

**Reclaiming Table Mountain:**  
**Perspectives from Cape Town's Black Township Residents**

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by

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**September 2021**

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate how the landless township residents of Cape Town could reclaim the iconic Table Mountain, for it to be fully inclusive in a manner that is meaningful and useful in their traditional and cultural practices. This study explored the request made by traditional surgeons and traditional leaders to have a portion of an un-serviced land on Table Mountain rezoned for Ulwalukho (Male Circumcision). This study calls for the management of Table Mountain to recognise the rights of the township residents of Cape Town to participate in the policy decisions, conservation management and heritage strategies of Table Mountain in order to ensure its inclusive use.

This qualitative study made use of ethnography, auto-ethnography and mobile methods. Individual in-depth interviews were also conducted, with the 10 purposely sampled youth and adults. This study found that Table Mountain could play a pivotal role in the transitional process of young people who interact with the ecological world, providing them a form of nature therapy that has improved their well-being. This study also found that it is feasible to have a piece of Table Mountain rezoned for Ulwaluko (Male Circumcision).

This study further found that black township residents of Cape Town must be integrated into the conservation agenda, policy decisions and strategic decisions pertaining to the management of Table Mountain. The conservation of the Cape Floral Kingdom on Table Mountain should be pursued in ways that are not to the detriment of, or threatening to the cultural practices of black township residents of Cape Town. This mountain must fully be inclusive in its practical sense not merely in theory, but in a manner that also appeases local people of Cape Town.

## Keywords

Environmental Justice, Black Environmentalism, Healing, Land, Table Mountain.

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFMSA - Apostolic Faith Mission South Africa

ANA - African News Agency

ANC – African National Congress

ASA- Anthropology Southern Africa

BEEP – Beyond Expectation Environmental Project

CA - Chrysalis Academy

CPUT) - Cape Peninsula University of Technology

DNA - Deoxyribonucleic acid

PA – Protected Areas

SANParks – South African National Park

TMNP – Table Mountain National Park

UNDRIP - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UCT- University of Cape Town

UWC – University of Western Cape

KNP -Kruger National Park

## Preface

In 2000, I was introduced to Table Mountain for the first time by the Pride of Table Mountain Project under Wilderness Leadership. I had never imagined that I would set foot on this iconic mountain prior to my trip with the above-quoted organisation. Since I arrived in Cape Town, I had only seen Table Mountain from afar and from the dusty townships of Cape Town. I cannot put into words the feeling I had when I climbed Table Mountain for the first time. I was ecstatic beyond measure, as I was presented with an opportunity to connect with myself for the first time whilst reconnecting with my spirit and with myself in a way that I had never imagined.

There I was, walking boldly and tall with a sense of delight. For a moment, I swiftly forgot that I had troubles back at home. Climbing up Table Mountain for the first time re-opened a chapter in my life that I longed to erase, but I could not handle this traumatic situation until I was on the mountain. I am talking about the painful reality of being abandoned by my biological father when I was nine months and subsequently subjected to poverty. I later worked for Table Mountain National Park as a Hoerikwaggo guide, guiding tourists from different walks of life from Table Mountain to Cape Point. It is where I learnt a lot about fauna, flora, and the different routes. In 2005 I established the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP), intending to encourage black people from local communities of Cape Town to take up space, reclaim their cultural heritage, and reclaim their national monuments, one of which is Table Mountain.

In my view, the mountain in question had the potential to improve the well-being of township residents, particularly youth between the ages of 18 and 35 from various townships across Cape Town. I was convinced that Table Mountain could transform the socially troubled lives of the youth through nature therapy, and I felt that exposure to the ecological world was necessary and important for children and the youth. It would help them to understand that Table Mountain belongs to them too. One of the goals for the forthcoming chapters is to ascertain if Table Mountain could be a source of life, a source of healing, and whether it can improve the well-beings of the local people of Cape Town.

This study presents findings derived from conversations with young people, with a Cape-Town-based traditional healer, and with elders responsible for Xhosa male circumcision in the Western Cape. My hope is that this study will open wider conversations about how young black people of Cape Town can find healing and connection with the land, via small shifts in policy and planning for Table Mountain National Park.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

According to South African National Park (2015), Table Mountain National Park is one of the most visited sites in Southern Africa, receiving almost four million visitors each year. This volume of tourist traffic is one of the highest among the national parks in South Africa. Ironically, the majority of Black township residents who live adjacent to Table Mountain have never set foot on it. Township residents are people of all ages whose origins are from the African continent; in the context of this study, the phrase refers to black South Africans. These are the rightful custodians of the land long before European invasion and subsequent colonisation. Local township residents are the stem of society. I am a son of the soil, and part of a society which feels aggrieved by the continuous alienation and exclusion of black people on Table Mountain. Swanepoel (2013: 10) insists that “Table Mountain National Park remains a colonial park, considering it was established by removing local inhabitants, including people of colour”. The current management of Table Mountain National Park does little to dispel the perception that it primarily is managed to accommodate and appease middle classes and elites, which in South Africa means it caters principally to the minority white population.

Nadia Belaidi (2018:08) asserts that “under the apartheid regime, national parks in South Africa were established at the expense of black South Africans who have been driven away from their land, and were unable to use the resources of the national park.” I support this view as it seems that the legacy of colonisation has created an impression that this iconic mountain belongs to the selected few, the elite. At the same time, some black South Africans from the working class sadly remain alienated and excluded from policy decisions and conservation management of Table Mountain.

Black South Africans might not know how to react when they connect with the land of their forefathers. They might not understand what it means to be greeted by a pleasant breeze of the mountain. It is an unfortunate reality of colonisation's legacy, the consequence of alienation and exclusion of black people from their land. In the context of this study Nkosinkulu (2015: 72) explains that “It is evident from this investigation that Land and Home play an important role in the way Xhosa people interact with space, other humans, and with each other. To speak of Land and Home in a Xhosa context is to incorporate more than just a physical aspect of the environment.” It means that when people are dislocated from their land and home, they find

themselves stripped of the layers of their unique heritage and identity. (Nkosinkulu 2015). According to Sol Plaatjie (1916:21), “black people remain pariahs in the land of our birth”. For Plaatjie, black South Africans had their land confiscated whilst others were driven away from their land in the aftermath of the land Act of 1913. Ngcukaitobi (2021) grapples with the land issues through his book titled *Land Matters, South African's Failed Land Reforms and the Road Ahead*, which is relevant to my argument. Ngcukaitobi (2021: 06) explains that “in sum, millions remain desperately poor while a fortunate few enjoy the wealth from the land in the country.” The National Parks Act 57 of 1976, however, states that national parks have been created for the benefit of all South Africans (Khan, 2000).

The words of Aime Cesaire, one of the founders of the global decolonial movement, in his epic poem: *Notebook of A Return to The Native Land* (Cesaire, 1983: 17-33), frame my argument:

To go away. My heart was pounding with emphatic generousities. To go away.... I would arrive sleek, and young in this land of mine, and I would say to this land whose loam is part of my flesh: I have wandered for a long time, and I am coming back to the deserted hideousness of your sores. I would go to this land of mine, and I would say to it: Embrace me without fear .... And if all I can do is speak, it is for you I shall speak.

Moreover, this land screamed for centuries that we are bestial brutes; that the human pulse stops at the gates of the barracoon; that we are walking compost hideously promising tender cane, and silky cotton, and they would brand us with red-hot irons, and we would sleep in our excrement, and they would sell us on the town square, and an ell of English cloth and salted meat from Ireland cost less than we did, and this Land was calm, tranquil, repeating that the spirit of the Lord was in its acts... (Cesaire, 1983: 33).

This poem speaks to the experience of some black South Africans who remain pariahs in the land of their birth. In the context of Table Mountain, township residents can be forgiven for their passive stance regarding its preservation, given its management paradigm framed without thought to the legacy of centuries of racism and exclusion. For that reason, the mountain in question is treated as a foreign affair by local people given its managers' perceived intolerance in embracing change by reproducing apartheid's repulsive principles that cut black South Africans off from the land. SANParks in its entirety would counter this narrative and point to

its 'park for all, a park forever' slogan, but nothing suggests that this is true in reality. Ngcukaitobi (2021: 6) wrote that "the return of the land of the people is a shattered dream. A new reality is emerging not controlled from the centre but springing from the ground, asking difficult questions of the unfinished business of liberation struggle".

Swanepoel cites Ciraj Rasool and Lesley Witz, who lament the fact that black South Africans have lost their relationship with their confiscated land, and find themselves bewildered in their encounter with the ecological world. Rasool and Witz (1993: 452), cited in Swanepoel 2013: 53) "Africans regrettably have little, and limited connection with their land and their mountain which continues post-apartheid to be an emblem of a 'White' national identity". This might be a big claim to make, which might need context as it is incorrect that Africans have little and limited connection with their land, and one would ask which land? However, in the context of this study, the local people of Cape Town have little, and limited connection with Table Mountain because they have been pushed to the city's peripheries during the apartheid years, which then limit their connection with the mountain in question.

It also seems that local people of Cape Town are unable to access Table Mountain and use it in a meaningful way, in a way that is desirable to them, and that is to use it for cultural reasons. For instance, being allowed to use Table Mountain for cultural purposes such as male circumcision, to harvest herbs and medicinal plants responsibly, and for sangoma rituals. I take a position that advocates for the decolonisation of Table Mountain. However, it is key to decolonise the minds of local people on the benefits and the value that comes with the encounter and interaction with the ecological world. I argue that local people must look beyond the politics of the mountain in question and reclaim their heritage.

This study is inspired by Archie Mafeje, an anthropologist and an esteemed model of Pan-Africanism. Mafeje remains a symbol of hope, a symbol of change, and an advocate of note for African scholarship. The focus of this study is on the necessity of academic decoloniality, as Mafeje had taught it, and described by Bongani Nyoka as "aimed at setting a new humanity free from racial hierarchisation and asymmetrical power relations in place since conquest" (2011: 68). This description represents the thinking behind the challenge of establishing Table Mountain's planning and management in ways that are profoundly inclusive for all. This study aims to produce knowledge that boldly and truly reflects the scholarship, ideas of Africans and further seeks to inspire others to be the catalysts of change, drawing courage from scholars

such as Archie Mafeje, Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, and others. Steve Biko was once quoted saying, “the black man must build up his own value systems, see himself as self-defined, and not be defined by others” (SASO Policy Manifesto). There is a need for more black environmentalism, if we are to change the status quo. Africans can no longer rely on the ‘other’ to narrate their stories or continue to bring to fore some of the distorted facts claimed about Africans such as “not interested in the environment.” I am researching about the subject matter or a research question that is not only affecting the ‘other’ or in this case my participants, but it affects me as a researcher as well. This means that I am situated or located in the study; therefore, my voice as a researcher become important. This notion of my situatedness in the study and its implication is explicitly discussed in this study.

This study explores whether the BEEP psychosocial intervention program that affords the township youth access to the tranquillity of Table Mountain bears any fruits in transforming their troubled lives for better. The program's interest is mainly in the role of nature therapy and the way these young people describe its impact in helping them to confront their social challenges whilst transforming their lives. I was especially interested in understanding how black South Africans who were historically excluded from protected areas reacted to and made meaning of encounters with Table Mountain and its relations to the sky, clouds, rain, plants, birds, small creatures, rock and soil. This study discusses Africans' ancient historical links to mountains in general and their role in their sense of cultural rootedness. It further discusses the cultural, ancestral, and spiritual links young Africans describe when encountering the mountain. In this regard, the critical question is whether township residents better connect with their ancestors when they encounter the mountain? This study also discusses why local people of Cape Town want a part of Table Mountain to be rezoned for male circumcision. It proposes that if the mountain's management plan is to serve all the people of the City, their voices need to be taken seriously.

According to Cocks (et al., 2012: 02) “despite acknowledgement of the need for an integrated approach to the conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity for ensuring sustainable development policy responses to this integrated paradigm have been slow to emerge in the communal areas of South Africa”. It is critical to adopt an integrated approach in the ecological world for the benefit of all South Africans irrespective of race. Cocks (et al., 2012: 02) state that “the vast majority of biodiversity assessments still focus solely on species, whilst equally important issues such as landscape diversity and provision of ecosystem services (including

cultural services) are given less attention”. The study that follows will offer scholarly background for a proposal to rethink the approach to assessing both the condition and the management of the Table Mountain National Park, with its impact on cultural and social services in mind.

## Background of the Study

This study is informed by four years of working as a Hoerikwaggo guide for Table Mountain National Park, where I was tasked with guiding tourists from Table Mountain to Cape Point. However, my 14 years of experience with ecology, nature, and Table Mountain through my work with the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) has influenced the thinking behind this study. I am also one of the township resident who had to bear the brunt of alienation from protected areas in my upbringing, like many black South Africans. My experience with Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) has made me realise that its slogan ‘park for all, a park forever’ is misleading, as it does not reflect reality. I am of the view that the custodians of Table Mountain should provide full access to Table Mountain for local people to utilise it for activities, including cultural activities, that are currently off limits unless they are for the cultural purposes of the elites in activities such as dog walking, mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing and bus tourism. It is time for the frame of reference of cultural activities such male circumcision, Sangoma initiation and heritage, to be broadened in Table Mountain National Park.

My 14 years of work with the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) has made me explore through this study whether Table Mountain could be a fitting space to help the troubled youthful township residents from the stress-ridden townships and to find nature therapy. In that time, I have seen many troubled youths who have been given a platform in the tranquil and sacred spaces on Table Mountain confront their social challenges and change their lives around while finding their healing through nature therapy.

## Statement of the Problem

Table Mountain National Park is one of the most visited sites in Southern Africa, receiving almost four million visitors each year and that, it is one of the highest compared to other national parks in the country as aforementioned (South African National Park, 2015). The irony is that millions of tourists from all over the world flock to the beloved Table Mountain whilst

many local people and black people to be precise who live few kilometres away from Table Mountain have never set foot on it. My assumption is that, the above scenario, is partly due to the legacy of colonisation and apartheid era which deliberately designed and executed unwarranted forcible removals. This resulted in exclusion and alienation of local people from any participation in the protected areas such as Table Mountain, as they have been pushed into the peripheries. This meant that people from the townships young and old are forced to live in poor environments, in poverty and in the confines of township life. This aggravated a situation whereby young people are facing serious social challenges partly instigated by poverty amongst other things. The socially troubled youth who seem to struggle to cope with a reality of living in a traumatic society tend to resort to crime, alcohol abuse, gangsterism, sexual abuse, rape etc. This study explores whether Table Mountain could be used as an ideal space to help these troubled youth with free therapy and help them to mitigate the effect of their social difficulties in the townships of Cape Town.

### Aims and Objective

This Anthropological study aims to remind black South Africans who continue to be alienated and excluded from Table Mountain that this iconic mountain belongs to them too. This anthropological study serves to explain how conservation spaces are key in respect of the cultural and spiritual well-being of black people. The key objective of the study is to engage the custodians of Table Mountain. This is to remind them about the rights of participation of local people of Cape Town in the policy decisions and conservation and heritage strategies in order to ensure the inclusive use of Table Mountain.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### **Introduction**

Literature review is a critical evaluation of what others have said about the topic in question, it includes theories that address it and the findings (Babbie, 2016). In this chapter, I review some of the existing debates and research material that is in the public domain. I rely heavily on such knowledge production which is essential in framing my arguments whilst also serving as an important evidence to the claims and assumptions made in this study.

#### Public Participation, Protected Areas, and Integration

Thomas Beierle and David Konishy (1999) state that recent high-profile research reports have suggested a need for greater public involvement in decision-making related to the environment. “Public participation is increasingly recognised as an important component of environmental planning and decision-making” (Beierle and Konishy, 1999: 01). However public participation should also encompass people from previously disadvantaged communities who are systematically alienated from the ecological world. In my view participation of local people in the affairs of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) should also filter through in the policy decisions and conservation strategies as the mountain in question also belongs to them.

William Adams and Jon Hutton (2007) explain that what ought to be firmly on the conservation planning agenda are the needs of local people. Adams and Hutton (2007) posit that “many countries have seen ‘People and Park’ projects developed, although many involved simply a repackaging of existing approaches”(Adams & Hutton, 2007: 151). My assumption is that this has not fully manifested in and around Table Mountain National Park as people from the township continue to view this national monument as belonging to the whites, the elites, given its historical exclusionary relationship with black people. “The issue of people in and around protected areas was central to the discussion at the Third World Congress on National Parks in Bali in 1982 (McNeely and Miller 1984), as were the rights and needs of indigenous people at its successor in Caracas in 1992” (McNeely 1993, cited in Adams & Hutton, 2007: 151). It seems that those discussions have not yet yielded any tangible outcomes thus far. It is important

to grapple with this because conservation spaces like Table Mountain belong to all, Capetonians, including people from the townships. Therefore, local people ought to advise on how this iconic mountain should serve their needs, including Xhosa, Sotho, Khoisan, Afrikaans groups, and white environmentalists amongst others who are well known for accessing the mountains for cultural reasons ranging from dog walking and extreme sports to simply walking for health and well-being. However, there are no provisions in place in the current conservation policies and conservation management strategies that cater for important cultural ritual practices for some African groups.

### Table Mountain history of politics, racism and the plight of black people

Adams & Hutton (2007: 153), cited in Swanepoel (2013: 10), state that “the history of protected areas such as Table Mountain is marked with racism predicated on treating nature as a domain of rationality”. According to Belaidi (2018: 08) “South African National Parks (SANParks), Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) must be ‘A Park For All, Forever’. This slogan aims at promoting access to the park for all the people whatever their social condition.” This is clearly not the case especially since there is no context provided on how it ‘must be a park for all forever’. Table Mountain National Park does not seem to reflect the above-quoted slogan as it still serves the interest of the selected few, particularly the elite. Belaidi (2018) postulates that some black South Africans were driven away from their lands in the aftermath of the establishment of national parks in South Africa as they were prohibited from using national parks resources. Jacob Dlamini recently published a book titled “Safari Nations: A Social History of the Kruger National Park” where he explains that Kruger National Park was the first park to be established in May 1926, and in Africa, it is the oldest parks (Dlamini, 2021). “Kruger National Park is known as one of the iconic wildlife sanctuaries in the world” (Dlamini, 2021: 1). This park has two million hectares, which makes it one of the biggest on earth (Dlamini, 2021).

Rasool and Witz write that “Table Mountain symbolises the efforts and glories of the past and the hopes of a future generation of a united South African nation” (1993: 452 cited in Swanepoel, 2013: 53). Swanepoel (2013: 53) notes “Table Mountain was declared a National Monument in 1958 after it had been demarcated as a White Group Area in 1957”.

## Landscape of imagination, complex embodiment in the flesh of the world.

Robert Macfarlane in his article titled “Mountains of the mind: a history of a fascination” (2004) states that “mountains stand tall in the quest for understanding nature or society interaction” (2004: 527). Could mountains be befitting spaces for social interaction, and could they be spaces of comfort, healing, and ‘a beacon of hope’ as Nelson Mandela described Table Mountain during his incarceration in Robben Island. Macfarlane (2004) states that one cannot describe mountain symbolism without reflecting on how mountain literature shapes geographical imaginations. I support this view as I will also rely on the mountain literature to shape my research study. However, I will also endeavour to fill some of the gaps in the literature which I have identified and addressed in this study.

In their book, “An Anthropology of Landscape” Tilley and Cameron-Daum (2017), cited in Meinig (1979) who drew on the landscape of imagination by

inviting us to imagine a landscape thus: a group of different people go to the top of a hill and look down and across the panorama of landscape below. Each is invited to describe the landscape before them: what do they see? Meinig lists ten versions of the same scene: the landscape may be regarded in various ways as nature, habitat, artefact, system, a problem, as a source of wealth, as ideology, history and so on. Why the people might describe it in these very different ways relates to their point of view and their interests and values, so inevitably the landscape seen from the ‘beholding eye’ means something radically different for a property developer, a local historian, an earth scientist, an artist and so on. Ten versions of the same thing is obviously an arbitrary number: there could be many more or less. The general point though is that political, economic, moral and aesthetic interests and values colour what people see and may inevitably lead to radically different attitudes.

Cultural geographers Denis Cosgrove, and Stephen Daniels, “define landscape as a cultural image, a way of representing things. It is through material experience that we can understand the ideological nature of these representations, how they quite literally frame the landscape, far better than by undertaking any desk-bound analysis” (1988: 11). The way we view the landscape reveals our mind's perspective, which is governed by our material experience.

According to Tilley and Cameron-Daum (2007: 06), “landscape is thus an intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world”. Landscape can also be viewed as interlinking our bodies, the ecological world and the social or human world. Tilley and Cameron-Daum, (2017: 06) further explain that

Bodies and landscapes thus produce each other in mutual relation, in the process of motility and inhabitation. In the most basic sense, the agency of landscape is embodied because it acts on us through the mediation of our bodies. The thinking, subjective mind emerges in relation to the landscape and ends in its perception. It is essential to discuss the mutual relation between our bodies and landscape.

It is fitting to suggest that landscapes trigger a certain kind of bodily sense reaction whenever we encounter it. “It may be experienced from the ‘inside’, through kinaesthetic sensations conveying information about posture, position and movement, or from the ‘outside’ as a body among others inter-subjectively constituted through a mutual relationship with other persons in culture” (Tilley & Cameron-Daum, 2017: 07). Milton examines how “thoughts and feelings, goals, values and emotions emerge from personal engagement with the world. She argues that emotion is the primary reason some people care about nature.

Environmental campaigners are passionate about what they do and will speak about their feelings for and enjoyment of the natural world” (Milton 2002, cited in Tilley and Cameron-Daum, 2017: 12). “People are materially entangled and entwined with the landscape, and precisely because of that, they are emotionally bound up with its past, present and future” (Tilley & Cameron-Daum, 2017: 13). However, despite people being intertwined with the landscape and subsequently emotionally bound up in the past, the era of racism with its racially discriminatory laws has ensured that people’s emotional attachment to the landscape remains locked in the past as black people were disconnected and alienated from their land. This clearly shows that there are limitations into Tilley & Cameron-Daum’s argument because access to landscape has been brutally managed in the interests of the elite and those who are economically privileged.

### [Relentless alienation and exclusion of black people in conservation spaces](#)

According to Farieda Khan (2000: 156),

South Africa's long and bitter history of racism and racial conflict dates back to the earliest days of white settlement in the mid-seventeenth century, has resonated down to the present, often negatively influencing the attitudes of historically marginalised communities toward environmental issues. The cumulative effect of racially discriminatory laws and punitive conservation regulations has been the gradual but relentless alienation of blacks from the environmental sphere and the growth of hostility to conservation issues as defined by the mainstream.

It is important to explore whether local black people, and township residents, in particular, have any desire to have Table Mountain decolonised and inclusive. In this context "Black South Africans were forced by the prevailing political realities and pervasive racial prejudice to operate outside mainstream environmentalism. Already deprived of their ties to the land by the process of conquest, colonisation, and discriminatory legislation, blacks inexorably became alienated from the natural environment as well as from the nascent environmental movement" (Khan, 2000: 157). The assumption is that local people have long been denied the mere privilege of connecting with their land, and their ecological world. Khan (2000: 159) postulates that "outside the political arena, blacks experienced a deepening sense of alienation from the environment as a result of their deliberate exclusion from the enjoyment of protected natural areas".

Khan (2000: 160) further argues that "this exclusion was particularly evident in the national parks, where blacks were only tolerated in the role of menial workers and seldom as visitors, even though the National Parks Act 57 of 1976 stated that national parks had been established for the benefit of the South African public as a whole". The assumption is that local people, and from the township residents of Cape Town have a desire to forge relations with Table Mountain National Park not by default, by only working as the menial workers. However, local people have a strong desire to use this iconic mountain in a manner that matters to them such as its possible traditional and cultural use which is explicated in chapter five. "The issue of the traditional use of natural resources in protected areas is also being addressed by national and provincial conservation authorities" (Khan, 2000: 175). It is admirable to hear that there has been this kind of engagement with the custodians of the protected areas, including Table Mountain, regarding natural resources for traditional uses. However, we await to hear the outcomes of these engagement and for tangible action to manifest.

Khan (2000: 175) suggests that “the aim is to persuade and educate black communities about the benefits of protected natural areas, and to gain their cooperation in the sustainable utilisation of natural resources.” Cocks (et al., 2012: 06) declare that “in failing to understand and meaningfully engage with the value and world views of the majority of South Africa’s population regarding nature, we are missing an important opportunity for implementing conservation more effectively”. I am interested to know what “more effective” conservation would mean and look like for local people of Cape Town.

### Land, black people link to land, and the reality of being landless

Nkosinkulu (2015) grapples with the concept of the land in his master’s thesis titled, “Diaspora, Identity and Xhosa Ancestral Tradition: Culture in Transience”. It is important to engage with the concept of land, and the concept in question is highly relevant, and central to my research study. Nkosinkulu (2015: 69) states that “human interaction with the land is both physical and spiritual. This means that land is suspended between a tomb and an altar, death and rebirth. The land is a home for the living and a burial place of the ancestors who guide those who live upon the land. The land is a mediator that binds human beings with their past, present, and future”. Land means everything to black South Africans. The exploration of this is still to come with the ecological world given their ancestors bitter experience of being cut off from their land.

Nkosinkulu insists that cultural preservation and identity formation is sharpened and influenced by the land. Some Xhosa people rely on the land for many of their cultural rituals, like male circumcision, the initiation of a *sangoma* (Diviners), and others. It seems that “by placing their mark on the land, humans shape the environment according to the cultural context and, in return, the ‘environment shapes culture’” (Eboh 2005: 01, cited in Nkosinkulu, 2015: 69). This statement is another illustration of the entanglement of land with personhood. Nkosinkulu (2015: 69) explains that “In my culture, the umbilical cord of a baby is cut off, and buried underground and during the rite of initiation, the foreskin is cut off and also buried underground”. This shows how important the land is to me, and to other black people. “The land has personal connections with the life and culture of the Xhosa people and is a keeper of their history and memories” (Nkosinkulu, 2015: 71). Nkosinkulu (2015: 72) insists that “to lose land and home is to lose that moment of rediscovery because, without those memories of human habitation and interaction on the land, the narrative of these people is also forgotten” (Nkosinkulu, 2015: 72).

Tim Ingold (2000) in an article entitled “The Perception Of the Environment”, In explaining the difference between land and landscape, land is the quantitative concept which is interchangeable. It is measured by the hectare, the acre and the square meter and that it is commodifiable. Landscape is viewed by contrast by its qualitiveness. It is often about its qualities in a particular area of land which also speaks to the quality in soil, minerals and its biota and this is defined as the realm of landscape. Etymologically speaking, landscape originates in the seventeenth century as a term for a particular experience of seeing a landscape, namely its representation in painting” (Rossler, 2009: 299) Landscape refers to a representation and that “landscape is nothing other than the congealment of what he terms the taskscape, which he describes as the patterns of production, consumption, movement, and exchange that constitute lives lived locally on the land” (Ingold, 2000: 198).

The landscape by this definition emerges from patterns of habitation (Ingold, 2000 cited in Goodrich, 2014). The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (2018: 05, cited in Vorster, 2019: 04), for example, “described land as a space directly related to the issue of ‘who I am, where I come from, where I belong.’ Local people need the land, want the land, and have sought to reclaim Table Mountain as part of their quest to rediscover their identities, and reclaim their dignity. “The moral strength of the land as social, and cultural space trajectory lies in its understanding that land ownership influences the well-being of whole communities, and affects generations of people. Places have historical meaning for people, are the arenas of identity formations, and provide inter-generational continuity, and meaning to peoples’ lives” (Bruegemann 2002: 36, cited in Vorster, 2019: 04).

Cesaire declares that “societies are drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out. I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life-from life, from the dance, from wisdom” (Cesaire, 1995: 43). Cesaire is spot on, land means everything to black people, and the absence of the land could be the beginning of an end to some people’s spiritual lives. Land, and mountains are the basis of our existence, because mountains represent our historical roots (Vorster, 2019: 04 cited in Masenya & Ramantswana, 2015).

## Healing power of nature, humanity, and well-being

According to Keniger (et al. 2013), escalating empirical evidence has emerged of a variety of quantifiable human benefits believed to be delivered through interaction with nature. “These benefits include positive effects on physical health, psychological well-being, cognitive ability, and social cohesion” (Keniger et al. 2013: 914). Keniger (et al. 2013) further explains that interacting with nature is essential in upholding and improving human well-being, especially in the rapidly urbanising world in which people find themselves confined to and trapped in the township throughout their childhood.

Keniger (et al. 2013: 918) further argues that there are “positive effect on individual religious pursuits or spiritual well-being, increased inspiration, and increased spiritual well-being when we interplay with nature”. This is the cornerstone of the essence of our beings, and it is vital for the revival of our spiritual connectedness.

Griffiths (2002) argues that unformed feelings, sentiments that the individual cannot express, may be produced by experience in nature. She quotes Naes, who suggests that “there is a realm beyond the material world, a spirit world beyond space and time, a spiritual realm. Nature is ‘spiritualised’” (Naes, 1989: 248 cited in Griffiths 2002). According to Griffiths, Naes “holds the view that the industrialised society of the developed world has lost touch with a crucial portion of human experience, the ability to be ‘alone’ and yet ‘not alone’ in nature, to subsume one’s own sense of relationship to something more significant than the individual personality or ego unites those who call themselves ‘deep ecologists’” (Griffiths, 2002: 259).

Apartheid urban planning and the subsequent emergence of townships isolated from both urban and natural centres have artificially created this alienation for many black South Africans. This might have resulted in some black South Africans losing a crucial part of their human existence. Griffiths (2000) citing Naes, further insists that the “mountain affords us an experience with God, and is God in its immensity, its proximity to the heavens, its status as neither entirely of the earth nor of the sky, but also in our necessary subjection to it, our necessary love of it, our unquestionable faith in it” (Griffiths, 2002: 261, cited Naes, 1989). Griffiths makes an interesting point, and this is one version of looking at the mountain as a place of a Christian God, which is a fair argument to make. When Griffiths says, “mountain affords us an experience with God” (Griffiths, 2002: 261, cited Naes, 1989).

Griffiths (2002: 261) posits that the “effect of this ‘nature experience’ is defined as nothing less than a transformation of the sense of self in relation to the universe”. Masango (2006), proposes that spirituality in the African context has a strong connection with ancestors, who in turn have a strong connection to land and soil. Masango declares that intrinsic belief in ancestral spirits is entrenched in the daily lives of some Africans. “Ancestors are people who have died and are buried, linking them to the land, and are believed to be protecting the living. By reciting their names during prayer, it is believed that they will pass the message to God or if they are ignored, bad luck and misfortune is likely to manifest itself” (Nkosinkulu, 2015: 81).

Mndende (2002: 21), in her thesis titled “Signifying Practices: AmaXhosa, Ritual Speech”, explicates the concept of ancestors, insisting that “from the time of conception until death, individuals within traditional religion and culture are engaged in actively maintaining close contact with the spiritual world, that is the world of their ancestors and Qamata (Creator). Communication between the world of the living and the ancestors, who reside in the spiritual world, is done in many ways both individually and communally. Mndende (2002: 21) posits that “ancestors play a crucial role within society in the form of healing, punishing, rewarding, and protecting living members of the clan. Communication between the living and the ancestral worlds is a reciprocal process and the absence of communication, from either side, is always a concern to members of the clan”.

Janet Hodgson’s book, *The God of Xhosas* (1982), provides context on who Qamata was, and the ancient relationship between Qamata and Xhosa people. Hodgson insists that Qamata was a living spirit, a supreme being, and was believed to have been the ‘God’ of the Xhosas who dwelled on mountains. She argues that this supreme being was worshipped long before white settlers came into South Africa. However, here a problem of translation arises. John Mbiti (1969), cited in Jele Manganyi and Johan Buitendag (2013: 02), challenges the use of the term “worship” and stated that such a term has no association with the Africans. Mbiti (1969: 178), cited in Manganyi and Buitendag (2013: 02), argues that “the word ‘worship’ does not exist in many African languages, and that the word ‘service’ would be a preferred term”. The word “worship” is often associated with Christianity.

Hodgson postulates that ordinary people were traditionally prohibited from talking directly to Qamata. They relied on their ancestors to talk to Qamata on their behalf (1982). This meant

that ordinary people would rely on *ukunqula* (veneration) to access their ancestors, using the burning of *impepho* (incense) to communicate, and ask their ancestors to speak to Qamata on matters that concerned them. This is a typical cultural practice amongst Xhosa people and other cultural groups whenever people see fit to interact and engage with their ancestors. In my view, ancestors and the Christian God both operate from the same spiritual realm. However, some Africans use *ukunqula* (veneration) to evoke and communicate with the spirit of ancestors, while Christians believe in the holy spirit and pray to communicate with their Christian God.

### The negotiated meaning, and the making of meaning through culture

It is important to explicate the importance of the concept of culture in order to provide context on the above argument. Nkosinkulu (2015) insists that culture gives meaning, and allows people to understand their positioning in the world whilst negotiating their identity. Lewis explains that “an individual human subject may participate in many different cultures simultaneously, and each of the cultures may have its own system of meanings which articulates itself through norms and values, beliefs, political ideas, rituals (repeated behaviours), clothing style, vocabulary, status position, and so on” (Lewis 2002: 15 cited in Nkosinkulu 2015: 57). Urban dwellers or township residents find themselves placed in a position where they have urban values, as well as the need to follow traditions that predated modern, urban, media-heavy lifestyles?

Thiong’O (1993a: 56-57), cited in Nkosinkulu (2015: 58), “compares culture to a flower by saying that culture has rightly been said to be to society what a flower is to a plant. What is important about the flower is not just its beauty. A flower is the carrier of the seeds for new plants, the bearer of the future of that species of plants”. Such a comparison speaks to the profound connection that some Africans have with the land, nature, and the ecological world.

### Xhosa people, their ancestral link with the Khoena, and ecology.

The Khoena, who are said to have named Table Mountain ‘Hoerikwaggo’ (meaning ‘the mountain in the sea’), have an ancestral link with the Xhosa people. It is an important and proper acknowledgement that the Khoisan were the first custodians of our land. Ross shows this ancestral link between the Khoisan and Xhosa people in his book, *The Order of Race in Colonial South Africa* (2014). Ross insists that Khoena had fled the Western Cape by 1710 and moved to the Eastern Cape where many intermarried with amaXhosa and thus their language shaped with isiXhosa (which has many more clicks than isiZulu). Thus the cultural heritage of

the Khoena pervades both the amaXhosa and the people of the Cape Flats, many of whom are reclaiming their Khoisan ancestry (2014). The term Khoena refers to the people of Khoisan descent. Ross (2014), explains that despite Khoena and Xhosa people having apparent precolonial differences in lifestyle. This did not deter the mobility of Khoena in the eighteenth century to spaces Xhosa people traditionally populated. Consequently, there is considerable number of Xhosa clans that are supposed to have ancestral links with Khoena. This suggests that the historical interrelation between the Khoena and Xhosa people has inevitably necessitated the indicated ancestral link between the Xhosa people and Khoena. Carver (2007: 39, cited in Nkosinkulu, 2015: 62) “describes the way that traditional Xhosa people live: Xhosa society is based on family units, largely hierarchical, and male-dominated.

This theme is reflected in all aspects of traditional Xhosa society, including the organisation of traditional homesteads, the structure of chiefdoms, marriage customs, reverence and interaction with ancestors, and rituals such as circumcision, that mark transition from one stage of life to another”. Cocks (et al., 2012: 06) argues that “natural landscapes and the associated biodiversity are closely linked to the strong nature-based religious belief, including a strong sense of interconnectedness with nature for some Xhosa people. Ancestor reverence is central to the belief system of the Xhosa people, whose identity and well-being is grounded in their strong relationship with ancestors who act as guides, mentors and protectors.” Nathan and Stengers (2018) contributes significantly to the notion of ecological habitation of ancestors. Nathan and Stengers (2018: 88) state that “the world is peopled not just with humans. We share it with a multitude of beings such as robs (guardian spirits), djinnas (spirits of the bush, water, mountains, forests, etc.), ancestors. All these non-humans are there, even if you, as a human, cannot manage to see them. They can brush past you, touch you, call you, appear in your dreams, follow you, hit you”. That we share the world with a multitude of beings such as ancestors, and that an interplay with ancestors is very strong, and highly powerful in the ecological world, is an important part of the Xhosa worldview.

### Theoretical Framework: Political Ecological Theory

A theoretical framework is used to provide a structure and also to support a theory. It is there to be used as a tool to analyse or discuss and provide a view point, like a lens which offers a consistent way of analysing the material. I will be working with political ecology theory as a

framework which I deem to be relevant and fitting to be used to analyse my data. This study uses political ecology theory as a framework to comprehend the logics and dynamics of exclusion of black South Africans from protected areas such as Table Mountain. The field of political ecology highlights the notion of social and environmental relations by arguing that they are deeply and inextricably intertwined. “It emphasises not only that the actual state of nature needs to be understood materially as the outcome of political processes, but also that the way nature itself is understood is also political” (Bryant and Bailey 1997, cited in Adams 2009: 197). In my undertaking to understand why local people from the townships of Cape Town are systematically excluded from any meaningful participation in the enjoyment of, or conservation and management of Table Mountain National Park, this study explored matters related to political ecology. Bryant (1998: 82, cited in Adams 2009: 197) insisted that, “at the heart of political ecology is the observation of the centrality of politics in attempts to explain the interactions between people and the environment, or the dynamics and properties of a ‘politicised environment’”. It seems that in reality, the current structure, policies and management of protected areas like Table Mountain National Park seem to favour white, minority groups and explain some of the conservation policies in this regard.

Cocks (et al., 2012: 06) state that:

In Southern Africa, conservation has a history of evictions of rural people to create protected areas, which has left a negative perception of conservation as being largely a White middle-class pre-occupation opposed to development that modern conservation approaches have largely failed to dispel. We suggest that local people’s values need to be incorporated into conservation plans and activities from the outset, in to their well-being, including the maintenance and strengthening of their cultural identity.

It is important to advocate the need to incorporate local people's interest into the conservation agenda especially since some black South Africans already have a profound connection with the ecological world, given some of the ritual practices taking place in the ecological spaces. “The way people relate to non-human nature around them (their environment) as well as the way they understand it is created by culture and bounded by social relations, by structures of power and domination” Adams (2009: 197). There is no evidence to suggest that ‘the powers that be’ at Table Mountain National Park have done enough to attract people from the township young and old, for them to interact with the ecological world of Table Mountain, and that clearly shows that there are cultural, ecological and economic politics at play, all of which are a legacy of apartheid.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

Methodology is “a philosophical stance of worldview that underlies and informs a style of research (Sapsford, 2006: 175).” I used an interpretive research method as its emphasis is on the experience and interpretation. This study has used an in-depth analysis with emphasis on the interpretive understanding of social phenomena by explorative ethnographic descriptions and interpretations of the subject matter of representation. I provided elaborate details on how the research is to be conducted and the approach to the study, whilst providing details of data collection.

### Research Methodology and Methods

According to (Henning et al), “methodology refers to the general principles by which we explore the social world and also how we prove that knowledge is valid (2004: 4).” This study employed qualitative research method. Strauss and Corbin (1998) insists that, qualitative method refers to getting information about lived experiences. Silverman (2001) explains that when it comes to finding out about the lives, views, values, cultures and traditions of people, the qualitative method becomes a useful tool in collecting data.

### Ethnographic Study

This study also employed ethnography as I joined some of the youthful participants in their outdoor activities with a purpose of collecting data. Johnson (2000: 111) described ethnography as “a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do.” This is about going to the field and doing participation observation which becomes key in the descriptive account of social life in particular, as it is the case in this study.

### Population and Sampling

The population for this study consists of 5 youthful participants, 3 participants from Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) and 2 participants from Chrysalis Academy (CA). I also had 5 adults who participated in this research. One of the latter participants came from

the Khoisan community, who is also a Rastafarian by religion. Another one was an elderly woman, who is also an Sangoma, and she comes from Phillipi. The last 3 participants were; land activist from Khayelitsha, an initiation forum chairperson from Gugulethu and the head of initiation in the Western Cape. Therefore, this means that I have a total sample size of 10 people and individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the 10 purposely sampled youth and adult respectively. The interviews were recorded, translated, transcribed and analysed using the framework method. The sampling in itself was purposely selected and this meant that as a researcher I had consciously selected people to form part of this study due to certain characteristics that may have been of interest to me as the researcher (Creswell and Creswell (2018).

### Auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography is a research method and methodology which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyse and understand cultural experience. According to Wall (2006: 148), “the research community is relatively comfortable with the concept of reflexivity, and this study has employed auto-ethnography which forms part of the qualitative method of enquiry”. This is why I deliberated and reflected on the importance of adding my voice as a researcher. “If a researcher’s voice is omitted from a text, the writing is reduced to a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others, with nothing new added” (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, cited in Wall, 2006: 148). This study has presented me with an opportunity to articulate my standpoint, which by so doing might have influenced the outcome of my research thought process.

Auto-ethnography is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context (Wall, 2016). In this study, it was critically important that I added my voice through self-narration, especially since I am situated or located within the social context of the study. Wall (2006: 151) states that “Autoethnography is accomplished through the use of personal writing and reflection, the stories of others”. This is precisely the reason I employed the method in question, especially as the subject matter or research question which I investigated not only concerns the ‘other’, or the participants I interviewed, but it also concerns me as well. “Auto-ethnography is a narrative approach to writing that falls under qualitative research in social studies” (Pinnegar & Danes 2007: 4). I have used my personal narrative in one facet of the data for this enquiry because “narrative inquiry embraces narratives as both the method and the phenomena of study”.

## Mobile Methodologies

This study also employs “mobile methodologies that are central to an analysis of a physical culture in nature, making sense of the embodiment, sense, and practice in the nature nexus” (Humberstone, 2013: 567). On a real level, and in the context of this study this means walking with people young and old on the mountain or in the ecological world whilst conducting empirical research. I walked with their respective groups of young people and their facilitators, experiencing the beauty that comes with walking in nature, whilst conversing with the targeted participants by putting questions to them about their experience. This is viewed as doing research through mobile technologies.

Humberstone argues that this is similar to many ethnographic approaches, which afford significance to “‘being there’ to data collection but also takes account of bodily movement through a place and time” (2013: 567). Mobile methodologies are vital and highly significant for this study. They afforded me an opportunity to get a different worldview and better insight into the knowledge which I sought from the participants. I might have had my own experience with the ecological world, but the worldview revealed through this method was for the benefit of my research study. This differs significantly from what I would learn through conversing with the same interlocutors as an ordinary person or fellow hiker. This mobile methodology has been described as “methods on the move” (Urry 2007: 39). This method goes beyond the norm and beyond the tradition of sitting down for an in-depth interview as it affords the researcher a broader perspective or worldview as aforesaid.

## Case Study

I made use of the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) and the Chrysalis Academy (CA) as case studies for one facet of this study which is explicated in chapter 4. I collected data from five youthful members of the two organizations quoted above. My association with BEEP as its founder played a positive role in the quality of the data collected. This is part of the auto-ethnography of this study, which is part of the qualitative method of inquiry. The data from BEEP participants was taken during one of our mountain activities on Table Mountain. I also joined Chrysalis Academy (CA) in their respective Table Mountain activities with a sole purpose of collecting data, as I sought to investigate any potential gains, benefits and the impact of my subjects’ interplay with nature, and their ecological world and what, if anything, it means for their well-being.

## Data Collection, and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis has been defined by Mayring (2000: 02) “as an empirical, methodological controlled analysis of a text within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models without rushed quantification”. Patton (2002: 453) “defined it as any qualitative data reduction and sense making, effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. It is important then to use qualitative content analysis, because it allows the researcher to understand social “reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (Zhang and Wildemuth, 1966: 01).

After collecting data which I deemed relevant for the study, I began a process of content analysis of the collected materials. “This process involved a systematic reading of the texts” (Klaus Krippendorff, 2004: 3). This allowed for objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content (Berelson, 1952: 18), which has allowed the researcher to draw valid inferences from text to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2004: 3). For my data collection, I mostly used in-depth interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Some of the participants were interviewed in isiXhosa, whilst others were a mixture of IsiXhosa and English. However, the narrative accounts of those who spoke IsiXhosa were translated into English for the purposes of my data analysis, and in this dissertation, both languages appear in interview material.

## Limitations

One of the limitations for this study has been that I have had to conduct some of the interviews during the Covid 19 lockdown. This meant that I had to hold my interviews virtually due to the enforced pandemic regulations, which limited my interaction with the participants. In the discipline we as researchers are expected to conduct primary research, and where we are required to conduct our studies empirically and by means of employing qualitative methods such as in-person in-depth interviews, fieldwork, participation observations, and mobile technologies to mention a few. I could not look at some of these participants in their eyes as I relied on WhatsApp calls as the medium of communication. This meant that I could not assess their emotional reactions to my research questions. However, I was able to conduct some of the in-person interviews and mobile technologies in some of the interviews when I managed to join the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) and the Chrysalis Academy (CA)

in their Table Mountain activities. A further limitation arose when I interviewed three chairpersons from different initiation forums across the townships of Cape Town. However, I could only make use of the data collected from one of them because I had enough data collected from other participants as that would exceed the word count limit for this study. I endeavoured to furnish adequate evidence of all the claims I make in this study, however the biggest limitation is the lack of available literature written from the African perspective which address some of my claims, especially claims related to Qamata, ancestors and African culture.

### Ethical Considerations

In this research, including the fieldwork, I upheld and maintained high level of compliance with the University of Cape Town's codes of conduct and ethics for researchers involving human subjects, along with the ethical guidelines as explicated by Anthropology Southern Africa (ASA, 2005). An important consideration was to ensure the rights of research participants are protected, which included their right to remain anonymous. Therefore, pseudonyms have been employed to those who wished to remain anonymous, whilst two participants namely (Buhle Booi and Clement Williams) preferred to have their original names used in the research. Throughout my research, I ensured that my participants were treated with the utmost respect. Upon meeting my participants for the purpose of conducting an interview, I endeavoured to explicitly explain the aims and purpose of my research project.

Permission was sought from Chrysalis Academy (CA) to join them when they lead groups up Table Mountain, and I have also led several trips up Table Mountain with Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP). The two organizations, and their respective participants were made aware of the aims, and the purpose of this research, the methods to be used and the full details of how the research will be conducted. Participants were given consent forms to sign before they could participate in the interviews. The participants in question were given adequate time to sign the consent forms before the interview could take place. The participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, and that they were at liberty to withdraw anytime they wished to do so. They were further informed of the nature of the study, and were asked to sign a written consent form (Annexure B). The University of Cape Town expects each student to go through ethical clearance before conducting any type of research. I applied, and received ethical clearance from the research office (see annexure A).

## Chapter 4

### How has access to Table Mountain improved well-being among young people from townships of Cape Town?

#### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the accounts of three members of the Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP) who describe the transformative experience of an overnight hiking Camp up Table Mountain which became a healing process from previously unacknowledged traumas. The pseudonyms of the three young women I interviewed in August 2020 are Yolanda Mbombo, Nonkanyiso Malase, and Noloyiso Masiza. They all joined BEEP initially as participants when they were in their respective primary schools. These young adults were just young girls when they started leading groups up Table Mountain along side other BEEP senior guides. They grew up in the organization, and have subsequently become part of its leadership. BEEP, with the help of the three young women, strives to expose young people to the ecological world.

#### **Findings**

It is hoped that such exposure to green spaces will be used as a symbol of light, a symbol of hope, and a rare opportunity to rekindle their dreams. It is hoped that in the aftermath of their exposure into the natural world, they would be imbued with the spirit of triumph, and resilience. With reference to Thoreau's body of thought, George Marcus comments that "in some sense, the act of walking embodies a worldview oddly placed in intellectual history. Thoreau called for a dynamic understanding of nature that transcended the contemporary emerging discussion on environmental issues" (Marcus, 2003: 04). This chapter's aims and objectives are to investigate ways in which black environmentalism can be advanced via hiking and walking. However, to achieve that it is imperative that the younger generation from local communities are constantly engaged with the ecological world by means of walking, hiking and beyond.

I began my interview with Yolanda Mbambo, who initially joined BEEP as a voluntary member in 2011 at the age of 11 years. Yolanda has led many groups up Table Mountain with BEEP over the years. She currently serves as a secretary of the organization while she is also doing her third year in Business Management at Cape Peninsula University of Technology

(CPUT). When I asked her to unpack the kind of social ills she faced prior to her first contact with Table Mountain, she said;

*Eyona ngxaki ndakendajongana nayo mna kukudlwengulwa. Kukungakwazi ukubanomntu wokuthetha naye ngalengxaki phofu ndandisemncinci ngoba ndandine minyaka eyi-6, ndisenza u-grade R. Zange ndibe nesibindi sokuthetha nomama wam ngale nxaki iminyaka.*

The problem that I once encountered was being raped. I never had someone to talk to about my rape ordeal but I was very young as I was only six years old, doing grade R. When that happened I never had the guts to talk to my mother about that rape for years now.

Chris Van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela discuss the concepts of narrative and its effectiveness to those who are working with trauma related issues in their book, *Narrating Our Healing, Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (2009). They argue that “turning one’s life into a narrative is a vital way of finding meaning in discovering causal links between different events we create” (2009: 02). Yolanda elaborated on the trauma that came with her rape ordeal, and how it affected her emotionally, saying: “I underestimated how my silence would affect my upbringing. I was under the impression that the problem would go away but it still haunted me down. I think it was made worse by the fact that I never received counselling after the ordeal. I think I only dealt with it when I was doing grade 7 after I was exposed to Table Mountain by BEEP. *Ndandingayazi indlela yokudilishana nalento ixhesha elide* (I did not know how to deal with this traumatic situation for a very a long time)”. She further insisted that “Ever since I got exposed to nature through Table Mountain somehow I was able to deal with my horrific past”.

Yolanda explained that “in the aftermath of that, now whenever I have flashback of the ordeal. I do not lose my sleep anymore. It does little to affect me the way it used to. BEEP has a program designed to get its beneficiaries to confront their social ills. I think that is what really helped me. It was after one of these sessions that I made a breakthrough. I felt as if a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders. *Andazi ukuba ndingayicacisa njani* (I do not know how to explain the feeling)”. According to Van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela (2009: 11) “It is interesting to note that people suffering from structural trauma may gradually become so used to the traumatic situation that it becomes traumatic to move out of it, what most people call “abnormal” has become normal for them”. However, this was certainly not the case for

Yolanda. Yolanda said further: “For me, I can safely say that healing can truly be found on the mountain as I can attest to that. Healing for me is being able to forget, okay not necessarily to forget but rather to accept the realities of life or what has happened in my life has happened however difficult it may be. I realised that I could not change the past. Accepting the reality however painful it may have been would be a step in the right direction. I am now able to move forward with my life, and begin a new chapter in my life”. According to Nkosinkulu, 2015:66) “Narratives preserve events or past experiences; they serve as reminders of the point of origin challenges, the successes, the losses and the history of the people. Narratives teach people lessons that can help them in their lives”. Nkosinkulu (2015: 65) is also of the view that “It is evident that narratives have the ability to restore identity, influence its nature and that a loss of narrative becomes a loss of identity”.



**Figure 1:** BEEP hike with a group of young people on Table Mountain (Source: author’s photograph).

Nonkanyiso Malase was 12 years old when she became a voluntary member of the organization in question. She joined BEEP when she was doing grade 7 at Bongoletu Primary School. Malase was trained in leadership skills, and was then presented with an opportunity to practice her newly acquired leadership skills by co-guiding different groups up Table Mountain. Malase is currently doing her final year in LLB (Law) at University of Western Cape (UWC) whilst

she continues to serve in the BEEP leadership structure. I asked her to reflect on her first contact with nature on Table Mountain. She said “Climbing up the mountain was rather frustrating, and hard for me. *Ndandino-msindo, ndidinwe yilendlela enyukayo, ndifuna ugoduka* (I was getting frustrated with the steep terrain to the top of the mountain, that I wanted to give up, and go home) until I was encouraged by the BEEP team to toughen up. The mountain was not just physically challenging but it was also emotionally draining”.

[...] The beauty of flora, the breath-taking scenic surroundings, and the wonderful sounds of the distinctive birds inaugurated a sense of calmness within me. I started to enjoy climbing up the mountain, and began to walk with a bit of courage. I started to appreciate the sense of tranquillity, and subsequently found myself soul-searching. I was reminded of the past I tried so hard to erase. The past which has bothered me for years. What bothered me the most was the fact that I grew up with a lot of anger as I felt abandoned by my parents at a very young age. I was raised by u-*Makazi* (my aunt), and later lived with *umakhulu* (my grandmother). Honestly speaking, I could not understand why I was being passed from one relative to another even though both of my parents were still alive. I could not comprehend whether I was the one who was a problem. *Lonto yandenza ndangumntu omoshayo ndingathandeki* (I became mischievous and unlikable as a result of that), so *i-self-esteem yam yayihle kakhulu* (I had a very low self-esteem). I felt as if I did not belong in this world. I did not feel needed and appreciated. It felt like I was useless, and one of those unplanned children. I did not believe that my mother was happy to have me as her child. I resorted at attempting to commit suicide by consuming petrol. I was in the Eastern Cape staying with my grandmother when that happened. I was rushed to a nearby clinic in Cofimvaba. When I got to the clinic I was immediately rushed to a referral emergency hospital in East London, where I stayed for 21 days. I must have been 11 years of age at the time.

[...] In the aftermath of the incident, I was told that I should come to Cape Town to live with my mother, and my stepfather. My relationship with my mother did not improve, instead it deteriorated, as we were practically living in separate worlds whilst living under the same roof. I was very angry at her, and blamed her for my failed attempted suicide. I did not recognize her as my mother. I bottled up all my problems for many years until I was introduced to Table Mountain for the first time in my life.

Howes (2005: 7) suggests that “embodiment implies an integration of body-mind situating the embodiment in time and space and is suggestive of the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind environment”. I was interested in inquiring whether nature could become a source of therapy to many who find themselves in a similar traumatic situation. Nonkanyiso explained her experience with nature, the ecological world on Table Mountain. She said:

I was doing grade 7, when I went to Table Mountain for the first time. I must say during my journey up the mountain, it felt as if I needed to be selfish, that I needed to reflect on my life. I found myself crying, it felt like I was having a conversation with myself. My mind for obvious reasons was dominated by the fact that I did not see eye to eye with my mother. I always thought that I was a problem hence I even wanted to take my life in the past. When I was climbing up the mountain, and through my conversation with nature, I somehow realized that I was not a problem. The mountain made me lighter, changed my mindset, and I started to think positively about my life. Today my mother, and I are the best of friends. I think if it was not for the mountain, I would not be where I am today. I truly found healing on the mountain. I must say, after the trip to Table Mountain, I have never even thought of committing suicide again, I value my life very much. If it was not for the mountain, I am certain that I would still be trapped in the life of despair.

When I asked her what it meant to be on the mountain, and what impact the mountain has had on her life, she responded that

“the mountain made me stronger and tolerant. Climbing the mountain, and connecting with nature enabled me to withstand difficult situations in my life. It gave me the courage to deal with every difficult situation I face in my life. I was reborn, and I am a totally different person now from who I was before. In time I replaced the word impossible with possible. Henceforth I never felt like there is anything impossible to solve in my life since the day I climbed Table Mountain. The mountain gave me strength to deal with challenges that I continue to face in my life. The mountain not only refreshed my mind but also significantly changed my worldview, and transformed me to be a better person”.

Noloyiso Masiza is another young woman who joined BEEP at the tender age of 12 years. She was at St Marys Primary School when she first joined in 2011. She started leading groups up Table Mountain at the same age cited above with the support of BEEP senior guides. Masiza basically grew up on the mountain, and to date she is the chairperson of the organization. She

is also doing her last year in Computer Science at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

I asked her to give me an account of how life was prior to her experience with nature, with Table Mountain, and the ecological world? She explained;

“For years, I have always been bothered by the fact that there was always constant in-fighting between my mother and my father. There was no peace at home. For us as children we found ourselves in the middle of their fighting. This situation started to affect me emotionally. *Ndingatsho ukuthi ingxaki zemali zazingomnye unobangela wengxwabangxwaba* (I think financial problems were some of the causes of the in-fighting). However, the major cause was due to the fact that my father had an affair with someone known to us from the same street as ours. I was emotionally affected by that, because I had to listen to the exchange of unkind, and abusive words from my parents, and this became a common occurrence”.

Masiza explained that;

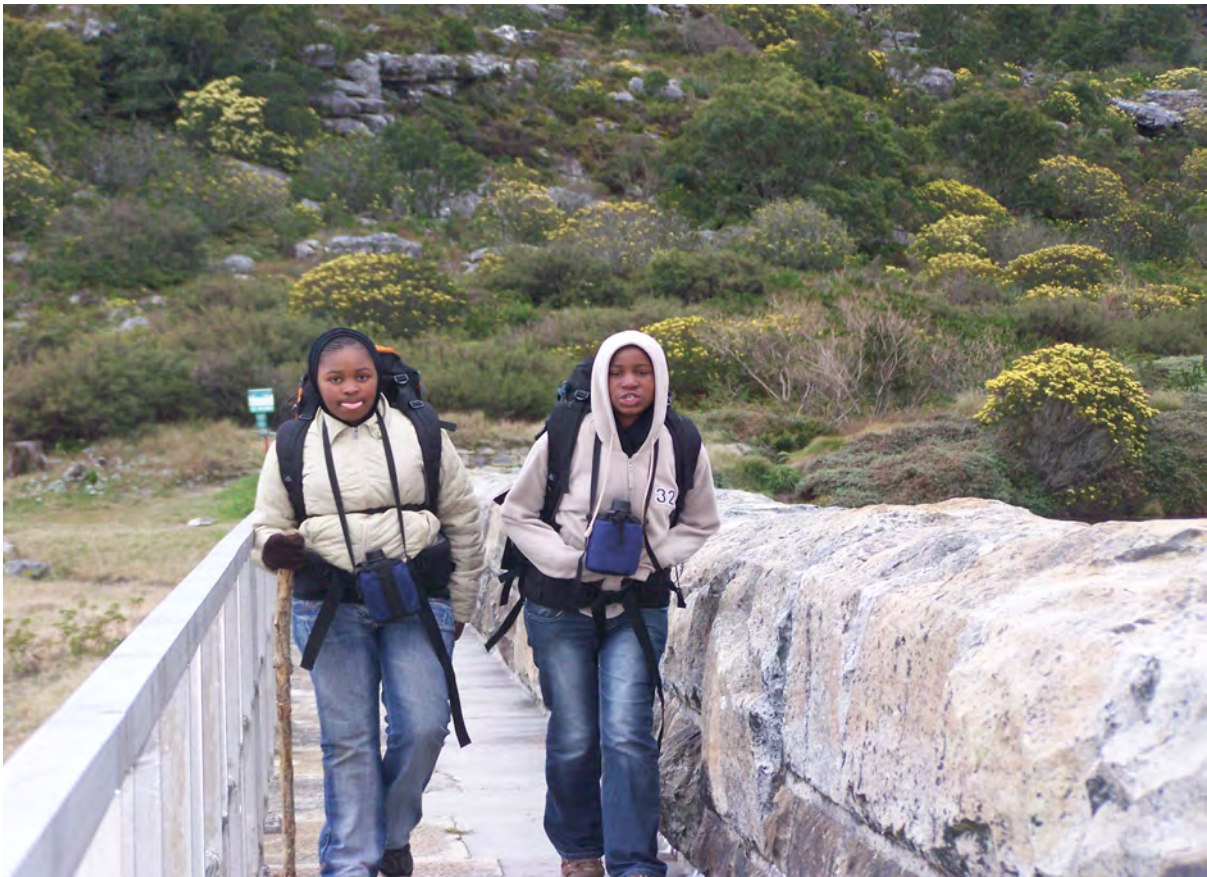
“I think what bothered me the most, was the fact that my mother was hurting while I could not do anything. I felt helpless, and only wished there was something I could have done. It was very painful for me, I had my spirit broken into pieces. I was constantly in tears because of my home situation which became unhealthy for me, and my siblings. My father did not take ownership of the situation even though he could see that we were suffering, he did not speak to anyone at home.”

In explaining the impact of her experience with nature on Table Mountain, she said,

I was in grade 7 when I went to Table Mountain with BEEP for the first time. The message I took from the mountain is that, the pain you endure, at the bottom of the mountain is less than the joy you feel at the top of the mountain. When I reached the summit of the mountain I was very proud of myself. I immediately realized that I could conquer the world. My heart was in a jubilant mood. I felt like a winner, a conqueror, and I just cannot put it into words. I must say, being at the top of the mountain somehow revitalized my spirit. I felt at peace on the mountain simply because of the surrounding environment which I was introduced to. I must say, not only the environment was very different but even the air which I breathed was different. Walking in nature, in the ecological world where I am surrounded by flora, different rock formations, whilst my

silence is interrupted by the variety of birds' calls which truly brought a sense of peace, and had a transformative effect in my life. [...] I got healed from the past realities of life which have been haunting me for years. The healing meant that I was not affected by my past anymore, and that I was able to move on with my life with-out any hindering from the past. I must recognise the role that nature, and ecological spaces played in my transformative period. This has made it possible for me to reflect to my unkind past life whilst confronting my demons. It freed my mind, re-created a new self, and gave me the new leaf in life.

This is all too familiar because nature has been kind to me as well. I am of the view that ecological world, valleys, caves, and mountain have a great deal of power, which include healing power. This statement is informed by my profound ties with nature, mountain, and the entirety of the ecological world. I must admit that every time I am on the mountain whether leading a group or walking by myself, I feel a very strong sense of connection with nature, with ancestors, with God, which gives me a sense of hope.



**Figure 2:** BEEP young leaders hiking through Woodhead bridge at the back of Table Mountain (Source: author's photograph).

The natural elements of the mountains, along with the sense of tranquillity they bring, can be used as a platform suited to confront social difficulties. Keniger et al (2003) insists that interacting with nature is essential in upholding, and improving one's well-being especially in the rapidly urbanizing world. Since I have a very strong ties with Beyond Expectation Environmental Project (BEEP), I thought that it is important to bring to the fore a version of another organization doing similar work and this was to avoid being biased towards the knowledge that I endeavour to produce. This led me to enquire as to whether or not participants on the Chrysalis Academy (CA) programs had found similar benefits in terms of their well-being when interacting with nature, ecology, and the mountain.

I approached the Chrysalis Academy and asked if they would be keen to be part of this study as they also use ecological spaces in some of their programs. I set out the accounts of two members of Chrysalis Academy namely Melikhanya Mathiso, and Zolisa Makhala (both pseudonyms), one being the instructor, and the other being a student. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2020, I interviewed Melikhanya Mathiso. Mathiso initially joined Chrysalis Academy as a student, and later become one of the youth instructors. He now facilitates and runs some of its programs which also include nature-based activities on Table Mountain. I began by probing what made him choose to work for Chrysalis Academy. He said;

I enjoy working with the youth as it is something that is very much close to my heart. It is more like a career for me to work as an instructor at this academy. I have learnt a lot from this program from being an ordinary student to becoming an instructor. However, before I became an instructor I also had my own challenges.

He explained further that:

I grew up without my father, I was raised by a single parent. When I first came to this academy as a student, I was unsettled. I was always in a foul mood, and angry. I think the anger was as a result of battling my social difficulties as I could not understand why I was abandoned by my father. I always had questions with no answers, and that took its toll on me as my character changed for worse. However, that was me before I joined Chrysalis Academy as a student. When I came here, I connected with other students who were coming from different communities, who had different personalities. After spending some time with other guys, I then realized that I was not the only one who was haunted by the past, and that others also had their own social challenges. It came to light

that many others in the group were also raised by single parents, and that some of the guys also did not live with their fathers.

When asked to share his experience of hiking up the mountain, Mathiso said:

Through my work with Chrysalis Academy, I became exposed to outdoor life, an experience I continue to enjoy. When I first joined Chrysalis Academy, I was given leadership orientation classes. The program is divided into four phrases. It was a really tense week until we went for an outdoor exercise, which was a hike up the mountain. I climbed the mountain, it was my first time to climb the mountain, and we were walking as a group. I decided to walk at the back, and I walked at my own pace. I felt connected to something. I was walking very slowly, and quietly. I was walking but very deep in my thoughts, reflecting on my life as I felt profoundly connected to the birds, to the wonderful sounds of crickets, to the indigenous plants, and I fell in-love with nature. According to Marcus (2003), all the information needed by the walker, when the walker has an intercounter with the ecological world, is provided by nature itself. “This allows for the walker to transcend the path behind and enter into the very order of things (Marcus, 2003: 5).”



**Figure 3:** Chrysalis Academy participants hiking in Silvermine Section of Table Mountain National Park (Source: Chrysalis Academy Staff).

Mathiso further explained how deeply he connected with nature on Table Mountain, saying that:

Up on the mountain, we were instructed to do a circle of life which is the solo program, where we had to spend time all on our own in nature. After the solo exercise we were asked to sit in a circle. We shared our experiences, our thoughts on the exercise, and how we felt during our solo exercise. I think being in the outdoors or taking up space in nature created a chance to engage with my inner-self, with God, and with my ancestors. The walk gave me a different perspective on life. It really gave me an awakening, and a new perspective in life. It was right there that I realized that I needed to change my character for better. I did not want my child to inherit my social troubles. I wanted a clean life free from any animosities.

He further posits that:

Nature came to my rescue, and truly transformed my life from the person that I was to whom I am now. After having spent time in nature here at the academy, I have found healing. I even had a quote which motivated me a lot, which says ‘when an egg breaks by outside force, life ends but when the egg breaks by inside forces life begins’. In other words, to speak about how you feel is the only thing that can help you, because there is no medication for inner scars. The only way to heal is to speak about it, sharing about your problems. Being in the outdoors has been the highlight of it all. I would not be able to find the kind of healing I found if I was in unsafe, and uncondusive spaces like the townships.

Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2009: 02) insist that “we are the narrators of our life stories, and we also play the part of the main character in them. Our stories are ‘autobiographies’, unified by the actions of the main character striving towards a future, and determined by a past”. This is what has been reported by the participants from BEEP as well whom I interviewed. They explained how in nature, they have been able to reflect and review their past by confronting some of the social challenges they face, which then, in hindsight, is key to their future successes.

Zolisa Makhala (pseudonyms) was a student at Chrysalis Academy at the time of the interview, and he was two months into the program, which is normally three months long. Makhala was

recommended by the senior staff from the academy to be interviewed. He was selected to give an account of his experience with the ecological world, and the mountain during his time at the academy. I was told that he already had a few interactions with the ecological world prior to the interview. The interview with Makhala was also held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2020. I began by asking him why he joined Chrysalis Academy, and what he hoped to achieve by joining the academy. Makhala said

my goal is to get employment as I do not want to go back to the township, and do nothing. I just want to get a job, and change my life for better, change the way I do things.

I was interested to hear how he felt when he connected with nature or just the general feeling of being on the mountain. He said:

For me it was not my first time to be on the mountain, as I had an experience of being on the mountain when I went to the initiation school. Now when I was on Table Mountain with my fellow students from Chrysalis Academy, I started comparing the two experiences. I would draw up images, and compare things I used to do when I was at the initiation school, and with this mountain experience which I found it to be tough. When we climbed the mountain for the first time it was raining from the start until our boots, and all our clothes were completely wet. The backpacks we were carrying were also wet, so much so that even the clothes inside the backpacks were also wet, it was really tough. It was no fun to walk in the rain like that. The journey itself to the top of the mountain was easy for me since I was used to walking on the mountain because I grew up in the Eastern Cape, and walking a long distance was not something new to me.

The highlight of the entire walk was reaching the summit, and when you are at the top there is an amazing view. That made me realize how beautiful Cape Town is from the top. To me the walk was a reflection of the life journeys as we bound to face similar challenges in life. You begin to reflect on your own experiences, and you draw strength from some of the past events. And that experience becomes key as it prepares you for tougher challenges ahead. The walk up the mountain truly helped me emotionally, and spiritually because I am a lot calmer here, and for some reason I am able to control my temper as I used to be aggressive in the township but that has changed since I came here.

Humberstone (2013: 568) argues that “Narratives of nature-based or adventurous activities frequently identify transcendental or spiritual features. I think solo hiking is a method of attaining a transcendental state, a kind of walking meditation”. This emphasizes the intuitive and significant role that nature plays in helping to improve our well-being as humans.

Makhala concluded by saying that

“Climbing the mountain has indeed helped me change my attitude, and it gave me a different perspective about life. I found healing from nature, but I think for healing to be found one has to be open minded, open his or her heart, and you start by forgiving yourself for everything that has gone wrong in your life. I think without doing that first, I think it would be difficult to find healing, and see change in your life”.



**Figure 4:** Participants from Chrysalis Academy hiking Table Mountain as part of its outdoor activities (source: Chrysalis Academy staff).

## **Conclusion**

Each of the five people interviewed seems to have found in their experience a way of re-narrating their life stories, via the physical experience of being part of a natural environment, outside of the stress-filled townships, and being able to experience what it means to view the city of Cape Town from the top of the mountain. That experience of situating one’s self in

nature appears to have offered each person a way of re-situating themselves in the world, and being able to begin to offer a different narrative of self. “Transforming the events in one’s life into a narrative structure is a way of counteracting the transience of life. In a narrative, every small component form part of the whole, when one episode has been narrated, it is not over, because it keeps reverberating, (Van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela (2009: 03). The five participants have articulated how their interplay with the ecological world has transformed their lives, and how they found healing through nature whilst having their well-being vastly improved.

## Chapter 5

### Reclaiming our Heritage: Tracing roots to the mountains

#### Introduction

In this chapter I investigated how indigenous people, and contemporary Xhosa people, trace their roots to mountains, and to ask what deeper cultural and spiritual meanings are attached to it for them? In this study I interviewed Nontembeko Mamsukwini (a pseudonym), a Sangoma, and an elderly daughter of the soil. Mamsukwini discussed how Xhosa people interacted with the mountain, and the ecological world at large, and the extent of their intrinsic connectedness. I also interviewed Benjamin Lakey, a Rastafarian of Khoisan descent, and a son of the soil. Sons and daughters of the soil are the people of all ages whose origins are from the African continent, in the context of this study I am referring to Black South Africans. Lakey with his insightful knowledge and wisdom shed some light on whether there has been any intrinsic connectedness between indigenous people, mountains, and ecological world. Both participants discussed whether the people in question have anyway contributed to the sustainability of the environment they occupied and interacted on the mountain.

#### Findings

On 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2020, I interviewed Nontembeko Mamsukwini from Victoria Mxenge, in Philippi. I approached her because my life experience has taught me that elders have a profound knowledge of our African history and culture. I inquired whether Africans have any form of historical connection with mountains. She explained:

<i>Abantu abanyama baphuma emiqolombeni. Umqolomba ufumaneka ezintabeni</i>	Black people come from the caves. Caves are only found on the mountain.
<i>Intaba yimvelaphi nalapho kukhulelwe khona luluntu oluntsundu.</i>	<i>Intaba</i> -a mountain- is the historical upbringing for Africans.
<i>Incambu yethu isezintabeni.</i>	Our roots are on the mountain.
<i>Njonga umzekelo abantu bakudala babeqhwitha ngelitye. Babengaqhwithi</i>	For example, people who lived on the mountain used stones, and rocks to make

*ngomatshisi umatshisi uze nababarheme,  
ontamolikhuni.*

fire. They were not using matches as the matches came with the white settlers.

Mamsukwini points out that some Africans and black people in general used to live *emiqolombeni* (in caves). It is understood that our ancestors are believed to be dwelling on the mountain. Mndende (2002) explains that sometimes Sangomas (diviners) call upon the ancestors in their respective habitats during a particular ritual or when a Sangoma communicates with their ancestors. The Sangoma would call upon the ancestors in the river, sea, forest and caves which are situated on mountains. My assumption is that the diviners (sangoma) would not call upon the ancestors in rivers, sea, forest and caves if they did not believe they were inhabitants of those areas. Cocks (et al., 2012) wrote of the dearth of literature in relation to this subject in South Africa. It is my desire to furnish adequate evidence of all the claims I make in this study. However it is not always possible because of the lack of available literature in some areas. This is the scholarly gap that this study endeavoured to fill up.

Mamsukwini explained how plants, wild fruits and some of the medicinal plants were used by their forefathers as sources of food. She further said:

*Abantu bakudala babephila nangezityalo  
ezifumaneka endle*

Our forefathers also used wild fruits as their source of food.

*Mna ndithetha nge ziphingo, itolofiya,  
ingwenya, nezinye izityayo*

I am talking about; *Isiphingo* (Canthiu Inerme), *itolofiya* (Cactu - Prickly pear, *Opuntia*) *Ingwenye*, (*Harpephyllum caffrum*), and other wild fruits.

This clearly shows how indigenous people, including some Xhosa people, have always had profound ties with their land and mountains. This can be interpreted as a symbiotic relationship between them, the land, and the mountain.

*Intaba yimvelaphi yoluntu olumnyama,  
kulaphobesinqula khona uQamata. Abantu  
abamhlophe bathi ngu-Thixo thina sithi ngu-  
Qamata athi amasilamsi ngu-Ala ukhona  
ngalonke ixhesha. uQamata, uQamata  
sisinyanya esikhulu esingu-thixo wethu.*

The roots of some Africans, like Xhosas lie on the mountain, it is where we worshiped or service *Qamata*, white people call him God while *amaXhosa* call him Qamata, the supreme being whilst Muslim call him, Allah, which is a spirit that lives amongst them. *Qamata* is viewed as the most powerful ancestor by some Xhosa people.

However, I would argue that while Mamsukwini offers deep knowledge of the significance of the ancestors, this is merely a historical account of the ancient culture of the Xhosa people. As my interviews with the participants and leaders of the two organizations confirmed, today's younger urbanised Xhosa generation often has little knowledge of who Qamata is, and might have no meaning to them. I am of the view that Qamata has been phased out, and subsequently lost its meaning in the aftermath of the introduction of Christianity. The interesting question is how it came about that Xhosa people disassociated themselves from Qamata if indeed Qamata is the most important ancestor for Xhosa people.

I think it is important to understand the concept of an ancestor to fully grasp the above argument. Mndende (2002: 21) says of the concept of the ancestors that:

from the time of conception until death, individuals within traditional religion and culture are engaged in actively maintaining close contact with the spiritual world, that is, the world of their ancestors, and Qamata (Creator). Communication between the world of the living, and the ancestors, who reside in the spiritual world, is done in many ways both individually, and communally. Ancestors play a crucial role within a given society in the form of healing, punishing, rewarding, and protecting living members of their clan. Communication between the living, and the ancestral worlds is a reciprocal process, and the absence of communication, from either side, is always a concern to members of the clan.

Mamsukwini confirms Mndende's point and she went on to say that:

*Intaba izakuhlala ihleli ibalulekile kuthi  
thina bantu bamnyama.*

The mountain will forever be important to us Africans, whether you are Xhosa, Zulu etc.,

*ngela xhesha lotat' omkhulu bekusithi xa  
imvula imkile kuthiwe makuyiwe*

During the ancient time  
and during the drought period,

*entabeni engekho umntu phaya ke  
onxibe isiqolangaphambili bhoka  
ngexhesha*

people were mobilized to climb the mountain to  
pray for the rain. People wore certain types of  
clothes, which were considered to be

*Bonke abantu bayabhinqa  
bambhethe ingubo abanye.  
bahamba ngenyawo ibiyindlela  
ebebehlonipha ngayo*

appropriate to stand before Qamata, and  
everyone was expected to wear them  
accordingly. Others covered themselves with a  
blanket and walked barefoot  
as their way of showing respect to *Qamata*.

*siyanqula, sithandaze phambi kokuba  
sihambe. Bebenqula bethandaza becenga  
imvula kuQamata, benyukela ngaphezu  
kwentaba.*

In actual fact, they often prayed, before  
heading to the mountain. And each one of  
them would not call upon *Qamata* but we  
would call upon their ancestors. They praised,  
worshipped and prayed to *Qamata* for rain as  
they moved towards the top of the mountain.

*Bathi besihla kulo ntaba ibe inetha  
ngamandla imvula*

After praying on top of the mountain, as they  
descended the mountain, the rain would start  
pouring.

Some black South Africans might not be aware that Xhosa people once upon a time had Qamata as their God. Not much has been said about Qamata in scholarly literature; only a handful of people have written about this God of the Xhosas. This knowledge production may provide some insightful perspective as to why black South Africans in the ancient time felt deeply connected to the mountains. I wonder, could it be that the original God of the Xhosa people who is supposed to be looking over us is no more? Hodson (1982) argues that we have not only lost Qamata, but we have also lost part of our identity and our dignity. In this context, the loss of dignity can be associated with the abandoning of Qamata because those who believed in him could be spiritually poor in the absence of Qamata, who was a source of life for them.

Mamsukwini further said:

*Noxa intaba noba uphi  
abantu abakhulu bahla entabeni.*

The mountain no matter where you are, remains very important. Let me tell you a secret. All our ancestors are on the mountain

*Ikhona ingoma ethi zile zile zilele na,  
zilele phezu kwentaba*

There is a song which goes as following; the ancestors are sleeping, sleeping on top of the mountain,

*Alele amakhosi alelebezu kwentaba  
phezu kwentaba.*

They are sleeping, sleeping on top of the mountain, the ancestors are sleeping on top of the mountain,

Ahla phezu-kwentaba amakhosi kwaye xa esiza umntu wawo uzakuwabona ngozigquma.

Ancestors are descending down the mountain, as they descend from the mountain, the minute the sangoma (Diviner) sees the ancestors with their faces covered,

*Uthi ke wena mntu wawo uwathuthe  
ukunqula amakhosi, uwakhokele angene,  
uwahlalise phantsi amakhosi uthi  
makahlale angene*

he or she would glance at them, and begin to praise or worship them by calling out their clan names, he or she would then invite them to come inside, and bless the ritual.

*Wena ungumntu nje awuziboni xa zifika  
ezizinyanya zibonwa zisangoma*

Other ordinary people would not be spiritually inclined to see the ancestors because, these senses, and powers are only afforded to a *sangoma*, who would be leading the ritual.

*Mna mntu wasemzini omkhulu, xa  
bekusetyenza umntu wakwamkhulu  
ndiyabona xa bekusetyenza phaya*

For example, as someone who got initiated through the river, if I walk past a particular river, I could pick up spiritually if there was someone who recently got initiated at the river.

Mamsukwinin added that:

*Ononkala yenye yezilo zabantu  
abantsundukodwa uluntu oluntsundu lutya  
ononkala*

Unonkala (Crab) is another totem animal amongst Xhosa people but (yet our people are eating Crabs today). They are basically eating their totem animal. *Sangoma's* even have a song which praises the Crab. And the song go as follows.

*Wadidiyela uNonkala ngasemlanjeni,  
Wadidiyela unonkala, wandindiyela*

The Crab is brewing something by the river.  
The Crab is brewing something by the river.

*Unonkala ngasemlandleni'  
Kudala babebahlonipha oNkonkala,  
Ibisisilo besisi-hloniphiwam kakhule*

The crab brewing by the river.  
Our forefather truly respected the Crabs  
Crabs were respected as creatures, and considered to be significant within the culture of Xhosa people.

The above argument explain how some animals seem to have some form of symbolism, and profound meaning amongst some Xhosa people. This speaks to the depth of the symbiotic relationship between some Xhosa people and the ecological world. Mndende (2002: 85) gives an elaborate account of the song about crabs. She states “There is a song that acknowledges the ancestors who are believed to reside in the river at a place known as *umzi omkhulu* (‘great house’) by those who *thwasa* (Sangoma (Diviner) initiate) by the river. A song such as *Wadidiyel'unonkala ngasemlanjeni* (‘*Nonkala* is dancing near the river’) symbolises dancing in the river. *Unonkala* refers to the crab who is regarded as a messenger, and *umlambo* refers to the river” (Mndende, 2002: 85). This serves as important evidence of how much black people care for the ecology and its habitats, something that is not documented enough. For example, Mamsukwini’s assertion highlights the significance of living in harmony with other species

and how other species help to make meaning of the intrinsic and historical connection of some black people to ecology.

Mamsukwini's account highlights the significance for some Xhosa people of living in harmony with other species which seem to hold profound meaning. Some Africans observe totems that are often symbolised by animals. An appearance of a dog in one's dream often represents a denotative visit of ancestors according to the Xhosa culture. "For example, dreams in which dogs are barking at the individual are believed to be symbolic of anger as a result of a communication breakdown between the individual and his or her ancestors" (Mndende, 2002: 71). It seems that animals are being used as a spiritual source of information to be unravelled on behalf of the receiver, often by the diviner.

In the afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, I met with Rasta Benjamini Lakay at Cape Town Taxi Rank at his stall, where he sells herbs and medicinal plants on a daily basis. I approached him to inquire if it was possible to interview him for the purpose of my research, to which he agreed. I was pleased to hear from him that he is a Khoisan descendent who claims an intrinsic right to the land. According to the United Nations (nd) "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was officially adopted by the United Nations General Assembly September 13, 2007, Aboriginal Title is regarded as the most comprehensive instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples".

I asked him where he gets his herbs and medicinal plants from, to which he answered:

"I get my medicinal plants from various mountains like Klein Mountain, and Table Mountain. I go to these mountains whenever I run out of *Imphepho*, *Mathunga* (English translation not found), *Intelezi* (English translation not found), and other medicinal plants and herbs".

I asked if he has any ties with mountains, and whether he has developed any kind of relationship with the mountains given his frequent interaction? His reply was:

"Yes my brother I do feel connected especially when I am climbing up the mountain. For me to have connection I must make sure that I pray when I get on the mountain. In my view, that is one of the ways, I can connect better with nature whilst connecting with God, whose spirits dwells on the mountain. I usually go to the mountain twice a week to go pray, as I must sacrifice my time if I want to be one with nature".

Despite feeling deeply connected with ancestors when I am on the mountain, I, too, somehow, still feel obliged to send my devotion to the Christian God because I am conditioned to believe that I am closer to God. Nkosinkulu (2015: 09) describes this more clearly: “Growing up between Christian and Xhosa practices has resulted in a diasporic mind state which is a position of confusion and feelings of dislocation. At the same time, ‘being in-between’ cultural practices and the discomfort of dislocation can yield new vistas on cultural identity” (Nkosinkulu, 2015: 09). The obligation to feel closer to God when I am on the mountain is certainly influenced by my upbringing in Christianity, but Nkosinkulu indicates that the discomfort can be productive, possibly in opening one up to a range of spiritual forms that engage with the mountain?

I asked Lakay if he traces his roots to the mountain as a Khoena, to which he responded:

“...one thing that I can tell you is that I am from the mountain. In fact, we are created from mountains my brother. When we go to the mountain we often get to reconnect with our ancestors and talk to our ancestors. Our ancestors give us visions, and they give us things which we cannot see with our own eyes if you know what I mean my brother. Some of these things are difficult to explain”.

According to Bae (2007: 32) “the ancestors speak with the living through dreams, visions, nature, and persons. At times they can be seen, particularly when they appear in dreams. At times only their presence is felt”. I further asked Lakay how he felt about the fact that indigenous, and local people remain alienated, and excluded from any key decision taken by those at the helm of Table Mountain. Lakay explained,

“the mountain was taken away from the people, I understand that these are the people who are maybe looking after the mountain. However, as the original custodians of the land, Table Mountain, it belongs to all of us too especially since mountains are part of our Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)”.

I agree with Lakay, because whenever I am on the mountain I always feel not only in-tune with myself but one with nature.

Lakay further indicates that

“...we are always chased away by SANParks law enforcement whenever we try to collect our medical herbs. However, that should not be the case as we do not have a history of destroying

the environment. In the ancient history, our forefathers have been living on the mountains for years, and we know how to harvest our herbs. For example, whenever we harvest herbs, and medicinal plants, we always leave behind some other herbs to grow”. This goes to show the kind of relationships indigenous people, and black people have with the ecological world. In my view a more inclusive approach to its management will ensure the sustainable future of the Cape Floral Kingdom on Table Mountain.

In his book, *Anthropology and the Bushman*, Alan Barnard (2007: 04) postulates that “there are San who retain a traditional knowledge of plants and animals that is at least as good as that of many Western biologists. They can identify, and know the names (in their own languages) of several hundreds of different species of plant, as well as their seasonal locations, their ecological associations with other species, and how to prepare them as foods or medicines”.

I suggest that many other Africans, and not only the San, have vast traditional knowledge of medicinal plants or herbs, especially those who grew up in the homelands. I am one of those people who has an acquaintance with traditional or medicinal plants and their usefulness.

I asked Lakay if he ever feels like he is walking with his ancestors when he walks on Table Mountain. He responded:

“When I get on the mountain I am often greeted by the wonderful sounds of nature. It goes without saying that when I walk on the mountain, I am always surrounded by the presence of ancestors. This is an experience which I cannot put into words. Sometimes if there is an herb or medicinal plant that I am looking for which I am unable to find, I would talk to my ancestors, and suddenly I would be able to find the herbs. These are some of the experiences that makes me grateful for this life my brother. In ancient times, there were no permits, and separation of the people from their mountains”.

This means that there was less restriction and open access to the parks, which are now being heavily protected from people. This illustrates the valuable relationship between ancestor worship and ecological knowledge. As Nkonsinkulu notes, “Ancestor worship entails a relationship with nature which results in the respect, and protection of animals and plants because of their connection to the ancestors” (2015: 82). The youthful participants I interviewed can relate to that because, they explained that whenever they walked quietly through hills, valleys, and the scenic wonders of nature on Table Mountain, they feel imbued

by the spirit of ancestors that invites them metaphorically to walk in silence and converse with them.

I asked Lakay if he was aware of the group of Khoisan indigenous people who were reported to have occupied Cecilia Forest on Table Mountain near Constantia Nek on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 in a bid to reclaim Table Mountain not only for cultural use but also for economic benefits of the area (Shakirah Thebus, 2020). He told me,

“Yes, I am aware of that, and I would have loved to join them but as you can see I am here every day trying to make a living. Time has come to reclaim our mountains; not only Table Mountain but other mountains as well. When that manifests, that would mean we would not struggle anymore to gain full access into our mountains, and hopefully practice our cultures”.

He further said “we have constitutional rights under section 9(3) of the Constitution that we stand on my brother because we were the first occupants or dwellers of the mountain”.

Lakay explained that indigenous people or black people were born on the mountain, therefore in the main mountains are our roots, and our bloodline. There is no one that can take away part of our bloodline, because mountains are one thing that remain dear to our hearts. We may have been forced to abandon our beloved habitats (mountains) as we still find ourselves to some extent separated and alienated from them by certain political, and socio-economic systems. However, we will never stop fighting for our constitutional rights. I was in solidarity with my fellow warriors who remonstrated at Cecilia Forest against cultural and economic exclusion from *Hoerikwaggo* (Table Mountain).

The presence of Khoisan claimants who occupied Cecilia Forest should serve as a warning to the custodians of Table Mountain National Park, as it seems the descendants of black, indigenous people in Cape Town are sick and tired of being grossly culturally and economically excluded from their Table Mountain. For example, no provisions have been made to allow township residents of Cape Town to use Table Mountain for cultural purposes, such as possible rezoning a piece of land to accommodate Male Circumcision despite such a call being made in 2015. This study should serve as a point of departure to engender a discourse on the cultural and economic inclusivity of Table Mountain. Thebus (2020), cited Macdonald (one of the occupants of Cecilia Forest) who insisted that, “Hoerikwaggo, now known as Table Mountain,

has a strong spiritual link to our people, and we are occupying the mountain to create a space where we can yet again learn, and practise our culture, traditions, and language in the same spaces our ancestors did.” He was further quoted saying “our remonstrance is inspired by the desire to reclaim the mountain for Khoisan indigenous people, and to restore the Khoena Kingdom”.



**Figure 5:** A group of Khoisan indigenous people who occupied Cecilia Forest on Table Mountain near Constantia Nek in their quest to Reclaim that area (source Henk Kruger/African News Agency(ANA).

SANParks spokesperson Lauren Clayton was quoted saying that, “they responded to a group of people erecting structures in a section of Cecilia Forest. They alerted the law enforcement which descended to the area in question, and informed the Khoisan group that their occupation of the Cecilia Forest was illegal. She also said that a land invasion case had been opened at the Wynberg police station” (Thebus, 2020). I understand why a case had to be opened with the Wynberg police by SANParks who are the custodians of Table Mountain. It is unacceptable to invade any section of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) in this case Cecilia Forest and get away with it. If we as black people want to reclaim Table Mountain, to reclaim our land we ought to do that in a manner that respects the rule of law and in a manner that follows due process as aforementioned, as we cannot take matter in our own hands. There is a clear common purpose and interest between indigenous people, who desire to reclaim their rights to land in the face of competing demands, and conservationists who wish to maintain and ensure the sustainability of the ecological world and its biodiversity.

## **Conclusion**

The claims of Mamsukwini, Benjamin Lakay, and the occupants of Cecilia Forest, suggest that the current resurgence of land claims in South Africa is part of a broader shift in society towards reclaiming connections to the earth itself. In their own ways, each of these participants, along with the Cecilia Forest protesters, speak to the growing sense that in the precolonial era black South Africans co-existed with the rivers, the hills, the valleys, the mountains, and the fabric of the ecological world. The claims of each suggest that indigenous and African people, including the Xhosa, articulate an unequivocal spiritual and cultural connectedness with the mountains, and the ecological world that both assents and dissents from the dominant framing of environmentalism in urban Cape Town. I am of the view that SANParks should bring in landscape architects to advise where it would be safe, and design an appropriate place to rezone for traditional circumcision. Table Mountain belongs to all of us, and the people specifically, black Xhosa Capetonians have spoken, they want Table Mountain to be rezoned for ritual circumcision. If mountain bikers and hikers can get ecologically-friendly trails created for their specific needs, why not male circumcision?

## Chapter 6

### Township Residence of Cape Town want a piece of Table Mountain rezoned for Ulwalukho (Male Circumcision)

#### **Introduction**

This study introduces an argument from Cape Town's townships to have access to Table Mountain for an African male rite of passage also known as circumcision. To date, despite substantial efforts to have Table Mountain made available for local people to practice traditional circumcision, nothing has yielded any positive outcomes. Some of the local people of Cape Town have already made it clear back in 2010 that they want Table Mountain to be used for traditional initiation schools. This was done through the public hearing on male initiation on Table Mountain, which was conducted by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, also known as CRL Commission (2010), in the report on public hearings on male initiation schools in South Africa. This study aims to investigate whether local people of Cape Town still have a desire to have a piece of land on Table Mountain made available for traditional male circumcision.

#### **Findings**

On 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, I interviewed the head of the Western Cape Initiation Programme, Traditional and Khoi-San Affairs under the department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, Clement Williams. Williams is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing traditional ritual circumcision in the Western Cape. I asked him to explain which cultural groups or tribes are practising male traditional circumcision here in the Western Cape, and which initiation sites are currently being used? He told me:

“Our initiation practice here in the Western Cape, involves three dominant cultural groups, namely Xhosa, the Sothos, and the Hlubi people, but the dominant cultural practices are that of the Xhosa people. Xhosa people can easily erect initiation huts (ibhoma) anywhere as long it is at least hidden from the community. For example, the current unconducive open spaces which are being used for initiation are in Philippi, Joe Gqabi, Langa, Delft, Mfuleni and Driftsands Nature Reserve”.

He went on to explain further that:

There have been challenges which have threatened the extinction of the Sotho cultural practices, as well as the Hlubi cultural practices. In fact they are still facing challenges as they mainly use mountains to practice their traditional ritual practices. I hope your research project will assist them as well because what they essentially need is a piece of land on the mountain to practice their ritual. I am working closely with municipalities in Grabouw, Villiersdorp, Franschhoek, Paarl, and Stellenbosch in order to lease some of the respective pieces of land for a month or two during initiation seasons for Sotho, and Hlubi ritual practices. Over the years, we have applied to Cape Nature for permits to lease their pieces of land for the purpose of male circumcision. It is often a long and tedious process. Sometimes you find that some of the land is privately owned, and that you do not know how to locate the owners. In the midst of that, then a question was put to me, which was ‘you are living on the foot of Table Mountain but yet, you are looking to use mountains which are extremely far from the communities for the purpose of male circumcision for Sotho, and Hlubi people. Securing space for ritual practices came at a high price as we had to pay close to R2000 to the relevant municipalities leasing the rental space’.

Williams further explained that

The biggest problem for the Xhosa male circumcision is the fact that the initiate’s huts or lodges (*amaBhoma*) are often situated very close to the community. We are concerned about that because the current initiation sites are uncondusive for our traditional male circumcision. Taking our boys next to the railway lines, very close to public roads, not far from their communities truly diminish the value of our traditional ritual practices. This can be seen as the direct threat to the culture of Xhosa people here in the Western Cape.

[...] *Ingandiceda njani le-project yakho* (how would this research assist me)? *Ngokuthi ibeyinto ethetheka* (by creating a discourse or debate on the subject). *Ithi nantsi i-ntaba yetafile mayisetyenziswe* (as it would say, here is Table Mountain, it ought to be used for our initiation ritual or practices where possible). I do not know to what extent you want to go with this. If you want our support I can give you the contacts of the “initiation forums” on the ground to assist with your research and help you to push for initiation

space on Table Mountain. I do not know if that would be enough but that is what we can assist you with as a government, as we are desperate for a piece of land rezoned on Table Mountain for initiation school.

[...]This would allow local residents of Cape Town to take their boys through various stages of *ubudoda* (manhood) whilst teaching them what it means to be *indoda* ( a man) in a most conducive and tranquil environment. We strive towards giving initiates enough time and not rush through the process to manhood especially during December season. They should be given enough time to learn about *ubudoda* (manhood), and about themselves. *Inggondo zabo* (their mindset or their way of thinking) would have been oriented, and broadened in terms of their cognitive thinking. We think by doing so, we would be able to assist not only our communities but even our government. *Silindele umntu athi ephuma abesenayo into yokuba ufuna ntoni ngobomi bakhe* (we would expect that by the time the initiation school is over, each initiate would have thought of what they want to do with their lives, and what they want to become in life post initiation school).

William went on to state that “we need to make sure that our young men truly understand what it means to be a man. You see, nowadays people have a misconception of what it means to be a man. Some think it is to be circumcised, which is their only definition of what it means to be a man. However, to be a man is an indoctrination, and wisdom instilled into the initiates on the mountain not only circumcision in itself or the removal of foreskin”. [...] “There is a need to review the current practices of initiation schools in the Western Cape. Custodians of the ritual practices of Xhosa initiation ought to review, redefine the purpose and the meaning of this ritual practice in an urban spaces like Cape Town, with a view of exploring its connection to the environment as well as fundamental social values that are traditionally linked to the teaching of social norms of masculinity”. As Genty Phokane (2018: 14) asserts, “the reductionist Western approach views the male rite of passage simplistically and superficially, equating male rites of passage to circumcision, thus ignoring the traditional, spiritual and cultural aspects”.

This request to have Table Mountain rezoned for the purpose of initiation schools was initially made by ANC Youth League in 2015. This was after having gone through the report on public hearings on male initiation schools in South Africa, which was conducted by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic

Communities, also known as CRL Commission (2010). Their then-secretary, Siyabulela Tom, said “it cannot be normal that we just continue to practice these traditions along railway lines, and highways in Khayelitsha, Philippi, Langa, Mfuleni.



**Figure 6:** Young men undergoing initiation at Phola Park, Phillipi (Source: Cybergeog).

[...]Table Mountain is a national heritage site, and was suitable to host initiates. It allows them the necessary ‘privacy’ as it is the inherent requirement for the initiates. Traditionally, the ritual was seen as a vital means of entrenching social norms, and imparting cultural knowledge to initiates” (Cape Argus, July 7, 2015). Table Mountain National Park through their then spokesperson Merle Collins responded by saying; “we have not received a formal request from ANC Youth League, and would have to investigate the feasibility of the initiates on the sites, given the conservation mandate” (Cape Argus, July 7, 2015).

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2020, I interviewed Buhle Boo, who is an advocacy and land justice activist from Ndifun’ ukwazi, an organization based in Khayelitsha. I asked Boo what he thought of the land invasions that have been occurring at an alarming rate across the townships of Cape Town since the country went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. He responded by commenting, “the term in itself ‘invasion’, I find it very problematic because this

is the term that is used by the City of Cape Town to try to criminalize our people. We prefer to call it ‘occupation’, because invaders are those who invaded our land in 1652. This is our land, and we cannot be *invaders*”. Booi’s narrative resonates with the words of Sol Plaatjie who noted in the early twentieth century that “we remain pariahs in the land of our birth” (Plaatjie, 1916: 21, cited in Goodrich, 2014: 58). Booi points out that black people cannot be viewed as invaders of the very same land that belonged to them.

When I asked him if he supports the land occupation, he responded

Ha ha ha ha (laughing), I mean, I support the collective action of people to restore the dignity that has been taken away from them, due to decades of dispossession. My view is exactly that there is a promise that has been made. There is a promise that has not been fulfilled, and our people are responding to that. It is the government’s fault that there has been these growing informal settlements. Therefore, it is partly their failure to dent the growth of informal settlement, and to provide basic services to our people. And that has led to this type of situation that we are seeing today. Our people are responding to the need, and they are not occupying these pieces of land for the fun of it. Some of the now occupied pieces of land have been earmarked for development or rather social housing for some of them. Nothing has happened, so we are exactly responding to that, that we are being failed. We have been told that we must wait for housing, but nothing has materialized.

When I asked further what he thought would be the future of traditional ritual practices if the people, whom he seemed to support, continue to occupy these pieces of lands at an alarming rate, his comment was, “I mean culture is very important; equally access to land for housing is equally important. There is no contradiction with asking for land for housing, and exactly for people to practice their cultural right. These things should not be viewed in separate lenses. My view is that there are pieces of land that have been reserved for heritage or monuments”.

Booi further said:

If you talk to the black man in relation to the Xhosa culture, their heritage and their culture has meant that we practice the culture of initiation, and in the context of Eastern Cape, we say that *siya entabeni* (we are going to the mountain). This is to ensure that we preserve the culture of black people, in particular Xhosa people. It is of no use to leave Table Mountain, and so on unoccupied. There is a culture that need to be preserved.

There are people who need to practice a particular culture, and there are spaces for that. Those pieces of land must be made available for this particular purpose. It is an argument that should be made that, this is our heritage. This is our culture, this is our land. Therefore, land should be made available for our people to practice their culture and practice their heritage.

Land is available, and it is not the question of land being unavailable. It is there, but people would talk around preserving nature. Let us preserve nature but to what end, to the detriment of the culture of black nation in particular amaXhosa (Xhosa people), and that cannot be correct. Land should be made available for various things, for housing, culture, and other different facets that talk to the being of the marginalized masses of our people. It is not our culture to be going to hospitals for male circumcision. There is a particular purpose as to why we go to the initiation school. It is not only around the act of cutting off the foreskin. There is a school on how one behaves as a man, that is what is happening there. It is about building a person or a man to be a better contributor towards the betterment of the society that we want, and that is not going to happen in hospitals. We would talk jokingly, saying that *amahlathi ayaphela* (we are running out of the bushveld or open spaces especially for initiation schools). It a very serious conundrum, it is a very serious crisis we are headed towards. We need to preserve *iSiko* (our ritual practice) okanye lizakubhanga (or else it will become extinct) here in the Western Cape.

This proposed notion of acquiring a portion of Table Mountain for seasonal initiation schools, would be key towards decolonising Table Mountain. This would go a long way in fostering much needed relations between local communities and Table Mountain. People have a right under section 9(3) of the Constitution to pursue cultural ritual practices, and public spaces that are part of the commons of all citizens should be available for a wider range of needs.

The youthful participants I interviewed for this study viewed Table Mountain as an ideal heritage site suitable for traditional ritual circumcision. An initiate (*umkhwetha*) in the initiation school is in the moulding phrase, or what in anthropology was called the liminal stage, in the process of becoming a man. However, the land plays a pivotal role in the process of that transition. “It is clear that land contributes to identity formation and culture preservation. There have been many cultural objects discovered by archaeologists that they use to construct

a narrative of people who lived on that land. Therefore, by placing their mark on the land, humans shape the environment according to the cultural context and, in return, the “environment shapes culture” (Eboh 2005: 1, cited in Nkonsinkulu, 2015: 69). It would be in the best interests of SANParks to build black environmentalism by offering young boys the opportunity to stay on the mountain for their ritual initiation. It would help considerably to build a black environmental public, which is sorely needed in South Africa where environmentalism overwhelmingly caters to specifically white cultural needs. It must be highlighted that fire is a vital part of the conclusion of the ritual initiation. Yet SANParks is very experienced in setting up campsites where fires can be safely lit. For example in places like Silvermine, and in particular at Silvermine Dam, it is permissible to light fires under certain conditions, as is the case also at Healey Dam.



**Figure 7:** Initiates walking freely in the wild (Source: SABC News).

Feri Gwata, in her master’s thesis, titled “Traditional Male Circumcision” has grappled with what its socio-cultural significance is among young Xhosa men. She argues that, “Traditional male circumcision is by far the most secretive and sacred rite practiced by the Xhosa” (Vincent, 2008: 434, cited in Gwata: 2009: 04)”. However, male circumcision in the urban settings is far from being secretive or sacred. Gwata (2009: 05) postulates that, “in South Africa, traditional circumcision is often referred to as ‘going to the mountain’ or ‘going to the bush’ since traditionally, initiation schools were situated in a secluded location afar from the community, somewhere in a relatively wild, and, uncultivated area”. These days however, lack of sacred or

secluded land around the townships has forced custodians of male circumcision to run initiation schools within close proximity to the community. This goes against the tradition, and makes the ritual practice “highly unpopular with prospective initiates as it diverges from the traditional practice of going to a secluded place” (2009: 07). In an ethnographic study titled “*Yithi Uyindoda*” (Say, you are a man!), which focussed on the construction of religion and masculinities in initiation schools in Cape Town Townships, Mawethu Ncaca (2014) explains that going to the mountain to be circumcised is what separates men from boys. Ncaca pronounces that “initiates up on the mountain, are given some words to live by and expected to remember the nuggets of what it means to be man” (2014: 13). I suggest though that this narrative has to be challenged, scrutinised and contextualised.

A boy in the process of becoming a man ought to reflect on the life that was, and toss out any unwanted habits, realign his mentality to the new chapter ahead, which is manhood. I am of the view that we cannot talk about manhood, and its complex realities without talking about masculinity. Male circumcision is known for creating, and perpetuating a particular idea of masculinity amongst some Africans, and it is no exception amongst Xhosa people.

Kopano Ratele (2016) grapples with the concept of masculinity through his book titled; *Liberating Masculinity*. Ratele is an accomplished scholar, a psychologist by profession and a known African voice on masculinity. Ratele discusses the realities and complexities of manhood in a society that embraces and supports the ideals of gender equality. He postulates that, “the meanings crafted around masculinity have become troubled” (Ratele, 2016: 05). The problem is that men no longer feel in charge as their dominance has subsided with no sense of power (Ratele, 2016). I am of the view that some men indeed feel entitled to some roles within their family settings and society at large. I agree with Ratele (2016) that there are toxic forms of masculinity that continue to cause havoc for women and children who fall prey to the hands of men.

This problem has undoubtedly led to lawlessness, chaos and social disorder in our country. As Ratele argues, “The men are grappling with shifts in ruling ideas and dominant practices of manhood; such shifts are entwined with other economic, political, legislative and cultural changes; in particular, the advent of constitutional ideas, and policies supportive of gender equality and female empowerment” (Ratele, 2016: 05). The problem is that masculinity is profoundly entrenched in our social structures, and it is passed on from one generation to another. The shifts are inevitable because the reality is that women are no longer dependent on

men as many of them are now independent whilst they compete with their male counterparts in the job market.

## **Conclusion**

It seems that historically, there is an ancient history that bonds some black South Africans with mountains and the ecological world. This chapter found that it is possible to have a piece of Table Mountain rezoned for Male Circumcision because there are abundance of un-serviced spaces on Table Mountain which can be used for the purpose of male circumcision. This chapter sought to remind custodians of Table Mountain that local people of Cape Town have a right of participation in the policy decisions, conservation and heritage strategies to ensure its inclusive use.

## Chapter 7

### Findings and Discussions

study is intended to serve as a point of departure in establishing what could be significant to local people who interact with Table Mountain for it to be deemed of value to them. My assumption is that it might be of great importance to establish what kind of relations black people have with the ecological world. I suggest the following findings: Table Mountain could play a pivotal role in the transitional process of young people who interact with the ecological world, providing a form of nature therapy that has improved their well-being. This study also found that healing through the healing power of nature can also be found in those who face social ills and who are subjected to the reality of living in the traumatic environments of the townships.

The five youthful participants I interviewed for this study found their interaction with the mountain to be critical in revitalising their lives whilst imbuing them with the spirit of triumph and resilience. My experience verifies the ongoing importance of this tradition, as the umbilical cords of my two children Likhanye and Lisakhanya were buried underground, on the land. I also had my foreskin cut off and buried underground during my initiation schooling in 2003. This study also found that it is feasible to have a piece of Table Mountain rezoned, because there are a lot of un-serviced spaces on the mountain in question. Bureaucratic processes may be deliberately designed to delay, deny the will of the people their constitutional

right under section 9(3) of the Constitution to exercise their cultural circumcision practices in secluded spaces. This does not mean that those who request such rezoning have no regard for the conservation of Table Mountain and its sustainable future. It is important to continue with the preservation of Cape Floral Kingdom on Table Mountain. However, conservation should not be pursued in ways that are not to the detriment of, or threatening to the cultural practices of local people. This mountain must fully be inclusive in its practical sense not merely in theory, in a manner that appeases local people of Cape Town. The custodians of Table Mountain must realize that we also matter as black South Africans and that this iconic mountain also belongs to us. Therefore, local people must be integrated in policy decisions and strategic decisions pertaining to the functioning of Table Mountain.

This has also been confirmed by then spokesperson of TMNP Merle Collins who was responding to the ANC Youth League's 2015 call to have a portion of Table Mountain rezoned for male circumcision. Collins said “This is new for us. Table Mountain National Park never had a request like this before and we will definitely investigate the feasibility”. She further added that it was difficult to say yes or no at that stage because SANParks also had a cultural heritage responsibility to uphold. However, this was not pursued up until now. I am of the view that SANParks should bring in landscape architects to advise where it would be safe, and design an appropriate place to rezone for traditional circumcision. Table Mountain belongs to all of us, and the people specifically, black Xhosa Capetonians have spoken, they want Table Mountain to be rezoned for ritual circumcision. If mountain bikers and hikers can get ecologically-friendly trails created for their specific needs, why not male circumcision?

## Conclusion

This study has shown that Table Mountain could play a pivotal role in the transitional process of young people who interact with the ecological world, providing a form of nature therapy that has improved their well-being. It also found that healing through the healing power of nature can be found for those who face social ills and who are subjected to the reality of living in the traumatic environments of the townships. This study also found that there is a growing claim to that reality, in which indigenous people, and Xhosa people, owe their beings, and trace their roots to mountains, and interweave their wellbeing with the ecological world. They are ardently interested in its preservation even while critiquing the way the mountain is managed in terms of the principles of conservation, that have been historically and culturally associated

with colonial practices whose implicit exclusions are valuable for its preservation. However, at the same time those exclusions of society need to be rethought in order to become genuinely inclusive of those who live in townships, and in poverty, that are effects of apartheid and colonial spatial planning. While I wholeheartedly support the stance taken by the group of Khoisan that occupied Cecilia Forest, it is, however, ill-conceived, and irrational to decide to invade a certain section of the park, and only hope that such an action would yield positive outcomes such as being allowed to reclaim that part of Table Mountain. We are not going to make inroads in our shared pursuit of reclaiming Table Mountain if we opt to take matters in our own hands. There are correct channels, and due processes to follow if we are to succeed. A strong, effective presence of black environmentalism is needed in putting pressure on the conservation managers to ensure that all conservation areas are decolonized, inclusive and reflect the cultural needs of all South African while simultaneously ensuring their sustainability. One step in this direction would be that Table Mountain be rezoned for male circumcision to ensure that the traditional male circumcision is practised in the most secluded places.

## Recommendations

How sustainable is the future of biodiversity conservation if Table Mountain National Park continues to disregard cultural, and social needs of local communities, to whom the mountain also belongs? It is imperative to rezone un-serviced land within the Table Mountain National Park area for the purpose of restoring cultural ritual for the benefit of the township residents of Cape Town. I recommend that Department of Education in the Western Cape should consider allowing its pupils from poor communities to confront their social difficulties, and find therapy from the trauma that comes with living in the townships whilst improving their well-beings and their academic studies?

I further recommend that Department of Environmental Affairs should consider to entice and promote the importance of interacting with the ecological world amongst local communities as a strategy of integrating local people into the conservation areas such as Table Mountain, whilst ensuring the sustainable future of the conservation world. The continuous exclusion of local people of Cape Town in the policy decisions and the management of protected areas like Table Mountain has severe cultural consequences. Access to Table Mountain for essential cultural needs such as male circumcision would go a long way in upholding and preserving the culture of local people in and around Table Mountain, and building a black environmentalism that is

sorely needed if South Africa's nature conservation spaces are to be supported and protected into the future. It is a terrible loss that custodians of initiation practices, particularly Xhosa people, have been compelled to take their boys to initiation schools located within the proximity of their communities for many years, even if those are alongside major highways like the N2 where there is no tranquillity or possibility of reconnecting to the land. Restricted access to Table Mountain goes against the tradition of taking boys to the mountain, to the required sacred and secluded spaces for the purpose of Xhosa male circumcision. Sangomas (Diviners) initiation is also subject to restricted access on Table Mountain; this means that Sangomas are not getting the desired access to perform their rituals on Table Mountain.

I am of the view that SANParks should bring in landscape architects to advise where it would be safe, and design an appropriate place to rezone for traditional circumcision. Table Mountain belongs to all us, and the people specifically, black Xhosa Capetonians have spoken, they want Table Mountain to be rezoned for ritual circumcision. If mountain bikers and hikers can get ecologically-friendly trails created for their specific needs, why not male circumcision? This study calls for a decolonial and inclusive management policy of Table Mountain by enabling people from disadvantaged communities to have full access and an opportunity to benefit from Table Mountain in ways that are meaningful to them, and not only in terms of cultural activities preferred by suburban elites.

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