

Religion and National Space: Defining National Sacred Space in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Zambia

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Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing reflection and debate on sacred space by mapping out and interpreting the meaning of national sacred space in relation to the National Heroes' Acre in Harare, Zimbabwe, Thaba-Bosiu National Monument in Lesotho, and the City Square in Kitwe, Zambia. The paper draws primarily on current studies of sacred space, particularly work by David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995). This approach marks a departure from the traditional understanding of sacred space and a venture into the world of the unfamiliar. In a region that is predominantly Christian, the argument might be unfamiliar to some readers, in that the concept of "sacred" is usually very specialised and tends to be restricted to one area, namely, conventional religious institutions and their activities. Places that function, both cognitively and empirically, as sacred places are those that are normally perceived in their respective religious contexts – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, African traditional religion, and so on. Spaces derive their sacrality from institutional religions. Sacred space signifies places and buildings such as churches, synagogues and mosques, or specific natural sites, such as mountains or rivers, where a momentous event occurred some time in the past. To that extent, then, one would rightly expect gatherings for petitions or remembrance, for instance, to take place in a "sacred" building, say, a church, mosque, or synagogue.

By articulating the National Heroes' Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and the City Square as sacred spaces, this paper intends to, one, creatively contribute an alternative perception or understanding of religion and, two, through this approach, critically consider the question of the distinction between "sacred" and "profane" in discussions about religion. While distinguishing the sacred and profane might be legitimate, this paper argues that it is, however, a hindrance rather than a help in understanding religion. In other words, the primary argument is that

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while religious sites, as it were, are important, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that there are other, different places which normally do not derive their sacrality from institutional religions, and that this perspective may be valuable for understanding the phenomenon of sacred space. This understanding is underpinned by David Chidester's proposal that religion itself is not separate from social institution. Religion "is a repertoire of symbols, myths, rituals that might be diffused through a network of social relations" (Chidester, 1999). Therefore, to confine the meaning of "sacred" to sites of a relic, shrine, or cathedral limits a richer definition of sacred space.

To explore the issue of national sacred space further, the rest of the paper is divided into three sections, beginning, first, with a definition of "sacred space". Second, the ways in which the National Heroes' Acre, the Thaba-Bosiu National Monument, and the City Square are portrayed, and their symbolic significance, are examined. Finally, an attempt is made to interpret and analyse what constitutes these national spaces as "sacred" spaces.

Sacred Space

What does the term "sacred space" mean? What do we mean when we say that a particular place is sacred or is sacred space? While a particular meaning or set of meanings might be ascribed to the term "sacred", its use as a descriptive term renders it highly ambiguous, as the religious expression of sacred space varies. There is just no clear definition of what makes a place or thing holy or sacred. Jackson and Henrie (1983: 94), for example, have defined sacred space as:

that portion of the earth's surface, which is recognised by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem. Space is sharply discriminated from the non-sacred or profane world around it. Sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man [sic] defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals.

In the above definition, ordinary, profane space is converted into holy or sacred space through a symbolic process that reflects the worldview of a particular religion. However, it seems that while the question of the distinction between sacred and profane is certainly legitimate, it is only secondary. The primary question is whether, on the theoretical level, at least, one sees the whole earth as sacred, with allowances for profanity or degrees of profanity, or whether the starting point is one where the whole earth is profane and sacrality is created by human cultural activity. It is not a question of whether or not there is a boundary – in the minds of most religionists the presence of a boundary is indisput-

able. Rather, the question is: Where is the boundary? Or where do religionists erect the dividing wall? On the basis of what criteria? By what technique? (Kwenda, 1998: 5). These are certainly vexing questions that demand critical reflection.

In any event, current studies on sacred spaces have seen direction depart from the classic works which dichotomise the sacred and profane, such as Eliade's (1959) substantial definition of the sacred as an irruption of the "real", or Emile Durkheim's (1976) situational definition that locates the sacred as "that which is set apart" by human, social practice. Subverting, for instance, Eliade's notion that "the sacred is separate from the profane", writers such as Chidester and Linenthal prefer to emphasise instead that the sacred is not necessarily the opposite of profane, nor is it absolutely separate from the profane. Situating their argument around Van der Leeuw's observation that sacred space is, among other things, consistently a politics of property - not merely a meaningful place, but a powerful place because it is "appropriated, possessed, and owned", Chidester and Linenthal (1995: 8) have paid particular attention to these factors with regard to American sacred space. In their analysis, heavy emphasis is put on the political aspects of sacred space as contested space, suggesting that the most significant components of sacred space "are not 'mythological' categories, such as heaven, earth and hell, but hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession". They have emphasised the "entrepreneurial, social, political and other 'profane' forces" that constitute the construction of sacred space (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 17).

From this perspective, then, sacred space "anchors more than merely myth or emotion". The concept is clearly not confined to easily recognisable religious buildings such as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples or to natural features of the landscape where a momentous event occurred some time in the past - places such as mountains, pools, trees and other objects of human perception and experience. To confine it to these would be losing the texture or full meaning of sacred space. For, in the first instance, "nothing is inherently sacred". The sacred, as Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested, is a "value of indeterminate signification, in itself empty of meaning and therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning whatsoever" (cited in Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 6). It is manifested much more widely and permeates all areas of life. In this respect, therefore, "anything can be invested with sacred meaning and significance, with sacred purity and power, through the ongoing work of ritual and interpretation that marks out with meticulous attention to detail that which is set apart" (Chidester, 1999: 27).

This emphasis on the political and contestable notions of sacred space is, certainly, an innovative departure from past analyses. More interestingly, too, it resonates with the African view of the legitimacy of non-distinction between

the sacred and the profane. Distinction between the sacred and the profane is one of the most contested issues in the African worldview or African religious thought. Generally, in Africa, it is strongly believed that the sacred and profane (or secular) are inseparable. They are interwoven aspects of life. Life, or virtually anything, is permeated or assigned with sacrality – to the extent that “sacred” and “profane” is hardly dichotomised. This is expressed in the notion that religion is not an exclusive entity, but encompasses the entirety of life: it is something lived and practised, not discussed and talked about (Setiloane, 1989:41). This now leads us to look at the spaces under discussion here.

National Heroes’ Acre

Located on a fifty-seven-hectare site, seven kilometres west of Harare in Zimbabwe, is found National Heroes’ Acre, marking the nation’s transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, from colonial oppression beginning in 1890 to freedom won in 1980. Constructed immediately after independence by the Zimbabwean government, the heroes’ acre is a national cemetery that has been set aside for liberation fighters or “war” veterans and high-ranking politicians. At a cost of over twelve million Zimbabwe dollars, sponsored by the North Korean government, the expense of its material construction arguably symbolises the value of patriotism and of the lives of Zimbabwean people in the restoration and maintenance of freedom (Kriger, 1995: 142). Furthermore, armed restriction and control at all access points protects the “sacred” nature of the site from the defilement of the “profane” world.

National Heroes’ Acre, as a symbol of liberation, is rooted in the colonial history of Zimbabwe, going back to when the territory was first colonised by “the people without knees” (as the indigenous peoples first called the white men who wore long trousers), under the leadership of Cecil John Rhodes in 1890. There were powerful indigenous religious and political figures, such as the spirit mediums, Kaguvi and Nehanda (male and female, respectively), who resisted white domination, colonial invasion, and settler expansionist ideology. Kaguvi and Nehanda, along with other clan leaders, were executed by the colonial administration, but before she was hanged, Nehanda prophesied that her bones would rise. During this period, spirit mediums were accorded great political and moral authority and so it was Nehanda’s prophecy that provided one of the symbolic resources for giving birth to the armed struggle in Zimbabwe in the 1960s (Lan, 1983). Her words, “my bones shall rise”, were believed to mean that young freedom fighters would come after her to fight white domination. These spirit mediums are perceived as the first heroes of Zimbabwe’s war of independence and their execution and “risen bones” give symbolic significance to those who gave their lives in the fight for freedom. From those first executed for resistance, until independence in 1980, 80 000 lives were lost (Kriger, 1995:

139). It is to honour their memory that the National Heroes' Acre was constructed.

Unlike other cemeteries in Zimbabwe, the heroes' acre means many things to Zimbabweans. At the political level, the National Heroes' Acre marks Zimbabwe's journey to the end of "settler" domination and provides a monument dedicated to the memory of the politics of protest against colonialism by black Zimbabweans. More than a mere cemetery, it is a place that commemorates Zimbabwe's independence and symbolises its very centre of political power. As such, the heroes' acre serves as a symbol of identity, the sense of identity the nation deserves, in relation to the ideals of liberation struggle that signify the birth of a new nation. For other people, though, the National Heroes' Acre also symbolises a national shrine, a memorial place that honours the freedom fighters who lost their lives during the war. Here, their memory is venerated, as families who convene at the site on national days are able to feel that the sacrifices made by their beloved ones are remembered and to experience the honour that has been bestowed on those lost and, needless to say, the continuing connection between the living and dead. This honour is extended to surviving relatives in a real way, as government programmes compensate families of ex-combatants, giving them a sense of security at both family and national levels.

At the centre of the National Heroes' Acre are found several material symbols that represent this sense of national unity in love of freedom and memory of sacrifice, pain and suffering (see Kriger, 1995: 144-45). Of profound significance is the tomb of the unknown soldier, representing those freedom fighters who perished in the bush, gunned down or bombed beyond recognition, whose remains could never be found for decent burial. For many families, two or more teenagers were lost in this way, and so for the nation's relatives of those who perished, the tomb bears and honours their memories. Also on this central site stands the national flag, which includes the colour red to symbolise the blood shed in the war, as well as a statue of two guerrillas - a woman and a man - representing the gender equality among those who fought for freedom. In addition, there is a forty-metre tower, bearing the eternal flame lit at the independence celebrations of 1980, which burns continuously as a symbol of the spirit of freedom that ensures that Zimbabwe's independence remains eternally intact. Engraved around the walls of the tower are scenes of the armed struggle and beside the tower is a museum of war materials.

Not least is the religious significance of the heroes' acre as enacted in the initial reburial rites, overseen by the State President in 1980, of the remains of several late heroes (*Sunday News*, 10 August 1980, Bulawayo). The churches, too, are invited to the national shrine to say prayers for the stability of the nation and for those who lost their lives. The spirit of God and that of departed religious leaders, such as Chief Rekayi Tangwena (*Sunday Mail*, 11 August 1991,

Harare), are believed to reinforce the sacred nature of this space. The National Heroes' Acre in Zimbabwe, then, is a sacred centre that inspires a sense of unity by transcending nationalism, over and above regional, ethnic and linguistic confinements (Kriger, 1995: 145). It serves to symbolise a philosophy of nation-building and the ideals of racial harmony and national reconciliation.

Thaba-Bosiu National Monument

Thaba-Bosiu, "the mountain fortress of Moshoeshoe" is one of the most important – if not the most important – of national monuments in Lesotho. There is a long history associated with Thaba-Bosiu as a national sacred space and symbol of the birth of a nation in Lesotho. In 1824, Moshoeshoe, with whom the monument is inextricably linked, and his followers made their way from Butha-Buthe to Thaba-Bosiu, and from that naturally fortified mountain, Moshoeshoe built his nation. What made this mountain such a special shelter of security was the fact that it was a large and well-watered plateau. Tylden dramatically describes the mountain as follows:

the summit is ringed round with sheer cliffs from twenty to forty feet high, pierced by six passes; of these only two cannot be covered by flanking fire from the defence. They are all steep and narrow and ideal for launching the showers of rocks which constituted the main weapon of the defenders. (Tylden, 1945: 4)

However, the name "Thaba-Bosiu" means "mountain of the night" (Rosenberg, 1999: 52) and legend has it that the sides of this mountain would rise up at night to protect Moshoeshoe and his followers. Clearly, it was believed that some supernatural power was intervening, as attack after attack on the mountain fortress failed (Tylden, 1945: 6). Furthermore, it was believed that if anyone took away some sand that formed part of the soil of the mountain, that sand would simply vanish. As Vincent Malebo, the current leader of the Marematlou Freedom Party in Lesotho, puts it: "When I was young I was told stories about the mountain growing at night, and how if you took the sand of the mountain it would return to the mountain" (cited in Rosenberg, 1999: 56). The maintenance of such myths and symbols signifies the high esteem in which the Basotho people hold Thaba-Bosiu, giving it credence as a sacred site in the history of Lesotho.

The history of Thaba-Bosiu and Moshoeshoe is rooted in the unique era of southern African history, in the 18th to 19th centuries, known as *Lifaqane*, or the "time of troubles" (Gill, 1993: 65), during which different peoples in the region began to organise themselves into nations and chiefdoms. For example, the

Zulu people were led by Shaka, and the Basotho by Moshoeshe. The turbulence of these structural changes caused by chiefdoms competing over prime pastureland and other resources was further exacerbated by natural disasters such as drought (Gill, 1993: 65-66). The fact that Thaba-Bosiu was never captured by invaders during Moshoeshe's lifetime, and that in addition to protecting his own people Moshoeshe also offered neighbouring peoples the security of the fortress in the event of further invasions, reinforces the idea that the mountain symbolises the birth of the Basotho nation (Thompson, 1975: viii, 53). Thaba-Bosiu therefore became not only Moshoeshe's home and political capital but also the centre of efforts to forge African unity against white invaders (Rosenberg, 1999: 52).

This history also cannot be separated from Moshoeshe himself, revered as the founder king of the Basotho nation, who gives Thaba-Bosiu its special significance as a "sacred mountain, the matrix of the Basotho nation, and the source of political inspiration, an emblem of Basotho nationhood, the only hope of spiritual and political resuscitation" (Rosenberg, 1999: 55). One of the most outstanding features of Moshoeshe's governance was his skilled diplomacy, particularly in his dealings with Shaka and the Zulu peoples and his clemency shown towards those who attacked him. When he died in 1870 his body was buried on top of Thaba-Bosiu and since then, all important kings and chiefs in Lesotho have been buried around Moshoeshe's grave. Now, there is an annual national holiday in Lesotho - Moshoeshe's Day - dedicated to commemorating the works of this great leader.

After Moshoeshe's death, little attention was paid to the mountain fortress for forty years, and it was only in 1913, when the Basotho began to resist the idea of incorporation into South Africa following the Native Land Act, that Thaba-Bosiu resumed its place of prominence. After the First World War, the site became increasingly important and a centrepiece in the Basotho struggle to define national consciousness and identity. Since the 1930s, the centrality of the mountain fortress in the emergence of Lesotho identity has been evident. As in the case of many national monuments, different interpretations of the significance of Thaba-Bosiu have been given. To sum up, Rosenberg identifies at least four reasons why the place is of central importance to the nation of Lesotho (1999: 55-57):

First, for many Basotho, Thaba-Bosiu is a source of political inspiration, a symbol of protection from enemies, especially during the *Lifaqane*. Being Moshoeshe's stronghold, it was, by association, the fortress for all the Basotho. This understanding of Thaba-Bosiu has continued to date and the Basotho still look to it as a symbol of resistance, especially to South Africa, and of Lesotho's continuing independence from its neighbour.

Second, Thaba-Bosiu is regarded as the birthplace of the Basotho nation and an emblem of Basotho nationhood. At Thaba-Bosiu "the Basotho nation

was born. If not for Thaba-Bosiu, there would be no nation". It is this view and the connection of all Basotho to this sacred site that binds them together as Basotho. Third, Thaba-Bosiu is also important to the Basotho because it is the final resting-place of Moshoeshoe and other Basotho kings buried there. They therefore regard Thaba-Bosiu as a national shrine to the birth of the nation and as the final resting-place of its founders. Thus, in times of crisis, the Basotho turn to Thaba-Bosiu for guidance, not only on a national level, but also on a personal level.

Fourth, Thaba-Bosiu is further regarded as the hope of spiritual resuscitation in Lesotho. As a shrine where the ancestors are buried, the mountain is believed to possess spiritual powers. Citing Leeu Mokoaleli (Basotho informant) and the editorial of the newspaper, *Leselinyana*, Rosenberg writes, "when you need peace ... when you are in trouble, remember the mountain of Moshoeshoe". All of these views illustrate the high esteem in which the people of Lesotho generally hold Thaba-Bosiu. The different words and expressions used to describe Thaba-Bosiu – "the birthplace of the nation", "the cradle of the nation", "the shrine", "Moshoeshoe's stronghold", "the resting-place of Moshoeshoe", "Moshoeshoe's mountain fortress" - are all indicative of the reverence given to this sacred place by the entire Basotho nation. Thaba-Bosiu, it could be said, is the most venerated and inspirational historical site in Lesotho (Rosenberg, 1999: 51).

City Square

The third site in southern Africa that is worth considering in this respect of national sacred space is the City Square in Kitwe, Zambia. Originally known as Kaunda Square and initially as a memorial site for the victims of the first and second World Wars¹, the square was constructed immediately after the promulgation of Zambia's independence early in 1964. The first celebrations at the site took place at the same time as the celebrations of the United Nation's Day and Zambia's independence day on 24th October of the same year. The two world wars are symbolised by two forty-metre arrow-shaped steel poles mounted on concrete walls in the middle of the square.

On the Copperbelt, the city of Kitwe was chosen to house this symbolic site due to its geographic location in Zambia's mining province. The city is regarded as the "hub" of the Copperbelt. It is the only town in the province that borders on and connects with all other towns, except one, in the province. Thus, in its design, the square captures this picture or structure, with six routes leading from different directions to the centre or hub of the square as a symbol of routes to and from other towns in the province, and also as a symbol of unity.

In addition to the world-wars statue, the square also houses a freedom statue, a public library and a clinic. The freedom statue was built on the site towards

the end of 1980 to commemorate the silver jubilee of Zambia's independence. This statue has dramatically transformed or added to the history and meaning of the square, particularly for the present generation - from a symbol of pain and loss, or simply a mere memorial site of the wars, to a place symbolising the struggle for the country's liberty and peace. The statue features a freedom fighter, a stone in his hand and a broken chain around his arms - a powerful symbol of liberation struggle and human freedom in Zambia. Unlike other statues in the city, this one fulfils the requirements of national politics and culture. For many Zambians, therefore, it is a symbol of inspiration. As a symbol of liberation struggle, it appeals to the sense of national identity and "otherness", defining Zambia and Zambians to "outsiders".

In recent years, however, more than a mere symbolic memorial site, the square has become a national centre of activity. Because of its strategic location within the city, the square is used for various functions, ranging from political rallies, celebrations, solidarity marches and demonstrations, to religious activities.

Of course, like any other national or sacred site, there are also several other interpretations of the square's importance. In particular, many Zambians view the freedom statue at the City Square as a symbol of power, an image that is clearly depicted in the design of the statue. The freedom statue is especially important to Zambians because it is a continual reminder of the liberation struggle.² Connected with this popular view of the statue as a symbol of the power of the freedom struggle, is the square's inspirational power that forges a sense of unity among Zambians. Again, this is clearly demonstrated, one, in the names inscribed around the decorated wall on which the freedom statue is mounted and, two, as described above, in the design of the square itself. The names are those of people from all language-groupings across the country who rose with a common purpose - to fight for freedom.

However, it is the memories and stories about the freedom statue, passed on from one generation to the next, which has, most particularly, made the site an effective symbol of Zambia's unity. As years pass and the history of the struggle begins to become remote, the statue serves as one of the visible national symbols of identity and liberation struggle. As Chishala Kamfwa, a museum attendant-in-charge at the Ministry of Education narrates: "as part of our history programme, teachers are required to take learners to the freedom statue or those far off, to other statues of similar significance in their respective towns, in the week marking our independence day so as to teach them about our freedom struggle and the birth of our new nation" (*Times of Zambia*, May 18, 1999). For young boys and girls, such school visits are important for learning the history of their country.

Interpreting National Heroes' Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and City Square as Sacred Spaces

Having examined the three sites or national monuments in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Zambia, the question remains as to how these places "pay off" as sacred spaces in their respective national contexts. In this regard, it is important to note that the process of creating sacred space involves a number of components. First, Chidester argues that sacred space is contested space, and that its production involves four components that denote such contestation or, in other words, a politics of sacred space, viz., politics of position, politics of property, politics of exclusion and politics of exile.³ Second, according to Chidester and Linenthal (1995: 9), sacred space is ritual space, its sacrality maintained by repeatable, formalised ritual performance. And third, sacred space is also essentially a place where human meaning is produced (ibid.: 12). The analysis of the components involved in creating sacred space, is, as we have indicated in the introduction, a departure from the traditional, religious understanding of sacred space. These components open up other, new ways of understanding how "specific sites can also be produced as sacred spaces". Here, the three major ways in which National Heroes' Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and City Square can be said to have been produced and maintained as national sacred spaces will be outlined.

Sacred space as contested space

Sacred space, as Chidester argues, is contested space; it is "a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols" (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995, 15). Take, for instance, the same sixty-acre-square platform in Jerusalem that the Jews refer to as *har ha-bahit*, or Temple Mount, and is known by Muslims and Palestinians as *al-haram al-sharif*, or the Noble Sanctuary. For Jews, this is the site that King David purchased for the Israelite nation's first temple, built by his son Solomon, a temple destroyed and rebuilt after their return from the Babylonian exile. Jews considered this site, at the centre of which stood the Holy of Holies, as the centre of the world. It functioned as a sacrificial site, the locus of contact between human and divine worlds, and the destination of the annual Jewish pilgrimages of Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot. For Muslims, on the other hand, the *haram al-sharif* is the site identified with the miraculous night journey of the Prophet Muhammad, described in the Quran's seventeenth Sura. It is from here that the Prophet ascended into the heavens, where the daily order of prayer was revealed to him. The Prophet ascended to heaven from the *sakra*, the same rock the Jews consider the "stone of foundation" (See Friedland and Hecht, 1998: 105).

This example has been extensively cited to show how sacred spaces can be, and have been, contested over time. The question, however, is: Why are sacred spaces or centres contested? Sacred spaces are contested for, among others things, access to power. Space is a potential source or sign of power and is fundamental

in any exercise of power, functioning as the theatre in which the metaphysical basis of power is consecrated, affirmed, and displayed. Being a signifier of power, those who wish to be powerful seek both to control a particular space and to ground their right to control it through their domination over it. Contestations and exercise of power are clearly demonstrated in the three national sites we have addressed. These are asserted or advanced by employing strategies of appropriation of the places and claims to legitimate ownership.

While National Heroes' Acre represents a holistic, unifying and sacred symbol for the people of Zimbabwe, it is, nevertheless, a highly contested site. Since 1980, there has been prolonged controversy over whose remains should "rest" at the national cemetery. The controversy has arisen due to failure to define who is and who is not a "hero" among the "war" veterans for, as shown since independence, not every freedom fighter's remains can be buried at the acre. Are heroes only those who were at the battle front? Are those courageous civilians who provided them with food and clothing also heroes? Or are heroes only those who orchestrated the war, those politicians in Maputo who provided the weapons for the freedom fighters and now hold top positions in government? (Kriger, 1995: 140). Indeed, "the criteria for determining heroism are still very unclear. Many ex-combatants feel forgotten, excluded and alienated from the elite" (*Sunday Mail*, 11 August, 1991, Harare). The ruling-party elite currently constitutes the majority of those who lie in expensive coffins at the national sacred centre. Moreover, since families of heroes buried at the acre receive financial compensation from government, families of others who fought but are deemed "lesser" heroes and denied access to this sacred space, receive less compensation and are buried in provincial cemeteries (Kriger, 1995: 152). They consequently feel unfairly treated and further alienated from the unifying sacred centre of Zimbabwe.

Besides the above, issues that have been raised by white Zimbabweans have made the heroes' acre a contested space. As a symbol of political legitimacy and national identity, the heroes' acre was meant, among other things, to replace all colonial symbols and statues. This was not easily accepted, particularly by those white Zimbabweans who felt their own "sacred" symbols were being destroyed. One white man, however, has been declared a national hero in Zimbabwe. The ashes of Comrade Guy Clutton Brock were brought from Britain by his family, at the invitation of the Zimbabwe government, to be buried at the heroes' acre, an honour that was conferred because of his unwavering support for Zimbabwe's liberation war (*Sunday Mail*, 15 August, 1993, Harare). However, is this sufficient symbolic action to fulfil the intent for the national monument to create a unity that transcends the divide between black and white Zimbabweans? The questions or concerns addressed above are clear indications of how National Heroes' Acre has become a contested space and also how its "ownership" and control has come to be claimed by the powerful elite.

Thaba-Bosiu National Monument can be seen as an equally contested national space. Paradoxically, in this case, it is the use of sacred symbols and claims by rightful custodians that have made Thaba-Bosiu National Monument such a highly contested national space in Lesotho. Various groupings have, in diverse ways, made competing claims to rights of ownership and control of the monument. For instance, as far back as the 1930s, the most evident contests for legitimate rights to the monument were between *Lekhotla la Bafo*⁴, led by Josiel Lefela, and Paramount Chief Griffith Lerotholi, as well as the colonial authorities. On March 12th, 1930, when Lefela's *Lekhotla la Bafo* decided to hold a meeting at Thaba-Bosiu, Lerotholi, the great-grandson of Moshoeshoe, vehemently opposed it. Each group claimed to be the true representative of Basotho tradition, competing for the right to use Thaba-Bosiu, for to be associated with the mountain in this way was to lay claim to Moshoeshoe's legacy (Rosenberg, 1999: 54). Equally important was the fact that the colonial authorities could not let *Lekhotla la Bafo* have exclusive rights to the symbol. Such contested claims to legitimacy and use of Thaba-Bosiu continued through the 1960s, particularly between party-political leaders and the government.

If the production of sacred space involves conflictual power relations, as Chidester points out, domination and violence may also be involved. Fighting over ownership and control of sacred symbols may often be violent (see Chidester, 1991). This is graphically apparent in the violence of a tragic incident in 1966, the same year that Lesotho gained its independence from British colonial rule, when the King attempted to convene a national meeting at Thaba-Bosiu (Khaketla, 1972: 144). As constitutional monarch, he failed to make proper consultations with his government, who were opposed to this meeting and advised him to cancel it. When people came by the thousands and gathered on the mountainside to see their monarch, not having heard of the cancellation, they were met by police who ordered them to disperse. Within minutes of the people peacefully disobeying this order, shots were fired and ten people lay dead and others seriously wounded. Violence and bloodshed provided an only too real example of competing claims to control of access to the sacred space of Thaba-Bosiu.

While there have been contests over legitimate rights to Thaba-Bosiu, the observation of Moshoeshoe Day itself has also been a contested ritual symbol. It is important here to recall that Thaba-Bosiu's symbolic significance as a national landmark rests on its connection with Moshoeshoe, the founder of Lesotho. In this respect, while the national holiday of Moshoeshoe's Day has become an important vehicle for honouring and remembering Moshoeshoe himself, through him, the nation as well as Thaba-Bosiu are also celebrated. However, as in the case of Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshoe's Day, too, has been subject to conflict, as various political groups have struggled over the use and meaning of this holiday (Rosenberg, 1999: 64). As far back as the 1950s, both the British colonial

authorities and indigenous groups sought to use this day to secure their own legitimacy and shape the identity of the nation.⁵ In recent years, however, the contestation of Moshoeshoe's Day has taken a new direction. Now, the debate concerns whether the holiday should be celebrated on March 12th, the day Moshoeshoe sought the protection of the British for the Basotho nation from the South African encroachment into the region, or March 11th, the day he died. While the elderly people are determined to keep March 12th, it is the politicians, those in power, who are keen to honour the 11th of March. All these struggles - over Thaba-Bosiu itself and over Moshoeshoe's Day - only serve to indicate just how contested Thaba-Bosiu has been in its production as a national sacred space in Lesotho.

Clearly, the City Square in Zambia is equally contested as a national sacred site. As in other conflicts over sacred spaces, here too, it is political groupings that have been competing over control of the square. Immediately after Zambia's independence in 1964, the square was named after Kaunda, the country's first president. Being a one-party state then, the ruling party claimed ownership of the site during the whole period it was in power. As such, for nearly twenty-seven years, no anti-government activities were allowed within the precinct of the square, for to do so was, so to speak, to defile the place. In 1991, however, when the new government (MMD) came to power, one of its first actions was to assert its "power" by appropriating the square. Despite popular protests⁶, the site's name, which had earlier been changed once more to Kaunda Square, again became "City Square". Consequently, those who had formerly felt they were excluded from ownership of this sacred symbol now found it was their time to demonstrate their power through possession and control of the sacred site. Being a historic site with profound historical and symbolic meaning for Zambians, those who felt the new government was tampering with or disrupting the history of the nation by renaming this site, as well as many other places, decided to take the matter to court. Inevitably, the court ruled in favour of the government (*Times of Zambia*, 10 October, 1992). As a national or public symbol or place, "the square needed a name that accommodated everybody", a name that would engender a sense of belonging for everyone, or so the court argued (*ibid.*). Certainly, in Zambia, recognition of the City Square as sacred space and unifying symbol proves to be intensely contested. Nevertheless, its significance as a symbol of power, and the attendant contested power relations involved, serve in themselves to produce the City Square as sacred space.

Sacred space as ritual space

Again, as Chidester and Linenthal explain, sacred space can be identified "as ritual space, a location for formalised, repeatable symbolic performances". In other words, ritual is another defining characteristic of sacred space. Sacred space can be understood as a ritual site that is "set apart from or carved out of

an 'ordinary' environment to provide an arena for the performance of controlled, 'extraordinary' patterns of action" (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 9). The cardinal point being made here is that sacred space cannot maintain itself simply by its existence out there in the world. Instead, it derives its sanctity from conscious human effort enacted through the process of ritual. Jackson and Henrie reinforce this point by stating that "sacred space does not exist naturally, but it is assigned sanctity as man [sic] defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals" (see Hume, 1998: 310). It therefore follows that if a place is to acquire and maintain its sacredness, some kind of ritual has to be enacted there, and without such ritual, the place will inevitably lose its effectiveness and symbolic power as sacred space.

National Heroes' Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and City Square, in this sense, can be said to be sacred spaces. They are sacred spaces not only because they are contested sites but also because they are locations where rituals are enacted. Each site has been initiated as sacred through various ritual actions: For instance, the burial rites for freedom fighters' remains at National Heroes' Acre; the burial of Moshoeshoe on Thaba-Bosiu; the silver jubilee celebration of Zambian independence at City Square. Continuing and maintaining the sacred nature of these sites in each region, nationals, tourists, veterans, families, students, and so on, ritualise these spaces by their ceremonial gatherings and displays and by their pilgrimage to these sacred precincts. In the case of heroes' acre and the square, the sites are further ritualised when people convene there to celebrate special, set-aside national days like Africa Freedom Day and Independence Day, among others. On such days, the sites are set apart from the "ordinary", everyday environment to provide an arena for the performance of controlled, "extraordinary" patterns of action. As for ritualising Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshoe's Day stands out as the most symbolically significant time in Lesotho. The day has become a national ritual. Though many Basotho do not necessarily go to Thaba-Bosiu, due to distance, their participation in observing the day, from wherever they are located, is deemed vitally important in linking them to the sacred space of Thaba-Bosiu.

However, it is important to recall that the ritualisation of sacred space does not rule out the contested nature of the maintenance of the sacred. As we have noted, conflict and competing claims have frequently arisen over symbols and rituals in each area: Who can be buried where? Which exact day should be set aside and honoured? Who is allowed in, and who isn't? Who might defile the sacred space? Issues of power and control, purity and impurity, honour and dishonour, and legitimate "ownership" of symbols still remain present in the ritualisation of sacred space.

Sacred space as meaningful space

Finally, sacred space is also, essentially, a place where meaning is produced. At

or in such places crucial questions “about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world” are interpreted. In this respect, as Chidester and Linenthal indicate, “the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production” (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 12). In other words, space defines human identity. Sacred space can identify who humans are. For example, the church, like other religious spaces, gives identity and meaning to its adherents. It defines who its adherents are – in this case, as Christians, as Catholics or Protestants, Baptists or Anglicans, and so on. The church, as sacred space, distinguishes Christians from “others”. In short, because of its immense cultural and religious significance, sacred space becomes a source of one’s identity or being. The power to destroy or defile it thus carries with it the power to distort or even destroy identity.

What meaning does National Heroes’ Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and City Square give to Zimbabweans, to the Basotho and to Zambians respectively? In essence, they are sites which, generally, inform or define what their nationals are today. They deal with the questions of sovereignty and identity. As Verrier writes of National Heroes’ Acre, the space defines Zimbabwe’s politics of protest by Africans (black people) from colonial domination. It defines a restoration of decency to black people (cf. Verrier, 1986: 50). Equally, Thaba-Bosiu serves the same purpose, as a symbol that defines the Basotho and shapes their national identity.

What about the square? Significantly, it answers such questions as: Who are Zambians? Where do they belong in the wider scheme of things? As a commemoration of the birth of the nation (now somewhat entangled in politics), it produces national identity – “Zambian-ness” – and reaffirms people’s freedom and their dignity as both humans and Zambians. But also, and most important, the appropriation of the square, and subsequent changes of names for the square itself, clearly illustrate the significance people attach to names – either of people or places. Names are often symbols laden with meaning and rich history, a significance which should never be underestimated. As Ezra Chitando, quoting Adrian Hastings, argues: “it is mistaken to regard the issue of names as being trivial. One’s name (even a place’s name?), after all, is the most precise assertion of one’s identity and the question of identity is what it is all finally about: who is one?” (1998:32). The profound significance of names, therefore, explains why naming cannot be monopolised by any one person or group.

Critiques and Conclusions

The approach taken in this paper to defining sacred space, from the starting-point of National Heroes’ Acre, Thaba-Bosiu National Monument and City Square, might be unfamiliar for some, especially those who have allegiance to

definitions that dichotomise the sacred from the profane, those who are preoccupied with matters of religious orthodoxy and not familiar with definitions that do not require to be assertive or dogmatic. From such an orthodox perspective, it could be argued that as much as these sites seem to encompass a representative range of possibilities for what might count or qualify them as sacred spaces, and as much as they evoke familiar metaphors, they are not, phenomenologically, analogous to sacred space. They cannot fully account for the defined requirements of sacred space. Most activities occurring at these spaces and monuments are secular; they are largely "political" rather than "religious" in nature. They provide "socio-political" as opposed to cosmological frameworks, and the nature of activities within those frameworks tends towards spectacle and thus relegates the transcendent to secondary importance. Attention to symbolic appropriation of the spaces themselves, it may be argued, becomes a "realm of competing discourses", not all of them positive. As a result, the whole process becomes amenable to falsification.

Essentially, these observations imply that while features of the heroes' acre, Thaba-Bosiu and the square and features of sacred space may resonate with one another – and we can draw on that resonance – it is also imperative that we try to separate sacred space from these particular places. The sacred cannot be reduced to any such secular or political orders. The argument that "virtually anything can be sacred space" thus raises a question: How can the sacred give an adequate foundation to its own existence and validity? From a logical point of view, this is a problem not easily solved. An order, even sacred space itself, cannot justify its own existence without reference to another order. Only when there is reference to the "other", can it justify its own existence. In other words, the relationship between sacred and profane, in this respect, must be seen like the dictum: "I" and "Thou"; "Us" and "Them". I am because something else exists, from which "I" can be identified or distinguished.

Once again, Durkheim's understanding of religion is of relevance here. For him religion depends upon beliefs and practices that identify and maintain a distinction between the sacred and its opposite, the profane (secular). The "distinction" is what makes a place sacred. The "sacred" cannot be "profane", neither can the "profane" be the "sacred". From this perspective, therefore, the examination of these internal structures is important for understanding the sacred, even more so for understanding its relationship to sites such as the City Square. Only with this recognition and appreciation can the above critique of our different approach to the production of sacred space, as argued in this paper, make sense.

While we hardly take issue with this critique – which represents a cogent, useful, and insightful observation – we do, however, maintain that the City Square, for example, though certainly a politically-contested space, is a unique phenomenon with a serious and far-reaching religious and cosmological basis.

We would be wary of a view that separates the socio-political from the cosmological so cleanly, for even religious rituals surely have socio-political characteristics. Certainly, most rituals, especially those with political inclination, do not necessarily comply with orthodox religious forms, but rather appropriate them, and in part invent new meanings for them. Furthermore, if nothing is held sacred any more – because the term “sacred” is considered synonymous with superstition, politics or irrationality – what is there to prevent one from treating his or her entire belief system as some great laboratory of life? What is there to prevent one from not appreciating what makes other people’s lives meaningful?

Clearly, then, the appropriation and analysis of National Heroes’ Acre, Thaba-Bosiu and City Square within the framework of the study of sacred space is but one route that can provide a real understanding of sacred space. Although these may appear “religiously” insignificant and politically-contested sites, if we accept the thesis, derived from Chidester and Linenthal’s theory, that the sacred is not “necessarily the opposite of profane” nor “absolutely separate from the profane”, then these sites, and their liberation memorials, represent sacred space, in the same way as do homes, temples, pilgrimage sites and other objects of human perception and experience. What matters in the context of this model is that the myths, rituals and symbols relate to and recreate the significant hierophanies within their particular traditions and social contexts.

Notes

- ¹ One of the plaques at the site has the following words: “To the Memory of all those gallant men who died during the First and Second World Wars. To God be all the Glory and Honour.”
- ² In an interview with Mr. Simon Chishimba, Councillor and former mayor of Kitwe – 4 August, 2000.
- ³ Sacred space can be identified with a politics of position: The establishment of position requires political conquest or colonisation of space. That is, a sacred space is not merely found, but is conquered or colonised, dominated or controlled. Every establishment of a sacred place is a conquest of space, which inevitably make the positioning of a sacred space a political act. In this respect, then, any place – for instance, a home, a city, or a natural site - could stand as a model of sacred space, as contested space, “not because power resides there but because power is asserted through conquest and localized through domination” (Chidester, 1995). Second, sacred space can be linked with a politics of property: Rather than merely a meaningful place, sacred space is a powerful place in that it encompasses the “realisation of possibilities” by virtue of it being appropriated, possessed and owned (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 8). Third, sacred space can also be identified with a politics of exclusion, in which those who would “defile” it are excluded: “The sacred is what has been placed within boundaries” (Chidester 1995: 217). In this under-

standing, a sacred space, such as a home, is a space defined precisely by what it excludes. Space becomes place, isolated from the rest of the world, by means of exclusion. Four, sacred space can also be located in the context of a politics of exile. The politics of exile refers to dislocation, alienation and/or remoteness from the sacred, generating a nostalgia or longing for a place that gives it sacred meaning. Deprived of any stable anchorage in sacred locations, modern people are "strangers to the sacred", they are "political exiles from sacred space."

⁴ *Lekhotla la Bafo* (literally translated as "the league for the commoners") was founded by Josiel Lefela in response to the abuse of power by the chiefs over their subjects. The league called upon the chiefs to return to the style of chieftainship epitomised by Moshoeshoe during his reign (cf. Rosenberg, 1999: 54)

⁵ "The use of this holiday in the political struggles of the late 1950s is illustrated by the events of March 12, 1957. In this case, the BCP held its celebrations at Thaba-Bosiu and the colonial authorities and the Paramount Chief held theirs at Thotaea-moli. Each group sought a place which was closely associated with Moshoeshoe as they competed to lay claim to his legacy" (Rosenberg, 1999: 64).

⁶ When Chiluba's MMD came into government they took over several institutions, among them Kenneth Kaunda's Temple and the UNIP Headquarters. Equally, Kaunda's name was erased from these institutions. In a random survey conducted by the *Post* newspaper in conjunction with Inter African Network for Human Rights and Development (Afronet) in 1992, many people were not supportive of the government's action. See also *The Post*, September 14, 2000.

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