



**UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF SACRED SPACE FROM THE AFRICAN  
TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE; challenges of spatial management**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Social  
Science to the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town

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JUNE 2005

**Declaration**

This works has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or words, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

DATE.....6/06/2005.....

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest and sincere gratitude go to my supervisor, Dr. Chirevo Kwenda for his guidance and tireless support. He has been a true 'companion' and a guide throughout the journey.

To Lynette Kruger (Lynnie!), a colleague, a comrade and a pillar of strength, for her invaluable sacrifice in reading, critiquing and editing this thesis.

To the staff at the Environmental Evaluation Unit, for their understanding, support and encouragement. Dr. Merle Sowman and Mrs Shanaaz Hassiem, my gratitude goes to you in particular for allowing me some time off to work on this thesis.

To my family, my wife and kids – guys, I owe you so much! I did not spend quality time with you and you understood. Thanks for that – I appreciate your support.

I know one thing and I am sure about it; that God was fully involved in this project – to Him be glory and honor for ever.

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the challenges that face land use and land management in the context of the new South Africa. Approached from the African traditional religious angle the study will propose, among others, a new approach to land management and land designation. The study draws insights from literature on religious meaning of land and interviews conducted with two African traditional healers from two different black communities.

The study introduces a new concept in land management, the concept of sacred space. Land in many African states and in South Africa has been understood from economic and scientific level, that is, from a functionalist approach. The paper argues that if the new democracy has to make sense to the African majority it should embrace their worldviews as well.

The paper uses religio-cultural information from both the Western and African worldviews to understand the meaning of space. The conceptual and discourse analysis methods are used. Conceptual analysis looks at the level at which a concept or concepts are used within the discourse. In short, conceptual analysis can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts – most often represented by words or phrases – in a text. The conceptual analysis tool, as part of the social scientific tools, is, in this study, used to analyse the use and meaning of two concepts, sacred space and ritual. Interviews with two traditional healers are also part of the study. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around a topic. Interviews may be useful as

follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses.

Finally, in chapter 5 the study goes beyond particular theories to focus on the South African context. The paper argues that the liberation of the African black majority should be all inclusive. The African people should not be accommodated within the Western worldview but elements of their own worldview must be integrated within Western management systems. This includes cultural and religious life-styles and their understanding of the world around them. The study concluded by recommending a tangible change in the way land is managed and used. It argues that Africa should have its unique system of governance, and institutions relevant to this governance system. That, Africa having been destroyed by colonialism cannot build on the same colonial foundations of colonial 'civilization'. That, a new way of thinking is necessary if justice is to be done to the African communities.

# **UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF SACRED SPACE FROM THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE; challenges of spatial management.**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The question of land and space has been a major issue in Africa as a whole. Land is a capital and a base on which most programmes are developed. In the African continent land assumes different meanings. Land is not only a source of production and physical sustenance but is also imbued with spiritual significance. Africans are closely attached to land for spiritual reasons and all other activities happen within this context. Therefore cultural and religious significance of land plays a very important role within African communities. That is why areas like place of birth, graves, some mountains, rivers, lakes, natural springs and other natural or human made landscapes are so important to them. The management and designation of land in South Africa therefore should reflect all these realities.

## **2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Land ownership and management in South Africa has long been a source of conflict. This conflict originates from various sources and causes. Some of these sources and causes have been South Africa's history of conquest and dispossession, of forced removals and a racially-skewed distribution of land resources. The unequal distribution of land caused vicious competition among the different land users.

Since 1994, the South African Constitution gave power to the government to manage all national resources including land on behalf of the people of South Africa. The

Department of Land Affairs, as a custodian of land resources, has developed a comprehensive land reform policy and programme that aims at assisting in mitigating some of the conflicts and competitions. In its vision statement the Department seeks to ensure “an equitable and sustainable land dispensation that promotes social and economic development”. The problem this paper seeks to explore is the fact that both land policies and regulation in South Africa do not directly address the cultural and religious significance of land. The failure of the Department of land affairs to address this issue makes these cultural and religious communities vulnerable and sidelined. As a result of this negligence, in some parts of South Africa there is conflict between the state and these communities, and sometimes between the white farm owners and the landless African communities.

### **3.STATEMENT OF THESIS**

This paper argues that a new way of managing land in South Africa needs to be developed in consultation with all land users including the cultural and religious communities. Though there are different philosophies in terms of land use and management national interests should take precedence. This should not mean overruling other interests but some interests need to be challenged for the general good of the South African people. An example of such interests is the fact that some cultural and religious theorists treat some spaces as sacred and therefore cannot be used for any other purpose. This paper will differentiate between the human made sacred spaces and the ‘discovered’ or natural sacred spaces.

### **3.1. PURPOSE**

The purpose comprises four basic areas, they are:

- i) to show that some categories of sacred space are transferable
- ii) to show that the concept of 'sacred' is only a religious discourse and people sometimes violate it
- iii) to show that space (with the exception of 'natural' sacred spaces) does not have indelible sacredness but it is endowed through the constant use of that space and ritualization
- iv) To show that different meanings of space can be interconnected and become a symbol of national unity.

### **4. SIGNIFICANCE**

This study will assist geographers, land planners, communities as well as African traditional religious practitioners to integrate all worldviews in their approaches to the use of space, be this social, economic or religious use. It may also assist in sensitising politicians, policymakers, African traditional religious leaders and development practitioners to the fact that all systems co-exist and are entrenched within communities and are accessible as rational resources and assets

The examples that are used in this paper, in chapter 5 under the South African case study, show what happens when political hegemony takes control of all social systems. They also portray the tension that exists between the 'recognised' Christian religion and the 'neglected' African traditional religion. Chapter 5 poses a challenge to the South African government, and the Local government in

particular to change their mindset to cater for the needs of the African religious communities when it comes to land planning.

## **5. METHODOLOGIES**

The following methods will be applied in this research paper.

- Conceptual analysis
- Discourse analysis
- Library and archival research
  - Primary sources
  - Secondary sources
- Case studies
- Interviews

### **5.1. Conceptual analysis**

Conceptual analysis looks at the level at which a concept or concepts are used within the discourse. In short, conceptual analysis can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts – most often represented by words or phrases – in a text. Some scholars feel that while conceptual analysis is extremely useful and effective in providing information when done right, it is limited by its focus and the quantitative nature of its examination. The conceptual analysis tool, as part of the social scientific tools, will, in this study, be used to analyse the use and meaning of two concepts, sacred space and ritual.

## **5.2. Discourse analysis**

This study will employ discourse analysis to explore the nature of some categories of the sacred space, particularly those that fall within the African Traditional Religious worldview. Discourse analysis is part of the social scientific methodology. Masondo states that social scientific methods provide one with a variety of tools to unearth some information ... discourse analysis is part of this methodology (Masondo, 1994: 4).

Dellinger claims that critical discourse analysis offers the opportunity to adopt a social perspective in the cross-cultural study of media texts (Dellinger, Brett: 1995: <http://users.utu.fi/bredelli/cda.html>). This social scientific tool assists in analyzing and understanding the meaning of the language “beyond the sentence” (Tannen. [www.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/)).

The thesis contends that the African worldview is unique and embedded with meaning hidden behind language and symbols and gestures. Discourse analysis will assist in uncovering these. The use of social scientific tools helps to unlock the society’s hidden or underlying meaning “beyond the sentence”.

## **5.3. Case studies**

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, general truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.

Harry Eckstein argues that "crucial cases" provide the most definitive type of evidence on a theory. He defines a crucial case as one,

that must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory's validity, or conversely, must not fit equally well with any rule contrary to that proposed." He adds that "in a crucial case it must be extremely difficult, or clearly petulant, to dismiss any finding contrary to the theory as simply 'deviant' (due to chance, or the operation of unconsidered factors) (Eckstein, 1975: 118).

There are many types of case study research designs adapted to different purposes, including designs for single case studies, comparative case studies, and case studies of most and least likely cases, most and least similar cases, and crucial cases.

This paper addresses the single case study which is representative of similar other cases throughout South Africa and other parts of the continent..

#### **5.4. Interviews**

Interviews can be based on a set of pre-prepared questions and can be used to identify patterns and broad social themes while leaving some room for unexpected positions to be expressed. Interviews can be structured differently depending on the intentions of the interviewer and the expected results. For example structured interviews tend to take longer in-depth than open-ended interviews. On the other hand unstructured interviews the subjects are allowed to express themselves in their own words.

Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around a topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate

their responses. Usually open-ended questions are asked during interviews. There are different types of interviews such as informal, conversational interview, general interview guide approach, standardized, open-ended interview and closed, fixed-response interview. This paper used the standardized, open-ended interview. In this method the same open-ended questions are asked to all the interviewees and they are free to answer in their own words. This approach facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared.

## **6. Limitations**

This study does not pretend to offer solutions to the political, religious or cultural problems that relate to land use and spatial development in South Africa. But it intends to raise fundamental questions and awareness about the reality of existence of other views about space and how communities relate to space, and the significance space has to African communities in particular. The study does not intend to offer solution to land policy issues and the tensions that often come up between authorities and communities about the 'illegal' use of land by those sections of the community that feel neglected in the land planning process. The study does not promise to develop any framework for the integrated spatial planning by land planners and African traditional land users. What this study hopes to achieve is to open a channel for communication between the different worldviews because they can enrich one another, and to raise critical issues about the treatment of African communities and their religious practices.

## **7. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of space is a highly contested concept. Diverse sciences have different definitions of space. The following discussion reviews some theories about space in general and sacred space in particular. It also brings forth different arguments about the nature of this (sacred) space in the apartheid South Africa and in the democratic South Africa.

Gardner (2000) writes, “religion is an orientation to the cosmos and to our role in it. To this end it uses a range of resources, including worldviews, symbols, rituals, ethical norms, traditions, and (sometimes) institutional structures”. Durkheim defines religion as referring to the sacred beliefs and these sacred beliefs are about that which is “set apart”. Whether humanly created or discovered, the sacred space is set apart. J.Z. Smith (1982) and J. Cox (1998) refer to religion as “a system of symbols”. There is an interaction between the symbol and an internal reality or the internal nature of what is represented by a symbol. Mircea Eliade (Parrinder, 1969) locates the sacred in the category of “religious experience”. And he argues that those he calls “believers” can only attain this experience.

There is diverse understanding of what the nature of the sacred space is. Some believe that with ritual(s) the sacred space can be transferred from one place to another and some argue that once an area is declared sacred through ritual(s) and use it can never be unsacred again.

Armstrong (1996) traces the origins of the concept of 'sacred' back to primordial religious convictions, he states that people had evolved sacred geography before mapping the world scientifically. This statement refers to 'created' sacred spaces (transferable spaces) as opposed to 'discovered' sacred space which Eliade argues cannot be removed and is permanent. Armstrong, Eliade and Hubert (1994) confine themselves to the natural or 'discovered' sacred space or sacred objects.

Pato differentiates between Western understanding of the sacred and African traditional understanding, he explains, "indeed traditional African life and practice is characterized by the motif of wholeness" (Pato,1997:55). He goes on to say:

The African way of life is not something static. Over the centuries, African societies have been in constant transformation ... due to changing conditions of life, new needs, development of ideas, and modification of techniques and values. (*ibid.* 54).

Pato argues that there is change in understanding those sacred places that were not transferable in the past, and now because of complex human needs they may be transferable. Pikirayi concurs with Pato when he states that:

Neither the human component nor the physical one is static... Each cultural type has come to a different solution to the basic problem of making a living from a particular landscape... We cannot alter their location, only how they are perceived and utilized ... (Pikirayi, 2001: 38-41).

Pikirayi argues that the sacred spaces' physical location may not be touched but the significance can be changed to accommodate new challenges that arise out of human

needs. And this response to “new challenges” suggests ‘creation’ and not ‘discovery’ of sacred space.

Ritual plays a significant role in the creation and de-creation of the sacred space. Bell (1992) approaches ritual from a Western scholastic discourse, as a “mental orientation”. In the African traditional religions ritual is the actualization of that which is being enacted and not a mere “mental orientation”. Gardner (2000) demonstrates how ritual works by giving an example of a religious ceremony that relates to the ordination of a tree. But Gardner says that “no villager of course thought of the tree a monk but because of the ritual the entire village accepted the effort as imbued with sacred meaning”. (Gardner, 2000:33-34).

This also demonstrates that the world of meaning is created and not discovered. The re-enactment theory has been strongly challenged by James Cox (1998). Cox’s arguments only show that the concept of ritual has been dealt with diversely and differently from different perspectives, religious traditions and cultures. He makes the connection between the ritual and myth because for him ritual tries to re-establish, re-enact the past or the ‘then’ to the ‘now’. He explains that “the ritual re-enactment theory holds, therefore, as Laurie Honko (1984: 51) explains, that ‘the context of myth is, in normal cases, ritual” (*ibid.* 65).

Cox’s re-enactment theory is set on Western thought system and premised mostly on Judeo-Christian western religion. It assumes that myth and ritual are interlinked.

Hooke S. H. has very useful concepts, for the purpose of this paper, which he says form core of the elements or structure of rituals; they are:

- i) 'a system of actions performed in a fixed way'
- ii) 'by authorized persons' (or under the guidance of)
- iii) 'to secure the well-being of the community'

Mbalazi Chrispin *et al.* (Tobler (ed.), 2000) argue that the nature of the sacred space is not immutable or untransferable but can in fact, if human beings see it fitting, through ritual, transfer the sacred to another area. They argue, "sacred space can be identified as ritual space, a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances. In other words, ritual is another defining characteristic of sacred space". (Tobler (ed.), 2000: 135-136).

Critical to sacred space is the actual use of geographical space in the face of fierce competition about space. The religious, developmental, economical and environmental claims on space have necessitated some policy, legal and development frameworks to control and regulate the use of space or land – thus the sustainable development framework which is a guiding document for all spatial development and land planning procedures. An example of a policy document is the White Paper on Spatial Planning and Land Use Management, which states "land is an asset. Land is scarce. Land is fragile" (p.1).

Keating (1993:17) calls for caution and sensitivity in managing and using land. He argues that "government should take into account environmental, social, population and

economic issues, then develop laws, regulations and economic incentives to encourage sustainable use and management of land resources” The Urban Development Framework confirms this view when it states:

To ensure that economic, spatial, social and environmental planning is integrated ..., it is essential that local economic development planners and urban planners work as a team to maximize urban generative capacity (Urban Development Framework, 1997:12).

The White Paper also gives an inclusive definition of spatial planning as “a high level planning process that is inherently integrative and strategic, that takes into account a wide range of factors and concerns and addresses the uniquely spatial aspects of those concerns” (White Paper on Spatial Planning and Land Use Management, 2001:4). The White Paper also states “land is a national resource. It falls squarely within the national legislative competence ... it the Minister’s responsibility for the administration of land, the transfer of land, the ownership of land and the cadastral boundaries of land” (*ibid.*3). Ramutsindela comments that “the end of apartheid in South Africa not only occasioned the restructuring of society, but also necessitated the restructuring of territorial space(s) ... (Ramutsindela, 1998:291). Ramutsindela argues that central to this restructuring of territorial space(s) is the use of maps which portray space as showing “a triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces”.

## **8. Justification for the study**

A lot has been written about the concept of space generally and sacred space in particular. Most of the written literature analyse space and sacred space in particular from a Western

religious perspective. Very little has been written about the sacred space from the African traditional religious perspective. Even those who write from the African traditional religious perspective say nothing about the transferability of the sacred space. Many religious theorists assumed that religious communities are fixed on one place or religion is a “mental orientation” and therefore you carry it in the mind wherever you go. Because of this thinking many religious scholars never addressed the constant tension between the sacred space (as that which is ‘set apart’) and spatial development (as that space which is in demand). Theorists like E.B. Taylor, Durkheim, Geertz, J.Z. Smith and J. Cox define religion either as “transcendent”, “sacred beliefs” or “a system of symbols” but they do not address the question of the sacred as embodied in a particular space and whether that embodied space can be transferred. Armstrong (1996), Pato (1997), and Pikirayi (2001) bring forth the idea of a “sacred geography” and the changing understanding within African way of life, which may help African traditional religion in changing the understanding and use of certain spaces, but they do not explain how. That is why this study goes beyond these theorists and introduces ritual as central to creating and de-creating sacred space and central in its transferability.

## 9. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

### **Chapter 1:** Introduction

### **Chapter 2:** General conceptions of the sacred space.

This chapter looks at how different religious theorists understand the concept of sacred place/space and how the African traditional religion is unique from these.

### **Chapter 3:** The African worldview and the meaning of sacred space.

Chapter 3 looks specifically at the meaning(s) attached to sacred spaces, the violation of that respect (protocol) and the consequences. A case study will be used to highlight the consequences.

### **Chapter 4:** The role of Ritual, and transferability of space.

This chapter focuses on different theories of ritual and ritual re-enactment and the role of ritual in creating and de-creating the human made sacred space and conclusion.

### **Chapter 5:** The meaning of space in the South African context.

Chapter 5 looks at the current issues that South Africa aims to address to improve the quality of life of all South Africans especially the previously disadvantaged. The chapter also shows how these issues are not presently fully addressed on the local level by the local government in particular which is the sphere of government that is close to the people. This chapter shows how this 'failure' by the local government is showing itself in creating different categories of citizens in the same country.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.0. General conceptions of the sacred space

#### 2.1. Introduction

Space is salient since it denotes a point of view: it has taken some time to grasp that there is no “god’s eye view”. This raises epistemological questions of considerable note for the investigation of “we” and “they”, identity and otherness (Cochrane and Klein, 2002:62-63).

The concept of sacred space is a broad and diversely defined concept. It is as diverse as cultures and religious beliefs are. Within the different religions the sacred space may be derived from its location geographically, it may be a visible space or an object; it may also exist in a belief with no external manifestations of sacredness. That is why many religious theorists argue that the reality of the sacred is only and fully experienced by insiders or those who fully participate in that particular religion or belief. Because of the complexity of the different religious worldviews therefore, the useful approach to the concept of sacred space is to explore and show this different religious understanding of the concept without comparing them. This chapter focuses on the different definitions by different religious theorists. It also looks at two specific religions that have spread rapidly in Africa and have affected the African traditional belief system, namely the Islamic and Hindu religions.

### 2.1.2. Dictionary definitions of the term sacred

#### 2.1.3. Sacred

The word “Sacred” stems from Latin, *sacer*, to make holy. Essentially, “that which is set apart from the ordinary world” comes as close as any other working definition.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines sacred thus: “Consecrated to; esteemed especially dear or acceptable to a deity ... set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; Consecrated, hallowed.” Further definitions include: “Regarded with or entitled to respect or reverence similar to that which attaches to holy things ... And: Sentiment, reverence, sense of justice, or against violation, infringement, encroachment ... Sacrosanct, inviolable; protected by some sanction from injury or incursion.

### 2.2. Overview of the concept of sacred space

“Do not come near,” says God to Moses; “put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5 [RSV]). As this quotation from the scripture shows, Judeo-Christian traditions maintain that there are sacred places and sacred spaces---places in which we should stand in awe. The other religions of the Book—Judaism and Islam—share this attitude, albeit in different ways. ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com). (St. Stephen’s College Internet Course – Sacred Spaces and ...).

This extract brings forth the existence of the concept of ‘sacred’ in all the Abrahamic (the religions of the Book) religions. But the methodologies applied to come to the conclusions about this sacred differ. There are few elements about the sacred space/place

that are common among all the religions of the Book that the extract seems to be suggesting, they are:

- 1) Awe: the author suggests that “we should stand in awe” in these places.
- 2) Particular behavior: the command to Moses to “put off your shoes from your feet ...”.
- 3) Different attitude: the sacred should take over or consume the one who experiences it.
- 4) Within a particular belief framework: people are influenced by their religious beliefs to ‘create’, ‘discover’ or ‘experience’ it and respond in an ‘acceptable’ and ‘conventional’ way within his or her religious worldview.
- 5) The belief in the sacred must be tested by time (from time immemorial): the sacred is born out of a practice (ritualization) or a belief that has been there for generations.
- 6) Mediated or unmediated: there is no consensus about what constitutes sacred spaces/places. Religious theorists differ in this regard. Different religious theorists show this difference in the following extracts of the concept of sacred space.

### **2.3. Religious theorists**

Mircea Eliade explains that it is not the nature, but how this sacred manifests itself, and this explanation may point to the internal dynamics of the sacred space. He says:

The sacred manifests itself as a power that is totally different from that of the natural order. He uses the word *hierophany* to refer to this manifestation, which takes place through objects or persons of our visible world. Each *hierophany* is made up of three elements: a visible reality that

is mysterious and divine; a natural object or being that acts as a mediator; a sacral dimension produced by the manifestation of transcendence through a contingent reality. (Ries, 1994:118).

Eliade's 'sacred' or what he terms 'hierophany', emphasizes on two aspects, that is:

- the difference of this 'power' to that of the natural order, and
- that it manifests itself "through objects or persons of our visible world".

This definition, as much as it suggests the transcendence of the cause of the sacred, it also states that it (the sacred) is embodied in the natural objects. And for Eliade the question of transferability of the sacred 'object' might not have been an issue because, (i) it was not created but discovered and therefore beyond human control, and (ii) the mobility of communities was not an issue then and land use was not controlled by legislations and policies.

Primitive people were drawn to some localities that they experienced as radically different from others and anything that stood out from its surroundings and ran counter to the natural order could be interpreted as divine (Armstrong, K., 1996). Eliade defines the sacred on the same lines but he emphasizes on three elements:

- a) localities which they experienced as radically different from others;
- b) that ran counter to the natural order; and
- c) radically separate from its profane environs.

Hubert (1994) gives his own definition, and dwells more on the different human behavior in these spaces, and the change of attitude that is expected from human beings, he states:

The concept of sacred implies restrictions and prohibitions on human behavior ... In the context of sacred sites and sacred places the prohibitions on behavior that exist define the relationship between the god or gods and the people. (Hubert, 1994:11)

Both Armstrong and Hubert suggest that the sacred space exists as a result of either a hierophany or the presence of a god. Hubert goes further to suggest that a different conduct and behaviour is required in these sacred spaces. This view implies intentionality in going close to these sacred spaces. They are not tourist areas but religious spaces. They are visited for religious purposes.

For Ries, the sacred consists of three aspects:

- i. It is the intimate living principle of all religions: the “noumenous”;
- ii. It is also a value in itself and a value to man: the sanctum or sacred; and
- iii. as an a priori category and primary datum, the sacred constitutes a special faculty through which the divine can be apprehended. It is at the origin of interior religion and God’s revelation in history; it is basic to the religions of humanity (Ries, 1994:117-118).

So far, sacred space has been defined as an outcome of the presence of a god or hierophany, or something radically different from its environments. The suggestion in these theories is that people through consecration either invite the sacred, or it is found, but it can be exorcised through de-consecration.

In an interview with Boston University professor Stephen Prothero, about the sacred space – Religion & Ethics Newsweekly gives this account:

**R & E:** What makes a site sacred?

**S. Prothero:** The community that decides it's sacred. There's no real one-two-three rule for why and how a site becomes sacred. A community decides that it's an important place. (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week601/cover.html>).

If this statement is true in Prothero's context, then it means for him sacred spaces can be anywhere where the community decides it should be. It also could mean that the decision of the community plays a vital role in instituting the sacred space as well as transferring it. Prothero, in other words, suggests that sacred is not discovered, is not indelible and therefore does not necessarily point to the presence of a divine figure or any hierophany.

In introducing the concept of sacred space in the American context, Albanese and Stein (1995) suggest a radical approach to the understanding of sacred space. In most cases the concept 'sacred' is consciously or unconsciously confused with the Christian religious notion of 'holy', 'piety', 'harmony' etc. Contrary to this idea (or it could be said to be a 'progressive' and creative way of understanding the concept of sacred space) Albanese and Stein introduce the element of 'conflict' as part of the definition of sacred space.

They write:

Rather, these essays challenge, divert, and direct the received theoretical model by their introduction of a body of evidence that pushes it even further toward the conflictual pole...

... American sacred space intensified conflict modalities and never allowed them to rest..., the cases presented in this volume only begin to explore the many ways in which conflict and sacred space in America go hand in hand (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995: IX – X).

The preface to this book goes further to say that “American sacred space has been produced from the beginning out of multicultural relations and intercultural conflict”. This statement reveals a rather divided view of what actually constitutes sacred space - and the competitions that prevail among these sacred spaces. In such a context the very definition of ‘sacred’ becomes subjective and contested. Thus Chidester and Linenthal (1995) give a variety of possible definitions of sacred without giving any definitive definition of sacred space. They address the sacred space as being defined as both substantial and situational.

Chidester and Linenthal (1995) give the following as examples of *substantial* definitions:

- Rudolf Otto’s “holy”;
- Gerardus van Leeuw’s “power”; and
- Mircea Eliade’s “real”.

From their perspective, these definitions try to portray the sacred as “an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance”.

*Situational* definitions:

These approaches, as Chidester and Linenthal (1995) put it, have recognized that nothing is inherently sacred. Not full of meaning, the sacred, from this perspective, is an empty signifier.

Chidester and Linenthal (1995) define sacred space in this way:

First, we can identify sacred space as ritual space, a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances. As sacred space, a ritual site is set apart from or carved out of an “ordinary” environment to provide an arena for the performance of controlled, “extraordinary” patterns of action.” (*ibid.*6)

For Chidester and Linenthal (1995) ‘sacred’ is not permanent, but remains sacred as long as maintained through particular actions.

Particular religions also have their understanding of the sacred space and their relationship with these sacred spaces. There is diversity among these religions in terms of understanding their origins. Following is an exploration of two religious worldviews, Hinduism and Islamic religions.

#### **2.4. HINDUISM**

Hinduism is “a religion with 648 million followers (as of 1996). It developed from indigenous religion of India in combination with Aryan religions brought to India c. 1500 BC. It was codified in the Veda and the Upanishads, the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. Hinduism is a term used to broadly describe a vast array of sects to which most Indians belong.

Caswell (1996) uses a case study of a Hindu Temple to demonstrate the multiple meanings or understandings of sacred space in Hindu religion. In his own words Caswell writes:

Embedded within an urban industrial landscape, the Divya Dham temple brings an oasis of sacred to diverse sects of Hindu immigrants from all over North India. Divya Dham's sacred space is three-tiered, being located in the United States, housed in a former electronic factory, and worshipped as a transposition of India's sacred geography.

Caswell explains the three levels of this sacred space:

1. The creation of such a temple in the New York area reveals the first layer of sacred space – establishment of the deities in the new host nation.
2. Another layer of sacred space is exhibited by the location of the Divya Dham temple within a former electronic factory – reflecting urban creativity among the diaspora's less affluent members.
3. Finally, the transposition of India's pilgrimage sites onto the physical space of the temple marks a third layer of sacred space in which Queens becomes South Asia, radically transformed for the purpose of worship. (<http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/religion/students/caswell.html>).

What Caswell demonstrates with these three layers of the sacred space is that the Hindu understanding of sacred space is flexible, accommodative, and responsive to challenging situations. Among other challenging historical factors that Caswell mentions, that necessitated Hindus moving to Britain was the British indentured labour system, the brain drain of the 1960s and 1970s, and economic reasons. These factors, Caswell argues, freed "Mother India to stretch her arms across the entire globe, transforming Hinduism into a truly international religion with international notions of space". Caswell therefore presents Hindu religion's understanding of sacred space as transferable, and migratory.

He states:

Through the sacred space of the Divya Dham, the deities of Hinduism are established in the United States. Hinduism is a religion of sacred geography; the physical spaces in which the deities reside within India become holy in and of themselves. The establishment of such deities in Queens is remarkable because the deities of the Divya Dham are “wholly, fully god; not a symbol, not an image, ... but wholly completely there”. God is not only in the ancient temples, pilgrimage sites and home shrines of India, God is also in the Divya Dham temple in Woodside, Queens (*ibid*).

“This transferring of sanctity is a quite frequent phenomenon in India” (*ibid*).

## **2.5. ISLAM**

Carmichael, *et al* (1994) presents a case where Islam and African traditional religious beliefs are intermingled to produce what they term a “hybrid”. They mention that “the situation on the Kenyan coast, especially among the Swahili and other Muslim communities, is of great interest: African customs and religions have become intertwined with Islamic non-African religion to produce a hybrid” (p.160). But the Islam religion taken on its own does not seem to believe in a sacred space or place as they believe that the face of God is everywhere. Recognizing a sacred space is a matter of convenience in Islamic religion. Schimmel in Scott and Housley (1991), explains this belief further, she says:

Withersoever you turn, there is the face of God (Sura 2/115). Thus says the Qur’an, and the conviction that God is not restricted to a single place but is *hādir nāzir*, “present and watching” everywhere, and that mankind feels his presence wherever it may be, has permeated the Muslims’ attitude to sacred space ... And yet there are spaces which are singled out for their religious significance, ... (Scott & Housley,1991:163).

Irfan (2002) also confirms the omnipresence of Allah but also brings up the element of 'convenience', that spaces and places serve to attract human attention. Irfan (2002) is of the view that only Allah is worshipped or venerated, and nothing else should be given that high status as a matter of principle. He argues, "the main precept of Islam is the unity and oneness of Allah and importance of worshipping only Allah and not any statues or other beings". In Islam religion the sacred space goes beyond being just a space set apart but is also about power relations. It draws borders between insiders and outsiders, women and men, pure and impure, the believer and the infidel. Mataar (2002) explains further:

According to these theorists sacred places are arenas in which power relations can be reinforced. Typically relations between insiders and outsiders; men and women; those who are included and those who are excluded; those who are active and those who are passive; those who are dominant and those who are subordinate; etc... (Mataar,2002:5 & 29).

Carmichael, *et al*, (1994) define the Islamic understanding of the sacred space in a Kenyan context. Like in most theories, in Kenya the sacred space is understood as "an area set apart for the use of the supernatural". This area is not to be "violated" and is "above criticism by those who believe in it". This definition sets out unambiguously the fact that this sacred space is meant for religious and ceremonial purposes. The belief in Kenya is that these sacred spaces are not 'made' but are 'found'. But the fact that these sacred spaces are 'found' is different from Eliade's 'hierophany' because in the Kenyan context the sacred spaces might have been 'made' in time immemorial and their function have changed through time.

## 2.6. AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

### 2.6.1. Introductions to the African worldview

#### Where spirits roam<sup>1</sup>

Nobody swims here because – apart from the crocodiles – it is believed to be the home the god of fertility, a great white python, that accepted human sacrifice in the form of young maidens before it would command the much needed rains. Even today, locals make sacrifices here to ensure good crops for the next year. But before you can visit the lake, you will need special permission from the authorities, who in turn need permission from the Priests of the lake.

This newspaper extract demonstrates the complexity of the African worldview. The African worldview has its own sets of rules and principles. It also has its own value system and ethics that do not necessarily seek to equal the ‘internationally accepted norms and values’. The above story of human sacrifice, judged according to these ‘international’ standards, would be seen as atrocity, cruelty and murder. This narrative portrays the complexity of the African worldview with regard to the production of space. Parrinder’s (1994) description of the African worldview encapsulates the expansive nature of the African world beyond descriptive words, into observation of life as lived by the African people. He writes:

The African worldview is life-affirming; a philosophy of vitalism or dynamism lies behind many attitudes and actions.

Because of this life-affirming character African religion covers the whole of life. It has often been regarded as purely social, and although this is an exaggeration, there is a large social element in

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<sup>1</sup> The Sunday Times newspaper: Lifestyles, June 29 2003. p. 6

rituals, festivals, societies and brotherhoods. There is a personal and private element, in daily life and in the retreats and meditations of religious reformers; but this is manifested in social action. Religion plays an important part in the hierarchy of society, the choice of chiefs or the actions of politicians, and the association of chiefs with Islam or independent churches is significant. Africans have been called 'incurably religious', but this they share with all mankind in needing an ideology that affects life and conduct (Parrinder, 1996: 233-5).

### **2.6.2. African traditional religions: the struggle to survive**

The influences of colonialism and imperialism in the African context have had an indelible impact on the African lifestyle as a whole, and on their religion in particular. Some religious theorists argue that these political systems have had a positive impact on African traditional religions because they brought them a step forward into 'civilization'. On the other hand some theorists argue that these systems have destroyed the very moral fibre of the African traditional religions, '*ubuntu*'<sup>1</sup>, which is the cohesive and unity of Africa traditional value system. Parrinder argues that the African traditional religions have shown their resilience throughout the colonial and imperial history, and have stood the test of time. He explains:

In the tropics writers have always spoken of the natural influences of Christianity and traditional religion and have ignored Islam, but nowadays all three religions must be taken into account. Christianity in Africa influences traditional religion, but is itself modified by it. Islam affects traditional religion, but is also affected by it. And Islam is touched by Christianity, and exerts influence on it ... The input of Christianity upon African traditional religion is apparent in the breakdown or decay of ancient practices ...

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<sup>1</sup> *ubuntu* means, a person is a person because of other people

On the other hand there is undoubted influence from traditional religions upon the forms of Christianity in Africa. It must not be supposed that the convert leaves all beliefs behind and come to Christianity with a blank mind (*ibid*: 228-9).

Pato (1997) argues that some specific cultural and religious aspects, in all civilizations, are bound to affect, and be affected by, other influences. There is little sameness in terms of consistency in each cultural or religious practice. There is constant change in understanding, in doing and in relating to traditional beliefs and practices. Exacerbating this situation will be the fact that most communities, more especially in the industrialized areas of African communities, are culturally and religiously compound. And this situation makes the concept of sacred space more complex to define as religious accommodation and tolerance would be expected. These 'foreign' influences have affected the way some African traditional religions define sacred space. The prevalence of dualism in their definitions is a testimony to this Western influence. Pikirayi (2001) expresses the accommodation of 'new' and 'other' experiences. In his own words he says:

Landscapes are neither natural nor wild. They are not waiting to be discovered; they are known, traveled, and named... Over periods of decades or centuries people use this reservoir of experience to adjust their life-ways, introducing innovative social forms or technologies into their cultural repertoire in order to meet a variety of challenges – natural as well as humanly made (Pikirayi,2001:41).

Pikirayi is direct about the suitability of the sacred space or sacred land, rivers, trees etc. to be used for other human needs. He suggests that the meaning of the sacred space can be changed, and the space be used for (if necessary) other human activities. Pato differs with Pikirayi, more especially when it comes to dualism, when he states that:

It has often been said that the African has a sense of the wholeness of life. Indeed traditional African life and practice is characterized by the motif of wholeness. For instance, in African traditional religion there is no separate community of religious people, because everyone who participates in the life of the community automatically participates also in its religion... As Archbishop Desmond Tutu so aptly puts it: The African worldview rejects popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual. All life is religious, all life is sacred, all life is of a piece. (Pato, 1997:55).

The care for resources raises the issue of human needs and the search for human satisfaction. The desire for fulfillment of human needs goes across the board and knows no cultural or religious boundaries. Communities will do anything to satisfy these needs. Most resources are related to land or space, that is, they are located somewhere in our surroundings and are provided for by nature. This is what *Pikirayi* tries to address (the constant desire to fulfill human needs and new responses to new challenges facing African communities).

If then, a scarce resource or resources can only be found in an area that is categorized as sacred or set aside or cannot be accessed by communities, what becomes a priority: the sacredness of the area, or the survival of the people? What if, for some reason, communities have to shift from one particular location to another, what happens to the graves and the sacred spaces? What happens to the spirits in the nearby rivers and mountains? Can these sacred spaces be rezoned for other uses? e.g. economic or social development programmes? Pato responds to some of these questions by saying:

There is, however, a more practical difficulty that has to do with culture (religious) change. The African way of life is not something static. Over the centuries, African societies have been in constant transformation, mainly due to the interaction with the outside world, but also due to changing conditions of life, new needs, development of ideas, and modification of techniques and values. (*ibid.* 54).

### **2.6.3. Radical views of space**

How do Africans conceive space? How are places constructed and imagined? How do the conceptions, constructions, imaginings of spaces and places affect, and in turn are affected by, social, economic and political change? What is the relationship between Africans and land and earth? These are the questions that need to be addressed if the discussion about sacred space within African traditional religion is to be pursued. Parrinder gives a brief summary of the African perspective to answer some of these questions. He explains that:

The land is generally sacred, for it belongs to the earth spirit, and to the ancestors as well as to the living community; attempts at selling land are unpopular and in older days they were impossible. This was a major cause of the Mau Mau troubles in Kenya; when settlers to whom land had been leased thought they had bought it. The Ibo dislike selling land because of their reverence for Ala, and they appease her if it has to be done. Their ancestors founded the 'face of the earth' (*i hu ala*), which became sacred for the people and was the place where major decisions, such as warfare or ritual oaths were made and strictly respected (Parrinder, 1996:53-54).

The above extract already shows the intimate, almost inseparable relationship that exists between the African people and the land. But some religious theorists challenge this 'overall sacred' African understanding of land. For instance Mircea Eliade proposes that 'sacred' is the sphere of the supernatural, of things extraordinary, admirable, and

momentous. He goes on to argue that the 'sacred is eternal, full of substance and 'reality'. The sacred is the sphere of order and perfection, the home of the ancestors, heroes and gods. This argument and definition of the sacred, points to the 'apartness', 'exclusiveness', and 'otherness' of the sacred. It brings the existence of a separate realm from the ordinary, thus the sacred and profane spaces. Eliade points out that this sacred manifests itself as a power that is totally different from that of the natural order. Each manifestation is made up of three elements: (i) a visible reality that is mysterious and divine; (ii) a natural or being that acts as a mediator; and (iii) a sacral dimension produced by the manifestation of transcendence through a contingent reality (Ries, 1994).

Chidester and Linenthal (1995) advance a radical, and different view of space. They argue that all space is profane, and that what is referred to as sacred space is actually a ritual space, a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances. As sacred space, a ritual site is set apart from, or carved out of, an "ordinary" environment, to provide an arena for the performance of controlled, "extraordinary" patterns of action.

The core of Chidester and Linenthal's (1995) argument is that there is nothing inherently sacred but, as stated above, all spaces are ritual spaces. The basic problem of this view lies in the fact that the concept of sacred space is a belief issue and therefore is a product of societies in their diverse ways. It is an epistemological problem and thus should be problematized instead of being absolutized.

Having said that, Chidester and Linenthal (1995) distinguish between spatial domains: (i) natural environments, (ii) built environments, (iii) and mythic orientations. This is how they explain these three domains:

1. Natural environments: They hold that this is an open set of interpretative strategies for investing the natural environment with sacred significance – and they argue that this is a way of producing a cultural product.
2. Built environments: Chidester and Linenthal (1995) refer to these as obviously constructed as cultural locations of religious meaning and significance. Among these locations they mention places of worship such as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. Of course Chidester and Linenthal's (1995) context and point of reference here is America, because if it were Africa, the list of sacred spaces or locations would go further to include the element of the presence of spirit(s) in these and unused locations and buildings. Carmichael (1994) explains the African view in relation to these locations when he says that spirit in an African society, is real and living, and caves and old mosques are areas through which these spirits can be reached, and which are also often inhabited by them. Like Islamic beliefs, Africans also believe that a mosque, even when in ruins, is still a holy place and can be used for worship.
3. The third dimension that Chidester and Linenthal mention is what they call Mythic orientations or sacred space: They claim that this is a contested space, “a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols. Space is fundamental in any exercise of power”. They continue to say that a sacred

space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed, rather it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests.

Tombs, on the other hand, are places in which spirits dwell, or rest; there are also holy places where specific spirits (such as those of the ancestors) can be appealed for assistance, explains Carmichael. This statement reveals the African view that people do not 'die' as such, but pass on to become higher beings in death. The spirits are in contact with the living, and can either bring good omens when appeased, or bad omens when annoyed.

#### **2.6.4. African traditional ways of creating a 'human space'**

##### ***2.6.4.1. Inviting and exorcizing the gods***

If, as it is maintained, that each and every piece of the land in Africa is sacred, where are human beings supposed to do their daily 'human' businesses? Where can they be all by themselves without the presence of the 'superiors'? What about the question of 'us' and 'them', 'personal' and 'their', boundaries and territories?

Cochrane and Klein (2002), writing in a different context bring forth the idea of 'own personal space'. This is a borderline beyond which anyone or any spirit will be trespassing. They argue that it is since we are embodied beings that space becomes salient. As bodies we take up space. We desire our bodied spaces. They maintain that bodies are not mere bodies with abilities, powers and constrictions, but they are always spatialized. Cochrane and Klein (2002) go further to say that space embraces both

material discursive dimensions, zones, boundaries and exclusions may be both symbolic and physical. This provides link between the discursive turn in social theorizing, without neglect of the materiality of embodied locations.

Eliade's definition of the sacred (as 'eternal', a place of 'order and perfection', the 'home of the ancestors', 'heroes and gods'), points to a different place and not this physical world. And this definition surely could be contrasted by human experience that in 'this' world such a place does not exist and therefore must exist in the world of the spirits and gods. On the other hand African traditional religion scholars claim that the whole of African soil is sacred. This definition of the sacred, as it is alluded to above, becomes problematic, in that it does not leave room for human beings to enjoy their 'own personal space'. It could be referred to as a suffocating sacred.

Even if this definition of sacred as an 'overall' phenomenon could be a fact, traditional African communities have ways of pushing the gods away from them. These communities are able to create boundaries between the gods and human beings. These boundaries are created through the performance of rituals (rituals will be treated extensively in the next chapter). For example, among Zulus, though it is believed that life continues beyond death, a dead person is believed to have gone home (Moilola.2003.63), or a special ritual, "sending home" *ukugodusa*, is performed. This means that the dead person does not belong 'here' any longer, s/he has another home/place somewhere and will be invited (through the same ritual performance process) back when the right time comes.

Another ritual that exists in most Nguni and Sotho tradition is the *ukukhapha* ritual, which means to accompany a distance (*ibid.64*). In modern terminology this ritual could be regarded as a send off party to say “go well” on your journey towards a certain destination. Moilola (2003:67) is quick to refute the impression, which he claims to be created by Basotho people that the ritual words ask the dead to go away and not to disturb them. He says the impression created is that the living are afraid to have contact with the dead. But after some time the dead person is invited back to his homestead – *ukubuyisa* which means the service of bringing back the deceased into vital participation (*ibid.72*). All these rituals are in fact a coping mechanism by African traditional communities. They are ways of dialoguing with the gods/ancestors to say that we don’t always need you among us and we will call you when we need you. This is not to negate the assertion by African religious scholars that the whole of African soil is sacred nor is it a way of desacralizing other areas but is a way of creating a human habitable space. In other words the human space is a sacred space within some ‘intense’ sacred spaces. Thus one could speak of the sacred and THE sacred; sacred within a sacred, the former (sacred) being the places of the ancestors and the latter being the whole land. The distinction between these sacred spaces helps to show that the sacred space is only an aspect of the larger sacredness.

An in-depth treatment of the meaning of the sacred space is dealt with in Chapter 3 of this paper. Chapter 3 is dedicated solely to the understanding and significance of sacred space as it is understood within African traditional religion. Particular focus will be given to graves as part of the bigger importance of land issues. Graves as burial sites cannot be

separated from land use, land ownership, care of the land, land management, sustainable use etc. That is why land is central to African traditional religion, because it is the source of life – the beginning and ending of life.

It is a known fact amongst religious scholars generally and African traditional religious scholars in particular, that African traditional religion had been misrepresented by some colonial (Christian) religio-anthropologists. Chapter 3 therefore will adopt a selective approach – focusing on the writings of African traditional religious theorists or those who represent African traditional religious view.

### **2.7. Summary**

This chapter has explored some definitions of the sacred spaces/places as it is understood by different theorists and specifically within the Hindu and Islam religions.

What this chapter has managed to do is to expose the diversity in terms of understanding and interpreting the concept of sacred space. Besides being a religious discourse, the concept of sacred space has been located within some (religious) social settings and has been used as a tool for different agendas. Friedland and Hecht (1991) argue that “this sacred (site) is a source of enormous social power, control over which has been contested between and within the Israeli and Palestinian communities ... The use to which this sacred space has been put has enormous implications for the content of the state’s legitimacy, that nature of the discourse in which political power is understood and exercised. Friedland and Hecht (1991) go on to say that there is an intimate connection

then, between the organization of the sacred space and the material and cultural organization of power. Sacred space is socially constructed. Its meaning is made, and that making has implications for the doctrines which motivate those who claim it as their own (Scott & Simpson-Housely: 54-55).

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.0. THE MEANING OF SACRED SPACE WITHIN THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The African is profoundly, incurably a believer, a religious person. To him, religion is not just a set of beliefs but a way of life, the basis of culture, identity and moral values. Religion is an essential part of the tradition that helps to promote both social stability and creative innovation (<http://www.igc.org/awpguide/relig.html>).

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The above abstract is indicative of how the African traditional communities understand religion. For an African, religion is 'everything', is a way of life or is life as it is lived on daily basis. This includes 'everything', the sky, the land, the rivers, mountains, the air that they breathe, the rain, the animals etc. All this is part of the sacred reality. Religion is the completeness of creation. Hubert (1994) demonstrates that reality in the following words:

The limitations of my land are clear to me. The area of my existence, where I derive my existence from, is clear to me and clear to those who belong in my group. Land provides for my physical needs and my spiritual needs. New stories are sung from contemplation of the land. Stories are handed down from spirit men of the past who have deposited the riches at various places, the sacred places. These places are not geographically beautiful: they are holy places, places that are even more holy than shrines. They are not commercialized, they are sacred. The greatest respect is shown to them. They are used for the regeneration of our people, the continuation of our life: because that's where we begin and that's where we return. (Hubert, 1994:9)

Chapter 2 of this paper has introduced the understanding of the sacred space concept by 'other' religions and how they define this concept. This chapter looks broadly at the meaning attached to sacred space by African traditional religious scholars and practitioners. This 'meaning' will be demonstrated by the use of two mini-interviews and a case study by Elizabeth Stites.

The first part of this chapter is made up of two live interviews that the researcher conducted with two traditional healers from the Western Cape. One traditional healer, Mr Ndhleli Albert Kandekana, is from Khayelitsha Township, just outside Cape Town, South Africa. The other traditional healer, Dr Richard Kutela, comes from Thembaletu Township in George, about 433 Km from Cape Town.

The following interviews with both Mr. Kandekana and Dr.Kutela are not a major component in this chapter, but they are meant to demonstrate how traditional healers in different social setting understand and interpret the concept of the sacred space. Therefore, the researcher will not go into great details in analyzing the content of the interviews.

The reason for choosing traditional healers is that they are considered to be part of the social groups that are custodians of the traditional religion. They also act as mediators between the ancestors and the community.

**3.2. Interview with Mr Ndihleli Albert Kandekana [President of the Buzani kuBawo Traditional Healers' Association, Khayelitsha, Cape Town)].**

Participants: Vuyisile Zenani – (“herein”) = VZ (Interviewer)

Ndihleli Kandekana – (“herein”) = NK (Interviewee)

**VZ: *How is the sacred defined within the African belief system?***

**NK:** It is very difficult to give an abstract definition of sacred without referring to a particular object or space or event in the African belief system. The sacred is embodied. It resides within a ‘thing’ or phenomenon e.g., graves, *ingethe* (a place charged with sacred power from the ancestors and is believed to be a place where traditional healers get their power and authenticity), rivers, springs etc.

**VZ: *Is there a difference between rural and urban understanding of sacred space?***

**NK:** Yes! There is a huge difference. In the rural areas the understanding of the sacred (and other African beliefs) is constant and stable. They live and are conscious of the sacred in their daily activities. They encounter the sacred when they enter a house which was formerly used by their late parents, when they approach the cattle kraal, in the agricultural fields, by the rivers etc. There are also commonly known authorities, who define and decide on a sacred space and the nature of that particular sacred space, and who are allowed to approach it and who is not. Activities that should and should not take place at a sacred space are clearly defined and respected. On the other hand in the urban areas there is no consistency, and no visible structures of authority to guide people. There

is no coherence in interpretation, and people generally do not have a profound respect for the sacred spaces. This of course is caused by the nature of the urban life, multiplicity of cultures and competition among cultural norms and values.

**VZ: *Do African traditional beliefs have any categories of sacred space?***

**NK:** There are categories of sacred space. But this must not be understood as meaning a hierarchical order in terms of importance, no! Each category is important in its own way, because it cannot be substituted. As I have stated before, that you have graves where the living dead are resting – this is a sacred space, there is also the *ingethe* where the traditional healers derive their healing power and authority – this is a sacred space, you also have certain rivers and trees that are set aside for particular purposes and are respected among African traditional communities – these are sacred places and sacred objects. So, all the above are sacred spaces but different in nature and purpose.

**VZ: *Who determines a sacred space ?***

**NK:** In some cases it is difficult to say because when I grew up I was just told about the existence of sacred spaces without being told about their origins and who determined them. And in those days you would not ask questions you would accept what is being said as true. Actually in African traditional worldview the how, where, by whom questions do not count or are not important – but what matters is the existence of that particular belief and our behaviour in relation to it. To try to answer your question about who determines the sacred space, I can simply say that dreams and traditional healers play a very important role in identifying (not creating) a sacred space and interpreting the

nature and how people should relate to it. Actually it is the ancestors through dreams and other mediums who point out, reveal and determine sacred spaces.

***VZ: If human beings are not involved in the creation of sacred space can they then be able to transfer a sacred space from one area to another?***

**NK:** Firstly, let me say that human beings are involved in the creation of some sacred spaces. But their involvement goes as far as inviting the spirits of the ancestors to be present in this particular space, but they do not have the power by themselves to create a sacred space. As far as transferring the sacred space is concerned I do not want to believe that sacred space is transferable because even if you remove the contents of the sacred space – e.g., the remains of a person in the case of a grave, or appeasing the spirits to move from a river or from a tree, the sacredness of that place is captured in memory and remains there for generations. From memory it is translated into oral and written stories – so in that way you can never get rid of sacred. There are places in Africa that are named after events or presence of a sacred spirit that people appeased to live in the area and build houses on it, the memory and respect is still there. The only difference is the fact that no ritual activities are taking place on those spaces.

***VZ: Does this non-transferability of sacred space apply to all categories of sacred space?***

**NK:** Let me make myself clear here. I am addressing the issue of transferability on two levels: (i) the physical migration and (ii) memorial resettlement. I agree that when the communities or when the people involved decide (with ritual and appeasing) to transfer a

sacred space from one area to another, physically and with the use of language they can do that, but what I am saying is that it still exists in the memories of the same communities or same people involved.

Let me come back to your original question whether the non-transferability applies to all categories of sacred space or not. No! It does not apply to all categories of sacred space but only to those sacred spaces that are indelibly sacred, in other words, the “discovered” sacred spaces. These sacred spaces are those whose sacred origins are not known to human beings. But the sacred spaces that existed through ritualization or through repeated use by human beings can be transferred. Let me also point out that the reason for transferring a sacred space should not be a selfish or externally motivated reason but must be a genuine one. And it must be based on the greatest good for the majority of people either in the family or community. Or it must be for the good of that sacred space/place/object or spirit, e.g. threat of development, resettlement of the whole community, floods etc.

***VZ: What happens, to the ‘discovered’ sacred if the area has to be used for something else – like housing development, roads etc?***

**NK:** It is true that Africa is faced with a lot of challenges that need a different set of answers and mindset. This question brings back the difference between urban and rural settings. In rural areas it is the people who decide on social changes and the building or demolition of buildings and roads etc. And it is easy to reach consensus because the culture of a village is homogenous and the structure of authority is central. Areas and

objects of importance are well known to everyone in the village. So in the village sets up the sacred spaces would that never be touched but an alternative piece of land would be identified for housing or roads etc.

In the urban set up this would be different because of the nature of the urban areas. They are huge areas with multicultural practices, different belief systems, different authorities etc. The authority is not a traditional authority but a political structure. There is a huge difference between the two. The former is a leader of a particular clan or tribe, while the latter is a leader over a jurisdiction of all people from all languages, cultures or persuasion. In the urban areas consensus is hard to reach, what works is a vote. So, if the majority votes for housing or roads that go through a sacred space, then that has to be done, irrespective of the sacred.

***VZ: What is the role of ritual regarding the 'transferability' of a sacred space?***

**NK:** First and foremost ritual is specific. It is family specific, clan specific, village specific, tribe specific. Sometimes it can look like an identity or the way the particular people or tribe does things in relation to a certain ceremony. But the structure of all rituals is similar; the difference lies in the internal dynamics and the purpose for which the ritual is conducted. Ritual is conducted for several reasons around a sacred space; it could be a commemoration ritual where the event that took place in that space is remembered. It may be a re-enactment ritual where the event is being relived. It may be a ritual to petition or appease the ancestors during the time of severe drought, famine, war, catastrophe etc. Sometimes ritual becomes a practice that is repeated over and over again,

on a particular area that makes the area, sacred because of the repetition. The same applies when a family or clan or tribe decides to transfer a sacred space. They call ritual priests or traditional healers, who preside over the ceremony. Then the ancestors are invoked and the reasons for wanting the sacred space transferred are put forward. This involves a lot of appeasing and slaughtering of beasts and dancing and clapping and some would fall into trance etc. This is the essence of ritual. Then the traditional healers would interpret the will of the ancestors and the sacred space would be said to have migrated to the new area. Another ritual would have to be performed in the new area to institute the sacred in the new 'home'.

One other thing I must bring to your attention is that the sacred in some cases leaves a place on its own will. If people treat a sacred space with disregard and disrespect the ancestors become angry and leave the place. This is terrible for any village or family and it becomes a very sad thing to contemplate.

***VZ: Should this 'disregard' or 'disrespect' of the sacred space be understood as violation of the sacred space, and what could be the consequences?***

**NK:** Exactly, that is the essence of violation of the sacred space. As I have indicated before that sometimes the violation is intentional and in some cases it is unintentional but out of ignorance. The sacred space is an excluding space. That is, it excludes that which is not sacred or impure. Or if you like you may say that the sacred space is a discriminating space. Some categories of sacred space are gender exclusive and exclude some types of actions and behaviour. Women and non-Africans are not allowed in other

sacred spaces, while other sacred spaces exclude bad behaviour like quarrelling, gossiping, drunkenness etc. Some people even build houses on sacred spaces. This is unacceptable. Consequences differ according to violations. In most cases it depends on whether the person violated the sacred space knowingly or ignorantly and the remorse the person shows. A sacrificial ritual might be necessary in some cases otherwise a mere apology (*ukungxengxeza*) could suffice.

**VZ:** *Can you give an example of a situation where people disregarded the rules of a sacred space and faced the wrath of the ancestors?*

**NK:** A good example of this could be what happened in Umzimkhulu (a town on the border between KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces) in the early 1970s. A well-known South African traditional healer/*Sanusi* by the name of Khotso Sethuntsa had his place where he would meet the spirits next to the deep part of the Umzimkhulu River. This was a sacred space for him and all the other traditional healers in the area. The government authorities of the time wanted to build a bridge across this part of the river. Khotso warned them of possible consequences but they ignored him and went ahead with the construction of the bridge. Every time they were about to complete the bridge it collapsed, and this happened several times. Khotso had to be called to offer sacrifices and appease the spirits of the river. After the sacrifice the bridge was constructed successfully. This is on a broad scale. On the family level the consequences of violation of the sacred space might manifest themselves in the sicknesses that attack family members, death of family members one after another, loss of live-stock through unusual diseases and so on.

**VZ: *Lastly, do consequences affect the perpetrator(s) or the whole family/community?***

**NK:** There is no standard pattern. Sometimes the whole family is affected by the consequences or only the perpetrator(s). Sometimes the anger of the ancestors is manifest through strange events that befall the community or some members of the community.

**VZ: *Thank you Mr Kandekana***

**NK:** *Camagu* (Let it be so/Amen).

The second interview was conducted with Dr Richard Kutela who is a Xhosa man but grew up in an Afrikaans speaking community in George. The interview follows.

**3.3. An interview with Dr Richard Kutela: Traditional healer, secretary of the Western Cape Association of Traditional Healers.**

**Participants: Vuyisile Zenani (“herein” VZ)**

**Richard Kutela (“herein” RK)**

**3.3.1. Introduction**

Dr Kutela (claims to be) is both a medical doctor as well as traditional healer. But, he says that although he completed his medical studies, he refused to register as a medical practitioner because he feels that would restrict him from using or combining Western medicine with traditional medicine as he is doing now.

**VZ: *Dr Kutela, how did you become a sangoma?***

**RK:** Becoming a sangoma is a gift from the ancestors.

**VZ:** *Did you want to be a sangoma?*

**RK:** It is not a matter of wanting or not, but you are called to be a sangoma, and all you do is to respond to that call.

**VZ:** *What is involved in being a sangoma?*

**RK:** It involves everything that pertains to the life of African people, their health and their relationship with the ancestors. In short, the role of sangomas is that of handling the communication between the living and the living-dead. I am saying this, because sickness and prosperity are signs of the state of the relationship between the living and the living-dead. When the relationship is good people's health remains well, but when the relationship is broken their health is affected too.

**VZ:** *Do you want to tell me that the lives of the African people depend on the relationship with the ancestors?*

**RK:** Yes even if they know this, or not.

**VZ:** *But how are people supposed to know what the ancestors want?*

**RK:** This knowledge is embedded in them, they are born with it, and it is handed down to them by the elders in the community. And, as I have said, there are people who communicate it to the people. Sangomas, Inyangas, Sanusis, priests, shamans etc. are among the structures that communicate the will of the ancestors.

**VZ:** *Would you then consider the above structures or people as the same that decide on a sacred place?*

**RK:** Yes! But also the whole community in its capacity contributes towards such decisions.

**VZ:** *What is your understanding of the sacred space?*

**RK:** Africa as a whole is sacred. But for practical reasons there are identified spaces, places and objects or phenomena that mediate this sacredness in our daily activities.

**VZ:** *How is the sacred space created, and how does one identify it?*

**RK:** Sacred space is socially constructed. It is human beings who either 'discover' or 'create' a sacred space. It is the same human beings who authenticate the sacred space. In short, it is a community or a clan, or tribal voice, and acknowledgement that put a seal on the nature of a particular space. The lack of that unanimous voice on the nature of a sacred space could make it dubious, and therefore cannot be respected, and becomes more divisive to the community. Most sacred spaces have their origins from time immemorial, but some are created in the history of a particular community.

**VZ:** *What happens if an individual claims to have dreamt of a particular place being sacred? Can that be acknowledged as an authentic dream and the place be declared sacred?*

**RK:** Dreams do play a vital role within the African culture and belief system. They are not interpreted as an activity that takes place in the sub-conscious but are dynamic

communication between the living and the ancestors. But also, it depends on who has the dream, and what role or status that person has in the community. Also, the persistence and consistency of the dream is taken into account. The space must be associated with an important event in the life of the community.

**VZ:** *Since you say that the sacred space is the creation of the community, are you suggesting that the community can decide, at anytime to transfer, change or get rid of the sacredness of a place?*

**RK:** This is a compound question. First, because the nature of the sacred space is largely, decided upon by the elders in the community. When these elders join the ancestors, it becomes very difficult for the remaining people to change that. Their pronouncements become tradition. Secondly, there are categories of the sacred space. Some sacred spaces are only associated with a clan or a family, and even individuals. I assume these sacred spaces can be transferred as their owners move from one place to another another. Look! Times are changing, communities themselves are faced with new challenges that they never thought of, so, there is a lot of adaptation, changing and even abandoning what used to be viewed as tradition, to address these new challenges. There is, sometimes a gap between tradition and practice on the ground.

**VZ:** *What you are saying therefore is that, there is no golden rule that guides the transferability of the sacred space?*

**RK:** On the community level, consensus is very important, but on the other levels, like family, clan or individual level it should not be complicated. There are 'rules' in all these

levels but they differ in terms of flexibility and interpretation. So, it is not easy to generalize when it comes to the transferability of the sacred space. Each case must be treated differently.

**VZ:** *Thanks very much Dr Kutela.*

**RK:** It's my pleasure.

### **3.3.2. Content analysis**

#### **3.3.2.1. Sample and sampling strategy**

Carney (1972:134) states that a 'sample' consists of one or more measurements or observations taken ('drawn') from a selection of persons, objects, etc. This sample is drawn from within the population with the aim of reaching some general conclusions about that population.

Live interviews were conducted with two participants who are high ranking officials in their organizations. These two individuals are from the two main traditional healers' organizations in the Western Cape. One interviewee (Mr Albert Kandekana) is the president of his organization, and the other (Dr. Kutela) is the secretary of the mother body organization in which Mr Kandekana's organization is an affiliate.

The sample was deliberately taken between Mr. Kandekana, who is well advanced in age, and originally comes from the rural areas of the former Transkei, and Dr. Kutela who is relatively young and comes from an urban setting. The reason for the focus on age and social setting is based on the perception that there is more understanding and experience

of the sacred in the rural areas than is the case in the urban areas. Secondly, some people argue that the older generation more prone to experience and respect the sacred spaces than the younger and modernized generation.

#### **3.3.2.2. Limitation**

The reason for a smaller sample in interviews is twofold: i) the lack of financial resources. The researcher did not have funds to interview a wide range of people, and ii) the traditional healers' world is a closed, secretive and hierarchically structured organization. One cannot go directly to interview the 'juniors' without the consent of the 'seniors'. And the argument put forward is that, if you can meet the 'seniors' what more do you want from the 'juniors'.

#### **3.3.2.3. Procedure**

The study adopts the content and conceptual analysis methodologies. Weber (1990:5) defines content analysis as a methodology that classifies textual material, reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data. He maintains that content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (Weber, 1990:9). Carney (1972:24) on the other hand defines content analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. He holds that, this means that the question has to be defined in such a way that the answers to it can be counted ("qualitative"). But, Carney warns that, content analysis is not just a frequency count. Much 'pattern-fitting' is currently practiced. He explains that pattern-fitting involves comparing a complex set of

interrelated words or views with various other model sets, to identify a mode of perception or reasoning. But the sample design, that the researcher has taken, of two individuals who are separated by age, social setting, and practice presents this content analysis with the problem of comparability. Glenn (1977) explains the problems of comparability in this way:

... even when the question wording, response alternatives, and coding are identical, they may discover that differences in sample design prevent the data from the different surveys from being strictly comparable ..., incomparability may result from changes in the meaning of words or phrases or from changes in response bias; or data gathered at two points in time may be incomparable because they were gathered during different phases of a cyclical pattern of change (Glenn, 1977:27).

Mr. Kandekana's approach and understanding of the sacred space/s as understood within the African traditional belief demonstrates the centrality of African traditional religion. Religion permeates all life, and there's no activity that falls outside religion. Sacred spaces are part of this broad approach to African traditional worldview. Dr Kutela, on the other hand, adopts the socio-scientific approach, where sacred space as a religious phenomenon, forms part of social sciences. This socio-scientific methodology helps to unearth the social meaning and relevance of the sacred spaces. Dr. Kutela acknowledges the role of the ancestors but his emphasis is more on the role of the community. He uses phrases like, "communication between community and ancestors", "knowledge embedded in the community", "community consensus", "daily lives", "sacred is socially constructed", "unanimous voice", "elders in the community", etc.

Although Mr. Kandekana has brought forth the reality of two African communities that is emerging in these 'modern' days, but he points out that the African beliefs have shown resilience. Mr Kandekana calls these communities the urban and the rural communities, the 'scientific' and the 'traditional' communities, the 'diluted' and the 'original' communities. Though Mr Kandekana is using such dry-cut concepts to refer to his two communities, reality has shown that all communities have undergone some evolution of some sort. It is no longer possible for any society to remain pristine because of several forces that influence all societies. These forces may be economic, social, cultural, religious forces etc.

Having said that, Mr Kandekana does not deny the existence of sacred spaces even in the urban areas, "sacred spaces are everywhere" he claims. The point Mr Kandekana is trying to make is that because of the nature of urban setting African traditional beliefs find themselves having to respond to urban challenges. That is why Mr Kandekana suggests that sacred space can be transferred but this must be done as a last resort and with the consent of the affected and infected parties.

Kalipeni and Zeleza ([www.google.com/Kalipeni](http://www.google.com/Kalipeni) and Zeleza [pdf]) in addressing the urban challenges, argue that because of the unique and complex nature of the urban society, a multidisciplinary approach must be applied. They argue that these (urban) rapid and complex changes cannot be adequately explained by the conventional and narrowly – focused disciplinary perspectives and approaches. And therefore they suggest a complex response to complex challenges. The African 'traditional' belief system appears not to be

able, in its simple “original” form, to offer solutions to what Kalipeni and Zeleza (*ibid*) call “impact of economic crisis and structural adjustment programs on the organization and production of urban life”.

#### **3.4. African traditional worldview**

It is important to give a clear definition of the African traditional religion upfront in this chapter. The reason being, that the concept of African worldview, generally, has been misunderstood in the past by researchers with a Western background. Moilola (2003) gives an example of this misinterpretation, when he states that the researcher’s interest in revisiting the definition of African religion is prompted by two things, namely, (i) the question of denial of the presence of religion in Africa, and (ii) the hot debate for and against the use of the word ‘traditional’ in qualifying the religion of the Africans. The fact that, at one time, African people were recorded as the people without religion, and then later they were defined as notoriously religious, raises the interest to see how their religion was defined states Moilola. It is the same denial that prompted this study of the transferability of the sacred space. The African traditional religion is acknowledged as a religion ‘among’ other religions. But it is not acknowledged as a ‘host’ religion in Africa, and therefore as having a leading role in terms of defining the length, the breadth, the height and the depth of African religion. This is the tragedy that is faced by the continent of Africa, that the ‘other’ religions have managed to entrench themselves in an intricate manner that the African traditional religion found itself being pushed to the periphery.

The demand for definitions is a problem that has been introduced by scholarship. This demand posed a challenge to African traditional religion. Africans do not speculate about life or religion but live religion without labeling it. Here's how Moilola (2003) and Udeani (<http://iago.stfx.ca/people/wsweet/abstract-Udeani.html>) define the African traditional religion:

The concept – “African traditional worldview” – is a sort of umbrella concept for all forms of worldviews which originate from Africa. The word “traditional” should demarcate these worldviews from other non-African worldviews found in Africa, which are today referred to as African worldviews because of some elements of the African worldviews which they have imbibed ... This is why one could talk of “African traditional worldviews or view.” Worldview in the grammatical plural points to the plurality of the traditional worldview, while singular is a concept for the common or similar underlying tenets of these forms of worldviews (<http://iago.stfx.ca/people/wsweet/abstract-Udeani.html>).

Moilola (2003), defines African traditional religion as comprising the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans that have been in existence from time immemorial, and are still adhered to today by many Africans, which have been handed down by their forebearers.

Pato (1997:54) claims that the African way of life is not something static. He argues, “Over centuries, African societies have been in constant transformation, mainly due to the interaction with the outside world, but also due to changing conditions of life, new needs, development of ideas, and modification of techniques and values”.

Mahapatra (1992:1) maintains that each society seeks to fabricate its own mechanism to explain and take stock of that other Realm: the Realm of the unknown, which is also the Realm of the sacred.

Dexter (1997) concurs with Dr. Kutela when he argues that, it is embedded in the nature of the community to designate what is sacred, he writes:

This management of the sacred through the strategic manipulation of space and time is what all social activity is about. It is also quite logical from this to deduce that a particular class, or some previously defined community, such as ethnic group, for example, might involve itself in such a project ... Once a collective has agreed on the sacred, its representation of this gets set down in the discourse ... The power and authority located within discourse is essentially anchored in the designation, recognition, and veneration of the sacred (Dexter, 1997:125).

Dexter (1997) and Couclelis (1992) agree that all spaces are socially produced, and they in turn produce the social. This means that, in as much as space is socially constructed the social is spatially constructed. Space is created, argues Doreen Massey (1993), out of the vast intricacies and the incredible complexities of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global. Space, then, is not a static and passive template of social existence, but an active, constitutive force of the social's very composition and construction.

### **3.5. The significance of land in the African context**

While it has become clear in the interviews with both Mr Kandekana and Dr Kutela that the whole of the African continent is a sacred place, it has also become clear that some

schools of thought argue that the whole earth is profane, and some argue that only 'some specific' places are sacred. This debate necessitates the focus on land, as the sacred is embodied in the natural world. Land generally has spiritual significance to African people, but because of the meaning attached to some landscapes, some patches of land have more importance than others. Certain places are particularly more important because of their ritual use, like burial grounds and places of special ceremonies. The kraal Also, which is used in most cases for slaughtering animals, to appease the deceased, and for *ukunqula* (which means that when the family wants to communicate something to the ancestors they go to the kraal and either ask, apologize, thank, or express displeasure etc.).

Sacred sites can be clustered generally under two categories: i) The sites which are sometimes referred to as 'increase centers', where special ceremonies are conducted to ensure the well-being of particular species; and ii) Places of great danger, sometimes called 'poison grounds' or simply 'danger places', where it believed that inappropriate action, such as murder, killing of a forbidden species, will cause severe storms, sickness or even death. Credo Mutwa (an African Sangoma) gives an example of the latter place. He states:

In the land of the Xhosa people there is a sacred crane, a graceful long-legged bird, whose feathers were only worn by warriors who had proven their bravery in battle and their loyalty to the tribe many times. This was the blue crane, the "Indwa" (sic), a bird symbolic of selfless courage and loyalty. A bird whose feathers were regarded by Xhosa people and the Zulu people in the same way that British soldiers regard the Victorian Cross. If you injured this bird, if you broke one of its legs, your own leg was broken with a heavy stone; and if you were a wealthy man, ten head of

cattle were taken from you afterwards as a fine. And the injured bird was finished off and its remains were cremated inside one of your huts, which was afterwards burned to the ground (Parry-Davies, David (ed.), 2002: 10).

This extract demonstrates the power that the sacred space, species, objects, sites etc. are imbued with. The sacred determines boundaries, identity, value system, ethics, unique language, certain conduct and gestures.

Parrinder(1969:54-55), in emphasizing the importance of the land, or what he refers to as 'earth', says that in other places there are no special Temples, but the earth is still venerated. Similarly when a grave is dug in the ground, a libation is made to the spirit, a custom that was taken to America by the slaves. Among the powers of the earth, Parrinder (1969) includes the spirits of hills, and great mountains like Mount Cameroun and Kilimanjaro. He observes that, Mount Kenya figures in the mythology of creation, and also as a place where men still invoke God. Even small hills, like those of Ibadan, have rituals recording the foundation of the city there. Rocks and outstanding formations are likely to be regarded as centers where special power is manifested and available. Parrinder (1969) mentions that:

Great trees such as the African oak, mahogany, silk cotton, or baobab are obvious haunts of spiritual power. If a shoot springs up spontaneously that is a sign of good luck, and if a tree is cut down its power must be propitiated so that no harm comes to the woodcutter (Parrinder, 1969: 55).

Djon Mundine (<http://library.trinity.wa.edu.au/aborigines/sites.htm>), in articulating the Aboriginés position in connection with the land, brings a very close similarity between

the Aboriginés belief and African traditional belief, in terms of the sacredness of the land. Mundine holds that at the beginning of time Original Creative Spirits came out of the earth or across the sea, and moved over the land forming and shaping it with life by placing their spiritual power in various places across the countryside. In African traditional religious belief (in relation to graves) it is the laying of the 'dead' person in the grave that makes the place 'intensified' with sacredness. What this 'intense' demonstrates is the fact that though there is a general understanding within the African traditional religion of the 'whole land being sacred' – the 'overall' sacred is intensified by ritual ceremonial performances.

Mundine also states that Aborigines do not have a name for the whole land, but many individual names for specific locations and areas to which they are related through their spiritual ancestor. And this space or place is referred to as 'country' – which means the areas of land which an individual or group has a special spiritual relationship. These spaces or places are what could be referred to as 'intense' sacred spaces within the African traditional religion. But both the Aboriginal and African traditional religions perceive land and humanity as one. That is why the Reverend Barbara Carlson (1999: <http://www.bloomington.in.us/~uuchurch/sermons/sacredspace.html>) believes that space is not only physical but a creation of the ancestors. She claims that as ancestors awoke and wandered, they camped and their songs and dances became the shape and character of the earth's geography. Both the African and Aborigines' views of the land show that the land is of immense symbolic significance to them. Dillistone (1986) maintains that to possess a piece of land, however small, gives assurance of identity and security, provides

an eloquent mark of continuity between past, present and future and establishes a source for food which can be relied on from year to year. Dillistone (1986) goes on to argue that not only does the human possess the land but, even more, the land possesses the humans. The land is regarded as sacred, a symbol of the ultimate fount of being. Several case studies could be used to demonstrate this fact, but one case that is close to Africa is the case of the proposed Development of the Epupa Falls <sup>1</sup>in Namibia. The reasons put forward by the traditional communities for refusing the continuation of the projects cover social and cultural issues. Among the cultural reasons cited are the following:

1. The Epupa site would inundate a 250km<sup>2</sup> area vital to the sustainability of the Himba's pastoral lifestyle
2. The Epupa Falls would be flooded along with nearly 100 sacred burial sites, vital to the Himba's ceremonial rituals.
3. About 1000 Himba people would have to be relocated to make way for the scheme.
4. The relocation would destroy the sense of community and belonging and identity.

A similar case study is examined by Elizabeth Stites (Tobler, 2000) in the case of two Eastern Cape families who were lodging claims for their land. Stites (2000) brings upfront the primacy of the families' connections to the land they considered sacred. She states that the most devastating aspect of the expropriation of *Maxongo's Hoek* (name of the place), however, was the family's separation from the ancestors whom they had buried on the land.

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<sup>1</sup> Mail & Guardian February 6 to 12 2004. P.40

### **3.6. Graves: an example of a sacred place in the African context**

#### **3.6.1. Maxongo's Hoek case study**

Stites (Tobler, 2000) reinforces the view held by African traditional religious scholars that death is not a barrier to communication between the living and the dead. This communication is a channel through which the contact between the living and the dead is kept. This contact is an obligation, since, through this contact, the living-dead are updated about significant events in the lives of the living, explains Stites. This updating ensures respect, acknowledgement and continued inclusion in important decisions that the living family members take.

The informing, acknowledgement and invoking of the ancestors is demonstrated through ceremonies and ritual offerings made at the gravesites. It is in relation to these ceremonies and rituals that the importance of the graves in the African communities becomes an issue. The graves are also referred to by different names in African traditional religions – they are called ‘resting place’, ‘home’, ‘waiting place’, ‘house’, etc. Stites (Tobler, 2000) refers to the specific living spaces including graves, as “the testimony of the power of specific tracts of land”.

The constant contact with the dead in the form of visiting the graves is imperative. Stites (Tobler, 2000) holds that, if the ties with the ancestors are severed, the living, not only lose the guidance and wisdom of their elders, but also the protection and positive influence in their daily lives. Losing the contact with (graves) ancestors might have fatal outcomes. A statement from a member of the Ndunge family demonstrates this:

As soon as we moved most of them [elder Ndunges] started dying ... and they died crying, wanting to go back. They never let go of that place .... They died because of the spiritual separation with the ancestors. They couldn't bear the pain of being cut off from them (Tobler, 2000:49).

The question could be asked whether the Ndunges could not take the remains of their dead with them? Couldn't the spirit of the ancestors be transferred to the new place? Would the 'transfer' not be a better alternative instead of losing everything? Would the 'spiritual' 'transfer' be of the same value as the 'physical' 'transfer'? Stites distinguishes between physically (the remains) transferring the ancestors and spiritual transfer of the ancestors. She also makes a distinction between transferring the ancestors to "home", and transferring the ancestors away from "home". The difference is between 'voluntary' transfer and 'forced' transfer, between 'home' and 'foreign' land. These dynamics played a huge role in the case of the Ndunges. Because of the nature of their removal from what they conceive as 'home', they had to take strategic decisions that should not impact on their chances of coming back home one day. Secondly, the transfer of either the bones or the spirit of their ancestors to the 'foreign' land would weaken both their claim to the land and their resolve to continue fighting for that land. Stites states that the different attitudes to these otherwise comparable rituals illustrate the centrality of Maxongo's Hoek to the family's spiritual identity.

The Ndunges' case study shows that communication between the living and the dead is most effective at the burial sites of the ancestors. Though it is also possible, through ritual re-enactment, to communicate with them elsewhere the former method is preferred. According to Stites, the time of relocation and the reason behind the relocation play an

important role in terms of the question of transferability. She says that if a household relocates by choice the ancestors can be informed of the imminent move and invited to follow the living to their new home. If, on the other hand, the family is forcibly uprooted with little time to properly convey the move to the ancestors, a rupture in inter-generational relations is likely to follow. Stites argues that the family could be neither whole nor healthy as long as separation from this core space continued. Proximity to the gravesites plays a central role in the ritual performances. Stites points out that the deceased could in effect preside over ritual performed near their gravesites, ensuring that such traditions were done correctly. The distance away from the gravesites may invalidate the ritual performance. The role of ritual and ritual performance in the transferability of sacred space is discussed extensively in chapter 4 of this paper. Ritual seems to be central to any interaction and communication with the spirits. What then is ritual? What is the structure of ritual? What types of ritual are there?

Chapter 4 is addressing these questions in detail. And after an elaborate definition of the concept of ritual this chapter will give few examples of the different types of rituals. Chapter 4 discusses ritual as an expression of life force, that is, ritual as that which encompasses the full experience, existence, past and present – continuity of life. Therefore ritual as an act or performance is analyzed in this chapter. Finally, chapter 4 hopes to address the way ritual can transfer sacred space.

### **3.7. SUMMARY**

Though this chapter has tried to be open to other interpretations of the concept of the sacred space and their influence on the African traditional religion, its focus was mainly on the African traditional religious understanding of the sacred space. The discussion here tried to show that in African traditional religion sacred space is not only the result of divine manifestation or 'hierophany', not only 'discovered' or 'created', ritualized or made by the presence of the ancestors or divine spirits, but primarily this concept of sacred space derives its meaning from within a particular worldview or linguistic setting, and its significance therefore is understood as it is experienced within that particular context. The interpretation is located at the level of the users or community level. What and how the sacred space is defined and understood therefore depends on the conceptual understanding by a particular group of people or cultural setting.

What the discussion has tried to do was to show that the concept of sacred space can be used in various ways by different users for different purposes.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4.0. THE ROLE OF RITUAL IN CREATING AND TRANSFERRING THE SACRED SPACE

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

But why are dances performed and repeated? There are many reasons, and powerful ones are that they express the life force, continuity with the past, and unity in the present community, and these are reasonable ideas (Parrinder, 1969:25).

But how I remember the shrill peeping of a little chick as Grandfather rubbed its wet downy body against mine. I squirmed at the tickling sensations, but Grandfather held me tight to keep me from looking around.

“Grandfather, you are tickling me with a little chick. Why are you tickling me?” “I am not tickling you”, he promised. Grandfather was trying to teach something about ritual ... “Look”, he explained, “we are doing what we are doing so as to learn how to play with the spirits. They are at the heart of ritual.”(Somé, 1993:41).

The above quotations point to a possible definition of ritual as a structure with various interlinked elements. These abstracts show ritual as an action or performance. Chidester (1992:91) argues that ritual is immediate, concrete, and even visceral practice that is only secondarily available to abstract, conceptual thought. But Smith (1982:57) rejects this view when he argues that ritual is a “human labor, struggling with matter of incongruity.” Smith (1982) goes on to argue that ritual should not be accepted as ‘fitting’ with some other human system but should be problematized. By ‘human labor’, most probably,

Smith is referring to ritualization. Ritualization, in simple terms, means giving meaning to a particular action or performance. This is where the role of words comes in and expresses the purpose of the ritual. There are various types of rituals that give rise to different kinds of definitions, but this chapter concerns itself broadly with the religious type of ritual, and specifically with ritual as it is understood and performed within the African traditional religious belief system.

The preliminary, but yet important question that needs to be answered before going to an in-depth discussion about ritual, is the question of why people do rituals? Secondary to this question is the need to define ritual. What are we referring to when we talk about ritual generally, and in the African traditional religious context specifically? Then, having defined ritual, the discussion will try to address the ability of ritual to create the sacred space, and to transfer it when there is a need to do so.

Somé (*ibid*: 42) in a conversation with his Grandfather gives an interesting insight to what and why do people do rituals. Following is part of that conversation:

With his grip lessening, I turned to ask, “Why do people do rituals?” I could see no baby chick. “They kill chickens, goats and all kinds of animals, and they eat some and throw others away. Why?” Grandfather never looked at any body while answering a question. He was working on a tobacco pouch while he spoke.

“Do you know why you go to the bathroom? Do you know why you urinate?”

“Of course I know. I can’t help it.”

“Well then, you know why we do rituals.”(*ibid*: 42).

Somé's Grandfather's final answer suggests that the African people cannot help it: ritual is part of being an African. Somé (1993) goes on to say that, among other activities, village life rotates around the practice of ritual. He maintains that, while subsistence work links human beings together, ritual links humans to the gods or God.

This chapter will first give a definition of ritual, then go on to give a few examples of different types of ritual. But the main discussion in this chapter is based on the power of ritual to create and transfer the sacred space from one place to another. Stite's Maxongo's Hoek case study will be central to this discussion. The use of ritual in transferring the sacred space from its original location to another location will be approached from a 'normal' perspective. That is, the discussion will assume that the transportation or transferring of the sacred space is done willingly and voluntarily by those involved because of circumstances beyond their control.

## **4.2. Definition of term**

### ***4.2.1. Ritual***

Rappaport (1999) defines ritual as denoting the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers. Cox (1998:60) on the other hand introduces the element of 'established patterns.' He says that rituals are repeatable according to established patterns. As such, there are correct and incorrect ways of performing rituals that determine their efficacy as sources of transforming power. Cox (1998) argues that actions within the rituals are employed prescriptively in ways known to the participants. The interaction between 'insiders' and

'outsiders', 'participants' and 'non-participants', 'men' and 'women' etc., becomes the hallmark of rituals. Turner (1969:7) attests to this hidden meaning when he states that it is one thing to observe people performing the stylized gestures and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performances and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the moments and words mean to them. Rappaport (1999) on the other hand, seems to suggest that people other than the performers can encode both acts and utterances.

Smith (1987:103) defines ritual as, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process of making interest. That is why 'space' is important in Smith's definition of ritual, because he argues that, the creation of this ritual space attracts the attention of people to relate to it differently. Smith (1987:109) maintains that, ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference – ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables (the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Grimes (1982:55) express his disappointment in the way ritual is defined. He states that most definitions of ritual are disappointing because they define the word too narrowly or lack fruitful images. Though he finds Turner's definition of ritual unsatisfactorily, he commends Turner for his "genius to have amplified a fertile image of ritual, namely, thresh-crossing. Rappaport (1999) is quick to point out that, the definition of ritual is broad and inclusive and it goes beyond religion. For example, he states that psychiatrists use a closely related or synonymous term "ceremony," to refer both to the pathological stereotyped behavior of some neurotics, and some certain conventional, repetitive but adaptive interactions between people. Rappaport (1999) concludes by saying that, as all ritual is not religious,

not all religious acts are ritual. He, nevertheless, argues that ritual as defined here, is the ground from which religion grows (*ibid*: 25-6).

For Turner (1969:6), rituals reveal values at their deepest level. He argues that men express in rituals what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. Turner states that he sees in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies. From his observation of the Ndembu people, Turner (1969) explains the meaning of the word ritual in the following way:

The Ndembu word for “ritual” is *chidika*, which also means “a special engagement” or an “obligation.” This is connected with the idea that one is under an obligation to venerate the ancestral shades, for, as Ndembu say, “are they not the ones who have begotten you?” The rituals I am speaking of are in fact performed because persons or corporate groups have failed to meet this obligation (Turner, 1969: 11).

#### **4.3. The ‘purpose’ in ritual performance**

Smith (1982:63) argues that there is a “Gnostic” dimension to ritual. He maintains that ritual provides the means for demonstrating that we know what ought to have been done, what ought to have taken place. He claims that, because of this, ritual is a magical imitation of desired ends, a translation of emotions, a symbolic acting out of ideas, a dramatization of a text, or the like. Cox (1998:66) supports this view when he claims that what was once possible and operative in the beginning of time becomes possible once more and can exert its influence anew. But Cox (1998:68) goes on to say that this causes

a tension between ritual perfection and ordinary life because what occurs in ritual can never be realized in reality.

#### 4.4. Some ritual theories

Segal (1998) gives the following list of ritual theories:

1. Hooke, S.H:

The meaning of the terms “myth” and “ritual” – Early ritual was concerned with practical problems of daily life, and myth is the spoken part of ritual (Segal, 1998:84).

2. Hyman, S. E:

Hyman maintains that all myths are connected to rituals. For him, as for Harrison and others, is the spoken correlate of ritual. But unlike Harrison, he postulates no specific ritual for myth (Segal, 1998:231).

3. Girard, R:

Girard maintains that myth distinguishes the sacrifice of the victim in various ways – by making the killing deserved, by making the death accidental, by turning the death into a tamer fate such as exile, and above all by turning the hated victim into a revered savior and indeed into a god (Segal, 1998:285).

4. Kluckhohn Clyde:

Kluckhohn claims that myths and rituals, operating separately or together, serve a psychological function: alleviating anxiety, anxiety arising from the physical world, from society, and from oneself. Myth reduces anxiety by providing fixed ways of understanding; rituals, by providing fixed ways of behaving (Segal, 1998:313).

Somé (1993:45) introduces an element of 'purpose' into ritual performance. He argues that the success of a ritual depends on the purpose of the individuals involved with it. And the type of ritual we are referring to here is the ritual that can be termed 'holistic', conscientious, rational ritual – that is, ritual in which the performers, more than performing or behaving, but are wholly and fully communicating with other beings. Ritual cannot therefore, in this sense, be any mere “pathological stereotyped behaviors” as Rappaport alludes to. Both Somé (1993:50) and Honko (1978:373) point to the fact that ritual performance goes beyond just a psychological excitement, but it contains “mystical notions”(Honko) or interpretation by the “supernatural world” (Somé). Somé argues that we (human beings) take the initiative to spark a process, knowing that its success is not in our hands but in the hands of the kind of forces we invoke into our lives. The weakness of psychology involves the placing of an emphasis on 'patterns of behavior' as the objective of ritual – losing sight of the fact that central to the pattern of behavior, performance, actions etc. is the purpose for which that particular behavior, which sometimes differs from that of the normal daily human conduct, is put in place. This psychological tendency is shown in the following quotation from Zock (1990) where she quotes Erikson as making a comparison between human beings and animal species. She writes:

Ritualization is a certain kind of informal and yet prescribed interplay between persons who repeat it at meaningful intervals and in recurring contexts ... [I]t has ... adaptive value for all participants and for their group living. For it further and guides, from the beginning of existence, that stage wise instinctual investment in the social process that must do for human adaptation what the instinctive fit into a section of nature will do for animal species (Zock, 1990:37).

Having said this, Zock comes up with important words, which show the unique nature of ritual. He suggests that ritual performance leads to:

- i) face to face encounter with the numinous;
- ii) which evokes a 'sense of a hallowed presence'; and
- iii) a 'sense of separateness transcended, and yet also of distinctiveness confirmed (*ibid.*98).

Honko (1978:373) refers to this face-to-face encounter as the traditional, prescribed communication with the sacred. And Somé seems to be suggesting that this is a mutual beneficiation process – he states that their (the ancestors) coming turns our activity (ceremony) into a ritual. The gods themselves will not enact the ritual without us. Thus our collaboration makes us central to the actual happening of a ritual (Somé, 1993:51).

Fuller (1988:118) takes the discussion further by specifying his context and thus giving direction to what he means by ritual. He states that the word (ritual) is being used here solely in its religious connotations as a structured form of worship. Fuller (1988) goes on to say that ritual provides a framework within which we can suspend secular existence and create awareness of the presence of the sacred. In other words, ritual in the religious context creates and enhances consciousness of the 'otherness' or 'differentness' of the spaces, place or atmosphere. Within this sacred charged atmosphere there are immediate mutual expectations from both humans and the gods. Fuller (1988) alludes to the fact that ritual is an act of seeking the intervention of the spirits in a situation that is burdensome or difficult to human beings. He states that from the religious point of view *communitas*

represents the activity of a sacred or holy presence. And he goes on to say that everywhere humans attribute *communitas* to the influx of a divine spirit into the human realm. *Communitas* reinvigorates lives that have been drained of vitality by the rigidity of social structure (*ibid*: 119). Turner (Cox, 1998: 62-3) argues that this *communitas* is a product of the ritual process. He claims that the entire ritual process binds the community together creating the *communitas*. Rituals, from the believer's perspective, are intended to restore harmony to a cosmic and social order which in some manner has been disrupted, argues Turner.

The elements of 'invitation' and 'intervention' within ritual seem to be popular among religious theorists. Somé (1993) also seems to be suggesting that the purpose of religious ritual is to ask the gods to intervene in a desperate situation. But for Somé this 'intervention', for example in the case of a sick person or the planting of seeds, is preceded by ritual – that is, the healing in the case of the sick person or the planting in the case of the seed “has already happen in a metaphoric world. The rest is just translation of metaphor”(ibid: 42). But he is also quick to caution that ritual should not be seen merely as a rescuing mechanism, but also positively as a relationship-building exercise between humans and the divine. This is a problem with several religious theorists when treating ritual; they approach ritual from a functional perspective. They treat ritual as a tool. Most of the authors cited in this chapter define ritual in a negative sense; as repeated performance to 'invite', 'invoke', 'ask for intervention', 'need help in a desperate situation', etc. None of them has depicted ritual in a positive way. From our own experiences we know that among other rituals there are thanks giving rituals, announcing

rituals to inform the ancestors that the family of Mr X has moved from the previous location to 'this' new place. Among the Xhosa tribes for instance, there are rituals that are said not be saying anything (*lento siyenzayo ayithethi*), that is, what we are doing does not mean anything, we are just doing it for our ancestors, it is not a request nor a thanks giving but something that has been done throughout generations. But even then, it is appreciated by the ancestors and brings health, unity and prosperity to the family and the community. Smith (1982: 53) calls the repetition of what happened in the past in the present "coincidence". He refers to the 'dilemma' of two events (symbol & thought) separated by time and space but still seem to be speaking directly to one another. Smith (1987: 110) acknowledges the simultaneity of the events, but not the coexistence of "now" and "there". Smith (1982) also suggests that, these events do not have intrinsic significance but are "given significance by the participants (1982: 53). Cox (1998: 59) on the other hand rejects Smith's argument that ritual is given meaning or significance by the participants. He maintains that ritual possesses its own intrinsic meaning and cannot be explained in terms of myth. Grimes (1982: 56) rejects the debate that rituals originate in the past and cannot originate or be created now. He argues that rituals "do change and are, in fact, being created". Cox (1998) gives a list of different rituals, which he says, can be subdivided according to the function they perform for the believing community. He borrows a list of such ritual from Turner. They are prenatal, pre-pubertal, naming, betrothal, initiation, ritual elevating individuals, and funeral rituals. Turner (Cox, 1998: 62) suggests that the entire ritual process from separation through transition to incorporation is liminal because each phase occurs in a time between times and in a space that is 'set apart' from other spaces.

Driver (1991) and Chidester (1992) introduce refreshing argument within the ritual debate. Chidester (1992: 92) maintains that ritual is the convergence of all the senses (taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing) and their involvement in symbolic action. While Driver (1991: 12-13) maintains that there is a tendency of thinking about rituals that is directed towards the “big” ones, and the tendency to separate them from the “little” ones. He mentions rituals such as; acts of greeting and leave-taking, table manners, making beds etc. Driver (1991) goes on to say that ignoring these because of their daily familiarity, we do not notice how greatly our lives are being affected by ritualizing activities that become, as they are supposed to do, our “second nature”. This practical understanding of ritual is demonstrated by a recent case of British hunters who claim that sport is a religious ritual<sup>1</sup>. The article states:

A group of hunting enthusiasts in Britain is setting up its own “church” in an attempt to stop the government from banning its favourite sport.

The founders ... claim that fox hunting is part of their religion and that legislation to ban it would be an infringement of their rights as religious minority.

They point to a decision last month to allow ritual slaughter by Jews and Muslim living in the UK.

“There are many parallels ... we also have regalia, we have our own language and our own art.

Those of the Jewish faith blow a horn, the *shofar*, and so do we. Hunting is a form of ritualized killing – the odds of actual killing are in favour of the animal. We baptize our children ... with the blood of that which we kill. Is this any more strange than submerging them in water?”

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<sup>1</sup> Sunday Times May 30 2004, 12

Somé (1993: 45) writes that when one cruises with the world of the spirits, rituals are less and less a matter of stopping commotions than they are a matter of maintaining a healthy state of balance. This, in short, means continuity of the practice of ritual from generation to generation. This 'continuity' is not the same thing as what Smith (1982: 54) claims when he talks about 'routinization'. This practice might change and adapt according to new circumstances and times, but the structure of ritual remains the same. Some rituals were practiced from time immemorial, and have borne the marks and impact of time, but the basics are still the same. This shows the resilience of ritual in the midst of modern challenges and the face of global influences.

Hooke (1963: 12) gives a definition of ritual that includes elements from the definitions of ritual that have been given by other authors in this chapter. He writes that we know that the ritual did not consist only of actions. The actions were accompanied by spoken words, chants, and incantations, whose magical efficacy was an essential part of the ritual. He goes on to explain that the ritual consisted of the part, which was done, and the spoken part. In ritual, the myth told the story of what was being enacted. It described a situation, but the story was not told to amuse an audience. It was a word of power, argues Hooke. Those involved in it can only understand the power of ritual, its significance, impact and effects. The role of the audience is very minimal and is only to witness. The audience's role becomes vital only because the ritual has social dynamics. Ritual is a community act, the context of ritual is community and ritual creates a community. The community created by ritual goes beyond the community of the living to include the living dead. In short, ritual creates bridges between the inhabitants of 'this' world and

those of the 'other' world. And thus this connection between the living and the living dead empowers the living and gives them hope in their hopeless situations.

#### **4.5. Transferability of the sacred space**

Hooke explains further and says:

The repetition of the magic words had power to bring about, or recreate, the situation which they described. (the recitation does something; it brings about a change in the situation which the ritual was enacting) ... Thus we may understand that in a society where such rituals formed an essential part of the life of the community, the historical truth of the story contained in the myth was irrelevant ... The function of the myth was not knowledge but action, action essential for the very existence of the community (Hooke, 1963: 12).

Honko (1978: 373) captures the essence of ritual as the traditional, prescribed communication with the sacred. This suggests therefore an ongoing interaction between the humans and the divine. It also suggests that some sets of rules of engagement must be in place for the two parties to observe. That implies an ability to predict what the other will do if the ritual performance is done according to prescribed rules or if the rules have been broken. That is why 'correctness' of performance and 'clarity' of purpose become very important in ritual performance. This communication cannot be ended or hindered by spatial location because of its vitality for both partners: the humans and the divine. It could be broken down because of failure to conform on the side of the humans, but it can be renewed when the humans humble themselves and ask for forgiveness from the world of the spirits. So the perpetual relocation of human beings in search of better living

conditions does not leave the world of the spirits behind when they are invited to come with. Physical assets could be left behind including physical sacred space, but the meaning of that space can be changed in terms of its new usage, and another physical space in the new area can be identified. Through the performance of rituals on that space it then becomes sacred.

Pato (1997), Pikirayi (2001), Mbalazi C et al (Tobler (ed.), 2000) and Peacock (Honko, 1978) argue that the sacred space is not something that is static or immutable. Peacock further explains that based on Durkheim's central premise, (that ritual has a social basis) one would expect that change and variation in ritual form and meaning correlate with change and variation in social structure (Honko, 1978: 390-391). This statement has implications for the creation and transferability of sacred space. It has been made clear in this paper that the role (the voice) of the community, in as far as consenting to the creation of a sacred space is concerned, is very important. It is the people themselves who declare a place sacred. It is the people who perform rituals with a specific purpose. The community, through accepted ritual interventions, has the ability to declare the sacred space transferred to another area that they would find suitable or approved by the gods.

Kamstra (Honko, 1978: 409) suggests that human beings do not come to a 'full' stage of growth but are always becoming. In this struggle or journey to self-realization, humans face new challenges, new situations which need new tools to respond to those challenges. Ritual is part of the human journey and therefore is also affected by these new situations and challenges. In such a situation communities will be forced to reformulate dogmas and

create new rites, argues Kamstra. This kind of argument on the other side, though it is realistic, might appear to be compromising ritual as being a set of consistent performances questionable and rather render ritual performance situational. But, as it has been argued and discussed in this chapter, that what is consistent is the structure of ritual and not the actual performance, such as, singing, drumming, dancing etc. Performance might differ from situation to situation. Thus, Kamstra (Honko, 1978) states that the intelligibility of a ritual therefore depends on that of the situation in which it originated. As soon as the situation changes, ritual changes too.

#### **4.6. Ritual as communication**

As Honko (1978) has already defined ritual as communication with the sacred – language and discourse are central to ritual. And these concepts need to be defined and put into their context. Simply put, discourse and conceptual analysis as social scientific methodological tools should unearth the role of language in ritual. As Masondo (1994: 4) puts it, “social scientific methods provide one with a variety of tools to unearth some information.” And Tannen ([www.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend)) writes that these social scientific tools assist in analysing language “beyond the sentence”. It should also be explained upfront that it is not the intention of this section to purely engage in conceptual and discourse analysis – but the intention is to put the concept of language within the community use or social setting. The language of ritual must be discussed both within its religious and social contexts. Waardenburg explains the use of language further when he says:

We are concerned here with the communicative function of language. Language is learnt from others; it is the cultural context which offers a language to man, so that the child or grown-up

person can communicate with his 'word-givers'. In using the words himself, especially in speech but also in writing, man makes meaning available, really or potentially, to others as well as to himself (Honko, 1978: 454-455).

Making meaning, articulating human experience, and uniting communities among themselves and with the gods, is in the centre of ritual. This means that the performance and the words that are said must be familiar to the people both in terms of the language used and in expressing the actual situation and experience of those involved in ritual. For example, if a pastoral or cattle grazing community is experiencing a severe drought and animal disease, which in turn poses a danger of hunger, starvation and death to the community itself – the community concerned, through ritual, could turn to the gods or ancestors for intervention. The intervention could vary from asking for rain to being allowed to leave the area to another better place. If the latter is the case then the spirit of the ancestors could also be asked to come with. In such case, ritual would be seen in action both in transferring the sacred (the spirit of the ancestors) from the original place and also in creating a new sacred space to lay to rest the spirit of the ancestors in the new location where the community is re-settling.

One can safely say that wherever an African community moves to the ancestral spirits move with them. African people are inseparable from their ancestors. The Maxongo's Hoek story is a perfect demonstration of this inseparability of African people from their ancestors. Stites writes that:

The Ndunges have tried to re-establish communication with the ancestors in the years since they left their land ... Even when visits were granted, the family was "threatened with being shot" by the white land owners, ... There were occasions, however, when the need to contact the ancestors

took precedence over caution, and several family members made covert trips to the graves in the years following removal (Tobler, 2000: 51).

The following quotation reinforces the reasons behind the Ndunges' taking such risks. The quotation also narrates the painful experience that an African undergoes when cut off from the ancestors or from the sacred space. Stites explains that the Ntulis maintained that:

“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.” When asked if the ancestors were aware of why the family had stopped visiting the graves, the Ntulis answered, “No, they don't know. We are lost.” The Ntulis still attempt to communicate with the ancestors, but the rituals are performed at the family's present location in the former Bantustan of kwaNdebele, and are seen as ineffective in reaching the ancestors or conveying the family needs and respect (*ibid*: 59).

The efficacy of one ritual lies in the correct order of other preceding rituals. For instance, in the Ntuli case it seems as if they did not perform a notification ritual to tell the ancestors of their pending move from the farm to another area. If their move was unexpected, (as it was the case with the Ntulis) then a crisis ritual would do. Central to this argument is the fact that ritual is not an isolated religious phenomenon, but is an element of the whole. That is, ritual is part of a bigger reality, which is religion in all its manifestations, in this case. Thus, the language of ritual should reflect the bigger reality and encompass the full human experience: pain, joy, hopes, successes and failures, in all the stages of human growth. In some instances the ancestors reject some rituals because

those concerned have started with the last rituals in terms of order, and the ritual priests would tell those involved how to go about doing things.

Waardenburg (Honko, 1978: 455) puts this beautifully when he says that, language is religious because of the religious use that is made of it, and that people who, at the moment of using it, are religious use such a religious language. This statement throws some light on the particular kind of communication that is linked to the use of religious language. Waardenburg (Honko, 1978) argues that central to this language is a particular 'truth' which addresses a particular 'reality' which only affects the people concerned. Believers and ritual practitioners therefore, understand this ritual language. The meaning of the ritual language could be fixed, hidden and sometimes obvious. Thus the need for ritual experts such as priests, shamans, etc. Nenola-Kallio (Honko, 1978: 461) concurs when she explains that using ritual language belongs to the above experts' ritual role. It is part of their role behavior. She explains further that there are cases when the use of ritual language belongs to the role behavior of other participants, too. Nenola-Kallio reveals that in invitation rites all over the world, the habit of using a secret language, totally different from everyday speech, is known. What this statement reveals is the fact that because the sacred space (as a religious category) is a space 'set apart', ritual (as a religious category) as a performance that takes place in a 'different', 'other' space, so is ritual language – it is a 'unique' language. This language takes a functional role in the context of ritual, because it is used to address a particular situation. And as Tetreault and Kleine III ([www.google.com/ritual\\_and\\_ritual\\_behaviour.html](http://www.google.com/ritual_and_ritual_behaviour.html)) put it, "ritual is purposive; the participants believe that they are accomplishing their aim in what they do ... this

cannot be ignored ... it may be tautological to state that ritual effects its purported objectives ... because that is what the ritual process is designed to do.”

This view strengthens the argument that, with the consent of the community or the participants, ritual does have the power to transfer and re-create a sacred space. Ritual is socially controlled. Its enactment requires the organized co-operation of the community to fulfill all necessary roles. Ritual therefore, is an expression of need by the community. It is an acknowledgement of powerlessness by human beings. Thus central to ritual is the invocation of the spirits of the ancestors. And Somé (1993: 71) argues that knowing what spirit to invoke and what to do with that spirit depends on one’s ability to stay focused on one’s purpose. Somé (1993), claims that ritual is a spirit-based activity performed by humans. “We invoke spirits because we need their intervention in our affairs so that we can feel safe” explains Somé. He goes on to say that invocation is a call placed upon a spirit. When you invoke the spirit world you initiate a different context or condition by bringing in witnesses that are non-human. This is why the space in question is sacred, states Somé.

The concept of space is becoming more and more subject of debate and research even in corridors that were not previously thought of as being relevant to it. It used to belong to geographers and historians, land planners and economists. Currently there is a break away from that traditional understanding to a broad, inclusive and open definition that acknowledges the existence of ‘other’ sciences and definitions. Sciences are adopting a more collaborative approach to the understanding of the concept of space. But,

unfortunately, in Africa generally and in South Africa in particular space is still monopolized and favours the Christian religion. African traditional religion, if it has to survive in the South African context, must adapt to Christian or Western ways and practices. Land management is in the hands of 'civilized' planners, managers, rich and business people. African traditional religious' adherents have to meet standards set for them if they have to qualify for pieces of land. The following chapter, chapter 5 looks into some of these challenges. This chapter explores the difficulty facing the African traditional religion in South Africa and the biasness of land designation processes. Chapter 5 seeks to explore possible solutions and what the chapter refers to as missed opportunities.

#### **4.7. SUMMARY**

This chapter has tried to define the concept of ritual as broadly as possible. But the chapter focused on religious understanding, to show that, religion also has its own understanding of concepts and a special way of using language. This chapter discussed the use of the word 'ritual' within its social context. Central to the discussion in this chapter was the fact that ritual cannot be separated from the experience of the community; it is actually a product of the history of each community. When there are changes in community life, ritual is affected by the changes. Above all, ritual was discussed as a mechanism that brings the human beings and the world of the spirits together. The gods need human beings to re-enact the ritual. The element of purpose and focused intention were clearly discussed in this chapter. So, rites form an essential part of social life, and rituals invoke ancestors and the living-dead. In the seasonal cycles and the

stages of life rituals play an important role in terms of sanctifying these stages. And, as Chidester (1992) suggests, the whole person, with all the senses, body and soul, is totally involved in ritual. It can be said therefore that human life is ritual life – human beings cannot do without ritual, whether they are interpreted as sacred ritual or secular rituals. The chapter has shown the connection between ritual, space and African traditional community life. Where there is no space or land there can be no ritual, and where there is no ritual African people's life is not complete. The chapter has suggested that in South Africa the African traditional religious communities are still finding themselves incomplete because of lack of land to perform their religious rituals.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5.0. THE MEANING OF SPACE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

South Africa has been the scene of a number of momentous social engineering projects from colonialism and segregation to apartheid and, currently, the democratic transformation. All of these had profound spatial implications and left significant legacies in the geography of the country... Apartheid, as implemented by the National Party between 1948 and 1994, was especially concerned with the control of space, notably its occupation and use on a racial basis (Christopher, 1994, 2001:1).

Chapter 5 locates the discussion within the effects of the multiple meanings that the concept of space has taken in South Africa in the past ten years of democracy. The chapter explores what the South African government in particular views as urgent on the agenda to better the lives of the previously disadvantaged South Africans. The chapter will also focus on how does the government go about undoing the legacy of apartheid to create a meaningful space for the previously segregated communities. The researcher will, on the other hand, try to show that there is still a huge gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', the rich and the poor, the land owners and the dispossessed, and so on.

Chapter 5 is divided into three sections: (i) The urgent issues on the agenda of the South African government (ii) How is this agenda being implemented: implementation strategies (iii) The reality on the ground: impact on the community level.

The first section will explore the priority issues that the South African government seeks to address, as key corner stone in strengthening democracy. This chapter will not discuss these issues in detail but will only mention them because the scope of the paper does not allow for that kind of discussion. The second part will suggest that the local government (though a lot has been done) has not adequately succeeded in improving African people's lives from what it was made to be by apartheid legislation to what people on the ground expect the democratic government to do in terms of redressing the past inequalities. And the third part will look at how, in the midst of good democratic legislation, the situation has not changed in the black communities.

### **5.1.1. Urgent issues on the agenda of the South African government**

South Africa is caught between what Mazrui (2000: 87) describes as nostalgia and amnesia. By nostalgia Mazrui means "a temporal homesickness, idealizing the past as our ideal home." And by amnesia he means "a political suppression of an unwanted past. Mazrui further explains, "both nostalgia and amnesia can be forms of "getting one's history wrong." These two concepts will be used in this chapter out of Mazrui's context to mean that South Africa is still a country of two nations in many aspects. South Africa could be said to be a country of 'twos'. It is a country of spatialized memories and spatialized hope. There is a 'nation' that still misses (and to a greater extent still lives in the past) the past and a 'nation' that yearns for the future. The first 'nation' feels that things were better for them in the past, and the second 'nation' feel that the past was horrible but the present has not delivered yet and so the struggle still continues. These 'nations' are spatially divided; the first 'nation' in most cases could be found in the 'first

world' areas, the city and urban areas. The second 'nation' is found in the 'third world' areas, the townships and squatter camps. The first 'nation' remembers (spatialized memories) the old South Africa where they were 'secured' financially, physically, mentally and economically. The second 'nation' hopes (spatialized hope) for a South Africa where all people will be equal in terms of land ownership, access to housing, access to resources and the right to live wherever one wants to live without being intimidated by financial constraints. Symbolic meaning is attached to this hope in the black townships. There are squatter camps in South Africa that are named after personalities and countries. In most cases these are persons that fought for freedom in their countries or countries where people are in a state of perpetual war for their rights. Some examples of these squatter camps in South Africa are places called Samora Machel squatter camp (after the late President of Mozambique), Harare squatter camp (after the capital city of Zimbabwe), Mandela Park (after the former South African President and freedom fighter Nelson Mandela), Beirut squatter camp (after the wars in Beirut), Moscow squatter camp, Lusaka squatter camp and many other names. This shows a yearning for identity, for belonging and dignity. A different space is imported into their present space because they feel it does not meet their demands and so choose a more radical space.

In his speech<sup>1</sup> the then Deputy-President, Thabo Mbeki alluded to the fact that there are two nations in South Africa. He said, "In South Africa we also have a 'north' and a 'south'. Do we not need to say as religious leaders that our faith is offended by poverty and that we need to see a transfer from this 'north' to the 'south.'" (ME, 1999:52). In the

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<sup>1</sup> Multi-Event 1999

same speech he set the tone for the priority issues that are facing the new South Africa. Among these issues he mentioned poverty, inequality, recovering a sense of pride and self worth, rule of law, human rights, justice, reconciliation, peace, national unity, economic growth and many other issues that will contribute towards the renewal of the African continent. The challenge that South Africa is facing is that almost all these issues are interlinked. For example, how do you ensure the rule of law if another section of the community does not have access to economic resources? How do you ensure peace if justice is not in place? How do you speak of reconciliation if the majority of the people are still living in slum areas, are jobless, do not have decent houses and receive poor services? How do you recover somebody's sense of pride if the place s/he lives in is not 'home' enough, if it degrades the very dignity you are promising to restore, if it is in an area designated for the poor and jobless? Should 'indigent', 'joblessness', 'can't afford', be accepted categories or standards by which some members of the community are spatialized? The rich and those who are in power determine the meaning attached to a particular space in South Africa. It is this group of people who decides which area should be designated a residential area, reserve, national park or business area. This is the reality of the meaning of space in South Africa. What is the government doing about changing this situation?

#### **5.1.2. How is this agenda being implemented: implementation strategies**

The present democratic government is trying its best to address most of the challenges facing South Africa. The biggest of these challenges is to make South Africa a one-nation country. The government has made some great strides in many

respects, more especially on the level of legislation. South African legislation reflects (and encourages) one united country. It also recognizes the fact that South Africa is a rainbow nation because of its multi-cultural formation. South African legislation (including the constitution) is among the best in the world. The biggest challenge is on the level of implementation. How to translate the legislation into positive mental attitudes?

Some government programmes show the efforts that the government is putting in closing the spatial, economic and power gaps between the 'two' nations. Among some of these programmes one could mention: i) Affirmative action ii) Black Economic Empowerment iii) Skills development programmes iv) Gender equity drive v) Job creation schemes e.g., expanded public works programme which give employment to thousands of mostly rural and previously neglected communities. These programmes are not without challenges but for those people who benefit from these programmes the meaning of space changes because some will be able to build themselves better homes, move from squatter camps to formal houses. Many black people are now holding positions that were previously reserved for whites. This means empowerment and enhance one's self esteem and dignity. There are numerous challenges that are still facing South Africa – more especially the effectiveness of these interventions as felt by black people on the ground.

## **5.2. The reality on the ground: impact on the community level**

Any political, social, religious or economic change in South Africa if it has to make sense to the African communities should also engage in the above issues. Those in authority

should adjust their way of governance to reflect the African reality. It is also true that when it comes to African traditional religion the problem might be that it is not 'formal' or 'well structured' and it does not have 'visible' structures or buildings and infrastructure. There is no central figure of authority and very little is written down. Mostly there are small sects or 'denominations' representing clans, lineage, or centered around a particular totem. But this cannot be an excuse for the authorities not to designate land to these religious communities to practise their religion. The issue is not about 'structures', 'buildings', and 'formality' but about a place where they in their own way can do whatever they want to do. Other religious communities, because they present themselves in the Western format, have access to designated 'church sites', 'church building land', water services, roads, electricity and other amenities. Because these religious communities have the ability to read and write and to constitute themselves into groups and legal entities and can fill in application forms, they do not have difficulty in getting church land. The process of applying for the religious space or land has become so complicated that it excludes the African traditional religion.

One might argue that there is freedom of religion in South Africa. This argument becomes incoherent when it is compared to the reality on the ground. We find churches everywhere in South Africa, be it in the townships, urban areas and in the city centers but this is not true of the African traditional religion. Its practices are confined to certain areas. In most cases these areas would be allocated to them without the latter being properly consulted. These designated areas are in the rural areas because it is believed that is where they belong, in the periphery. Or the designated areas would be tolerated if

these practices took place close or in the black townships. If any of the African traditional religious practices were conducted in or close to a white or rich suburb they would be castigated as 'disturbing' the residents. Examples of these practices are: initiation rites (newly born babies, puberty stages, circumcision, initiates to traditional roles, and many) and house-opening rituals to mention a few. If the practitioners reside in the urban area or in the city they have to abide by a series of by-laws. They would have to apply to the municipal offices to hold the celebration and should notify the neighbours (or consult with neighbours). They might not slaughter beasts in the yard but at the butchery or farm outside the city. They should keep the noise to a minimum. They must behave within accepted behavioral and health standards in the area. There is nothing wrong with these requirements but it shows how some spaces are more valued than others. It also shows how some religious practices are more respected than others. Because, if the same celebrations could be held in a black township, most or all of the requirements would not be enforced. To make things worse, the same locations; the rich urban and the township areas may belong to the same municipality but standards are different. This division of space according to the categories of economic well-being or race is still prevalent in the South African society. Another example, just to demonstrate the extent of the bias management systems, is the waste management system. Waste collection falls within the municipal jurisdiction, sometimes this responsibility is outsourced to private companies. But the way the waste is collected in the urban and city centers is different from the way and the frequency with which it is collected in the black townships. The city space is more cared for than the township space. The reason why this is mentioned in this chapter

is because the social and economic aspects of the African people's lives are part and parcel of their religious life.

The African way of life permeates all levels of being. It permeates social, economic and cultural aspects of their being and cannot be reduced to any single one of these. All these aspects in their fullness are what constitute an African's religious/cultural identity. For Africans to be fully human is to prosper in all those areas equally. Any community that acknowledges and respects these dynamics is what Saayman (1992) refers to as " a healthy community", and he says: "such a healthy community is a community in which there exists a balance between living people, their ancestors and their environment. "(Saayman, 1992: 43) Wherever they go African people carry their religion with them. Therefore whether in rural or urban areas they should be allowed to practise their religion freely. The local government authorities must find a creative and sustainable solution to their needs. For the African traditional religious communities modernity is not necessarily a problem, the only problem is when their 'sacred assets' are transgressed and designated for 'other' uses without them being involved in the decision making process.

Though in the past land management was biased and favoured a certain racial group and religion, now, even though the purpose is to distribute it through legislation, equally to serve the needs of all South Africans the African traditional religion is, in practice, still sidelined in this process. This discussion intends to show that the effects of the past 'political' control of space are still experienced by the black majority in this country in their social, cultural and religious daily lives. The chapter argues and demonstrates that

not much has changed in terms of the 'spatialized economy', 'spatialized residential areas' and 'spatialized resources'. This means that the African people still have land designated to them in the peripheral areas of the city under the pretext of 'affordable' land. But the question is; why is land 'affordable' to one group of people and not 'affordable' to another in the same country, sometimes under the same municipality? The racialized space is still visible in the new dispensation, the bulk of African people are still in the 'townships' and the bulk of the White people are in the urban areas or city centers. This shows that space is commercialized and is designated according to how much money one has than the genuine needs of a particular community or individual. Services are biased towards the rich, which in many respects means those who were previously advantaged and a small band of black elite. Services run smoothly in the urban areas and in the city centers but in the townships there is a frequent breakdown of electricity, water pipes, badly built cheap and small houses that do not cater for privacy, roads that are punctuated by potholes, landfill sites close to residential areas, industrial complexes that pollute both the air, the land and water, as well as sewer treatment plants situated next to the black townships. To get the services the African communities have to 'break' the law. They have to 'repossess' what they believe rightfully belongs to them like all other citizens of the country. People in the township connect electricity from the electricity poles illegally, they connect phones from the street public phones illegally, and use water beyond set measurements and take land illegally. The question here should not be about the legality or illegality of the people's act but the question is about their quest for belonging, to be treated equally, like other citizens in the urban and city centers. This is the challenge that the new municipalities are faced with; it is the opportunity the

municipalities are missing. The local government as a sphere of government close to the people should pick this up, consult with these communities and develop strategies that will come up with sustainable solutions to the plight of the African communities.

### **5.3. Land management issues**

South African history and politics are inseparable from the struggle over land. South Africans have long found their identity in space and location, and concepts of home, belonging, and entitlement are central to people's understanding of themselves and each other. Land expropriation has been central to South African history since the arrival of the Europeans at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. (Tobler, 2000: 11).

The effects of apartheid were felt in all social systems including urban planning. Simone Abdoumalia (2004)<sup>2</sup> points to the fact that under apartheid, the lines of fragmentation were forcibly racialized. Thus apartheid was also referred to as 'racial inequality', 'spatialized inequality', 'separate development', 'institutionalized racism'. Proceeding from this colour of the skin classification was a list of various 'divided' and 'separate developments'. There was separate education systems which favoured the rich and disempowered the poor, separate residential areas, separate institutions of learning, separate transport systems, separate amenities like toilets, waiting rooms at railways stations and government offices. Laws were promulgated to regulate these spatial distinctions.

The purposes of land use management include protection of individuals from adverse impacts of land usage by others. But the government has failed to use this opportunity to

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<sup>2</sup> *Mail & Guardian July 2 to 8 2004 (Vol 20, No 27): 11*

protect other sectors of the community from being deprived of the chances of getting equal share to the land. It also has not done enough in protecting its poor citizens from the water pollution, land pollution, air pollution and unhealthy activities that are carried out by big industrial and business operations. The achievement of a better environment for all through implementation of integrated development plans still has to be realised.

South Africa has missed the opportunity of involving all communities in dealing with land issues. This involvement could have been done in the initial stages. Affected parties could have been consulted at the planning stages when the land restitution and redistribution laws were drafted. Among other aspects of land use management is the division of land into plots for different users – this is where the communities, more especially the African communities, could have had a say about the nature of space they need, where they need it and the types of activities they want to conduct on those spaces.

Foster (Cochrane and Klein, 2000) maps five different types of racialized space, according to what he calls “a grid of levels of analysis. In his fourth “type” of racialized space Foster presents an argument that says bodies are always spatialized. This is how he puts it:

A fourth distinguishable “type” is that of local, immediate space. People live their lives, carry and present their bodies in local face-to-face interactional spaces: buildings, houses, offices, theaters, churches, pubs, beaches, playgrounds, restaurants and meeting places both public and private. Immediate spaces are ordered in more informal means than the laws which govern international, national, and urban demarcations ... In different places, bodies customarily do different things, immediate space is embodied space, and bodies are always “sexed”, “gendered”, “racialized” and

“abled” or “disabled”, as well as carriers of other forms of identity such as status and class (Cochrane and Klein, 2000:67).

Ramutsindela (1998) states that the meaning of boundaries during the apartheid era went beyond the mere existence of a line, to encompass rituals, metaphors and images. Ramutsindela refers to the different interpretations of either written or unwritten histories, contested territories and identities, the manipulation of political, social, religious and economic spaces. It is therefore within this political system that the transferability or non-transferability of ‘space’ should be understood. Because the ‘creation’ or ‘transference’ of a sacred space was not going to be an issue in the African traditional religion if the people concerned had decided on that ‘freely’. It became an issue because central to the apartheid system was the programme of reorganization of space, which involved removing, and resettling of black communities from their ancestral lands. This removal and resettling became an inconvenience to the black communities and thus the transferability of sacred space also became an issue. It is true though that African communities were always on the move seeking for grazing pastures for their live-stock and areas with resources for their livelihood, but again this was not an issue as they would know in good time when they were supposed to leave and therefore inform their ancestors about the pending move. Stites rightly says, “For Africans, the loss of land came to be synonymous with the loss of independence, agency and self-sufficiency.” (Tobler, 43). In essence this is the loss of the sacred, it is a desecration of a sacred space. For African people, life without the sacred space is meaningless. The loss of the sacred is anti-health. A community that is in close contact with its sacred space is the community which Saayman refers to as “ a healthy community”, and he says: “such a healthy

community is a community in which there exists a balance between living people, their ancestors and their environment. "(Saayman, 1992: 43) It is in this context that the African attachment to land should be understood. Stites emphasizes this point when she says:

The inclusion of the sacrality of space in the land reform debate greatly enhances our understanding of what land meant to people who lost it, and how land affected their livelihoods and security and their emotional and spiritual well-being. On the one hand, working a conception of land as sacred into the land reform discourse expands our understanding of why land is so important to South Africans, and prioritizes human ties to the land above legal and bureaucratic issues. (Tobler, 2000: 43 – 44).

The 'politically controlled' spatial development during the apartheid era was more manifest in urban planning. King (1990) maintains that the central social fact of colonial planning was segregation, principally, though not only, on racial lines. He argues that the segregated city not only resulted from but also in many cases, created the segregated society. The intention of this spatialized planning was to develop a 'separate' space for the black communities and 'separate' space for the white communities. In this context space assumed different meanings for the two racially segregated communities. For the black communities space denoted 'powerlessness', 'inferiority', 'poverty', 'lack of resources', 'inhuman living conditions', 'deprivation', 'secondhand citizenship', 'lack of civilization'. For the white communities space meant 'first class citizenship', 'power', 'wealth', 'superiority', 'opportunities', and 'better life'. As a result there was constant tension and conflict between these two artificial spaces. King says about the space designated for black communities:

In Southern Africa, the indigenous population was kept out of cities; ... confined to 'native locations' or 'townships', or it 'squatted' on the perimeter ... In South Africa, as labour migration increased, 'native housing' was provided in locations on the edge of the city. As urbanization proceeded, Africans were 'brought into' the urban systems in the form of segregated cities, thus, learning to see themselves in the new social categories imposed by the ruling White minority (King, 1990: 57).

Foster (2000) refers to these spatialized bodies as "abled" or "disabled" bodies. In this case the African traditional religion was 'disabled' and Christianity was 'abled'. When the South African governing authorities talk of religion they have Christianity in their mind. These authorities think and act according to Christian categories. When the South African legislation and Constitution state, "all religions are 'equal' before the law", in practice they are referring to organized religion. This shows the weakness of African democracies; they have a tendency of forgetting that the previously oppressed, undermined, mostly illiterate people whose land is now in the hands of farmers, business people, rich property owners and those who have a voice in the administration and management of the land, constitute the African traditional religion and do not have a voice in land management. Decisions about land use are still influenced by the rich people. Those who have the tools and understand the discourse of the powerful, the learned, and the well organized get preference in terms of land designation. South Africa has numerous tracts of land designated for animals; there are several National Parks all over South Africa, there are reserved areas in the sea for sea animals, there are closed areas to protect different kinds of animals, big patches of land set aside for biodiversity but there is no land designated for the African traditional religious practices. These reserved, protected, and set-aside areas have become commercialized spaces. They have

become places to entertain tourists. The African culture has been reduced to an entertainment tool and a commodity to be purchased. It is only in this commercialised role that the African religion is tolerated in these spaces. All over the National Parks, the tourist destinations and Arts galleries they display African products but there is no space set apart for Africans to be fully Africans. All these 'activities' are done under the guise of 'exposing our culture to the international arena'. As it has been mentioned already, the African traditional religion is allowed only to use borrowed spaces on *ad hoc* bases, i.e., they do not own the spaces, they do not freely choose these spaces but they depend on the availability of the spaces and the space being identified by the municipal authority. This is what Foster means when he speaks about 'disabled' bodies. Some of these 'reserved' 'protected' and 'closed' areas were once sacred areas to the indigenous people. Some of these places were once religious and spiritual places. These areas were once used by African people as meeting spaces between the African traditional communities and their ancestors. They were also places from which the communities would derive their livelihood in the form of agriculture, hunting, gathering wood, medicinal plants and even aesthetic pleasure. As has already been said, African people are very close to nature, some of the areas that are now used as parks, botanical gardens, biodiversity sensitive areas and even some of the so called marine protected areas were once places of intense divine presence and therefore were sacred places. Thus different kinds of initiation rituals would take place either inside or close to such areas. Rich property owners now occupy most of these areas. The communities on the South African coast in most cases have no access either to the beach or nature because the rich property owners and farmers fence off these places.

South Africa has become part of the global community and it has signed several international protocols and trade agreements. Some of these agreements and protocols, as much as they may be sensible, might need some adaptation in the South African context. These protocols range from agricultural protocols to environmental, health, and security protocols. But the question is, are the African traditional people of South Africa ready for these protocols? Who benefits from such agreements? Who speaks for those whose religious, economic and social life depends on these resources? The interest of authorities is in the economic welfare of the nation and very little in religious considerations. Interestingly enough, Christianity, as the religion of the ruling elite, tends to fit well with much of this thinking. What is the root of all this ill-treatment of the African traditional religion?

Masondo (2001:8) mentions the fact that earlier missionaries said that Africans had degenerated from a superior civilization to an inferior one. The inferiority of African civilization was reflected in their superstitions “including their belief in witchcraft, their practice of circumcision and their funerals.” The irony of this perception is that these same practices are deeply embedded in the Western civilization. On the other hand, the South African democratic government has not done much to change this perception. Masondo goes on to state that the earlier missionaries also thought that the absence or lack of religion among the Africans went along with the lack of “other defining human features, such as institution of marriage, system of law or any formal political organization. This statement makes one to understand the reason why the African people were never granted human rights, decent places to live, were never included in

deliberations, were treated like children or ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ (these terms were used to refer to those who worked in the gardens and kitchens of white masters). Masondo explains:

As animals by comparison to Europeans, therefore, indigenous people who lacked a religion also lacked any recognizable human right or entitlement to the land in which they lived. ... Animals, therefore, had no human rights to life or land, neither did the indigenous people in the Americas, Australia, Africa, or the Pacific Islands, who were classified as beastly or brutal because they lacked religion (Masondo, 2001:8).

African people’s deprivation is still on track in South Africa. This could be seen in the land restitution and land distribution process. Everybody agrees that land was taken from the African indigenous people either by force of law or by cheating. But the victims have been made to wait for years without being compensated either financially by getting their land back. Those who choose to receive their land back are also given houses on their land. But things get difficult as they have to pay for the services that are provided on these lands; water, sewerage, electricity, and roads. Those of them who want to go back to a life of cultivating their fields and producing food for themselves find it hard as there is minimal help from the government. There are cases where it is alleged that the previous ‘owners’ (those from whom the state tries to get the land; present farmers, and property owners), as part of their resistance to the land claims process, put poisonous chemicals into the soil so that it never produces again. Some of these ‘owners’ raise their land prices so high that it becomes impossible to buy it back. Though the legislation

allows the government (the Minister), in such a case, to expropriate the land in the spirit of reconciliation, the South African government prefers to negotiate with these 'owners' on the principle of "willing seller", "willing buyer". This process has proven to be slow and prolonged, thus exacerbating the plight of the victims. South Africa's land reform process has not been marked by violence and disrespect of the rule of law. However, a number of land invasions have occurred over the past few years outside of the government's programme. But whenever the landless people express their frustration and occupy land, they are referred to by several names like, 'squatters', 'illegal occupiers', 'land invaders', and 'law breakers'. And yet what is needed here is more than simple legality. There are questions of morality, legitimacy and goodwill as well. The fact is, land has always been an emotive issue in South Africa, and if the pace of land reform is not accelerated land 'invasions' might get out of hand. Unless the racial imbalance of land ownership and land distribution is addressed, it will aggravate racial tensions and lead to violent confrontations. The question, therefore, is not whether to conduct land reform; it is how to do it and make it effective and meaningful to the landless communities. Against this background, it seems that the government has not been able to come up with a working strategy.

#### **5.4. The way forward**

Soja (1996:260) encourages and proposes what he calls a 'new' way of thinking about space – he writes that:

"In encouraging geographers and others to 'think differently' about such familiar notions as space, place, territory, city, location and environment I am not suggesting that you discard your old and

familiar ways of thinking, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope of critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations (Soja, 1996:260).

Jean and John Comaroff (2004)<sup>3</sup> argue that the (inherited) politics of difference, which were legally instituted during apartheid, won't just go away in the new South Africa. But they maintain that the new Constitution is playing a vital role in terms of accommodating the cultural claims of minorities. The question that needs to be asked is; on which model is the Constitution based? Is it Afro-centric or Euro-centric? They also raise the issue of the emerging religious and cultural tolerance among the diverse South African cultures. Again, how can we be sure if what the Comaroffs call 'emerging tolerance' is not religious and cultural compromise? The Comaroffs also claim that this tolerance in a way is indicative of the growing level of understanding among all South Africans. South Africans are creating a 'common space', the space of equal opportunity, equal participation and unity in diversity. How is this 'common space' visible on the ground? Christopher warns that some apartheid institutions might not go away quickly. He writes:

In the period between 1990 and 1999 substantial progress was made in removing many of the more openly discriminatory measures of the apartheid era. However, other issues remained essentially conditioned by the apartheid mould as a legacy for the new millennium (Christopher.1994, 2001: 196).

A mammoth task lays ahead for the people of South Africa more especially those in authority, to create a new meaning of space, not only in their minds or legislation but also

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 6

in reality. This new space should enable the previously segregated people to be brought to the center. The poor people should experience their lives changing for the better. The boundaries that kept the poor away from resources, from the economy, from better residential areas, from beautiful scenery should be done away with. The formerly segregated spaces might need to be demolished and a collective space which will ensure common citizenship be created. This 'new space' might necessitate new tools of engagement where both the previously disadvantaged and the advantaged people will feel at home. Christopher argues that most work has been done on policy level but on the ground there are still huge challenges. He states that:

The programme of land restitution and redistribution was begun in 1991. However, South African cities are the most enduring monuments to apartheid ... The fabric of the apartheid cities, the homeland settlement patterns and the infrastructure can be adapted but not erased ... The physical inheritance from the apartheid era will be a massive legacy to be overcome by future generations (*ibid*: 208, 236 & 238).

There are few issues that need to be considered if transformation has to be effective in South Africa. This has to take place both on the level of (i) legislation and (ii) implementation. South African legislation as it stands, including the Constitution is based on Western models, and this has to change. The legal system has very little African content; in fact, in most cases African legal systems are modified to suit Western models instead. What this means is that if African people have to fit well in the present legislative system they must behave and act in a Western way. That is why people like Mndende (1998: 122 – 123)) argue that there are still challenges that are facing African

traditional religions in the new dispensation. She mentions the fact that the so-called democracy is based on the minds that had suffered from colonialism and racism. She further argues that the black leadership itself sees racism as having destroyed only the economic side of the black people – and turning a blind eye to the fact that Christianity nearly destroyed the identity of the black people.

There should be a fundamental restructuring of the governance structures and institutions to reflect the African reality. Africa has had its traditional governance models for centuries. And these models were successful in African terms – until the introduction of the concept of democracy that is a Western construct. The role of traditional leadership therefore needs to be clarified both on the level of development of policies and implementation of those policies and other community related issues. Africa as a whole and South Africa in particular is becoming a heritage country. Several places have been identified as heritage sites in South Africa and this points to the wealth of wisdom that existed in Africa in the past and how that wisdom was put to good use. The contradiction is to acknowledge the wisdom of the people and on the other hand exclude that wisdom in governance systems.

The acknowledgement of the South African heritage resources should point to the fact that African traditional systems have something to offer in this democratic government. The Kimberly<sup>4</sup> declaration points to the knowledge and skills that the indigenous people have. Among other issues the declaration raises is the fact that the indigenous people need to be involved in management roles of different kinds. The declaration suggests that

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<sup>4</sup> Kimberly, South Africa, 20-23 August 2002

the indigenous people should not only be involved as implementers but also on the policy formulation level. And if these issues of policy, legislation, management, consultation and partnerships could be addressed and implemented on all levels the African people could experience change in their lives.

## **5.5. SUMMARY**

Chapter 5, unlike the previous chapters, has concretised the concept of space. This chapter has used South Africa a case study because the researcher understands the South African context better and is a South African himself.

In this chapter the researcher has demonstrated the fact that South Africa still has two communities; the rich community and the poor community, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and the urban resourceful communities and the rural under-resourced communities. Instead of dwelling on the problems of the past the researcher pointed out that some of the abovementioned challenges are a priority on the agenda of the democratic government. This chapter has shown that the present government is doing significantly well in terms of alleviating poverty and closing the gap between these 'two communities'. But some people still feel that what the government is doing is not enough and the way it is done is exclusive. It is alleged that the African people are still left out in terms of participating in policy, management, economic, social and implementation issues. Their views and traditional beliefs are left out in the nation building exercises. Chapter 5 has also shown that on the religious level the African traditional practices are still both overtly and covertly neglected or are not given the same treatment as Christian

religion in terms of allocation of religious amenities. The researcher argued that the new democratic government, in its programme to undo the past injustices and inequalities, has missed the opportunity to involve the affected parties in setting up the agenda and the mechanisms to take that process forward. This exclusion has deprived the previously segregated communities the opportunity to participate in the reconstruction of their country.

Lastly, the chapter suggests a way forward and a possible programme of action that the government could adopt. Fundamental changes could be on the level of Constitution, the Euro-centric nature of the country's legal system to be more Afro-centric, management and governance model to be more Africa friendly, clarified agreed upon and meaningful role of traditional leadership. This are just few issues that chapter 5 raises and a lot of other areas could be covered with the inclusion of the affected communities in decision-making processes.

## **5.6. CONCLUSION**

As Africa recovers its dignity and its 'Africanness', so too it is recognizing, recovering, and reviving its presence in the past – including the Bible ... 'Africa' is one of the constructs of Western colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Africans themselves have had little to say in the way 'Africa' has been constituted by the dominant discourse of discovery, civilization, colonialization, industrialization, and capitalization (West, 1997: 114-115).

Although West appears to be sympathetic towards the African cause his approach could be confusing. He assumes that Africans would be pleased to discover themselves in the Biblical histories and narratives. He insinuates that African religion,

as it were, has its roots in the Bible. This approach to African religion shows how difficult the debate in this thesis had been. The different approaches to African religion by non-Africans have made the discussion difficult. The other contributing factor to this difficulty was the fact that most of the so-called African religion scholars are Western trained scholars. But the most challenging part in writing about the African traditional religion is the fact that because of colonialism and all the forces that accompanied it, African traditional religion had to adapt immensely. Most African people have developed this double identity of belonging to both African traditional religion and to the Christian religion. During the week they practice their African traditional religion, perform their various African rituals and on Sunday they go to their respective Christian churches. This double identity has helped Africans to survive during the harsh days of colonialist rule in Africa because through being Christians they would be able to get education, jobs, houses, health services and other benefits. Even to this day Africans go to Christian churches on Sundays and during the week they would practice their African traditional religious rituals.

Even though the aim of this thesis was to explore how the concept of sacred space is understood within the African traditional religion the researcher has also shown that there are multiple challenges that the African traditional religion is facing in relation to space in Africa. In chapter 1 the researcher showed that sacred space could be divided into 'discovered' or 'uncreated' sacred space and 'human made' or 'ritualized' sacred space. The former sacred space cannot be transferred but the latter, in the face of unavoidable challenges, can be transferred. Chapter 2 discusses 'other'

religious understandings of sacred space; as there could be mutual influence between these 'other' religious understandings of sacred space and the African traditional religion. Some of these 'other' religious understandings, e.g. Christianity, form part of the Western civilization that has colonized African culture for many decades. Chapter 3 has revealed the connection between the African traditional religion and land. This chapter suggests that to deprive Africans of their land is to 'disable' their religion. That is, religious freedom goes hand in hand with land availability or land designation for their religious practices. Chapter 4 confirms the fact that African religion is a spatial religion or is a land religion because it is a religion that connects the living and the living-dead through ritual acts. The living-dead are referred to as *abaphantsi* (those living underground), and this imbues the land with a religious significance. In Chapter 5 the researcher focuses on the South African situation. The researcher claims that in South Africa land is racialized and monopolized in favour of the Whites and the Christian religion, therefore, in favour of the Western culture, the same culture that has colonized Africa for decades. The researcher argues that as long as the African people do not have access to land their religion will remain suppressed, their human dignity violated and their rights abused. Chapter 5 suggests that there can be no genuine peace or reconciliation in South Africa unless the land restitution and redistribution process is fast tracked. Only when these issues are addressed can the South African government truly speak of a free and democratic South Africa.

## **5.7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

With statutory colonialism gone in Africa there is hope for a new agenda that will convince African people that the old oppressive system is gone. This change of political regime should not be a mental feeling but African people must experience the positive impacts of this change in their lives. The benefits of the new era in Africa must trickle down to the poorest of the poor in the African communities. The change must positively affect the social, economic, cultural, religious and political status of the African people. Freedoms that were previously lost must be regained, including cultural and religious freedoms. African people should be free to think as Africans, act as Africans, behave as Africans and express themselves as Africans without being apologetic about that. African governments need to create a conducive atmosphere for these expressions. The urban and rural divide needs to be done away with in terms of the freedom of cultural and religious expressions. Africans should be enabled to live wherever they want to in Africa and be fully Africans wherever they are without being forced to modify and adapt their Africanness to suit some Western standards or expectations. These aspirations should be included in all countries' structures of governance, be they national, provincial, local or traditional. The voice of the African people, irrespective of their community status or educational standards needs to be taken seriously in developing the agenda to implement this African programme.

Initiatives to set this African agenda/programme in motion are already on the way. Among those initiatives is the transformation of what was known as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into African Union (AU). This shift shows the need to respond to

new challenges facing Africa, among which is the need for economic and cultural development. This is a move away from reactionary programmes to more proactive programmes. Also part of the initiatives is the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). These programmes are good in themselves but people on the ground feel that they are not consulted on issues that affect their lives. There is already a feeling that these initiatives are meant for the elite and educated and that they leave the majority of poor and illiterate Africans out. Such initiatives need to be the product of the African communities and should therefore reflect their reality on the ground. There is a need for meaningful and implementable projects on regional, local and community levels. Issues of human dignity, justice, equality, land restitution and redistribution, reparation and recognition of African people's culture or religion need to be addressed on the local level. The issue of land, which is central to African people's dignity and religion, needs to be revisited. The African people themselves need to be part of the land management process in their different capacities. In most cases it is the same colonizers who determine the pace and price of the land to be given back to the dispossessed.

There can be no justice in South Africa if Africans themselves do not drive the process of transformation. The so-called cultural, economic or political globalization constitutes one of the main obstacles to the recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples. Transnational corporations and industrialized countries should and must not be allowed to impose their global agenda on the local processes. African countries' constitutions should reflect African culture and African needs and standards. The unfortunate part about these constitutions is that in the name of 'international standards' they betray the

African aspirations and flavour. African legislation needs to reflect the African reality. That Africa has its unique system of governance, and institutions relevant to this governance system. That, Africa having been destroyed by colonialism cannot build on the same colonial foundations of colonial 'civilization'. That, a new way of thinking is necessary if justice is to be done to the African communities. That, even if Africa belongs to all who live in it – Africa is still a continent of two nations; the rich whites and the poor majority of black people. And therefore this gap needs to be closed for Africa to be said to be really free.

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