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**Spirit of the Land:
Politics, Memory, and the Sacred
in South African Land Claims**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of sacred space in people's attachment to land, analysing the ways in which people create sacred space through labour, ritual, myth, and memory. Three case studies explore the human interpretation of the sacred through the history and politics of land acquisition and dispossession. While providing historical background and legal analysis of forced removals, evictions, and relocations, the thesis calls attention to the role of religion in South African land claims. Although the people in these case studies believe that returning to their original land will materially improve their lives, their main concern is to reconnect with their alienated sacred space. This study explores the changing nature of the sacred and its formulative role in shaping and informing people's identities and memories.

Chapter one examines contrasting models of entitlement to land and introduces the category of sacred space into the analysis of land in South Africa. Chapter two develops a case study of the Ndunge family of the Eastern Cape and explores the role of the ancestors in people's connection to a fixed or locative sacred space. The family shows how suffering and contestation act as catalysts in the creation of the sacred.

Chapter three addresses the claim of the Ntuli family to the land on which they spent three generations as farm workers. They prioritise their need to re-contact their ancestors buried on the land. The Ntulis illustrate how their labour became the ritual which created the sacred. Chapter four examines the complex case of the Ebenhaeser

community of the Western Cape. The history of this community depicts the ambiguous role of Christian missionaries in the shaping of colonial relations and land allocation.

This case study demonstrates the power of memory, showing that memory of the land can ultimately become more important than the land itself.

The conclusion in chapter five looks at the prospects and possibilities of reclaiming the sacred and situates land claims in the larger South African framework of restorative justice and reconciliation. As an indicator of people's origins and structures of belonging, sacred land is generally overlooked in the present discourse on land reform. The role of the graves of the ancestors and the locative power of memory need to be understood if a land restitution program is to be effective. People's religious commitments to land and the power of their claims on the sacred as explored in this thesis call for land to be recognised not only as that which can bring material prosperity and self-sufficiency, but also as that which continues to shape identity, existence, and spiritual well-being. A comprehensive land reform program must recognise sacred space as a critical component of individual, familial, and communal attachment to land.

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Preface

There are numerous accounts of the history of land acquisition and dispossession in South Africa. In this thesis I use in-depth historical analysis to locate people's origins and identities within specific places. Ultimately, however, this thesis is about people's lives, experiences, and attachment to the land they have lost. I have therefore tried to allow people's testimonies of the way land has shaped their lives speak for themselves. In these narratives we find an interpretation of land that has often been overlooked within historical and political discourse. This interpretation of land is a spiritual one, and it has the power to fundamentally shift our understandings of dispossession, reclamation, and development. I believe that only through such an examination of religious aspects of and attachments to land can we create a cohesive, holistic, and sustainable land reform program for South Africa. The parallel material and spiritual aspects of space must be considered together in order for land's power and importance to be fully understood. Such a conception allows us to use history and politics as useful tools to understand the significance of land from the perspective of those who inhabit it, belong to it, and locate their identity within it.

I first conceived of this research project as an undergraduate student at Wesleyan University in the United States. Although I had already spent a year in South Africa, I could not imagine, from the gray winter of an economically depressed southern New England city, the experiences and people this research would bring me into contact with. I wanted to investigate people's attachment to land, to their homes, but I was unprepared for the strength of these connections, and for the ways in which I myself would come to think about land, space, and power. In my studies of religion, colonialism, and modern politics, I had come to understand the material and symbolic control inherent in the ownership of land, but I did not yet see history in land, did not understand space as an object of desire, or attachment to

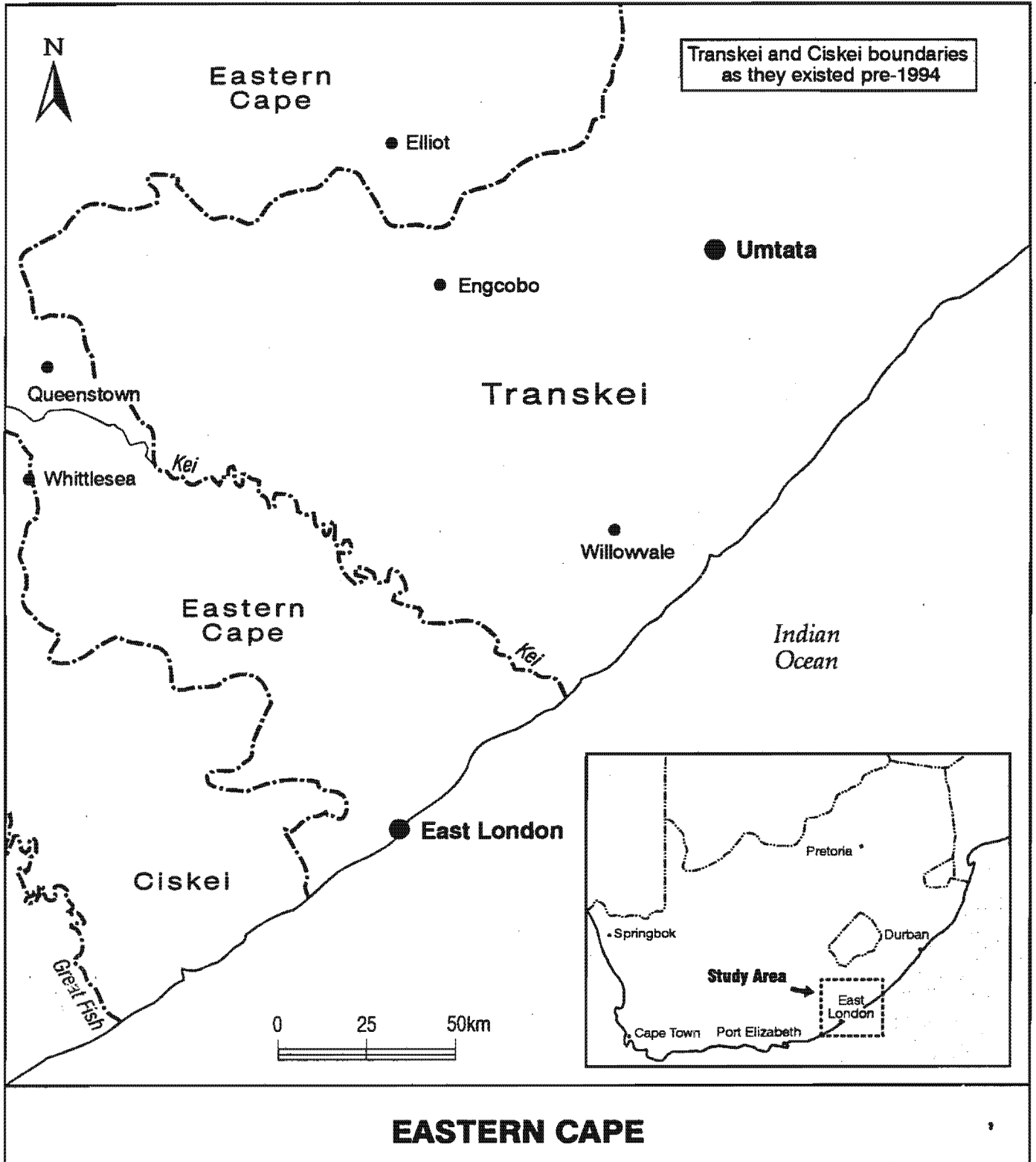
place as an indicator and formulator of identity. Nor did I comprehend the power of memory in shaping the present. I was taught these things through the people who speak in these pages. I learned these things on my journeys to the places they lived, and through their descriptions and memories of the land they had lost. It is as a result of these interactions and experiences that I no longer see land as open space; that I no longer see open space as void of history and meaning. It is my hope that the stories of loss, hope, and reclamation in this thesis convey these conceptions and understandings of land and do justice to those who experience them.

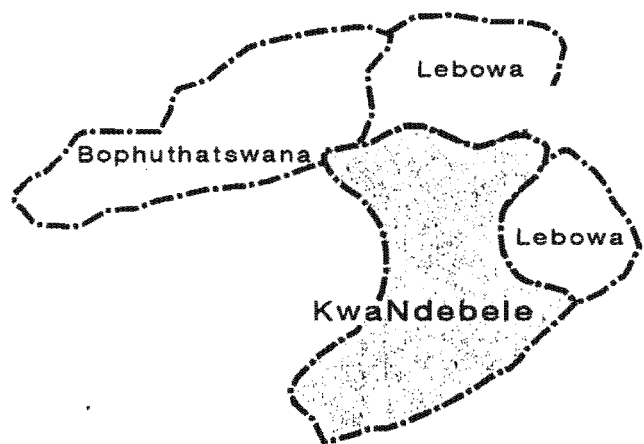
This research would not have been possible without the assistance and support of key individuals who went out of their way to help me in locating case studies, allowed me to accompany them on research trips, provided translation, and answered my questions. These people include Linda Faleni and Moshe Swartz of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in East London, Megan Anderson of the Surplus People Project in Cape Town, and Louise du Plessis of the Legal Resource Centre in Pretoria. The Ntuli and Ndunge families opened their homes to me and told me their stories, and the people of Ebenhaeser spent many hours talking to me in the intense heat. I am especially grateful to Peter Ntuli, Miriam Ndunge, and David Cloete, who went out of their way to make me welcome and actively participated in my research. In the Eastern Cape, Mrs. Molo of the Department of Education made introductions for me, and Denmark Dumalisile of the Department of Arts and Culture spent three days taking me around the Willowvale District. Major Gushelo helped me to find Mhlwazi. Melissa Visser and Nqaba Bucwa accompanied me and provided translation on long trips to remote areas under adverse climatic and automotive conditions. Additional translation was supplied by Torben Bülbring, Martine Visser, and Caroline Foot, although occasionally I was told that it was all in Dutch and was surely irrelevant. The librarians and staff at the University of Cape Town's Government Publications Department and the African Studies Library were extremely helpful and only

occasionally hid when they saw me coming, and I am especially grateful for the assistance and humour of Margie Struthers and Allegra Louw. Thanks to Technodraft for making the maps.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of Gene Klaaren of Wesleyan University, who first encouraged me to come to South Africa in 1992. Since then he has never faltered in his provision of advice, close and dedicated readings of my work, innumerable letters of recommendation, and friendship. My supervisor at the University of Cape Town, David Chidester, first sparked my interest in this topic and has kept me on track and offered insight and encouragement. Nigel Penn and Megan Anderson read and commented on the Ebenhaeser chapter. Chris Kuhn helped with the editing, and Tessa Lewin encouraged me to talk about my work. My trips to the Eastern Cape were made a pleasure by the cooking and company of Rodney Smith and the generosity and hospitality of Jörn and Sandy Bülbring.

I owe infinite appreciate to those people who have helped make Cape Town my home. Thank you to Nqaba for his support, patience, and realistic interventions, particularly in the final days. Steffen has been a source of unfaltering optimism and encouragement, and Caroline has kept me grounded in reality with her pessimism and questions. Thank you to Martine and Vanessa for reminding me why I am here, and to Tessa for keeping me afloat at the worst of times. Thank you to Torben, for these years, and with whom I came so far. Lastly, I owe the most to Nancy, because nothing in my life thus far would have been possible without her unconditional love and support. She continues to inspire me, and this thesis was written both for and through her, although she is the one person I never took the chance to thank.





Eastern Transvaal

● Pretoria

● Groblersdal

● Middelburg

● Ohrigstad

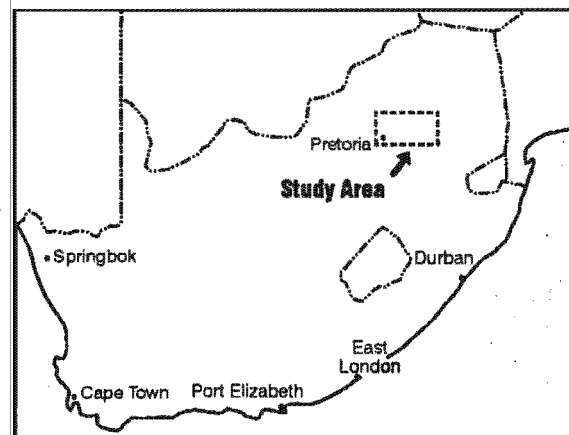
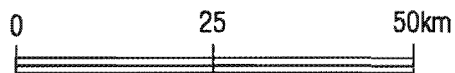
● Lydenburg

● Mapochsgronde

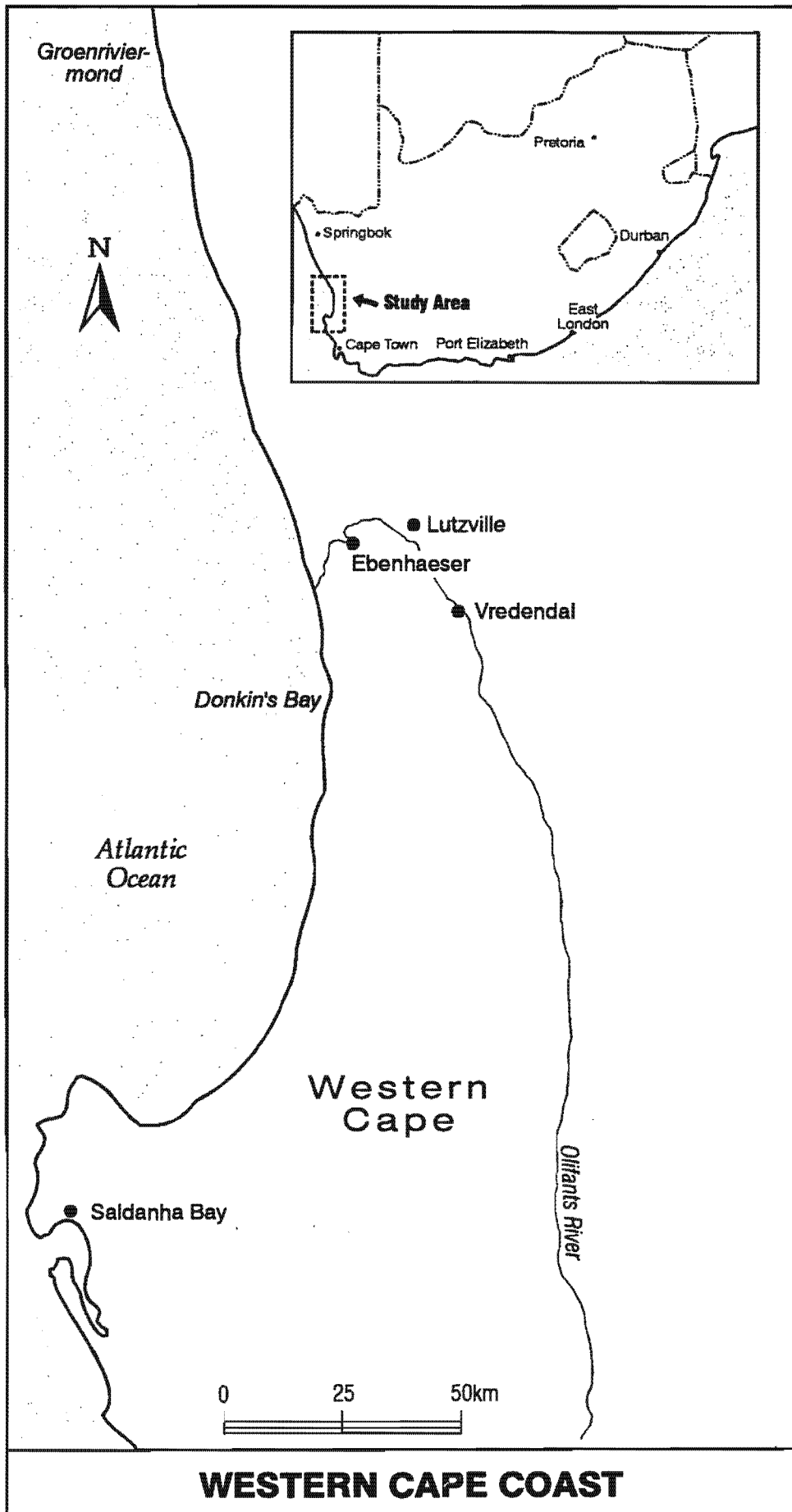
● Roossenekal

Steelpoort River

KwaNdebele, Bophuthatswana
and Lebowa boundaries as they
existed pre-1994



MPUMALANGA



"Maybe the land does not belong to us in the way the clothes we are wearing and the blanket that keeps us warm in the night belongs to us. But we belong to the land as our ancestors belonged to it. This is not an issue of holding a piece of paper with a stamp and a signature in our hand-- our mothers and fathers have left their marks on the land by their graves."

-Desmond Tutu, commenting on the eviction of families from Nyanga, Cape Town, as quoted in the *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 September 1981.

Chapter One

Sacred Land

On September 16, 1998, the Afrikaans daily *Beeld* ran a story on "mini-armoured cars" capable of firing tear gas, bullets, or grenades in all directions at the touch of a button. If production is approved by the government, farmers could purchase such vehicles in order to protect themselves and their families against criminal attacks and car-jackings. The acquisition of armoured vehicles by farmers forms part of the larger plan of the South African Agricultural Union, a national organisation of predominately white farmers, to create "farmer armies" across the country to supplement the existing police structures in rural areas. Issued in response to increasing attacks on farmers and their families, the call for such measures reflects the widespread public belief that the police and government are unable to combat this violence.

Political parties and interest groups disagree as to whether the white farmers are murdered for political or criminal reasons. This has resulted in a highly charged debate which is in itself politicised and problematic. The government maintains that violent crime is born out of the inequalities of apartheid and affects the whole country, with farms providing particularly easy targets because of their isolation. The official view holds that any possible political motivation behind the attacks indicates the emergence of attempts to sabotage the process of nation building. By this argument, the claim by the Afrikaans media that the attacks are politically motivated is a racist campaign aimed at discrediting the government. Black opposition parties are quick to point out that many more farm workers than farmers are killed or severely injured on farms, but these stories and statistics do not make the

headlines or cause public outcry. Furthermore, some attacks on white farmers may be in retaliation for the farmers' mistreatment or eviction of labourers, and farm deaths on the whole would decrease if labour conditions and rural race relations were improved. Many white farmers and conservative organisations believe the killings to be part of a calculated plan by renegade guerrilla groups to drive whites from the land.

The present furor in South Africa over the killing of white farmers indicates that control of land is a key issue in the nation's political transformation. As journalist Richard Jurgens points out, it makes very little difference whether this rural violence is perpetrated on political or criminal grounds. "Crime," he says, "has become too politicized in South Africa to be strictly separable from politics."¹ Yet what is indisputable in the eyes of many farmers is that the struggle over land lies at the center of farm violence. Previously dispossessed people are now able to lodge claims for the land they lost. Legislation aimed at preventing unmediated evictions and increasing security of tenure for farm workers has heightened the anxiety of the white farming community. White farmers fear losing control of their land to those who previously occupied it or to the farm workers who have may have worked it for decades. Large-scale evictions of farm workers have taken place in certain areas. Although these farmers may be aware of the repercussions of such actions, they would rather chance indictment for the evictions than even slightly loosen their grip on the land.

Many questions are generated by these accounts of rural violence, evictions, and emotive attachments to land. What makes one piece of land unique? What makes a family or community try for restoration of the land they lost as opposed to accepting alternate land ear-marked for redistribution? Why, in the discourse surrounding attacks on white farmers and their families, do we continually come across the issues

¹ Richard Jurgens, "The Civil War that Never Happened," *Leadership* 17, 2 (1998), 47.

of land claims, dispossession, and brutality? If, as the South African Agricultural Union believes, farm killings are part of a plan to force whites from rural areas, what has led groups to believe that sporadic killings will succeed in driving farmers from the land? The government posits that a possible political motive behind farm violence is to undermine the reconciliation of South Africa's fragmented society. What is it about land or land ownership that could cause it to be a focus of such a plot? Farm attacks and the reactions they engender demonstrate the centrality of the land issue and the very sanctity of land itself.

This thesis is a study of how and why specific places and spaces, in the form of land, have come to be sacred to South Africans. Land is examined not only as a valuable resource and a means of wielding control over other people, but also as that which informs identities, shapes families and communities, and gives meaning to beliefs. The sacred is seen not only as the holy ground of churches, temples, and national monuments, but also as farms, flood plains, family graves, and memories of a past existence. These interpretations of land and the sacred are seen through the eyes of three groups of South Africans and lead to a new understanding of space and sanctity. We see that place is not sacralised by its location, structures, or national history, but by what it represents and symbolises to individuals, families, and communities. This understanding of sacred space is examined in the context of land acquisition, contestation, and reclamation.

Space is made sacred through belief. The land is imbued with significance and importance through personal and collective experiences and interpretations. These interpretations are layered upon space to form a complex web of meaning and connections, and this web forms the basis of understanding in which people locate their origins, identity, and worldviews. Beliefs of belonging, based on emergence, inheritance, contractual, and covenantal entitlement, are situated in this nexus which links people to space. Attachment, or rootedness, in land is established. In order for this web of interpretation and conditions of belonging to be maintained, however, the

sacrality of the space to which the web is linked must be upheld. Space, because of its multiple and often conflicting levels of meaning, is continually contested and thereby requires protection against dispossession. Although dispossession portends desecration, it does not detract from the power of the sacred space. Instead, dispossession results in an on-going quest to reclaim the sacred. As this thesis shows, the sacrality of space often increases following alienation. The lost space becomes even more critical in establishing and maintaining people's sense of belonging, identity, and belief.

People give space meaning and significance, and space in turn shapes and informs people's identity and existence. This relationship is upheld and passed from one generation to the next. Land is sacralised through belief; belief is transmitted through myth and ritual. Myth, in this context, comes to mean not only myths of emergence, but also narratives and interpretations of personal and collective identity and belonging. Ritual is not only that which is performed, for instance, at the graves of the ancestors, but also the repeated and routinised movements, efforts, and experiences which build human attachments to and impressions of specific spaces. Myths of belonging and rituals of attachment continue to be shared and enacted after alienation from the sacred land, but the focus is shifted to reclamation and reconsecration of the lost space.

Contestation over land in South Africa began 350 years ago. Today, this struggle moves into a new and critical stage. Present land reform legislation allows people to reclaim land that they lost through racially-biased expropriations. What is the role of people's connection to sacred space in this process? How does the possibility of restoration of land reconfigure the web of contested and connected meanings which informs human interaction with specific sites? I posit that the meaning bestowed on land by people, and the identity which people seek from the land, intensifies with the potential for restoration of that which was lost. The question remains, however, if

such restitution can make a difference, can result in the reconsecration and upliftment not just of the groups discussed here, but of a divided and embittered nation.²

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Entitlement to Land

Prior to the transition to democracy, the preamble to the constitution of the Republic of South Africa read, "In humble submission to Almighty God, . . . Who gathered our forebears together from many lands *and gave them this their own.*"³ The land of South Africa was thereby represented as a divine gift, a symbol of the covenant made between God and the Afrikaner people. Although clearly identified as settlers from foreign lands, Afrikaners were tied to *this* nation by divine right. *Die Stem*, the official national anthem of the republic from 1959 to 1994, hails the tie between the Afrikaner people -- the "true and loyal . . . children of South Africa"-- and the land itself:

Rise the voice of our beloved, from our land South Africa. / We will answer to your calling voice, we will sacrifice what you ask: / We will live, we will die-- us for you, South Africa. / . . . Share no other land our love, no other loyalty detractive.⁴

This symbolism of symbiosis among God, people, and land is central to the history of Afrikaner nationalism, surfacing even today in calls for a *volkstad* or state for Afrikaner self-determination.

² The present land reform program distinguishes between "restitution" and "restoration." People who were dispossessed after 1913 can apply for land restitution, and a successful claim may entail restoration of the land that was lost, monetary compensation, or provision of alternate land. "Restoration," therefore, applies to the actual return of the previously expropriated land.

³ *Republic of South Africa Constitution Act*, Act 32 of 1961, my emphasis.

⁴ *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika* was written by C.J. Langenhoven in 1918. The official English version of the anthem was a compilation of over 220 translations, but is a rather pallid rendition of the Afrikaans lyrics. I, therefore, have used a more direct translation by Martine Visser and Chris Kuhn. The Afrikaans text of the cited lines is as follows: "*Ruis die stem van ons geliefde, van ons land Suid-Afrika. / Ons sal antwoord op jou roepstem, ons sal offer wat jy vra: / Ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe- ons vir jou, Suid-Afrika. / . . . Deel geen ander land ons liefde, trek geen ander trou ons af.*"

Afrikaner folklore holds that the Afrikaners were supported by God in their victory over 3,000 Zulu warriors at the Battle of Blood River in 1838, a watershed event in the Great Trek from Cape Town to the interior. Only three whites were injured in the battle-- considered a "sacred moment in Afrikaner history"⁵-- and their triumph was evidence of their status as God's chosen people and inheritors of the land. In 1938, ten years before the Afrikaner Nationalists came to power, construction began on the monolithic Voortrekker Monument on a hill outside Pretoria to commemorate the Great Trek. Exactly at noon on December 16th, the anniversary of the battle, a beam of sunlight passes through the apex at the top of the hollow cube of stone, illuminating the words on the cenotaph two hundred feet below: "*Ons vir jou, Suid Afrika.*" Until 1994, December 16th was called "The Day of the Vow," and was a national public holiday, celebrating God's gift of the nation to the Afrikaner people and their descendants. The monument and holiday heralded the dominant order's control over the national historical narrative: the land belonged to the Afrikaners, bestowed to them by divine contractual entitlement. Eugene Terre'Blanche, leader of the far-right Afrikaner Resistance Movement (*Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging*, AWB), makes reference to this entitlement:

We only want the land which rightfully belongs to *us*. Which our forefathers paid for in installments of blood. It can be no one else's land than the Afrikaners'. It was [sic] rightfully the country of the Boer people. It belonged to us.⁶

God gave South Africa to the Afrikaners, who in turn paid for the land and sacralised the soil with their blood and faith.

The importance of land is also emphasised in African nationalism and resistance ideology. The seminal text of the resistance movement, the Freedom Charter of 1955, reads in part:

⁵ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 4th edn. (London: Macmillan, 1991), 70.

⁶ Cited in Adam Hochschild, *The Mirror at Midnight: A South African Journey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 215-216. "Boer", literally meaning "farmer" in Afrikaans, is frequently used interchangeably with "Afrikaner," but refers more specifically to rural Afrikaners. Its usage increases in discussions on the history of the Transvaal region, as this area was settled as one of the "Boer Republics."

South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white. . . . [O]ur people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality; The land shall be shared amongst those who work it.⁷

Whereas Afrikaners believe that the land belongs to their people by divine right, the Freedom Charter locates this claim in a framework of birthright and heritage. In both the pre-1994 constitution and the Freedom Charter the people in question are clearly defined; in the latter document, "our people" are the dispossessed workers, and they shall share the land between them. "Birthright to land" is conceived of as a tangible right which can be stolen by external forces. Having land is linked to "liberty and peace," with the loss of the first resulting in the cessation of the other. Resistance writing frequently returns to this correlation, locating freedom from oppression in a time when black people had land. Following this logic, the redistribution of land is central to political and economic emancipation. A section of a discussion document by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which has long garnered support for its campaign for the return of land to the African people, reads:

The land is the substance and symbol of indivisible nationhood. . . . [T]he land is the heritage of the African people. The resolution of the land question thus represents the fundamental element in the struggle of the oppressed African people for national liberation, self-determination and socio-economic development. In effect, it is the centre of gravity of all these elements.⁸

Land is the core and fundamental element in reversing the process of oppression and creating a sustainable future. As envisioned by the writers of the Freedom Charter, equal land holding is the basis of a utopian society in which those who work the soil shall eventually share it amongst them. In pan-Africanist discourse, the return of the land to its rightful heirs will bring self-determination and independence for future generations. Likewise, the Afrikaner belief in connection to the land implies a provision for the future: God gave his chosen people a nation, in which they shall remain "from the cradle to the grave."⁹

⁷ Nico Steytler, ed., *The Freedom Charter and Beyond: Founding Principles for a Democratic South African Legal Order* (Cape Town: Wyvern Publications, 1991), 269-270.

⁸ Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, *The Land Policy of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania*, Discussion Document prepared by the Department of Land Affairs, 1992, 1.

⁹ From *Die Stem*, Afrikaans: "van ons wieg tot aan ons graf".

The concept of heritage is central to indigenous land claims. People are rooted in specific land because they come from the land. African creation myths relate people's genesis from the earth and oral histories detail lineages, establishing a connection to place. A chief is usually able to recount numerous generations of his family tree and the life stories of his predecessors.¹⁰ These genealogies do more than trace the inherited path of authority; they *locate* the chief and his followers by detailing the duration of their existence and historicising both the claim to power and the land over which that power was wielded. In this way, people are linked to place and place to people.

African myths of origin speak of the creator of life or of the first humans themselves arising from beds of reeds or holes in the earth. Such myths represent early accounts of indigenous claims to land.¹¹ One Zulu creation legend, clearly adopted after contact with Europeans, details the distinct realms for the races. The creator, *uNkulunkulu*, said, "the white men may live in the midst of the water, in the sea . . . the black people shall live within [this] land, they shall inhabit it."¹² The role of whites as foreign occupiers was incorporated into legend: black people emanated from the land, white people arrived upon it. Both this creation myth and Afrikaner folklore refer to a higher power granting rights to land. The Zulu account, however, shows the tie between the land and Africans from the origin of life. In the Afrikaans version, the people are allocated land as part of a divine plan of military intervention and defeat. Both accounts validate a people's claim of belonging. In the African

¹⁰ The genealogies strictly follow the male line and detail the life stories of male relatives almost exclusively. For more on lineages within African society, see P.J. Jonas, "Clanship as a Cognitive Orientation in Xhosa World-View" *South African Journal of Ethnology* 9, no. 2 (1986), 58-66; Erich Heinrich Bigalke, "The Religious System of the Ndlambe of East London District" (M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1969).

¹¹ David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6. For more on creation myths, see W. H. I. Bleek, *Zulu Legends*, ed. J.A. Engelbrecht (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1952; orig. edn. 1857); Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982); Alice Werner, ed., *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (London: George C. Harap, 1933); Sigrid Schmidt, *Catalogue of the Khoisan Folktales of Southern Africa*, vol. 1 & 2 (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1989); J.B. Peires, *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-killing Movement of 1856-57* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989).

¹² Bleek, *Zulu Legends*, 4.

An attorney who won an 1810 case before the American Supreme Court explained his view of "native occupancy" as follows:

What is Indian title? It is mere occupancy for the purpose of hunting. . . . [T]hey have no idea of a title to the soil itself. It is overrun by them, rather than inhabited. It is not a true and legal possession. . . . It is a right not to be transferred but *extinguished*. . . . They had no idea of property in the soil but a right of occupation.¹⁶

In this case, the claim of occupancy was used as a tool to dispossess, rather than as an indicator of pre-existing right. On the other hand, as is shown in the example from the Willowvale District, claims to the land as an inviolable gift, commonly associated with the Afrikaner belief in the covenant, are also used to defend the security and sanctity of African land-holdings.

These conflicting and mythologised claims and models of entitlement serve to demonstrate allegiance to land and nation. Such accounts should be viewed as myths, justifications, and systems of location, domination, and identification. The characters, events, and interpretations change and adapt to the situation and context of the telling, as is apparent in the Zulu tale involving the coming of the white settlers. David Chidester sheds further light on the nature of myth when he writes, "A myth . . . is never a closed story. It is always open to retelling, reinterpretation, and redeployment in the context of inter-cultural relations."¹⁷ Both the African and Afrikaner interpretations of their respective connection to South Africa are open myths, adapted and deployed to serve particular ends and interests. Historically, one has provided moral and divine justification for subjugation and alienation, while the other has created a picture of inalienable indigenous right and a discourse of belonging to and evolving from the land. These histories, models of entitlement, or myths are certainly disputable. They will continue to be reinterpreted and reconfigured. At present, however, they are important not for their accuracy or

¹⁶ Michaelsen, "Dirt in the Court Room," 57, citing attorney in case of *Fletcher v Peck*, 1810. Original emphasis.

¹⁷ David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 261.

validity, but because they have shaped and informed the lives of people. What is important is what they tell us about the *significance* of land, and how this significance continues to interact with, and is affected by, South Africa's changing geopolitical landscape.

Land: Significance and Loss

To have control of land is to have immense power over resources and people's lives. Hardship is experienced on a number of levels following the loss of land. The ANC-led government's program of land reform attempts to address the material and economic consequences of colonial and apartheid-era dispossession. In some cases, however, people prioritise psychological or spiritual elements of their attachment to a specific place, and fear that these factors are not acknowledged or adequately addressed within the existing parameters of land reform. An understanding of religious attachment to land needs to be incorporated into the discourse of land claims if restitution is to meet people's needs. Before looking at specific land claims, however, it is important to explore people's connection to specific land in order to understand how and why space has come to be considered sacred.

In many instances, the locations at which communities, families or individuals established roots, tilled the soil, raised children, and buried their dead represent critical spatial dimensions of their religious worldview. Land is imbued with importance and meaning due to the events and interactions which took place upon it. Separation from such places through dispossession does not diminish the land's spiritual importance, and, in many instances, increases the significance of the alienated ground. Communities removed from their original land spend years attempting to return to it. The phenomenon of the intensification of land's significance after dispossession cannot simply be ascribed to material need or desire for land, because people repeatedly go back to their original land, even in cases where sufficient alternative land has been made available.

Under legislation passed by the South African Parliament in 1994, people can make claims for land expropriated after 1913. This thesis recounts three instances of alienation from land that was central to people's identity, spirituality and existence. In each case, the family or community is at present attempting to return, on one level or another, to their original land. A glimpse of the fluid and adaptable nature of sacred space within South Africa is presented through the narratives of people who feel they were long ago forgotten and abandoned by the government. In order to locate these stories of ties to sacred space, we must look briefly at the history of contestation and occupation of land in South Africa.

Land Loss under Colonialism: Three Regions

Dispossession in the colonial era, defined for these purposes as the period from 1652 to 1910, was not a uniform process. The take-over of lands occurred throughout the country, but the legislative and practical means of expropriation varied depending on region and time period, as did relations between white and black populations. Land's significance and importance, however, was never far beneath the surface of ideological discourse, and land was occasionally used as a bartering tool or reward for service to the colony. The Mfengu people, for instance, were allocated land in recognition of their allegiance to the British in the Frontier Wars after 1835. Missionaries, increasingly influential in the nineteenth century, were also granted land, and frontier mission stations and their environs became pockets where blacks were afforded limited independent access to land and freedom from full-time farm labour. This section looks at some of the patterns of dispossession under colonialism in the three regions of South Africa discussed in this thesis; the western Cape, the eastern frontier, and the eastern Transvaal.¹⁸

¹⁸ Today these areas are three out of the nine South African provinces, called the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and Mpumalanga respectively. The names used will reflect the time period under discussion.

Land has been central to group identity and inter-group power relations from the time of initial contact between Europeans and indigenous inhabitants. Although for many years white schoolchildren were taught that South Africa was largely unpopulated when their forefathers arrived, the Cape peninsula was home to the Khoikhoi and San people when the Dutch East India Company set up a way-station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652.¹⁹ White settlement spread outwards from the initial confines of the station, resulting in the near decimation of the Khoisan population. Historian Richard Elphick maintains that by the beginning of the eighteenth century "virtually all facets of Khoikhoi life were eroded by contact with the alien society."²⁰ Surviving Khoikhoi and San groups gradually moved north from the Cape in front of the white advance, in search of open land, watering holes, and other natural resources crucial to their existence and lifestyle.

Contact between whites and the Xhosa-speaking chiefdoms of the eastern Cape was marked by the Frontier Wars, lasting over one hundred years, and resulting in constant shifts in territory and allegiances. Resistance to the takeover of indigenous lands was fierce, and the last independent Xhosa territory, Pondoland, was not incorporated into the Colony until 1894. Colonial structures, including mission stations, schools, and magistrates, were imported to the eastern frontier zone, resulting in a unique relationship between the Africans who, whether through coercion, need of employment, or military alliances with the British, entered the colony.²¹ A small number of male land-holding Africans eventually became eligible for the Cape voting role,²² and many adopted colonial dress, religion, education, and

¹⁹ The Khoikhoi and San (called the "Hottentots" and "Bushmen" by the Dutch), or Khoisan people, are perhaps the true "indigenes" of southern-most Africa, and archeological evidence places them in South Africa 20,000 years ago. The Khoikhoi were semi-nomadic pastoralists, and are estimated to have numbered 100,000 to 200,000 at the time of Dutch arrival. The much smaller San hunter-gatherer population possibly never exceeding 20,000. See, inter alia, Richard Elphick, *Kraal and Castle: Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Davenport, *South Africa*; Martin Hall, *The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings and Traders in Southern Africa, 200-1860* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).

²⁰ Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, 148.

²¹ Davenport, *South Africa*, 113-114.

²² African voting rights in the Cape were revoked in 1936.

farming techniques. The battle on the eastern frontier was not simply for control of Africans' land and labour, but also for sway over their lifestyle and very existence.

Control over space was a central tenet of the English settler ideology on the eastern frontier, with the layout of fields and houses serving as a measure of civilization.

Africans were perceived as 'idle' or 'vagrant' if they did not conform to the English conception of industrious workers, and the ordering of space on farms and in settlements was used as a method of psychological and physical control. Governor Smith told a meeting of Xhosa chiefs in 1848:

Your land shall be marked out and marks placed that you may all know it. It shall be divided into counties, towns and villages, bearing English names. You shall all learn to speak English at the schools which I shall establish for you. . . . You may no longer be naked and wicked barbarians, which you will ever be unless you labour and become industrious.²³

Controlling Africans was simplified if they lived in a way that authorities and employers understood and could monitor. The scattered plan of African villages was considered to contribute to 'idleness,' or, more aptly, unwillingness to serve the white settlers, and, as a result, the British authorities attempted to determine the design of settlements and even the shapes of dwellings. Clifton Crais describes the settlers' opinion of African settlements:

[T]he African built in a disorderly fashion, in circles as opposed to right angles, where they lived in 'an undifferentiated space' which contributed to the perpetuation of 'illegal customs' and compounded the problem of reforming their flawed character. Not only did huts as 'strongholds of Savageism' contribute to 'vagrancy', 'thievishness', 'indolence', and 'licentiousness', but also . . . made effective applications of power difficult.²⁴

Africans' "flawed character" could best be "reformed" through the regulation of lifestyle and customs, and such control was closely linked to official manipulation of physical and geographical space and order. Crais explains that as conflict intensified

²³ Gov. Smith, 7 January 1848. Cited in Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992), 145; Jeff Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in their Days of Independence* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981), 166.

²⁴ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, 138.

in the eastern Cape, "Struggles over the land embraced issues such as the construction of identity, and remembrance and forgetting."²⁵ The land provided the site for battles over both territories and humans, with the conquest of space facilitating the destruction of the autonomy of its occupants.

In the third region, the former eastern Transvaal, a rough balance of power was maintained until the end of the nineteenth century between the African polities and Afrikaner communities that settled in the region at the culmination of the Great Trek. The participants in the Great Trek, known as Voortrekkers or "forward marchers," left the Cape Colony in the mid-1830s. They went in search of vacant land and freedom from the yoke of British rule and its increasingly liberalised code of racial relations, including the 1834 prohibition of slavery. The interior of South Africa was not empty, however, but populated by different African polities, many of whom had experienced two decades of relocation and upheaval as a result of the *mfecane*.²⁶ Although the Voortrekkers occasionally experienced decisive victories over the sovereign Africans they encountered,²⁷ in general the ethnic groups competed for occupancy of land and access to resources, and initially no one group established undisputed control on the frontier.²⁸ When white settlers did acquire land in this area, it was in a more piecemeal and give-and-take fashion than in regions where colonial control was more thoroughly entrenched. This balance of power on the Transvaal frontier shifted in the latter part of the nineteenth century as the population, unity, and military might of the Boer groups increased. A growing number of Africans were incorporated-- by coercion or induction-- into the frontier economy as labourers. Several African chiefdoms, including the Ndzundza Ndebele, discussed in

²⁵ Ibid., 149.

²⁶ For discussion on the *mfecane*, see chapter two.

²⁷ For example, a party of trekkers defeated the Khumalo Ndebele under Mzilikazi at Mosega in 1837, and the famous Battle of Blood River saw the death of some 3,000 Zulu troops under Dingane in 1838. See Eric Anderson Walker, *The Great Trek*, rev. edn. (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1938), 157, 188.

²⁸ Hermann Giliomee, "Processes in Development of the Southern African Frontier," in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, eds. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 78.

chapter three, were defeated and their lands and labour swallowed by the South African Republic, the independent Boer state in existence from 1852-1902.

Dispossession under Union and Apartheid, 1910-1991

By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly all the land that would come under white control had done so. Three years after South Africa became a Union in 1910, the Natives Land Act, a law institutionalising and legalising all previous losses, was tabled and passed. The 1913 Act limited the areas in which Africans could acquire land to the pre-existing reserves²⁹-- less than 8% of the total land mass-- and any purchase, hire, or independent use of land by Africans outside of these "scheduled areas" was prohibited.³⁰ Most of these scheduled or reserved areas were far from market centers and already overcrowded by the early 1900s. The Act had devastating effects on small-scale black producers and independent peasants, especially those who leased or rented land in predominately white farming areas. The law attempted to eliminate the more autonomous forms of land tenure, such as cash tenancy and sharecropping,³¹ which had provided thousands of Africans with limited access to agricultural land. Many people were forced into labour for white agriculture, but complete proletarianisation was avoided by the reservation of a small percentage of land strictly for African use. There was, however, too little land to support a

²⁹ The establishment of "reserve" areas, described as the regions from which "the Africans could not be pushed by the advancing white settlers in the nineteenth century," began in 1846. With the reservation of land that had previously been owned or occupied by Africans for whites, more and more people were moved into the reserves, resulting in worsened conditions caused by population and environmental pressures. These reserves were called "bantustans" or "homelands" after the passing of the 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. See Sheridan Johns III, *Protest and Hope, 1882-1934*, vol. 1 of 4 vols., *From Protest to Challenge*, eds. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 63.

³⁰ *Natives Land Act, Act 27 of 1913*, section 1(1).

³¹ In the late 1800s and early 1900s many blacks retained access to agricultural land by living on white farms and paying a form of rent to the owner. Some paid cash, others, the share-croppers, gave a portion of their crops to the farmer, and a third category worked as labour tenants, paying for the use of land with a set amount of labour each year. The 1913 Act attempted to eliminate cash-tenant and share-cropping arrangements, and to replace them with the more dependent labour tenancy and wage-labour systems. The magistrate of Helibron described the repercussions of the law: "This Act is one by which man is reduced from being a farmer in his own account to being a servant at one stroke." Quoted in Colin Bundy, "Land, Law and Power: Forced Removals in Historical Context," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

successful peasantry, and many men were compelled into migrant labour in mining or industry, leaving their families in the reserves to survive off remittances and sparse income from the land.³² The foundations of the relationship between the reserves and the migrant labour system were laid with this Act, and would come to fruition with the infamous homeland or bantustan system of the National Party, elected to power thirty-five years later.

The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 released an additional 7.25 million morgen of land for African occupation, bringing the total available land to 13% of South Africa.³³ Most of these additional areas bordered reserves, and the newly released land was owned not by its black residents, but by the South African Native Trust. The Trust was meant to manage the areas "for the benefit and well-being of their black inhabitants."³⁴ The 1936 Act further regulated the presence of Africans in white areas and stipulated that any farmer allowing unregistered workers onto his land could be charged and fined. The elderly dependents or extended families of farm labourers were liable for prosecution and eviction, a clause designed to encourage the movement of such 'surplus' people from 'white' South Africa to the reserves.³⁵

One of the most critical stipulations of the 1936 Act was the power of removal and relocation. Black people owning or illegally residing on land which fell within an otherwise white area could be uprooted and relocated, their land re-allocated for white use. This Act gave the authorities sweeping powers of expropriation and removal,

³² "Pass laws" and urban influx control kept the families of migrant workers in the reserves, and ensured that the workers retained a rural base. Union organisation in industry was easily preventable, as instigators could be sent 'home' to the reserves and replacements quickly recruited.

³³ The approximate conversions for the common measurements of land-- morgen, hectares and acres-- are as follows: 1 acre = 0.4 hectares; 1 hectare = 10,000 square meters; 1 morgen = slightly more than 2 acres.

³⁴ Michael Robertson, "Dividing the Land: An Introduction to Apartheid Land Law," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126. This trust was renamed the South African Development Trust or SADT.

³⁵ Elaine Unterhalter, *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund Publications, 1987), 151.

requiring no explanation and little compensation, and laid the legislative basis for the massive process of forced removals which would reach its zenith during the apartheid years.³⁶ 'Non-white' urban areas were declared slums, and were razed and re-zoned for white settlement.³⁷ Corresponding rural areas, which would be coined "black spots" in the early 1950s, were designated for appropriation by the state and their residents trucked off to the bantustans. After the National Party came to power in 1948, the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 were followed by a barrage of laws designed to control and contain segments of the population in an attempt to realise complete segregation, the hallmark of apartheid's system of social engineering.³⁸

As part of the apartheid vision of creating 'white' South Africa, people were assigned an ethnically determined "homeland" and told to return 'home'-- often to places they had never seen-- to take advantage of their rights of citizenship.³⁹ This policy, however, was doomed to failure in a society where people had lived on the land and forged ties to specific places. Resistance to the bantustan policy was met with force, and a minimum of 4 million people were forcibly removed and relocated between 1960 and 1983 alone.⁴⁰ People commuted from the bantustans to jobs in white

³⁶ Section 13 (2) of the Act provided for the expropriation of black-owned land which was outside of the scheduled or released areas. The passage read: "The Governor-General may expropriate any land outside a scheduled native area and a released area of which a native is the registered owner when he considers that for reasons of public health *or for any other reason* it would promote the public welfare or be in the public interest to do so." *Native Trust and Land Act*, Act 18 of 1936, section 13 (2), my emphasis.

³⁷ The best known examples of urban removals are District Six in Cape Town (cleared and removed from 1966 to 1976), Sophiatown in Johannesburg (rezoned for whites and renamed "Triomf" in 1956), and Cato Manor in Durban (declared a white area in 1958). These are but three cases of many, but each attracted international attention due to the brutality of the removals, the resilience of the residents, and the out-cry from members of the local community.

³⁸ The word "apartheid," literally meaning "separateness," came into force as social policy after the National Party, under the leadership of D.F. Malan, won the 1948 election. Elaine Unterhalter provides a good overview of legislation related to social engineering and forced removals. See note 35.

³⁹ "Homelands" are more commonly referred to as "bantustans," a word which has come to connote the illegitimacy of their creation. Ten bantustans were created in all, four of which were deemed "independent states" and the rest "self-governing territories." The four "states"-- Transkei, Venda, Boputhatswana, and the Ciskei-- remained completely dependent on Pretoria and were never internationally recognised as independent countries.

⁴⁰ The Surplus People Project (SPP), a nongovernmental organisation which undertook the most extensive research on forced removals in the 1980s, estimated that 3.5 million people were moved in these years. This figure does not take into account the many removals before 1960, nor does it include relocations *within* the bantustans. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to count the numbers of farm labourers evicted, although this group is thought to be the worst affected by uprooting and removals. The SPP figure, due to the time of the research, also does not take into account the removals that continued until the late 1980s. Four million, therefore, is a low estimate.

areas, and sprawling dormitory townships or "native locations" on the outskirts of towns housed blacks who were indispensable to maintaining the white order and standard of living.

Apartheid has left South Africans economically, socially, and physically divided. This separation is apparent in the layout of the towns in the countryside, in the disparity in neighbourhoods and living conditions in the cities, and in the isolated and often squalid clump of farm workers' dwellings on white farms. This division requires more than a peaceful transition to democracy, a representative government, or a campaign of reconciliation to resolve. These are major issues of space, of home, of healing. The people interviewed in these pages all spoke of their 'homes' in the past tense. After their eviction, forced removal or relocation they did not re-establish themselves in places which held any emotional or spiritual significance. Home and the stories of its loss and hopes for reclamation are the threads running through the narratives in this thesis. Two seemingly contradictory ways of looking at land illustrate the claims of different groups to being the true children of South Africa. This thesis, however, is less concerned with the ideological or mythological conflicts between Afrikaners and Africans than it is concerned with land and people. What does land mean and why, and what does its loss entail?

The majority of people in South Africa were politically marginalised, and many were physically removed to the periphery, away from the locations and centers they valued. I will examine the continuing relationship between the marginalised, the "people everyone forgot,"⁴¹ and the land they left behind. I hope to show that these sites remain at the center of the dispossessed's worldview and ideology, even decades after relocation. People's ties to land go beyond models or stereotypes of contract or inheritance, even when the complex, flexible, and ambiguous nature of these models is examined. Land-- as specific physical space-- remains at the center of people's lives and existence. These centers become even more significant when

⁴¹ Interview with David Cloete, Ebenhaeser, 5 February 1998.

they are in imminent danger of being lost, and these contested centers and the battles over them define and shape individual, familial, and collective identities. In order to build a framework for understanding and interpreting the specific ties to land in these case studies, it is useful to look at some theoretical aspects of sacred space and how these constructs relate to land in South Africa.

Sacred Space

Can a specific space or place be inherently sacred or is it sacralised by ritual labour and human endowment? It is easy to think of places with seemingly inherent significance or meaning, especially those of religious importance. Mecca, the Temple or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and many other examples come to mind, yet there are still more which we could consider sacred on a more profane level. Think, for instance, of Mount Everest, the Great Wall of China, or the White House. These sites could also be thought of as sacred, not because their creation was divinely inspired, but because of what they represent, whether it be of historical, political, or natural prominence, to people. It is people who give places, objects, buildings, and mountains meaning. We assign and reinforce value with the consequence that almost anything can be made sacred through human belief and practice. The sacred, and thereby sacred space, emanates not from a divine mandate but from the human condition, and is located "at the nexus of human practices and social projects."⁴² In the words of J.Z. Smith, "There is nothing that is sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation."⁴³ It is human memory, labour, and ritual which negotiate the form of relations. In the above list of sites (which could be extended to include the even more mundane: cities, national landmarks, shopping malls), it becomes possible to see two important aspects of the sacred, these places, even those we consider significant because of their religious context, are sacred because of human endowment, and the

⁴² David Chidester, "The Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space: Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Religion," in *From the Sacred to the Divine: A New Phenomenological Approach*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 211.

⁴³ Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 54.

meaning, relevancy, and power of these sites is contestable, debatable, and subject to numerous interpretations.⁴⁴

The Statue of Liberty provides a good example of the multiple meanings, reinterpretations, and contestation of the sacred. The Statue of Liberty can be seen as a beacon to a better life, promising immigrants picket fences and unlimited television stations. To Americans, on the other hand, the statue may simply be a historical monument symbolising the nation's sovereignty, and does not include a message of welcome to the world's poor. The differing messages assigned to the statue are not a case of misunderstanding, but of conflicting interpretations. Although their forebears were most likely immigrants themselves, those who have an interest in halting immigration have reinterpreted the statue's message to suit their own needs. This reinterpretation results in contested meanings. What did the Statue of Liberty represent to the student demonstrators parading its replica in Tiananmen Square in 1989? To the protesters, the statute was an emblem of freedom, signifying their aspirations in the campaign for government reform. In and of itself, however, the Statue of Liberty is an "empty signifier" and has no inherent meaning.⁴⁵ Its significance is created and assigned by the viewer, and is therefore constantly reinterpreted. Meaning is allocated, but is continually fought over and contested. Who controls the significance of the statue, the immigrant who arrives at its feet or the police officer with the key to the deportation center? The dominant voice, in this case the representative of the American state, will prevail when interpretations clash. Instead of preventing the existence of contradicting interpretations, however, this contestation increases resistance. Consequently, each interpretation or meaning defines itself in relation or contrast to the others.

⁴⁴ A distinction can be made between substantial and situational analyses of sacred space. The former purports to have grasped the "essential experience of the sacred" and its connection to matters profane, while the latter analyzes the "practical, relational, and often contested dynamics of [sacred space's] production and reproduction." Although these categories are not entirely mutually exclusive, I shall focus on the situational or political aspect of sacred space for the purpose of this thesis. See Chidester, "Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space."

⁴⁵ Chidester, "Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space," 211.

It is important to make a distinction between two orientations of sacred space, locative and utopian. Locative sacred space is that which is fixed and bounded, while utopian space is unlimited, idealised, and removed from the existing social order. A locative interpretation situates the sacred in a specific location, a permanent center which has been assigned meaning and significance. This center must be protected against expropriation and desecration. Within locative space, according to J. Z. Smith, "each being has its given place and role to fulfill."⁴⁶ The rules within and boundaries of this space must be observed and maintained. Utopian sacred space, on the other hand, exists outside the bounds of everyday reality. This orientation calls for "liberation from place, often requiring the transgression or destruction of a prevailing social, symbolic, or spatial order."⁴⁷ In the context of sacred land, we are primarily concerned with a locative interpretation of sacred space. Specific locations remain crucial to people who have been alienated from them. There remains, however, an element of utopian orientation within this locative framework, as land as the lost sacred center represents a social order outside the lived reality of the claimants. In this way, land is conceptualised as utopian sacred space for the way of life it symbolises, and as locative sacred space to which the dispossessed struggle to return.

A piece of land has no inherent meaning of its own. Land in its initial state does not represent any one concept of order or significance, but remains, literally and figuratively, open space. It is the gaze of people that generates specific significance; when passing a farmscape, the urban dweller sees something entirely different than the resident farmer and labourers. Beliefs, memories, and events are attached to land and transform it from an empty signifier to a place of importance. Yet, by virtue of being spatial, an infinite number of occurrences and interpretations are layered upon the land by various participants who have interacted with the site and each other.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 293.

⁴⁷ David Chidester, "A Big Wind Blew Up During the Night: America as Sacred Space in South Africa," in *American Sacred Space*, eds. D. Chidester and E. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 281.

These multiple layers necessitate the existence of competing meanings. The location and domination of every space is established through a process of conquest or displacement, and the legitimacy of this process of establishing ownership is always contested.⁴⁸ Those who control access to a site at a given moment dictate the primary interpretation of that particular center and relegate other interpretations and participants to the periphery. The competing interpretations continue to vie for legitimacy and supremacy in a dynamic that defines and redefines the conflicting views as well as the meaning of the sacred itself. "Power and resistance," accordingly, "go together, defining . . . the contested process of positioning a sacred place."⁴⁹

Conflict over land is an age-old facet of societal interaction, as control or ownership of land bestows power. Competition over access to natural resources results in conflicts of varying degrees, and space for housing and industry is essential but scarce as urban populations burgeon. Ethnic and national groups strive for control over land as part of self-determination. The combination of land and religion is particularly volatile, legitimising countless wars and never occurring without some degree of conflict. The sacred can have a multiplicity of meanings which are interpreted and reinterpreted to serve specific ends, and the sacred is always at risk of being desecrated, defiled, or lost. Although battles for control over sacred land have often been fought in the trenches, they are just as frequently waged through more subtle forms of domination and appropriation. Sacred space in the form of land determines identity, position, and worldview, and is, as such, inevitably closely guarded and heavily contested.

Sacred space shapes and focuses the way in which we see the world. J.Z. Smith explains how a temple, as a bounded and intentional space, serves as a "focusing lens, marking and revealing significance."⁵⁰ That which might otherwise be

⁴⁸ Chidester, "Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space," 228.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁰ Smith, "Bare Facts of Ritual," 54.

"ordinary" becomes "significant" simply by being in this space. Seen as a focusing lens, land as people's sacred center offers a reference point for existence which informs their relations with the rest of the world. Smith is concerned with the nature of relations and events taking place within the temple, but how does this sacred space continue to shape human perceptions outside of the temple? If, as Smith believes, a sacred place "is a place of clarification," how does it shed light on the existence of those who cannot gain access to this place? According to Chidester and Linenthal, sacred space "focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world."⁵¹ These questions and responses call attention to what may happen when displacement from the sacred occurs.

Both Smith's and Chidester and Linenthal's theories examine the role of sacred space when accessed by those who consider it sacred, but this role is transformed when the sacred is beyond human reach. Several critical changes occur in human interaction with sacred space. First, although the focusing lens still serves to "anchor a worldview," it does so from a distance. The immediacy, intensity, and effectiveness of the sacred is not entirely depleted, but is certainly diminished. Communication with gods within the temple is less effective outside of the temple, and rituals performed at the sacred altar are less potent when enacted in exile. Family gatherings at an alien hearth themselves become gatherings of alienation. In other words, although the sacred continues to play a role in people's lives, its power is in direct proportion to their proximity to the sacred center. Second, an element of struggle and resistance is built into the interpretation of the sacred. Once people have been removed from their sacred center, it becomes impossible to conceptualise of the sacred place without also thinking of its dispossession. Elements of struggle and resistance become intertwined with the significance and meaning of the sacred, surfacing in all subsequent interpretations of and interaction with the sacred space. In some instances, the struggle to reclaim the sacred may become more of a defining

⁵¹ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction," to *American Sacred Space*, ed. D. Chidester and E. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 12.

characteristic than the sacred itself. Finally, the loss of sacred space permanently alters those who experience it, with the loss and suffering informing reality in much the same way as did the focusing power of the sacred. An alternative sacred center, if built at all, will always look back to the alienated center for its context and meaning. People will continue to define themselves, individually or collectively, in terms of what they had and lost. In these ways, increased distance from the lens of the sacred defines the viewer through his or her quest to lessen the extent of the displacement and to re-appropriate the sanctity and power represented in the sacred space.

Sacred space is significant space, made so by the actions and beliefs of a person or people. Continual interpretative labour goes into making space significant, with the resulting sacred being nothing more than a "by-product" of the "human labor of consecration."⁵² In theories of sacred space, this labour occurs in the form of ritual. Smith says, "Ritual is not an expression of or a response to 'the Sacred'; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual."⁵³ Ritual is labour, and labour makes space sacred. The consecrative labour of ritual results in infinite interpretations of the sacred; these layers of meaning are often in conflict with each other. Control of ritual space grants control of the resulting mythology and ideology, thereby enabling the dominant group to reinforce their claim to rightful ownership. Ritual sacralises space for those who interpret the ritual action. According to Smith, ritual has a strong "capacity for routinization."⁵⁴ The seemingly ordinary act of routinised and repetitive labour has become significant. The site where the routinised labour becomes ritual is transformed, and, in becoming sacred, shapes and informs the world. There is a direct correlation between human input and significant return. That which is laboured over becomes more important: a fancy Christmas dinner is unique not only because of the occasion, but also because a great deal of work went

⁵² Ibid., 6.

⁵³ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 105.

⁵⁴ Smith, "Bare Facts of Ritual," 54.

into its preparation. A bridge over a deep gorge is noteworthy not because it provides a way to cross the chasm, but because hundreds of man-hours, effort and perhaps lives went into its construction. Personal effort yields personal returns, and a construction worker revisiting the bridge he worked on will feel more attachment to it than a passing motorist. Effort, input, and labour, particularly repeated and routinised labour, create the sacred.

Sacred space is always at risk of desecration and requires protection against outside forces. It is, therefore, set apart from the rest of the world and bounded to maintain its sanctity, and is defined by whom or what is included and excluded. David Chidester says, "Space becomes place, isolated from the rest of the world, by means of exclusion. It becomes sacred place through a highly-charged, contested, and even violent politics of exclusion."⁵⁵ Struggles over inclusion and exclusion revolve around purity, and only through segregation can purity be ensured and maintained.⁵⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan describes the need to keep the "categories" of cleanliness and contamination separate: "Fences must be built and guards hired to keep the sacred areas pure. . . . Dirt at the boundary is threatening and portends desecration."⁵⁷ Purity is risked even by the proximity of uncleanness, necessitating a buffer strip to properly exclude the impure. A breakdown of this division results in the contamination of the sacred. Desecration in the form of defilement, however, is reversible through rituals of purification, exile, and the confirmation of sacrosanct boundaries. The more serious form of desecration is dispossession, as it entails both a fundamental shift in how people interact with sacred space and the forfeiture of the power and control accompanying ownership and access. Redress of this type of desecration is much more difficult to achieve as the ritual participants are physically removed from the site in question. According to Chidester and Linenthal, "Under conditions of dispossession, ritual acts of consecration can only be performed in

⁵⁵ Chidester, "Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space," 217.

⁵⁶ Chidester and Linenthal, "Introduction," 18.

⁵⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sacred Space: Explorations of an Idea," in *Dimensions of Human Geography*, ed. Karl W. Butzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 92-93.

exile, alienated from their sacred ground."⁵⁸ Rituals performed after alienation are less effective, with full purification possible only if the participants reclaim the sacred space.

Dispossession, as the ultimate act of desecration, must be prevented at all costs. It entails a reversal of order as the previously excluded have seized the center, pushing those who inhabited the center to the periphery. The sacred space is reinterpreted by its new occupiers, and the collective identity of both groups is transformed. The newly marginalised continue to imbue the sacred with their own meanings, but the implementation and enactment of these interpretations is permanently altered by the removal from the ritualised central space. Existence from outside the sacred center is continually shaped and informed by the experience of alienation. Although the sacred still operates as a focusing lens for those on the periphery, the lens is tarnished by dispossession. Relations to the world, and the very worldview itself, become tainted both by suffering from loss and by the desire to re-occupy the center. It is no longer possible for the sacred to exist distinct from its alienation, and the experience of removal has become a defining characteristic of its being. Subsequent interaction with the sacred land, in other words, can never be free from the contestation over its ownership. The role of the sacred in daily life is always interpreted within the parameters of dispossession and the experience of disempowerment.

A new existence may be established at the periphery following the forced move away from the center, and an alternative center may even be created. This center, however, is perceived of, at best, as temporary and secondary to the initial sacred space.

People's reflections on their lives and experiences before alienation illuminate the power which continues to be assigned to the sacred center. The sacred anchored people to their beliefs and values, and provided for stable relationships and ease of interaction with the outside world. Life was always 'better' at the center-- materially, physically, and psychologically. Spiritual and economic hardship may have existed,

⁵⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, "Introduction," 2.

but was of less consequence to people's overall well-being than after alienation.

Purpose in life was easier to understand, perceived suffering less severe.

Consequently, the new location outside the center is never fully accepted.

Since dispossession is the ultimate act of desecration, the importance of the site to those in control of its center increases when dispossession is imminent. More effort is required to protect its purity or inviolability, and an increase in protective rituals or physical labour results in greater significance of the sacred. Places are reinterpreted in the context of their impending alienation, and are redefined in relation to the perceived threat. A place "is often experienced as most sacred by those who perceive it at risk of being desecrated."⁵⁹ The very existence of those at the center is bitterly contested, and yet, for those who inhabit them, these sacred spaces have "achieved prominence against the surrounding entirety of space because [they are] always at risk of dispossession."⁶⁰ If a site becomes more sacred when under threat of dispossession, its sacrality increases dramatically following alienation. Efforts previously directed at maintaining purity now must be aimed at reclamation. The new occupiers, however, in taking possession of the center, also establish their own boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. The distinctions between pure / impure, included / excluded, and center / periphery are reversed. The people who were previously at the center are now the excluded and impure. In order to reclaim control of the primary interpretation of the sacred they must battle against the newly established and enforced rules of purity. The group controlling the sacred center, however, is almost always the dominant order, making reclamation difficult. They possessed sufficient might to oust the previous occupiers. More importantly, by commanding the center they now also control the symbolic and ritual interpretations of the site and can use these interpretations to reinforce their claim to legitimate ownership.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰ Chidester, "Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space," 219.

The sacred in and of itself has no inherent meaning, rather humans assign it value and significance. Labour, in both ritual and physical forms, imbues the sacred with meaning and makes land sacred, assigning it with significance. Sacred land as a form of sacred space has multiple interpretations to any number of people, but the primary interpretation is *controlled* by those who occupy the center, who strive to balance the elements of purity and impurity. By virtue of being both sacred and spatial, sacred space is always and inevitably contested. Contestation creates a dichotomy between those in the position of symbolic and actual power at the center, and those at the periphery, who struggle to claim or reclaim the center. Position, therefore, is established relative to occupancy of the sacred. The sacred as a focusing lens shapes and informs people's worldview, but also configures and maintains identity. Increased distance between the viewer and his or her sacred space, caused when access to the sacred is prohibited, changes the clarity and the nature of the perception provided by the focusing lens. Alienation from sacred land, therefore, leads to a fundamental shift in the existence and identity of the viewer. Suffering, a result of alienation, heightens the experience of and nostalgia for the sacred, and drives the dispossessed to return to the sacred land. The experience of suffering alters the interpretation of individual and collective past, and changes the relation to the sacred in the future.

South African Sacred Space

This thesis explores three cases of people's connection to and alienation from their sacred land. Their narratives detail the politics of identity and position inherent in relations to the sacred, and show how human belief and labour informs and creates sacred space. Land as a theoretical and geographical construct has been contested throughout the colonial and apartheid periods, and yet personal and familial accounts show the role of contestation in individual connection to sacred place. The experience of suffering reoccurs in people's narratives of their relationship to and separation from their land, and this suffering contributes to the sacralisation of their

space. Today, people are able to reclaim expropriated land under restitution laws passed by the ANC-led government. How does the possibility of re-acquisition affect people's perception of and relationship to their sacred space? What about those who are not eligible for restitution, such as evicted farm workers? Some people will be able to return to their sacred center while others will not. How do those who will return envisage their lives changing once they are reunited with the center? What does reclamation symbolise? People who do not qualify for land restoration may have to accept that they will never be able to access their sacred space as they hoped. How will this realisation change their lives and worldview?

Contractual and inherited models of entitlement to land provide a theoretical framework of connection to land or to a nation. The sacralisation of specific spaces, however, differs with the relative ease of access for the beholders. People who enjoy unhindered admittance to space they hold sacred have a very different relationship with the land in comparison to those who are barred from their sacred space. Likewise, people who are in the process of alienation or dispossession also have unique sentiments for their land, and these emotional attachments change yet again when the prospect of return is mooted. The thoughts and beliefs contained in these pages reflect these changing perceptions based on people's proximity and access to their sacred space, and show that the sacred, although always contested, is never static in its significance or meaning. Rather, the sacred, and, more tellingly, people's memories of it, are amorphous and mutable. To circumscribe sacred space within strict academic parameters would be to detract from its true nature, and, more importantly, to discredit the emotions and sentiments of the people in these pages. Bearing this in mind, I proceed to discuss the characteristics of sacred land and people's attachment to it as they emerged in the course of my research, conversations, and communications.

Conceptions of the sacred vary greatly depending on people's proximity to their sacred space. If land was produced as sacred during periods of access, how was it

Land, therefore, became sacred in its representation of a way of life in which self-determination, autonomy, and an element of material security were at least feasible. Many people in this thesis reflect on a time when they had at least some access to land by saying, "I could feed my family then." Aninka Claassens' work on rural movements points to the link between people's sense of dignity and the ability to provide for their families. A man from the south eastern Transvaal put it clearly, "When the whites took our land away from us we lost the dignity of our lives, we could no longer feed our children. We were forced to become servants."⁶³ Not just individuals, but entire families were compelled into servitude following alienation from their land. Dignity was lost along with sacred space, and autonomy and familial integrity were diminished.

People's spiritual and religious connection to land was also critical to their identity and overall sense of well-being. Spiritual attachment to place makes *specific* land meaningful and sacred, as material security can be realised on any arable soil, but spiritual links bind people to *one* place. A location where rituals and beliefs are repeatedly enacted becomes sacred; the soil becomes a symbolic recipient of the values and knowledge shared upon it. The physical space is sacralised through the exchange and enactment of beliefs, as well as through the message or meaning deemed resident in it. Inter-generational communication and respect contributes to familial security and harmony within many traditional African worldviews or belief systems.⁶⁴ Handing down of knowledge and information is only possible when

for outside commodities or manufactured goods. The acquisition of commodities in turn necessitated engagement, at least to some level, in the white-controlled cash or market-driven economy. Many successful black farmers participated in the market economy alongside their white counterparts. See, for instance, Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1979; reprint Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 58, 74-75, 153-154.

⁶³ Aninka Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980's," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25. Quoting Petros Nkosi, speaking at a meeting to discuss the formation of regional rural committee in south-eastern Transvaal, July 1989.

⁶⁴ Many authors speak of African Traditional Religion or Religions when referring to customs, practices, and beliefs generally attributed to people of Africa. Although there are commonalities and trends across the continent, I have tried, as much as possible, not to use this uniform label for such an ethnically, historically, and socially diverse population. Although I have incorporated aspects of studies of African traditional religions into my work and observations, I tried to focus on the specific worldview and faiths of the people I encountered. On occasion, however, I have found it necessary to refer to generalised attributes of traditional worldviews or belief systems. In these instances I found repeated correlation

there is sufficient space for members of extended families to live together. Land became significant, therefore, as the site of family cohesion. Hierarchical codes, established gender roles, and inter-generational relations could be enacted in a prescribed and understood manner. Continuity between the past and present was established by rootedness in one place, a place where ritual and practical knowledge was passed from parent to child. These teachings imbued the place with importance and consequence, as the space where the exchange of knowledge occurred.

The ladder of familial authority extends past the living to the realm of the deceased. Access to the graves of the ancestors is therefore extremely important if positive relationships are to be maintained with the dead. The ancestors must be respected and provided for in order to beneficially influence the living in both spiritual and physical matters. The place where the ancestors lived and were buried is imbued with their power, knowledge, and authority, and the living must be in proximity to this place to maintain ties with the ancestors. Location or land, therefore, is the crucial link between the material and spiritual realms. Yi-Fu Tuan talks of a similar connection between land and belief in antiquity:

[L]and and religion were so closely associated that a family could not renounce one without yielding the other. Exile was the worst of fates, since it deprived a man not only of his physical means of support but also of his religion and the protection of laws guaranteed by the local gods.⁶⁵

Although this association between land and people is clearly not limited to ancient times or worship of local gods, Tuan's analysis of familial ties to land is highly applicable to systems in which ancestors occupy important positions in people's spiritual and daily existence. The importance of land and ancestors in African tradition is explained further by theologian Welile Mazamisa,

Land relates to the ancestors. . . . Land is the blanket that covers the ancestors. When you take away someone's land, you take away the blanket that covers the ancestors. This is not always articulated in political discourse,

between ethnography and my own interviews. More information and bibliographical references on this topic are provided in chapter two.

⁶⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977), 154.

but it is very important, central, in people's lives on the land and in their struggles for it.⁶⁶

Belief systems which prioritise interaction with ancestors encourage "a strong sense of the past, of lineage and continuity in place," and provide security "through this historical sense of continuity."⁶⁷ Place is significant because "people believe it to be not only their home but also the home of their guarding spirits," in this case, the ancestors.⁶⁸ The living inform the ancestors of life-changes, such as births and marriages, and receive vital blessings from the ancestors. Absence of these blessings leads to material hardship, illness or misfortune. Failure to carry out prescribed and ritualised acts of respect and communication offends the ancestors and the living are subsequently detrimentally affected. Barring access to the graves, therefore, results in both material and psychological hardship for the living. The gravesites carry meaning as the locations where contact with the ancestors is possible and where family information, beliefs, and rituals have been shared.

As we have established, land gains importance when it is scarce and contested. Contestation over land was especially prevalent in the mid-1900s, when the process of forced removals of black South Africans reached its peak. There are various levels, however, at which people can 'have' land. Many people, such as farm workers, had no claim or access to land beyond their position as labourers on white farms. A high percentage of farm labourers were share-croppers or labour tenants, but the contractual terms of these arrangements were rarely documented and were subject to change at the farmer's discretion. Eviction could and did come at any time and thousands of farm workers lost their crops, livestock, and homes. Farm workers' existence on the land was perilous and constantly under threat of revocation. For these people and others in equally insecure positions of tenure, land

⁶⁶ From a speech given at the launching of the Relevant Church Series of the Western Province Council of Churches, April 1994. Cited in David S. Gillan, "Who are Land Rights?: The Crisis of Interpretation in Land Restitution," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 116-117.

⁶⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 153.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

became sacred simply for what it was: space.⁶⁹ Land offered a space to build a home, grow a few crops, raise a family, and have as much livestock as permitted by the farmer. Even a small amount of land could be sacred, as it was often farm workers' only asset and source of material and economic stability.

The significance of a specific place, regardless of recognised right of ownership, increases with time and labour. Although the sacralising role of labour is often evident in the relationship between land and people, it is especially apparent in the case of farm labourers. Many farm workers have lived on one farm for generations, surviving numerous changes of white ownership.⁷⁰ They have raised their children and buried their dead on the land, imbuing the location with spiritual meaning. Entire families work in order to fulfill the contractual agreements with the farmer while still producing sufficient food for their own needs.⁷¹ People speak of the symbiotic relationship between their families and the soil; the family relies on the produce of the land, and the land's productivity depends on human labour. Generations of a family's manual exertion sacralised the soil: the routinisation and ritualisation of human labour converts the seemingly ordinary to the sacred. People who lived on and worked the soil for years believe the land to be rightfully theirs, made so by their labour and by their long-standing residency. The white farmers are not considered to work as hard as the black families, and the white families come and go. As Aninka Claassens found in the course of her research on rural struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980s,

⁶⁹ Another group within South African society who are in an equally insecure position on the land are 'squatters' or shack-dwellers in peri-urban informal settlements.

⁷⁰ Although some farm workers manage to remain on farms after a transfer of ownership, it is very common for the new owner to summarily evict the workers residing on the farm or to change the terms of employment in such a way that the workers and their families are compelled to leave. See, for instance, Jo-Ann Bekker, "The 'place of weeping' still has some tears," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, March 27-April 2, 1987; Jo-Ann Bekker, "The tenants who cling to land they do not own," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 25 March 1988.

⁷¹ A labour tenant would often use his extended family's labour to fulfill the contract with the white farmer. One or two of the men would work for the farmer while the rest of the family worked their own fields and attended their livestock. Children and women, who were usually the primary workers in the black family's fields, were often expected to work for the white family-- usually without pay-- as domestic servants on weekends and at harvest and sheering times.

Again and again tenants refer to the white farmers as transient sojourners and to themselves as the permanent inhabitants of the farms. . . . There are individual families who have been evicted from, and returned to, the same farms many times. (One old man, Sergeant Yende . . . did this eight times).⁷²

People such as Sergeant Yende experienced intense suffering and loss in the process of eviction, including serving jail sentences and having their houses burnt and livestock impounded. Yet people return, over and over again, to land the whites say does not belong to them. The land to which they return is home, and, albeit tenuous, it is the only home many in such situations have ever known. The people who live and work on the land have made it their own, have made it sacred, through their sweat, through the generations born and raised there, through the bones of their ancestors, and through their suffering.

Land in South Africa is sacred on a general level for its provision of material security and economic independence from white society. It is sacred on a more specific level for its spiritual representation of the location of extended family cohesion and communication with the ancestors. Human labour and generations of habitation make land sacred, and it is especially significant for many people as their *only* tie to place, their *only* physical asset, and their *only* manifestation of a home. What, however, serves to maintain these ties following dispossession and alienation? How and why does the land continue to be construed as sacred? I posit that land, in the South African context, becomes even more sacred following people's alienation from it. The hardship and loss experienced during and after dispossession increases land's significance and importance. Suffering, therefore, is an important element of the sacralisation of land in South Africa. After relocation, the original land continues to be imbued with meaning through memory and reflection. Position and identity following removal are defined and maintained in relation to what was lost; people re-establish themselves, but they remain on the peripheries of their sacred centers. This thesis shows how the processes of contestation, suffering, and memory have not only kept the sacred alive in the hearts and minds of the dispossessed, but have also

⁷² Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal," 45.

shaped and motivated their continuing struggle to reclaim what was lost, to reposition themselves at the center. I will touch briefly on the elements of contestation, suffering and memory as they apply to the maintenance of land as sacred in South Africa before explaining the case studies and methodology.

Contestation, Suffering and Memory

Black South Africans were the victors in conflicts over land on very few occasions, and contestation almost always led to their dispossession. The very experience and process of contestation, however, added a new layer of interpretation and meaning to the land. Once the threat of loss became apparent, people increased their effort to maintain the sanctity and integrity of the sacred. Increased effort leads to increased meaning: the closer the threat of dispossession, the harder people tried to protect the land, and the more important that particular space became. J.Z. Smith says that sacred place provides a focusing lens which "directs attention."⁷³ When the sacred is contested, however, the focus of our awareness is on the threat of desecration. We primarily conceive of the sacred as the sacred in danger. Attention is directed at the challenge to the sacred, and the sacred's significance is magnified as it is afforded increased amounts of cognitive and spiritual investment. Although people stepped up efforts to protect their lands following notification of imminent removal, there was often very little that families or communities could do to prevent usurpation.⁷⁴ The land was not, therefore, made more sacred because of actual battles fought upon it, but because contestation brought increased consideration of its significance, drew people together around it, and heightened the sense of land's importance as an identifying-- perhaps as *the* identifying-- element in the lives of families or communities.

⁷³ Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.

⁷⁴ There were some successful campaigns against forced removals or urban clearances in the 1980s. Prior to this, however, very few communities had the connections, resources, and international or local attention to mobilise support for their struggle to keep the land. See chapter two for more on resistance to removals.

The continuing power of the original land is apparent in people's attempts to remain near to it following removal. Given a choice of alternative land, people select a new site based on its proximity to the old site. This is demonstrated by the similarities of descriptions of the relocation sites taken from the three case studies in this thesis:

We had a choice between pieces of alternative land. We had never seen either. We chose Mhlwazi because we didn't want to be too far from the graves of the ancestors.

When my father was evicted from Witpoort he moved us to the neighbouring farm and found work there. That way there was only a fence between us and the other land.

We are nine kilometers from Ebenezer.

Life at the margin is defined in relation to the center. Even after removal, people continuously look to the sacred land for meaning and location. Contestation and the ensuing removal result in a physical shift in position from the center to the periphery, but identity remains closely linked to the original sacred site. The character of the focusing lens of the sacred, however, is permanently altered due to the new position, since the influence and benefit bestowed by the authority and knowledge resident at the sacred center decreases with distance. Sacred space, as the mechanism through which people view and understand their world, has been tarnished by the process of contestation. Position and identity have been fundamentally shifted, material and spiritual stability over-turned. Contestation and ensuing dispossession, therefore, can never be forgotten, as they continue to inform all relations and interactions with the distanced sacred space, and become as prevalent in people's daily lives as the sacred itself.

The loss of land brought extreme hardship and suffering in both physical and spiritual terms. People lost property, homes, crops and livestock-- usually all of their accumulated wealth. Ties to the ancestors, ritual knowledge, and proximity to extended family members were destroyed. Continuity with the past and hope of security for future generations ceased to exist. Producing one's own food, existing outside of the white economy, and having even a tenuous attachment to a piece of

land became much more difficult. Death was common during and shortly after removals, as some people could not survive the severing of ties to the land or to what it represented. Such hardships were not limited to the act of dispossession, but lingered following relocation and often became a central and pervasive feature in people's lives. Loss of sacred land was therefore associated with adversities: people suffered *because* of that land. This made the land all the more significant, desirable, and central to people's worldview. Pain needed to be located, to be ascribed to something, to have an explanation or justification behind it. What could be powerful enough to bring such enduring affliction? The land and experience of alienation possessed this power. The space itself was sacralised through the suffering experienced at removal, and was maintained as sacred through the continuing hardships endured as a direct consequence of the dispossession. The hardship brought by the loss indicated the extent of the land's importance and meaning. Land's centrality to people's existence was confirmed and reconfirmed through the suffering which occurred as an aspect of contestation.

Sacred space remains significant space in accordance with human recollection and reinterpretation of its importance. As has been established, this level of meaning increases during and after dispossession and is intensified by continual suffering. In this way, space is maintained as sacred through individual and collective memory. But what role does memory play in people's relation to their sacred space? How are land lost, time past, and human interactions implicit within and upon space, remembered? A tendency exists to romanticise the time when people had access to their sacred space; in retrospective narratives there is a recurring theme of "how much better life was then." Yet even romanticisation is not constant or simple. In what appears to be a tale of a mythological golden past, people suddenly pause to reflect on conditions of poverty and hardship. How does memory of the past, be it romanticised or understated, inform life and interaction with the present?

Memory itself is highly unstable, and, as a human creation, is susceptible and easily adaptable. Events are replayed, reinterpreted and forgotten, and circumstances and motivations assigned new meanings. Maurice Halbwachs, who developed a philosophy of collective memory, believes that individual memories are created and reformed through the memories of others. Collective memory, therefore, acts as a script, guiding and locating individual recollections.⁷⁵ When individual memory is expanded to influence the collective, and the collective in turn guides individual recollection, the scope for contestation and instability of memory is magnified. Challenge and conflict over the meaning and very content of the past becomes inevitable. Marita Sturken, however, writes that

the instability of memory . . . is what makes memory both political and subject to debate. The changeability of memory raises important concerns about how the past can be verified, understood, and given meaning. Yet it is important not to allow discussions of memory to bog down in questions of reality.⁷⁶

It is not the accuracy of the recollection that is important, but the significance of the reflection itself. The past is not only understood through recollection, it is *created* and *re-created* by human memory, and this creation sets the conditions of the present. Sturken continues, "We need to ask not whether a memory is true but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present." Memory in and of itself is important because it "indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definitions."⁷⁷ Space that is sacred to a family or community continues to be of consequence largely through the mechanism of memory. The land's spiritual and material significance and its subsequent alienation are continually reconfigured and reinterpreted in the here and now. This process, as we have seen, locates the existence of a group or family in relation to the lost sacred center. Collective definition is thereby informed through

⁷⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). On collective memory, also see Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), and George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

⁷⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* On history and memory, see Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

the locative power of memory, and memory finds and retains origins and identities.⁷⁸ It is often memory itself, therefore, and the act of remembering, that bears more weight than the events, circumstances, or role players. It is not the past that shapes the future and informs the present, but the *memory* of the past. For these reasons I have let people's recollections in this thesis speak for themselves without gauging the accuracies or inaccuracies of their personal accounts. It is the memories, not the events, that carry meaning, and it is memory that preserves and affirms the sacred as such in the human mind.

Collective and individual memories set the parameters for human relations and connections to the sacred. Pierre Nora writes, "Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events."⁷⁹ As has been established, the recollections associated with places often serve to idealise the time that they recall, recreating an image which may be far from reality. Sturken says that "memory manifests itself in different and unexpected forms, that it integrates fantasy, invention, and reenactment, that it is a process of engaging with the past rather than a means to call it up."⁸⁰ In terms of human relation to sacred land, these tools of fantasy, invention, and reenactment are particularly useful in maintaining the symbolism of the sacred and influencing daily life away from that sacred center. Through fantasy, the alienated sacred is always envisioned and remembered as better than present circumstances or conditions. Invention leads to the perpetual reinterpretation of the sacred and its relationship to the present day. The primary role of invention in memory is to shape and reconfigure past events and circumstances, and it is frequently employed in narratives of loss and dispossession. Timelines and principle players shift, words uttered and boundaries delineated are up for constant debate. Invention is an important tool in terms of healing: we invent a context,

⁷⁸ For memory in society, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); for memory in South Africa, see Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, eds., *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁷⁹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 22.

⁸⁰ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 259.

motivation, or justification to help us process or accept past events: we blame scapegoats or find a villain in our midst. Without invention the atrocities of the past are meaningless and without reason, and it becomes difficult to move beyond such events if they are not located within a comprehensible framework. Reenactment entails the symbolic reliving of the past event and, in relation to the loss of land, is done through ritual and repeated physical moves from center to periphery. Reenactment maintains the significance of the sacred space through the recreation of the process of dispossession and continual renewal of the effects of alienation. Place is not only recalled through memory, it is also re-lived, re-experienced, and re-lost. Memory, therefore, locates people in places from which they were long ago removed.

Memories of the past inform the present. It is sometimes said that people "live in the past," or can't "escape" the memory of a person, place, or event. What makes one thing hold precedence over another in human memory? Sturken quotes Nietzsche:

'[I]f something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory.' Nietzsche's statement evokes the enactment of trauma within and upon the body. That cultural memory has been prominently produced in these contexts of pain testifies to memory's importance as a healing device and a tool for redemption.⁸¹

We remember that which wounds us. The people in this thesis tell stories of intense pain, or wounding which killed their families and erased portions of their past and existence. If we accept Nietzsche's argument, the hurt caused by the alienation from the sacred land is what has kept the land and its significance alive in the daily lives of the people who suffered. If we add to Nietzsche's theory the fact that the land was sacred, that it represented a time and way of life now permanently altered, we understand the power and continuing prevalence of these places in people's minds. J.Z. Smith examines memory's position in and interaction with the present day:

So it is with memory: it is a complex and deceptive experience. It appears to be preeminently a matter of the past, yet it is as much an affair of the present.

⁸¹ Ibid., 16. On the role of trauma in memory, see Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

It appears to be preeminently a matter of time, yet it is as much an affair of space. . . . If memory of a past experience is, through the processes of memory, experienced only in the present, how can that present memory be an awareness of the past?⁸²

Events from the past make and shape the present. Recollection, therefore, is not just how we think about the past, it is how we live in the present. It is never simple, never straightforward, and always says more than it appears to. Nowhere is this more apparent than in people's stories about the loss of their sacred space. These are more than accounts of the past, they are active insights into the present. The importance of sacred land is illustrated by its predominance in people's worldviews. The people in this thesis are not trapped in memory, yet, in many ways, they are guided by it. The *memory* of land and its loss has been reconfigured and reinterpreted so often that it takes on a character and power of its own. As we shall see, memory, perhaps, can become more sacred than the land itself.

Case Studies and Methodology

The case studies in the body of this thesis are three out of the thousands of cases which have been lodged with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) since its inception in 1995.⁸³ I located these specific cases with the assistance of various governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). I worked specifically with the Surplus People Project in Cape Town, the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and the Department of Land Affairs (Redistribution) in East London, and the Legal Resource Centre in Pretoria. I used a variety of criteria in selecting my case studies. First, I looked for cases in three different regions of the country to illustrate distinct historical processes of land acquisition and dispossession. Accordingly, the cases include a family which held freehold tenure to two farms in the Eastern Cape until their removal in 1963, a family which worked on a farm in Mpumalanga for three generations prior to their eviction in 1959, and a

⁸² Smith, *To Take Place*, 25-26.

⁸³ By December 31, 1998, an estimated 40,000 land restitution cases had been lodged with the CRLR.

community which resided within and adjacent to a mission station in the Western Cape until their relocation in 1927. Second, I hoped to find cases in which people had expressed a spiritual or religious connection to their land. The Ndunges in the Eastern Cape stressed the suffering they had experienced due to the isolation from their ancestors. The Ntulis in Mpumalanga made an urgent request to be able to bury their dead on the white-owned farms and to have unhindered access to the graves.⁸⁴ The Ebenhaeser community provided an interesting angle on the correlation between land and religion because of the role of the church and the missionaries in the removal of the residents. Ebenhaeser also complemented the first two studies in that it involved a larger group of people, resulting in various interpretations of history and diverse sentiments surrounding the restitution claim.⁸⁵ The removal in this case occurred twenty years prior to the formal onset of apartheid, calling attention to the origins of segregationist policy and the quest for white purity which were in place long before 1948. Third, I selected cases in which people assigned varying significance and meaning to the land. This illustrates the multiplicity of aspects in the production and maintenance of sacred space. The cases studies also highlight various issues surrounding the implementation of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa. Lastly, it was important that the family or community welcomed my research visits and questions and that they desired their story to be shared with a larger audience.

The Ndunge family, discussed in chapter two, live in the southern Drakensberg region of the Eastern Cape. In the late 1880s the family was granted freehold title to two farms in recognition of their allegiance to the colonial forces in the Transkei Rebellion. The Ndunges lived on these farms until their removal in 1963 following the declaration of the district as a 'white' area. In their restitution claim filed with the CRLR, the Ndunges referred to their need to be reunited with the ancestors buried on

⁸⁴ The Ntulis have not lodged a formal restitution claim with the CRLR, but contacted the commission for assistance and their case was forwarded to the Legal Resource Centre in Pretoria.

⁸⁵ Of the three cases studied, the Ebenhaeser case was unique in the availability of secondary sources. In the Ndunge and Ntuli cases, no secondary sources, other than Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and Legal Resource Centre reports, were available. The history of Ebenhaeser, on the other hand, was comparatively well documented. This provided the opportunity to go into the origins of the community and people's relationship to the land in greater depth and detail.

the original land in order to restore spiritual integrity and material well-being in their lives. This land was sacred both in its religious significance and because it had provided relative prosperity to the family of small-scale farmers. Today, the Ndunges reenact their relocation every time they make the trip from town, close to their original land, to their relocation site. The trip takes almost two hours and costs twenty-five rand; the journey is a constant reminder of their existence on the periphery of their original sacred center. In the three studies presented here, the Ndunge case is likely to be the only one resulting in the full restoration of the expropriated land.

The Ntuli family, discussed in chapter three, lost independent access to their land in the Middleburg District of Mpumalanga following the Boer defeat of the Ndzundza Ndebele in 1881. The Ntulis became farm labourers, and three generations of the family worked on a white-owned farm. They received no pay, in cash or provisions, and the entire family was evicted without notice in 1959. Due to an agreement between the patriarchs of the white and black families, the Ntulis were allowed visitation and burial rights after their eviction. Poor employment opportunities eventually compelled the family to move farther and farther from the farm. Their initial eviction and subsequent increased marginalisation from their sacred land was reenacted each time they left the farm after visiting their ancestors. The right to visit the graves, however, was revoked in the early 1990s. At present, the Ntulis' main goal is to reestablish the spiritual connection to their ancestors, but this will be possible only if they are allowed unhindered access to the land and graves. The land is sacred to the Ntulis because of the years of labour which they gave to it, and they believe that they are the rightful owners of the farm. The family, however, is ineligible for restitution because they lost their original land prior to the 1913 Natives Land Act, and because they were workers, not owners, at the time of their 1959 eviction. Recent legislative advances do provide for visitation rights to the graves, but not for future burial. The Ntulis' ultimate goal, however, is to reclaim the space which they hold sacred.

The community of Ebenhaeser in the west coast region of the Western Cape is discussed in chapter four.⁸⁶ In 1832 a mission station, called Ebenezer, was established near the delta of the Olifants River. The people who lived at Ebenezer and the adjacent settlement of Doornkraal retained limited access to land through their affiliation with the mission station.⁸⁷ The extended community, incorporating both Ebenezer and Doornkraal, was relocated in the mid-1920s to allow for the establishment of a resettlement project to benefit poor whites. The land is held sacred as the site of the community's origins and for the independent lifestyle it represents. The time prior to removal has been immortalised in the memories of the elderly as an era of harmony and tradition which has been irreparably lost. Many people who live at Ebenhaeser work as farm labourers on the land which was once their own. Each day they return to the high dry plain nine kilometers back from the fields at the river's edge, symbolically reenacting the removal of their forefathers seventy years ago and burning the event into the collective memory of the community. Today, the memory of the land and accompanying lifestyle is more significant than the land itself, and the hardship experienced as result of the community's relocation continues to define life at Ebenhaeser. The chances of successful restoration of the land are slim due to the extremely high market value of the land, now divided and owned by more than fifty white farmers. This case points to one of the fundamental limitations to land reform within the present legislative framework. Private property is protected by the constitution, meaning that land for restitution or redistribution must be acquired from a willing seller at market value. Some members of the Ebenhaeser community continue to hope against the odds for restoration of their lost land. Others, however, would now settle for material improvements or the development of infrastructure at

⁸⁶ "Ebenezer" was the name of the mission station established in 1832. The name of the settlement as it exists today, nine kilometers from the original site of Ebenezer Mission, is "Ebenhaeser." I use the former spelling when referring to the mission station and the latter when discussing the community or settlement at present. In several references, Ebenhaeser is spelled "Ebenhaezer."

⁸⁷ The original residents of the area were Nama-speakers of Khoikhoi ethnicity. By the early 1800s the area had also become populated by people of mixed-race, descendants of slave / Khoisan and black / white unions. This population is discussed in further detail in chapter four.

their present site. The community's interpretation and memory of the land and life that they lost illustrate the importance of sacred space even when it is unattainable.

Ebenhaeser allows for the discussion of several concepts which appear frequently in this thesis, namely the state, community, and family. Many of the respondents in this thesis treat the state as a monolithic entity, and assign full responsibility to the colonial or apartheid governments for policies or practices which resulted in hardship and loss of land. This fails to take into account the often ambiguous nature of government power and control, and ignores the role of private citizens or groups in the formation and implementation of legislation. For instance, many strategies to control land use and restrict freedom of movement to and residency in urban areas were promoted by white farmers eager to protect their supply of labour. The line between those who created policy and those who benefited from it was very thin, and this is important to recognise even when individual accounts and recollections may imply otherwise.⁸⁸ Just as people talk of the white regime as the ultimate perpetrator, the present democratic government is expected to provide salvation for past injustices and their repercussions. As the case studies in this thesis demonstrate, most people do not problematise the state, and are still waiting for salvation to be delivered.

The concept of a "community" is equally complex and problematic, as it is nearly impossible to conceive of a group of people with communal goals, equal relations, and a mutually agreed upon history. Ebenhaeser is an ideal example of the complex nature of a community, with innumerable fractures along political, class, and historical lines. Every action, every attempt at establishing identity or representation by one segment of the population, is contested by another. Even along the cleavages there is no consistency, and people fall into different groups at various times.

⁸⁸ One organisation which existed in the gray area between the private and political realms was the Afrikaner Broederbond, established in 1918. This covert organisation of Afrikaner men would become extremely influential in policy-making, and pushed for many reforms which were implemented in the apartheid era, such as the use of Afrikaans in schools. For information on Afrikaner history and the Broederbond, see T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

Whenever feasible, therefore, I use the word "community" to refer to the smallest possible common denominator, for instance, the elderly who trace their roots to Nama-speakers and whose families lived at Doornkraal prior to removal. Related terms, such as "collective memory" are likewise employed. This limited usage, however, is frequently impractical, and often there is little option but to speak of the inhabitants of a settlement as a community. In these instances, therefore, the term should not be assumed to imply a uniform group, but a highly complex, fractured and ever-fluctuating body of people.

In this thesis, I have attempted to employ the description "family" only as people themselves used it. This approach, however, has its drawbacks, as a family is often construed as such by those who benefit from its system of order and relations. Dominant voices exist within any family structure, and these voices are the ones I was most likely to hear. This is due to the problems of translation, politics of participation, and the subsuming of the individual voice in the collective narrative. An example of the differing and often invisible views within a family is the oft-cited hope for the return of extended family members after restoration of the original land. This opinion, however, does not take into account the perspective of the absent family members, for whom the land may have lost the significance it holds for those who continue to live on its margins and define themselves in relation to the center. When I use the term "family," therefore, I am aware of the implicit hierarchy and scope for differing opinions conveyed by this term.

A final matter of importance is the role of women in the land restitution process.⁸⁹ I had initially hoped to locate cases in which women played a visible participatory role. This, however, was easier said than done, and was ultimately only successful in the Ndunge case, in which Miriam Ndunge was the dominant voice throughout the

⁸⁹ "Women" like family and community, also is not a homogenous entity, even within a given racial and class bracket. Women's access to land and resources differ depending on their position as single, or married, with or without children, as sister, daughter, or aunt. These categories determine women's status or power in relation to men. Women are not a homogenous group, but it is possible to refer to problems common to the majority of rural South African women.

interviews.⁹⁰ Even so, she is not the official representative of the family in the land claim process. The forum for discussion with the Ntulis was a family setting and the women did speak, but translation was provided by one of the men, and I suspect that I received little of the exact nature of the women's input. My interviews at Ebenhaeser were unique in that they took place in groups of one to three people, and I requested to speak to as many women as possible. The presence of my escort, however, an influential and vocal male member of the community, was always felt, and in many cases the women interviewees would turn to him for verification of facts or for help in remembering details. Women, therefore, end up being visible largely due to their silence in these pages.⁹¹ This, however, is indicative of the land reform process, regardless of how much effort goes into making it gender-sensitive and women-inclusive.

The fact that all my interviews were done through interpretation was one of the inevitable difficulties of this project.⁹² In the case of the Ntulis, much of my information was gathered through written correspondence with Peter Ntuli, who wrote in English, thereby eradicating the language barrier but decreasing the number and variety of viewpoints which could be expressed in a group interview.

No academic project in South Africa is complete without a justification, apologetic, or explanation of terminology used to differentiate between racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. Although two of my case studies involved "Africans" and the third

⁹⁰ My interpreters for the two Ndunge interviews were female and male respectively. Miriam dominated the second extended interview, and my interpreter, who was not related to or associated with the Ndunges, was careful to reproduce her statements verbatim.

⁹¹ As most, if not all, histories of southern Africa have been written from an overwhelmingly andocentric viewpoint, labels which have purportedly been used to explain the lifestyle or means of production of a society -- such as "pastoralist", "hunter / gatherer", "commando", etc., tell us about the lives of less than one half of the population. Although the Khoikhoi, for example, have long been referred to as "pastoralists," Khoikhoi women were not pastoralists, they were workers for husbands or other male kin. For more information on the invisibility and insignificance of women in South African historiography, see Helen Bradford, "Women in the Cape and its Frontier Zones, c. 1800-1870: A Critical Essay on Andocentric Historiography" (Unpublished paper presented at the South African Historical Society Conference, 1995).

⁹² I tried to address this difficulty by using interpreters, whenever possible, to whom I could explain the nature of my project and nuances I was looking for, but inevitably a great deal is lost in translation.

"coloured" people, I prefer the unilateral use of the term "black." I do use "African" as a descriptive term when referring specifically and only to black Africans, i.e., African chiefs, prohibitions on African land-owning, etc. Although the Khoisan were probably the earliest inhabitants of much of South Africa, I primarily use the term "indigenous" to mean all residents of South Africa prior to European arrival. I employ the term "coloured" when necessary in the Ebenhaeser chapter because this is how the people referred to themselves. Furthermore, their identity as coloured people, as opposed to African, is relevant in the context of this case study, as different strategies of removal would have been employed if settlement in question was African. After its appearance on this page, "coloured" will no longer appear in inverted commas.

In terms of diction, I have allowed the material from interviews and correspondences to stand as it was presented. Part of this project was to hear the stories of people who were pushed aside and marginalised by previous systems. It is therefore their voices, without my attempts at sanitation or reconfiguration, which are included in these pages.

Chapter Two

Bones of Our Ancestors

To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their final resting place is hallowed ground, while you wander far from the graves of your ancestors, and, seemingly, without regret. . . . Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe. . . . The very dust under your feet responds more lovingly to our footsteps than to yours, because it is the ashes of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch, for the soil is rich with the life of our kindred.¹

In June 1998, in the remote Eastern Cape village of Mhlwazi, Miriam Ndunge speaks of her family's ancestors, buried fifty kilometers away at Maxongo's Hoek,² land that was once the Ndunges' home: "Our connection to the ancestors is now only in dreams. When we dream we dream only of Maxongo, never of this place."³ This place, Mhlwazi, is the site to which the Ndunges were relocated in 1963 after their farms at Maxongo's Hoek were expropriated by the state. We approach Mhlwazi after a two hour drive-- covering just over thirty kilometers-- on excruciatingly rough roads. The people in the village seem shocked or perhaps mildly amused that the little Volkswagen has made it this far. When it rains these roads are impassable altogether; if the weather changes, we won't be leaving. Mhlwazi is spread along the base of a steep hill. Children move slowly up a track which zig-zags up to another row of huts at the top of the hill, their blue school uniforms in marked contrast to the brown and gold veld grasses. Until 1994 the homes at the top of the hill were, according to the apartheid government, in a separate country from

¹ Speech by Chief Seattle, 9 January 1855, as published in the *Seattle Star*, 29 October 1877. Cited in Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977), 155-156.

² Maxongo's Hoek is a region of the Elliot district of the Eastern Cape. Although the two farms belonging to the Ndunges made up only one part of the larger area of Maxongo's Hoek, the family uses "Maxongo's Hoek" or just "Maxongo" to refer to their farms.

³ Miriam Ndunge, Mhlwazi, 4 June 1998. The interviews with the Ndunges took place on 10 April 1997 in Elliot and on 4 June 1998 in Mhlwazi. Although both interviews were conducted in groups, Miriam Ndunge was the main respondent (through translation) in the 1998 interview, whereas the previous year translation had been provided after general discussion of my questions. From this point onwards I will cite only the speaker and the year of the interview.

those at the bottom. Residents of the former lived in the 'independent state' of the Transkei, while people in Mhlwazi lived in South Africa.⁴ We ford several bouldered streams before driving up a steep embankment to the home of Miriam Ndunge who, although close to seventy years of age, is out gathering wood when we arrive. A child runs to find her, and we all pile back into the car and drive past the scattered homesteads and church to the school, a simple block of modern classrooms out of place on the windy hillside in the open veld. Ten to fifteen members of the Ndunge family congregate in one of the classrooms, and we talk until silenced by the approaching dark. There are children to feed and animals to attend to. We retrace the torturous track to the tarred road, stopping to greet two astonished bakkie drivers: "No cars like yours come in here!" they laugh. We smile wearily through teeth clenched against the dust, and drive on, leaving the Ndunges in Mhlwazi to dream of their homes at Maxongo's Hoek.

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Space, Authority and Belief on the Eastern Frontier

In roughly 1770 the eastern edge of the expanding Cape Colony reached the outlying Xhosa-speaking chiefdoms of the eastern Cape. For the next one hundred years the colonial and African forces vied for supremacy of this region, taking and ceding the land between the Sundays and Kei Rivers. Race relations on the eastern frontier were tense throughout the period, exacerbated by a violent cycle of stock theft and attempted recovery. In 1820, as part of a plan between the British and colonial authorities, 5,000 British immigrants were settled along the Fish River in the eastern Cape. They were intended to exist as a self-sufficient European community in the midst of an otherwise hostile environment; their cultivated settlement was to be a buffer-strip between the two warring sides in the volatile frontier zone. Many of these Britons, however, had little or

⁴ There were two reserves (terminology before 1959) or bantustans (terminology after 1959, also called "homelands") in the eastern Cape for the Xhosa-speaking population. These were the Transkei, declared independent in 1976, and the Ciskei, declared independent in 1981. See chapter one, notes 29 and 39, and below.

no farming experience, and were settled on small plots in a region better suited for pastoralism than grain cultivation. This scheme quickly began to deteriorate as class conflict among the immigrants was rife and tensions with the neighbouring black chiefdoms antagonistic. Many settlers abandoned their farms and moved to Cape Town or smaller frontier towns, while others took over better and more extensive lands.⁵ The remaining British settlers and the pre-established Boer farmers were eager to procure steady labour. After Ordinance 49 of 1828 allowed colonists to employ Africans from across the colonial borders, the farmers began a campaign to compel or entice Africans into servitude. By virtue of the shifting border, movement of people in and out of the region, and interdependent relations between master and servant, black and white lives in the eastern Cape became "inextricably-- and inequitably-- intertwined" in a way unlike the other frontier zones. Clifton Crais describes the social, political, and economic interactions on the eastern frontier:

Ambiguous frontiers produced unambiguous conflict. Increasing numbers of Africans who shared a fundamentally different culture than settlers moved into the colony and onto white farms, initiating an astoundingly complex process of conflict and compromise.⁶

This seemingly inevitable conflict was played out over a century of jockeying for supremacy and autonomy in the struggle for land and human resources. Elements of compromise also emerged from the clash and merger of competing ideologies, effectively illustrated by the spatial layout and relations in and around mission stations. Compromise contained aspects of adaptation and assimilation, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the histories of black people who allied themselves with the colonists in battle and were rewarded for their efforts, at least in the short term, with land.

The missionary presence and efforts to regulate space and order in the eastern Cape demonstrate the interwoven relationship between religion and colonial expansion. The

⁵ See J.B. Peires, "The British and the Cape 1814-1834," in *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, eds. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 472-518.

⁶ Clifton Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992), 125-126.

successes of the missionaries, quite limited in the region until after the mid-1800s, entailed the incorporation and adoption of certain western structures of belief into indigenous lifestyles and ideology. Mission societies, particularly the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society (WMMS), were critical players in the formation and perpetuation of social, political, and spatial relations in frontier society. As the Comaroffs have shown, missionaries were as much agents of cultural change as they were of political transformation,⁷ and the effects on African culture and lifestyle were readily apparent in the eastern Cape. Control over living conditions and spatial arrangement of black settlements was seen as critical to the maintenance of order, and missionaries "demanded of Africans a reorientation of thought and behavior which can only be called revolutionary."⁸ Mission stations, however, were not uniformly appreciated by authorities or white settlers on the frontier, and continued to play an ambiguous role in both black and white society.

Mission ideology encouraged cultivation and reorganised settlements into the 'civilised' patterns which were considered to be desirable characteristics of western society. Crais describes the missionaries' response upon seeing the "precise rectilinear plots and buildings" of the Kat River settlement: "Missionaries and their supporters . . . rejoiced at the community of well-built cottages with prosperous fields supporting schools, churches, and even an active Temperance Society."⁹ Black mission residents were not only emancipated from their 'savage' beliefs, but were also taught European, and therefore 'civilised,' ways of existence, of organising their fields, communities, churches and schools. Yet many whites did not view mission stations in such a favorable light, as residency on the stations provided an alternative to labour on white farms, and labour was a desperately needed resource in the frontier economy. Settlers, therefore, were often

⁷ See Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).

⁸ Richard Elphick, "Africans and the Christian Campaign in Southern Africa," in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, eds. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 282. Ironically, those mission stations which were established beyond the colonial border relied on African chiefs for gifts of land and freedom to operate. African leaders, who initially permitted and even invited the missionaries, gave land as a gift to these interlopers who would soon work to fundamentally alter black systems of land use.

⁹ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, 82.

hostile towards the missionaries in their midst, and believed that life on the mission stations contributed to the great flaws of "thievishness" and "idleness" within the African character. The stations themselves were felt to contribute "to an immoral economy which made it impossible for the African to ever learn a respect for private property and hard work for white employers."¹⁰ The conflict over the role and effect of missions in nineteenth century frontier society illustrates the important relationship between spatial relations and belief and ideology. Furthermore, the controversial and ambiguous position of missions shows how space and belief can be reinterpreted to achieve various ends. For their supporters, including some colonial authorities, missions played a beneficial 'civilising' role and introduced elements of stability into an otherwise tumultuous region. For white settlers eager for land and labour, however, they were a threat to the establishment and maintenance of dominion over the local population and natural resources. These two groups interpreted the effects of the stations accordingly: in the eyes of the former the stations instilled important western values, whereas for the latter they were pockets of licentiousness and vagrancy.

As the example of mission ideology and accompanying white reaction shows, belief and space were critical and related components to the expansion of colony authority. The term "Kafir," used to designate black people on the frontier, is thought to have originally meant "unbeliever." According to early missionary reports, the Xhosa-speaking people of the eastern Cape had no religion except superstitious belief.¹¹ Evangelicalism went hand in hand with the desire for land in the expansionist drive of the colonists. Reverend John Philip of the LMS reported that the Christian mission was good not only for the "natives," among whom it spread the "seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness," but also for "extending British interests, British influence, and British empire."¹² In theory, the spread of Christianity would peacefully extend 'civilisation' across Southern Africa. The British settlers and authorities, however, preferred to pave the way for

¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹¹ David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 73, 75.

¹² John Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, 2 vols. (London: James Duncan, 1828; reprint, New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 1: ix-x.

conversion through the destruction of 'native' independence.¹³ Either way, colonial authority and expansion was inextricably linked to and driven by evangelicalism and conversion.

Missionaries and settlers were not two different colonial forces unleashed upon Southern Africa in the same period. Rather, they were indissoluble and interdependent parts of one whole, acting and reacting upon both the indigenous population and colonial society.¹⁴ This does not imply, however, that the indigenous people were passive role players whose victimisation provided a backdrop for the spread of colonial authority. On the contrary, as the multi-faceted and pervasive black resistance in the eastern Cape demonstrates, the 'colonised' subverted and re-appropriated symbols and teachings of the missionaries and used colonial weapons, education, and authority to their own advantage. Conversion to Christianity did not, therefore, necessarily entail adherence to the colonial social order or political agenda. As Crais points out, allegiances on the frontier remained highly complex and fluid in the nineteenth century:

many of the inhabitants [of the eastern Cape] refused overt struggle against dispossession and proletarianisation and remained faithful to the state, others fought the British with a gun in one hand and a bible in the other.¹⁵

There was no single static or closed response to colonial advancement and control. In the case of religion, many Africans converted to Christianity, but many more fused portions of Christianity with elements of their own belief systems, creating a syncretic worldview which combined the most relevant aspects of both the message of the missionaries and their own traditions. Communication with the ancestors, through ritual and sacrifice, and belief in their continuing authority in the lives of their descendants could, did, and frequently still does go hand in hand with membership in a church congregation.¹⁶ Similarly, the local population amalgamated appealing or seemingly useful aspects of the ordering of space as dictated by European standards of civilisation and disregarded the

¹³ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 97.

¹⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 19.

¹⁵ Crais, *Making of the Colonial Order*, 83.

¹⁶ For information on the parallel practices of African traditional religion and Christianity, see note 110 below.

rest. Schools were built in classroom blocks while huts in rural settlements lay in the traditional homestead or *umzi* pattern. In terms of farming, fields were marked off and cultivated in the European fashion if a crop proved successful, yet, in accordance with a Xhosa worldview, cattle remained the primary asset and indicator of a man's wealth.¹⁷

Nineteenth century eastern frontier society was unique in its synthesis of a number of colonial and African institutions and systems. This process saw the creation of spaces which were European-influenced but remained African in character and design, such as occurred through the establishment of black peasant farmers on freehold farms.¹⁸ The residency of Christian African families on freehold productive land represented a success story for the evangelical aspirations of colonial ideology. Adoption of western farming innovations, religion, dress, and land use implied acceptance of western authority and supremacy. In order to encourage such acceptance, Africans on the frontier were often rewarded for allegiance to the colony with land. Some of these beneficiaries became successful small-scale producers and model, if still third-class, participants in colonial society. These anomalous successes, however, became more difficult for whites to accept as their demand for labour increased. In the twentieth century, the isolated cases of successful black peasants were a threat to the apartheid system of racial hierarchy, residential purity, and white domination in the region. The history of the Mfengu people of the eastern Cape shows the complexities of these processes of assimilation, allegiance, and acceptance, as well as the mark these processes left on the layout of the rural landscape.

¹⁷ On the importance of cattle in Nguni society, see Adam Kuper, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Thomas N. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence and Conventional Explanations of Southern Bantu Settlement Patterns," *Africa* 56, no. 3 (1986), 280-298.

¹⁸ These freehold areas, initially inhabited by extended families, became populated by large groups of people forced off white-owned land in the mid-twentieth century as the incidence of forced removals and farm evictions increased.

The Mfengu and Land Acquisition¹⁹

Long-standing historical orthodoxy says that the Mfengu people entered the eastern Cape region as refugees fleeing the upheaval of the *mfecane* in the first part of the nineteenth century²⁰ and were absorbed into the Gcaleka territory of Chief Hintsa.²¹ This historiography describes the Mfengu as living in poverty and servility beneath the Gcaleka, forced into clientage as second-class members of Xhosa society. Accordingly, following the devastating Sixth Frontier War in 1835, British forces "rescued" 17,000 Mfengu and led them across the Kei River into colonial territory, where they were the "first black indigenous inhabitants of South Africa to be declared British subjects."²²

Recently, some historians have put forth a different picture, attributing the notion of the Mfengu in forced servitude to a creation of white missionaries and magistrates of the period to justify the incorporation of a diverse group of Africans into the colonial economy as involuntary labourers.²³ Some authors, such as Julian Cobbing, have promoted a revisionist history of the *mfecane*, proposing that the destruction and

¹⁹ The term "Mfengu," which replaced the anglicised "Fingo," gained widespread use in the 1960s. "Mfengu" is thought to be derived from the Xhosa verb "ukumfenguza," meaning "to wander in destitution," which was the supposed social position of the Mfengu. See Alan Webster, "An Examination of the 'Fingo Emancipation' of 1835" (Unpublished paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, May 1990), 6.

²⁰ The history and origins of the *mfecane* (or *difaqane* in Sotho-Tswana) have come under intense debate. What is indisputable, however, is that the early 1800s were a period of intense destruction and warfare which saw the ascendancy of the Zulu state and sent shock waves and cycles of displacement reverberating through much of the Southern African interior. See Carolyn Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).

²¹ The Gcaleka were the paramount branch of the Xhosa, controlling the area to the east of the Kei River. The lands across the Kei River were collectively called the "Trans-Kei" in the nineteenth century, although colonial officials viewed the territories as "discrete nodes of power" controlled by different paramount chiefs. These areas would have been individually referred to by name, for instance, "Pondoland," "Gcalekaland," "Thembuland," etc. In the early twentieth century these areas were called the Transkeian Territories, and this reserve became the Transkei homeland or bantustan in 1959, and gained 'independence' in 1976. See William Beinart and Colin Bundy, "Introduction: 'Away in the Locations'," in *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930*, eds. William Beinart and Colin Bundy (London: James Currey, 1987), 5.

²² Noel Mostert, *Frontiers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 720. Being British subjects did not mean that they enjoyed rights of citizenship.

²³ An important source of the "mythical history" of the Mfengu, as described by the revisionist historians, is the 1912 book by Whiteside and Ayliff, *History of the Abambo, generally known as "Fingos"* (Butterworth, 1912; repr. Cape Town, 1962). This book, according to Webster, was written entirely by Whiteside and is "full of contradictions, exaggeration and myth . . . written by an amateur . . . with an infusion of Victorian conviction and a good dollop of imagination." This work has been used as the basis of much subsequent Mfengu history, perpetrating the impression of harsh treatment and subsequent escape from the Gcaleka. See Webster, "An Examination of the Fingo Emancipation," 5.

dislocation were not caused primarily by inter-tribal conflict and Shaka's imperialism, but occurred in reaction to European penetration and pressures in the region.²⁴ By this argument, the people who came to be known as the Mfengu were not a homogenous population fleeing the rising Zulu state, but an ethnically diverse group of indigenes co-opted into servitude by the Europeans. Cobbing describes the arrival of the Mfengu into the colony after the 1834-35 war (or, in his terms, a colonial "land and labour expedition") as follows:

[Governor] D'Urban and his missionaries brought out 17,000 [people from the Trans-Kei], eighty-five percent of whom were women and children. They . . . were hypocritically described as full of gratitude for being rescued from the 'bondage' of their own rulers, and, for further disguise, supplied with a fictitious past. These were the Fingos, or Mfengu . . . who at last solved the labour supply shortage on a more permanent basis.²⁵

Alan Webster agrees that the account of the Mfengu being "invited" into the colony is largely mythical, and says it was a ruse to cover-up "illegal labour practices being carried out by the colonists."²⁶ Although their exact history before 1835 remains indiscernible, we can concur that "Mfengu" is a "catch-all" term for people from a variety of Xhosa-speaking ethnic groups,²⁷ who "tended to be identified as much by their experience after the *Mfecane* as by their origins."²⁸ Their experiences following their arrival in the colony illustrate the complex and fluid ways in which colonists and colonised interacted in the eastern frontier zone.

Large groups of Mfengu were settled in the mid-1800s on "worse than useless" land in proximity to frontier towns, notably Peddie, Grahamstown, Fort Beaufort and

²⁴ See Julian Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988), 487-519.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 513-514. According to Cobbing, the story of the Mfengu originating as refugees from Natal was part of the "fictitious past" created by the British. Rather, he says, it is likely that most of the 17,000 newcomers in the colony were Gcaleka and Rharhabe subjects of the Trans-Kei.

²⁶ Webster, "An Examination of the Fingo Emancipation", 1.

²⁷ Richard Bouch, "The Mfengu Revisited: The 19th Century Experience of one Mfengu Community through the Eyes of Historians and Contemporaries" *Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 17, Collected Seminar Papers, no. 42 (University of London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1992), 83.

²⁸ William Beinart, "Conflict in Qumbu: Rural Consciousness, Ethnicity and Violence in the Colonial Transkei," in *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930*, eds. William Beinart and Colin Bundy (London: James Currey, 1987), 111.

Queenstown.²⁹ Tensions on the frontier between white settlers and Xhosa-speaking groups across the Kei River continually erupted in cycles of violent attacks and recriminations, and the Mfengu settlements were used as a "barrier between the Colony and the barbarous and hostile tribes beyond [the] border."³⁰ The following statement, although made in the 1880s by a senior official of the Natives Affairs Department, aptly describes the earlier motivation for the positioning of the Mfengu:

[L]oyal natives . . . are in a position much more effectively to protect themselves from thefts than Europeans. . . . The natives could in case of need easily rally at some fixed point and defend themselves, and in the case of the worst could remove their families and stock, losing only their huts . . . but with the Europeans the matter would be very different.³¹

As the colonial administration had hoped, the Mfengu sided with the colonial forces in the three frontier wars after 1835. The groups involved in this collaboration, however, "were at no point static," and "alliances and cleavages shifted both in response to patterns of state intervention and to the changing social and economic position of rural communities."³² For their contribution to the war effort, groups or families were often awarded tracts of land in captured territory or along the frontier zone, further fortifying the buffer strip between the white settlements and the Trans-Kei.³³ Mfengu identity began to be distinguished by their status as recipients of colonial land, and Bouch goes so far as to say that there was no significant development of a group or ethnic consciousness amongst the Mfengu "beyond the well-known point that they had a history of collaboration with the colonial power during frontier conflicts, and that they constituted a group of people who gained access to increasingly scarce land as the fruit of their collaboration."³⁴

²⁹ Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1979; reprint Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 33. For a critique of Bundy, see Jack Lewis, "The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1984), 1-24.

³⁰ Charles Brownlee of the Natives Affairs Department as cited in Beinart, "Conflict in Qumbu," 110.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

³² *Ibid.*, 109.

³³ For accounts of land granted to Mfengu following successful military campaigns, see, among others, Bouch, "Mfengu Revisited," 82, 87; Webster, "An Examination of Fingo Emancipation," 8; Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1171; Bundy, *Rise and Fall*, 34.

³⁴ Bouch, "Mfengu Revisited," 87.

The stereotype of the Mfengu as land holders was given further credence by their reputation as relatively prosperous cultivators. As a group, the Mfengu proved to be readily adaptable to missionary education, conversion to Christianity, and western agricultural innovations. Although the first arrivals in the colony worked as labourers on white farms, the Mfengu were soon producing "on their own behalf . . . not only selling tobacco, firewood, cattle and milk, but . . . raising grain in increasing quantities, and disposing of the surplus for cash or stock."³⁵ Explanations of the independence and affluence of the Mfengu in comparison to other groups are varied, and include their early association with missionaries and the undermining of their "traditional ways" by the disruption of the *mfecane*, resulting in their amenability to the adoption of "western ideas" and agricultural methods.³⁶ The lack of a unified leadership structure following their settlement in the colony may also have allowed for an intense focus on individual accumulation and wealth, traits which would have been frowned upon within communally-oriented chiefdoms. Furthermore, unlike other Xhosa-speaking groups in which the responsibility of agricultural work fell largely upon the women, Mfengu men were "active in tilling and other agricultural duties," freeing more work-hours for cultivation.³⁷ Another theory holds that the Mfengu acquired wagons, plows, and oxen in order to diversify their economic base in response to both the decimation of cattle herds caused by lung-sickness in 1853-55 and to colonial attempts to rearrange household and village patterns.³⁸ The Xhosa cattle-killing in 1856-57 also brought the Mfengu

³⁵ Bundy, *Rise and Fall*, 34.

³⁶ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Affairs* (London: Longman, 1971), 167. The explanation of the loss of tradition as a result of the destructive nature of the *mfecane* clearly does not work if we accept the views of Cobbing and Webster, who theorise that the colonial Mfengu were not a subservient refugee group but captured labourers. However, even if they did not enter into the colony as escapees from Gcaleka mistreatment, their traditional structures would have been broken down by the removal from their communities and the severing of ties with their past and their ancestral land.

³⁷ Ibid. In Xhosa-speaking societies, the homestead operated as a "work unit," with the men caring for the livestock, clearing the land, and building frames for the structures. The women did the agriculture labour of planting, tilling and harvesting and household and child-rearing duties. On gender divisions of labour in Xhosa society, see Anne Kelk Mager, "Changing Constructions of Power and Gender Relations in the Ciskei, 1945-1968" (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop, 1994), and Jack Lewis, "Class and Gender in Pre-capitalist Societies: A Consideration of the 1848 census of the Xhosa," *Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 17 (University of London: Institute for Commonwealth Studies, 1992), 61-75.

³⁸ Governor George Grey's threat to move Mfengu families onto small household plots would have interfered with "the economy of the homestead," according to Bouch, and thus the Mfengu diversified in

prosperity, as few Mfengu heeded the prophecy to kill their cattle and destroy their crops.³⁹ Rather, they purchased cattle and grain at low prices from their neighbours during the rush of selling, and resold them at higher prices to white traders or back to the believers after the prophecies failed to come true.⁴⁰ Large amounts of cash entered the Mfengu economy in the years immediately following the cattle-killing, allowing for the purchase of agricultural implements and manufactured goods.⁴¹ In the eyes of the whites, the Mfengu were fast becoming the African elite, privately owning land, participating in the cash economy, and attending church and school. This elite group was encouraged and rewarded, if only in the short term, with land, the ultimate prize in the colonial political economy.

In 1880 a rebellion broke out in the Tsolo, Qumbu, Engcobo and Umtata districts of the Trans-Kei. The rebellion was largely in reaction to the imposition of hut taxes and annexation of the territories, and was spurred by the 'Gun War' revolt in neighbouring Basutoland. Historian Christopher Saunders says that the rebellious groups had initially accepted white rule in the face of superior firepower or as means of securing "protection" against hostile neighbors, but when "the full meaning of what white rule entailed became clear . . . the decision was taken to use force to throw off the alien yoke."⁴² The rebels were defeated by March 1881 after 'loyal' Africans, including the Mfengu, took up arms in support of the colonial forces. Following precedent, collaborators were granted land confiscated from the rebels. The Ndunges of Elliot say that their forefathers, Jacob and

reaction to these threats. Bouch, "Mfengu Revisited," 82. Also see Lewis, "A Critique and Reassessment."

³⁹ The Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856-57 came in response to the prophecy of a young girl, Nongqawuse. According to Jeff Peires, hundreds of thousands cattle were killed in the Trans-Kei territories and eastern Cape and tens of thousands of people starved to death or fled into the colony in search of food or work. On the Xhosa cattle-killing, see the what has been considered the comprehensive work on the subject, J.B. Peires, *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-killing Movement of 1856-57* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989). For critiques of Peires, see Clifton Crais, "Peires and the Past," *South African Historical Journal* 25 (1991), 236-40, and Jeff Guy, "A Landmark, Not a Breakthrough," *South African Historical Journal* 25 (1991), 227-43. Also see Bonnie B. Keller, "Millenarianism and Resistance: The Xhosa Cattle Killing," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 13 (1978), 95-111; and Jack Lewis, "Materialism and Idealism in the Historiography of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement, 1856-1857," *South African Historical Journal* 25 (1991), 244-68.

⁴⁰ Richard Moyer, "A History of the Mfengu of the Eastern Cape 1815-1865" (Ph.D. Thesis, London University, 1976), 410.

⁴¹ Bouch, "Mfengu Revisited," 82.

⁴² C.C. Saunders, "The Transkeian Rebellion of 1880-81: A Case-Study of Transkeian Resistance to White Control," *South African Historical Journal*, no. 8 (November 1976), 33.

Willem Ndunge, received land in the early 1880s as "thanks to the Mfengu" for their help in the war. They received title deeds to the farms Mfanta's Kloof and Nqumeni's Kloof, in the Maxongo's Hoek area of the Elliot district, in 1887 and 1888 respectively.⁴³ The Ndunges kept livestock and cultivated the land, establishing themselves as independent producers and trading their surplus harvest in Elliot.

Although not a uniform or indisputable development, pockets of the Mfengu peasantry prospered, with some out-producing their European counterparts by the 1870s. Bundy explains the success of the African peasantry in the face of limited land, capital, and access to white-controlled markets:

Apart from his specialized knowledge of local conditions and methods, the peasant tended to cultivate more intensively *because of the growing scarcity of land*. His lower consumption costs and his use of pre-capitalist forms of labour meant that production of a modest surplus . . . enabled him to participate in the exchange economy largely on the terms of his own choosing and without the surrender of his land, security, or cultural identity.⁴⁴

Bundy posits that land was used effectively by small-scale producers *because* it was contested. Access to land became critical to people's identity, especially if they were successful producers in an often contentious and hostile environment. Some authorities and settlers accepted thriving Mfengu agriculturists as independent participants in the colonial order. These African peasants represented the 'civilised natives,' and their 'advancement' could be heralded as a success story of the schools and missions.

⁴³ Major Gushelo and Miriam Ndunge, 4 June 1998. It is very likely, however, that the Ndunge families lived on this land prior to the 1880s but only received official title and recognition of their claim following the Transkei Rebellion. Richard Moyer explains that this was a common practice of black agriculturists within the colony: "Mfengu settled on land which had no apparent claimants and through exploiting [sic] it hoped to acquire formal acceptance of their occupancy." Moyer, "A History of the Mfengu," 352. I will refer to the 1880 dates as the start of the Ndunge's tenancy for lack of a more accurate estimate. These dates are used by the Restitution Commission to mark the start of the Ndunge period of ownership.

⁴⁴ Bundy, *Rise and Fall*, 112-113, my emphasis. Bundy's analysis illustrates how land's scarcity made it more significant, and compelled those who had access to it use it more efficiently. As established in chapter one, the sacred -- here in the form of increasingly scarce land -- becomes more so when it is contested. In regard to Mfengu prosperity, Bouch challenges Bundy by saying that the success of the Mfengu from the 1850s onwards was largely exaggerated by local officials who failed to recognise the highly stratified nature of the Mfengu and the over-crowded conditions on their lands. See Bouch, "Mfengu Revisited," 84-85. There is certainly evidence to suggest, however, that a segment of the Mfengu population was highly successful within eastern Cape society. Bundy describes a "virtual 'explosion' of peasant activity in the 1870s," which particularly affected Africans in the Trans-Kei areas of the Cape. Trade of manufactured goods increased dramatically, as did sheep farming, and wool became the primary cash crop of the region. See Bundy, *Rise and Fall*, chapter 3.

Success, however, can easily prove to be a threat to those on a higher social level, as is shown by Governor Grey's concern over the effects of affluence upon the Mfengu, whom he found "haughty and insolent . . . a source of danger rather than strength to us."⁴⁵ Affluence was seen as insolence; white farmers in areas with large populations of successful Mfengu did not respond well to the competition posed. Neither these farmers nor white industrialists took kindly to the decrease in low-cost labour caused by the self-sufficiency of black farmers who were no longer forced to seek employment. In fact, the white productive sector generally assumed that Africans "had no right to continue as self-sufficient and independent farmers if this conflicted with white interests."⁴⁶ The Mfengu farmers had, in many ways, conformed to the controlled and linear spatial lay-out and adoption of western values as prescribed by the colonial religious and political order. There was still no room, however, for successful black farmers, even as small-scale producers, in the white landscape of South Africa. The 'threat' posed by rural black prosperity would be quelled in the twentieth century by increasingly harsh legislative measures restricting black land holding and land access. Such laws were designed to relegate blacks permanently to a position of servility within the system of white order and control. This could best be done through the manipulation, regulation, and re-configuration of space.

Land and Union

The main support base for the union government of 1910 lay in mining and industry, and this was reflected by policies geared towards the creation of a steady and low-cost labour supply. Farmers also carried substantial political weight, and the Union government was careful to cater to their needs. These white farmers were becoming increasingly concerned over access to land and the perceived threat of the burgeoning African peasantry to their potential rural labour supply. The government responded to the combined pressures from agriculture and industry with one of the most important pieces

⁴⁵ Cited in Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

of pre-nationalist legislation, the Natives Land Act of 1913. This law would permanently alter the distribution of power and wealth in South Africa.⁴⁷

The Act greatly limited the area available for African occupation and outlawed forms of cash or crop tenancy, thereby drastically decreasing the number of small-scale independent black producers. White commercial farmers benefited, as they were provided with an easily exploitable labour pool and land that had previously been occupied by Africans. At the same time, complete proletarianisation of the rural black population was avoided through the allocation of land strictly for African use in the reserves.⁴⁸ There was, however, too little land in the reserves for the establishment of a successful peasantry, and many African men left the rural areas in search of work. This system assured mine and industry bosses of an easily substituted workforce of single men who did not require family housing. Union organisation or strike action was preventable, as the instigators could be sent 'home' to the reserves and replacements recruited. The 1913 Act, therefore, had long-term consequences not only on land holding patterns and accompanying power relationships, but also on labour patterns and the economic development of the country. Platzky and Walker write, "[T]he Land Act of 1913 boosted the system of migrant labour on which the industrial power of white South Africa was being built."⁴⁹ Furthermore, it laid the foundation for the apartheid policies of racial separation and control which were to steer the course of the nation for the remainder of the century.

⁴⁷ Laurine Platzky and Cheryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 83. Just prior to the enactment of the Act, the districts of Elliot and Maclear were excised from Thembuland, thereby excluding them from the areas available for African land-holding. The *Maclear and Elliot Districts Further Provision Act*, Act 12 of 1913 stated that the two districts were "to cease to be subject to special laws of the Transkeian Native Territories." This was presumably enacted because of the high agricultural quality of the land and the relatively large percentage of white settlers in the areas, and indicates the close relation between farmers' needs and policy formulation.

⁴⁸ The majority of the African areas were in the Cape and Natal, where the largest reserves already existed, and excluded many areas already owned or occupied by Africans. Black tenure of these excluded tracts of land would be repeatedly challenged in the coming seventy-five years, with nearly all land removed from black hands by the late 1980s. Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, SPP reports, vol. 1 (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, 1983), 36.

⁴⁹ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 84.

The 1913 Act stipulated that roughly 8% of the land would be reserved for African use, but the amount of these "scheduled areas" was to increase following the identification of additional appropriate land. The Beaumont Commission was established to recommend additional land, and held hearings throughout the country to judge reactions to the Act. The minutes and accounts of these hearings provide valuable testimony to black protest against the restrictive land measures. The South African Native National Congress (SANNC; later the African National Congress, or ANC), formed in 1912, made opposition to the 1913 Act one of its first campaigns, calling attention to both the social and economic consequences of dispossession. A representative of the Transvaal branch of the Congress said that the Land Act "causes our people to be derelict and helpless," and a chief explained how children would be forced to work if it was no longer possible to make a living off the land.⁵⁰ People would have to choose, said one respondent before the commission, between homelessness and virtually enforced servitude at pitiable wages.⁵¹ Reverend John L. Dube, president of the South African Native National Congress, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, stating, "It is evident that the aim of this law is to compel service by taking away the means of independence and self-improvement" of Africans.⁵² As Dube predicted, the Land Act was highly effective in this regard, hastening proletarianisation as people who had previously maintained limited access to land became wage labourers or were evicted from farms and compelled to move to the reserves. Dispossession was particularly devastating in its removal of people's independence and self-integrity, and the Act was criticised for assailing "the sacred right of every man to choose for himself in what manner he should earn his daily bread, and use the mental and physical attributes God has endowed him with."⁵³

⁵⁰ Quoted in Colin Bundy, "Land, Law and Power: Forced Removals in Historical Context," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6-7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3. Reverend Mtinkulu said: "When the white man threatens to remove us from off his farm we have nowhere to run to; we would be obliged to stay and work for him at 2s 6d a month as we have to accept his conditions."

⁵² Petition to the Prime Minister, from the Rev. John L. Dube, President, South African Native National Congress, February 14, 1914 (published in *The Cape Argus*). From Sheridan Johns III, *Protest and Hope, 1882-1934*, vol. 1 of 4 volumes, *From Protest to Challenge*, eds. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), document 25, 85.

⁵³ "The Squatters' Bill," article in *Imvo Zabantsundu*, March 19, 1912. From Johns, *Protest and Hope*, document 24, 82.

Many people who came before the Beaumont Commission spoke of the injustice of removal from land which had belonged to them for generations. Some referred specifically to the hardships caused by the severing of ties to the resting places of their ancestors. In 1914 the South African Native National Congress sent a petition to King George V, asking him to intervene against the implementation of the Land Act and related legislation: "[the acts] interfere with the vested rights of the natives exercised for generations, on land once theirs, and on which lie buried their ancestors."⁵⁴ The significance and authority of the ancestors, addressed in depth later in this chapter, was closely linked to the places where they were buried. Separation from these places brought substantial losses in the lives of the descendants, destroying not only people's livelihoods and independence, but also their ties to their extended families, living and dead.

Access to land, or lack thereof, was a critical element in the shaping of labour and power relations in the South African countryside. For this reason, the initial recommendations of the Beaumont Commission to "release" additional land for African occupation engendered massive controversy within the white community. Africans were expected to be agriculturists, but on white terms, not as independent commercial or subsistence farmers. A senator's remarks clarify this opinion:

The object of the Government should be, as far as possible, to force the natives, of course peacefully, into agriculture. The great object therefore should be to get him to work for the white men on the farms at a wage.⁵⁵

The interests of the white farmers and their demands for labour were closely linked to the formulation of government policy. The white farming sector's negative reaction to the proposed increase of African land delayed the implementation of the recommendations. Nor did the commission's suggestions find favour with the South African Native National Congress, which was angered over the relatively small portion of land

⁵⁴ Petition to King George V, from the South African Native National Congress, July 20, 1914 (Published in *The Cape Argus*). From Johns, *Protest and Hope*, document 35, 129.

⁵⁵ Senator the Honourable G.G. Munnik as quoted in Bundy, "Land, Law and Power," 3.

designated for release. The Congress found that "most of the recommended areas were inhospitable to human habitation or agriculture."⁵⁶ The organisation charged that,

the report . . . indicated the determination of the Union government and the white population to relegate the Africans permanently to second-class citizenship in every aspect of their existence.⁵⁷

These conflicting responses to the Beaumont Commission's proposals illustrate land's significance and the ferocity which would continue to characterise the struggle over it.⁵⁸

Land was central to people's identity and worldview, as well as to their material independence and dignity. People would continue to conceive of themselves as belonging to one place, regardless of physical access to that site, and would struggle to reclaim the center of their existence even after dispossession.

The 1936 Native Trust and Land Act brought the total amount of land available for black use to just under 13% of the overall territory of South Africa.⁵⁹ Some of these areas had been slated for black use in the 1910s and had been allowed to stand as *de facto* African settlements in the interim. This did not, however, hold true for all such areas of black freehold or communal tenure, and "extensive areas of African freehold land and of unsurveyed state land which has long been regarded as African areas were left out of the schedule" of land for black use.⁶⁰ Elaine Unterhalter explains that many of these areas had been acquired before 1913 as part of a concerted move by groups or individuals "to buy back from White settlers the land the Africans had lost through conquest. Land acquired in this way was generally of high quality in the centre of white farming communities," and therefore these sites became the "focus of white farmers'

⁵⁶ Johns, *Protest and Hope*, 64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Due to the controversy, the commission's proposals were referred to local land committees for review in 1917-18. These committees greatly scaled back the total area for African land occupation. In the Orange Free State, for instance, the Local Land Committee recommended the release of 79,000 additional morgen compared to the Beaumont Commission's proposal of 148,000 morgen. The conflict over the extent and location of areas for release was such that the listing of additional land for African occupation was delayed until 1936. Johns, *Protest and Hope*, 64.

⁵⁹ SPP, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, vol. 1, 37. Not all earmarked land could be acquired at one time due to the opposition of white farmers. Such land was scheduled to be purchased at a later date. The SANT/SADT (see chapter one, note 34), however, was slow in acquiring the rest of the quota land, and by 1974 20% of the area stipulated for release still had not been purchased.

⁶⁰ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 84-85.

antagonism."⁶¹ By the early 1950s these sites were commonly referred to as "black spots" in an otherwise 'white' landscape and were designated for removal, thereby satisfying the white farming communities which had long pushed for the relocation of the black settlements in their midst.

The presence of black-owned land in white rural areas caused consternation among the white voters and farming community for a number of reasons. On the one hand, black use of viable land ruled out white ownership of and profit from a valuable resource. The rapid urban and industrial growth of South Africa in the early part of the century resulted in expanded markets which encouraged the development of large-scale commercial farming. White farmers were eager to take over black-held land for their own use. Second, when black-owned farms were successful, their owners and inhabitants did not provide labour for the white farming community, who continued to bemoan labour shortages. Third, the presence of a black community or family in an otherwise white area gave rise to a number of sentiments related to the desire for 'purity' through the separation of the races. Stereotypes regarding black settlements fueled these negative suppositions, as is apparent in an article from the *Natal Agricultural Union* of 1974 which said that "[o]rdinary 'border farmer' problems" (referring to white farms bordering on reserve areas) brought by proximity to black settlements included stray cattle, dogs, theft of grazing, minor thefts, soil erosion, stock theft, vindictiveness, and stock poisoning.⁶² On both theoretical and practical levels, the black presence marred the purity of white space and threatened the sanctity of white property. In the larger picture, independent black areas jeopardised the doctrine of white domination and supremacy, and had the potential to undermine the labour, social, and spatial policies which formed the premise of the apartheid system.

⁶¹ Elaine Unterhalter, *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund Publications, 1987), 105. One such concentrated effort by Africans to buy land was led by Pixley ka Isaka Seme, one of the founders of the ANC, between 1905 and 1913. He established the Native Farmers' Association, a company with the specific purpose of acquiring land for sale or lease to Africans. Three of the farms the association obtained in the Transvaal were to become black spots under apartheid legislation. See Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 74-75.

⁶² Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 63-64.

Although the National Party had hoped to 'clear up' areas of black land-holding as soon as possible after coming to power in 1948, this was prohibited by the powerful agricultural lobby's resistance to such measures. The controversial aspect of the proposal was the increase of land for legal use by Africans from 8% to 13%. White farmers objected to selling land for the resettlement of evicted black-spot residents, even though the clearance of black spots would release land in prime areas for white use. As the controversy illustrates, conflict over land was deeply rooted in racial ideology. The chairman of a Natal farmers' association made this point clear:

The Native is not a farmer and will never be a farmer. He would ruin every bit of land that was placed at his disposal, and it was the height of folly to hand over the district to Natives.⁶³

White farmers did not begin to sell land to the SADT until the 1960s, when the increased mechanisation of agriculture resulted in a labour surplus on many commercial farms. Farmers began to evict their 'surplus' or 'unproductive' employees, and recognised the need for resettlement locations in rural areas. Furthermore, the improved stability of agriculture made the white farming community less hostile to the reservation of agricultural land for blacks. Farmers sold off poor-quality agricultural land abutting the bantustans. These remote areas became the dumping grounds for the evicted farm workers and black spot inhabitants, and the white farmers acquired the previously black-owned land "at knock-down prices."⁶⁴ Black spot removal became a priority in the 1960s, as the continued existence of African-owned farms in white areas detracted from the argument, central to apartheid discourse, that the bantustans "were the only true and traditional homelands of the African population."⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁴ Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 105. The consolidation of the bantustans and clearance of black spots was enacted by the state but closely linked to the demands of the white farming community.

⁶⁵ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 115. The restructuring of bantustan policy began in this period. The first step towards creating "independent ethnic enclaves" for various "tribal" groups came with the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 which allowed for the establishment of regional and tribal authorities with limited governmental powers in the reserves. In 1959 the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act was passed and the policy of separate development began in earnest.

The Ndunges: Maxongo's Hoek

In 1936 there were sixty-three black-owned farms in the eastern Cape which fell outside the areas allocated for black use by the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts. These farms were designated for expropriation, and their inhabitants were to be removed and relocated to the reserves or adjacent areas. The sixty-three farms included eight farms in the Elliot district, two of which, Mfanta's Kloof and Nqumeni's Kloof in the Maxongo's Hoek area, had been owned by the Ndunge family since the late 1880s.⁶⁶

In 1961 the Ndunges were notified of their impending removal.⁶⁷ The "Notice of Expropriation," the standard method of alerting residents to the planned removal, read as follows:

Kindly take notice that the following immovable property together with all improvements thereon and all rights to minerals attaching thereto . . . in respect of which you are the registered owner(s), are hereby expropriated . . . on behalf of the Republic of South Africa.⁶⁸

The removals, to be carried out by the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, would supposedly be preceded by negotiations with community leaders in order to procure agreement on the terms of the relocation. Negotiated cooperation would preclude the use of force, claimed the Minister of Bantu Administration in 1969: "We get their co-operation in all cases voluntarily. As a matter of fact sometimes it is necessary to do quite a lot of persuasion, but we get them [sic] anyway."⁶⁹ In the case of the Ndunges, however, there was no negotiation regarding the removal, and the early attempts at "persuasion" occurred even before the family received official notice of the scheduled expropriation. Miriam Ndunge remembers:

⁶⁶ Information taken from Parliamentary Assembly Debates, 7th February 1969. Other reports list 11 black-owned farms in Elliot in 1914, and 7 in 1925. The Department of Land Affairs report claims there were only 5 black spots in the Elliot district, but this is clearly contradicted by the Assembly Debates. Title deeds show that Jacob and Willem Ndunge owned the two farms since 1887 and 1888 respectively, but it is very likely that their families had been resident on this land previously. See note 43 above.

⁶⁷ Willem and Jacob Ndunge both died around the turn of the century and were buried on their respective farms. Their grandchildren were the land owners by the 1960s, although the title deeds remained in the names of the patriarchs.

⁶⁸ SPP, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, vol. 1, 99.

⁶⁹ Cited in SPP, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, vol. 1, 1. Quoting Mr. M. C. Botha.

Before 1961 . . . the white army would come in the night and search the houses for anything that could be a weapon, even things like the tools to cut grass, and they would confiscate these things. After a few of these raids [we] were told . . . that [we] were going to be moved.⁷⁰

The raids, presumably the state's attempt at establishing cooperation, were designed to intimidate and coerce the family into leaving their land voluntarily. Random weapon searches, which undermined the peace and stability of the family, were an insult to their position as successful producers within the community. The scare tactics described by Miriam Ndunge stand in marked contrast to the humanitarian picture painted by a parliamentarian in a debate on forced removals:

Everything possible is . . . being done to ensure that [a removal] is carried out with consideration and compassion and that all the people of South Africa will eventually benefit from it.⁷¹

The interpretations of "all the people" and "benefit" were clearly selectively employed in this context.

The removal and relocation of black spot dwellers was justified as necessary in order to undertake the development of the African people. Apartheid doctrine reasoned that different ethnic groups would best develop in their own homogenous enclaves, thereby morally justifying the creation of ten separate bantustans and the expulsion of Africans from white areas. When the Ndunges asked why they were being moved, they were told that "kaffirs needed to stay together and that this was the law."⁷² The Department of Bantu Administration and Development supported this view, stating that "the geographical pattern of the Bantu areas was so fragmented that the development programmes were seriously hampered." By this argument, it was the scattered layout of black settlements, not discrimination and lack of access to resources, which created rural poverty. Black living patterns must be altered and consolidated, argued the report, "before [the] undertaking [of] the development of the human factor" would be possible.

⁷⁰ Miriam Ndunge, 1998. See note 3 above for an explanation of interview citation format.

⁷¹ Cited in Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 111.

⁷² Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

Without a concerted policy of consolidation, black communities would remain dispersed, and such "fragmentation could only result in Bantu communities becoming an appendage to the White community."⁷³ In actuality, however, resettlement in the bantustans was *designed* to fragment the black population in order to halt the formation of a multi-ethnic black middle class and political base. Forcing people out of urban areas or off productive agricultural land made survival, as opposed to political opposition, people's primary concern. Accordingly, black spots were not accepted as independent settlements or self-sufficient family holdings, but were seen as appendages within a white system of order and control. They had to be eradicated because of the threat they posed to white uniformity and domination over all aspects of South African life.

The consolidation of black ethnic groups into designated locations under apartheid is reminiscent of Crais' findings on the authoritative ideology of the colonial frontier. Control and regulation of the spatial order brought domination over the social order. Likewise, forced removals, deemed to be in the "general public interest" and beneficial to black communities, opened land for white use and destroyed the production potential of black farmers.⁷⁴ This form of spatial manipulation also brought social and political control by ensuring that inter-racial coexistence would exist purely within master-servant parameters. Like the parliamentarian's use of "all the people" as the beneficiaries of removals, the "public" and its accompanying "interest" were narrowly defined terms. Whites were at the top of the social ladder and legislation and practices reflected their needs and interests, which were, in this case, access to land, racially pure space, and a steady labour supply. The general public in the context of forced removals was the *white* general public. The Ndunges and other black spot residents were moved not in their best interest or to advance their development, but to make their land available for white ownership and to purify the white landscape.

⁷³ 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, 15. Note the recurring negative characterisation of scattered communities and associated living conditions.

⁷⁴ *Native Administration Act*, Act 38 of 1927, section 5 (1)(b).

According to the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, people were to be compensated for expropriated land with an amount equal to the "fair market value of the land" plus any "useful improvements" made on the land.⁷⁵ But compensation rarely took monetary form, and was only payable to those people who had "some real right to the land," which excluded tenants, share-croppers, and people who occupied the land under communal title.⁷⁶ Only families or communities who had held freehold title, such as the Ndunges, were eligible for compensatory land. As dictated by the 1936 Act, the alternative land had to fall within or be adjacent to a bantustan, and was rarely of equal agricultural or pastoral value to the original land. Furthermore, the SADT or bantustan government, as opposed to the residents, retained title to the land and were responsible for its administration and allocation. Removal strategy took only limited account of post-relocation conditions, and authorities paid little attention to the formal or informal claims which may have already existed to the compensatory land itself. This meant that relations between the prior residents of the area and the relocated communities were often strained, further compounding the difficulties caused by forced removals.

Removal

In 1963 the Ndunges were told to vacate their land.⁷⁷ The family had a greater understanding of the white legal system than many black rural communities, and their first reaction to the news of impending expropriation was to seek legal representation.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Native Trust and Land Act*, Act 18 of 1936, section 13 (5).

⁷⁶ SPP, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, vol. 1, 104. People who did not hold freehold title to the land on which they lived had no legal right to compensation following dispossession. These people, who made up a large percentage of the victims of forced removals, were dumped in rural relocation settlements within the bantustans where they had little or no access to land or resources and were expected to build their own houses, schools, etc. Some of these resettlement camps, called "closer settlements," such as Dimbaza and Onverwacht, gained notoriety for their squalid conditions.

⁷⁷ There is no record of the number of family members resident on the two farms at the time of removal, but at present there are 155 known family members. Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim to the Land Claims Court," Claim No. KRO 6/2/2/D/0/0/2 (East London: Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, June 1997), 19, 7.

⁷⁸ Platzky and Walker's research shows that many people faced with removal had little or no formal education or understanding of the legal system. Nearly all affected communities were poor, making the payment of legal fees or expensive trips to urban areas to garner support nearly impossible. Perhaps most significantly, the rural communities were isolated from each other, and had little recourse to information about actions taken by other groups in similar situations. Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 130.

Their knowledge of the system did not, however, obviate their removal. The Department of Bantu Administration and Development intervened to effectively prevent the family from obtaining legal advice, warning them that "we were wasting their time and that if we didn't want to cooperate and move voluntarily we would just be put on the street with no alternative land."⁷⁹ The Ndunges, realising they had little hope of winning a legal battle, could not risk being left without alternative land. Even in cases where a family did acquire the services of a sympathetic lawyer, the lawyer could act only within the parameters of a legal system which had been created to bolster and maintain white privilege. There was no guarantee that a court or judge would rule on behalf of a community on the basis of moral right, as expropriation and removals were legal and constitutional under apartheid law. As global attention became focused on South Africa in later years some of the struggles to halt forced removals would prove successful, but this change in circumstances came too late for most of the threatened communities in the eastern Cape.

By the 1980s, some black spot residents threatened with removal were able to make effective use of the court and appeal system. Lawyers intervened on their behalf and appeals were sometimes granted, though often these only served to delay the removal.⁸⁰ Debates on land rights were held in parliament, communities under threat staged protests, and petitions for foreign intervention were sent to world leaders.⁸¹ Furthermore, by the

⁷⁹ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

⁸⁰ The Mogopa community was one such group who fought their removal in the Transvaal Supreme Court but lost the case. They then appealed to the Appellate Division, but their removal was carried out while their petition was still before the court. After their removal in 1984 there was a "world-wide outcry" and the U.S. State Department delivered a protest to the South African Ambassador in Washington. See Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 114-118.

⁸¹ An example of protest is the 1978 Batlokwa case, in which community members blockaded officials of the Department of Plural Relations after being told that the decision to remove them was irrevocable. An example of parliamentary debates is the 1982 debates on Mfengu land rights. Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 114-118. The kwaNgema community wrote to Queen Elizabeth to ask her to intervene against their removal. In some cases, however, sustained resistance led to violence and casualties at the hands of the police. In 1983 Saul Mkhize, leader of the Driefontein community, was shot and killed during a protest against the planned black spot removal of Driefontein. His death and subsequent trial of the white policeman illustrate one of the problems facing black communities who took their cases to court, as explained by Aninka Claassens: "Despite the fact that the unprovoked murder was witnessed by hundreds of people, the policeman was acquitted and the judge, in exonerating him of blame, referred to Mkhize as a 'rude and arrogant man' who 'had it coming to him.'" Aninka Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980s," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 32.

1980s the state had begun to move away from the "direct use of force and towards a greater reliance on indirect methods of coercion to pressurize people to move voluntarily."⁸² Even so, without international and media attention, communities had little hope in drawing outrage or sufficient sympathy to preclude their removal. Groups had to be highly organised and internally unified to be effective in garnering wider support or launching successful protest action. On a legal basis, motions against forced removals which were based solely on their unjust nature or racial bias usually went unheeded.

Aninka Claassens maintains that

legal challenges that address laws such as the Black Administration Act are often doomed to failure. Where the legal challenge can be directed at less explicitly racial law, law which is ostensibly common to all South Africans, like pensions, the law of expropriation or the law of contract, there is a much greater chance of legal success.⁸³

The increased focus on forced removals did not always have the desired effect. It encouraged the state to act swiftly in its relocation of designated communities, particularly those in isolated areas or of small groups of people, because once expropriation and resale of the land were complete there was little hope of redress. A combination of factors operated against the Ndunges' chances of preventing their alienation from the land. They were removed twenty-five years before most of the world took notice of the human rights violations of apartheid; they were prevented from seeking legal advice; and they were a small group in a remote area of the eastern Cape highlands.

Transportation of residents and goods from the expropriated land to the relocation site was meant to be provided by the state. The Report of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, from the year of the Ndunges' removal, reads:

⁸² Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 131. This shift in tactics included encouraging people to "voluntarily" sign a register which was then used to show their acceptance of removal (at Driefontein, 1982), surveillance of people who attended protest meetings or workshops (at Thembalihle, 1981), and schools and shops being closed until the group acquiesced. During this period a less visible army presence was maintained at removal sites, particularly at the final physical stages of removal. Legislative terminology was modified and softened, and the name of the Department of Bantu Administration was changed to the Department of Plural Relations in 1978, and then to the Department of Cooperation and Development in 1979. These name changes were meant to signify a softened approach and more cooperative strategy. See Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 131-176.

⁸³ Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal," 41.

Transport is provided in the form of lorries with drivers and sufficient labourers for the demolition of improvements. Facilities for loading and unloading lorries are provided. Transport expenses are defrayed out of South African Bantu Trust funds.⁸⁴

This policy of providing transport, like the assurance of removals without the use of intimidation or force, was rarely matched in practice. The Ndunges, for instance, "had to hire their own transport and in the process had to give up some of their personal belongings and livestock on their original land, because they could not afford the cost of transferring everything."⁸⁵ Miriam Ndunge remembers that

Basically the government said we must remove ourselves. . . . The government provided small trucks, but what happened still was that if [the size] of your load meant that the truck had to come back [for a second load], it meant that we never got to see the truck again.⁸⁶

Each household was allowed to move one load of goods; anything else was left behind. When transportation was provided for removals, it was in the form of "GG trucks," standing for "government garage," which moved both possessions and people. Testimonies given to Platzky and Walker describe the degradation of being moved "like animals" on the trucks,⁸⁷ and people were deposited at places they had never before seen. The Ndunges, for example, "never knew this land [compensatory farms] existed."⁸⁸

The Surplus People Project, a nongovernmental organisation established in the 1980s to campaign against forced removals, found striking similarities in people's accounts of the destruction of their possessions and the events surrounding their removals. One story, repeated many times with slight variation in detail, went as follows:

[O]ne morning when they were having breakfast, they saw lorries coming to their houses, one following the other. They were told to leave their houses immediately and . . . they grabbed together as many of their possessions as possible and everything was thrown in the lorries and everything that could break

⁸⁴ Department of Bantu Administration and Development, "Report of the Department," 1963, 15.

⁸⁵ Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 18.

⁸⁶ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

⁸⁷ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 196. Buses were sometimes provided for the women or children.

⁸⁸ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

broke. . . . The sheep went with but died on the way. . . . For many weeks their furniture stood outside in the rain and it became warped and useless.⁸⁹

Houses were demolished before people could remove their furniture. Livestock, a crucial asset for small-scale producers and labour tenants, often perished during or shortly after the move. Resistance was met with intimidation and actual or threatened violence.

"[N]obody could resist the barrels of the guns," recalled a victim of one removal, "[o]ther households were still refusing [to move] and the soldiers promised to shoot them."⁹⁰

In one of the few instances of communication between the authorities and the Ndunges, the family was told that they had a choice between two locations for resettlement. The first was roughly 140 kilometers away, near Whittlesea, in the Ciskei, and the second was in the Elliot district, fifty kilometers from their original farms. The Ndunges had never seen either site, but they opted for the latter, "because they didn't want to be too far from the graves [of the ancestors], they chose this [land] because at least it was in Elliot."⁹¹ They wanted to remain as near as possible to Maxongo's Hoek. The compensatory site consisted of two farms, now known collectively as Mhlwazi, bordering the Engcobo district of the Transkei. The compensatory land allocated to the Ndunges was larger than the expropriated land (a fact frequently cited by officials when the family protested their removal), and was said to have higher productive potential. Recent evaluations, however, have shown that the alternative land was of inferior quality. Research done by the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) compares the land at Mhlwazi with Maxongo's Hoek:

[P]roductivity in agriculture is far below the levels obtained whilst they still worked their original land. . . . [A]nnual levels of harvest which, throughout the period of their stay on the new land, have always been far lower than what they had experienced [previously]. . . . [T]heir livestock has suffered as a result of its relocation to land which is characterised by much poorer pastures.⁹²

⁸⁹ Edith Faltein describing a letter from her eldest son. Quoted in SPP, *Removals*, vol. 2, 352.

⁹⁰ Cases cited in Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 196.

⁹¹ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

⁹² Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 18-19.

Although the Ndunges were dissatisfied with the productivity of the land, its agricultural value was not the only element of importance for the family. As we shall see, the land at Maxongo was imbued with meaning, and had been made significant through people's interpretation of it and attachment to it. Its relevance was due as much to what it symbolised on a spiritual or emotional level, as for its provision of material prosperity, independence, and family cohesion. Miriam Ndunge, unaware that the CRLR's report had found Mhlwazi to be of inferior quality to Maxongo's Hoek, says:

This land [Mhlwazi] is in fact more rich than the other land [Maxongo]. We *know* that, but that land [Maxongo's Hoek] could support us; that land is of more value than this one, as we have no *connection* to this one.⁹³

Here Miriam redefines value: even if Mhlwazi is more productive than Elliot, it is her family's connection to the land and the meaning ascribed to it that is of utmost importance. "This land is nothing to us," she says. The goal of the family, even thirty-five years after removal, is to return to their significant space.

Life at Mhlwazi

The life of the Ndunge family changed dramatically with their relocation. Mhlwazi is over fifty kilometers from the town of Elliot, and the roads to town are nearly impassable by normal vehicle and completely inaccessible after rain. Small trucks provide an irregular taxi service to town, charging 20-26 rand per person for a return trip. But "during rains no one goes to town, even if you are sick."⁹⁴ There is no clinic or electricity in Mhlwazi. Rain water is collected at a tank at the school in the summer. In the dry winter months the only steady water source is the nearest river, a forty-five minute round-trip walk.⁹⁵

At the time of their removal, the Ndunge family had been successful small-scale producers on Mfanta's Kloof and Nqumeni's Kloof for over seventy years and each

⁹³ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 21.

household had its own series of huts and storage facilities. No alternative housing was provided at the new site, although, according to state guidelines, each household was to be "supplied with a tent or prefabricated house until its own home is available."⁹⁶ The relocated families were expected to build houses from their personal resources or with the compensation funds from their land and improvements. The Ndunges, however, received only land as compensation, and no monetary payment was made for structures or improvements at Maxongo's Hoek. Furthermore, the houses on their original land were destroyed and the building material could not be salvaged for use at Mhlwazi.⁹⁷ Patricia Ndunge describes the situation facing her family 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."⁹⁸

Access to educational facilities was also forfeited with relocation. Although the report of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development stated that "substitute school facilities are provided in the new neighbourhood," there was no school at Mhlwazi.⁹⁹ In comparison, the proximity of the Maxongo's Hoek farms to Elliot had enabled the Ndunge children to attend school in town. With few alternatives, the Ndunges built a primary school at Mhlwazi without funding from the state or Department of Bantu Education. At a later stage the government built six additional classrooms, extending the school up to Standard 7. Children who qualify for higher education leave their families and rent rooms in Elliot or other eastern Cape towns in order to attend secondary school.¹⁰⁰

The Ndunges immediately had problems with their new neighbours. The conflict between the established residents and the new arrivals was exacerbated by poverty and competition over the limited resources of grazing lands, water, and firewood. Cattle raids

⁹⁶ Department of Bantu Administration and Development, "Report of the Department," 1963, 15.

⁹⁷ Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 31.

⁹⁸ Patricia Ndunge, 1998.

⁹⁹ Department of Bantu Administration and Development, "Report of the Department," 1963, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Miriam Ndunge, 1998; Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 20.

from across the Transkei border started as soon as the Ndunges arrived and led to the loss of much of the livestock that had survived the move from Maxongo's Hoek. The situation has continued to deteriorate in recent years:

The life we have always lived because of this is a life of fear. . . . When dogs bark at night we hide because people from across the border take things, break our windows with axes.¹⁰¹

The state has not taken action to resolve the conflict or prevent the livestock raids. There are no phones in the area, no police or cars. Miriam Ndunge sees the root of the problem as follows: "These [neighbours] were the people who had initially been on *this* land, and therefore [we] were seen as the intruders."¹⁰² Regardless of their empathy for their neighbours' feelings of displacement, the Ndunges feel they are prisoners in their homes and fear for the safety of their children and animals.

Thirty-six years after their relocation, the Ndunges continue to compare conditions at Mhlwazi to life at Maxongo's Hoek. They maintain that "it was a wonderful life at Maxongo . . . we plowed the land, we had livestock, we produced our own produce for trade."¹⁰³ At Mhlwazi, on the other hand, there is no money to purchase the necessary seeds or implements and the only farming possible is livestock based. There is little recourse to outside agencies for aid, as agricultural credit unions have historically not extended credit to black farmers, especially those with little collateral and living on SADT land. The only local work opportunities are in Elliot or on white farms. More than 60% of the family members living at Mhlwazi are unemployed, while many men have left in search of work in urban areas.¹⁰⁴

A lot of people are not around now. They are in places like Cape Town, Johannesburg, and they send money back. In times of drought and that sort of thing, that is when people leave and look for some other income. . . . Some do come back, others just disappear.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹⁰² Ibid., original emphasis.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Regional Land Claims Commissioner, "Referral Report on the Ndunge Families Claim," 19.

¹⁰⁵ Patricia and Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

The high rate of migrancy has led to a break-down of family cohesion and a predominance of female-headed households. Some money comes as remittances from migrant labourers, but it is the pensions of the elderly that provide the majority of financial support. Pensions are paid on a set day each month in Elliot, a problem during the wet season due to the poor condition of the roads from Mhlwazi.

If it rains, or if we know that it is going to rain, we take days in advance and go stay that side [in town] so that we can be able to receive it on *that day*. We cannot miss it, because the government won't come again until next time.¹⁰⁶

The pension is spent on food and supplies in town on the day of payment. By the time the taxi for the return trip to Mhlwazi has been paid for the money is gone.

Spiritual Significance of the Land

Although the removal and relocation of the Ndunge family destroyed their livelihood as independent producers, uprooted them from their home, and resulted in a decline in socio-economic conditions, the most devastating aspect of leaving Maxongo's Hoek was the separation from the ancestors who were buried on the land. Although the Mfengu people of the colonial period were considered to be the least "traditional" or most "detrribalized"¹⁰⁷ of the Xhosa-speaking people due to their early exposure to missionary Christianity and education, many families, such as the Ndunges, maintained a deep-seated belief in the importance and primacy of their ties with the ancestors.¹⁰⁸ These belief systems, which prioritise communication with the ancestors through ritual, often run parallel to participation in Christian congregations. The Ndunges, for instance, do

¹⁰⁶ Miriam Ndunge, 1998, original emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ A letter from the magistrate of Elliot to the local police sergeant from 1 July 1925 in reference to the number of "detrribalised Natives" in the area reads, "by detrribalised Native is meant [sic] the Native who no longer bases his social and economical life upon old Native custom." CA 1/EOT 8/1/21 N2/7/2. The sergeant replied that there were no detrribalised Natives in the area.

¹⁰⁸ On ancestral rituals, communication between the living and the dead, and the role of the ancestors in the lives of their descendants, see Heinz Kuckertz, *Creating Order: The Image of the Homestead in Mpondo Social Life* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1990), chapter 7; Heinz Kuckertz, "Symbol and Authority in Mpondo Ancestor Religion. Parts 1 and 2," *African Studies* 42, no. 2 (1983), 113-33; vol. 43, no. 1 (1984), 1-17; C. Masilo Lamla, "The Dead: Prepared to Live in the Spirit World," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa*, ed. Heinz Kuckertz (Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 14-21; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Ancestor Religion," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa*, ed. Heinz Kuckertz (Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 22-33; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Who Worships Whom: Agnates and Ancestors Among the Nguni," *African Studies* 44, no. 1 (1985), 47-64.

not practice one set of beliefs at the expense of the other, but have incorporated both into their worldview and daily life.¹⁰⁹

Death is not a barrier to communication between the living and the dead, and the ancestors must be informed of all important milestones or decisions in individual and familial life, including births, deaths, marriages, and change in physical location.¹¹⁰ Based on the hierarchical family structure, ancestors are situated above the living elders, and are respected accordingly. Such respect is shown through ceremonies invoking the ancestors' presence and ritual offerings made at their gravesites.¹¹¹ In return for these acts of reverence, the ancestors bestow benefaction on families and individuals, providing for material, physical, and spiritual prosperity and health. If a family fails to uphold proper communication or demonstrate respect for the ancestors, the living will be negatively affected. Place is critical within this worldview or spiritual understanding, as the ancestors' knowledge, power, and authority is symbolised and represented at the

¹⁰⁹ On the parallel practices of Christianity and African traditional religion in South Africa, see C.W. Manona, "The Resurgence of the Ancestor Cult Among Xhosa Christians," in *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa*, ed. Heinz Kuckertz (Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 34-39; Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1991), 119-134; James P. Kiernan, "The Impact of White Settlement on African Traditional Religions," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, eds. Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1995), 72-82; M.G. Whisson and Martin West, eds., *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975); Monica Wilson, *Religion and the Transformation of a Society: A Study of Social Change in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936; 2nd edn. 1961; 3rd abridged edn. Cape Town: David Philip, 1979); Philip Mayer, "The Origin and Decline of Two Rural Resistance Ideologies," in *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society*, ed. Philip Mayer (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1-80; O.F. Raum and E.J. de Jager, *Transition and Change in a Rural Community: A Survey of Acculturation in the Ciskei, South Africa* (Fort Hare: Fort Hare University Press, 1972).

¹¹⁰ For general ethnographical and anthropological studies of African belief systems, see W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "World-view I: A System of Beliefs"; "World-view II: A System of Action," in *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, ed. W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 318-43; 344-63; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "The Symbolic Structure of Cape Nguni Cosmology," in *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa*, eds. M.G. Whisson and Martin West (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), 15-33. James P. Kiernan, "African Traditional Religions in South Africa," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, eds. Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1995), 15-27; David Chidester, "African Religion," in *Religions of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1-34; Max Gluckman, *The Realm of the Supernatural among the South-Eastern Bantu*, 2 vols. (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1936); Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹¹¹ On various uses of ritual in African society, see Monica Wilson, "Ritual, Resilience and Obligation," in *Social Systems and Tradition in Southern Africa*, eds. John Argyle and Eleanor Preston-White (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978), 150-164; Garrey Dennie, "One King, Two Burials: The Politics of Funerals in South Africa's Transkei," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 11, no. 2 (1992), 76-87; P.A. McAllister, "Using Ritual to Resist Domination in the Transkei," *African Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (1991), 129-44.

location of the graves. Communication between the living and ancestors is most effective at the burial sites. Although this ritualised rapport is possible to a lesser degree when people are separated from the graves, it is highly dependent upon previously and correctly established relations with the ancestors. For instance, if a household relocates by choice, the ancestral spirits can symbolically accompany the family to the new residence. Mr. Banzi Nkuhlu of the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape describes the process whereby an intentional move from one location to another is conveyed to the ancestors:

If I buy a house in East London, according to our tradition, we cannot just fold our arms and sit there. We have to call the family members and make a beer [ritual of offering traditional beer drink] . . . so that we can inform them that we are here. ¹¹²

If, on the other hand, the family is forcibly uprooted with little time to properly convey the move to the ancestors, a rupture in relations is likely to follow. The latter scenario applies to the Ndunges, who feel that they did not have the opportunity to adequately inform their extended family, as represented by the ancestors, of their relocation to Mhlwazi.

For the Ndunges, leaving the farms at Maxongo's Hoek meant leaving the ancestors behind. The first Ndunges were buried on the farms in 1901 or 1902, and an estimated 115 people had been buried on both farms by the time of the 1963 removal.¹¹³ In protesting their removal, the family said they could not be separated from the graves of their ancestors. In response, the authorities said that if they wanted to be near to their relatives, they should exhume their ancestors and take them to the new land. This was unacceptable to the Ndunges. Maxongo's Hoek was home, the center of their worldview and site of their spiritual well-being. The land symbolised their past and represented their identification as a family. Continuity with the past and with the family as a whole could

¹¹² Butterworth interviews, 15 October 1997. On ritual use of beer, see P.A. McAllister, "Indigenous Beer in Southern Africa: Functions and Fluctuations," *African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993), 71-88, and C. Davies, "Customs Governing Beer-Drinking among the Ama-Bomvana," *South African Journal of Science* 24, (1927), 521-24. Ancestors can also be informed of an individual's departure from home in order to partake in migrant labour. See P.A. McAllister, "Work, Homestead and the Shades: The Ritual Interpretation of Labour Migration Among the Gcaleka," in *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society*, ed. Philip Mayer (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 205-250, and P.A. McAllister, "Umsindleko: A Gcaleka Ritual of Incorporation" (Grahamstown: ISER, Occasional Paper no. 265, Rhodes University).

¹¹³ Ndunges, 1997.

be maintained, at least to a degree, if the ancestors remained on this sacred land. The ancestors, therefore, could not be moved from Maxongo's Hoek. Furthermore, by moving to Mhlwazi as opposed to the location in the Ciskei, the living members of the family were able to retain at least a measure of proximity to their relatives, and hoped that they would be able to visit the graves after the takeover of the land by white farmers.¹¹⁴

The abruptness of the removal prevented the Ndunges from effectively informing the ancestors of their new location. They explain:

Due to the nature of the forced removal we did not have opportunity to show the ancestors with the respect they needed and with correct rituals that we were being moved to a new place. This effectively broke communication [with the ancestors].¹¹⁵

Rituals of explanation to communicate their imminent relocation, such as described above by Mr. Nkuhlu, would have established understanding between the living and the ancestors. Given the circumstances of the removal, this was not possible. It is interesting to note the differences in the theoretical situation described by Mr. Nkuhlu and that experienced by the Ndunges. Mr. Nkuhlu explained that even if he had moved abruptly, in the case of a job transfer for example, he would have been able to inform his ancestors of his relocation. The Ndunges, on the other hand, although they had been alerted to the possibility of their removal since at least 1961 through acts of intimidation by the army, did not take steps to tell the ancestors of their imminent relocation. The implication, therefore, is that informing the ancestors is not so much dependent on *opportunity* as it is on *agency*. The Ndunges did not want to move and thus the environment and emotion surrounding their relocation was not conducive to positive communication with the ancestors. Furthermore, informing the ancestors of their relocation would have been a taciturn acceptance of their removal. Although it brought severe emotional hardship, it was important that the ancestors remain at Maxongo's Hoek, as this land represented the Ndunges true center. The ancestors' presence at Maxongo's Hoek maintained the Ndunges' connection and claim to the land.

¹¹⁴ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹¹⁵ Ndunges, 1997.

The severing of contact with the ancestors devastated the family, especially the elder members, who had lost touch with their nearest family members.¹¹⁶ Coupled with the physical and emotional hardship of the removal and loss of land, the alienation from the ancestors was too much for many of the elders to endure. Miriam Ndunge remembers:

As soon as we moved, most of them [elder Ndunges] started dying; presently there are more graves this side [at Mhlwazi] than that side [at Maxongo]. Our mothers and fathers are [buried] here, 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.¹¹⁷

The death of the elders after removal shows that the land of Maxongo's Hoek was essential to the spiritual, physical, and material health of the Ndunges. The land was more than a receptacle of past experiences, it was inextricably linked to the very existence of the family. The elders, as the family members who had resided on the land for the longest period of time, were devastated by their alienation from their place of belonging. They could not survive without the land and the connections to the ancestors inherent within it. The land, as the Ndunges' sacred space, brought material prosperity and spiritual wholeness, but it also brought life and health as the center, the well-spring, of the family's being. Leaving the land dislocated, disrupted, and destroyed the family; they could not leave the land and their ancestors and still remain an intact unit.

The loss of the elders intensified the gravity of the dispossession in the lives of the Ndunges. Maxongo's Hoek's significance and power was apparent in the visceral deterioration of the people who had lived their lives at the center from which they were now removed. Younger family members, who may have been less concerned with the meaning of the land, were suddenly aware of its preeminent position within the family. Dispossession brought not just removal and loss of material resources, but the deterioration of the family network through the death of the eldest generation. The land,

¹¹⁶ Based on the ladder of authority which extends through the generations of a family, the ancestors are the elders' closest relatives.

¹¹⁷ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

already central to Ndunges' physical and spiritual identity, became increasingly important through the suffering and loss of cardinal family members.

The death of many of the older family members had long-term consequences on the spiritual lives of their descendants. The elders were the caretakers and guardians of the ritual knowledge of the family. Due to their sudden and unexpected demise, this knowledge was not passed on to their descendants. African theologian John Mbiti explains that such beliefs and rituals are passed from one generation to the next through myth, practice, and observation, as opposed to through formal lessons.¹¹⁸ Since the Ndunge elders died over a short period of time, before the family was settled on the new land, the passing of ritual knowledge to the next generation was left incomplete. As a result, explains Miriam Ndunge,

All our traditional rituals and activities were never done the way they were meant to be. What happened is that by the time we were settled here, most of [the old people] were dying. The rest didn't know the rituals.¹¹⁹

The loss of the correct rituals further accentuated the severing of communication with the ancestors. As burial on the original farms was prohibited after the removal, the elders were buried at Mhlwazi, but the family did not know how to unite the spirits of the recently deceased with those at Maxongo's Hoek. The loss of spiritual knowledge due to death and displacement left Miriam Ndunge's generation little choice but to

simply conform to the rituals that were being done by other people in the area. These were the same people raiding [the Ndunge livestock and crops] from across the border. . . . We adopted the rituals of the area to try to fit in.¹²⁰

Relocation to Mhlwazi moved the Ndunges from not only their land and family, but also from their ritual knowledge. In order for the family to survive, existence and tradition had to be reformed and restructured, at least temporarily, on the periphery of the lost center. With the death of the elders, however, the practices which may have enabled the family to recreate their old way of life were lost. The situation was further exacerbated by

¹¹⁸ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1991), 15.

¹¹⁹ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the hostility of the new neighbours at the relocation site. In this scenario, ritual assimilation seemed to be both the best and only option. Such assimilation, however, reiterated the Ndunges' alienation from their previous way of life. Maxongo's Hoek became even more significant as alienated space as adopted practices were repeatedly enacted and conformed to at Mhlwazi. Miriam Ndunge believes that the ritual authority of the ancestors is inherent in the land of Maxongo. Reclaiming the farms and resuming proper communication with the ancestors would impart this awareness to the living and allow them to reclaim their identity as represented by the correct rituals. Although the Ndunges have lived for over thirty-five years at Mhlwazi, family, identity, and knowledge remain anchored at the locative space of Maxongo's Hoek.

One of the main methods of communication between the ancestors and the living is through dreams. Ancestors appear in dreams and offer guidance or make requests for sacrifices or rituals. An individual's dreams are interpreted by the family and action is taken to appease the ancestor's wishes.¹²¹ An elderly male respondent at Mgxabakazi near Willowvale in the Eastern Cape explained that *izinyanya* (ancestors) send messages to the living

during our sleeping time. For instance, if my father or grandfather wants me to slaughter a beast for him, he will appear in a dream . . . then he is directing me what to do. . . . [H]e wants me to do something for him. . . . I am calling all my family and all the people around me on *his* behalf, we are going to eat on his behalf, then we eat for him and we believe that he is eating with us.¹²²

The ancestors still came to the Ndunges in dreams after the family's removal to Mhlwazi, but the family could not enact the requested rituals because of their physical separation from the gravesites. As time passed and the Ndunges were unable to return to their land, the frequency of dream visitations by the ancestors subsided. Nompucuko Ndunge explains:

Communication with the ancestors takes place in dreams— we see them in dreams and speak to them. This communication is broken through removal, is not as

¹²¹ On dream interpretation, see M. Vera Bührman, "Tentative Views on Dream Therapy by Xhosa Diviners," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 23 (1978), 105-21.

¹²² Interview at Mgxabakazi Administrative Area, Willowvale District, Eastern Cape. 24-26 November 1997.

effective when we have been removed from the site. Ancestors do not [now] come as readily in dreams.¹²³

The Ndunges began to feel the presence of the ancestors in their daily life abate. They believe that the ancestors think they have been abandoned because the family was "never able to inform the ancestors that we were moving."¹²⁴ Yet the living members still long for the daily support of the ancestors. "We need to speak to them, show them respect, ask guidance, show our love for our parents."¹²⁵ This revitalisation of connection to the ancestors can only come with a return to the place which symbolises their familial and spiritual wholeness. "When we dream we dream only of Maxongo, never of this place."¹²⁶

The Ndunges have tried to reestablish communication with the ancestors in the years since their removal. Visiting the graves on the farms at Maxongo's Hoek was only possible with the permission of the local magistrate and white farm owners. Seeking this permission, however, "was too difficult and humiliating to try for access very often."¹²⁷ The family was repeatedly reminded "that it was no longer their land."¹²⁸ Even when visits were deemed legal, Miriam Ndunge recalls, "whenever we wanted to go back we were threatened with being shot" by the white owners.¹²⁹ The protection of private property, particularly white property, and laws such as the Trespass Act of 1959, made it illegal and dangerous for the Ndunges to enter the land without explicit permission.¹³⁰ The Ndunges say that they were denied access to their graves because the "farmers did not want black people going on the land, regardless of their purpose."¹³¹ Due to the

¹²³ Nompucuko Ndunge, 1997.

¹²⁴ Patricia and Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹²⁵ Ndunges, 1997.

¹²⁶ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹²⁷ Ndunges, 1997.

¹²⁸ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ The Trespass Act was most widely used in conjunction with the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 in order to drive unwanted farm workers or 'squatters' off the land and prevent their return. However, it was also effective in preventing previous owners or inhabitants such as the Ndunges, from accessing land. Although the Trespass Act does not appear to be racially or politically biased, it has been used to protect white land holding. On this law, see Raylene Keightley, "The Trespass Act," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 180-193.

¹³¹ Ndunges, 1997.

humiliation and difficulty of seeking permission and the hazard of unsanctioned visits, the family has only legally been to the graves three times since removal in 1963. More frequent contact with the ancestors would have resulted in increased health and happiness, but facing the bureaucracy and discrimination in arranging a visit was dehumanizing, "difficult and painful."¹³²

The family quickly realised the seriousness and consequences of severing ties with the ancestors and tried to find alternative means to rebuild contact. Shortly before his death, Miriam Ndunge's father tried to reconnect with his forefathers. Without permission from the farmer or magistrate, he went to visit the graves on one of the farms at Maxongo's Hoek. Miriam Ndunge relates this attempt to reestablish contact,

One thing I remember is that my father wrote a will, which was his attempt to connect with the ancestors. What he did was he went to the graves with a traditional drink, and he made [the beer drink] there [at the graves], without telling the white farmer or the government, to talk to the ancestors. On the way back from the ritual he wrote a will, which I still have. This was his attempt at connecting with the ancestors. This is our hope that we still may have some connection.¹³³

The act of pilgrimage and offering described by Miriam Ndunge demonstrates the importance of the Maxongo's Hoek farms to the family. In one of her father's final acts, he returned to the center of his alienated ground to address his ancestors. This was done not only for his own benefit, but in the hope of materially and spiritually improving the lives of his descendants. He clearly felt that such a measure would only be effective if performed at the correct site, the location which represented the power and authority of the ancestors. He recorded a will in order that future generations would be aware that an attempt was made to restore contact with the ancestors. Miriam Ndunge is not certain, however, if her father was successful in appeasing the ancestors and explaining to them the conditions of the family's sudden abandonment. The Ndunges are concerned over what they will find when they return to the land. They worry that their relationship with the ancestors may be irredeemable.

¹³² Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹³³ Ibid.

[W]e do not know where we stand [with the ancestors]. We worry that the ancestors believe they have been abandoned, and there are trees growing up in the graves. There is much pain and fear when we think about all that needs to be done. . . . But we want to go back there, and try to rebuild this connection anyway.¹³⁴

The Ndunges have lived for the last thirty-five years removed from their significant and sacred space. The land at Maxongo's Hoek provided them with a home, with an independent and relatively prosperous existence, and with a spiritual wholeness that has been absent since their relocation to Mhlwazi. Furthermore, resident in that land is the ritual knowledge and power of the ancestors. The Ndunges' existence at Mhlwazi has been peripheral, and they have continually defined themselves against the lost center, assimilating to the local way of life only as a last resort. The suffering experienced since the removal has made the land more important, the desire to return to it more pressing. The family has remained focused on the hope of reclaiming the land, since they believe reunification with that space and the ancestors is the only way of returning to the source of spiritual and material well-being that will enable them to move forward with their lives.

Hopes for Return

One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the democratically elected government in 1994 was the Restitution of Land Rights Act. This law allows groups or individuals to make claims for land lost after 1913 as a result of racially discriminatory legislation or practices.¹³⁵ In November 1995 the Ndunges filed a restitution claim for Mfanta's Kloof and Nqumeni's Kloof. After several rounds of negotiation over price, the white farmers agreed to sell the land to the state in order for it to be restored to the Ndunges.¹³⁶ At present, the transfer process is proceeding steadily, but slowly. In anticipation, the Ndunges have been trying to come to terms with the possibility that their dream of

¹³⁴ Patricia and Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹³⁵ *Restitution of Land Rights Act*, Act 22 of 1994. An amendment was made to the original restitution act to include "racial practices" as well as laws. This was because certain legislative measures, such as the Trespass Act or irrigation schemes, discussed in chapter four, were not explicitly racist but were used to enact racial segregation. In the case of the Ndunges, their farms were declared black spots and the family was removed in terms of the 1936 Native Trust and Development Act, thereby meeting the criteria for eligibility of restitution cases.

¹³⁶ The restitution process is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

returning to Maxongo will soon be realised. Return to the land after thirty-five years of alienation will not, however, be entirely without complications, especially with regard to relations with the ancestors.

When the Ndunges attempted to acquire permission to visit the graves in the years following their removal, the authorities and white owners of the farms suggested that, if proximity was critical, the family should exhume and relocate the bodies of the ancestors. This idea was met with shock by the family. "It was *our* land-- why should we have to move *our* ancestors?"¹³⁷ Although the family refused to exhume the bodies on their original land, they now say they would be willing to move their relatives buried at Mhlwazi to Maxongo's Hoek after restoration.¹³⁸ On the surface this appears an irony: the family said that exhumation went against their beliefs, but now they consider this option. This apparent contradiction, however, is in fact crucial evidence that the land at Maxongo's Hoek is inviolable and sacred, and thus the ancestors could not be disturbed and disinterred from this resting place. The farms at Maxongo are the seat of the families existence and history and the locative center of their identity. Mhlwazi, on the other hand, is peripheral to this center: it is not sacred, but profane. Knowledge and experience enacted at Mhlwazi is not inherent to the land, it is transferable. To move the ancestors from Maxongo's Hoek would have shown disrespect, but would also have further violated and undermined the Ndunge's spiritual, material, and moral claim to this center. Returning the bones of those who have died since 1963 to Maxongo, however, is an act of reclamation, of victory, of reaffirmation of the family's continuing tie to the space that they hold sacred. The family's willingness to move the bones of their ancestors reiterates the Ndunges' view that they have not been at their rightful home since 1963. They hope that such a move will rectify communication with the extended family, and in so doing will bring a return of material prosperity and spiritual health. Exhumation may, under most circumstances, be prohibited by ritual codes, but the sacrality of space takes precedence, and rituals are adapted accordingly.

¹³⁷ Ndunges, 1997. Original emphasis.

¹³⁸ General discussion among participants, Ndunges, 1998.

Moving the graves from Mhlwazi to Maxongo's Hoek will be a costly exercise, and most family members will not be able to afford to exhume and relocate their immediate relations. Even if relocating the bodies is infeasible, it is important to the Ndunges that the extended family be united at the reclaimed center. The family explains how consolidation will occur even if the ancestors physically remain at Mhlwazi:

We can have a traditional ritual whereby we will 'call' the spirits of [those at Mhlwazi] -- one by one-- we call the spirit to the other side [to Maxongo's Hoek]. Even if we cannot dig up the graves. . . . [I]t is possible to move them this way, in spirit.¹³⁹

This ritual summoning of the ancestral spirits is less desirable than physical relocation. The successful 'calling' of each spirit to Maxongo, however, will allow the entire family to be reunited at the original land. The act of calling the ancestors buried at Mhlwazi to Maxongo shows that ritual improvisation can be dictated by circumstances.¹⁴⁰ Similar rituals were not employed to transfer the ancestral spirits to Mhlwazi because the family did not *belong* at Mhlwazi. Rituals of contact, summoning, and cohesion are possible, but only when the move is towards the center, back to the sacred.

The return to Maxongo's Hoek will bring the family together at their symbolic center, but, first, amends must be made to the ancestral spirits who have been neglected for four decades. In an attempt to rectify the impression of abandonment, the living elders must "go back there [to Maxongo] and bow to the ancestors."¹⁴¹ Plans have already been made for the healing of relations, as explained by Major Gushelo, who has been working on the Ndunge case:

[The Ndunges] want to have all those graves, even those that are hard to see, re-defined and renovated, so that they can begin to conduct rituals and pray to the ancestors . . . brew traditional beer and have ceremonies at the site of the burial.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ J.Z. Smith makes this clear in his essay "The Bare Facts of Ritual," in which he shows that ritual is used to bridge the gap between the way things would exist in an ideal situation and the way they exist in reality. In the case of the Ndunges, the calling ritual will allow the family to be reunited at Maxongo's Hoek, although in reality the graves of the two groups of ancestors will remain separated by 50 kilometers. See Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown*, 53-65 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁴¹ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

That is the first thing they aim to do [following their return], because the spiritual connection is the priority.¹⁴²

The prioritisation of the family's spiritual connection to the farms once again draws attention to the importance of space. The ceremonies and rituals can only be properly conducted after the condition of the space— represented by the gravesites— has been attended to. The area has been desecrated through dispossession and must be cleansed of the foreign presence before it can be reoccupied. The repairing of the graves and sharing of food and drink with the ancestors are rituals of consecration, designed to make amends and heal the rift between the generations. Only once the space has been reclaimed and consecrated and the ancestors made aware of the return of the living will the Ndunges truly be home.

Although the family's primary concern is the connection to the ancestors, they also hope that restoration will improve relations among the living family members. Miriam Ndunge plans to ask the ancestors

for their help to rebuild the Ndunge family. It is very difficult to have something to unite the family because they are now scattered. We hope that the ancestors will serve to be the uniting factor in the family. It is the only way.¹⁴³

The land at Maxongo's Hoek is the locative tie across and between generations of the family. The members who presently live at Mhlwazi are hopeful that the farming opportunities at Maxongo will entice those who have left in search of employment to return to the land. Miriam Ndunge explains, "This area [Mhlwazi] is very difficult, but the new area [Maxongo's Hoek] has more opportunities that can bring back those people who are working away."¹⁴⁴ It is the family's hope that successful agricultural production will lead to less reliance on remittances from migrant labourers. If this proves to be the

¹⁴² Major Gushelo, 4 June 1998. ("Major" is Mr. Gushelo's first name, not a rank.)

¹⁴³ Miriam Ndunge, 1998.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. A meeting of the entire family will be held shortly after their return to Maxongo's Hoek to determine how the land should be used and allocated, whether farming should be through cooperatives or on an individual basis, and who should fill managerial roles.

case, it will no longer be necessary for young people to leave in search of work, and the family will be able to be whole.¹⁴⁵

Finally, it is hoped that reclaiming the land at Maxongo's Hoek will bring a return of ritual knowledge, especially for the sake of the children. The Ndunges stress that it is critical for their children to re-learn traditional ways, especially proper veneration of the ancestors. Major Gushelo says that the Ndunges want "to show their children and grandchildren how these rituals were done according to family history, so that these things are not forgotten. The children need to be taught to respect the dead."¹⁴⁶

Although the correct rituals were lost when the Ndunge elders died following relocation, the ancestral knowledge remains resident in the original land and space of the ancestors. Rituals performed at this center, therefore, will be performed correctly, and knowledge will be imparted to the children.

The generation of Ndunges born at Mhlwazi have long been told of the life that was lost at Maxongo's Hoek. These children do not remember this place, but, through the recollections of their parents and grandparents, the land has come to represent an improved life and a better future. "Even the children, because of the difficulty of life this side [at Mhlwazi], they want to go back, because they have heard that life was good."¹⁴⁷ Memory has filled the children with longing for a place most have never seen. But, as the elders say, it is not enough to orally relate tales of the old life. The children must experience the land and learn from the place in order to appreciate its significance and symbolic role in their family's history.

¹⁴⁵ The view expressed here is mostly that of the elders who have remained on the land. It is possible that not all family members who left Mhlwazi did so purely in order to engage in migrant labour or send regular remittances. Often upwardly mobile family members will leave remote areas in order to pursue careers or higher education, and may have no intention of returning to the original land. The opinions expressed here, although the only ones I heard, are certainly not the only opinions or sentiments in existence. On dispersed family members in land claims, see Deborah James, "After Years in the Wilderness: Development and the Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa" (unpublished paper presented at University of the Witwatersrand, Institute for Advanced Social Research, October 1997), 13.

¹⁴⁶ Major Gushelo, 4 June 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

For over seventy years, the land at Maxongo's Hoek brought the Ndunges material and economic well-being, spiritual wholeness, and a home for their extended family. The space was significant not only for the prosperity and independence that it provided, but also for the sense of home and belonging that uncontested access to it entailed. The land was sacred in its provision of both a context and a location through which the Ndunges saw their world. They had an established position and identity within eastern Cape society as successful small-scale agricultural producers. They also lived at the center which both shaped and allowed for the enactment and reproduction of family relations, rituals, and worldview. For many years the family enjoyed relatively security on the land. In this period Maxongo's Hoek's sacrality was implicit, informing but not controlling people's identity. Existence was closely linked to the use of the land and the ties to the ancestors were extremely important, but these things were accepted as simply part of daily life, labour, and system of belief. The land was sacred as the familial and spiritual center, but this sacrality was maintained through use and ownership. This conception of the land was in marked contrast to the period after contestation and removal to Mhlwazi, a time defined by struggle, suffering, and existence on the periphery of the sacred space.

The Ndunges were probably cognisant of the threat to their ownership of the two farms as early as the late 1930s when additional land was scheduled for incorporation into the reserves. The farms at Maxongo's Hoek were not included in the list of lands for black occupancy, signaling that future expropriation was possible. As pointed out by Elaine Unterhalter, white farmers had long harboured resentment towards black owners of productive land in their midst.¹⁴⁸ The Ndunges were likely to have felt such antagonism or hostility from the surrounding white community. The fragility of the Ndunges' position as black land holders would have become increasingly obvious as other black-owned farms in the Elliot district were expropriated. Contestation over the land and the

¹⁴⁸ Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 105.

urgency of protecting and maintaining the sacred space increased. As we have seen, however, there was little the family could do when faced with the power of apartheid legislation and police force. Desecration of the sacred, through dispossession of their land, was soon to follow. In a short space of time, the family lost their home, their material means of survival, and their extended family as represented by the elders and ancestors.

The importance of the Ndunges' sacred space to their well-being and existence was further intensified through the death of the elders and the drastic decline in living standard at the new land. These hardships were experienced almost immediately after removal. Death brought the loss of ritual knowledge and a sudden vacuum of authority figures and family leaders. Grief was heightened through the difficulties of trying to build houses and a school, and the entire situation was worsened by the hostile reaction of the new neighbours. This on-going suffering served as a daily reminder to the surviving family members of what they had lost. The severing of their connection to the land and the ancestors brought sorrow, death, and material struggle, all of which served to further illuminate the centrality and significance of Maxongo's Hoek. Contestation sacralised, while suffering memorialised and immortalised the sacred space.

In the years since removal, the Ndunges, including the children, never truly accepted Mhlwazi as home. Their memories of the past and hopes for the future remained hinged to Maxongo's Hoek as their sacred space, and the family was firmly positioned at the margin of their lost center. Legal or surreptitious efforts to return to the land only heightened their sense of alienation, and served to remind them of the damage done to their connection with the ancestors and the seemingly irrevocable loss of ritual knowledge. The pain brought by repeated confirmation of their alienation, however, also increased their desire to return to their sacred land. The Ndunges lodged their restitution claim with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) only months after the

establishment of the commission.¹⁴⁹ The Ndunges are now focused on once again occupying their central, significant, and sacred space and reconnecting with their ancestors. In the words of Major Gushelo, "Their lives are dependent on those graves. They cannot see a future without a connection to those graves."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ The Commission on Restitution of Land Rights began accepting claims on 1 May 1995, and the Ndunges lodged their claim in November 1995.

¹⁵⁰ Major Gushelo, 4 June 1998.

Chapter Three

The Soil, Our World

When the whites took our land away from us we lost the dignity of our lives, we could no longer feed our children. We were forced to become servants, we are treated like animals. Our people have many problems, we are beaten and killed by the farmers, the wages we earn are too little to buy even a bag of mielie-meal. We must unite together to help each other. . . . But in everything we do we must remember that there is only one aim and one solution and that is the land, the soil, our world.¹

On the 31st of May, 1996, Mr. Bambhazibukhale Charlie Ntuli wrote, "We will be pleased if you can consider our request to return to the farm and have access to our family graves."² The Ntulis were evicted from the farm of Witpoort in the Middleburg District of Mpumalanga in 1959 and lost access to their family graves in 1993.³ Although nearly forty years have passed since his father's eviction, Charlie Ntuli and his family remain determined to return to the land and to reconnect with their relatives who are buried there. The Ntulis did not hold the title deed to this land, and they were never considered to be *de facto* owners. The patriarch of the family lost land to white forces during Mapoch's War in the 1880s, but this land was elsewhere in the district, and the family came to Witpoort with a white farmer in the early 1900s. Unlike the Ndunges', the Ntulis' removal from the land in 1959 was not premised on racial legislation designed to separate the races and purify 'white' space, but on a common farm eviction, similar to those experienced throughout the world with the mechanisation of commercial agriculture. To the Ntulis, however, the legalities are irrelevant. Their title deed does not exist in a registrar's file but in the labour they put into the land and in the spirit of the ancestors buried there. The

¹ Petros Nkosi, opening a meeting to discuss the formation of a regional land committee in the Transvaal in 1989. Cited in Aninka Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980s," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 27.

² Charlie Ntuli, letter to the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 31 May 1996, Ntuli file at Legal Resource Centre, Pretoria.

³ The farm, Witpoort #14, is in the Middleburg District of Mpumalanga, approximately 150 kilometers east of Pretoria.

white farmer may have been the formal owner of the land based on laws of private property, but the Ntulis *made* the land their own through their labour. They ask, with patience and determination, to return to this land and their awaiting ancestors.

The Ntulis' main concern is reunification with the ancestors buried on the farm.

Although they consider Witpoort to be their rightful home, they have placed their desire to reconnect with the ancestors ahead of their wish for the land. Perhaps they recognise that a battle over land access will be more rapidly resolved than one over ownership, and are biding their time before pushing for full restoration. Or, perhaps the family feels that the rebuilding of proper communication with the ancestors is more important than material prosperity, in the form of land, for the living. In the worldview of the Ntulis, the link between the living and the dead is not severed by death, but it *is* hampered by separation. Exclusion from the graves of the dead divides the extended family. The restoration of the family unit has thus become the motivating factor in the Ntulis' effort to return, in some way, to their land. Forty years after eviction, Witpoort remains the critical space in terms of the Ntulis' family and identity.

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Ndzundza Ndebele: Origins and Ascendancy

The Southern Ndebele lived in northern South Africa for at least two hundred years before the Ndzundza branch, under Mabhogo, broke away from the central polity in the 1830s.⁴ Mabhogo and his followers settled near present-day Roossenekal in the Steelpoort River basin, in proximity to the area of Pedi hegemony.⁵ The break-away

⁴ Mabhogo was also known as Mapoch. The Southern or Transvaal Ndebele should not be confused with the Matabele (also called the Ndebele), a Zulu offshoot which, under Chief Mzilikazi, conquered large areas of the Transvaal before being defeated by the Boers in 1836. The Matabele were pushed north across the Limpopo River, and their descendants now populate much of southern Zimbabwe. The group discussed in this chapter are the Ndzundza Ndebele, the largest branch of the Southern or Transvaal Ndebele. In the context of this work I use Ndzundza and Ndebele interchangeably in reference to the Ndzundza Ndebele.

⁵ Deborah James, "Kinship and Land in an Inter-ethnic Rural Community" (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987), 24. By the beginning of the 19th century the Pedi had established dominance in the region. The Pedi were actually a loose confederation of groups subsumed by conquest and marriage, including the Koni, Matlala, and Tau.

Ndzundza centered themselves around the protected mountain fortress of KwaNomtjharhelo.⁶ Following initial skirmishes with the Pedi, the group had established itself as a significant presence in the region by the 1840s. The Ndzundza accepted the authority of the Pedi chief Sekwati, and offered him a wife as a sign of their deference.⁷ The ranks of the Ndzundza increased due to an influx of refugees from the *difaqane*, and they came to control some of the richest farmland in the region, reaching the height of their power in the 1860s and 1870s.⁸

In 1847 a group of Voortrekkers, led by Andries Hendrik Potgieter, reached the eastern Transvaal and founded a settlement of roughly 300 families in the vicinity of present day Ohrigstad.⁹ The leaders of this community envisioned a society based on pastoral and agricultural stability, and were thus eager to secure access to the surrounding land for the purposes of hunting, cultivation, and the establishment of trade routes. Leadership struggles soon erupted within the trekker group. In an attempt to cement his position, Potgieter negotiated a treaty with Sekwati, and believed that Sekwati had ceded him a section of Pedi land. Sekwati, on the other hand, thought that he was making the same concession to the trekkers that he had made to other subordinate parties: they could settle on the land and enjoy usage rights, but he would retain ultimate authority.¹⁰ If upheld, the system envisioned by Sekwati could be mutually beneficial. The African polity

⁶ This natural fortress, a network of caves in a steep hillside, is referred to by different names, including Namsaxelo, Erholweni, KoNomtjharhelo, and Mapoch's Caves. The Ntulis use the name KwaNomtjharhelo, and I will use this name throughout.

⁷ James, "Kinship and Land," 24; Peter Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity, 1883-1914," in *Holding their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, eds. Philip Bonner et al (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 229.

⁸ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 230-231. *Difaqane* is the Sotho word for the *mfecane*, as described in the previous chapter, which disrupted African politics in the interior in the first part of the nineteenth century. When discussed in relation to the northern regions of South Africa, the Sotho term is usually used. The Ndzundza Ndebele weathered the turmoil and displacement of the *difaqane* better than many groups in the region. The Manala Ndebele, for example, another branch of the Southern Ndebele, were almost completely wiped out by the turmoil and subsequent white advances.

⁹ Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 30-34. The location of the settlement was selected largely due to the proximity to Portuguese (as opposed to British) controlled ports and an abundance of game in the lowveld. The region surrounding Ohrigstad, however, harboured malaria and stock disease. In 1848 the community, already facing much internal conflict, moved south and established the town of Lydenburg as the new center of the district.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32. According to Delius, Potgieter and the elected Volksraad struggled for the leadership of the community. One of the community's main concerns of the community was rights to land. It was therefore in Potgieter's interest to negotiate a land deal with neighbouring African groups in order to increase his credibility and leadership position in the eyes of the trekkers. See Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*, 30-40.

gained a potential military ally, increased their number of subjects, and entrenched the monarch's internal authority. The Boer group, on the other hand, would receive access to land, resources, and protection under the dominant regional power. The new arrivals' understanding of land use, however, fundamentally differed from that of the rest of Sekwati's African subjects. To the trekkers, land access or occupancy was synonymous with land ownership. The misconstrued arrangement between the Pedi and the Boers heralded the start of the steady European encroachment and appropriation of African lands in the eastern Transvaal.

Conflict between the trekkers and the Ndzundza Ndebele flared repeatedly after the establishment of the Boer settlement in the 1840s. Demand for land and labour increased as the white population grew, and the African polities in the region were reluctant to provide such resources. The Ndzundza, located at the edge of the powerful Pedi kingdom, were often subject to the trekkers' labour demands. Their steady resistance contributed to the tensions with the white settlements.¹¹ According to Delius, Mabhogo "denied the validity of Boer claims to the land and refused to recognize their right to rent or tribute."¹² The surrounding white landowners were further angered when groups such as the Kopa invoked Mabhogo's authority to support their refusal to acquiesce to Boer labour demands. The Kopa responded to Boer attempts to force compliance by moving their subjects, "and on occasion the landowner's stock, to the core area of the Ndebele kingdom."¹³ Further exacerbating tensions, the Ndzundza were beginning to acquire increasing numbers of firearms through migrant labour, trade, and raiding of their white neighbors,¹⁴ setting the stage for conflict with the Boer state.¹⁵

¹¹ James, "Kinship and Land," 25.

¹² Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 229.

¹⁵ Stanley Trapido, "Aspects in the Transition from Slavery to Serfdom: The South African Republic 1842-1902," *Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 6, no. 20 (1971 / 1972), 26. The Boer state, the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), established in 1852, remained relatively weak until the last decade of the century

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Boers, Pedi, and Ndzundza had established an uneasy coexistence in the region, "with occasional cooperation between two of the groups in attempts to subordinate the third."¹⁶ Earlier peaceful relations between the Pedi and the Ndzundza disintegrated when the latter recalled the wife they had given to Sekwati and refused to recognise the regency of Sekhukhune, his heir. In 1863 Sekhukhune and the Boers combined forces to launch an unsuccessful attack against the Ndzundza stronghold. Sekhukhune was acting largely in retaliation for the mounting numbers of raids by the Ndzundza against his people, and wanted to show support for the Boer forces so as to avert a combined Boer / Swazi strike against his chiefdom.¹⁷ The political, military, and financial authority of the ZAR, however, collapsed in the mid-1870s, in part because of the burghers' refusal to tax themselves.¹⁸ By the late 1860s many white farmers had "trekked away in despair. Those who remained recognised the authority of the Ndzundza rulers and paid tribute to them."¹⁹ The Ndzundza, numbering an estimated 10,000 by the 1870s, appeared impenetrable in their mountain fortress and ceased to recognise Pedi supremacy. As Hermann Giliomee explains, however, no one group established "undisputed control" until the 1880s as the delicate power balance in the region continued to shift and sway.²⁰

Land and labour played a critical role in the shaping of black and white relations in the Transvaal throughout the nineteenth century. Large parcels of land were distributed to the initial Boer arrivals, with two six-thousand acre farms for summer and winter grazing

¹⁶ James, "Kinship and Land," 25-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25. Many of the raids were on returning Pedi migrants who passed close to the Ndzundza territory. The Boer / Swazi forces did attack the Pedi in 1869, but had little success. On allegiances between Africans and settlers, see Christopher Saunders, "Political Processes in the Southern African Frontier Zones," in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, eds. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 161-162.

¹⁸ Trapido, "Slavery to Serfdom," 26.

¹⁹ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 229. The payment of tribute by the settlers to the Ndzundza is significant because it illustrates that, for a brief period of time, the Boer community accepted their position as subordinates who were granted *use* of land by the regional chieftancy.

²⁰ Hermann Giliomee, "Processes in Development of the Southern African Frontier," in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, eds. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 78. The British annexed the ZAR in 1877, and defeated the Pedi and the Zulu states, which had previously been the main threat to Boer authority. The state the Boers took over after retrocession in 1881 had a more developed and efficient administrative system than before, and the ZAR prospered until the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. See William Beinart and Peter Delius, "Introduction," in *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930*, eds. W. Beinart, P. Delius, and S. Trapido (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 25.

granted as a right of settlement prior to 1870. As stated by Stanley Trapido, however, "[I]and without labour and cattle was of little use."²¹ White settlers initially found a surplus of land, but shortages of labour remained a serious problem, with indentured, captured, or 'orphaned' children, known as *inboekseling* children, providing one of the only steady supplies.²² The Boer practice of raiding African chiefdoms did little to ease tensions in the region and were the basis for continuing conflict and distrust between the white and black powers. The discovery of gold in 1886 made it even more difficult for farmers to attract labourers, as the more lucrative mining wages drew potential workers away from rural areas.²³ If white settlers were to survive as agriculturists, they had to prevent their labour pool from abandoning the farms for more rewarding prospects. These concerns of the ZAR settlers were resolved through the 'indentured' labour system established in the aftermath of the Boer defeat of the Ndzundza Ndebele in the early 1880s.

By the 1880s the African polities in the Transvaal were relatively weak in comparison to the restructured ZAR, although initially the Ndzundza still rode on the zenith of their prosperity of the 1860s and 1870s.²⁴ The Ndzundza's downfall came through a combination of Boer dominance and continuing rivalry with the Pedi. The Ndzundza refused to recognise the legitimacy of Sekhukhune, Sekwati's successor, and sided with his half-brother, Mampuru, in the power struggle for the Pedi paramountcy. Mampuru had Sekhukhune assassinated in 1882, and the Ndzundza, under Mabhogo's heir Nyabela, harbored Mampuru in the fortress at KwaNomtjharhelo. Sekhukhune's followers enlisted the help of the ZAR forces, who laid siege to the Ndzundza. The

²¹ Trapido, "Slavery to Serfdom," 27. Delius says that in order to receive title to land, the Boer settlers simply had to select farms and provide descriptions of them to the local authority. This system did not, however, always result in even-handed land distribution, as many settlers failed to register for formal rights and would find themselves landless in later years. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*, 127.

²² The *inboekseling* children were usually seized in commando raids on African settlements. Trapido says, "Since no very great distance was put between the slave's community of origin and his place of enslavement, deracination was achieved by the seizure of children rather than adults. These children were deemed to be orphans -- very often slave raiding ensured that they became orphans -- . . . [and they] were required to serve their masters until the age of 25 if they were male, and 21 if they were female. There is, however, no evidence of the emancipation of the *inboekselings* at their coming of age." Trapido, "Slavery to Serfdom," 25.

²³ Beinart and Delius, "Introduction," 26.

²⁴ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 230.

conflict, known as Mapoch's War, appears to have centered around rival claims to the Pedi cheiftancy and retributive action by the Boers. Deborah James, however, believes that the Ndzundza's provision of refuge to Mampuru

merely provided a flashpoint which ignited the already tense situation between Boers and Ndzundza. This tension existed due to persistent refusals by the latter to provide labour, their reluctance to be assigned a reserve . . . and the general threat perceived by white settlers in the existence of this independent chiefdom so close to them.²⁵

The Ntulis tell the oral history of this event:

The war started when the Ndebele King, Nyabela told the Boers that he has swallowed the king of Pedi, Mampuru. The Boers were angered by Nyabela and they attacked the Ndebeles at Roossenekal (KwaNomtjharhelo). The war took almost a year . . . [and] the Ndebeles were defeated.²⁶

The Boer forces destroyed crops, dynamited food storage areas, and seized Ndzundza cattle. After eight months the Ndzundza were near to starvation, and Nyabela surrendered.²⁷

Following their victory, the Boer forces took over 15,000 morgen of Ndzundza territory at the heart of the chiefdom, known as Mapochsgronde. Emergency grain supplies were provided for the severely weakened Ndzundza, but the Boer leaders did not consider long term charity profitable or appealing. Land and labour shortages had been "perennial problems" for the ZAR settlers, and, according to Delius, many of those who had fought in the campaign against the Ndzundza "probably suffered from one or both of these disabilities and anticipated that [the war's] successful completion would bring them some respite." The conflict had been expensive, and the ZAR leaders needed to recoup their

²⁵ James, "Kinship and Land," 26.

²⁶ Peter Ntuli, personal correspondence, 25 October 1997.

²⁷ The information presented in this and following paragraphs on the fall and subsequent treatment of the Ndzundza Ndebele in Mapoch's War (1882-1883) was taken from the following sources: T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 3rd edn. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); James, "Kinship and Land;" Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*; Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele;" John Nixon, *The Complete Story of the Transvaal* (Cape Town: C. Struik Ltd., 1885; reprint, 1972); Ivor Powell, *Ndebele: A People and their Art* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 1995); Chris J. Van Vuuren, "Anthropologist's Report: LRC in the case of J.M. Mahlangu" (Pretoria: Legal Resource Centre, unpublished document, 1994); Peter Ntuli, "The Dispute about graves and access to these graves between the Ntuli and Du Toit family," unpublished document, written for Elizabeth Stites, 1997; Interview with Ntuli family, 3 July 1997.

losses. The authorities also believed that it was necessary "to provide a salutary lesson to other African communities" of the dangers of resisting ZAR authority, and planned to penalise the Ndzundza for their recalcitrance.²⁸

The Ndzundza lands were opened to the Boers who had served in the commando on a first-come first-served basis. The area was "rushed" in October of 1883 and became densely settled by relatively poor white farmers. "Kaffer kraals" or independent African settlements of any size on the land were prohibited.²⁹ The conquered Ndzundza were allocated to the settlers as labourers for a five year period, with preference given to the Boers who had served in the commando or who were without labour.³⁰ Under these terms, the Ndzundza received no pay for their services, and were allotted only a small piece of land for a garden and dwelling. In theory the indenture was to last five years, but many Ndzundza were not emancipated at the end of this period.³¹ In an attempt to avoid criticism of inhumane treatment and to minimise defections, Boer settlers took families into servitude together. This practice tied all immediate family members, including children, to farm labour. By September 1883 the majority of Ndzundza had been parceled out to white farmers in the districts of Lydenburg, Standerton, Pretoria, and Middleburg.³²

Although families were supposed to be indentured together, the definition of family was based on Boer, not African, familial structures. Polygyny was rejected or ignored, as were extended families of multi-generational homesteads.³³ In most cases, only immediate and monogynous families were kept intact on the white farms, breaking up existing kinship networks and disrupting authority structures. Delius posits, however, that in some cases it was possible for extended homesteads to re-group, due in part to the "existence of extended families and localised clusters of kin within Boer society" which

²⁸ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 232; James, "Kinship and Land," 26.

²⁹ Ibid.; Powell, *Ndebele: A People and their Art*, 17.

³⁰ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 232.

³¹ Powell, *Ndebele: A People and their Art*, 19. Research in the last ten years has discovered people on farms whose conditions have not changed since their ancestors were indentured in 1883.

³² Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 233-234.

³³ Most Ndzundza households included two generations of married adults.

saw different 'nuclear' Ndzundza homesteads of a shared family indentured in close proximity to each other. On the whole, however, Ndzundza society was "scattered across the breadth of the Transvaal," and many people deserted farms in attempts to locate their children or spouses.³⁴

Many people left white farms in search of their families, but there were also concentrated efforts to return to the heart of the Ndzundza chiefdom at Mapochsgronde. Following their victory and take-over of the lands, the ZAR authorities proclaimed that the Ndzundza would "under no circumstances" be allowed to live at Mapochsgronde again.³⁵ Based on regulations in later years, it seems that this decree was made not only to punish the Ndzundza and force them into labour, but also to remove them from the location symbolising their independence and power. The Boers were clearly aware of the significance of Mapochsgronde in the collective Ndzundza worldview. Delius, focusing on the primacy of family, believes that Ndzundza attempts to move back towards Mapochsgronde was "a return to familiar territory," and a reflection of people's hope that the high concentration of Ndzundza working in the area would allow them to revive previously existing social and familial networks.³⁶ The site did hold potential for the reunification of dispersed families, but it also had an important psychological and spiritual role. Mapochsgronde was the central locative space of the Ndzundza collective identity and history. The centrality of Mapochsgronde is most evident in the pervasive desire and attempts of the Ndzundza to return to the area, even many years and several generations after alienation. These attempts, however, were repeatedly barred by the Boers. According to Deborah James, the Ndzundza requested to be allowed to settle at Mapochsgronde and KwaNomtjharhelo throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but

³⁴ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 234-236. Families also escaped as whole units, hoping to seek refuge with nearby African chiefs. These efforts were largely unsuccessful since chiefs were reluctant to harbour Ndzundza refugees because of the threats of harsh repercussions from the Boer state. Furthermore, a Ndzundza family, "stripped of their cattle and firearms, and without cash," was not a particularly attractive addition to a chief's subjects.

³⁵ James, "Kinship and Land," 26.

³⁶ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 239.

[t]heir requests were consistently refused. Judging from earlier statements, this was because it was thought strategically unwise to allow the reuniting, at a place which had come to symbolise its former power, of a group which had proved so recalcitrant in recognising the sovereignty over them of successive white governments.³⁷

The authorities clearly recognised the power and significance inherent in the land. These two parallel and conflicting trends, the state's refusal to allow the Ndzundza to return and the Ndzundza's desire to do just that, came to the fore once again in the 1980s. A group of Ndzundza living in the bantustan of Lebowa refused to move to the newly created bantustan of KwaNdebele, "as they were adamant that they would never accept any Ndebele Homeland other than the original heartland" of Mapochsgronde.³⁸ One hundred years after alienation, Mapochsgronde remained at the heart of the Ndzundza worldview and the center of their sacred space.

KwaNomtjharhelo and the surrounding area of Mapochsgronde was especially significant to the Ndzundza because it represented a way of life which contrasted sharply with the conditions they endured after their defeat. In collective memory, the land remained the site of independence and integrity, and the location through which the Ndzundza could conceptualise their identity as a powerful and autonomous body. The eight-month siege of KwaNomtjharhelo imbued the land with further importance, as it signified the intense effort expended to protect the sanctity and perceived inviolability of the Ndzundza heartland. Ownership of the land remained significant, since it was the determining factor in the Ndzundza's descent from a powerful polity to a nation of unpaid workers. Regardless of who controlled and owned it, Mapochsgronde would continue to be critical to Ndzundza identity.

³⁷ James, "Kinship and Land," 48.

³⁸ Deborah James, "A Question of Ethnicity: Ndzundza Ndebele in a Lebowa Village," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 1 (March 1990), 36. The KwaNdebele bantustan is discussed in greater detail below.

The Ntulis and the Du Preezes³⁹

The increased Boer demand for labour in the mid-1800s was met with the stipulations placed on the Ndzundza at the end of Mapoch's War. Although the forced indentureship of the Ndzundza was a direct consequence of the conflict, the move to tie Africans to servitude reflected more general legislative trends designed to push rural blacks into agricultural labour. In 1894, Cecil John Rhodes, prime minister of the Cape Colony, said, "It must be brought home to [blacks] that in the future, nine-tenths of them will have to spend their lives in daily labour, in physical work, in manual labour."⁴⁰ The five-year period of unpaid labour for the Ndzundza may have been particularly harsh, but compelling Africans into labour for whites was not an unusual policy in either the Cape or the Boer Republics.

Although many Ndzundza were 'parceled out' to farms in districts neighbouring Mapochsgronde, some were taken over as labourers on their own lands when the kingdom was opened to members of the Boer commando. Shelele Ntuli was living in an area of Mapochsgronde called KwaMahlangu when the Ndzundza were defeated. In 1883, Arnold du Preez, a member of the victorious forces, was granted the land of KwaMahlangu. The Ndzundza living on the farm became his labourers, and he re-named the farm Rooikraal. Peter Ntuli, grandson of Shelele, explains, "The clan of the Ntulis was there at KwaMahlangu [Rooikraal], then Du Preez found them there and occupied the land."⁴¹ Du Preez took KwaMahlangu and the Ntulis over as his own. No formal contract was made between Shelele Ntuli and Du Preez. The white farmer

³⁹ The white farmers were not available for interview. As their views are presented here only through the perspective of the Ntulis, their names have been changed.

⁴⁰ Cited in Wendy Davies, *We Cry for Our Land: Farmworkers in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1990), 1.

⁴¹ Interview with the Ntuli family, 3 July 1997, Mathyszynloop, Mpumalanga. Peter Ntuli is listed as the main source because he translated for 8-10 family members in a group interview. Questions were put to the group, who would discuss them amongst themselves before Peter provided translation. From this point onwards the interview will be cited with the family name and date.

renamed the young Shelele "April" and a relationship between the two families spanning three generations began.⁴²

The Ntulis were not released from servitude at the end of the stipulated five-year period, and the conditions of their employment did not change or improve. While living at KwaMahlangu under Du Preez, Shelele married two wives and fathered seven children.⁴³ After the Anglo-Boer War the Du Preezes moved, taking Shelele and his family to the farm Berevlei, also in the vicinity of Mapochsgronde. Workers, like other farm implements, were considered moveable property. At Berevlei, Shelele's wives gave birth to five more children; his first wife and two daughters died at Berevlei and were buried on the farm. Arnold du Preez also died during this period and was buried on the adjacent farm of Witpoort. After his death, the farms Berevlei and Witpoort were divided amongst his children, as were the farm workers, or, in the words of Peter Ntuli, the "slaves." Peter continues, "Nollie du Preez [son of Arnold] was *given* Witpoort and our grandfather April."⁴⁴ The Ntulis moved to Witpoort in 1939 or 1940, where they were "owned by Nollie du Preez."⁴⁵

Prior to his death, Arnold du Preez made an agreement with Shelele that all Ntuli descendants could be buried on the Du Preez farms. The Ntulis believe that a level of respect and understanding existed between the two patriarchs, and that the arrangement was made in recognition of the long history between the families. According to the Ntulis, Du Preez's agreement with their grandfather said that "the family of Ntuli . . .

⁴² Delius found that many of the Ndzundza indentured by the Boers were given names corresponding to the month in which their servitude began. "September" was the most common name, as the allocation of Ndzundza to white farmers occurred in September 1883. Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 234-235.

⁴³ Most of the Ntulis introduced themselves to me by their first names, and used their first names in correspondence. The names in this chapter therefore reflect this pattern. No names for Shelele's wives were given in any correspondence or interview.

⁴⁴ Ntuli, "Dispute about graves," 1, my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Ntulis, 3 July 1997. Berevlei and Witpoort were adjacent farms, both owned by the Du Preez family until Berevlei was sold in the mid-1900s. The Ntuli family worked the land in entirety before the death of Arnold and the division of the farms. Although the Ntulis initially lived on Berevlei following their move from KwaMahlangu, their main attachment is to Witpoort. This is largely because they have many more family members buried there. When I refer to the combined area in the first part of the century I say Witpoort / Berevlei, while in discussion of later years I follow the Ntulis' lead and simply say Witpoort.

must continue burying their families there because they had worked too much for him."⁴⁶ Based on this verbal agreement, the Ntulis could bury their dead on the land even if they were no longer living there. This pact gave the family a sense of permanence which, for labourers on white farms, was difficult to achieve. Even black farmers with freehold title had at best an unstable grasp on land in the Transvaal by the beginning of the twentieth century. Farm labourers, extremely susceptible to eviction without notice, had the most insecure tenure on the land. The claim that families like the Ntulis did have, tenuous as it may have been, was critical to their well-being and survival, since land and its produce was their only asset and modicum of stability. Shelele's descendants believed that they had a slightly better claim to the land than other farm workers, since the accord between the patriarchs seemed to ensure the continued presence of their family on the farm. The family established a strong connection to the land of Witpoort / Berevlei as their home, a location made all the more significant by its proximity to the lost land of Mapochsgronde, the Ndzundza heartland.

The pact between the patriarchs of the two families was important because it established what the Ntulis believed was an inalienable resting place for their dead. When Shelele buried his wife and daughters at Berevlei he must have wondered where he would be buried, and if his descendants would have access to his grave. The agreement with Arnold du Preez eased this concern, since it guaranteed the family a place where a continuing link to the past and to the ancestors could be sustained. The maintenance of such a bond would allow for the unbroken transfer of knowledge and authority from the ancestors to the living. Shelele was assured that his children would be able to afford him the respect required after death, and that he would play an on-going role in the spiritual and material lives of his descendants.

Although the Ntulis had security in terms of an immediate home and a final resting place for their dead, their working and living conditions had barely improved in over sixty

⁴⁶ Ibid.

years of employment. The Du Preezes made minimal concessions to their workers, as Peter Ntuli explains:

We were just given a small piece of land that we can plow food for the year. . . . [We worked] all the time for the Du Preezes for nothing. That is the only thing that we were given, a small piece of land, even our cattle were numbered.⁴⁷

Jantjie Ntuli, son of Shelele, was never paid, in cash or food, by the Du Preezes. The piece of land that each Ntuli homestead was given was large enough only for a house and small garden. Peter says, "We were given small land to plough so that we could live with it for the whole year," but this small garden could barely sustain a family.⁴⁸ Boshiwe Sithole, Peter's aunt and Shelele's only surviving child, describes the only food provided by the Du Preezes to their workers:

You see this milk that they have taken the butter off the top of? This was put outside in a drum there . . . there was nothing that covered that milk -- and then as a black man or woman we were supposed to just go there and eat that milk. . . . They don't care about flies -- what what what -- what falls in that milk.⁴⁹

Three generations of labour were rewarded with skimmed milk.

The entire Ntuli family worked for the Du Preezes. The men worked in the fields and tended the livestock, and the women worked in the kitchen and cared for the Du Preez children. All of Shelele's surviving children and most of his grandchildren worked on Witpoort, "all for nothing, they were not paid." Peter Ntuli describes the working conditions of the women and children:

My cousin started working in the kitchen when she was the age of that young woman [points to a young girl of about seven years]. She was given some chair to stand up [on] when she washed the dishes. Another thing is that they were supposed to work until late-- ten o'clock. And then after [they were done] they

⁴⁷ Ibid. The Ntulis do not fit neatly into categories of farm workers. They were not labour tenants, as labour tenants are given a portion of land for their own use in exchange for working for the farmer for a set number of days per year. Nor could the Ntulis be considered share-croppers, who contribute a portion of their crops as rent. A third category of farm workers pay cash rent for the land on which they live and farm, and the farmer benefits from labour supplied at low cost by the tenant's family members. The Ntulis do not belong in any of these categories of South African farm workers, because they received nothing for their labour.

⁴⁸ Ntuli, "Disputes about graves," 1.

⁴⁹ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

were chased away-- "just go to your home"-- and then before the sunrise they were supposed to be in the kitchen and working.⁵⁰

After the women worked in the whites' kitchen they would return to their homes to care for their own husbands and children, adding greatly to the length of their days.⁵¹ No provisions were made for development of skills or resources that would be useful outside of agriculture. Nor did the Du Preezes provide schooling for the farm workers' children.⁵² In the first decades of the twentieth century, farmers found it increasingly necessary "to immobilize their labour" so as to prevent people from leaving farms for the more appealing wages offered by the mining sector.⁵³ "Farm worker" stamps were placed in labourers' ID books, making them eligible only for agricultural employment. Strict influx controls under apartheid made it nearly impossible for people to move to urban areas, and the lack of education and transferable skills effectively tied people to the farms.

Farm labourers were usually allowed to keep livestock on white farms, but the maximum number of animals, particularly cattle, was set by the farmer. Peter Ntuli gives the family's understanding of why Du Preez limited the number of cattle the Ntulis could keep at Witpoort:

He said maybe we would be rich, we were 'kaffirs,' we were not supposed to have or own anything. It must have been the means to keep us [working for him]. Another thing . . . we were not supposed to have even a bull. The bulls somehow just belong to them, to the whites.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The women and children would have also contributed to agricultural labour at harvest and planting times. On women farm labourers, see Sandra Hill Lanz, *Women on Farms* (Pretoria: Lawyers for Human Rights, 1994).

⁵² Lack of education for farm workers' children is not unique to the eastern Transvaal or to the Ntuli family. As late as 1988 it was found that only 1 in 3 children on farms attended school, and 8 out of 10 farmworkers were illiterate. When schools were provided on farms they were usually managed by the farmer, who could close the school when the children's labour was needed. Most existing farm schools have very poor facilities, and many farm children who do have access to school never finish their primary education. In 1987 there was only one secondary farm school in the entire country. Farmers benefit from their workers' lack of education or illiteracy, as this almost guarantees another generation of labourers. Davies, *We Cry for Our Land*, 19.

⁵³ Beinart and Delius, "Introduction," 13.

⁵⁴ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

Nor were the Ntulis permitted to have goats, only cows and sheep.⁵⁵ Since many farm workers received no cash wages, livestock provided a critical source of both income and social security. The animals could be sold or bartered in lean times or used as meat to feed the family. Owning livestock also offered a modicum of otherwise absent independence in financial affairs, because the family could decide how and when to dispose of these assets, and could also use the animals to pay bridewealth, or *bogadi*, when their sons wished to marry.⁵⁶ Yet, as pointed out by the Ntulis, the prosperity of farm workers threatened white dominion and labour supply, and it was in the farmer's interest to maintain his labourers' dependency. A prohibition on the ownership of bulls served this end, since it made it impossible for a farm worker to increase his wealth in terms of cattle from within his pool of resources. In order to acquire more animals he would have to barter or enter into the cash economy, which was extremely difficult without cash savings or surplus crops. By placing limits on livestock and thereby wealth, the Du Preezes ensured that their workers were "powerless in terms of their capacity to choose other options" of employment.⁵⁷

Dependency on the farmer was further maintained through the constant if unspoken threat of eviction. Farm labourers knew they were in a precarious position, and this awareness would only have been intensified by the increasing rate of evictions in the mid-twentieth century which accompanied the growth of agricultural mechanisation.⁵⁸ Although farm workers had very little material wealth, any wealth that they did have was tied up in the small pieces of ground, dwellings, and livestock, all of which would be lost if they

⁵⁵ Ntuli, "Disputes about graves," 2. This was presumably because goats are more destructive in their grazing habits than cows and sheep, and could potentially do more damage to the Du Preezes' crops.

⁵⁶ For general information on *bogadi* (known as *lobola* in Zulu and Xhosa), see E.J. De Jager, "Traditional' Xhosa Marriage in the Rural Areas of the Ciskei, South Africa," in *Man: Anthropological Essays Presented to O.F. Raum*, ed. E.J. de Jager (Cape Town: Struik, 1971), 160-82, and G.P. Lestrade, "Some Notes on the Bogadi System of the Ba-Hurutshe" *South African Journal of Science* 23 (1926), 937-42.

⁵⁷ Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), *A Toehold on the Land: Labour Tenancy in the South Eastern Transvaal*, (Johannesburg: A TRAC Publication, 1988), 14.

⁵⁸ Colin Bundy, "Land, Law and Power: Forced Removals in Historical Context," in *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, eds. Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4. Bundy points out that the dispossession of rural peasants is not unique to South Africa, and has occurred in all societies with the onset of industrialisation and capitalism. When small-scale producers or subsistence farmers lose access to land they also lose the ability to provide for their families, which forces them into dependency on the very forces and people who dispossessed them.

moved or were evicted.⁵⁹ Furthermore, even if security of tenure was fragile, the farm provided a home for the ancestors and the extended family, and alienation from that space would bring the loss of everything, ranging from the familial to the ancestral, from the material to the spiritual.

Eviction

In 1959 Jantjie Ntuli was evicted by Nollie du Preez. "Almost all the other Ntulis . . . were forced to move before, then my father was the last [man] to be forced to moved, amongst the sons [of Shelele]."⁶⁰ The Ntulis do not know why their father was told to leave the Du Preezes' farm. To them it seemed that the eviction was without reason. Du Preez's motivations may, however, have been grounded in legislation, as a 1954 amendment to the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act obliged white farmers to register all African workers on their land. Two years later a further amendment created Labour Tenant Control Boards to set the number of labourers allowed on each farm. The boards, established in each district, were meant to redistribute "surplus" workers, defined as more people than "needed to run [a] farm effectively," to areas experiencing labour shortages.⁶¹ If other farms in the region did not require labourers, the workers were to be evicted, although "every endeavor should be made to place ejected labour tenants in employment" with places of residence.⁶² There was no guarantee that new employment would be found, however, and if the family or individual refused to take the new position the labour board was under no obligation to provide alternative housing. Evicted farm workers were barred from moving to urban areas by the same legislation.

These legislative regulations came in the same period as the release of the findings of the Du Toit Commission, established to investigate the decline in the rural white population.

⁵⁹ TRAC, *A Toehold on the Land*, 12.

⁶⁰ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

⁶¹ Stefan Schirmer, "Reactions to the State: The Impact of Farm Labour Policies in the Mid-Eastern Transvaal, 1955-1960," *South African Historical Journal* 30 (May 1994), 76. These regulations referred specifically to labour tenants, but would also have included families such as the Ntulis, even though the terms of their employment were not strictly on a labour tenancy basis.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Citing Native Affairs Department (NAD) General Circular, 24 August 1956.

This commission found that whites made up only 4% of the population in rural areas, and generated a fear of the "*beswarring van die platteland*" (blackening of the countryside).

The low percentage of whites in rural areas was perceived to be a threat to the advancement of white South Africans.⁶³ 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."⁶⁴ While incentives such as electrification, education, and cheap land were used to attract whites to rural areas, the commission stressed that a policy was needed

to organise farm labour in such a way that only the absolutely essential number of units are employed, and particularly to limit large non-white families on farms to the absolute minimum.⁶⁵

The "absolutely essential units" included farm workers, registered labour tenants, or dependents of those in these two categories. People deemed 'surplus' or 'idle' were summarily evicted, as were families who refused to submit their children to farmers' labour demands. Delius found that one of the main causes of eviction in the 1950s was the struggle between white farmers and the heads of African households over education. By the same token, children were prevented from leaving farms to attend school elsewhere. Delius quotes J. Motha, a Ndzundza farm worker, explaining his family's eviction:

[The eviction] resulted from the children demanding to leave the farms because they were sick and tired of farm life and ill-treatment by the Boers. They said they wanted education. . . . Then the Boers said we should go along with them. So we left.⁶⁶

Evictions of farm workers in the eastern Transvaal in the late 1950s and 1960s were also due to the restructuring of commercial agriculture in South Africa.⁶⁷ Improved technology and mechanisation meant that fewer people were required to complete a task in

⁶³ Elaine Unterhalter, *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1987), 95.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Unterhalter is citing the 1959 report of the Du Toit Commission, 3. The commission found that the decline in the rural white population was due to people leaving small farms upon finding that they were unable to compete with the large commercial farming sector. The growth of urban industry also encouraged the urbanisation of a white labour force.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Citing page 51 of the Du Toit Commission Report.

⁶⁶ Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele," 250.

⁶⁷ Davies, *We Cry for Our Land*, 6.

the same amount of time. The average size of farms also increased, and fewer white owners employed fewer black workers.⁶⁸ The advent of the Nationalist government in 1948 saw a substantial rise in state support and subsidies for the white agricultural sector, which in turn decreased farmers' dependency on black labour. Attempts were made to replace labour tenancy with straight wage labour.⁶⁹ Although farm evictions resulting from these trends reached a peak in the 1960s and 1970s, by 1959 there was already a pattern of evictions from farms, such as Witpoort, in the eastern Transvaal region.⁷⁰

According to his sons, Jantjie Ntuli was initially told by Nollie du Preez to "just go and rest somewhere," implying that the suspension was temporary and that he would be able to return to Witpoort.⁷¹ In actuality, Du Preez was evicting Jantjie and the rest of the extended Ntuli family, numbering roughly thirty people at the time.⁷² The Ntulis were served a *trekpas*, defined by Aninka Claassens as

a letter which says that the person, his or her family, and all 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.⁷³

The family was given one day to pack their possessions and leave the farm. Although the Ntulis are uncertain as to the specific reason for their eviction, they have put much thought into the event which drastically changed their lives:

The cause [of eviction] may have been that there were too many people on that farm, or that white man [Nollie du Preez] just hates black people. And they have

⁶⁸ Laurine Platzky and Cherryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 31, 119. The workers on grain farms, once the largest agricultural employer, were the worst hit by increased mechanisation. There were massive evictions from grain farms in the 1960s.

⁶⁹ Davies, *We Cry for Our Land*, 6.

⁷⁰ Ntulis, 3 July 1997. I asked the Ntulis if other people in their area were also forced off the land in the same period. They responded, "Yes, that was something that was common amongst those people around there." I asked, "Having to move?" Response: "Ja, they were forced to move, they were just tossed around these farms there."

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jantjie's sister, Boshiwe Sithole, who had married into another family on the farm, remained at Witpoort until she was evicted in 1974. The large size of the Ntuli family at the time of eviction lends credence to the possibility that they were evicted because they were considered a "surplus" population on the farm.

⁷³ Claassens, "Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal," 46.

the right just to change workers, everything that they want to they can just do it, without anything to hinder them.⁷⁴

After receiving the trekpas the family had no option but to leave Witpoort. Although the Ntulis were aware of other farm evictions in the area, they had no recourse to resistance as a group, and no legal means of preventing their removal. Platzky and Walker expound, "Farm evictions normally take place on an individual basis. Farm workers and ex-tenants have [the] least protection from the law, making any response let alone resistance to this massive programme of relocation almost impossible."⁷⁵

The Ntuli family, united on Witpoort, was "scattered all around" on other farms in the Middleburg District. "We were tossed around, forced to move from farms, just wandering."⁷⁶ Jantjie eventually found work on a neighbouring farm, called Kontaskloof, and moved there with his immediate family. The extended Ntuli family, however, went in separate directions to find employment. Kontaskloof's proximity to Witpoort was significant for Jantjie and his family. The farms were "divided by a wire, a fence," meaning that the family could return regularly to visit their ancestors.⁷⁷ Initially, most of the other households found work on farms within a ten kilometer radius, but were eventually forced to move further afield after repeated evictions.

Although the Ntulis had been able to take their livestock when they were evicted from Du Preez's farm, many of their new employers would not accommodate their entire herds. Peter Ntuli says, "They [other farmers] said that our cattle would eat the grass that their cattle was supposed to be eating. And maybe also because they are racist and black men are not supposed to have cattle."⁷⁸ A positive aspect of Jantjie's employment on Kontaskloof was that the farmer allowed the extended family to gather for family events

⁷⁴ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

⁷⁵ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 31. Farmworkers made up the largest group of victims of forced removals between 1960 and 1990, with an estimated 2 million people removed or under threat of removal by 1983. Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 10, 373.

⁷⁶ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and ceremonies, which helped to ease the hardship caused by physical separation from their living relatives.

The Ntulis' employment at Kontaskloof lasted twenty-five years, ending with Jantjie's death in 1982. At Witpoort all family members worked for the Du Preezes, but at Kontaskloof Jantjie was the primary provider of labour. At the time of his death, some of his children had left the farm to work in Pretoria. Others were too young to take over their father's tasks, Peter was in school. Although the immediate family was dispersed, Kontaskloof had remained their base and gathering point for the duration of Jantjie's employment. According to the Ntulis, the white farmer forced them to move after Jantjie's death because "there was no one who would work for nothing for that farmer. . . . They wanted a person who was like my father." None of Jantjie's sons were willing to endure the conditions under which he had worked.⁷⁹ The family was evicted and given one day to leave. When they delayed by a week, the farmer impounded their goats and charged them for their release. Although Jantjie, the main provider, was deceased, the family was not given any food or money to take with them when they left the farm, nor were they allowed to dismantle the houses they had built in order to re-use the materials.

The mechanisation of agriculture in many developing nations has led to a down-sizing of farm labour, usually resulting in increased urbanisation as people moved to industrial or commercial centers in search of employment.⁸⁰ In South Africa, however, this pattern of resettlement was prevented by influx control and pass laws designed to keep blacks from flooding urban areas. A few people managed to secure the papers which allowed them into the cities, but most were rendered 'redundant' agricultural workers and confined to the rural areas by the "farm worker" code stamped in their passbooks.⁸¹ In 1984, after two years of failed attempts at finding a new home and stable employment following their

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People*, 67-68.

⁸¹ Ibid., 67. The Ntulis' passbooks were not stamped "farm worker" by the Du Preezes at Witpoort, but were stamped on subsequent farms.

eviction from Kontaskloof, the Ntulis decided to move to the recently created bantustan of KwaNdebele. They had heard that it was possible to obtain grazing land for their animals, and welcomed the prospect of being able to have a piece of earth not owned by a white man or contingent upon their supply of labour.

KwaNdebele

KwaNdebele was the tenth and last bantustan established by the apartheid government. The authorities had hoped that the Southern Ndebele would be subsumed into the Bophuthatswana and Lebowa bantustans, but influential Ndebele businessmen and chiefs began to lobby for a separate Ndebele territory. In 1972 the Department of Bantu Administration and Development drafted plans for the creation of a separate Ndebele homeland.⁸² The nucleus of the area was the farm Weltevrede, near Groblersdal, which had been acquired in the face of prohibitions on African land owning by a group of Ndzundza in 1922. In the years after its purchase, Weltevrede had served as a gathering point for evicted Ndzundza farm workers or those escaping harsh labour conditions. Weltevrede residents fought against black spot removal for many years. Several white-owned farms in the area, including Mathyszynloop, where the Ntulis would settle, were purchased and added to Weltevrede, as Pretoria began to consolidate the Ndebele bantustan, "creating a country out of nothing."⁸³ In 1974 the Ndzundza tribal authority was given jurisdiction over an area of 51,000 hectares, and, by the late 1970s, Ndebele who had been living in Bophuthatswana and Lebowa flocked to the area.⁸⁴

KwaNdebele, although described in the Surplus People Project reports as "one of the

⁸² Colleen McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt: KwaNdebele: An Economic and Political Profile* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1987), 4. The influence of the Ndebele elite in the establishment of the bantustan provides another example, although from a slightly different angle, of the link between individual citizens and groups and the formulation of apartheid policy.

⁸³ Philip Van Niekerk, "The Bus Stop Republic," in *The Transported: A South African Odyssey*, text by Brenda Goldblatt and Philip van Niekerk, photos by David Goldblatt (Duke University: Aperture Foundation, 1989), 70. For more information on African land purchases after the 1913 Natives Land Act, see Harvey Feinberg, "Challenging the Natives Land Act: African Land Acquisitions between 1913 and 1936," and Bernard Mbenga, "The Acquisition of Land by Africans in the Western Transvaal: The Case of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela of the Pilanesburg District, 1903-1931." Both papers presented at South African Historical Society 16th Biennial Conference, Pretoria, July 1997.

⁸⁴ McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt*, 5, 6, 13. In 1977 a section of Bophuthatswana seceded and joined KwaNdebele.

least viable bantustans . . . with little development having taken place and the vast majority of people living in poverty-stricken conditions in over-crowded relocation areas," was assigned self-governing territory status in April of 1981.⁸⁵

KwaNdebele leaders, who stood to benefit from increased political power, were eager for the bantustan to assume independence, but a move in this direction was not supported by most residents.⁸⁶ The national government, however, chose to interpret the large influx of people to the area, which reached its peak in 1979 and 1980, as a sign of the Ndebele people's desire for independence. Dr. Piet Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development, said:

By means of the large-scale migration of the South Ndebele to a country of their own, the Ndebele people is [sic] bringing together those who belong together, and those aspirations must not be denied.⁸⁷

The creation of the bantustan was billed as a response to African aspirations and demands. While some Ndebele may have expressed such sentiments, the creation of a fifth independent state would primarily serve the interests of the Pretoria government because it symbolised another step towards complete ethnic segregation. Colleen McCaul points to the flaws in Minister Koornhof's argument that people were moving to KwaNdebele out of a desire to have their own nation:

⁸⁵ Surplus People Project (SPP), *Forced Removals in South Africa: SPP Reports, The Transvaal*, Vol. 5 (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, 1983), 47. A bantustan was declared self-governing prior to becoming 'independent,' a status which was never recognised by any country other than South Africa. (Four of the ten bantustans, Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, and Venda, were granted independent status.) A self-governing territory had its own legislative assembly, cabinet, army and police force. In the case of KwaNdebele, only 16 of the 72 members in the assembly were democratically elected, and the rest were appointed by chiefs. Women could neither stand for election nor vote. See McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt*, 6-9.

⁸⁶ Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), *KwaNdebele-- The Struggle Against Independence* (Johannesburg: A TRAC Publication, 1987).

⁸⁷ Cited in McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt*, 12. KwaNdebele's independence was initially scheduled to take effect in December 1984, but was delayed when "even Pretoria saw that KwaNdebele was completely undeveloped and that independence would make a mockery of its policy" of creating autonomous states for the ethnic groups. Van Niekerk, "The Bus Stop Republic," 70. In early 1986, a vigilante group called Mbokodo (meaning "millstone," connotating its crushing power), was set up by the KwaNdebele leaders and led by shopkeepers who were dependent on the bantustan administration. Mbokodo embarked on a campaign to stamp out opposition to independence, and the bantustan exploded into violence. The conflict between the Mbokodo and anti-independence activists left over two hundred people dead. In August 1986 the KwaNdebele Legislative Assembly reversed the motion to take independence, dealing a surprising and unusual blow to the will of the apartheid state. For further information on events in KwaNdebele in the mid-1980s, see Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), *KwaNdebele*, 1987.

While voluntary migration in pursuit of such ideals may have been the reason for some of the influx, there is persuasive evidence that hundreds of thousands who settled in KwaNdebele from 1978 were largely forced there by structural processes beyond their control.⁸⁸

Most people entering KwaNdebele had little other option of a place to settle. The majority were evicted farm workers or those pushed out of Bophuthatswana by aggression aimed at non-Tswana residents.⁸⁹ The Ntulis, for instance, although hopeful about the prospects that KwaNdebele might offer, only moved to the bantustan when they had exhausted all possibilities of finding work or land in 'white' South Africa.

The Ntulis settled at Mathyszynloop in KwaNdebele and acquired a small piece of land for grazing their animals. Eighty percent of their stock, however, died following the move due to the poor quality of the pasturage. Very few employment opportunities existed in KwaNdebele, and in 1980 only 8% of the working population was employed within the bantustan.⁹⁰ Most people commuted daily by bus, sometimes up to four hours in each direction, to jobs in Pretoria or other industrial areas.⁹¹ Others came home to their families only on weekends. Infrastructure in KwaNdebele was severely lacking, and in 1984 only 2% of houses had electricity and almost none had running water. Regardless of the lack of resources, the bantustan quickly became over-crowded.⁹² Journalist Joseph Lelyveld describes the surprise of finding the remote yet dense settlement in the middle of the open veld:

You drive through the Pretoria suburbs and then through more than forty miles of rich farm country before you hit it; then you could drive another forty miles, and it was seldom out of sight: a serpentine stream of metal shanties and mud houses, the metal roofs of which were typically weighted down by small boulders to keep them from blowing off in the Transvaal's violent hailstorms. Such sights can be seen in other countries, usually as a result of famines or wars. I don't know where else they have been achieved as a result of planning.⁹³

⁸⁸ McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt*, 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 13. It is difficult to know the exact numbers of evicted farm workers who moved to KwaNdebele and other bantustans, as they arrive in small groups of one to two families.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹¹ Joseph Lelyveld, *Move Your Shadow: South Africa, Black and White* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), 127. Urban influx control was more relaxed in the case of commuters from the bantustans, as these territories catered to the image of a migrant working population which would vacate white areas when their services were no longer needed.

⁹² McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt*, 53.

⁹³ Lelyveld, *Move Your Shadow*, 125.

Removed from the land where they had lived for generations and invested with years of labour, the Ntulis found themselves in a crowded and dry dumping ground, far from their roots, home, and extended family, both living and dead.

Loss of Place

The whites have not been here for long. This one has been here for six months. The one before was the same. . . . We are the people who live on the farms. We are not people who are visiting or people who are passing through. We were *born* here. Another place we have not seen.⁹⁴

When Jantjie Ntuli and his family were evicted from Witpoort in 1959 they lost their sense of place, their tie to the land and to their home. Although Shelele Ntuli first came under Arnold du Preez's charge at KwaMahlangu, his family put years of effort into the farms of Witpoort / Berevlei and established a permanent relationship with that specific land. The Ntulis repeatedly point out that Shelele began to work for Du Preez when he was "still young, not yet married," emphasising the lifetime of labour that Shelele gave to the Du Preezes.⁹⁵ Shelele's youth at the time of his first connection with Du Preez also implies that he had not yet formed a strong attachment to one place. The Ntuli family, locating themselves as Ndzundza Ndebele, identify on a macro-level with the space of Mapochsgronde, yet on the personal or micro-level their ties are to the land of Witpoort / Berevlei, where they spent nearly 60 years.⁹⁶ This specific location is the Ntulis' significant space, as it was to this land that the family gave generations of labour, and on this land that the family first buried their dead.

When the Ntulis lived on Witpoort and later Kontaskloof they had no cash savings, no farm implements, few crops to be harvested, and only extremely limited access to land.

⁹⁴ Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), *A Toehold on the Land*, 17. Quotation by Mr. Aaron Zwane, original emphasis.

⁹⁵ Ntulis, 3 July, 1997.

⁹⁶ One exception to this was the case of Peter's aunt, Boshiwe Sithole. I asked where the various family members would say they were "from." Most replied that they were from Witpoort-Berevlei, even though they had not lived there in over 30 years and some were not even born there. Mrs. Sithole, however, said that she was from KwaMahlangu, because she had been born there and moved to Witpoort / Berevlei with Du Preez. Personal correspondence with Ntulis, 25 October 1997.

Livestock was their only asset, and even these holdings were restricted by the farmers' quotas. The few benefits that the Ntulis did accrue in their service to the white farmers came through their tie to the land. These benefits were forfeited when the family was evicted. Witpoort was the space at which the extended kinship network, incorporating the living and the dead, could be maintained. As with the Ndunges, the familial ladder does not end with death, and the deceased remain an integral part of homestead relations and communication. The importance of Witpoort and Berevlei was therefore intractably linked to its position as the burial site of the ancestors, and this land was the location where the knowledge and authority of the ancestors could be called upon. As was shown in the previous chapter, proximity to and proper communication with the ancestors brings spiritual and material prosperity and wholeness. Contact with the ancestors must be upheld through the observance of rituals if such interaction is to benefit the living.⁹⁷

The agreement between Arnold du Preez and Shelele Ntuli regarding burial rights gave the Ntulis full access to the graves of their ancestors. Nollie Du Preez, son of Arnold, upheld his father's pact and allowed the Ntulis to bury their dead at Witpoort and to visit the graves for any purpose providing that he was informed of their presence.⁹⁸ Ten family members, including Jantjie, were buried on the farm after the family's eviction in 1959.⁹⁹ Although visits to the graves became increasingly difficult as the family moved farther afield in search of work, occasional pilgrimages back to the site brought the necessary contact with the ancestors. Unbroken spatial proximity to the graves would have been preferable to the rare visits, but access to the sites for ritual purposes helped to maintain the physical and spiritual health of individuals and the unity of the family. Peter talks of the generational ties represented by the burial location, "Our family is a unit.

⁹⁷ Such rituals would typically involve the sacrifice of a bull or goat, followed by a communal feast. If meat was unavailable, a traditional beer drink would be shared with the ancestors. These ceremonies symbolise communion between the living and the dead. Animals are offered to the ancestors, and beer is poured into the earth in the kraal, as representative of the ancestors final resting place. See the bibliographical references on beer drinks and ancestor rituals in chapter two, notes 109 and 113.

⁹⁸ Ntuli, "Dispute about Graves," 2.

⁹⁹ Four Ntulis were buried on Berevlei before Shelele moved to Berevlei with Nollie in 1939-1940. Peter says that these graves are not as important as the twelve graves on Witpoort due to their age. The Ntulis have also maintained a better relationship with the white family at Berevlei than with the Du Preezes, and therefore there is less contention surrounding the issue of visiting the graves. Ntulis, 3 July, 1997.

Those graves, they form a part of our unit . . . in terms of our family as a whole."¹⁰⁰

Burials at Witpoort allowed for the observance of correct ritual relations with the ancestors and for the passing of knowledge and information between generations.

Furthermore, returning to the land for such ceremonies provided an opportunity for the living family members to come together, an occasion which was increasingly rare due to distance, time, and expense.¹⁰¹

Although contact was limited to the occasional visit to the farm, the relationship between the Ntulis and the Du Preezes went smoothly for many years. Nollie du Preez was succeeded by his son Arnold, who died in 1992, and it was at this time that things began to sour between the families. Peter writes:

Our relationship started to change after the death of Arnold the son of Nollie in 1992. His son-in-law forbidden us to visit the graves and even to continue with our burial.¹⁰²

The Ntulis understand the actions of the son-in-law, Kobus van Niekerk, as follows, "He told us that he is a Christian and he does not believe in our rituals and ancestors."¹⁰³

Both parties frame their struggle for unhindered access to the land in religious terms. Van Niekerk uses his Christianity to prevent the Ntulis from performing rituals on the land.

Van Niekerk's argument has, up to now, been effective in barring the Ntulis admission, showing that Christianity, long associated with colonialism and civilisation, is still effectively employed against 'traditional' indigenous beliefs. The white belief system takes precedence over the African worldview. The Ntulis, however, locate their struggle not only in their religion, but in the primacy of the sacred space of Witpoort. Van Niekerk, like the white farm owners in the eastern Cape case, suggested that the Ntulis move their ancestors in order to be close to them. Peter writes, "He even told us to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ntuli, "Dispute about Graves," 2. The eviction caused the disruption of internal family relationships, as Peter writes, "The infliction that was caused by the removal, cause [sic] the parents to split."

¹⁰² Ibid., 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

exhume those corpses [bones] on his farm."¹⁰⁴ But, like the Ndunges, the Ntulis refuse to disinter their ancestors.

We don't believe in that [exhumation]. Our culture doesn't allow us to do that. . . It is part of our belief that a person who has been buried has just been buried. They are not supposed to be moved.¹⁰⁵

The prohibition on disinterment and the importance of the central space prevent the exhumation and relocation of the ancestors. Witpoort is the ancestors' home, but it is also the locative hearth of the Ntuli family. The Ntulis will not move the bones of their ancestors from the land they hold sacred, regardless of the suffering caused by separation from their relatives.

Cessation of contact with the ancestors brought a rupture in the Ntulis' familial and spiritual life. Before Kobus van Niekerk took over Witpoort, the Ntulis could visit the graves as often as time and finances allowed, as Peter explains,

If there was a need for us maybe to praise our ancestors then we would just go there. . . . We were allowed to do our rituals, even at night, we were allowed to sleep there all the night in our own peace.¹⁰⁶

Like the Ndunges, the loss of visitation rights especially affected the Ntuli elders. The elders, says the family, "are feeling bad because they are unable to go there and be united; they are unable to go there and clean and pray and do their rituals because they have no more access to those graves."¹⁰⁷ This caused severe spiritual hardship and the deterioration of the extended family network. Peter writes, "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."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the loss of Witpoort removed the central congregation point for members of the scattered households of the extended family.¹⁰⁹ Revoking access to the family's central place disturbed relations both within and between

104 Ibid.

105 Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Ntuli, "Dispute about Graves," 3.

109 Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

generations. The Ntulis became alienated not only from their land, but also from both their living relatives and ancestors. This situation has affected even the young children. The Ntulis explain that "if a child is born in the family that child will be taken to graves to be united with his / her ancestors."¹¹⁰ The link established between the ancestors and young children shows the importance of place in the collective identity of the Ntulis. The land which holds the history, memory, and knowledge of the family remains critical to their spiritual and social existence.

As was the case with the Ndunges, the Ntulis' physical separation from the ancestors meant that rituals could no longer be performed properly. Although the Ntulis were able to visit the graves for more than thirty years after their eviction from Witpoort, Van Niekerk's abrupt severing of the pact between Arnold and Shelele meant that there was no opportunity "to go and tell" the ancestors that the family would not be coming back.¹¹¹ The sudden break in communication left the ancestors unaware of the whereabouts of the living. This, in turn, made it difficult for the ancestors to play an active and effective role in the daily existence and well-being of their descendants. When asked if the ancestors knew the reasons for the family's lack of communication, the Ntulis laughed and said, "No, they don't know. They don't know. We are lost."¹¹² Each significant event in an individual's life should be communicated to the ancestors, as explained by Peter :

It is our belief that each and every thing we do we are supposed to tell them. Everything that we do. Even if a child is born you just go to the graves and tell them that you are having a child. Anything, even if I am getting married I am supposed to go and tell them that I am married. . . . It is affecting us a lot. We are separated from the people who through our life they have been a part of our life. We can't tell them, [yet] everything that happens to us we must tell them. It is our belief.¹¹³

The benefits of contact with the ancestors are not possible without access to Witpoort. The Ntulis still perform rituals of communication and respect for the ancestors, but these are done at KwaNdebele. The family believes that these rituals are ineffective, and that

¹¹⁰ Peter Ntuli, personal correspondence, 25 October 1997.

¹¹¹ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

they do not adequately convey the Ntulis' wishes, needs, and respect. Peter says that the ancestors cannot "hear" their descendants from the distant location of KwaNdebele.¹¹⁴ The family has faced many hardships since their eviction from the farm, including the deterioration of marriages, scattering of relatives, death of patriarchs, and loss of livestock. The move to KwaNdebele was expected to bring a respite from misfortune, yet the successes have been limited and little has changed materially.¹¹⁵ These continuing difficulties are blamed in part on the severing of ties with the ancestors. The Ntulis must return to Witpoort if they are to experience prosperity, family unity, and spiritual well-being.

Land: Betrayal and Labour

The Du Preezes betrayed the Ntulis on two distinct, yet interconnected, levels. On the large scale, the betrayal involved the breakdown of the relationship between the Ntulis and their employers. On a more specific level, the family feels betrayed by Van Niekerk's refusal to uphold the pact between Arnold du Preez and Shelele Ntuli. Although the Ntulis worked under harsh conditions with few rewards, they believed that the unique relationship between the patriarchs extended down through the generations. The agreement between the two men was motivated, in the eyes of the Ntulis, by a shared history and mutual respect. It was implied that the affiliation between the two families would continue. This association, however, broke down one generation later when the Ntulis were evicted with one day's notice. Although never naïve about the terms of their relationship, the sudden eviction and later deterioration of relations with the white family made the Ntulis painfully aware of the complete lack of respect that they were afforded by the Du Preezes. This sense of outrage and betrayal comes through strongly in the story of Shelele's last surviving child, Boshiwe Sithole, as translated by Peter:

My aunt was the one who took care of Arnold the junior when he was still young, was the one who was looking after Arnold du Preez from the tender age until he

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ntuli, "Dispute about Graves," 2.

was old and then after that she *worked* for that Arnold du Preez until 1974. For nothing. And then after that she was chased away, by him, that same person.¹¹⁶

Boshiwe Sithole raised the child who would force her from her home. Her visible anger illustrates the indignation the Ntulis feel after investing so much in the Du Preezes' farm and receiving so little in return. The Ntulis believe they have been discarded and forgotten by the people to whom they gave three generations. "They worked for nothing," says Peter of his family, "but today [the Du Preezes] don't want to see [the Ntulis]. They don't want to see us now."¹¹⁷

Although the Ntulis felt intense betrayal when evicted from Du Preez's farm, the greatest blow came when they were denied access to the graves of their ancestors. Nollie Du Preez had reassured the family of the inviolable nature of the patriarchs' agreement even at eviction in 1959. According to the Ntulis, Du Preez said, "Even if I force you to move, your children and your grandchildren they can come and be buried on my farm."¹¹⁸ Although the family was uprooted and separated from each other and their ancestors, the contract continued to offer an element of security in their otherwise unstable lives. The agreement guaranteed a final resting place and uninterrupted communication with the ancestors, and ensured at least some connection with the space of Witpoort. Kobus van Niekerk's refusal to recognise the accord was devastating because it disrupted continuity with the past as afforded by regular contact with the dead. The family was barred from the space which they considered to be their center, from the land which informed their identity and shaped their present existence. By revoking the Ntulis' burial rights and prohibiting access to the graves even for the purpose of maintenance, Van Niekerk denied the Ntulis their basic humanity. Peter says, "We didn't bury *dogs*, we buried *people*."¹¹⁹ The Du Preezes' obvious disrespect for the Ntulis has heightened the family's sense of injustice and anger at both their present situation and past working conditions, and has prompted them to push for redress and reparation.

¹¹⁶ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

The Ntulis lived for almost eighty years on land legally owned by the Du Preez family.¹²⁰ They never owned the land or even lived independently at Witpoort. There are times, however, when formal title to land becomes irrelevant, particularly in the context of labour and ritual. The Du Preezes may have owned Witpoort, but the Ntulis feel that they *made* the land their own through their generations of labour. Their years of unrewarded effort transformed the farm into valuable property; the men gave their labour and the labour of their families to the land.¹²¹ Input increases the significance of the return, and the Ntulis' expenditure of human effort, routinised and repeated over three generations and eighty years, has made the land both their home and their right. Labour as ritual tied people to place, and instilled the land with power and meaning. The work which the family performed and enacted each day transformed the soil from a white man's farm to the Ntulis' home. The human input of labour gave the land importance and created the locative center of the family's worldview.

The centrality of Witpoort to the family's existence is passed from one generation to the next, and its importance is replicated for those who have never been there. Peter and his family write of Witpoort's significance as conveyed to the children:

We tell them that Witpoort is our roots, if they want to meet with their ancestors they must go there. We also tell them about the beauty of the land and the relationship that my grandfather had with the Du Preezes.¹²²

¹²⁰ Arnold du Preez took control of KwaMahlanguu prior to 1913, the cut-off date for land restitution claims. This means that although Shelele was dispossessed of his right to KwaMahlanguu, his family is not able to lodge a claim for it. The 1913 cut-off date was implemented because the 1913 Land Act was a watershed piece of legislation in the dispossession of many black South Africans. Furthermore, unraveling accounts of colonial era ownership and dispossession would prove difficult and controversial, partially because such an endeavor opens the door for conflicting African claims to territory. In this case, for example, the Pedi could claim that they had initial dominion over the land settled by the Ndzundza in the early 1800s. In the case of African and pre-colonial claims, there will rarely if ever be title deeds to substantiate such claims in a court of law. For the Ntulis, although KwaMahlanguu remains important as part of the territory of Mapochsgronde, they are primarily concerned with gaining access to the land of Witpoort.

¹²¹ In terms of the value of the farms, the Ntulis said that the farmers "were rich in those days of Arnold du Preez and Nollie du Preez, but now we don't know." Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

¹²² Peter Ntuli, *personal correspondence*, 25 October 1997.

In turn, the children "feel as part of Witpoort. When you ask them where they are from they will simply tell you that they are from Witpoort."¹²³ The children's identification with the farm is powerful testimony to the power and significance of the land, and to the effort by the older family members to ensure that the meaning of Witpoort is not lost. The primacy of place as passed down to younger generations emphasises the Ntulis' hope that the land will continue to provide for their family, either as the accessible and guaranteed resting place for the dead or, ideally, as their home and location of prosperity and well-being.

In recent years, Witpoort has become more than desecrated sacred space or a lost home. The farm also represents the compensation the family feels they deserve on account of their hardship and suffering. The need for reunification with the ancestors drives the Ntulis' desire to return to Witpoort, but they would eventually and ideally like to claim the farm as their own. Witpoort provided the family with a home and a sense of belonging and rootedness. Due to their conditions of employment, however, the Ntulis had extremely little material independence or opportunity for advancement. These factors influence their wish to return to the land under changed circumstances. "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."¹²⁴ The family wants to see the rewards of the effort they invest, and to be the beneficiaries of their labour. They feel that the land of Witpoort should be restored to them as reparation for their years of hardship and effort. They say, "[W]e must be given a large piece [of the farm] because we worked for nothing, we have never been paid. 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!"¹²⁵

The family feels that their misfortune could be reversed if they are able to return to the farm, reconnect with the ancestors, and live as independent producers. Although the family has been "lost" to the ancestors since they were denied access to the graves, the

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

Ntulis believe that this relationship can be rectified if the proper rituals are performed. They express less concern than the Ndunges in a similar situation, and believe that the ancestors will be welcoming even after their absence.¹²⁶ Reunification with the ancestors and between the scattered homesteads could be achieved through a gathering of the entire family on the farm. A ritual sacrifice of a cow or bull would alert the ancestors to the family's return, and would heal the rift which has resulted from the prohibition on access to the graves.¹²⁷ In turn, this reunification would restore health and well-being across the generations. While these actions would perhaps be possible with limited access to the farm, only complete restoration of the land will sufficiently provide, both spiritually and materially, for future generations. Although the Ntulis continue to press for limited rights through access to the graves, they believe that only returning as the owners of the land will make adequate amends for the past. What will happen if the Ntulis can get their farm back? "We can be happy, we can be over the moon. We can go there and dance."¹²⁸

Conclusion

At Witpoort the Ntulis had only a small piece of land for their personal use and very few moveable assets. One could say that because they owned nothing they had nothing to lose. The Ntulis, however, would disagree. They believe they lost a great deal, most importantly their connection to the place which was their home. The land of Witpoort was critical to the Ntulis in what it provided them as a family: children were born there, adults married there, and the dead were buried there. Witpoort was not their land in terms of legal title, but it was the place where their family was united and whole. The land is most significant as the resting place of the ancestors. As with Maxongo's Hoek, inherent in the space of Witpoort is the ancestors' knowledge, power, and authority. The living members of the family need to be able to connect with this locative space in order to exist

¹²⁶ This is probably partially due to the fact that the Ntulis were able to visit the graves once or twice a year until they were barred all access in 1992. In comparison, the Ndunges visited the graves only on rare occasions since their removal in 1963.

¹²⁷ Ntulis, 3 July 1997.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

as a coherent unit, and to benefit from the support structures and wisdom of the extended family.

The Ntulis were allowed to bury their dead at Witpoort for more than thirty years after their eviction. The land's significance increased as the one location where the family could gather, and where communication between the living and the dead could occur effectively. The land was also important in what it represented for the future in the form of guaranteed burial rights; here the elders would be buried, here the ancestors would be visited and respected, here the family could gather. The loss of access to Witpoort entailed not only permanent exclusion from the land that had been the Ntulis' home, but also the loss of that which was essential to present and future generations.

The Ntulis' eviction in 1959 and prohibition on visiting the graves or burying their dead in 1992 entail both material and spiritual losses. The family may not have had access to land as independent farmers, but in 1959 they lost *the only access they had*. After eviction, Jantjie's family was the only household within the extended Ntuli family to find stable work. Most of the other family members bounced from one farm to the next in Middleburg and neighbouring districts. Even Jantjie's family had only limited stability at Kontaskloof, and after their eviction moved to the over-crowded and strife-torn bantustan of KwaNdebele. Although the Ntulis remember their conditions of slavery at Witpoort with bitterness, the farm did provide a place where they could own livestock, and where they had access to some land, however limited, for planting. More importantly, the Ntulis are aware of the *potential* of Witpoort. They feel that the soil has rewarded the white owners because of the Ntulis' labour and cultivation. The farm, therefore, continues to represent the hope of future security and material prosperity. It is to this land, made sacred through their labour, that the Ntuli family wishes to return.

At present the Ntulis are primarily concerned with gaining access to the graves of their ancestors. The Legal Resource Centre (LRC) in Pretoria is assisting them, and negotiations with the Van Niekerks are on-going. The Extension of Security of Tenure

Act, passed in November 1997, states, "Any person shall have the right to visit and maintain his or her family graves on land which belongs to another person."¹²⁹ The LRC has been using this act as legal leverage to reinstate the Ntulis' access to the graves. Initially, Kobus van Niekerk said that he would allow the Ntulis to enter his land to visit and maintain their graves only if they could prove that the graves belonged to them.¹³⁰ This information would have been nearly impossible to validate in the face of extremely sparse death records for black workers. Van Niekerk's request was highly insulting to the family who gave the Du Preezes three generations of unremunerated labour. The request was seen as an affront to the Ntulis' history and validity of their home. Van Niekerk has since, however, agreed to allow the Ntulis visitation rights between sunrise and sunset.¹³¹ The Ntulis have rejected this offer, saying that certain rituals must be performed after dark if they are to be effective. In response, Van Niekerk says that he is apprehensive about people being on his property after dark due to the high crime rate on white farms. This also insults the Ntulis, as they wish only to visit their family graves and reconnect with the ancestors.

The case will be taken to court if Van Niekerk continues to refuse to allow unfettered access to the graves. The Ntulis' case has the potential to set a precedent as a test of the courts' interpretation of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act in regard to the rights of evicted farm workers. Even if the Ntulis are allowed access to the graves, however, the existing legislation makes no mention of burial rights. Burial is an extremely important aspect of land access for the Ntulis. They have already had to bury fourteen relatives at KwaNdebele, away from the ancestors at Witpoort. The separation of the family, continuing in death through the different locations of the graves, is extremely detrimental to the well-being of the living. At present, this law does not sufficiently attend to the spiritual needs of the Ntulis or others in similar positions. If the familial integrity and spiritual well-being of the dispossessed is to be restored, the land reform process must

¹²⁹ Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs, *Extension of Security of Tenure Act*, Act 62 of 1997, section 6 (4).

¹³⁰ Louise du Plessis of the Legal Resource Centre (Pretoria), personal correspondence, 21 January 1998.

¹³¹ The most recent information regarding the Ntulis and the Du Preezes comes from Louise du Plessis, personal communication, 10 December 1998.

ensure that people can practice their religious beliefs to full capacity. Furthermore, provisions should be made to recognise evicted farm workers' rights, in one capacity or another, to land that they worked for extended periods. Only through the implementation of such measures will people be able to benefit from the restoration and reconsecration of their sacred space.

Chapter Four

Not to Blot out our Memories

When one listens to what the Church has done, we need to apologise for the level of pain, alienation, division, hunger and joblessness caused. . . . This is not to blot out our memories, but to sharpen them so that we can put things that can be put right, right.¹

Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present. . . . Memory instills remembrance within the sacred.²

A small settlement crouches on the bluff above the Olifants River delta on the west coast of South Africa. The land is dry and brown, with low scrub brush meeting the green rushes along the river. A dirt track leads from the tarred road to the settlement, and here thin sheep and a few cattle graze. The incessant wind swirls dust devils and leaves from the blue gum trees, and the summer heat is searing. Most of the houses are made of reeds, or white-washed stucco with corrugated iron roofs. Many have small flower gardens overflowing with dahlias, sunflowers and strelitzia. One or two have peach trees by the backyard latrines. Here and there, long narrow strips of level land have been planted. Others lie fallow, unusable because of the salt in the water and soil. Most of the dirt roads are deeply rutted, more appropriate for pedestrians or donkeys than the occasional vehicle. The only visible sign from the tarred road that people are living here is the very top of the church steeple. This is Ebenhaeser, a community still struggling to recover from the loss of land and relocation that took place seventy years ago.³ There is an

¹ Bishop Paul Verryn, speaking at a Church Land Workshop, April 1997. Cited in Samantha Hargreaves, "In Pursuit of Equitable and Sustainable Solutions: The Uitkyk Case Study," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 43.

² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 8-9.

³ The people who today live at Ebenhaeser, in the Vredendal District of the Western Cape, were removed from the settlements of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, just outside of the town of Lutzville. The families of most of the people I spoke with had lived in the Doornkraal area. The extended region, however, was

ephemeral air about the place: a feeling that the houses are poised for a wind strong enough to blow them away, that livestock are waiting to be led to another field, that the children are asking, "Now what?" Ebenhaeser seems to have no sense of itself as a place imbued with years of effort and memories. Its very existence appears arbitrary, accidental.

It is here that we meet David Cloete, called Oom David, or "Uncle" David, by old and young alike. He stands on the edge of the road next to the school, possibly waiting for us, possibly examining a wildflower. It is hot, but Oom David wears trousers, a long-sleeved shirt, suspenders, and a dark cap. He takes us to meet various members of the community, and at each house inspects the garden, the flower beds, the peach trees. He is a wealth of information about Ebenhaeser's history, and people turn to him time and again to be reminded of events that occurred before he was born. We visit the narrow irrigation canal with Oom David, and he shows us the fence dividing Ebenhaeser from the state land which buffers the white settlement. It is through his narration that we learn of the Italian prisoners of war who re-built the canal, and with Oom David that we visit the old church mission and view the fields of the white farmers. In him we see the power of the land in memory. This land was lost before he was born, yet it shapes and defines his existence, his identity, and his position within the community.

We drive nine kilometers east towards the town of Lutzville and pass a richly cultivated area on the flat banks of the Olifants River. Well-kept farmhouses dot fields of thick grape vines and heavily laden tomato plants. Irrigation canals and fences run perpendicular to the tarred road, and farm machinery and produce trucks rattle past. Farm workers' cottages line the driveways leading to the main houses, and the area bustles with activity and commerce. The lush green fields follow the course of the river, turning as it does between bluffs and koppies. These green

often simply referred to as Ebenezer. I have used the combined term of both place names whenever possible. As explained in chapter one (see note 86), the relocation site is called Ebenhaeser, and this spelling is used in discussions about the present location and community.

fields are where the people of Ebenhaeser lived before the land was expropriated and irrigated for white use. The land did not hold grape and vegetable farms then, and there were no fences and canals. People grazed their livestock over a wide expanse of the surrounding countryside. The river banks were planted each year after the floods, and produced enough pumpkins and corn to last the community through the dry months.

Two hundred years ago the land that today comprises Lutzville, Ebenhaeser, and the surrounding white farm land was one of the last independent Khoikhoi settlements in the Cape Colony. As one of the final holdouts against white take-over of indigenous lands in the western Cape, this area is important in a national history characterised by dispossession. To the former inhabitants, however, this site was important in a different way. This bend in the river was their home, the seat of their community, the physical location of their origins and identity, and their connection to a disappearing way of life. For generations the people of this region enjoyed seemingly boundless open space and freedom of movement, a lifestyle which was steadily eroded by the coming of the white order. In the 1830s the ancestors of today's inhabitants of Ebenhaeser invited a Christian missionary into their midst, partially in an attempt to stave off the steady white encroachment of indigenous lands. The establishment of a mission station brought refuge and relative peace for nearly one hundred years, but the eventual dispossession was carried out in the name of this same religious power. Nevertheless, the ethos of many of the elderly people of Ebenhaeser remains deeply rooted in Christianity. Sectors of the highly divided community locate their call for reparation in forgiveness and repentance. How has Christianity informed and shaped the lives and the pasts of these people? How has the land they lost been memorialised, and what does it signify today? The story told by the elderly people of Ebenhaeser illustrates the role of the sacred in collective and ritualised memory. The power of space, although still geographically important, now lies in how it defined a people's history and in its physical representation of loss. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, land is

important both spiritually and materially. The people of Ebenhaeser add a further consideration to the examination of sacred space, because here we find, in the transformation and redefinition of collective memory of space, a quest for the roots and definition of a coloured community. The land described in this chapter can be located on a map, but it is within the memories of the people of Ebenhaeser that the elements of the sacred are found. Passed from one generation to the next, the memory of the way of life before dispossession has become more sacred than the land itself. The community's quest for reparation or restitution is shaped by a desire for the loss and hardship experienced as a result of their relocation to be acknowledged. They want their memories, which incorporate their origins and the injustices committed against them, to be recognised.

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Khoikhoi of the Southwestern Cape

The first people to come into contact with the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope were the Khoikhoi of the western and southwestern Cape. The Khoikhoi were a pastoralist society, their main productive activity determined by the seasonal movement of cattle and sheep in search of grazing grounds and water. This mobile lifestyle, or transhumance, usually occurs in regions where rainfall is not sufficient for sustainable agriculture. Although members of such a migratory society did not have concepts of privately owned land, the control of space was critical to survival. In his doctoral thesis, historian Nigel Penn observes, "The best strategy for a pastoralist society to adopt was to control an area containing diverse natural resources and subject to different seasonal characteristics." Only by having such control could a group ensure access to adequate resources throughout the year. Penn continues, "Full control of such an area was absolutely crucial . . . for if access to any one seasonal resource within the area was denied the cycle would be

disturbed and survival jeopardised."⁴ Areas bounded by these cyclical patterns overlapped and shifted with the conditions, and were "focal points" of transhumant movements as opposed to distinctly demarcated units of control.⁵ According to Isaac Schapera, in pre-colonial times these natural resources were seen as communal holdings belonging to entire communities, and might be shared between certain groups.⁶ These areas, or collections of resources, create a picture of an overlapping, intersecting, and constantly shifting spatial and societal map of the pre-colonial western and southwestern Cape. This spatial map was able to operate unchanged and without interruption as long as all participants played their part.⁷ It was this cycle, this shifting mosaic, that was irreversibly and devastatingly disrupted by the imposition of European concepts of space and order.

Because of the relatively rapid rate of reproduction of sheep and cattle, pastoralism provided its practitioners with self-sufficiency. Farmers could raise their herds or flocks to a stable number for breeding before selling or bartering, and in this way ensured a supply of meat, milk, and clothing for their families. On the other hand, pastoralism did not offer a high degree of economic stability, because domestic animals were extremely susceptible to drought, theft, or disease, factors which made sudden impoverishment a constant and unpredictable threat.⁸ When families or individuals fell on hard times they had several options, including stealing livestock from neighbours, working for other Khoikhoi in exchange for new animals, or falling back on hunting and gathering.⁹ Closely related dialects among regional groups made it possible for Khoikhoi to work for more fortunate neighbors in times

⁴ Nigel Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700-c.1815" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1995), 36.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Isaac Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa* (London: George Routledge, 1930), 286-291.

⁷ The hunter-gather indigenous people of the region, the San, although not pastoralists, also utilised the natural resources in a cyclical fashion, following their game to seasonal pastures and watering holes.

⁸ Richard Elphick and V.C. Malherbe, "The Khoisan to 1828," in *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, eds. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 6.

⁹ Ibid. The line between the Khoikhoi and the San remained blurred, as at times some Khoikhoi would resort to hunting and gathering, and occasionally San would have livestock.

of hardship.¹⁰ These linguistic links simplified trade relations across the Cape, which in turn paved the way for trade routes between the Dutch and Khoikhoi. Although Khoikhoi society experienced severe deterioration in the early colonial years, this was not due to *initial* trade and contact with the settlers, but to the coercion, violence and encroachment of Khoikhoi lands that increased as white settlement expanded.

In the 1590s the Khoikhoi began supplying meat to English and Dutch ships which anchored in Table Bay while en route to the East Indies. At first the Khoikhoi were willing to trade large numbers of their highly valued cattle and sheep for tobacco, copper, and iron. The European demand for meat, however, increased in the years following the establishment of the permanent stop-over station of the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*; VOC) in 1652. The Cape Khoikhoi gradually became reluctant and unable to meet the ever-rising requirements of the Company.¹¹ In 1657, in hopes of countering their dependence on Khoikhoi suppliers, the VOC allowed several company employees to establish themselves as farmers, or freeburghers, on land outside the confines of the Company. They were to sell grain and meat to the Company at set prices. It proved impossible, however, for the freeburghers to meet the demand. Consequently, VOC officials traveled farther and farther afield to locate Khoikhoi trading partners, and increasingly resorted to intimidation and seizure to acquire animals.¹² For the Khoikhoi, the establishment of freeburgher holdings on land outside the company borders signaled that the presence of the white order, and the threat to previously uncontested land, was serious and permanent. Although resistance to the white settlement mounted over the next twenty years and two Khoikhoi-Dutch wars were waged, the European expansion and encroachment on Khoikhoi pastures continued.

¹⁰ Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan to 1828," 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11. Wealth in Khoikhoi society was determined by the number of animals held by an individual, and thus there would have been reluctance to sell or trade large numbers of animals in exchange for goods with lesser status value. See Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 34.

¹² Richard Elphick, *Kraal and Castle: Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 161.

The early trekboers, farmers who moved far outside the Company boundaries and into the western Cape region, practiced semi-nomadic pastoralism in much the same manner as their Khoikhoi neighbors.¹³ This was necessitated by the climate and distance from the Cape Town market, and was an attractive option because the trekboers were able to achieve self-sufficiency with minimal initial capital. The similarities between Khoikhoi and trekboer lifestyles resulted in what Penn describes as a relationship of "semi-cooperative symbiosis" on the northern frontier.¹⁴ The new arrivals did not, however, entirely abandon their European concepts of land holding, and their adoption of transhumant patterns

could be reconciled to ideas of private ownership by claiming different loan farms at strategic points within the [transhumant] cycle. It was not necessary to own the grazing land between two watering points. It was sufficient merely to own the two watering points and the grazing land between would become useless to anyone else.¹⁵

Although a certain amount of sharing of resources was possible following the early European arrivals in the region, the shifting spatial map of the Khoikhoi began to be restricted by white land claims. Conflict was minimal as long as resources such as grazing land and water were plentiful, but the transhumant and spatial balance was fragile and easily disturbed. As more whites entered the area, the occurrence of overgrazing and depleted watering holes increased, and fences disrupted the cyclical movement of people and animals.¹⁶ Penn argues that it was the system of granting large loan-farms to white farmers that "encouraged the rapid dispersal of free burghers into the interior . . . [and,] in turn, had incalculable effects on the economic, social, and political development of both their own and the Khoisan

¹³ Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 35. One difference in Khoikhoi and trekboer transhumance was their means of transport. The trekboer used horses, oxen, and wagons in their search for seasonal grazing grounds, whereas the Khoikhoi traveled on foot. See Megan Anderson, "Elandskloof: Land, Labour and Dutch Reform Mission Activity in the Southern Cederberg, 1860-1963" (Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993), 8-9.

¹⁴ Nigel Penn, "Labour, Land and Livestock in the Western Cape during the eighteenth century: The Khoisan and the colonists," in *The Angry Divide*, eds. Wilmot James and Mary Simons (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 2.

¹⁵ Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 36-37. Trekboers in these areas were granted loan-farms, which meant that they rented as opposed to purchased the land from the government.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

societies."¹⁷ The effect on the spatial landscape was also irreversible, bringing an end to a system based on "succession rather than stasis,"¹⁸ and introducing fences, boundaries, and divisions to a region in which wide-open spaces and freedom of movement was critical to human attachment to the land. These changes affected not only the economic and political way of life of the Khoisan, but also irreparably altered their spiritual conceptions of belonging to the earth and identification as a people with a set way of life.

By the early eighteenth century, traditional Khoikhoi society had all but deteriorated. Khoikhoi communities were doing everything they could to avoid the depletion of their livestock. As historian Richard Elphick notes, "guides misled expeditions, chiefs hid their stock; and when all else failed, Khoikhoi tried to sell sheep rather than cattle."¹⁹ Meanwhile, trekboers and company representatives used force to increase their holdings, often resorting to raiding Khoikhoi kraals and seizing animals.²⁰ The Khoikhoi also suffered serious losses through diseases brought by the whites, most notably the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1713 which may have killed up to 90% of the Khoikhoi in the southwestern Cape.²¹ Loss of access to land and resources due to the rapidly growing number of white loan farms led to further impoverishment and diminished herds. Many Khoikhoi found themselves in an impossible dilemma caused by the decrease in available land. They were able to find work on the white farms, thereby giving the impression that temporary labour would allow for the acquisition of wealth and animals needed to rebuild their depleted herds. In actuality, however, most Khoikhoi were paid in food, or their wages proved too meager to re-invest, and very few would ever be able to re-enter traditional Khoikhoi society.²² Even if Khoikhoi were able to effectively restock

¹⁷ Penn, "Labour, Land and Livestock," 4.

¹⁸ Anderson, "Elandskloof," 7.

¹⁹ Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, 161.

²⁰ Penn, "Labour, Land and Livestock," 5.

²¹ Elphick and Malherbe, "The Khoisan to 1828," 21.

²² Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, 173; Penn, "Labour, Land and Livestock," 6. Penn points out that although the practice of Khoikhoi labouring on white farms eventually led to their almost complete proletarianisation, the fact that they were able to keep some animals on the farms "did much to prolong their existence."

their herds, the lack of unclaimed land meant that they had to enter into wage labour and graze their animals on white farms. If Khoikhoi wanted to maintain unfettered access to land or avoid entering into the service of whites, they were left with little choice but to move north beyond the colonial frontier. By the late eighteenth century, the majority of Khoikhoi remaining in the southwestern Cape were labourers with a status scarcely higher than slaves.²³

The Arrival of the Missionaries

One of the only available means of resisting total proletarianisation was for Khoikhoi to move to mission stations. Mission activity in the region increased in the nineteenth century, with large numbers of Khoikhoi converting to Christianity. A missionary from the Moravian mission of Bavianskloof (later Genadendal) reported in 1792, "There is at present an amazing eagerness in the Hottentots to be instructed."²⁴ Mission stations offered the last alternative to permanent farm labour and provided a degree of access to land, factors which may have enticed Khoikhoi to convert, move to missions, and conform to Christian behavioral codes.²⁵ By the 1840s, however, the mission stations of the western Cape were already overcrowded.²⁶ As a result, there was an increasing shortage of land available for mission station inhabitants, and many men were forced to seek temporary or seasonal labour on the very farms they had deserted.²⁷ Mission stations played an ambiguous role in frontier societies, operating both as centers of refuge and

²³ Penn, "Labour, Land and Livestock," 2.

²⁴ Elizabeth Elbourne, "Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity," in *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, eds. Henry Bredekamp and Robert Ross (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 65. Elbourne and Ross point out that the "community structures of the Khoikhoi . . . had been profoundly weakened before they came into contact with the missionaries," which very likely contributed to their willingness to adapt to a faith which provided structure and purpose. See Elizabeth Elbourne and Robert Ross, "Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, eds. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 33.

²⁵ Nigel Worden, "Adjusting to emancipation: Freed slaves and farmers in the mid-nineteenth-century South-Western Cape," in *The Angry Divide*, eds. Wilmot James and Mary Simons (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 36.

²⁶ In the Clanwilliam district, the mission station Wupperthal grew from 200 inhabitants in 1835 to 400 in 1840. By 1845 Ebenezer, also in the Clanwilliam district, had 241 inhabitants. Anderson, "Elandskloof," 23.

²⁷ Anderson, "Elandskloof," 23.

religious learning, and as perpetrators of ruling ideology and interests. As we shall see, this ambiguity remained a critical aspect of the relationship between mission stations and the surrounding population well into the twentieth century.

White farmers held ambivalent attitudes towards the missions in their midst. On the one hand, the missions served as a convenient labour pool from which farmers could hire men who did not require food or family housing. On the other hand, many Dutch-speaking settlers "upheld an ethnically-based Christianity which associated religion with race," and were therefore against the conversion of blacks.²⁸ The settlers' main objections to the stations, however, were related to their labour demands. Mission stations provided disillusioned workers a refuge, and white land owners claimed to suffer from a paucity of workers caused by the "drift of labour from the farms" to the stations.²⁹ Workers now had a place to share their grievances, and mission stations, to a limited extent, became bases from which labourers could exert collective bargaining leverage. Lastly, linked to a prevailing view that the Khoisan were "idle," "lazy," and "vagrant," the mission stations were seen by many settlers as havens for squatters and as encouraging a semi-dependent indolent lifestyle.³⁰ Lichtenstein, as described in his *Travels in Southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*, visited the Sak River Mission in Namaqualand in 1805. His description of life in the mission station was characteristic of the white master class' sentiments.

[The inhabitants] would have been much better employed in the service of the colonists, providing for their wants by industry, than pursuing, as they did here, lives wholly useless, and abandoned to sloth. Their indolence was indeed absolutely insupportable: instead of occupying themselves in husbandry, or at least taking care of the few cattle remaining to them, they passed the whole day in their huts in complete idleness. . . . In short, such

²⁸ Elbourne, "Early Khoisan Uses of Mission Christianity," 68. Based on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, the settlers were to be saved and the 'heathen' indigenous people damned. In the legal structure of the period, only "Christians" could testify in court. Within the parlance of the day, "white" and "Christian" were synonymous, and it was therefore in the settlers' interests to prevent conversion. On the ambiguous role of mission stations see William M. Freund, "The Cape under the Transitional Governments, 1795-1814," in *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, eds. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 339-343.

²⁹ Anderson, "Elandskloof," 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 24, 29.

was the universal sloth and negligence, that no one could remain here, but with great reluctance, and from strong necessity.³¹

The white settlers' ideas about vagrancy pertained not only to how Khoisan people spent their time, but how they utilised, or did not utilise, the land. Although the trekboers in the area had initially practiced transhumance similar to the Khoikhoi, the allocation of all land into private ownership allowed the white population to become more settled. Space and residency no longer shifted with the herds and seasons, but had become tied to homesteads and fields. Like the Xhosa-speakers of the eastern Cape, when the Khoikhoi failed to adapt to the colonial spatial order, they were viewed as lazy people who did not make effective use of the land.

Khoikhoi sentiments towards mission stations and missionaries were also ambiguous. According to Elizabeth Elbourne, there were several reasons, other than a desire to convert to Christianity, that Khoikhoi accepted mission stations in their midst. First, outcast or marginalised people moved to missions for protection and asylum. Second, mission stations provided a base from which Khoikhoi men could work on white farms while their families and livestock remained on the stations. Third, access to otherwise scarce land was attainable through allegiance to a mission station.³² However, although mission stations offered an alternative to permanent wage labour, moving onto a station entailed a compromise of independence and lifestyle. Furthermore, mission ideology was not free from that of the white order, and perpetuated the class differentiation between master and servant, white and black. Missions, Megan Anderson asserts, with "their simultaneous ideals of resisting boer oppression of labour, while equipping their inhabitants with the habits of industry to render them humble and docile labourers," played a highly ambivalent role in the shaping of Khoikhoi ideology and behavior.³³ Missions offered a degree of refuge and security in a rapidly changing environment,

³¹ Martin H.K. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*, vol. 2 (Cape Town: Van Riebeck Society, 1928-1930), 233.

³² Elbourne, "Early Khoisan Uses of Missionary Christianity," 82-83. Elbourne points out the land on and around mission stations was often relatively infertile.

³³ Anderson, "Elandskloof," 24.

but their inhabitants were still subject to racial class structures and were compelled to conform to the spatial and lifestyle demands of the missionaries. This meant that although some Khoikhoi entered missions and converted to Christianity, others preferred to move north or live on white farms. A third category lived in proximity to mission stations and may have converted to Christianity, but did not reside on the stations themselves.

In the first part of the 1800s, mission stations were able to offer enough land for their residents to be self-sufficient, but this changed with the rapid expansion of the mission population in the 1830s. As a result, most male inhabitants had to work part of the year on white farms.³⁴ Beginning to realise frontier mission stations' potential as steady labour pools and pockets of stability, the British authorities in Cape Town encouraged the spread of missionaries in certain regions. Khoikhoi communities, however, were not always willing participants in the establishment of the mission stations in their midst. The Moravians, for instance, founded Groene Kloof in 1808 at the invitation of Governor Caledon but against the wishes of the Khoikhoi captain. This often led to tension and resentment within the community.³⁵ Other captains, however, such as Captain Links of the Kamiesberg, allowed missionaries to establish themselves within their communities, partially as a means to retain claim to land that would otherwise be lost to white farmers.³⁶

The missionaries themselves played the most ambivalent role in the colonial era. In theory, the missionaries' position in the church was removed from the secular realm of the state. As colonial representatives, however, they inevitably moved between the spiritual and political arena, often operating in both simultaneously. Comaroff and Comaroff argue that, due to their position on the colonial frontier, "missionaries

³⁴ Ibid., 23. The men worked on white farms and the women and children tended the family crops and livestock on the station.

³⁵ Freund, "The Cape under the Transitional Governments," 340.

³⁶ Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 475. Richard Elphick explains that a "captain" was the head of a clan in Khoikhoi society. He would in turn report to the chief who was in charge of various clans under his jurisdiction. See Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, 46-47.

could not escape secular entanglements."³⁷ Political and social outlooks varied from one mission society and individual to the next, but all missionaries served, at the very least, as symbolic intermediaries between the colonial administration and the mission members.³⁸ This dual role led to complex relationships between missionaries and followers, whereby at times the missionaries acted against government policies and at other times effectively behaved as government representatives. According to the Comaroffs, a major problem facing Christian missionaries and, in some cases, leading to rejection by their followers, was that the "impotence of the evangelists in the political arena [had] important implications over the long run." In other words, even when missionaries were viewed by their congregations as possessing potentially beneficial or useful links to the colonial government, connections which should, in the eyes of their followers, provide protection and prosperity, the missionaries could rarely deliver. This "impotence," coupled with missionaries' real or imagined actions as government agents,

contributed to the deepening fissure between the seductive promises of the church and the irreducible realities of colonialism. It was also to reveal contradictions between the message of the missions and the actions of the missionaries.³⁹

In the case of Ebenezer, the double role of the missionaries and the mission's inability to fulfill its promises of protection were played out in the context of land. The presence of a mission station failed to protect the people from dispossession and impoverishment at the hands of the state. The chain of Ebenezer missionaries, with their complex and ambiguous roles, leads to the character of Reverend Booyesen, who was instrumental in the final land dispossession. Booyesen and the other missionaries who acted in the state's interest failed to deliver not only on the Christian promise of a better life brought by work and prayer, but also on the sanctuary of the mission and its pledge to operate on the congregation's behalf. In

³⁷ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 272.

³⁸ Freund, "The Cape under the Transitional Governments." See 340-341 for details on political and social views of various missions and missionaries.

³⁹ Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, 273.

this way, Reverend Booysen came to represent the fissure between faith and reality, between sacred preaching and secular hardship. We will return to this man and this story, but for now he stands as a clear representation of the Comaroffs' picture of a missionary moving back and forth between the realms of church and state.

By the end of the eighteenth century, few Khoikhoi kraals remained south of Namaqualand. In 1809 Hendrik van der Graaf, the *landdrost* of Tulbagh, embarked on an expedition to the northern and north-western frontier.⁴⁰ His meticulous journals of the trip show that nearly all the Khoikhoi he encountered were labourers on white farms. White colonists in the area were experiencing a serious labour shortage, due both to the lack of new slaves since the 1807 abolition of the slave trade and to the movement of Khoikhoi to mission stations. Farmers may have felt that they were losing control over manpower in the frontier zone, but there could be no question that they had control of nearly all of the land. From Van der Graaf's accounts, it is clear that the few surviving independent Khoikhoi kraals faced an ever-increasing threat from "land-hungry colonists."⁴¹ These remaining kraals were often on poor land that was, at least for the time-being, undesirable to whites, and were inhabited by groups of people marginalised from colonial society. These included Khoikhoi and San who had not entered into labour for whites or moved north, and "Bastaards" or "Bastaard-Hottentots" who were also experiencing pressure on their lands.⁴²

The dissatisfaction of the white farmers resulted in escalating instability on the frontier. Action had to be taken to address the labour concerns of the settlers -- a powerful and volatile group -- and to placate their needs while simultaneously

⁴⁰ Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 472. A *landdrost* was similar to a magistrate.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 477. Labour shortage concerns came largely from white farmers' fears of the imminent abolition of slavery following the 1807 prohibition of the slave trade in all English colonies. The banning of the slave trade made it more difficult to acquire slaves, but slavery was not abolished in the Cape Colony until 1834, and was not put into full effect until 1838.

⁴² Nigel Penn, personal communication, 4 May 1998. "Bastaards" or "Bastaard-Hottentots" were people of mixed cultural or racial origin who gradually acquired their own identity and role on the northern frontier. Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," II.

increasing the colony's jurisdiction over them. In 1809 Governor Caledon introduced the Caledon Code (also known as the Hottentot Code or the Hottentot Proclamation), which served to institutionalise regulations on Khoikhoi movements. The drafting of the Code arose both out of labour demands and in response to complaints concerning the "vagrant" nature of the itinerant Khoikhoi. The legislation gave the Khoikhoi greater protection against brutality from their masters, but in most other respects officially entrenched their subordinate status within the colony. According to Susan Newton-King, "the primary effect [of the Code] was to give legal form to the forced labour practices which had been informally observed on the frontier for so long."⁴³ The Code stipulated that every Khoikhoi must have a registered and fixed place of residence, and a pass to move from one place to another. Zine Magubane explains the extent to which this law imposed control over the lives of the Khoikhoi:

Without a pass it was illegal for anyone of Khoikhoi descent to be anywhere at all in the colony. The colonists-- particularly the local officials such as the landdrosts and field-cornets-- controlled the issuing of passes and thus gained the right of total control over the mobility of all the Khoikhoi within the Colony.⁴⁴

Khoikhoi who were not already under white employment or resident at mission stations were considered vagrant and subject to punishment. The law was designed to completely transform Khoikhoi lifestyle, and clearly laid out the position of the Khoikhoi in the colonial order. Khoikhoi were forced into a settled existence and white farmers steadily appropriated any remaining Khoikhoi land. As their options became increasingly limited, more and more Khoikhoi moved to mission stations.

⁴³ Susan Newton-King, "The Precolonial and Colonial Khoikhoi: From Fragile Independence to Permanent Servitude; Part II: From Servitude to Resistance" (Unpublished paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1984), 27.

⁴⁴ Zine Magubane, "Labour Laws and Stereotypes: Images of the Khoikhoi in the Cape in the Age of Abolition," *South African Historical Journal* 35 (1996), 117.

Ebenezer and Doornkraal

During Van der Graaf's travels through the Olifants River valley he came across a small Khoikhoi kraal "under a Captain Louis, at Doornkraal." Although Van der Graaf usually aligned himself with the colonial school which did not support land rights for blacks, especially in an area with a purported labour shortage, in this instance he acted on behalf of the Khoikhoi inhabitants. According to Nigel Penn, Van der Graaf used his position as a colonial authority to confirm the land rights of Captain Louis' group, "whose land was likely to fall victim to the rival land claims of some local farmers."⁴⁵ When the colony granted Khoikhoi land rights, the captain was usually awarded a staff or "cane of office" which symbolised government recognition of his position.⁴⁶ Captain Louis was granted a staff and a map showing the lands under his jurisdiction, an extensive area which the community had used for seasonal grazing for generations.⁴⁷

According to oral tradition, Captain Louis traveled to Cape Town at some point between 1809 and 1815 to collect the staff and map. While in Cape Town he is said to have expressed interest in a church and school being established at Doornkraal.⁴⁸ White settlers in the Olifants River area were eager to claim the remaining pockets of even poor quality black-owned or occupied land. Labour was in high demand, and the Caledon Code compelled all Khoikhoi except those on a mission station to enter into servitude. Due to the white population's increased clamour for land and labour,

⁴⁵ Penn, "The Northern Cape Frontier Zone," 477.

⁴⁶ According to Elphick, these canes of office may have originated from the Second Khoikhoi-Dutch War [1673] or earlier, but were made a major feature of tribal life by Cape Governor Simon van der Stel (1679-1699). These canes or staffs were topped with a copper grip which bore the Company coat of arms and sometimes the name of the Khoikhoi leader. The staffs were given to captains or chiefs after they were appointed to office by the governor. To some these staffs symbolised acquiescence to colonial influence, but this did not prevent them from becoming "prized artifacts which Khoikhoi passed down from generation to generation." Elphick maintains that the canes "conferred a certain prestige on a chief, since it implied that the Company would aid him in times of peril." Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*, 191-192.

⁴⁷ Based on oral tradition, in 1809 the land area utilised by the Doornkraal community extended from the mouth of the Groenrivier in the north to Donkin's (or Donkies) Bay in the south, and inland to the Heerenlogementsberg and the Vlaminkberg. Surplus People Project (SPP), *Land Claims in Namaqualand* (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, 1995), 80.

⁴⁸ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 81.

it is unlikely that Captain Louis would have been granted land for independent Khoikhoi use. It is more probable that he was given jurisdiction over an area with the understanding that a mission station be established. Missions were being set up among the Khoisan by the early 1800s, and Louis was probably aware that association with a mission station provided at least limited land access.⁴⁹ Von Wurmb of the Rhenish Mission Society arrived at Doornkraal in 1832 and a mission station, called Ebenezer, was established.⁵⁰ The presence of the station ensured Louis' descendants access to the land for another 100 years, and temporarily prevented his followers from being forced to move onto white farms.

The majority of the people at Doornkraal were Nama-speaking followers of Captain Louis. By 1832, the population included freed or escaped slaves and Bastards or Bastard-Hottentots.⁵¹ Like other arid or remote frontier areas, it appears that Doornkraal had become a "catch-all" for marginal members of colonial society who were hoping to escape white appropriation of their lands.⁵² The crown land grant,

⁴⁹ Early missions in the area included Kamiesberg (London Missionary Society), Leliefontein (Wesleyan), Kommagas (Rhenish), and Steinkopf (Rhenish). See J. Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (London: Longmans Green, 1911; reprint, Cape Town: Struik, 1965); and Elizabeth Elbourne and Robert Ross, "Combating Spiritual and Social Bondage: Early Missions in the Cape Colony," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, eds. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 31-50.

⁵⁰ The name Ebenezer is a biblical reference from I Sam. 7:12 and means 'stone of help.' The name may have been selected in reference to the arid climate and relative poverty of the area.

⁵¹ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 80. Pastoralism remained the primary activity of the settlement, yet people supplemented their livelihood with hunting, fishing, seasonal cultivation of the flood plain, and seal hunting. See F.A. van der Horst, "Comprehensive draft report on a brief visit to Ebenhaeser" (unpublished paper, Development Planning and Management, University of the Western Cape, August 1994), 4. On the populations of missions in the western Cape in the nineteenth century, see Worden, "Adjusting to emancipation," 35-36. Worden points out that although a percentage of freed slaves moved to mission stations, many stations were already over-crowded by the 1840s and were unable to support people who did not have external sources of income. Stations began to regulate access, and many people who were dependent on farm labour would have chosen to remain on farms rather than conform to behavioral and religious codes of mission stations which were able to offer less and less land as their populations rose. Some missions required newcomers to possess a certain amount of personal resources, such as livestock, to contribute to the communal holdings of the station before they would be accepted.

⁵² Nigel Penn, personal communication, 4 May 1998. The Kneegsvlakte, between the Olifants River and the Kamiesberg Mountains, was such an area, consisting of barren land undesirable to white settlers. In his history of Christian missions, J. du Plessis describes the origins of the Ebenezer station as follows: "Von Wurmb secured a waste tract near the mouth of the Oliphants River, which received the name of Ebenezer, and which was maintained as a missionising centre, less on account of its fertility, which indeed was conspicuous by its absence, than by reason of its situation at the ford of the Oliphants River on the main road to Namaqualand." Du Plessis makes it clear that this area was largely undesirable to white settlers, and had therefore been left undisturbed by white encroachment. As Van der Graaf made clear in his journals, however, even these marginal lands were coming under threat of white appropriation. As it turned out, the problem with this land was not fertility, but water. See J. du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions*, 302.

given to the Rhenish Mission Society, demarcated two separate areas of land, Ebenezer and Doornkraal, to be held in trust by the mission for the occupants.⁵³ Doornkraal was reserved for "the use of Hottentots only." Ebenezer was to be "exclusively used for the purposes of the said [Rhenish Mission] society's Institution called Ebenezer, and when no longer so used shall revert to the Colonial Government . . . for the sole use and benefit of the Hottentots."⁵⁴ The first residents of the mission station were the "Bastaards" and other relative newcomers to the area, while the majority of the Nama population remained under the jurisdiction of Captain Louis on the portion of Doornkraal.⁵⁵ Although the crown grant made specific provisions for the Khoikhoi community, the land granted was substantially less than that shown on Captain Louis' map of 1809.⁵⁶ Rights to the mission station and Doornkraal were contractually protected, but encroachment of the surrounding lands, used for seasonal grazing, was well underway.

Reverend Torlinden, early missionary and official administrator of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, wrote to Governor Benjamin D'Urban in 1837 to request more land for the use of the community.⁵⁷ Torlinden said that the additional land, to the north of the Olifants River, was needed as "an outlay for cattle in the winter season."⁵⁸ He clearly recognised, as the residents of the area had known for generations, that extended space for seasonal grazing was necessary if animals were to survive the low rainfall conditions in the region. The Cape government responded favourably to Torlinden's request, referring to the area as "waste land" and granting rights in 1844 to

⁵³ Legal Resources Centre (LRC), "Ebenhaezer. Eis aan die Kommissie vir die Herstel van Grondregte" (Cape Town: Legal Resource Centre, May 1996), Annexure A: Copy of the Crown Land Grant of 1837.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 80.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁷ Pam Wernich, "Land and land rights of the Ebenezer Community: Historical Aspects" (Unpublished paper compiled for the Regional Land Claims Commissioner, Western and Northern Cape, in association with the Legal Resources Centre, August 1996), 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Transcript 6: citing Cape Archives, vol. LBD 42: Request of Torlinden to D'Urban, 14 January 1837. The map granted to Captain Louis had initially included these areas, and they had long been part of the community's pasturage.

Aborigines, Hottentots and Bastards residing at the Missionary Institution Ebenezer, allowing them to occupy until it should be required by the Government the crown land called Elsje Erasmuskloof and Banjang Vley.⁵⁹

Torlinden's role in securing formal title to this land illustrates the ambiguity of the role of the missionaries in colonial society. Torlinden appears to have acted in the interests of the people among whom he was living and working. Such actions served to create a basis of trust which would deepen the sense of betrayal when the same men fulfilled their role as government agents.

In 1876 the rights to the extended grazing lands were revoked. The Acting Civil Commissioner reported that there was "no necessity for such a large tract of country being reserved for the use of the inhabitants of this Mission Station." The commissioner's report was followed by a report by the Surveyor-General, which stated that the "increased demand [by whites] for land in every part of the Colony" justified revoking the extension of land rights.⁶⁰ The government was only willing to allocate black communities land that was not desired by white settlers. An area deemed "waste land" forty years earlier had become valuable because of scarcity. Space becomes more significant when it is in short supply; land becomes more precious when it is contested.

The people of the adjacent settlements of Ebenezer and Doornkraal shared grazing lands and jointly cultivated the flood plains of the river. Residents from Doornkraal and surrounding regions attended church and school at Ebenezer, and interwoven social and family ties extended throughout the area.⁶¹ Yet clearly defined factions between the settlements had emerged by the late nineteenth century. The inhabitants

⁵⁹ Ibid., citing Cape Archives, vol. LBD 42: Report on Torlinden's memorial, 25 February 1843.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Transcript 8: citing Cape Archives, vol. LND 1/3: Report of Acting Civil Commissioner, Clanwilliam; Report of Surveyor-General, 23 December 1876.

⁶¹ Sarah Coetzee, Interview 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift. This extended community also included residents of Olifantsdrift and Viswater, two smaller settlements between Ebenezer and the sea, who survive largely off fishing. The interviews took place over three days in February 1998 at Ebenhaeser and surrounding areas. Interviews took place in people's homes and we spoke to between one and three people in each interview. David Cloete, also called "Oom David," was present at every interview and our discussion was on-going. From this point onwards, only the speaker's name and date of interview will be given. Interviews were in the settlement of Ebenhaeser unless otherwise noted.

of Ebenezer "tended to congregate around the church and the mission" and saw themselves primarily as Christian members of a mission community. For the most part, they expressed loyalty to the missionaries and were willing to follow their lead. The people of Doornkraal, on the other hand, identified themselves as descendants of Captain Louis and his followers.⁶² They enjoying their protected position adjacent to the mission and many converted to Christianity, but they remained focused on their Nama origins. Their tradition was situated in the place of Doornkraal, and they took pride in their history as a long standing Khoikhoi settlement. The differences between these groups were marked, but in times of stability and prosperity people functioned as one multi-faceted community. Under duress or hardship, however, the cleavages between the factions became more prominent.

The first major test of the extended social network came in 1890 when the Rhenish Mission Society handed Ebenezer over to the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC).⁶³ This was supposedly done with the consent of the inhabitants of both Ebenezer and Doornkraal, but the legitimacy of the transfer and the mandate from the community was subsequently questioned on a number of grounds. First, the transfer to the DRMC went against the conditions of the 1837 title deed which stipulated that the land must be returned to the colonial government if it ceased to be used by the Rhenish Missionary Society. The government would then, in theory, manage the land for the "sole use and benefit of the said Hottentots."⁶⁴ Second, although the land of the Doornkraal community was held in trust by the Rhenish

⁶² A. V. De la Harpe, "Ebenezer" (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, unpublished paper, 1994), 3.

⁶³ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 82. In 1881 the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) established the DRMC for its coloured congregation. This was done to address the segregationist sentiments within the DRC while still providing for the "labouring class" of Christians. The DRC issued a pamphlet titled, "The DRC and the Native Problem," which described the newly created Mission Church as follows: "To this fully organised Mission Church all the native and coloured members of the DRC belong, and they possess and exercise rights and privileges such as appertain to members of the European Church." What this obscured, however, was the hierarchical system behind the establishment. The DRC could veto any DRMC decision and all property was held in the name of the Sendingkommissie of the DRC. Anderson, "Elandskloof," 49. The Rhenish Mission Society initiated a policy of self-support in 1878, which meant that the congregation had to pay the missionary's salary. The congregation at Ebenezer could not meet this new financial demand, and the missionary was withdrawn, resulting in the DRMC's take over of the station in 1890. See Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions*, 341.

⁶⁴ LRC, "Ebenhaezer," Annexure A: Copy of Crown Land Grant of 1837.

Mission Society, missionary work was to occur on Ebenezer, not Doornkraal. Doornkraal, therefore, should not have been included in the transfer to another missionary body.⁶⁵ While it appears that the inhabitants of the mission station were at least nominally consulted in the transfer process, it does not seem that members of the Khoikhoi community had proper representation. As a result, members of the Khoikhoi faction became more assertive of their rights following the take-over of the station by the DRMC. This led to a rising number of disputes between Khoikhoi leaders and the missionaries.⁶⁶ The Doornkraal residents' increased demand for representation did not, however, ensure their inclusion in future land negotiations. The division between the residents of the mission and Doornkraal intensified, and by the early twentieth century there was a clear distinction and occasional antagonism between the two sides of the community.⁶⁷

Irrigation and Betrayal

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the state began to investigate the idea of settling poor whites in "labour colonies" where they could develop skills and a livelihood.⁶⁸ The government began to assess the agricultural potential of the

⁶⁵ Based on the terms of the initial agreement in 1837, "Present day residents argue [that] this should have meant that the DRC could not assume control of the land [of Doornkraal]." SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 82.

⁶⁶ De la Harpe, "Ebenezer," 3. De la Harpe reports that one missionary found the situation to be "too much for one white man to deal with" ["te erg voor een wit man om te houden"] after a series of insults were exchanged between him and several community members.

⁶⁷ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 82. According to the missionary in 1912, the group at Doornkraal had "absolute control for admitting new occupiers and consider [the area] their Reserve, something in the nature of a small kingdom." (Citing Report Ebenezer Claims Committee, 1920. S5 2/41/3 CAD) This observation may have been fueled by resentment that the Khoikhoi community could turn away newcomers more easily than the over-crowded mission station.

⁶⁸ Although white poverty and landlessness had been increasing since the mid-1800s, the prevalence and visibility of poor whites increased rapidly following the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Many whites deserted the countryside and moved to cities and towns, where they often had trouble finding work due to competition with cheap black labour. The residential proximity of poor whites to blacks was the focus of much public outcry, and general awareness of the poor white problem heightened. The Dutch Reformed Church became particularly active in formulating a rehabilitation policy, and the influential Reverend Marchand first proposed the "establishment of land settlement colonies for landless whites" in 1893. The DRC was instrumental in initiating the first resettlement scheme in the Cape in 1897 at Kakamas on the Orange River. Although similar schemes would later fail, Kakamas was declared a success in 1906 and the Select Committee on the Poor White Question recommended that further such projects be implemented. The irrigation scheme at Ebenezer was one such project, although it wasn't implemented until fifteen years later. David Berger, "White Poverty and Government Policy in South Africa: 1892-1934" (Ph.D. thesis, Temple University, 1982), 110-112. For more information on poor whiteism, see

Olifants River valley for the development of an irrigation scheme to benefit poor whites. In 1911 the area was proclaimed an irrigation district and Ebenezer Mission Station was designated a labour colony.⁶⁹ Although the residents of Doornkraal and Ebenezer were also poor, the Legal Resource Centre found that it was

never intended that the 'hottentot' residents of Ebenezer would benefit from the scheme. The proposed exchange would ensure the settlement of white farmers on land at Ebenezer. This was only possible through the removal and resettlement of the coloured inhabitants of Ebenezer.⁷⁰

The purpose of the project was to give the poor and landless whites "a second chance."⁷¹ Moving the poor whites away from blacks, whose presence was thought to cause their condition to "further degenerate," was a priority of the rehabilitation schemes.⁷² The coloured residents of the mission station and surrounding lands would have to be moved to make space for the incoming whites, and the state required the assistance of the missionaries to implement this proposal. The Minister of Lands, Abraham Fischer, told the missionary of the time, L.A.R. du Plessis, that he did "not want the people [coloured people of Ebenezer] here, they must go," and instructed him "to act as government official and not as missionary while negotiating with the people."⁷³ Although a settlement was not reached immediately, the increasingly duplicitous role of the missionary would soon become vividly apparent to the inhabitants of Ebenezer.

By 1919 there was still no settlement, and the involved authorities' tone was reaching a fever pitch. A missive from the Klawer Station of the Olifants River Irrigation Scheme to the Minister of Lands read: "[I]t is important, almost essential

Colin Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism" (Cape Town: Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, Carnegie Conference Paper No. 247, April 1984); John Bottomley, "Public Policy and 'Poor Whiteism' in South Africa" (Pietermaritzburg: unpublished paper, 12th Biennial National Conference of the South African Historical Society, 1989).

⁶⁹ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 82.

⁷⁰ Legal Resources Centre (LRC), "Ebenezer: Claim to the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights" (Unpublished draft document from the LRC to the SPP, October 1995), 4.

⁷¹ Berger, "White Poverty and Government Policy," 28.

⁷² Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen," 14. Quoting *Argus*, 1893.

⁷³ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 83, citing Du Plessis to Dr. D. S. Botha, 4 March 1912, S5 KAB 2/41/3.

to the interests of the settlement, that the Ebenezer and Doornkraal irrigable lands be acquired, as it is obviously undesirable that there should be a coloured community intervening in the European irrigable areas."⁷⁴ In 1920 the state set up the Ebenezer Claims Commission, ostensibly to reach an agreement with the present occupants. The primary aim of the commission, however, was to expedite the appropriation of Ebenezer for white settlement.⁷⁵ A committee of mission station residents-- in theory a representative body-- was appointed to discuss the settlement.⁷⁶ The members of this body, however, were selected from among the inhabitants of the mission station, leaving the Doornkraal residents without representation. Among its findings, the Claims Commission concluded that the coloured residents would not be able to afford the high water rates that would arise following irrigation, and this justified moving them from the land. The commission ruled that "the type of claimant [coloured resident] is certainly unable to cultivate and develop such a large extent of land so as to pay the heavy water rate and would without the least doubt be forced to sell" to Europeans.⁷⁷ The fact that the poor whites had limited farming skills and also lacked the means to pay the water rates was an irony lost on the commission. The justification for relocating the coloured residents due to their inability to meet the scheme's financial demands was reiterated five years later in the bill authorising the exchange of land.⁷⁸

The commission proposed that the inhabitants of Ebenezer and Doornkraal be moved onto other land, stating "that an extent of 500 morgen of irrigable land would

⁷⁴ Cape Archives, vol. WSO1, file 0.10: correspondence, Klawer Station to Cape Land Board, Minister of Lands, June 11, 1919. It is interesting to note the increased consciousness of 'purity' as a goal to strive for. It was no longer simply that land was wanted for white settlement, but also that whites and coloureds needed to be strictly separated. The presence of coloured people would *ruin* the land, and the irrigation scheme, for white settlement and upliftment.

⁷⁵ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 83. The committee was meant to "ascertain what persons will have to be negotiated with and what rights and claims would have to be brought up or compensated for."

⁷⁶ Van der Horst, "Comprehensive draft report on a brief visit to Ebenhaeser," 5; Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the question of the claims of certain Hottentots living on the farms 'Ebenezer' and 'Doornkraal' division of Van Rhijnsdorp, 1920" (unpublished document, Surplus People Project, Cape Town), 8.

⁷⁷ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 83; Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920." S5 2/41/3 CAD.

⁷⁸ *Ebenezer (Van Rhynsdorp) Exchange of Land Act*, Act 14 of 1925.

be a sufficient and reasonable extent for the community." The report listed a series of "advantages" which would result from the proposed "land exchange."⁷⁹ These included:

- a) the opening up of some 1370 morgen of irrigable land for white settlement;
- b) the segregation of the Hottentots apart from white settlers and other private owners participating in the irrigation scheme;
- c) the provision of an opportunity to the Hottentots to make continues [sic], instead of spasmodic, use of land which only requires water for its development;
- d) the concentration of the Hottentots which should afford the Mission authorities greater facilities for thier [sic] spiritual work.⁸⁰

The points listed by the committee highlight important issues in official coloured-white relations in the early twentieth century. Issues such as racial purity of space, the on-going debate surrounding land use and ownership, and the creation of a Christianised spiritual standard for all people lay behind the findings of the Ebenezer commission. These issues formed the ideological basis for the removal of the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal. It is important, therefore, to examine the relevance of these larger debates in the context of the community in question.

Purity was becoming increasingly important in official South African discourse by the early twentieth century. The coloured and "Hottentot" residents of Ebenezer and Doornkraal were a problem not only because their claims to the land blocked the expansion of the irrigation scheme, but also because their presence in an area earmarked for white settlement would defile a white community. It was thus important to find alternative land for this group that did not abut the white area. The commission suggested relocating the inhabitants to "the neighbourhood of Olifants Drift," some nine kilometers west of the irrigation scheme.⁸¹ The tract of land

⁷⁹ Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 8. The relocation deal was called a "land exchange" because one piece of land was supposedly exchanged for another of equal value and desirability. The residents of Doornkraal and Ebenezer call it an "exchange" because they believe they were giving up their land in order to be assured of water. Although neither of these theories accurately describes the terms of the resulting transaction, the forced removal and relocation is often still referred to as a land exchange, and I occasionally employ this terminology here.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9. A fifth listed "advantage" was "the retention of the portion of the river frontage for the Hottentots which is most suitable for fisheries." Today, however, commercial fishermen from farther afield have depleted the area and there is little money to be made off fishing.

⁸¹ Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 8.

between the two sites was not needed for white settlement or farming, but the distance seemed an appropriate 'buffer zone' between the white and coloured settlements. Space was being created for whites to build their lives and futures, and contamination of this space by a 'non-white' presence could not be risked.

White ideology centered on a premise of hierarchy and supremacy which mandated racial purity and segregation. By this logic, those who were not white were lower on the hierarchy and had to be "looked after," resulting in a uneasy mixture of oppression and paternalism.⁸² A recommendation made to the commission-- the recommendation which, incidentally, received "the greatest support from European witnesses"-- involved sub-dividing the areas of Doornkraal and Ebenezer and granting these plots "to the respective claimants [of Ebenezer], who would then be in the same position as the *ordinary* European owner of land participating in the Irrigation Scheme."⁸³ This plan, however, was rejected by the commission on the grounds that the coloured owners would be unable to manage the financial responsibilities and would soon be forced to sell their plots to whites. The commission felt that, if implemented, this proposal

would be really employing economic pressure to dissolve the community and is hardly defensible when the state of civilisation of the community and its status as a mission station is taken into account.⁸⁴

As Christian mission residents, the inhabitants of Ebenezer were of an advanced "state of civilisation" and thereby closer to the European 'norm,' but still required protection from their land-hungry white neighbours. The people of Doornkraal are

⁸² David Chidester argues that a corollary of the quest for white purity and preservation under apartheid's policy of "separate development" was the perceived "Christian religious duty to exercise trusteeship or guardianship over blacks." David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992) 197. For an account of segregationist policies before the official beginning of apartheid, see David Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845-1910* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁸³ Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 10, my emphasis. The use of "ordinary" by the Claims Commission in this context illustrates the prevailing view towards blacks. "European" was synonymous with "ordinary," and this was the standard against which everyone else was judged. Locating the European white as the norm enabled the majority of the South African population to be labeled as "other" or "extra-ordinary." This made dispossession or brutality seem more justifiable in the eyes of both the perpetrators and the European public.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

left out of these descriptions, just as they were left out of the proceedings. Doornkraal appears to have been viewed more as a piece of land to be acquired than as a group of people to be considered. Although little attention was paid to Doornkraal, the commission needed to explain why the land would not be allocated to the whites and the coloured residents of Ebenezer alike. The commission therefore adopted a paternalistic attitude which served a dual purpose linked to the quest for racial and spatial purity. By expressing concern over the security of the coloured residents' property in a sea of hostile white farmers, the commission could justify relocating the coloured community in entirety. In reality, however, the commission did not want the land to be sub-divided and allocated to both coloured and white farmers, since such a plan would result in coloured people sharing space with whites. Oom David Cloete, of Ebenhaeser, believes that the government hoped the whites would eventually take over the whole area, including the relocation site. He remarks on the authorities' obsession with purity:

They [the government] were scared that [the coloured people] were going to mix with the whites, they can't all lie in one line, as people are sinners. . . . They decided to put the coloured people on *brakvlei* land because the ground was bad and they wouldn't be able to survive and sooner or later they would have to give way to the white people.⁸⁵

Whites did not buy out the community after relocation, but the authorities had succeeded in dividing the settlements by nine kilometers, a distance considered adequate to maintain the sanctity of the white space.

One of the "advantages" of relocating the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal was that they would be able to make continuous, as opposed to "spasmodic," use of the land. Year-round cultivation was viewed as more advanced and therefore more civilised than seasonal pastoralism supplemented by cultivation. Although the climate and conditions of the western Cape were such that even the early white settlers practiced transhumance, and although the sparse rainfall of the Olifants River

⁸⁵ David Cloete, 5 February 1998. This quotation by Oom David also points to the concern over miscegenation.

catchment area required such a system, the colonial discourse deemed regulated sowing and planting to be the ideal.⁸⁶ The residents of Ebenezer and Doornkraal could no longer use their lands in the transhumant patterns employed by their forebears because the surrounding grazing lands had been expropriated. They did not, however, have the water resources to continuously cultivate the land.⁸⁷ The government, in light of its plan to build an irrigation scheme on the land, clearly recognised that water was the missing commodity in the area. Both white and coloured people would require irrigation in order to make "continuous" use of the area, but the supposedly superior European concepts of space, land use, and ownership were mobilised as an excuse to remove the coloured population. The irrigation scheme was symbolic of the white state's imposition of its strategy of order and ideology on both the people and the landscape.

From the time of early colonial contact, whites judged the level of civilisation of indigenous peoples based on Christian codes and standards. The closer a population came to a Christian sensibility, the more civilised they were considered to be. This is apparent in the Claims Commission's finding that the inhabitants of Ebenezer were quite 'advanced' due to their residency in a mission. The fact that the community slated for removal was predominately Christian complicated the issue slightly for the government, but was not sufficient to prevent the preparation of the area for white habitation. Finding a religious benefit within the proposed relocation plan-- the "concentration of Hottentots" which would assist the missionaries in their spiritual work-- enabled the commission to justify the destruction of a mission station. The fact that some members of the Doornkraal community had no interest in religious instruction was of no relevance. By couching the relocation in spiritual

⁸⁶ A British understanding of proper land usage included fenced gardens and villages. "Improvement" of land meant cultivation. On European concepts of land ownership and usage and effects on early colonial relations, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Dispossession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸⁷ David Cloete, 5 February 1998. The community irrigated their gardens by making boreholes beside the river. This, however, did not always supply sufficient water, and certainly did not provide enough water for the large scale cultivation which would be possible after the implementation of the irrigation scheme.

terms, the government was able to morally justify the removal as beneficial to the Christian community.

On the 22nd of March 1920, the terms of the proposed land exchange were put before the residents of Ebenezer and Doornkraal. The settlement was unanimously approved by all who attended the meeting and signed by community representatives.⁸⁸ On paper, therefore, the deal reflected the wishes of the community. The land exchange amounted to an agreement to remove all buildings from Ebenezer, and for the community to give up approximately 1,370 morgen of irrigable land and 7,000 morgen of non-irrigable land. The residents would be moved nine kilometers southwest towards Olifantsdrift and they would receive 500 morgen of irrigable land and 3,000 morgen of grazing land.⁸⁹ This resolution was later changed to include less compensatory land, although this alteration was supposedly also approved by a representative body.⁹⁰ Unbeknownst to the signatories, the land they would receive was worth roughly 25% of the land they were giving up, and offered only extremely limited irrigation rights to the Olifants River.⁹¹

In 1925 an act of parliament canceled and annulled the 1837 grant of crown land to the Rhenish Mission Society, the 1890 transfer to the DRMC, and the reservation of Doornkraal for the use of the "Hottentot" descendants of Captain Louis. The following clause from the preamble to the Ebenezer (Van Rhynsdorp) Exchange of Land Act points to several issues within the official ideology of land use:

it is in the public interest, in view of the large sums of public money which have been expended on the said irrigation works, that the said lands [of Ebenezer and Doornkraal] should become available for the purposes of land settlement.⁹²

⁸⁸ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 84.

⁸⁹ Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 9.

⁹⁰ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 85; De la Harpe, "Ebenezer," 19.

⁹¹ LRC, "Ebenezer: Claim to the Commission," 5. The irrigation rights are discussed in more detail below.

⁹² *Ebenezer (Van Rhynsdorp) Exchange of Land Act*, preamble.

First, "land settlement" is misleading, since the land had been settled for generations by the inhabitants of Doornkraal and Ebenezer. Yet under the rubric of land acquisition, land not inhabited by whites was considered unsettled and vacant; the black residents were rendered invisible as well as expendable. Such land must be made "available" for white occupation. Second, like the removal policies legislated by later laws and discussed in chapter two, the land exchange was described as being "in the public interest." Here, the "public" were not the occupants of the land, but were the white farmers, policy makers, and even poor city dwellers. The land of the Olifants River valley was to be prepared for white farming through investments of human labour and capital provided by the government. Land occupied by black people was to be 'improved' for the use of whites. Based on South Africa's racial hierarchy, the state would not invest in a scheme that did not benefit those at the top of the social ladder. These people were decidedly not the coloured inhabitants of a mission station and a Khoikhoi reserve.⁹³

Although the Ebenezer residents who were involved in negotiating the land exchange supposedly had a mandate from the community, subsequent reactions suggest that many people did not accept their authority.⁹⁴ Many residents believed that "they were not properly consulted and that decisions and agreements were entered into without their consent or knowledge."⁹⁵ It appears that the people of Doornkraal were not represented or informed of the proceedings. David Cloete of Ebenhaeser says, "The people who started to negotiate were the people in the

⁹³ An area which receives inputs of labour and capital becomes the focus of energies and investments. As the intensity of this focus increases, the area becomes increasingly sacred to those who are working it and waiting for it. By improving the land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, the government was *creating* space for poor whites, one sector of its people. Poor whites, as the beneficiaries of government initiatives aimed at their upliftment, were made, at least temporarily, a sacred sector within society. The space prepared for them had to match their political and ideological worth. Coloured people could not be the beneficiaries of land which was improved in this way because such this transaction was not balanced on either a racial or sacred scale.

⁹⁴ It is important to point out that even those mission station members who were present at meetings regarding the planned relocation would have had very little, if any, influence over the proceedings and outcome. The DRC, the official owner of the land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, was actively involved in early poor white resettlement schemes. Therefore, although a body of residents may have been invited to partake in the discussions, the land exchange was most likely a done deal before interaction with the community began. The only benefit accrued from such forums would have been the allocation of the best land and accompanying water rights to those who first signed the agreement.

⁹⁵ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 85.

church, but the people at Doornkraal didn't want to negotiate."⁹⁶ People who spoke only Nama were at a disadvantage, as the meetings were conducted in Afrikaans. "The Nama people, they didn't want to sign [the settlement], they were from here, they didn't want to give up their birthrights."⁹⁷ The people of Doornkraal saw the land as their connection to their history and the site of their origins, and held the mission residents accountable for their loss and removal. "The missionary people didn't exchange *their* ground for [other] land, they exchanged the *captain's* ground [Doornkraal]."⁹⁸ Some people allege that the majority of those on the church committee which negotiated the settlement were *inkommers*, or new-comers, who had less stake in the land and were therefore more amenable to the agreement.⁹⁹ In their defense, some members of the committee felt that they had no choice but to settle, as they recognised that the land would be expropriated regardless and felt that the terms would be less favourable if they resisted.¹⁰⁰ Although resentment still exists towards those who were involved in signing the deal, the majority of the blame for the loss of land is placed on the missionary of the time, Reverend Booyesen.

The role of Reverend W.A. Booyesen in the land exchange and removal has been immortalised in the oral history and collective memory of the inhabitants of Ebenhaeser. His perceived complicity in the land deal represents one of the most severe injustices to the people, and many in Ebenhaeser hold him as primarily responsible for the loss of the land. The community witnessed preparations for the irrigation scheme for several years prior to their removal in 1927. Fields were leveled and tilled and construction began on houses.¹⁰¹ According to several people whose families lived at Doornkraal at the time, Reverend Booyesen let the coloured

⁹⁶ David Cloete, 5 February 1998.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., original emphasis. In actuality, inhabitants of both Ebenezer and Doornkraal lost their land, but some members of the original Doornkraal community still feel that their ground and rights to the land were considered expendable by the mission station residents.

⁹⁹ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ LRC, "Ebenezer: Claim to the Commission," 5.

¹⁰¹ David Cloete, 5 February 1998.

community believe that *they* would be the recipients of at least part of the newly developed land.

Their understanding is that the government actually did make provisions for coloured people, but that then it was *Booyesen* who came and changed this, you see. And that is why everyone was so shocked, because they thought the government *had* done this [made provisions] for them and then [Booyesen] basically manipulated everything and then the people were forced to move out.¹⁰²

According to William Coetzee, it was Booyesen who, up until their removal, allowed people to hold the misperception that a section of the land would be theirs:

They were told that the ground was being made level for *them*. . . . [The government workers] were plowing the land and [the coloured people were] being told, no, its for them, and then [the workers] built houses and basically the white farmers just came and moved in and *then* [the coloured people] were told that they had to move.¹⁰³

This betrayal at the eleventh hour increased the perception that Booyesen was the main culprit behind the removal. For many people, he personifies the overall injustice and abuse experienced. This feeling of betrayal was further accentuated by his position in the clergy. As Dirk and Bettie Cloete note, people had liked Booyesen before their removal. "He was a man of the church, so they trusted him. They didn't suspect anything. He had the Bible."¹⁰⁴

Booyesen was the most obvious and readily available target when the injustice of the land exchange was realised by the majority of the residents. The people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal thought they were 'safe' from government interference because of their connection and proximity to a mission station, and Booyesen, as head of the station, embodied this promise of security. In this context, Booyesen may be despised more for what he *didn't* do than for what he did. He is remembered as actively abetting and promoting the land exchange deal, but part of the antagonism

¹⁰² David Cloete and Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift, original emphasis.

¹⁰³ William Coetzee, 6 February 1998, original emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Dirk and Bettie Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift. It is also alleged the Booyesen orchestrated the relocation of the Vaalkrans beacon prior to the demarcation of the boundary line which would determine the extent of land to be expropriated. The moving of the beacon, which supposedly occurred in the middle of the night, would have substantially increased the amount of land lost. The correct original location of the beacon is still in dispute.

towards him may originate from the fact that he did not *prevent* the dispossession. Booyesen was clearly acting on behalf of state and the DRC in their program to acquire land for the settlement of poor whites. The reverend did, however, provide a convenient and familiar scapegoat to dull the pain and anger felt by the community. It was easier to blame Booyesen for the removal than to blame the government; the injustice was easier to conceptualise and to incorporate into the collective identity of the community if it was perpetrated by someone who was close to the people themselves. Locating the betrayal within the community, of course, also made it that much more extreme, as is expressed in Oom David's comment about Booyesen: "He didn't just impoverish the people, he actually killed their hearts."¹⁰⁵

Although some of the wrath directed at Booyesen may have been due to the need to locate a scapegoat with close ties to the community, the evidence points to Booyesen's deep involvement in the land settlement. Furthermore, it appears that he might have been able to act to save the community's land. The Minister of Lands, Colonel Reitz, came to Ebenezer in May 1921 to gauge the response of the community to the Ebenezer Claim Commission's findings. Reitz found that the people believed they would be forced to remove regardless of their stance towards the proposal. Reitz indicated to Booyesen at this time that there was a possibility of a portion of the land under the irrigation scheme being reserved for coloured people, but it appears that Booyesen never pushed for this position to be adopted. The silence of Booyesen and the mission society, therefore, allowed for the removal to go ahead as planned. The poor white problem took precedence as soon as it appeared on the national and evangelical agenda, and the actions of the mission society show that the leaders of the DRC were more concerned with Afrikaner poverty than with their coloured congregations.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ David Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift. Afrikaans: *Hy het hulle gedood in hulle hart.*

¹⁰⁶ All information regarding Colonel Reitz's role and communication with Booyesen is drawn from the report *Die Rol van die Binnelandse Sendingkommissie van die N.G. Kerk in die Verskuiwing van die Ebenezer-Gemeenskap, 1890-1940*, 16-17, 4. Author and date unknown.

The story of Booysen's eventual demise, as immortalised and retold by the people of Ebenhaeser, warrants recounting. After the "stormy events following the exchange of land," Booysen left the ministry and turned to politics. In 1938 he became a member of parliament on the National Party ticket.¹⁰⁷ Booysen's move from the clergy to politics was proof for the people of Ebenhaeser that he had been promoting white interests all along. His former congregation remained aware of Booysen's movements after he left the ministry. Bettie Cloete says that he moved to Vredendal because he could no longer show his face around Ebenhaeser. Her husband recalls, "I was shaking so much the last time I saw him that I couldn't actually look at him."¹⁰⁸ Adding to the story of the reverend's deceit, the Cloetes posit that Booysen was acquainted with the whites who moved onto the irrigated land, and that he had displaced the coloured people in order that his friends could be the beneficiaries of the settlement scheme.¹⁰⁹ It is the story of his death, however, that most effectively illustrates people's belief in Booysen's evil ways. Oom David, Sarah Coetzee, and Dirk and Bettie Cloete tell the story of Booysen's final moments. He lay under a white sheet, "shaking from so much grief and sin" that he could not die. Three times he nearly died, and "three times he sat up and called, 'Ebenezer! Ebenezer!'" The sin of betraying the community weighed so heavily on his soul that he could not be forgiven; his deception of his congregation prevented him from dying in peace.¹¹⁰

Removal

We leave the memories of Booysen and return to the events of the removal. Most of the people at Doornkraal did not want to move. They were told that if they moved to the new site they would receive water free of charge, but if they resisted, all water -- even drinking water-- would be cut off. In this scenario they had little option but to

¹⁰⁷ De la Harpe, "Ebenezer," 41.

¹⁰⁸ Dirk and Bettie Cloete, 6 February 1998, *Olifantsdrift*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ David Cloete, Sarah Coetzee, Dirk and Bettie Cloete, 6 February 1998, *Olifantsdrift*.

relocate. According to a memorandum from a meeting between Colonel Reitz and the Ebenezer residents, the people

were given to understand that they would be compelled to move and the best thing they could do was to sign agreement [sic] and to have no trouble about the matter. They were ignorant and afraid to create trouble between the authorities and themselves. They did not want to leave Ebenezer -- their chiefs and ancestors were buried there, but they were under the impression that they would be removed willi nilli and they therefore signed the agreement.¹¹¹

Although fearful of losing their water supply, some residents of the Vaalkrans area of Doornkraal resisted until they were moved by force.¹¹² David Cloete remembers, "There at Vaalkrans, if people stayed on there their things were just taken and thrown over the fence and if it was broken it was tough because they had to go, they couldn't stay there. Their ground was just plain taken."¹¹³ No provisions were made to move possessions to the new location. "There weren't things like cars . . . they used donkeys and stuff. So they had nothing when they reached where they were supposed to go. Everything was broken."¹¹⁴ A small compensatory payment of 15 to 20 pounds was granted for each house.¹¹⁵ The houses were then burnt, flattened, and the sites made into fields for the white farmers. No houses were provided on the alternate land.

The move from Ebenezer and Doornkraal proved devastating for many of the residents. The last people were pushed out of Ebenezer and Doornkraal in 1927. Some left the area immediately and went to stay with relatives in the Boland or Cape Town. Others slept in the veld until they could establish themselves in the new

¹¹¹ *Die Rol van die Binnelandse Sendingkommissie*, 16. Citing W.S.O. 1.0.10, Memorandum, Vergadering van Reitz met Ebenezer inwoners, 03.06.1921.

¹¹² William Coetzee, 6 February 1998. Vaalkrans was one of the areas that the people thought was being improved for them as opposed to the whites. Mr. Coetzee said the people thought the land was being fixed up for them, "and then the next thing they know [the government] gave it to the white people."

¹¹³ David Cloete, 6 February 1998.

¹¹⁴ William Coetzee, 6 February 1998.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 16. The report lists 50 people who were to receive compensation for their houses. Three of these people were to receive over £100, two were to receive £50-100, eighteen were to be paid less than £50, and twenty-seven of the home owners were to be given £5.

settlement.¹¹⁶ William Coetzee remembers, "[S]ome people went and just lived in the veld. Some people died from cold in the fields."¹¹⁷ The move also resulted in severe blows to livestock holdings. William Coetzee's father had always used donkeys to plow his fields, but was told that there wasn't enough grazing room for donkeys at the new site. The donkeys were then "shot and killed by the government people."¹¹⁸ Many sheep were also lost, some under questionable circumstances. William Coetzee tells his father's story: "He had 85 sheep and then he got really ill [for a time] and when he returned there were 32 [sheep], that's counting the small ones too. No one could tell him where [the other sheep] had gone."¹¹⁹ There simply was not enough space on the alternate land for people's animals. The lack of grazing space remains a problem today. Dirk Cloete explains that each person can have

a couple of sheep, but there isn't enough place for everyone to be a *good* farmer and have lots of sheep. The result is quite obvious in that everyone is going to have a struggling life. They can help themselves a little bit and have a few sheep, but you can't really prosper and go forward and move on this little ground.¹²⁰

The land shortage has worsened with population growth, leaving people with no hope for the improvement of living conditions without access to more land.

The land exchange did not provide equally for all residents at the compensatory site of Ebenhaeser. There were to be only 150 "registered occupiers," allocated plots of two morgen each and granted grazing rights. A canal extending from the irrigation project to the settlement supplied these plots with water.¹²¹ These 150 people were the only legal 'citizens' of the new community and only they had the right to vote in local elections. Most of those granted occupier rights were mission station residents who had been first to sign the land exchange deal. There was great deal of

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. The memory of sleeping in the fields came up in nearly all of my interviews.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹²¹ LRC, "Ebenezer: Claim to the Commission," 9.

resentment from other residents, who felt that this group consisted of people who had had the least to lose within the status quo at Ebenezer and Doornkraal. Oom David says, "The first people to give land for water were those who didn't even have land to give."¹²² As the only citizens of the new settlement, holders of registered occupier rights were invested with leadership positions in the new community. Many residents of Doornkraal and long-standing inhabitants of the mission station, on the other hand, had been among the last to sign the land exchange settlement. They were almost entirely excluded from the registered occupier list and were faced with the worst conditions upon arrival at Ebenhaeser. Oom David again:

When these people refused to sign they had their land taken away by force and the police were called in. They just had to move. The people living in this area [area of reed houses without land] are all of that generation. The people in the other section [modern houses next to church and school] were the ones who signed. . . . Some of the people who signed and were promised water never got it.¹²³

Some people received no land, others received poor land, while still others, many of whom had had no right to land at Ebenezer or Doornkraal, were granted the best land.¹²⁴ For women, land access was through their husbands or fathers, as all registered occupiers were men.¹²⁵

The deterioration of the social network of the community was apparent in the debate over the land exchange deal. Some of these splits were already in existence -- such as the division between the people of Doornkraal and those of the mission station -- but new areas of tension erupted and existing conflicts were exacerbated by the

¹²² David Cloete, 5 February 1998. David's comment calls attention to the perception by members of the community that they were not exchanging land for land, but land for water.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ A number of residents also left the area altogether, moving to the interior or Cape Town in the hope of finding work. This served to further upset the social and familial balance and contributed to the break-up of the community.

¹²⁵ Registered occupier rights were hereditary but could not be divided. This meant that only the eldest son within each family could inherit rights to land and water. Women could hold registered occupier rights only if they were widowed, and this was subject to the provision that they not re-marry. Furthermore, they had to transfer the right to their eldest son when he reached adulthood. See Surplus People Project (SPP), "Access to and the allocation of rights to natural resources (notably land) in Ebenhaeser" (Unpublished document, 1996?).

removal. The most obvious and immediate fissure was between those who had resisted and those who complied with the relocation. Those who complied received water and the best land at the new settlement, which added further insult to injury in the eyes of the resisters. Another area of tension involved members of the extended community who lived at the settlements of Olifantsdrift and Viswater. Sarah Coetzee, who is now well over eighty, lived at Olifantsdrift and attended church and school at Ebenezer. She says that prior to the relocation, the people of Olifantsdrift, Viswater, Ebenezer and Doornkraal had "all one life."¹²⁶ Due to the land exchange, however, the inhabitants of Ebenezer and Doornkraal were moved back towards the Olifantsdrift settlement, displacing those who already lived there. This encroachment on the land of Olifantsdrift in turn put pressure on the resources and inhabitants at Viswater, the closest settlement to the sea. Before the removal, the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal had the best land and were at the top of the social ladder in the larger community. The removal, therefore, had a double-edged effect on the social order. First, the social structure of Ebenezer and Doornkraal was thrown into upheaval. Those who signed the exchange and received plots and the right to vote quickly became the new leaders, regardless of their previous position. Second, the placement of people of higher social standing into the midst of Olifantsdrift sent shock waves running through the settlement, in turn upsetting relations with the population of Viswater. The relocation led to a complete re-shuffling of the status quo and further accentuated existing differences and divisions, leading to strife within the community. The continuing deterioration of the social fabric of the settlement, still blamed largely on the removal and resulting conditions, remains a concern of elder residents.

The loss of land also brought with it a changed conception of movement and landscape. As a child, Sarah Coetzee was able to walk from Olifantsdrift to the sea without crossing a fence.¹²⁷ Land was used communally, and, according to

¹²⁶ Sarah Coetzee, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

William Coetzee, "everybody had land, and *big* land. There was only one fence," erected in the mid-1800s to mark the line between the mission station and Khoikhoi land.¹²⁸ Even the trekboers' arrival in the area did not initially change the landscape or land use, as they too practiced communal grazing. Although much of the extended grazing lands had been lost by the late 1800s, it was the relocation of 1927 which resulted in the final transformation of the meaning and use of space.

Olifantsdrift, which had previously been open space with scattered houses, was turned into plots to accommodate the people from Ebenezer and Doornkraal. As Sarah Coetzee says, "It became a little town."¹²⁹ Garden and grazing space was suddenly a commodity, with water the most desirable commodity of all. The open veld was gone, and people had to contend with each other's boundaries as well as those of their white neighbours. Relations within the community itself became increasingly strained because of the lack of space and resources. This in turn led to a general climate of distrust and individualism which continues to hinder community relations in the present day.

Sarah and William Coetzee's memories of wide open spaces focus our attention on indigenous relationships to land before extensive white settlement. Although few people of Khoikhoi descent still practice a transhumant lifestyle, the stories of mobility and open spaces passed from one generation to the next inform people's desire for land as enjoyed by their forebears. Details about the past form a critical aspect of this community's collective memory, and people continue to locate themselves as descendants of Captain Louis. Land plays a central role in these remembrances, as it was the loss of land which irreversibly changed people's lives. Additional land is desired because the climatic conditions of the west coast make large tracts of land necessary for maintaining livestock. But land is also critical for its representation of a way of life which was lost with the coming of the white order.

¹²⁸ William Coetzee, 6 February 1998. The erection of this fence illustrates both the early distinction between the two settlements and the exclusivity of mission space. Like white space, Christian space needed to be protected against foreign or heathen impurities at its borders.

¹²⁹ Sarah Coetzee, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

People locate their roots in memories of land, as it was land as open space, land as freedom of movement, which defined their past existence. These myths main central to the identity and aspirations of this community.

Today's residents tell stories of land loss and appropriation by individual whites. These accounts illustrate the differing concepts of land use between whites and indigenous people that would ultimately result in the mass dispossession of the Khoikhoi. William Coetzee relates a tale of early loss arising from the belief that space was unlimited:

In the old days when we would walk to see the doctor it was a two day trek by ox-wagon but many more by foot. Some boer comes along in his ox-wagon and says, "Do you want a lift?" and you say, "Yes, please." And then after the boer says, "Well, I really need some grazing for my cattle -- do you mind if I have this piece of land here?" And, you know, its a two days walk from where you are staying and grazing your cattle so you say, "Well, okay, fine," and you let him graze his cattle.¹³⁰

When a great deal of land was available Khoikhoi leaders granted grazing rights to various groups and individuals, such as the early trekboers. In allocating what they believed were simple usage rights to the whites, however, the Khoikhoi effectively signed away control of their land. Once the boers grazed their cattle on the land they considered it their property. Khoikhoi lands were lost as much through this process of gradual white encroachment as it was through blatant state expropriation.

The people of Ebenhaeser recount incidents in which white settlers exploited the differing concepts of land use to their advantage. Sarah Coetzee tells the story of people losing land in the area of Papendorp, next to Viswater, through the trickery of a neighbouring farmer:

In those days the people here used to be really stupid. . . . [They] were invited to the birthday party of [the white farmer's] daughter. . . . [He] made them really drunk, gave them lots of cake and everything and then said, "We've been so nice, don't you want to give us something in return?" And when they said they didn't have anything he said, "Yes you do, you have

¹³⁰ William Coetzee, 6 February 1998.

some land. Give us a bit of land -- just enough for a house for an old woman." ¹³¹

Although Sarah focuses on the naïveté of the coloured residents, it was the farmer who manipulated the people through his friendly invitation and then insisted that his hospitality meant he was owed something in return. He relied on the people's generosity, and made it difficult for them to not to agree to his demands by asking for only "a bit of land." Based on Sarah's childhood memories of unfenced open vistas, space was plentiful. It was therefore easy to convince the people of Papendorp that they had enough land for a house for an old lady. These stories about loss of space illustrate the opposing interpretations of land and space as they exist in memory. Sarah and William Coetzee recount dispossessions shaped by historical processes, but it is through myth and oral history that such accounts continue to resonate today. These tales provide a colourful and poignant account of the past, but they also inform the relations between those who tell them and the white farmers in the district. Such stories locate land loss not in government legislation, but in the manipulations, exploitations, and deceptions of specific individuals. Contestation and subsequent alienation are not remembered as gradual phenomena, but as exact events, betrayals, and misunderstandings. These actions and reactions have been woven into the community's existence. They shape and inform people's identity in relation to the land, and they locate existence and history in locative space.

The elderly people of Ebenhaeser remember these long ago losses at the hands of individual whites with laughter at their own susceptibility to white manipulation. There is no humour, however, when they talk about the loss of Ebenezer and Doornkraal in 1927. "That forced removal caused many a heartache and actually heart *attacks*," says Oom David. "A lot of people died from this: they were just so saddened by it."¹³² The sadness was caused by the loss of a place that was the

¹³¹ Sarah Coetzee, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹³² David Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

location of both their history and their homes. Sarah Brandt discusses the importance of the land her family lost:

We were born there and we grew up there. I was born in 1918, and I grew up and went to school on that piece of land. That is how I feel about that land. We were sad and oppressed when we came here [to Ebenhaeser].¹³³

For Oom David, having land meant that he could live and do as he pleased. After their relocation the land was still administered by local authorities, and the residents had to ask for permission before they could make changes on the land at Ebenhaeser.¹³⁴ "People told [us] what to do with [our] land." If you don't understand what that feels like, says Oom David, "try understanding walking over the river and being taken to jail for walking on someone else's land which was *your* land. It is not having freedom."¹³⁵ For William Coetzee, the ground was a right, and to lose it was to lose a measure of independence and dignity. "It was land--ground, earth-- and it was my *right* [I]t was my *right to land* and now I have no say and no rights." People such as William Coetzee, who were not granted registered occupier rights at Ebenhaeser, lost their power within the community. A consequence of not having land, therefore, was the loss of representation and voice. People without land felt that they were effectively silenced in the public forum. In this way, land shaped and informed not only individual identity and integrity, but was also the basis for people's political and social standing.

The land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal would prove incredibly fertile when supplied with water, and over time the new white owners became extremely successful. The productivity of the land did not, however, come as a surprise to those who had been moved from it. Sarah Brandt remembers the communal farming on the flood plain when she was young. William Coetzee says his father was easily able to grow six to seven hundred pumpkins and 25 bags of corn per year, and his family produced

¹³³ Sarah Brandt, 5 February 1998.

¹³⁴ Although there were no official bantustans for coloured people as there were for Africans, rural areas of coloured settlement such as Ebenhaeser were known as Coloured Reserve Areas. The land in these reserves was administered by the state in trust for the residents.

¹³⁵ David Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

enough watermelons to feed the surplus to the cows. Land use was varied, with certain areas for sowing, grazing, and some strictly for vegetables. After the relocation to Ebenhaeser, self-sufficiency was no longer possible, says William Coetzee, and people "had to go to the shops to buy corn."¹³⁶ The Ebenezer Claims Commission said that the coloured people would not be able to make proper use of the land,¹³⁷ but the problem was not due to lack of agricultural know-how, but to lack of *water*. The resettlement program provided the white farmers with immensely fertile fields and water, and they would remain "poor whites" for a very short time.

Ebenhaeser

The importance of water at Ebenhaeser was made clear through its scarcity. The former residents of Ebenezer and Doornkraal had been told that they would be given water for drinking and farming at the new site, but only the 150 registered occupiers received water for irrigation. Many of the irrigated plots, however, were low-lying and of obviously poor quality. Twenty-seven of the registered occupiers left Ebenhaeser in protest immediately after seeing the land.¹³⁸ Within fifteen years over fifty plots were rendered useless by the brackish quality of land and the high salt content near the mouth of the river.¹³⁹ A canal supplied water for irrigation and drinking to Ebenhaeser, but the initial floor of the canal was sand, resulting in water loss through leaching. In summer there was insufficient water for the fields of the registered occupiers, and people with homes near the end of the canal had very limited drinking water.¹⁴⁰ According to the Surplus People Project, the Department of Land Affairs was made aware of the problem of brackish lands as early as 1933. In official reports it appeared that most of the registered plots were intentionally located near the river mouth, and therefore in the poorly drained and inadequately,

¹³⁶ William Coetzee, 6 February 1998.

¹³⁷ Ebenezer Claims Commission, "Report of the Commission, 1920," 8.

¹³⁸ SPP, "Access to and the allocation of rights," 1.

¹³⁹ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Surplus People Project (SPP), "What has happened to the original 150 besproeiingserwe?" (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, undated report), 1.

watered section at the end of the canal, in order to maximise the distance between the coloured farmers and the white settlement.¹⁴¹ Several attempts were made over the years to exchange the brackish land for more fertile fields, but such efforts came to naught.¹⁴²

The pain of losing Ebenezer and Doornkraal was worsened by the unmet promises of a better life and by the ensuing poverty at Ebenhaeser. The physical hardship of the relocation provided the first indication that life was not going to improve as had been promised by the church and authorities. People who resisted the removal were pushed into the veld, and others moved to the informal settlement outside Lutzville.¹⁴³ Sarah Brandt's parents "were so unhappy that they moved all the way to Malmesbury," as at first they did not believe that alternate land would be available. They returned when they heard that there was land at Ebenhaeser, but her father was unhappy at the condition of the land from which they were expected to survive. "No, he wasn't happy, but what could he do? He just had to move forward."¹⁴⁴

Although people had not been wealthy at Ebenezer and Doornkraal, the poverty they experienced after the removal was much more severe. The limited land rights meant that most people were no longer able to feed their families from their own produce, and they were cut off from the fertile flood plains which had yielded a bounty of pumpkins and corn each year. Oom David compares life before and after the move:

If you have land and water you have life. When the people were living [at Ebenezer and Doornkraal] they had land and water. They were living okay and could have sheep and goats and cows, but now there is just so much poverty. There was never that kind of poverty before. They weren't so impoverished there. . . . You could sell your animals and your own stuff because you owned it. People had their own gardens and could plant things like potatoes and beans and mealies; they could plant whatever they wanted

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² According to the Department of Lands, the Ebenezer Exchange of Land Act did not make provisions for such an exchange. Department of Land Affairs, "Report 266/97 on Ebenhaeser," 8.

¹⁴³ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Brandt, 5 February 1998.

and the ground was quite fertile. Then the government came and took that land for whites.¹⁴⁵

Many people talked of the suffering in the present day. "It's a struggle here," says Sarah Brandt.¹⁴⁶ "It is a struggle living," says Dirk Cloete.¹⁴⁷ There is not enough land; there is not enough water; there is not enough room for grazing; there are no jobs.¹⁴⁸ "People have been hungry," says Oom David, "they have been going to sleep without food, they have been slaves to the white people."¹⁴⁹ Much heartache was brought on by the removal and continued because of the living conditions at Ebenhaeser. This pain still affects many members of the community today, as Sarah Cloete explains, "Some recovered but not all. Some just moved inland, . . . moved away from all of this to forget."¹⁵⁰

One of the justifications for removal was the assumed inability of the coloured residents to pay the water rates following the implementation of the irrigation scheme. Based on their livelihoods as subsistence farmers, farm labourers, and fisherman, this was probably an apt assessment at the time. What was ignored, of course, was that the improvements brought by irrigation would substantially increase the earning potential of any community settled on the land.¹⁵¹ This was certainly the case for the new white residents, who also received a massive program of assistance from the government. Upon settling on the land, the whites were given seeds, farm implements, and two labourers for a period of two years.¹⁵² The

¹⁴⁵ David Cloete, 5 February 1998.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Brandt, 5 February 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁴⁸ Unemployment in Ebenhaeser remains very high, with a limited number of jobs available in Lutzville or Van Rhynsdorp. Other people have found work on the diamond and gravel mines in the area, and others have become migrant labourers. Namaqua Sands, a local mine, said that it would create 700 jobs for people from surrounding communities. Most of the workers at the mine, however, are from outside the vicinity -- from "up north," say the people of Ebenhaeser. The white farmers in the area were supposedly influential in this hiring practice in order to prevent labour loss to the mines.

¹⁴⁹ David Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Coetzee, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁵¹ Ironically, the whites, even with government assistance and a five year payment scheme, were unable to repay the debts incurred by the Olifants River Irrigation Board. In 1943 the interest and loan, amounting to £250,500, were canceled and annulled. Nothing had been repaid on it by this time. See Angus Hamish McLeod, "Ebenhaezer, A Local History" (Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1990), 45-48.

¹⁵² William Coetzee, 5 February 1998.

aid provided to the whites remains one of the most unjust aspects of the relocation in the eyes of the people of Ebenhaeser. The community was shocked and angered by the massive discrepancy between the subsidisation of the whites and the neglect of the coloured people who were moved from the land.

The government always helped the white people. . . . The whites had houses built and everything: they fixed the land for them; . . . they sowed crops for them; then they brought the whites here.¹⁵³

In contrast to the aid given the whites, the people of Ebenhaeser were saddled with a rising cost of living, greater distance from produce markets, and brackish lands that had to be cleared and leveled before they could be planted.¹⁵⁴

Many of the labourers hired by the state for the two year contracts on the white farms were people who had been moved to Ebenhaeser from Ebenezer and Doornkraal. Others sought work on the white farms out of economic necessity. Working on white farms was not an uncommon practice before the loss of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, but it had served to supplement a family's income. After 1927, farm work became the primary source of income for many residents.¹⁵⁵ When asked how it felt to work on land that had belonged to his parents and grandparents, Peter Brandt replied, "You feel bad but you have to work because you have to feed your children."¹⁵⁶ His wife, however, made sure that the whites saw the irony in the situation: "I used to go and work [on the farms] as well, but I used to speak absolute cheek when I went to work. I told them that it was *my* ground but that I was working so hard for *them*."¹⁵⁷ The low wages of the farm workers further accentuated the class disparity between the coloured people who had once owned the land and the new white owners. "It was a struggle," says Dirk Cloete, "when you

¹⁵³ David Cloete, 5 February 1998. Afrikaans: *en toe het hulle gaan haal en hulle daar gesit* .

¹⁵⁴ SPP, *Land Claims in Namaqualand*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ McLeod, "Ebenhaezer, A Local History," 53.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Brandt, 5 February 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Sarah Brandt, 5 February 1998

had to go and work on a white farm for the equivalent of fifteen cents a day."¹⁵⁸

People made next to nothing working on land which should have made them rich.

Some of the white farmers acknowledged that the land had belonged to the coloured people, others did not. Most of the people of Ebenhaeser, however, do not hold the whites living on this land responsible for the loss.¹⁵⁹ Rather, they blame the church

and the government for the dispossession. The white farmers are seen as the recipients of the land and subsidisation, but not as the perpetrators of the removal.

Oom David says, "It was the government's fault, not the fault of these people."¹⁶⁰

Other whites in the area, such as the family who asked for "just enough land for an old woman," are held individually accountable for their appropriation of land.

Those who were settled at Ebenezer and Doornkraal, however, are classified as passive players in a larger project. This impression of these white farmers, clearly formulated in the period immediately following the land exchange, has been maintained and passed down through several generations. Oral history has preserved this attitude, and such sentiments continue to inform the Ebenhaeser community's relationship with this group of white farmers.

The fact that many Ebenhaeser residents do not hold the farming families responsible for the dispossession does not mean that they have forgotten that these farmers accrued their wealth from the land of the coloured people. The belief of Ebenhaeser residents that they are the rightful owners of the land makes working on the white farms emotionally difficult. The productivity and wealth of these farms is a constant reminder that the state helped the white people at the expense of the

¹⁵⁸ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁵⁹ It should be pointed out that many of the initial white residents have long since sold their farms to people who have no connection to the events of the 1927 land exchange.

¹⁶⁰ David Cloete, 5 February 1998. From our conversations, it appeared that many of the people of Ebenhaeser, and Oom David in particular, see state policy as completely isolated from popular sentiment or influence. The state and its agents, such as Reverend Booysen, were the ones who perpetrated injustices. By the same token, it is felt that the present government should provide salvation and reparation for people's suffering and losses. As discussed in chapter one, this mindset does not take into account the role of white citizens in influencing and implementing apartheid policies, and it overlooks the participatory role which must be played by the public in the post-apartheid era if the poverty of the past is to be addressed.

coloured inhabitants. Investing effort in the soil of their forebears repeatedly calls attention to the dispossession, and burns the displacement from their critical locative site into the community's collective memory.

The major problem facing the community today is lack of usable land. Fallow land is available around the settlement, but there is insufficient water to make this land fertile. Even if water was supplied, additional acreage would be required to meet grazing needs. As the population increases, more and more people try to graze their animals and eke out a living on the same small amount of land. This creates inevitable tension. Dirk Cloete explains, "If there is more ground [people] will be able to make a living and will stop . . . oppressing one another so much. . . . There are more and more people all the time but less and less land for them."¹⁶¹ He discusses the difficulties of farming with such limited resources:

Previously everyone could have a *little bit* of land . . . but now you can't really subdivide a plot that big. . . . [Y]ou can't really prosper and go forward and move on on this little ground and with a system such as this. . . . We can't develop. This is our oppression.¹⁶²

Residents draw a direct correlation between the lack of available land and the deterioration of community relations. Bettie Cloete says, "The one that is strong isn't helping the one that is weak . . . people aren't standing together anymore."¹⁶³ Oom David adds, "Eleven people must farm in one small little camp. It is too small, and that is why everyone is just trying to do everything for himself."¹⁶⁴ An increase in land and water would ease the growing tensions and, hopefully, allow for the mending of the social fabric.

Although a solution is being sought to the registered occupier system, there can be few viable alternatives until more land is added to the existing holdings. The prohibition on subdividing the land, as dictated by this system, means that a limited

¹⁶¹ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Bettie Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁶⁴ David Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

number of people in each generation can obtain access to farmland. Dirk Cloete says, "A father can't give his sons now anymore land because there just isn't enough land to give."¹⁶⁵ Johannes Boiis describes the situation facing the youth of the community:

It is just a terrible thing that the young people . . . can't own the land. . . . [T]he young people are going off to Jo'burg or Cape Town and they don't have a place, they are not staying and working the land.¹⁶⁶

For many residents, the lack of inheritable land has come to symbolise the disintegration of families. Most young people have left Ebenhaeser. Dirk Cloete talks about the dangers which young people face as they go in search of work in the cities:

The result of this is that a man has six children, but only one of them can inherit, so the rest of them go all over the country. The next thing is that either [the child] has been killed in Johannesburg or he has killed somebody. The money that was given [to him] to go out in the world is long gone, because it was nothing in the first place, and there is no money for the children to get back here.¹⁶⁷

The elderly residents believe that people would stay at Ebenhaeser "if they could find a means to live."¹⁶⁸ The lack of land has resulted in a community of old people, struggling to create a home for their grandchildren to return to.

Present Day

At present, an estimated 2500 people live in Ebenhaeser.¹⁶⁹ Infrastructure and resources within the settlement are limited. They include a library, two small stores,

¹⁶⁵ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁶⁶ Johannes Boiis, 5 February 1998.

¹⁶⁷ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ A recent survey of 100 households, conducted by the Surplus People Project, found that the average income per household of 4.5 people was R759 a month. 81% of households said they were in need of land to improve housing facilities. All houses have electricity due to a recent electrification campaign by Eskom, but only 51% have telephones. 17% of houses have running water inside, the rest use backyard taps and latrine toilets. 74% of respondents were employed, which is estimated to be slightly higher than the overall average for the community. 30% of Ebenhaeser residents, mostly those living at Olifantsdrift and Viswater, derive some income from netting mullet "harders" which are then dried and sold at 35 cents a kilogram. In winter when there is no fishing, 60% of all households bring in less than R600 per month. Most other residents live off state pensions and employment on white farms.

a primary school, a post office, and a local government office. There are no medical facilities, public transport, bank, or petrol pumps. Much of the land has been severely over-grazed.¹⁷⁰ The denudation of the vegetation results in silt build-up in the estuary system, damaging both the community's water supply and the fishing at the mouth of the river.

The uprooting and removal of the community in the 1920s is still powerful and tangible within the collective memory of Ebenhaeser.¹⁷¹ In a survey conducted by the Surplus People Project, 85% of respondents said that they, their parents, or their grandparents had been subject to forced removal.¹⁷² This was not an isolated negative event that faded when the next generation came of age, but one which remained of critical importance to the identity of the community. The events and repercussions of the removal and relocation have been passed from one generation to the next, and continue to shape both relations and aspirations of the community today. The experience of seventy years ago is kept alive in part because of the obvious prosperity of the white land owners, a constant reminder of the rewards bestowed on one sector of society at the expense of another. The residents of Ebenhaeser believe that their poverty and economic stagnation would have been averted if they had been assisted as the whites were. The past would be different, people say, if they had been afforded even a portion of the treatment given to the whites. The suffering of their parents and grandparents would have been less severe; the young people would not have left for the cities. Memory hinges on the injustice inherent in the assistance given to the whites, and it is within this act of

The Surplus People Project estimates that less than 50 of the initial 150 households with registered occupier rights can still make a living from farming. As explained earlier, this is largely a result of the unusable nature of many of the fields due to the high salt content of the water and soil. Surplus People Project, "Questionnaire Results: West Coast Network Community Workshops" (no date); Megan Anderson, personal communication, 3 December 1997.

¹⁷⁰ Urban Dynamics Wes-Kaap, Gibb-Africa, "Environmental Analysis of the Olifants Estuary" (unpublished report compiled for the Surplus People's Project, no date).

¹⁷¹ "Collective memory," as used in this context, does not imply that the community of Ebenhaeser is a cohesive or homogenous entity. Rather, it shows the shape of the community as a whole, complete with its divisions, classes, and political antagonisms, is historically rooted in what was Ebenezer and Doornkraal and the surrounding settlements. Collective sentiments do exist within Ebenhaeser, but are specific to groups, such as the elderly descendants of Doornkraal families, the primary focus of my interviews.

¹⁷² SPP, "Questionnaire Results."

discrimination that the people of Ebenhaeser locate both the cause of and potential solution for their present social and economic stagnation.

The expropriation and importance of the land has been incorporated into the collective memory of Ebenhaeser through narrative and ritualisation. Stories, such as how Italian prisoners of war were used to build a canal designed to bring insufficient amounts of water to Ebenhaeser, are continually retold. The first canal, extending from the irrigation scheme to the settlement, was lined with cement until shortly after it crossed the boundary of Ebenhaeser, at which point the floor of the canal became sand. As explained earlier, much water seeped into the soil and was lost, even more so in times of drought. People with registered occupier rights did not receive enough water to irrigate their crops, and many others struggled to obtain adequate water for household purposes. According to the narrative, Italian prisoners of war were sent into Ebenhaeser during World War II to build a new canal. This canal, while fully lined with cement, was intentionally designed to limit the water flow to the settlement. People say that the cement floor of the canal rises sharply just before entering Ebenhaeser. This, supposedly, decreases the amount of water reaching the settlement. Visits to the canal and measurements of the water level have become ritualised. "Never high enough," says Oom David, after checking the depth of the water flow. Water, of critical importance to the physical survival of the community, is also central to the formation of collective memory. Water and canals determined past experiences of dispossession and alienation, and they continue to dictate the terms of present existence and social reality.

Agricultural fertility has also been ritualised at Ebenhaeser. The lush irrigated fields of the expropriated land cannot be replicated, but many houses have flower gardens, a fruit tree in the back, and house plants in the lounge. These act as symbolic representations and carefully cultivated reminders of the way life could have been if the coloured community had been the beneficiaries of the irrigation project. The captain's staff, given to Captain Louis in the early nineteenth century, is perhaps the

most significant piece of memorabilia symbolising the Khoikhoi roots of the descendants of the Doornkraal community. This staff is today kept by Sarah Brandt, carefully wrapped in plastic packets and hidden in her bedroom. It is brought out and unwrapped with care, and the colonial seal and name of Governor Caledon admired on the copper head. The community feels that this staff still represents their land rights, not only to Doornkraal and Ebenezer, but also to the large expanse of surrounding land used by their Nama ancestors. Although the staff is engraved with Governor Caledon's name, the people imagine the staff as coming directly from Queen Victoria. Caledon is secondary, and his significance is not as the governor of the Cape Colony, but as the representative of a magnificently important woman. The staff shows that the queen herself validated their forefathers' claim to the land. This validation of rightful ownership remains of critical importance in the memory of today's inhabitants of Ebenhaeser. The staff, the transplanted pockets of lush vegetation, and the stories of the past locate in ritual and memory the way of life at Ebenezer and Doornkraal. The community's origins and past existence, aspects which might otherwise have been forgotten as one generation rolled into the next, are brought into the present, into lived reality. Memory is a bond, "tying us to the eternal present."¹⁷³

In 1997 the Ebenhaeser community filed a restitution claim for the 3,699 morgen lost in terms of the Exchange of Land Act of 1925.¹⁷⁴ A claimant committee was formed, and all interest groups were asked to send representatives. The Dutch Reformed Church and the National Party initially refused to participate, reflecting the antagonism between various groups of the community. As of July 1998, however, they had reversed their decision, and were participating in the claim. Deep-seated cleavages, however, continue to exist within the community. Some fissures are based on political differences, as both the African National Congress (ANC) and National Party (NP) have support bases within Ebenhaeser. These

¹⁷³ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

¹⁷⁴ Department of Land Affairs, "Report 266/97 on Ebenhaeser," 8. This includes 2,031 morgen of Doornkraal and 1,668 morgen of Ebenezer.

differences are further exacerbated by the land claim issue. The local council, pro-ANC by a small majority, voiced concern over participating in the land claim on the grounds "that there might be repercussions from commercial farmers in the district if they were seen to be involving themselves."¹⁷⁵ This is a valid concern for both ANC and NP supporters within the community. Many of the successful small-scale farmers within Ebenhaeser are NP supporters, and sit on the same local NP branch as the white land-holders. Land restoration is not widely endorsed by the NP, and overt involvement in the restitution claim could negatively affect the coloured farmers' business and personal relationships with their white neighbours. Many ANC supporters, on the other hand, work as labourers on the white farms. These people are reportedly apprehensive about voicing support for the land claim which may result in a souring of relations with their employers.¹⁷⁶ Apprehension from both camps is understandable, but does little to alleviate class tensions which have simmered in the community since relocation.

Based on the South African Constitution and the Restitution of Land Rights Act, land scheduled for restitution must be purchased from the present owners at market value, although this amount is meant to take into account the history of acquisition and subsidisation of the property or improvements.¹⁷⁷ The land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal is today owned by more than fifty white farmers and has an estimated value of over 800 million rand, an amount which makes purchase for full restoration highly unfeasible. Most of the white farmers are unwilling to sell their land,¹⁷⁸ and the bill of rights of the new constitution protects their claim to private property.

Although the case is still under negotiation, one of the only feasible outcomes would

¹⁷⁵ Surplus People Project, "Ebenhaeser Restitution Project Report, January - June 1997" (Unpublished report, Surplus People Project, 1997).

¹⁷⁶ Megan Anderson of the Surplus People Project, personal communication, 3 December 1997. The political differences outlined here do not fall strictly along the socio-economic lines, as some ANC supporters are from the wealthier sector of the community and some NP supporters are from the working class. As a generalisation, however, these categories are applicable.

¹⁷⁷ *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996, section 25(3). This topic is dealt with in greater detail in chapter five.

¹⁷⁸ Surplus People Project, "Ebenhaeser visit 17 and 18 October, 1997; Notes" (Unpublished notes from a meeting, Surplus People Project, 1997), 3.

be a combination of partial restoration of a small section of the original land and a development scheme comprised of state funding, community-based initiatives, and planning and implementation aid from the white farming community.¹⁷⁹

By 1998, some of the elderly people of Ebenhaeser had begun to shift their hopes away from restoration of their lost land. This was due to several factors, including fears of social upheaval, doubts regarding the feasibility of the proposal, and a sense of moral imperative. As discussed above, there is a concern that a successful land claim would exacerbate political tensions in the larger community and lead to the loss of farm jobs. The claim, although still under mediation by the CRLR and the farmers' lawyers, is becoming increasingly seen as unfeasible, at least in its entirety, by certain members of the community. A restoration offer would certainly not be refused, but there is a certain measure of reluctance to press the claim. One alternative to restoration is government support comparable to that which was given the whites in 1927. This would be an especially appropriate measure because this aspect of the relocation continues to be of critical importance. The centrality of this issue is evident in Johannes Boiis' shock at the discrepancy between the assistance given to the whites and coloured people: "The white farmers got all this help but [Ebenhaeser] has had to do it alone without any help."¹⁸⁰ To the people of Ebenhaeser, it seems fitting that the government of today should do for its poor what the government of seventy years ago did for poor whites. As Oom David says,

a deal must be cut to make the land nice like the whites' land was made originally. . . . What we want is the help that the whites got . . . and not so much to get the land back. . . . The land is worth so much that if the government were to buy it from the whites there would be no other money for the people of Ebenhaeser. They would be shooting themselves in the foot if they asked for the land back.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ This case is still in the process of being resolved. This possible outcome is therefore my own conclusion as a result of my research, interviews, and observations.

¹⁸⁰ Johannes Boiis, 5 February 1998.

¹⁸¹ David Cloete, 5 February 1998.

The old people have lived at Ebenhaeser for years and many are not prepared to relocate again, even if it is back to the land they lost. They do, however, want there to be something to show for their years of hardship and struggle. Visible progress, they feel, must be made to benefit future generations. Such progress and government assistance could come in the form of irrigation for the settlement of Ebenhaeser, which would enable successful cultivation of the land. The community believes that the onus is on government to provide for the people. They would also like the white farmers to contribute in recognition of the source of their land and its prior ownership by the coloured people. The people do not expect an on-going subsidy programme, but want the community to be supplied with the means to develop itself from within. William Coetzee says, "I want the government to help us stand on our own two legs. That is all I want."¹⁸²

The last reason for the elderly people's reluctance to reclaim the land is a moral one. Some residents believe that it is wrong to take the farms from the whites. Oom David is the most vocal proponent of this view, frequently reiterating that it would be "inhumane" to reclaim the land. This is rooted partially in the belief that the government, not the white farmers, was responsible for the expropriation. Regardless of the injustice of the removal, the betrayal by the church, and the manipulation by the state, Oom David argues that it would be cruel to ask the whites to give up their farms in light of the effort and money they have invested in the land. He voices genuine concern for the well-being of the white families: "The other people [the whites] must also live; we don't want their land. Where are they going to go?"¹⁸³

Oom David and the other residents who oppose the appropriation of the farms on moral grounds base their argument on Christian values of reparation and forgiveness. The irony is that the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal were betrayed

¹⁸² William Coetzee, 5 February 1998.

¹⁸³ David Cloete, 5 February 1998.

by this same religion in the hands of a church which promoted white interests over black ones. The central figure in the dispossession, as reproduced and instilled in memory and oral tradition, was Reverend Booyesen, a Christian missionary who came to represent not only the evil and unfairness of the state but also the church's double standards. Oom David and his friends, however, do not see this employment of Christian ideology as a contradiction. In fact, Oom David firmly locates himself in a Christian worldview and sentimentality, prioritising the humanity of his neighbours above his own needs. The community and spatial world of Ebenezer and Doornkraal was shattered by Christianity, but Christian tools continue to shape the worldview of the people of Ebenhaeser. In order to be understood, this apparent irony must be seen in the context of the destructive nature of colonialism. Khoikhoi way of life and existence was all but entirely destroyed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the time the Dutch Reformed Church took over Ebenezer Mission in 1890 there were very few indigenous networks-- of leadership, land use, or belief-- remaining. The Ebenhaeser community has kept the story and locale of their origins alive in memory. Christianity, with both its positive and negative applications, remains the dominant ideological tool within this worldview. In this context, Christianity exists as the only resource for recovery, healing, and forgiveness. The Christianity employed by Oom David, while linking his community to acts of betrayal and dispossession, also locates him within a worldview. This worldview dictates his relations both with the larger community, and with the space around him. The land and history of Ebenezer, Doornkraal, and Ebenhaeser has been imbued with Christianity, and this Christianity continues to shape the terms of recovery.

The reluctance of certain members of the Ebenhaeser community to take the land from the white farmers does not mean that people are willing to continue working for the whites or living with the repercussions of discriminatory state policies. Nor does everyone voice the same level of support for Oom David's sentiments of reconciliation. People may not directly blame the white farmers for their ownership

of a better future. This assurance, say the old people, can bring them peace in their lifetimes. Dirk Cloete says, "I want to see it all come right before I die."¹⁸⁹ Sarah Coetzee is exasperated: "It can't be like this anymore. . . . I'm in a hurry! I want to see it right in my lifetime!"¹⁹⁰

Conclusion

The land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal has multiple layers of significance and meaning which have been and continue to be reinterpreted and renegotiated. Four hundred years ago this section of the Olifants River was one in a range of spaces and resting points for transhumant pastoralists and hunters and gatherers. It was not conceived of as 'place' or 'land,' but was simply a feature in a boundless, unlimited, and uncontested landscape. With the advent of colonialism the extent of this unlimited space began to shrink and the transhumant cycles became more confined. Indigenous people's emphasis shifted to set 'places' still free from white encroachment. It was important to know which watering holes were on white loan farms, and where cattle would be safe from trekboer raids. Specific tracts of land, as opposed to open and uncontested expanses, became important and central to people's existence. The land on the banks of the Olifants River gained strategic importance as a location which was initially undesirable to whites because of its proximity to the arid and inhospitable Knegtsvlakte. The site was a relatively secure location for a Khoikhoi kraal, but the increasing threat of loss made the area important to hold onto. The contestation of land and space established Doornkraal as a critical site in the eyes of its inhabitants, and the continuation of this contestation has shaped and defined the meaning and interpretation of Doornkraal and Ebenezer to the present day.

¹⁸⁹ Dirk Cloete, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

¹⁹⁰ Sarah Coetzee, 6 February 1998, Olifantsdrift.

The land of Doornkraal and Ebenezer became crucial to the origins, history, and memory of the descendants of the early inhabitants. The loss of this land was a defining moment in the transformation of their existence and lifestyle. Their removal marked the beginning of a life of poverty and struggle. Their relocation witnessed a complete reshuffling of the status quo and led to the disintegration of the community's social fabric. Their resettlement resulted in young people permanently leaving the area due to lack of land. There was a breakdown of trust in the church, fences were introduced, and boundaries and divisions were brought into a region where they had previously not existed. Land was transformed from a shared and respected resource to a commodity that could be allocated, assigned, and appropriated. The land exchange introduced political sentiments of racial exclusion, purity, and privilege, and these aspects would continue to define the very existence of the coloured community. Dispossession of Ebenezer and Doornkraal brought massive, irreversible, and almost entirely negative changes to the community and its way of life. These events were burnt into the collective memory of the people who resettled at Ebenhaeser. They became memorialised through narrative, ritualisation, and the constant reminder of the white farmer's fortune and privilege. The original site of the community was physically demolished and transformed, but could not be eradicated from memory.

The tales of origin which provide the community with identity are called forth through objects such as Captain Louis' staff. The memories of removal which inform their existence are reenacted through the farm workers' daily journey from the fertile irrigated lands to the settlement of Ebenhaeser, following the path of the relocation of their forebears in the 1920s. The lush fields of the whites farms are visited; the old mission, now a storehouse, is pointed out. Peter Brandt's grandmother took him to the site of their home, where the house had been backed against a steep rock overhang and called "Kliphouse" (Stonehouse). It was important, she explained, that he know where his family had lived, that he could see

exactly what had been taken from them.¹⁹¹ Individual memories of houses and families together form the collective narrative of Ebenezer and Doornkraal. The collective memory, in turn, informs individual remembrance. Sarah Brandt asks Oom David to remind her how her family was moved. Oom David's memories have been shaped by those of the generation before him, but he remains a receptacle of the history and experiences of the community. Memories of the removal continue to shape and define the present, and have taken their position alongside the early stories of Captain Louis in the historical canon of Ebenezer, Doornkraal, and Ebenhaeser.

¹⁹¹ Peter Brandt, 5 February 1998.

Chapter Five

Reclaiming the Sacred

The stories of the Ndunges, the Ntulis, and the people of Ebenhaeser illustrate the centrality and sacrality of land to people's lives and identity. We have seen that land's importance does not diminish following dispossession, nor does it fade after years of alienation. Land's significance is informed by factors specific to the circumstances of people's connection to the land and the ensuing loss of ownership, access, or occupancy. The three groups in this thesis continued, even after dispossession, to define and position themselves in relation to their land. Today, under legislation which allows people to reclaim land rights, families and communities may be able to return to the sacred space from which they were removed. The possibility of successful land claims, however, raises some critical questions. In what way will restoration, right of access, or reparation for past losses transform people's lives? Will returning to the sacred bring reconsecration, and can consecration bring redress? Before we look at these critical questions of individual, familial, and communal relations to sacred space in the context of restoration of land rights, it is necessary to briefly revisit the specific land of the three case studies, and to discuss the role of suffering, labour, and memory in the creation and maintenance of South African sacred space.

For the Ndunge family, the land of Nqumeni's Kloof and Mfanta's Kloof was sacred on both a material and spiritual level. Prior to their removal in 1963, they lived as small-scale producers and enjoyed a measure of prosperity, independent cultivation, and control over proceeds. Most importantly, autonomy over their land brought self-determination and integrity, and the family was able to provide for themselves with limited reliance on external sources of income or the white economic order. Before relocation, fewer family members left the area in search of employment, and those who remained at Maxongo's

Hoek were less dependent on remittances. The land was critical to the family's existence and identity, as it provided the material means by which they were able to live relatively prosperous and self-sufficient lifestyles.

The Maxongo's Hoek farms provided the Ndunge family with security and stability of place, and they could trace their legal ownership of the land to the 1880s. The land was bestowed upon their forefathers in reward for their participation in colonial conflict, and the hand of the government in the family's ownership of the land was not forgotten. The state had validated the Ndunges' claim to the land, and the family expected this right to be upheld and respected. They believed that their position on the farms was secure, and, most importantly, that future generations would enjoy the same security of place and home. The land was important in its provision of familial continuity, as it linked the forefathers, Jacob and Willem Ndunge, to the present generation and to family members still unborn. This continuity rooted the family in one place, and the land was significant in its provision of spatial stability.

The Ndunges provide eloquent testimony of the importance of their ties to the ancestors as represented by the land of Maxongo's Hoek. The farms are critical to the family's belief system, as only by accessing the land can the living family members effectively communicate with their ancestors. This was most apparent with the loss of ritual knowledge following the death of the elders after the forced removal. Only by returning to the farms can such knowledge be restored, as the wisdom and authority of the ancestors resides in that locative space. The severing of ties with the deceased causes intense spiritual pain, but also affects the family on a material level, as they no longer benefit from the positive influence of the ancestors in their daily lives. A restoration of the land of Maxongo's Hoek may be able to rectify these spiritual and material hardships.

The land of Maxongo's Hoek, already sacred to the Ndunges at the time of their removal in its provision of material stability and connection with the ancestors, was further sacralised by the suffering which followed expropriation. The death of the elders and

forfeiture of ritual knowledge were directly linked to the loss of the farms, and this tie between the elders and the land intensified the sacrality and centrality of the place in the lives of the remaining family members. The land could not be remembered without also recalling the death of the loved ones; the death of the elders could not be remembered without evoking the strength and significance of the land. The material importance of the land was further heightened through the hardship experienced after relocation. The experience of suffering, therefore, while it does not directly create the sacred, intensifies and entrenches the sacrality of space.

For the Ntulis, the farm of Witpoort also provided a physical location where they benefited from their connections to their ancestors and proximity to their extended family. The Ntulis, however, did not experience material security or stability on the land comparable to the Ndunges. Their family had worked the land for generations, but had not lived on Witpoort prior to their employment under the du Preezes. They did not associate a time of independent production or prosperity with the farm. As farm workers, their day-to-day and future position was reliant on the white farmer, and they had little of the self-determination or stability that the Ndunges had enjoyed at Maxongo's Hoek. The dearth of education and transferable skills acquired at Witpoort further weakened the Ntulis' security, as they knew that if they left the farm they would have few prospects for finding better employment elsewhere. The family's tenuous position on the farm, however, served to *increase* the significance of the land. With little long or short-term stability, the Ntulis were constantly aware of the contestation of the land and their position on it. The family's security on the farm was tenuous, and they had to do everything possible to maintain their connection to the land. In this way, and because the land was the family's only asset, it became central to their identity and existence. Although Witpoort was owned by white farmers for the duration of the Ntulis' tenancy, the farm was the Ntulis' home and site of family unity. The strength of the interpretation of Witpoort as the place to which they belong has remained with the Ntulis for forty years after their eviction and removal to the periphery of their sacred center.

One way in which the Ntuli family has sought to control the interpretation of Witpoort is by locating the land in the geographical space of Mapochsgronde. The larger area is important both in that it ascribes a history and collective identity to the Ndzundza Ndebele, and in that it represents a time when the otherwise impoverished and enslaved people were independent, prosperous, and powerful. By drawing on this aspect of the land's significance and relaying it to younger generations, the Ntulis are able to increase both their sense of continuity on the land and their claim of ownership. The Ntulis' reflection to the era of Ndzundza dominance over Mapochsgronde acts in the same way as the Ndunges' recollections of their life at Maxongo's Hoek before removal: it locates the Ntulis, at least historically, in a better time, an era when their people enjoyed self-determination and sovereignty. By positioning the farm within the larger historical interpretation of control and dispossession of Mapochsgronde, the sacrality of Witpoort is increased and extended.

By the mid-1950s, the Ntulis were witnessing increasing numbers of farm worker evictions from surrounding farms. The Ntulis knew they could be evicted from the farm without notice. The pact with the Du Preezes guaranteeing a permanent resting place for the ancestors became critical, as it signified at least a measure of stability. This agreement was the only inalienable facet in the family's life. The gravesites, the only constant in the family's *spatial existence*, remained extremely significant after the Ntulis' eviction.

Witpoort's significance as the site of the ancestors' graves extended beyond the spiritual and familial center as discussed in relation to the Ndunges. As the supposedly secure burial location, Witpoort's sacrality went deeper than the site of ritualised communication with the ancestors. Although the resident knowledge, power, and authority of the ancestors remained central to the Ntulis' attachment to the farm, the land as the guardian of the family's hope of continuity, its sole measure of permanence and reliability, became the main indicator of the sacred.

The land of Witpoort was sacred as the resting place of the ancestors, but the Ntulis made that land their own through labour. Witpoort could never belong to the white family as it

belonged to the Ntulis, because the Ntulis were primarily responsible for its productivity and any prosperity which it would bring. They had put exhaustive effort into its cultivation and creation, and in this way it had become their sacred space, the center of their worldview, and the location of their belonging. The land retained its sacrality as created through labour even after the Ntulis' eviction, as it was the place and the soil in which the family had invested, and, in turn, was the place from which they hoped to receive lasting returns.

By virtue of the number of people involved, the meanings assigned to the land by members of the Ebenhaeser community are more complex, multi-faceted, and ambiguous than those voiced by the Ntuli and Ndunge families. These many voices illustrate the multiple utilisations and interpretations of sacred space. The varied interpretations show that contestation within and between communities does not end with the struggle over land ownership, but extends to the debate over land's on-going significance. Differing interpretations of the land were apparent prior to removal from Doornkraal and Ebenezer, as some people focused on the land as the site of their Nama roots and origins, and others located its importance in the presence of the mission station. In 1927, some members of the community were willing to leave the land and move to a new site; for them, the relocation was associated with forward progress. They were not moving away from a sacred center, but towards new opportunities. In contrast, most of those who resisted the move drew on the importance of their past as represented in the land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal. Although rifts do remain between these two groups, it is important not to over-generalise their viewpoints. New-comers to the mission station may have been the first to agree to the land exchange, but many of their descendants, even those who have been relatively prosperous at Ebenhaeser, have long campaigned for the return of the original land. Likewise, as is apparent in the beliefs of Oom David, some people who lived at Doornkraal no longer believe the land should be taken from the whites for the purposes of restitution. The community remains divided nonetheless, and these cleavages create the premise for further conflicting and multi-layered interpretations of the land.

For the people from Doornkraal, the land their forebears lost in the 1920s is significant as the physical representation of their origins, as a final hold-out against white encroachment of indigenous lands, and as an indication of the prosperity they could have enjoyed.

Doornkraal was one of the last remaining independent Khoikhoi settlements in the early nineteenth century, and the descendants of Captain Louis still speak of their Nama heritage. The land and accompanying Nama origins provide this group with individual and collective identities. They speak of their forefathers' allegiance to Captain Louis, and many individuals, such as Sarah Brandt, can trace their family tree to the captain. These elderly Ebenhaeser residents take great pride in the history of Doornkraal as one of the last surviving Khoikhoi kraals. Although labeled coloured and speaking Afrikaans as their mother tongue, this community seeks definition in its Nama roots. These origins bestow a unique identity and a connection to a way of life and control of land, and are spatially represented in the place that was Doornkraal and Ebenezer. This heritage, and therefore this land, continues to inform the community's identity in the present.

Prior to relocation, the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal utilised the land to its full potential without a steady supply of water. They provided for their families and sold surplus crops after seasonal cultivation of the rich flood plains. Before the encroachment of the vast surrounding area of grazing lands, the descendants of this community lived a transhumant lifestyle, taking advantage of shifting rainfall and different coastal conditions. The land met their needs, and they, in turn, understood how to use the natural resources to the best of their advantage. After relocation, Ebenezer and Doornkraal, like Maxongo's Hoek, symbolised the vast disparity in living conditions and well-being before and after removal. In this way, the land was remembered as that which had provided materially and allowed for a way of life that had been irreparably destroyed. The expropriated land of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, however, contains another important aspect of material significance, as the community only saw the full potential of the land after the irrigation scheme for the whites was completed. Because of its fertility, the expropriated land has become a constant reminder of the potential prosperity which the

coloured residents were denied. The sacrality of the land lies both in what the land was for the community before expropriation, and for the prosperity which should have belonged to the people of Ebenezer and Doornkraal.

The spatial proximity of Ebenhaeser to the forfeited land and the land's obvious agricultural and monetary value heighten the community's awareness of their losses. Many Ebenhaeser residents have long worked as farm labourers on the original land. The farm workers continually reenact their forebears' relocation through their daily trips from the land to the settlement of Ebenhaeser. This repeated reenactment, extending across decades, has kept the significance of the land alive for subsequent generations and has burned the trauma of the removal into the collective memory of the community. The re-telling of stories and ritualised visits to the canal reinvent the betrayal by the church and the injustice of the allocation of registered occupier rights. In this way, aspects of the past are carried into the present, and inform both modern reality and collective and individual interpretations of the land.

The role of memory in the creation of the sacred, although apparent in all of the case studies, is particularly illuminating in the case of Ebenhaeser. The loss of land occurred over seventy years ago, and although some residents can recall the actual removal, most only learned of the event from their families. Likewise, the previous way of life was directly experienced by only a few members of today's community, and even those remember it from the perspective of children. The significance of the land has been imparted to those who today consider it sacred. The elders from Doornkraal locate their origins and collective identity in the expropriated land even though most do not have individual and specific memories or experiences of it. Individuals utilise and interpret aspects of the land and relocation in their own way, establishing personal or familial narratives within the larger shared script. As the memory of the land has both individual and collective aspects, the meaning of its ensuing loss, also instilled in memory, remains adaptable and open to varied and fragmented interpretations. These meanings and

motivations to return are dictated by memory, and continue to inform the community's identity, complete with its fissures and cleavages.

It is the memory of the land, as passed down through generations, rather than the land itself, that is of crucial importance to the Nama descendants of Captain Louis and his followers. The land has been changed drastically since the time of their forebears. The large expanse of grazing land, once extending out from the nucleus of Ebenezer of Doornkraal, was expropriated long before the 1927 relocation. The sacrality of the place lies in the inherited memory of its provision of the groups' origins, way of life, and freedom from the poverty and stagnation which today characterise Ebenhaeser's existence. The tale of origins from before the time of Captain Louis has been passed down through oral history, and the story of Booysen and the forced removal has been added to the catalogue of memories which give shape and identity to today's population. Reclaiming these cultivated and fertile lands would not bring a return to a way of life long gone. The land is sacred in terms of the distinct origins it imparted and the way of life it symbolised, but restoration of the land will not make these things more tangible. The elderly people are aware of this, and it is for this reason that the memory of the land as it once is today more sacred than the land itself.

Restitution

It is necessary to touch on aspects of the land claims process both in relation to the cases in this thesis and to land reform in South Africa. Constitutional protection of private property prevents state appropriation of land for the purpose of restitution or redistribution.¹ Instead, land must be purchased from its present owners at "reasonable market value" as determined by an independent evaluator.² The Department of Land Affairs explains this system of compensation as follows:

¹ *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996, section 25.

² Reasonable market value is defined as a price comparable to recent sales in the area and endorsed by an independent assessor. Department of Land Affairs, *White Paper on South African Land Policy*, April 1997, x.

The underlying principle is that while a farmer should be fairly compensated for what he or she paid for or invested in the land, he or she should not make a profit at the expense of the public as a result of any special benefits that were given.³

This clause raises difficult questions, as much of the land expropriated from black owners was subsequently sold to whites at extremely low prices.⁴ Although white farmers were instrumental in pushing for policies for their own benefit, black South Africans were dispossessed by the state, not the whites who took over the land following removal. The onus, therefore, lies on the present government, which has inherited the apartheid legacy, to fairly compensate white farmers for their land. Although in theory the compensation offered takes into account "the history of the acquisition" of the land in question, to date farms have not been purchased at less than market value.⁵ It is very difficult to imagine how a consideration of the "special benefits" given to white farmers could be factored into a monetary amount. Under apartheid, white farmers, regardless of how they acquired the land, benefited immensely from state subsidies, low interest loans (at 8%), and credit offered by the Land Bank. A steady and cheap labour supply was ensured by pass regulations and influx control designed to keep blacks in rural areas, and the isolated and easily monitored nature of farm labour prevented workers from forming unions to lobby for improved conditions. The gains made by commercial agriculture and individual farmers came at the expense of the black majority, and this cannot be accurately addressed or reflected in prices offered by the state for white owned land.

Purchase funds for land designated for restoration to the claimants come from the state coffers and from the claimants themselves. Participants in a restitution claim must form a Communal Property Association (CPA), and the Settlement / Land Acquisition Grants (government-sponsored payments of R17,000 to eligible households) of the CPA members are combined and applied towards the overall

³ Department of Land Affairs, *White Paper*, 57.

⁴ Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, 105.

⁵ Department of Land Affairs, *White Paper*, 57.

purchase price. There is endless scope for discussion on CPAs and their repercussions for both individuals and the claimant groups, but there is not ample space within this thesis to examine this in detail. Suffice it to say that when an outside power, in this case the state, encourages or mandates the formation of a group which may not otherwise be a natural amalgamation of interests, desires, or needs, there is bound to be controversy and internal struggle. Conflict is even more likely when such a group is asked to decide on volatile matters such as financial management and long-term land use. Furthermore, the financial base of the CPAs, in the form of the Settlement / Land Acquisition Grants, focuses on 'households' as its basic unit and aid recipient. Although households and their presupposed division of labour and interdependent relations do operate as a basic social unit, accepting households as the building blocks of society also entails the adoption of the gender and hierarchical power relations inherent within households. This further damages the representativeness of the CPAs and raises doubts about the potential for successful communal relations following resettlement.

The tension between the protection of (largely white) private property and the need to redress inequitable land ownership as a means of promoting social justice has slowed the rate of delivery of land reform. Tessa Marcus says that land redistribution to the dispossessed is "held hostage" by the market value compensation clause, and believes, "There can be no doubt that it is in the interests of the majority that land is expropriated and not bought."⁶ Expropriating land without just compensation, however, places the blame for colonial and apartheid policies of dispossession on the white land owners, many of whom are second or third generation farmers on land held by their families for decades. Although these farmers reaped the rewards of the apartheid system and many encouraged practices designed to ensure low wages and easily exploitable labour, they cannot be held solely responsible for the loss of land rights of black South Africans. In an era frequently touted as one of reconciliation

⁶ Tessa Marcus, "Land Reform -- Considering National, Class and Gender Issues," *South African Journal on Human Rights* 6 (1990), 188-189, footnote no. 25.

and nation-building, we cannot expect or even propose a policy of expropriation without just compensation. Although land reform may be slowed by the protection of private property, the process does operate largely in the interests of those who lost land rights. The present white owners of Mfanta's Kloof and Nqumeni's Kloof, for instance, were encouraged by their lawyers to agree to the sale of their farms for restoration to the Ndunges. Cases in which owners refuse to sell their land at market value are referred to the Land Claims Court, which usually rules in favour of the dispossessed.⁷ Although some claims, such as the restitution claim for Ebenezer and Doornkraal, are unfeasible due to high land prices, the process does ultimately favour the poor and landless. Marcus points out that the land reform system could be more expedient and more aptly provide redress for historical injustices if it was not hinged to compensation for whites. It is possible, however, that this would also result in the flight of white capital and expertise from the agricultural arena. These assets are needed in order to build a cooperative program geared towards rural renewal and development of black farmers.

Expectations

During South Africa's liberation struggle, the return of land to the oppressed was seen as a critical step in addressing the social and economic inequalities between black and white South Africans. The ANC-led government continued to recognise the importance of land reform, and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), implemented in 1994, set a goal of redistributing 30% of the land before 1999.⁸ By October 1998, however, this goal was far from being realised, with only 1% of land redistributed and

⁷ Personal communication with Moshe Swartz, advisor to Eastern Cape Commissioner on Restitution of Land Rights, and Linda Faleni, researcher for Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, 10 April 1997.

⁸ Dave Husy, "The National Budget and Implications for Land Reform," *LandUpdate* 65, March 1998: 6. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a program designed to improve living standards and initiate community-based developments, was replaced in 1996 with the Growth, Equity and Redistribution Strategy (Gear), which appears to place emphasis on economic growth and investment rather than social reform. Many people believe this change of focus is at the expense of the reform projects of the RDP.

only 9 claims settled before the Land Claims Court.⁹ Although more claims have been settled outside of court, this figure is useful in indicating the slow progress of the restitution process. At present only 1% of the budget has been allocated for land reform, which will make it difficult to improve the expediency of returning land to the dispossessed.¹⁰ To its credit, the Department of Land Affairs is working to restructure itself and to draft legislation which will allow for more efficient processing of land claims, but these changes are still to be felt on the ground.¹¹

Substantial land redistribution remains an important issue for the growth and development of the country. When expectations for land reform go unmet, the level of disillusionment with democratic leaders and policies rises. The current slow pace of land reform makes the reversal of the apartheid policies of social engineering, which directly resulted in wide-spread proletarianisation and impoverishment, difficult.¹² Landlessness and lack of capital for development are major factors contributing to poverty, especially in the rural areas, home to 72% of South Africa's poor.¹³ For decades South Africa has had one of the highest income disparities in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.58.¹⁴ This gap between the rich and the poor will be effectively addressed only if resources, such as land, are made available to the lowest strata of society. Furthermore, nation-building and reconciliation, heralded as priorities of the government of national unity, are impossible within a framework of continuing landlessness of the majority, *de facto* group areas

⁹ *Mail and Guardian* 5 June 1998; 9 October 1998. Derek Hanekom, Minister of Land Affairs, wrote a response to the claim that land redistribution would never achieve the 30% target, saying this percentage "was a broad aim, not a promise, and was never adopted as policy." Hanekom also claims that the pace of land reform is accelerating, and says that more than 250,000 people in 279 redistribution projects have received land. *Mail and Guardian*, 24 July, 1998. While many people have certainly benefited from the land reform program at present, the overall progress is extremely slow, especially in the arena of restitution.

¹⁰ Husy, "The National Budget," 6.

¹¹ 31 December 1998 was the last day for lodging restitution claims, and the CRLR is now faced with an estimated 40,000 applications. In January 1999, however, Derek Hanekom issued a statement saying that as part of the restructuring of the land reform process, the focus would no longer be on large restitution claims or redistribution projects as they were difficult to manage and implement.

¹² A special hearing on land-based poverty, held in the Northern Province in April 1998, found that landlessness was one of the main causes of poverty in South Africa.

¹³ Julian May, ed., *Poverty and Inequality in South Africa*, report prepared for the Office of the Executive Deputy President and the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Poverty and Inequality (Durban: Praxis Publishing, 1998), 2,11. Two-thirds of the rural population live in poverty.

¹⁴ May, *Poverty and Inequality*, 25.

determined by the overwhelmingly racially-determined class system, and lack of land for housing in cities and towns. Frustration will continue to rise if the needs of the poor and landless are not adequately addressed. Such frustrations and rising expectations have the potential to become a major problem for the post-1999 government. The possible repercussions of these unmet expectations concerning land delivery are best illustrated through the example of Zimbabwe.

The highly sensitive issue of land control and reallocation is inseparable from the present political and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's pattern of land holding under colonialism was similar to South Africa's, with 5,000 white farmers holding freehold title to 18 million hectares, while 650,000 black peasants occupied an only slightly larger area.¹⁵ Independence from white rule was achieved after a fifteen-year war of independence in 1980, and those who fought for the liberation movements expected to be rewarded for their efforts with land. Although the post-independence government, led by Robert Mugabe, did expropriate some land from white farmers, most of this land was allocated to politicians and party leaders. In 1983 Mugabe announced that 162,000 peasant families would be settled on redistributed land within five years. Fourteen years later, only 70,000 families had benefited from the program, leading one journalist to report that "land reform is as critical an issue in Zimbabwe now [in 1997] as it was at independence in 1980."¹⁶ The dissatisfaction over lack of delivery periodically culminates in protest, and the government eventually responds with promises of land. These assurances are followed with threats of expropriation to white farmers. In November 1997, 1,772 white farms were listed for confiscation, totaling roughly half of the country's commercial farmland.¹⁷ The farmers were told they would receive compensation for improvements on their land, such as houses, but not for the property itself. The announcement was met with a flight of capital from the Harare Stock Exchange, plunged the Zimbabwean economy into turmoil, and caused apprehension

¹⁵ *Mail and Guardian*, 28 November 1997.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Mail and Guardian*, 23 January, 1998. At the time the government had only enough money to implement the resettlement of ten farms. See *Mail and Guardian*, 28 November 1997.

among international investors. Employing the discourse of sacred space, an official from the Reserve Bank said, "Once private property is no longer sacred it is impossible for investors anywhere to believe in you."¹⁸ Mugabe backed down and pledged to re-evaluate the issue, and in November 1998 issued 841 expropriation notices to white farmers, but these cases have not yet come to court. Land hunger in rural areas remains high, with land invasions-- indicative of the frustration over lack of delivery and deepening poverty-- by peasants, war-veterans, and the unemployed becoming increasingly common. Mugabe's eighteen years of inconsistency in land reform strategy has contributed to the rising trends of social unrest and economic instability in Zimbabwe, threatening both the fiber of the fragile democracy and Mugabe's grip on political power.

Land hunger and resentment over unmet expectations should be an important consideration for South African politicians and policy makers. Land invasions in South Africa are increasing, although the Department of Land Affairs has warned participants in such actions of punitive measures. To date, mediation between community leaders, NGOs, and government representatives has diffused these potentially volatile situations, but the only long-term solution is the provision of more land in rural areas and more housing for urban developments. Land invasions will cease if people feel that their needs are being attended to, or, at the very least, when they see substantial progress in this direction. These acts of frustration and impatience will continue to increase if the pace of land reform is not picked up, and will begin to have negative repercussions, as is the case in Zimbabwe, on the larger social and economic order.

¹⁸ *Mail and Guardian*, 4 December 1998. Donor officials from the IMF said that aid to the country would be delayed until a decision had been reached on the expropriation issue, saying, "If this [land seizure] signals an intention to proceed immediately with large-scale land acquisition, this could have adverse fiscal implications for 1999 and beyond, as well as hurt confidence in the economy in general."

Restorative Justice and Reconciliation

In this process of bridge building, those who are benefiting from a range of unearned privileges under apartheid have a crucial role to play. . . . This means that a great deal of attention must be given to altered sense of responsibility; namely the duty or obligation of those who have benefited so much . . . to contribute to the present and future reconstruction of our society.¹⁹

When writing about South Africa in the late 1990s, it is impossible not to address the issue of reconciliation. This is particularly true in terms of land, as the struggle over land has been a central factor in colonialism, apartheid, and liberation. As this thesis has shown, land is extremely important to individuals and communities, both for what it bestows, in terms of material prosperity, independence, and self-integrity, and for what it represents through its provision of spiritual connection to the ancestors, site of community origins, and previous way of life. The expropriation of black lands lies at the heart of the injustices and atrocities committed under colonialism and apartheid, and a way must be found to balance the repercussions of these past policies with future development and poverty alleviation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to examine the abuses, atrocities, and human rights violations which occurred as a result of the South African political situation between 1960 and 1994. The commission's mandate required that it focus on those "violations committed as specific acts, resulting in severe physical and / or mental injury."²⁰ The apartheid policies of social engineering and separate development, including forced removals, evictions, and relocations, do not fall within this mandate. In its final report, however, the commission points out that while this category of abuses was outside the mandate of the commission, such violations were part of "a much larger pattern of human rights violations," and were "an assault on the rights and dignity of millions of South Africans." The commission acknowledges that a strong case can be made for the violations of human rights as caused by separate development-- such as

¹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 1 (Cape Town: CTP Book Printers, 1998), 134.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 64. Gross violations of human rights, as defined by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, include torture, abduction, killing, and severe ill treatment.

racially-based and grossly disproportionate land holdings-- as these "had, and continue to have, the most negative possible impact on the lives of the majority of South Africans."

The consequences of these violations

cannot be measured only in the human lives lost through deaths, detentions, dirty tricks and disappearances, but in the human lives withered away through enforced poverty and other kinds of deprivation.²¹

Land issues may not be directly addressed, but the commission acknowledges that the gross human rights violations committed, including abuses of social, economic and political rights, demand the undertaking of "extensive healing and social and physical reconstruction at every level of society."²² The rebuilding of South Africa must take into account the inequalities of land ownership and violations incurred through dispossession if the reconciliation for which the TRC has worked is to be effective.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission takes the concept of restorative justice as one of its central principles. Restorative justice incorporates African judicial beliefs which prioritise reparation over retribution, and focuses on the participation of both the perpetrator and victim in the judicial process. A paper by the South African Law Commission on the subject explains the role of reparation in the restorative process:

Actions are aimed at repairing the damage caused by the crime, either materially or at least symbolically. . . . The goal of the process is to heal the wounds of every person affected by the crime.²³

Healing the victims and offenders, as well as the larger community, forms the basis for the Truth Commission's work of "restoring the human and civil dignity" of all South Africans.²⁴ This restoration is particularly important in the context of the previous legal and socio-political system which denied basic humanity to the majority of the population. By including elements of restorative justice in its ideology, the commission is able to

²¹ Ibid., vol. 1, 64, 65. The report lists the violations caused by separate development as migrant labour, forced removals, bantu education, and the creation of the bantustans.

²² Ibid., vol. 5, 350.

²³ South African Law Commission, "Sentencing Restorative Justice" (Issue Paper 7, Project 82, 1997), 4.

²⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Report*, vol. 1, 126.

move away from calls for revenge for past events, and to focus instead on the coming together of people from across the political, racial, and economic spectrum in an attempt to uncover the truth about the past.

The perpetrator's recognition of his or her role in the crime or violation is a central principle of restorative justice in traditional African society. Emphasis shifts from the breaking of laws to the violation of human beings, with each act viewed as a direct wrong against another person. According to the South African Law Commission, "[R]eparation to the victim and community is regarded [as] a duty or obligation of the offender," who is held responsible for his or her actions or behavior until appropriate amends have been made.²⁵ A judicial system which mandates full participation of the offenders necessitates the offenders' acknowledgment of their role in the violation, wrong-doing, or attitude which harmed another being. This stipulation leads us to a difficulty in both the overall prospects for reconciliation in South Africa and specifically for the restorative nature of land claims.

Reconciliation requires the coming together of two or more previously divided or opposed groups. In simplified terms, such groups are represented in South Africa, on the one hand, by those who were economically, politically, and socially oppressed, and, on the other hand, by "those who benefited and continue to benefit from past discrimination."²⁶ This second category includes the overwhelming majority of white South Africans. Although there were attempts by individuals and groups within the white community to oppose the apartheid system, most of these efforts were made from within the realm of relative wealth, comfort, and job reservation inherent to the white lifestyle. Very few individuals risked their lives and security to work for the political liberation and social equality of the oppressed. The vast majority of the white population, however, still refuses to recognise its complicity in the creation, maintenance, and enforcement of the apartheid system. Dr. Laurie Nathan, director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution,

²⁵ South African Law Commission, "Restorative Justice," 4.

²⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Report*, vol. 5, 435.

criticises the view held by many of his peers that "[r]ehashing the past will only perpetuate divisions and inhibit reconciliation." This position, he continues,

adds insult to injury. It's a monumental deceit. Whatever the individual talents and efforts of whites, our lives of privilege today are the product of a grand historical act of theft. We stole the land, the labour, the dignity and, in countless instances, the lives of the black people of our country. The majority of blacks still live with the consequences, and the majority of whites still enjoy the fruits of our acts of violence. The past is present.²⁷

The TRC has, in some ways, helped to contribute to white society's myopia by focusing on select individuals, such as those within the security forces, who committed numerous atrocities. While it is important that such crimes be revealed, the publicity surrounding such individuals allows responsibility to be deflected away from white society as a whole. But until the white community acknowledges its role, whether through "commission or omission,"²⁸ in the apartheid system, there will be no reconciliation of this highly divided society, and South Africans will have come no closer to collectively examining and moving on from their past.

The necessity for participation by all parties in order to achieve restoration of past wrongs is highly problematic in the context of land claims. According to restitution legislation, the state is the perpetrator of forced removals and relocations, and the present government is responsible for providing reparation for these losses. The white farmers and their successors who benefited from the removal, relocation, or enslavement of those who lost land rights are involved in the land claims process, but usually only as the potential seller of the land in question. Yet these people benefited from the previous system, and, in many cases, directly influenced apartheid policy to serve their own ends. The apartheid regime's policies and actions were not created in a vacuum, but reflected the needs and wishes of the white constituency. Rural white areas were and still are overwhelmingly conservative, with white farming communities forming a critical support base of the National and more conservative parties. Even those farmers who did not support the apartheid government benefited from policies which denied black people the right to

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 5, 404.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 5, 201.

land.²⁹ Farmers were granted expropriated land at reduced prices, received massive agricultural loans and subsidies, and were ensured of a constant and cheap labour source by legislation designed to curtail movement out of rural areas by potential farm workers. The line between beneficiary and perpetrator is thin. White farmers need to play an active role, as perpetrators who are obligated to make amends for past violations, in the reparation and restitution process. Only when this segment of society takes responsibility for the history of land dispossession, acquisition, and conditions on farms, will land reform be effective and will reconciliation in the extremely polarised rural areas be possible.

The white farmers need to acknowledge their dual role as beneficiaries and perpetrators in specific relation to the three case studies if the land claims are to bring about the restoration of the human dignity of all the participants. In the case of Doornkraal and Ebenezer, however, it is also necessary for the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) to participate in the restoration process if the healing of the community is to be achieved. Under colonialism and apartheid, churches acquired vast amounts of land, much of which is still under their control.³⁰ A 1990 gathering of church leaders made the following statement regarding the land holding of churches: "As the first step towards restitution the church must examine its land ownership and work for the return of all land expropriated from relocated communities to its original owners."³¹ As part of recognising their role, as both agents and victims of oppression, in the apartheid system, various faith communities made submissions or statements to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In its final report, the TRC found that "many faith communities mirrored

²⁹ This is not to imply that the white farming community were the only beneficiaries, passive or active, of apartheid. All white South Africans, dissident or otherwise, reaped the rewards of the apartheid system through superior quality of education, health care, living areas, infrastructure and services, job opportunities, and political rights.

³⁰ It is difficult to ascertain the exact extent of the property held by churches because the land is owned by individual congregations. Few churches have disclosed their complete land holdings. It is estimated, however, that South African churches own more than 7% of the overall land. *Mail and Guardian*, 14 November 1997.

³¹ Andile Mngxitama and Zakes Nkosi, "The Church, Land Questions: An Introduction," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 4. Citing the *Rustenberg Declaration*.

apartheid society, giving the lie to their profession of a loyalty that transcended social divisions."³² This connection between the white order and the church extends to land holding and dispossession, and, as the case of the Ebenezer mission shows, applies to the colonial as well as to the apartheid government.

In its submission the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Dutch Reformed Church, which was often characterised during the 1980s as the "National Party at prayer," confessed to "having 'misled' its members by 'presenting apartheid as a biblical instruction'" and giving apartheid official sanction.³³ The DRC's policy and practices concerning land have been the focus of attention in various cases, including Ebenezer and Elandskloof, another former mission station in the Citrusdal region of the Western Cape.³⁴ The acceptance of responsibility for their part in dispossessions will allow churches to assist in the reconstruction of society and make reparation for violations committed under white rule.³⁵ In the case of Elandskloof, for instance, the DRC contributed R500,000 to the development of the farm following restoration. The church sent a letter of apology to the community, stating:

The Synod recognises: 1) that what the church did in those days was insensitive towards the community; 2) that the interests of those community members were not protected; and 3) that because of the church's action the community was very aggrieved and inconvenienced, and the church wishes to ask for forgiveness.³⁶

Although it could be argued that the apology understates the long-term effects of removal, the combination of acceptance of moral responsibility and active participation in the

³² Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Report*, vol. 4, 65.

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 66.

³⁴ Although the title deed of Elandskloof stated that the land was for mission use only, the land was sold to two white farmers in 1961 and the inhabitants forcibly removed. The case was the first case settled by the Land Claims Court, and the Elandskloof community returned to their land in 1997.

³⁵ The Dutch Reformed Church was certainly not the only religious institution which played a role in forced removals and relocations. Other cases of church complicity include the 1995 sale and ensuing eviction of workers on the farm Sheridan in the Free State by the Roman Catholic Church, and the removal of the Uitkyk community, in the North-West Province, by the Methodist Church in 1967. See Gillan, *Church, Land and Poverty*.

³⁶ Sam Carolus, "The Elandskloof Community Returns at Last," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 27.

restitution and development process are extremely important steps towards achieving restorative justice.

The participatory role of the church in certain land cases highlights a variety of ways in which the Dutch Reformed Church could positively contribute to the reconstruction of the Ebenhaeser community. The people of Ebenhaeser want recognition of the fact that their sacred land was taken from them, and want the church to acknowledge its role in these events. The DRC could take a step towards achieving these ends through a public apology and a request for forgiveness for the injustice perpetrated through their support of the government's discriminatory measures. The DRC should also contribute to the improvement of infrastructure at Ebenhaeser by funding developments, such as the building of a dam and procurement of alternative land for expanded agricultural. Furthermore, the church could play a mediating role in negotiations with the white farmers with the aim of obtaining a portion of the original land for restoration to the community. Negotiations through the church would perhaps be more effective than those conducted by an outside mediator, as many Afrikaans farmers in the area are members of the DRC congregation. Finally, the DRC could participate in the rebuilding of Ebenhaeser as a development partner. In this scenario the church would make a commitment to an on-going process of reconstruction and education in the community, and would provide skills and resources in response to the community's needs.³⁷ Most important to the elderly people of Ebenhaeser is the DRC's recognition that although people were removed more than seventy years ago, the suffering and injustice experienced as a result of their dispossession remains central to their lives. Only when amends have been made will the community be able to advance on both a material and psychological level. Until such acceptance of responsibility and participation by the white farmers and the Dutch Reformed Church is forthcoming, the principles of restorative

³⁷ For more information on models of implementation for the church's role in land reform, see Samantha Hargreaves, "In Pursuit of Equitable and Sustainable Solutions: The Uitkyk Case Study," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 44-45.

justice and the stated goals of reconciliation and nation-building are difficult to apply to these case studies.

As seen above, the first impediment to the effective contribution of land reform to national reconciliation is the lack of participation by all role players in the land claims process. There are exceptions to this trend, such the Western Cape wineries where the owners have signed part of their vineyards over to their workers.³⁸ The workers on these farms, while still employed by the white owners, now possess title deeds and have full control over a portion of the land. In the case of these wineries, the farmers appear to have recognised, regardless of their involvement in acts of dispossession, their responsibility for improving the living standards and future prospects of their employees.³⁹ These cases are positive examples of participatory white responses to land redistribution, but the substantial problem still remains of whether the restoration of land can make amends for the suffering and loss which followed dispossession.

This second problem is perhaps a more fundamental obstacle to successful reconciliation and redress. According to the concept of restorative justice, victims should be compensated for their losses.⁴⁰ But how, when dealing with land and all it bestows and represents, are these losses to be assessed? In the case of the Ndunges, for instance, the land can be returned, but will restoration successfully bring back the ritual knowledge forfeited at the time of their removal? No compensation or reparation will rectify the physical and spiritual suffering which led to the death of the elders following relocation to Mhlwazi. Can a remedy be provided for thirty-five years of separation from the ancestors, with whom the living were meant to have daily contact?

³⁸ Wineries which are now owned in part by the farm labourers include Nelson's Creek, Fair Valley, and Freedom Road.

³⁹ It could also be argued that these farmers are taking prophylactic measures against the loss of their land. By this argument, the farmers are giving land to their workers in hopes that such action will count in their favour if a case of restitution or redistribution is lodged against them, or if legislation changes so as to allow for expropriation.

⁴⁰ South African Law Commission, "Restorative Justice," 5.

For the Ntulis, complete restoration of Witpoort may be appropriate remuneration for their years of unpaid labour, but it is unlikely that even this could erase the humiliation and indignity which the family suffered as slaves. The successful restitution of Witpoort is highly unlikely given the current limitations on legislation allowing for such claims by evicted farm workers. Furthermore, even if the Ntulis do gain access to the graves, it is improbable that they will be allowed to bury their dead on the land, and the rupture and dispersal of the family will be on-going.

The people of Ebenhaeser also have little hope of returning to their original land. At best they will receive a portion of several of the white-owned farms in symbolic recognition of their rightful ownership. For this community, the most likely form of reparation will be a development program at their present site, and possibly the allocation of alternative land in the vicinity. These acts, however, will not change their physical location across the buffer zone from the wealthy white farms, a constant spatial reminder of their identity as second-class citizens. Although irrigation and the provision of land will improve their standard of living and future prospects, such compensation without full acceptance on the part of the DRC of their moral responsibility will do little to address the pain experienced as a result of the betrayal by the church.

Post-restitution

A serious consideration for the future stability of the land claims process is sustainable development on the land following successful claims. The people in this thesis speak of their desire to return to the land and their need for space for farming and grazing. Many such claimants, however, have been away from an agricultural environment for years or generations, and need to develop skills to effectively manage the land following their return. This is especially true in cases where successful claimants are taking over farms which produce crops or use innovations which have been introduced since their removal. In the case of Elandskloof, for instance, the land had been converted into a commercial citrus farm. Although the community wished to take over the profitable orchards, they

first required training in the care and cultivation of citrus. In this case, the white farmer arranged for his farm manager to remain on the farm to train members of the Elandsklower community. Such programs providing for the training and transfer of skills and knowledge are crucial if the returning family or community is to have a chance to prosper on their land. These initiatives, however, require funding, resources, and implementation, expenses which are not included in the land reform budget.

Another important aspect of post-restitution development is the provision of infrastructure and access to capital. Many claimants in rural areas or beneficiaries of land redistribution are extremely poor and will have difficulty acquiring equipment or paying for the construction of buildings following their return to the land. Some claimants, such as the Ndunges, comprise a large number of households and will require a school on or near to their land. Access roads may need to be improved to accommodate the increased number of people, and water supplies must be tested. Without start-up capital it is difficult to make necessary improvements, such as fencing, to the farms, and acquiring tools and implements is hindered by remote locations and the lack of reliable transport. Although policies are slowly changing, poor or small-scale farmers still have difficulty in receiving loans. The Land Bank, which long supported the white commercial farming sector, is working to target emerging black farmers. The Bank's interest rate of 25% for farmers who have no track record or assets is particularly daunting to new entrants into the formal sector, and discourages people from applying for credit. Potential applicants are aware of the high failure rate in the first years of farming, particularly when faced with limited investment capital. William Mahlangu, a beneficiary of the Gauteng Small Farmers Settlement Programme, says,

I am afraid to use the Land Bank facilities because it means that what ever little property I have will be liquidated. . . . To add to our problem the extension officer [of the Land Bank] moved offices to Germiston. How do they expect us to drive to Germiston? Our cars are old and we fear being hijacked.⁴¹

⁴¹ Keneuoe Mosoang and Victor Monyemangene, "Not Yet 'Uhuru' for Emerging Farmers: William Mahlangu," *Land & Rural Digest* 1, no. 3 (October/November 1998), 20.

Mahlangu, who lost his first year's crop when he ran out of diesel and fertiliser, says that only one out of six farmers in the program has been successful. Some small-scale farmers do succeed, but it is extremely difficult to prosper without initial capital and infrastructure.⁴² The next five to ten years will be the most critical for South Africa's land reform program, as it is in this period that the government must demonstrate their commitment to making sustainable development a reality for people who have returned to the land. Without such a commitment it is unlikely that the entrenched rural poverty will be alleviated by the provision of land to the marginalised and landless.

Conclusion

As the situation presently stands, there is little chance of restitution substantially altering land ownership in South Africa. Of the large number of restitution claims lodged, many are individual urban claims for District Six in Cape Town and Cato Manor in Durban. If the Department of Land Affairs is able to improve the implementation of the restitution process, land claims settled in the claimants' favour will return thousands of people to land they lost due to racially-motivated acts and practices. However, as Dr. Peter Mayende, Land Claims Commissioner for the Eastern Cape and Free State, explains,

A sobering fact is that while restitution will undoubtedly make a major contribution towards the resolution of the land issue generally, it will not significantly alter the balance in land ownership. The reason is simply that, due to the fact that these restitution claims have a 1913 cut-off date, the amount of land that is likely to be involved is not likely to exceed 10 per cent of the land at issue.⁴³

⁴² One such successful farmer is Tshepo Khumbane, who purchased 21 hectares of arid land in the Northern Province in 1997. She built herself an 8-room house, uses recycled bath and cooking water for irrigation, and her first crop of tomatoes, groundnuts, and maize was successful. Although Mrs. Tshepo is not wealthy, she clearly had at least an initial amount of start-up capital which allowed her to purchase the land, material for the house, buy the seeds and build the dams. Her case provides a good example of what can be accomplished when dedication is matched with development funds. Victor Monyemangene, "Not Yet 'Uhuru' for Emerging Farmers: Tshepo Khumbane," *Land & Rural Digest* 1, no. 3 (October/November 1998), 22.

⁴³ Peter G. Mayende, "The Church and Land Restitution: Time to Deliver," in *Church, Land and Poverty: Community Struggles, Land Reform and the Policy Framework on Church Land*, ed. David S. Gillan (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, 1998), 101.

The real changes in inequitable land holding will come as a result of the redistribution program, assuming that this aspect of land reform is implemented effectively. Land restitution will not turn back the process of colonial dispossession and the disruption caused by apartheid's policies of social engineering, but does have the potential to make reparation to some of the individuals, families, and communities who suffered human rights violations, loss of independence, and destruction of spiritual worldviews as a result of forced removals, evictions, and relocations.

The central factor in the land claims in this thesis is the return to the sacred space of the families and communities, or, in the case of Ebenhaeser, the desire for recognition of the significance of the loss of the sacred and for reparation to be made for the injustices committed. A successful restoration claim has the potential to bring spiritual fulfillment through re-connection with the ancestors and return to the locative space which holds the ritual knowledge, power, and authority of the deceased. Return allows for complete reunification with the extended family, living and dead, as it provides both access to the graves and a place where the living family members are able to gather. The dispossessed are no longer confined to the margins of their primary space, and are no longer forced to look to the distant center for identity and meaning. The interpretation of the sacred is in their control, and the land's meaning ceases to be shaped and informed by *contestation*.

The people in these three case studies experienced the desecration of the space which was central to their well-being and identity. In the case of Ebenezer and Doornkraal, the land has been fundamentally changed through the intensive development of the white farms. It remains as it was before 1927 only in the collective memory of the elders.

Reconsecration, therefore, also applies in the realm of memory. In this case, such reconsecration could be possible if the DRC takes responsibility for its role in the removal and makes amends to the community. The sacred spaces of Witpoort and Maxongo's Hoek, desecrated for the Ntuli and Ndunge families as they were pushed from the *center* to the periphery, have not been radically altered. If the families return to the land they will be able to perform acts of consecration, largely through ritualised communication

with the ancestors, which will allow them to re-occupy the sanctified center. This process will most likely only be fully realised for the Ndunges, as the Ntulis' reclamation of the sacred will, in the foreseeable future, allow access to but not occupation of the center. Restoration of land ownership or access at any level cannot, of course, entirely heal the wounds of the past or rectify the repercussions of years of isolation from the ancestors. In cases where claims are successful, however, it can provide for material and spiritual well-being and the hope of a better future for coming generations. Even limited right of return, the most likely outcome in the Ntulis' case, is an improvement in the lives of claimants who have previously been denied any connection to their sacred space. For the people of Ebenhaeser, acknowledgment of their loss and suffering, while never sufficient to mend the injustice, will be a start to mending the rifts in the community and moving forward with the shared goal of improving the future for their children.

The restitution program initiated by the post-1994 government will never be able to provide complete redress for the appropriation of people's integrity, dignity, and independence. The acknowledgment of people's right to reclaim the specific land they lost under these systems, however, is also an acknowledgment of the violations committed and the injustices suffered. A land reform program which only allowed for redistribution of land to the poor or landless, while helping to uplift people materially, would not include this critical recognition. This is why restitution, regardless of its slow pace and many problems, remains an important aspect of national reconciliation. Before the population can move forward as a whole, the past must be faced and acknowledged, and reparations for past violations of people's spiritual and material well-being must be made.

Facing the past does not have to entail either forgiveness or forgetting. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes this point in the final pages of its report, lest we think that concluding the hearings and testimony means succumbing to collective amnesia.

Reconciliation does not wipe away the memories of the past. Indeed, it is motivated by a form of memory that stresses the need to remember without

debilitating pain, bitterness, revenge, fear or guilt. It understands the vital importance of learning from and redressing past violations for the sake of our shared present and children's future.

Reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness. It does involve a minimum willingness to co-exist and work for the peaceful handling of continuing differences. . . .

Reconciliation requires a commitment, especially by those who have benefited and continue to benefit from past discrimination, to the transformation of unjust inequalities and dehumanising poverty.⁴⁴

Memory and the need to tell the stories of the past drives reconciliation. In this thesis, the narratives of the past are the stories of the sacred as it was lost, dreamt of, and possibly regained. Restitution, as the process presently stands, will not bring large-scale reconciliation. But it can bring individual and communal restoration of dignity, of self-determination, of connection to the home, the hearth, and the family. In order to effectively achieve this end, however, land reform policy-makers must acknowledge the primacy and importance of sacred space in people's attachment to land. Such recognition will allow for a more encompassing understanding of land and the ways in which it continues to shape and inform people's identities and existence. If the sacred is taken into account, and if the small successes within the complex, protracted, and multi-layered system of land claims can be expanded, can garner wider participation by all involved parties and can receive assurances of support for post-restitution sustainable development, the individual victories of reclaiming the sacred will lead to a larger reconciliation, and will begin, however slowly, to shift the balance from the suffering and abuses of the past to hope for and promises of the future.

⁴⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Report*, vol. 5, 435.

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Selected Interviews

10 April 1997: Ndunge Family, Elliot, Eastern Cape

Gordan Zolile Mhlatshana

Nompucuko Ndunge

Miriam Ndunge

Sonwabo Ndunge

Jeremiah Ndunge

Mpumelelo Ndunge

Zweledinga Ndunge

Nkosinathi Ndunge

Klaas Sokweba

3 July 1997: Ntuli Family, Mathysznloop, Mpumalanga

Boshiwe Sithole

Rose Maqhiwa Sithole

Rose Khulelaphi Masilela

Charlie Bambazibukhele Ntuli

Peter Fihlwephi Ntuli

Sindi Elizabeth Ntuli

Lisa Ntuli

Johannah Ntuli

15 October 1997: Mr. Banzi Nkuhlu, Butterworth, Eastern Cape

24 November 1997: Denmark Dumalisile and family, Mgxabakazi Administrative Area,
Willowvale District, Eastern Cape

25 November 1997: Chief Mandlenkosi Dumalisile, Dumalisile Administrative Area,
Willowvale District, Eastern Cape

26 November 1997: Jongingwenya Manxiwa, Quaninga Location, Willowvale District,
Eastern Cape

5 February 1998: David Cloete, Ebenhaeser

5 February 1998: Johannes Boiis, Ebenhaeser

5 February 1998: Johannes Buijs, Ebenhaeser

5 February 1998: Sarah and Peter Brandt, Ebenhaeser

6 February 1998: William Coetzee, Ebenhaeser

6 February 1998: Sarah Coetzee, Bettie and Dirk Cloete, Olifantsdrift

7 February 1998: David Cloete, Ebenhaeser

4 June 1998: Ndunge Family, Mhlwazi, Elliot District, Eastern Cape

Miriam Ndunge

Sityu M. Ndunge

Patricia Ndunge

Sheila Ndunge

C. R. Ndunge

Jane Ndunge

Gladys Ndunge

N. Xolile Ndunge

Major Gushelo