lack of coordination with other land reform policy branches, and competition over resources further exacerbated the problem. The Commission is understaffed on the whole, and this was an acute problem in the East London office. As a result, background information and case research was collected haphazardly, and cases were addressed in a piecemeal and sporadic fashion, rather than being followed through from start to finish. Finally, the foot-dragging by white farmers over select small issues stalls many cases such as the Ndunges', and inter-family disputes among claimants over the best way to proceed with the land claim application, settlement/acquisition grant, or post-restitution development of the land creates further difficulties.

The Ndunges have every reason to desire restitution of their land at Maxongo's Hoek. The fact that the land has remained central to their collective identity even forty years after their removal is testimony to the power of specific tracts of land. Although not framed in spiritual terms, the restitution legislation recognized the powerful needs of people like the Ndunges, and has the potential to assist such families in working for justice and rebuilding lives destroyed by removal and relocation. On the other hand, the Ndunges' case is fairly simple and should have been resolved easily: there was no question of the eligibility of the claim, as the removal was premised on racially discriminatory acts, the land had not been developed for non-agricultural purposes, the owners agreed to sell after minimal debate, and there was a relatively high degree of cohesion among the Ndunge family. Furthermore, the case was lodged early in the restitution process, and before the backlog at the Eastern Cape office became too great. Yet even with all of these factors operating in their favour, the Ndunges have not been able to move back to their land.

The failure to carry through on the Ndunges' relatively straightforward case calls into serious question the effectiveness of land restitution. Although it would certainly not have been their first option, we are forced to wonder if the Ndunges' settlement/acquisition grants might have been better spent on the development of Mhlwazi. If the money was allocated for the improvement of roads, housing, and agricultural technology, and for the delivery of water and electricity, the standard of living at Mhlwazi could be improved greatly. Residents across the area could have used a portion of their combined funds to build

a secondary school and a health clinic to serve several villages, a move that would have helped community relations and improved social and economic conditions. As it stands, if and when the Ndunges are able to return to Maxongo's Hoek, most of their money will have been spent on acquisition of the land and moving costs, leaving little to be put towards the sustainable development of their newly restored land.

Restitution is designed to address the hardship and suffering experienced by families who have lost their land. The return of such land is seen as a way of delivering justice and reparation for these losses. And yet the Ndunges are likely to end up on their land, their sacred space, with even less than they have now, and with few prospects of becoming successful producers without sinking into debt. Although restitution would answer the family's spiritual needs and reunite their family across generations, as a long-term strategy it does not seem to be a feasible or well-orchestrated method of bringing justice to those who deserve it most.

### ***Ntuli Family***

Unlike the Ndunges, the Ntulis never held formal title to the land they consider sacred, the farm of Witpoort in the Middleburg district of Mpumalanga Province. The family lived and worked at Witpoort since early this century, but the initial dispossession of their forefathers occurred elsewhere. The Ntulis envision two overlapping loci of sacred space, one providing the identity of their family, and the second of their ethnic group, the Ndzundza Ndebele (see Delius, 1983, 1989; James, 1987). The first, significant to their family alone, is demarcated by the boundaries of the farm of Witpoort. The second is the larger area commonly known as Mapochsgronde, the territory of the Ndzundza Ndebele prior to their conquest by the fledgling Boer state. This second area extends around the natural fortress of KwaNomtjharhelo, a network of caves in a steep hillside, which was one of the last independent holdouts against white appropriation in the eastern Transvaal.<sup>17</sup>

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Afrikaner or Boer settlers had made steady inroads in the eastern Transvaal, but they had suffered several setbacks in attempting to take the land of the Ndzundza. The Ndzundza had established themselves, along with the Pedi, as a formidable presence in the region, and by the 1860s and 1870s were in control of some of the richest farmland in the eastern Transvaal. The leaders of the Afrikaner republics were trying to solidify their own power base, and attempted to accomplish this through the takeover of land, the supplementation of their small labour pool, and the subjugation of the powerful African polities in the region. This opportunity arose in the early 1880s, when the Afrikaners joined forces with the Pedi to attack the Ndzundza heartland. The Boer troops destroyed crops, dynamited food storage areas, and seized Ndzundza cattle. After eight months, the Ndzundza

were near to starvation, and at last surrendered.

The Ndzundzas' recalcitrance angered the Boers and made the conflict costly for the fledgling white state. The Boer victory, however, provided an occasion to make an example of the Ndzundza to other African communities who might also contemplate resisting Boer hegemony. The Ndzundza lands, roughly 15,000 morgen, were made available on a first-come-first-served basis to the men who had participated in the Boer commandos, and soon became densely settled by relatively poor white farmers. Independent African settlements of any size were prohibited. As the harshest component of the penalty, the Ndzundza were allocated to the newly settled farmers as labourers for a five-year period. Under these terms, the Ndzundza received no pay for their work, and were allotted only a small piece of land for a garden and dwelling. The indentureship was meant to last five years, but many Ndzundza were not emancipated at the end of this period. By September of 1883, the majority of Ndzundza were in servitude to white farmers across the region (Delius, 1989: 232-34; James, 1987: 26).<sup>18</sup> Many people deserted white farms in search of family members scattered across the area, and others left in attempt to return to the heart of the Ndzundza chiefdom, land of great significance as the representation of Ndzundza independence and autonomy. Most people, however, had few alternatives and knew that they would be captured and returned if they fled the white farms.

Although many Ndzundza were parceled out to farmers across the eastern Transvaal region, others became workers on the same land they had inhabited before the influx of Boer settlers. Shelele Ntuli, the Ntuli patriarch, lived with his family and other Ndzundza on land called KwaMahlangu prior to the arrival of Arnold du Preez, a member of the victorious forces.<sup>19</sup> Du Preez was granted the Ndzundza as his servants and the land, which he renamed Rooikraal, as his farm. The Ntulis were not released from servitude at the end of the stipulated five-year period, and there was no change in their living and working conditions. Shelele lived at Rooikraal under Du Preez for over twenty years, marrying two wives and fathering seven children in that time period. He received no wage, in cash or kind, from the Du Preez family. After the Anglo-Boer war at the turn of the twentieth century, the Du Preezes moved to Witpoort, another farm within the region of Mapochsgronde. Workers, like other farm implements, were considered moveable property, and Shelele and his family were transferred to the new farm with the Du Preez family.<sup>20</sup> The move to Witpoort further entrenched the Ntulis' servitude to the Du Preezes. While living at Rooikraal, land that had belonged to his family less than a generation earlier, Shelele could reasonably hope for his emancipation. Relocation to Witpoort, however, reinforced the unlikelihood of this prospect. Furthermore, the power imbalance between black workers and white landowners had become much greater by the beginning of the twentieth century. The few remaining options for independent African settlement were whittled away by increasingly

restrictive legislation and practice. Without other options or hope for redress, Shelele and his family began to make the most of their circumstances. A central facet of this process was establishing a connection to their new location, and so began the process of making Witpoort their home. Over time the land upon which they lived and worked became the centre of both their day-to-day lives and their hopes for the future.

In what was probably the early 1930s, Arnold du Preez made a pledge to Shelele Ntuli that the Ntuli family would always be able to bury their dead at Witpoort. This verbal agreement formed a key aspect of the Ntuli's connection to Witpoort, as it seemed to offer a degree of security rarely afforded to farm workers. Farm workers were extremely susceptible to eviction without notice, but Arnold du Preez's gesture suggested that the relationship between the Ntulis and the Du Preezes would not be broken. The Ntulis believe that a level of respect and understanding existed between the family patriarchs and view the burial arrangement as a reflection of this bond. The pact between the families was critical to the spiritual security and generational integrity of the Ntulis, as it offered long-term attachment to the land. This, in turn, established what the Ntulis believed was an inalienable resting place for their dead. The continuity of place for their deceased provided the Ntulis with a sense of belonging, and allowed them to establish a connection to the land of Witpoort that would otherwise not have been possible.

Although the Ntulis had security in terms of an immediate home and a final resting place, the day-to-day conditions at Witpoort were deplorable. The entire Ntuli family, including young children, worked for the Du Preezes. No schooling or days off were provided. The absence of schooling on farms was (and, in some places, still is) a common practice throughout South Africa, and the lack of education and transferable skills effectively tied generations to farm labour. The Ntuli family, like other Ndzundza in the region, never received wages for their labour. The Du Preezes allocated each household a small piece of land, large enough for a house and small garden. The plot was barely big enough to support the family for a year, and the lack of cash or kind payment made it extremely difficult for the family to acquire outside goods to supplement their diet or improve their living conditions.<sup>21</sup> The Ntulis were allowed to keep some livestock, but the farmer set the maximum number of animals, particularly cattle, and owning bulls was prohibited.<sup>22</sup> Owning livestock offered farm workers a modicum of financial independence: the family could decide how and when to dispose of their assets, and could use the animals to pay bridewealth when their sons wished to marry. Yet, as pointed out by the Ntulis, any sign of prosperity among farm workers threatened the white dominion and assurances of a steady labour supply, so farmers preferred to maintain the dependency of their labourers. A prohibition on the ownership of bulls served this end, making it impossible for a worker to use his own resources to increase his wealth. By placing

limits on the Ntulis' assets and access to education, the Du Preezes ensured that their workers were powerless to leave the farms for other employment.

In 1959 the Du Preezes evicted Jantjie Ntuli and his family. Jantjie's children are not aware of any dispute between the farmer and their father, and believe that the eviction was without reason. Farm worker evictions, however, were increasingly common in the 1950s due to the mechanization of agriculture and legislation to limit the number of surplus workers or their family members in white farming areas.<sup>23</sup> In 1959 the Du Toit commission, established to investigate the decline in the rural white population, released its report. The commission found that whites made up only 4% of the population in rural areas, generating a fear of the "beswating van die platteland", or the "blackening of the countryside". The commission recommended that this depopulation trend be reversed, as "a numerically strong, yet economically sound rural population is a prerequisite to the maintenance of White civilisation in South Africa" (cited in Unterhalter, 1987). This anxiety over the racial balance clearly illustrates the emphasis placed on the purity of space in the rural South African landscape. The platteland, the farmland itself, was perceived as being endangered by the high percentages of Africans in areas deemed to be for whites. The fact that the overwhelming majority of African inhabitants in these areas were either in the employment of white farmers, sharecropping on white land, or the families of these groups was irrelevant: the numbers of rural whites were low and should be increased. The health and advancement of the country was inextricably linked to patterns of habitation, land access, and land use.

The range of possible motivations behind the eviction of the Ntulis from Witpoort did not soften the blow to the family, and the nature of their eviction exacerbated their sense of injustice. The family, numbering roughly thirty people at the time, was served a *trekpas* or eviction letter, and given one day to pack their possessions.<sup>24</sup> The Ntulis had no option but to leave Witpoort, and the family members were "scattered all around" as they sought employment on other farms in the region. "We were tossed around, forced to move from farms, just wandering," recall the Ntulis.<sup>25</sup> Jantjie eventually found work on a farm that neighbored Witpoort, and was able to move there with his immediate family and some of his livestock. The proximity of the new farm to Witpoort meant that the family could make regular visits to their ancestors and the land they considered home. Jantjie's new employer also allowed the extended family to gather for family events on his farm, helping to ease the hardship of separation from each other.

While living at Witpoort the Ntulis had no cash savings, no farm implements, few crops to harvest, and only extremely limited access to land. Their only asset was livestock, and the farmer's quotas restricted even these holdings. The few benefits that the Ntulis did accrue came through their tie to Witpoort, even though this land was not theirs in terms of formal title. The kinship

network could be maintained on the farm, a network incorporating both the extended family members and the deceased who were buried on the land and remained an integral part of homestead relations. As the burial site of the ancestors, Witpoort was the physical location where the knowledge and authority of the ancestors could be called upon. Believing that they had irrevocable rights to bury their dead on the land, the Ntulis saw the farm as both their present locative family centre and their future resting place. Although the family was not naïve in regard to the tenuousness of their position and did not expect conditions to improve, Arnold du Preez's pledge allowed them to consider the land their home, and to build emotional and spiritual ties with it. Furthermore, the combination of familial connections afforded by the land and the right of burial granted by Du Preez gave the Ntulis a precious asset which they considered to be irrevocable, a conviction they clung to even after their eviction. Even though removal uprooted the Ntulis from the space they considered home, Jantjie's family was able to remain close to Witpoort, and the Du Preezes did not enforce the trespassing laws that prevented others, like the Ndunges, from accessing their family graves.

Between 1959 and 1992 the Ntulis buried ten family members, including Jantjie, on Witpoort, and the relationship between the Ntulis and the Du Preezes remained amicable. Following Jantjie's death, his family was evicted from the neighbouring farm and forced to leave the area in search of work. This made return visits to the ancestors more difficult, but the extended family continued to make pilgrimages to the graves whenever possible to inform the ancestors of major events and decisions in their lives. Unbroken spatial proximity to the graves would have been preferable to the rare visits, but the occasional family gatherings on the land for ritual purposes and burials helped maintain the spiritual well-being and unity of the family. Although access to Witpoort was limited and difficult, the farm continued to provide the family with a sense of a place to which they belonged.

The relationship between the Ntulis and the Du Preezes changed drastically in the early 1990s after the death of Arnold du Preez's grandson, also named Arnold, who had been running the farm. Witpoort was taken over by Kobus van Niekerk, the second Arnold's son-in-law, and he immediately suspended the Ntulis' right to bury their dead on the land or visit the graves. The Ntulis explain Van Niekerk's actions as follows, "He told us that he is Christian and he does not believe in our rituals and ancestors."<sup>6</sup> Both parties frame their right of access or prohibition on access to the land in religious terms. The Ntulis place primacy on the graves of their ancestors, and their claim to the land is based on their right to the sacred space central to their worldview. Van Niekerk, on the other hand, uses his Christianity to prevent the enactment of practices he considers pagan. In both circumstances, belief defines not only the ideology of the family, but also their conception of the land as their own. For Van



Niekerk, the enactment of non-Christian practices within the boundaries of his farm would defile the land, and he draws upon this principle to prevent the Ntulis from accessing their graves. Like the white farmers in the Eastern Cape, Van Niekerk suggested that the Ntulis exhume their ancestors. The Ntulis refused, saying that such a practice went against their beliefs, and stressed their guaranteed right to bury their dead and access the graves. Witpoort, they say, is their rightful place, the only home they have ever known as a unified family.

Kobus van Niekerk's retraction of the pledge made by Arnold du Preez infuriated the Ntulis. For years they had lived in exile from the land they considered sacred, but they had been able to visit the farm to maintain contact with the ancestors and to ensure the continuity of the family across generations. Van Niekerk's move disrupted this relationship, and the Ntulis were unable to inform their ancestors of the reasons behind what seemed a sudden abandonment. Peter Ntuli, son of Jantjie, explains, "Now we are having a life that is incomplete because we are separated from our ancestors which are forming an integral part of our life."<sup>27</sup> When asked if the ancestors were aware of why the family had stopped visiting the graves, the Ntulis answer, "No, they don't know. We are lost."<sup>28</sup> The Ntulis still attempt to communicate with the ancestors, but the rituals are performed at the family's present location in the former bantustan of KwaNdebele, and are seen as ineffective in reaching the ancestors or conveying the family's needs and respect. The prohibition on visiting the land also caused the deterioration of relationships between the living. After Jantjie's family's eviction from the neighbouring farm, visiting the Witpoort graves became the only opportunity for the extended family to gather. With Kobus van Niekerk's declaration, the Ntulis were alienated not only from the land they considered home, but from their history and extended family, both living and dead.

The 1994 inauguration of South Africa's representative government restored the Ntulis' optimism that they would be able to return to Witpoort. Legislation restricting residency and ownership based on race had been repealed several years earlier, but the family did not have the means to acquire land in the vicinity of Witpoort or the resources to attempt to establish access to their graves. The announcement of the restitution programme introduced a new hope, and the Ntuli family began to investigate the possibility of reclaiming Witpoort. In May 1996, Charlie Ntuli, son of Jantjie, wrote to the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights: "We will be pleased if you can consider our request to return to the farm and have access to our family graves."<sup>29</sup> Although the family prioritizes access to the graves in order to reconnect with the ancestors, they also stress that they would ultimately like to reclaim the farm. "We have the belief that one day we must be given a chance to go back to that farm, as farmers, not as slaves as before."<sup>30</sup> Unlike the Ndunges, however, the Ntulis never had legal ownership of Witpoort, and the land that Shelele lost before 1883 was elsewhere in the region.<sup>31</sup> The family strongly believes, however, that

their labour made the land their own, and that their right to Witpoort should be recognized in return for years of unpaid manual labour. The Du Preezes, they argue, did not make the farm productive: the fruits of the soil were a result of the Ntulis' efforts. The Ntuli men gave their labour and the labour of their families to the land, and this work transformed Witpoort from a white man's farm into their home. Furthermore, the farm is central and sacred to the Ntulis' worldview, and this connection should be more important than a title deed. The Ntulis feel that these aspects of their ties to the land provide sufficient evidence of their rightful claim to Witpoort. They add to this list the betrayal of the Du Preezes, first in the form of the 1959 eviction, and then in the sudden prohibition of access to the graves in 1992. The abuse of the trust between the families and the forfeiture of the agreement between the patriarchs are injustices that mandate reparations. At the very least, the family believes they should be awarded a portion of the farm. They say, "We must be given a large piece [of the farm] because we worked for nothing. We are poor because of those people." When asked how much of the farm would suffice as just remuneration, the Ntulis reply, "We would take it all!"<sup>32</sup>

Many members of the Ntuli family presently live in the desolate and overcrowded former bantustan of KwaNdebele. Several of the women commute for up to four hours each day to jobs as domestic servants in Pretoria, and employment opportunities in the area itself are extremely limited.<sup>33</sup> The Ntulis were unable to find work on other farms after Jantjie's death, and moved to KwaNdebele in 1984. They hoped that life on the bantustan would afford them at least a modicum of independence and some space to graze their animals. The land, however, was arid and over-grazed, and many of the Ntulis' sheep and goats died soon after the move.

The Ntulis' present living conditions and the on-going importance of Witpoort in their lives made their desire to reclaim the farm fully reasonable. The problem that arose, however, was the feasibility of their restitution claim. To their credit, the Land Claims Commission in Pretoria forwarded Charlie Ntuli's letter of May 1996 to the Legal Resource Centre (LRC), a pro-bono legal aid clinic that represents and advises low-income families in a wide range of legal matters. The Ntulis' case worker at the LRC explained to the family that they should focus on gaining access to their graves, but the Ntulis continue to see this as simply the first step in ultimately being able to reclaim their land. They feel that their right to the land is valid, and that, based on the injustices they suffered and the years of labour they gave to the soil, the land belongs more to them than to the Du Preez/Van Niekerk family. As the restitution programme was set up to favor the dispossessed and take into consideration oral testimony and the right of occupancy, the family hoped to be able to file a restitution claim for all or part of Witpoort. The deadline for such claims, however, passed on December 31, 1998. The Ntulis, as advised by the LRC, had been focusing

on gaining access to their family graves and did not file a restitution claim before this date. This does not mean, however, that the family has abandoned their desire to return to Witpoort, or that Witpoort's significance has in any way diminished in their eyes.

Even more than forty years after their father's eviction, the children of Jantjie Ntuli continue to define themselves and their spirituality in relation to the farm. The Ntulis' focus on the farm of Witpoort has shaped their day-to-day lives, their choices of where they live, and their identification as a family. The importance of Witpoort has been passed from one generation to the next, and the adults tell their children that Witpoort is their roots, if they want to meet with the ancestors they must go there. We also tell them about the beauty of the land and the relationship that [Shelele] had with the Du Preezes.<sup>34</sup>

According to Peter Ntuli, this transmission of Witpoort's significance has been so complete that if "you ask [the children] where they are from they will simply tell you that they are from Witpoort". Although the position and power of Witpoort as the Ntulis' sacred space is clear, we must ask how this interpretation has shaped their attempt to reclaim the land they lost. At first glance, the restitution legislation appears to prioritize claims such as the Ntulis: in theory, it allows people to receive land they lost as remuneration for the injustices and abuses that they suffered. For this reason, people such as the Ntulis and the Ndunges, who place priority on their connection to their sacred space, have been quick to try for restitution of their land. Yet in reality, the implicit recognition of sacred space within the restitution policy has allowed people to focus on claims that are infeasible and unlikely to be decided in their favour. Although this reality was made clear to the Ntulis by the LRC, the very existence of the restitution legislation and the family's determination to return to Witpoort prevented them from seeking alternative solutions to their lack of productive land. If the government had initially focused on redistribution, as opposed to restitution, people such as the Ntulis would probably be better off at present, and would stand a chance of receiving land on which to rebuild their lives. The Ntulis, of course, may still apply for land through redistribution, but the process itself is slow-moving and poorly resourced, due in part to the government's early and intensive focus on restitution.

### **Beyond Restitution**

The Ndunge and Ntuli cases illustrate the continuing significance of specific tracts of land, even decades or generations after expropriation. Space can be construed as sacred while lived on or owned, and this sacrality can increase, not dissipate, even after dispossession and alienation. While the Ndunges lived on Maxongo's Hoek it was their home, their source of livelihood, and it represented their standing in the community. As the burial place of the ancestors,

the land was the physical location tying the generations together, and inherent in the space of Maxongo's Hoek were the family's collective history and the ancestors' knowledge, power, and authority. Following removal, the hardships of life at Mhlwazi accentuated the family's loss of independence and self-sufficiency. The repercussions of the separation were amplified by the deaths of the elders, and these losses served to constantly remind the living members of their alienation from the land. Although the land had always been significant as the family's home, symbol of independence, and means of self-sufficiency, its sacrality increased as the years of alienation wore on and the story of its loss passed from one generation to the next.

Unlike the Ndunges, the Ntulis never had unfettered access to Witpoort. But although the family was never able to farm the land independently, their eviction took from them the only land access they had. Although the Ntulis remember their conditions at Witpoort as akin to slavery, the farm provided a place where they could own livestock and be together as a family. Furthermore, as the Ntulis' home, Witpoort was the location of innumerable significant moments in the family's history, including births, deaths, and marriages. Resilient in the face of hardship, the Ntulis took advantage of the few things that life at Witpoort did provide, including the integrity of their family. Like Maxongo's Hoek for the Ndunges, Witpoort was the place where knowledge and teaching could be passed from one generation to the next, and shared between the living and the dead. Witpoort's significance grew over time as increasing numbers were buried on the farm, and the guarantee of access to the farm became one of the few secure facets in the otherwise unstable lives of the Ntulis.

Although both the Ndunges and the Ntulis discuss the economic or physical hardship caused by their displacement, their alienation from the land is couched primarily in terms of the loss of sacred space. Material well-being remains a pressing concern for both families, but their ultimate goal is to reconnect with the ancestors. In formulating a land reform policy for a country moving from authoritarianism to democracy, it is important to recognize the depth of meaning and many layers of significance in people's attachment to land, including this attachment to land as sacred space. In South Africa, the loss of land has played a central role in the disempowerment of the millions of black people who were uprooted and displaced. Although the drafters of the land reform legislation did not make explicit reference to the sacrality of space, the restitution policy recognizes the power inherent in specific places or tracts of land, and aims to provide reparation for past wrongs through the return of expropriated land. Without this conception of land's importance on a spiritual level—in addition to its political, economic, and social role—it is difficult to take appropriate steps to use land reform to address the continuing imbalances and injustices of the past.

South Africa's restitution provision incorporates a multi-dimensional un-

derstanding of land's importance. The focus on this aspect of land reform, however, has come at the expense of other, and possibly more practical and far-reaching, alternatives. Restitution has enabled people such as the Ndunges and Ntulis to concentrate almost exclusively on returning to the land they lost. While restitution may have been an appropriate option in a case such as the Ndunges, who had a relatively unambiguous land claim, the Ntulis' chances of receiving land may have been hindered by their exclusive efforts to return to Witpoort. The possibility of restitution and the early promotion of this aspect of land reform gave the Ntulis hope that they would be able to reclaim Witpoort. If the redistribution programme had been as widely endorsed and advertised as restitution, the Ntulis might have opted for participation in this programme. Redistribution would clearly not have been the Ntulis' first option, as it would not have enabled them to return to the land they considered home, but it may have allowed them to receive productive land while simultaneously lobbying for visitation rights to their ancestors' graves. Even for the Ndunges, who are likely to realize their ambition of returning to Maxongo's Hoek, the restitution process has been difficult, time-consuming, and expensive, and there will be little money left over for the development of their land. One must ask, therefore, if restitution's importance as a concept is not outweighed by its impracticality as a solution to South Africa's divisive past.

One of the major problems with restitution as it currently stands is the lack of sustainable development and support for the people who have returned to the land they lost. As discussed in the Ndunge case, the claimants' combined settlement/acquisition grants are used to purchase the land and defray moving costs. The land in question, however, is often in a prime agricultural area and may have been extensively improved in the years since its expropriation. The claimants are encouraged to seek alternative forms of reparation in cases where the cost of the land is prohibitively high,<sup>35</sup> but the priority is on returning people to the land, and thus purchases are made whenever possible. Such a strategy is problematic when it leaves little funding for post-resettlement improvements, such as housing or educational facilities. This appears to have been the case for the Elandskloof community in the Western Cape, the first group to return to their land after the settling of their restitution claim. The claimants' initially joyous return to the land has been dampened by the realization that they lack basic necessities for development and advancement. Some of these situations could be avoided by an improved level of coordination between the Department of Land Affairs and other government departments, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Public Works, but the underlying problem is scarcity of resources. Until these issues of funding, inter-departmental planning, and post-resettlement support are adequately addressed, the beneficiaries of restitution are likely to be met with hardships upon returning to their land.

People prioritize the spiritual meaning of land, and place significance on the history, rituals, and burials that have transpired there. This powerful human attachment to land has the potential to positively contribute to the restitution process in South Africa and countries undergoing similar transitions. The problem is not that sacred space is not relevant to a debate on land reform, or that there is no place for it in policy formation. On the contrary, an incorporation of the sacred into any debate on land allows for a more complete understanding of how people have been affected by the loss of land, and this consideration may, in turn, help to promote the rehabilitation and reconciliation of a divided society. The problem in South Africa has been one of resources and priorities. There are over four million people in South Africa who suffered forced removals on the basis of racist legislation, and these people do deserve the opportunity to make claims to their land. And yet there are a great many more people like the Ntulis, who lost access to land through a common farm eviction, and many others who never had ownership or access to begin with. In a society faced with such great need and limited resources, programmes should be clearly prioritized to assist the greatest number of the most needy people in the shortest amount of time. Such a list of priorities might not exclude restitution, but will result in a greater focus on other measures, such as redistribution.

The South African land reform programme does not have the resources to simultaneously meet the goals of justice, through restitution, and social equity, through redistribution. This reality has not been recognized, and both the redistribution and restitution programmes, and the people they are designed to help, have suffered as a result. Although redistribution may be a more effective method to meet the land needs of larger number of South Africans, it is too late to turn back the clock on the restitution programme. The process can, however, be streamlined and revised. Attention needs to be given to the huge number of unresolved claims, and these should be evaluated for feasibility and cost. Although politically unpopular, cases that can't be settled expediently or that involve land of too great a purchase price should be rejected, and the applicants placed in the pool for redistributed land. People are eager to reclaim land they lost and to return to their sacred space, but there is no justice in promoting resettlement if the claimants are to be met with a total lack of development, infrastructure, and future prospects. The Department of Land Affairs should begin to shift its financial and personnel resources towards redistribution and the promotion of sustainable development, and to focus on delivering land to the majority of landless South Africans.

The issue of sacred space remains important, as has been shown by the poignant stories of the Ndunges and the Ntulis. Regardless of necessary changes to the land reform programme, the spiritual significance of land, and the necessity of access to graves in order to communicate with the ancestors, must not be downplayed or ignored. Restitution, however, does not seem to be effective in

providing the desperately needed return to the space of the ancestors. In order to address this issue, legislation must be passed allowing people free and unfettered access to their family graves on privately owned land. Although such a measure exists in the Extension of Security of Tenure Act of 1997, this act is both broad and extremely controversial, and this clause seems to have been forgotten in the battle over the act's more contentious aspects.<sup>36</sup> In order to remedy this, legislation must be passed that deals specifically and exclusively with access to graves, and must include provisions for enforcement of this measure. Access should be unconditional, and people must be allowed to perform rituals at any time to ensure their connection, or reconnection, with their ancestors is complete and effective. Whether or not such a measure could also allow for burial on private land is another question, waiting to be fought at another day.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga make up two of the nine provinces created after the 1994 elections. The Eastern Cape was previously part of the Cape Province, though was usually referred to as the eastern Cape. Prior to the union of South Africa in 1910 this area was the Cape Colony. Mpumalanga was part of the Transvaal Province, and was called the eastern Transvaal. The terminology in this paper reflects the time period under discussion.
- <sup>2</sup> The granting of land in acknowledgement of military allegiance was a common practice of the British colonial administration. The Mfengu frequently sided with the British, whether by choice or coercion, in the frontier wars and were rewarded with land. For more information on the much-debated role of the Mfengu in history, see Bouch, 1992; Hamilton, 1995; Webster, 1990.
- <sup>3</sup> One of the ways in which the Mfengu had been considered a "strength" by some colonists was as a "buffer" between the British settled along the Fish River and the hostile Xhosa-speakers in the Trans-Kei. The creation of this buffer zone was one of the motivations behind granting Mfengu land in return for their collaboration with the British war effort against the Xhosa population. As with many aspects of colonial history, the nature of both the agricultural success of the Mfengu and the British response is hotly contested.
- <sup>4</sup> The districts of Elliot and Maclear were excised from the territory of Thembuland by the Maclear and Elliot Districts Further Provision Act, Act 12 of 1913. This act excluded the two districts from the areas reserved for African land holding.
- <sup>5</sup> Each household was allowed to move one small truckload of goods to new land, and any possessions that did not fit into one load had to be moved by the family's own means.
- <sup>6</sup> For the guidelines on forced removals and relocations, see Department of Bantu Administration and Development, "Report of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development," for period 1 January 1963 to 31 December 1963, published by authority, Republic of South Africa, Government Printer, Pretoria, R.P.

41/1965.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Ndunge, Mhlwazi, June 4, 1998. All interviews are cited with the respondent's name, location, and date. Group responses are listed by the family name.

<sup>8</sup> On the parallel practices of Christianity and African traditional religion in South Africa, see Manona, 1981: 34-39; Jacob K. Olupona 1991: 119-34; Whisson and West, eds. 1975; Monica Wilson, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Miriam Ndunge, Mhlwazi, June 4, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Miriam Ndunge, Mhlwazi, June 4, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Nompucuko Ndunge, Elliot, April 10, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Ndunge family, Elliot, April 10, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Ndunge, Mhlwazi, June 4, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Miriam Ndunge, Mhlwazi, 1998, and Ndunge family, Elliot, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Due to the slow pace of this process, legislation was later passed that allowed certain cases to be settled directly by the commission, bypassing the Land Claims Court.

<sup>17</sup> The mountain fortress of KwaNomtjharhelo is known by a variety of names, including Namsaxelo, Erholweni, and Mapoch's Caves.

<sup>18</sup> In the last ten years, researchers have discovered people working on farms in this area whose conditions have not changed since their ancestors were indentured in 1883. The land taken over by the Boers includes territory in today's districts of Lydenburg, Standerton, Pretoria, and Middleburg.

<sup>19</sup> The white farming family was not available for interview, and thus their names have been changed.

<sup>20</sup> The new Du Preez land consisted of the adjacent farms of Berevlei and Witpoort, which were divided between Arnold Du Preez's children after his death. The Ntulis initially lived on Berevlei and worked on both these farms at various times, but ended up living at Witpoort for a longer period and forging a much deeper connection with this area.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed picture of the ingenuity required for basic survival of Transvaal farm workers, see van Onselen, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Ntulis, Mathysznloop, July 3, 1997

<sup>23</sup> The Du Preez's motivations for evicting the Ntulis may have been related to legislation passed in 1954 that obliged farmers to register all African workers on their land. Local control boards were established two years later to redistribute "surplus" workers, defined as more people than "needed to run [a] farm effectively" to other areas. Although these measures were specifically aimed at labour tenants, who had more independence than workers such as the Ntulis, the pressure to reduce surplus farm workers may have contributed to the overall rate of evictions. Colin Bundy (1990: 4) points out that the dispossession of rural peasants is not unique to South Africa, and has occurred in all societies with the onset of industrialization and capitalism.

<sup>24</sup> A *trekpas*, probably the most common form of farm worker evictions, is defined as "a letter which says that the person, his or her family, and all of their livestock and cattle must vacate the farm by a certain date. If the family has not left by that date the farmer reports the matter to the police and lays a charge of trespass or illegal squatting. The head of the family is then arrested forthwith and brought to court" (Claassens, 46).

<sup>25</sup> Ntulis, Mathysznloop, July 3, 1997.



- <sup>26</sup> Peter Ntuli, personal correspondence, June, 1997.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ntulis, Mathysznloop, July 3, 1997.
- <sup>29</sup> Bambhazibukhale Charlie Ntuli, letter to the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, May 31, 1996. On file at the Legal Resource Centre, Pretoria.
- <sup>30</sup> Peter Ntuli, personal correspondence, October 25, 1997.
- <sup>31</sup> Even if the family had been working on KwaMahlangu until their eviction, Shelele Ntuli was dispossessed thirty years before the 1913 cut-off date for restitution claims. A restitution claim to KwaMahlangu would not, therefore, have been eligible.
- <sup>32</sup> Ntulis, Mathysznloop, July 3, 1997.
- <sup>33</sup> For an in-depth description of the way of life for those who commute from KwaNdebele, see van Niekerk, 1989.
- <sup>34</sup> Peter Ntuli, personal correspondence, October 25, 1997.
- <sup>35</sup> This has been the case for the Ebenhaeser community in the Western Cape. The community was moved off their land in the 1920s to make room for an irrigation scheme to benefit poor whites. The land was developed as vegetable farms and grape vineyards, and is now worth an estimated 800 million rand. The high market value of the land makes it unattainable, and the community has been encouraged to seek restitution of a smaller portion or to redirect their settlement/acquisition grants to the development of the land at their present location.
- <sup>36</sup> Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs, Extension of Security of Tenure Act, Act 62 of 1997, section 6(4).

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