

PILGRIMAGE TO SACRED SITES IN THE EASTERN FREE STATE

by

SHIRLEY DU PLOOY

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Promoter: Prof P.J. Nel

(Centre for Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa)

Co-promoters: Proff. P. Post & W. van Beek

**(Tilburg School of Humanities, Department of Culture Studies, University of Tilburg,
The Netherlands)**

January 2016

DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

There are many pilgrimages and revered forms of travel in South Africa. However, no systematic anthropological studies have been conducted into these journeys. Filling this void, this is a multi-site ethnographic study of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State province. Following a qualitative methodology, the purpose of this combination inductive-deductive study was to explore the pilgrimage phenomenon, describe pilgrimages to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng, and explain the reasons pilgrims have for undertaking pilgrimages.

Situated in the Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley, the sacred sites of the eastern Free State attract visitation from a range of site users. Predominantly Sesotho-speaking, but also coming from across the country and neighbouring countries as well, groups of mostly Apostolic, ZCC, Roman Catholic and more recently Protestant congregants or lone journeyers travel to the sites, mainly over weekends. Seeking to commune with the divine, pilgrims come to report and make prayer requests. Important motives for their pilgrimages are to search for and solidify ancestor connections, and to secure blessings. Further incentives comprise complying with the commission and instruction to visit the sites, and the healing implications of these pilgrimages. Some visitors to the sites make the trip but once, whereas other site users periodically return a number of times a year and yet others reside permanently at the sites for years.

The beautifully vibrant, colourful and complex pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State call for a rethinking and broadening of the pilgrimage lens. The mainly Anglophone and Western conception of classic pilgrimage is too narrow to accommodate the range and complexity of motivations, traditions, people and behaviours associated with pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. This heterogeneity further leads to jostling and vying for favour, clientele, narrative dominion and overall legitimisation among the pilgrim communities.

Being journeys and places of substance required an acknowledgement of the significant role that the immaterial plays in all that is pilgrimage. This meant that culturalistic and hylomorphic models proved inadequate in capturing a more complete pilgrimage story. Instead, within a relational epistemology and ontology, the entwinement, enmeshment, entanglement and entrapment of the material and immaterial, the animate and inanimate, the present and absent things, bring the sacred sites, the pilgrimages and the pilgrims into existence.

Key words

Pilgrimage; sacred sites; Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley; substantiveness, animacy; relational epistemology and ontology; meshworks; entanglements; presencing absence; pilgrimage studies; Zion Christian Church (ZCC); Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC).

OPSOMMING

Daar is vele pelgrimstogte en eerbiedige vorme van reis in Suid-Afrika, alhoewel daar geen stelselmatige antropologiese studie van hierdie reise is nie. Hierdie etnografiese studie van pelgrimstogte na veelvuldige gewyde plekke in die Oos-Vrystaat vul daardie gaping. Die doel van die gekombineerde induktiewe-deduktiewe studie was om die verskynsel van pelgrimstogte te ondersoek, die pelgrimstogte na Mantsopa, Mautse en Motouleng te beskryf, en die redes vir die pelgrimstogte te verduidelik deur middel van kwalitatiewe metodologie. Die gewyde plekke van die Oos-Vrystaat, geleë in die Mohokare (Caledon) Riviervallei, lok besoek van 'n verskeidenheid van pelgrims. Pelgrims is oorwegend Sesotho-sprekend, maar kom van dwarsoor die land en naburige lande en sluit in groepe van grotendeels Apostoliese, ZCC en Rooms-Katolieke affiliasie, terwyl Protestantse gemeentelêde en alleenreisigers meer onlangs na die gewyde plekke begin reis het, meestal tydens naweke. Ten einde sielsgemeenskap te hê met die goddelike kom pelgrims om gebedsversoeke te doen. Hulle soeke na en versterking van voorvaderlike verbintnisse en die verkryging van seëninge is belangrike motiewe. Die volvoering van opdragte en sendings na hierdie plekke en die genesingskrag daarvan dien ook as verreikende insentiewe. Sommige pelgrims onderneem die reis slegs een keer, ander pelgrims pak die reis van tyd tot tyd 'n aantal keer per jaar aan, terwyl 'n kategorie van permanente pelgrims se togte hulle etlike jare by die plekke kan hou.

Die pragtige, lewendige, kleurryke en komplekse pelgrimstogte na die gewyde plekke van die Oos-Vrystaat vereis 'n herbesinning en verruiming van die pelgrimstoglens. Die hoofsaaklik Engelssprekende en Westerse klassieke beskouing van pelgrimstogte is té beperk om die wye verskeidenheid en kompleksiteite van motiverings, tradisies, mense en gedrag te akkommodeer. Hierdie heterogeniteit lei voorts tot 'n worsteling en wedywering vir gunste, klandisie, narratiewe heerskappy en algehele regverdiging onder die pelgrims-gemeenskappe.

Synde substantiewe reise en plekke, het vereis dat die insiggewende rol wat deur die immateriële in pelgrimstogte gespeel word, erkenning geniet. Dit beteken dat die kulturalistiese en hilomorfiëse modelle ontoereikend was om die meer volledige pelgrimsstorie te ondervang. Die verweefdheid, verwickeldheid en verstriking van die materiële en die immateriële, die lewende en die lewelose, die teenwoordige en die afwesige binne 'n verbandhoudende epistemologie en ontologie het die gewyde plekke, pelgrimstogte en die pelgrims volwaardig in die lewe geroep.

MEMORIAL NOTE

Three long-time site users, key informants and mentors passed away during the course of this study. Nkgono Shabalala died in 2011 after a short illness, and Ntate Sam Mantsoe and Gogo Monica Mangengenene unexpectedly died in 2013. May the rest of your journeys be soft and may your loved ones know this love and light. You leave traces I visit often and I hold you in my heart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The landscape of pilgrimages in Southern Africa: An overview

Africa, the ancient continent, the cradle of humankind, with peoples and ways of living as old as the hills; this may all very well be true. However, there is a meagre and very recent record of studies having been conducted into South African pilgrimages. In the imaginations of the general public, South Africa has two major pilgrimages, that of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) to Moria and the Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC) to Mount Nhlankazi. Perfunctory internet searches produce photographs of hundreds of thousands of devotees making their way by bus and on foot to the respective pilgrimage destinations. Refining the search delivers a well-rehearsed history of the ZCC with Engenas Lekganyane and his sons Edward and Joseph as the main characters. Isaiah Shembe, the founder of the NBC, with his gift of prophecy and white-robed members and their characteristic sing-dance worship are the topic of blog postings and fall primarily within the domain of religious studies.

Contrary to popular belief, the pilgrimage landscape is not that sparsely populated. This section is dedicated to connecting some of the dots and adding colour to what was thought to be a largely greyscale landscape. This section sets the scene of the study, deriving from a need to contextualise pilgrimage within the South(ern) African context. This chapter is not meant to be analytical and substantive matters arising from the cases presented will be addressed in Chapter 4 and elsewhere where discussion is warranted.

Typical and a-typical pilgrimages

Most South African scholars have focused on the subject of religious pilgrimage in such a way that journeys are treated as part of the belief system. In this regard, missiological and religious studies of pilgrimage dominate South(ern) Africa's pilgrimage study landscape. Some pilgrimages are formal, organised and attract people from far and wide, while others are informal and

domestic, with people travelling short distances. The ZCC Easter pilgrimage to Moria near Polokwane (Müller 2011), the NBC sacred journey up the Nhlankakazi mountain in KwaZulu-Natal (Becken 1968), and the Corinthian Church of South Africa's (CCSA) annual gathering at Mlazi (KwaZulu-Natal) (Wepener & Te Haar 2014) serve as examples of organised religious pilgrimages in South Africa. Informal pilgrimages tend to be quite spontaneous and very eclectic in form and function. The cases of domestic pilgrimages in the Makoni district (Ranger 1987) and those to Njelele¹ in Zimbabwe (Nthoi 2006), the journeys to Cancele in the Eastern Cape (Becken 1983), and the journeys to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State are enlightening (Cawood 2014; Coplan 2003; Nel 2014a, 2014b).

Let me begin this part of the story with Isaiah Shembe (c 1865-1935) who established the NBC in 1910. At Inanda Shembe purchased 38 acres of land on which Ekuphakameni (the exalted place), the holy city, was founded (Tishken 2006:83). The church started by Shembe is a church of many names. In isiZulu it is known as Ibandla lamaNazeretha, and in English as the Shembe or Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC).

Hans-Jürgen Becken's (1968) work on the NBC's annual pilgrimage up Mount Nhlankakazi (Image 1.1) in KwaZulu-Natal describes the 80-kilometre, five-day pilgrimage undertaken by thousands of NBC devotees in the month of January (cf. Chidester 1992:131; Oosthuizen 1968). The Nhlankakazi pilgrimage is the first of two journeys celebrated by the Shembe congregations. The second is the Festival of Tabernacles which takes place in July (Davidson & Gitlitz 2002:160; cf. Becken 1968:139). The Nhlankakazi pilgrimage is accepted as the zenith of NBC congregants' pursuit of spiritual revitalisation (Hlatshwayo 2012). What is remarkable about this pilgrimage is that the two feuding branches of the Shembe Church undertake the journey together (Hlatshwayo 2012, 2011).

Characteristically dressed in white cotton robes or gowns called *umnazaretha* (Image 1.2) befitting of age and gender groupings as well as church rank, barefooted church leaders, followed by the men, lead the pilgrimage procession. Married women constitute the middle platoon and the young maidens bring up the rear. Hlatshwayo (2012) explains the pilgrimage as a "hypnotic experience of spiritual praise through song, movement and dance". According to him, each hymn is individually choreographed and sets the tone and the pace for the snaking procession, with the

¹ Njelele is the spelling used by Nthoi (2006). Alternative spellings include Ndzhelele.

summit of the mountain being the ultimate destination. Here the activities are centred on prayer meetings, sermons, celebrations of song and dance, meditations and healing rituals.

A number of altars are marked with white-washed stone or bunches of *imphepho*.² The main altar, a circular 70 centimetre high by 182 centimetre wide altar of packed rock forms the focal point of the central service's proceedings. Laid thick with *imphepho* flowers brought by pilgrims which are burned on the last day (cf. Sundkler 1961:199), one cannot imagine a more beautifully prepared and befitting table (cf. Becken 1968:141). The leader himself addresses the masses at the central service, after which the first ascent is made in his company and that of the pastors (Becken 1968:147). Three further services are conducted here during the course of the pilgrimage period, the last of which is an Isithebe or Isidlo esigcwele service and the other two being dance-centred.³ On the last day of the pilgrimage all participants carry a stone to the highest point of the plateau and place it on the large cairn – a symbolic action to invoke good luck (Becken 1968:148). Sundkler (1961:154) considers this pilgrimage a major opportunity for church leaders and followers to forge bonds, which makes the process sound very much like Turner's *communitas*.

If the NBC is to be a *centre of stability* in our post-apartheid state, as Liz Gunner (cited in Heuser 2005:366) suggests, we cannot but anticipate that large NBC gatherings such as the Nhlankakazi pilgrimage will begin to occupy a more prominent place in the region's religious-cultural landscape and in South Africa as a whole.

² Imphepho (isiZulu and isiXhosa); mphepha in (Sesotho) is a pungent herb, *Helichrysum moesianum* used as incense to cleanse relationships with and draw on the authority of ancestors in the majority of traditional practitioner gatherings. According to Becken (1968:141), the variety of *Helichrysum* is *microniaefolium* and for Bernard (2001:38) it is *odoratissimum* – an evergreen plant burnt as offering to the spirits with a characteristically sweet scent. *Helichrysum* generally have an array of medicinal applications, among others as anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, for respiratory problems such as cough and colds, as well as acting as an insect repellent. It is also idiomatically known as *kooigoed*, the herbaceous plant materials used as bedding by the Khoekhoe (*Helichrysum petiolare*).

³ Becken (1968) called this a Holy Communion service.



Image 1.1: Shembe pilgrims gathered on Mount Nhangakazi © 2013 (A McGibbon)

Source: www.behance.net/gallery/8977267/The-Holy-Mount-Nhangakazi

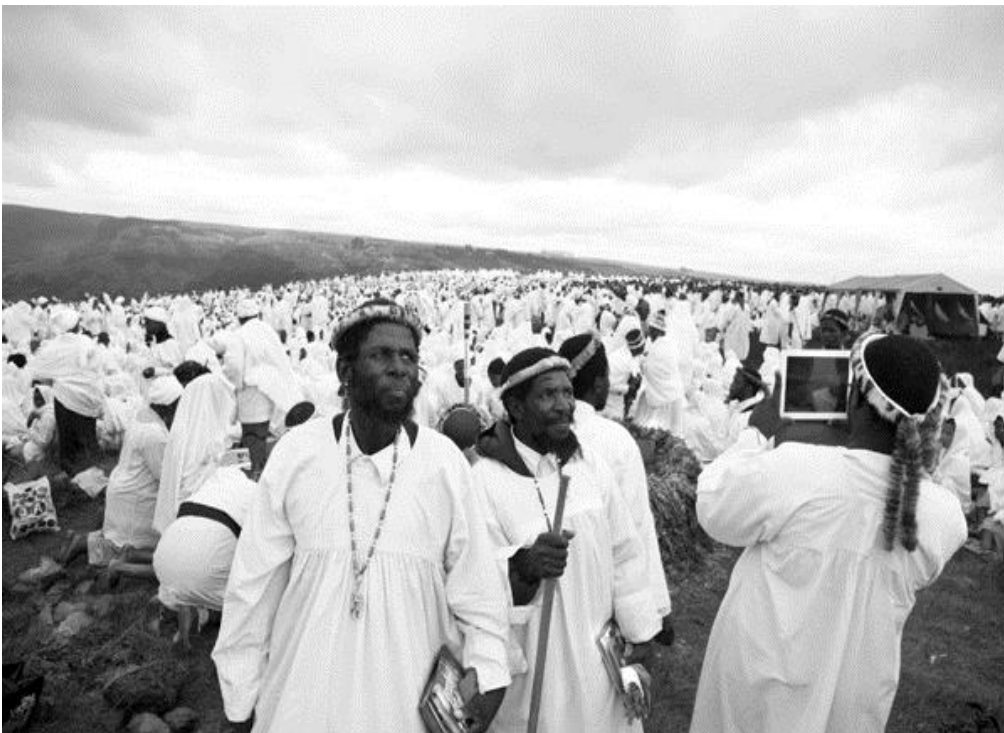


Image 1.2: Beautiful white-robed NBC journeyers © 2013 (A McGibbon)

Source: www.behance.net/gallery/8977267/The-Holy-Mount-Nhangakazi

The ZCC is but one, albeit the largest, of the Zionist churches⁴ in Southern Africa. Jean Comaroff (1985:238) calls it an indigenous religious movement because it is panethnic and membership is not limited by geopolitical boundaries. Moria,⁵ the name of its holy place near Polokwane⁶, Limpopo, is the biblical name for Jerusalem and according to 2 Corinthians 3:1 is the place of the new Temple. It has become the *new* Jerusalem for the ZCC, and a centred theocracy (Comaroff 1985:239, 241). Comaroff claims that unlike the majority of its members, who are poor, Moria is large and extravagant (1985:238, 240; cf. Chidester 1992). It must be borne in mind, however, that a comment such as this would be considered irresponsible without being substantiated by the necessary evidence.

Formally established by two Lekganyane⁷ brothers in 1925 the ZCC has become a “powerful central place, which administers a fund of spiritual, material, and symbolic power” (Comaroff 1985:238). Comaroff (1985:240) contends that the Lekganyane descent group or dynasty has acquired the “stature and an overarching authority that rivals the state’s in important respects”. In this regard Müller (2011:5) adds that the ZCC forms a parallel nationality to the South African nation-state. Considering the 2001 national census data which indicates that 4.9 million people, 11.03% of the then population were ZCC members, this is not difficult to understand (Müller 2011:7).

The influence and reach of the ZCC on the African sub-continent is far-reaching. Because of the politics of insider-outsider research, opinions differ concerning the transparency of and ease of access to ZCC events. Müller (2011:184-186) laments the lack of scholarly work conducted in any sphere of the ZCC. To substantiate this, two large volumes of work, namely Ogbu Kalu’s *African Christianity: An African story* (2005) as well as Davidson and Gitlitz’s *Pilgrimage from the Ganges to Graceland* (2002) both mention the NBC (Shembe, see above), but not the ZCC. He ascribes this largely to the difficulty in gaining access and permission to conduct participatory kinds of research, and when this is granted, the always hovering presence of a chaperone who limits freedom of movement and probing questions. The many strictly adhered to behavioural

⁴ Collectively referred to as churches of spirit (dikereke tsa moya), important Zionist signs include robes of distinct colour schemes, the drum, baptisms, inspired healing and holistic separatism (Comaroff 1985:237).

⁵ Morija (in Sepedi) is pronounced Moriah and spelled Moria in English. For purposes of this study I use the latter spelling since it is also the spelling used on the star on the hill at Zion City.

⁶ Zion City Moria is situated some 50 kilometres east of Polokwane, on what was originally two farms that Engenas Lekganyane bought in 1943 (Müller 2011:13).

⁷ Lekganyane is a Pedi (North-Sotho) lineage.

restrictions during church gatherings compounds this difficulty. However, Moripe (1996), from the University of Limpopo, did not agree. In fact, his work is published widely. This highlights the pitfalls of making sweeping statements which cannot be generalised across the board.

Retief Müller's *African pilgrimage: Ritual travel in South Africa's Christianity of Zion* (2011) expounds on the ZCC pilgrimages. Müller (2011:9) explains that there are at least three annual pilgrimages to Moria and a number develop around Bishop Lekganyane's travels to neighbouring African countries.⁸ In at least two of these events, i.e. the Easter event and at the ritual New Year pilgrimage in September, as many as 1.5 million ZCC congregants make their way to the assembly grounds of Moria's Zion City (Saayman, Saayman & Gyekye 2014:408). In fact, the Easter pilgrimage, one of the world's largest, sees more than two million ZCC pilgrims in attendance (Roos 2006:35).

In preparing to embark on such pilgrimage, ZCC members are reminded to ready themselves in the correct manner. Such preparations may include appropriate behavioural restrictions related to food consumption and sexual relations; appropriately neat attire and ZCC identity documents; the negation of guns, knives and muthi (traditional medicines); readying for sin confession; and bringing financial donations (Müller 2011:57-58). In addition, the sermons and announcements that precede the journey describe ways of imagining the cultural and religious space they are approaching (Müller 2011:63). They familiarise journeyers with the appropriate moral code and value system, and the central characters of their *new* Jerusalem. Central to their imagining is the presence of the Bishop at Zion City – both he and the place provide the congregants with central referential points (Müller 2011:63).

The majority of journeyers travel from their local-level congregations situated across the country to Moria via chartered buses. Particularly for the Easter pilgrimage, this presents a veritable headache for traffic officials as hundreds of thousands of ZCC members make their way to Moria. The congested road between Pretoria and Polokwane which under regular circumstances cannot cope with the volume of vehicles, is placed under severe pressure. I find that seeing photographs of this pilgrimage helps to put this awe-inspiring trek of believers into perspective (cf. Image 1.3).

⁸ In Deuteronomy 16:16 the instruction is clear: "All the men of your nation are to come to worship the Lord three times a year at the place of worship: at Passover, Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters. Each man is to bring a gift". Jeremiah 6:16 talks about the selection of a path: "The Lord said to his people, 'Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Walk on it, and you will live in peace'".



Image 1.3: ZCC pilgrims *en route* to Moria via chartered buses © 2014 (SABC News)

Source: www.sabc.co.za/news/2014/04/19/zcc-congregants-gather-for-Easter-pilgrimage-20140419%3B592%3B540

Before departure, vehicles are customarily blessed by ZCC functionaries. *En route* there is much song and prayer to spiritually prepare pilgrims for their arrival at Moria and perhaps also to bide the often slow progress towards Zion City. Only those in possession of the required documentation are permitted entry. Very strict access control sees persons turned away at the gates for transgressions as small as incorrectly wearing uniforms or being in possession of a mobile phone with camera capabilities. Pregnant women, for example, are not permitted at all, and thorough vehicle and body searches are mandatory. Vehicles are parked and may not leave the premises without the parking ticket stub. It would seem that certain site visitors are restricted to specific localities for the duration of the weekend. Strict policing of these access restrictions are enforced. In Image 1.4 the small Lego-like vehicles attest to the vast number of pilgrims that descend on Zion City over Easter.

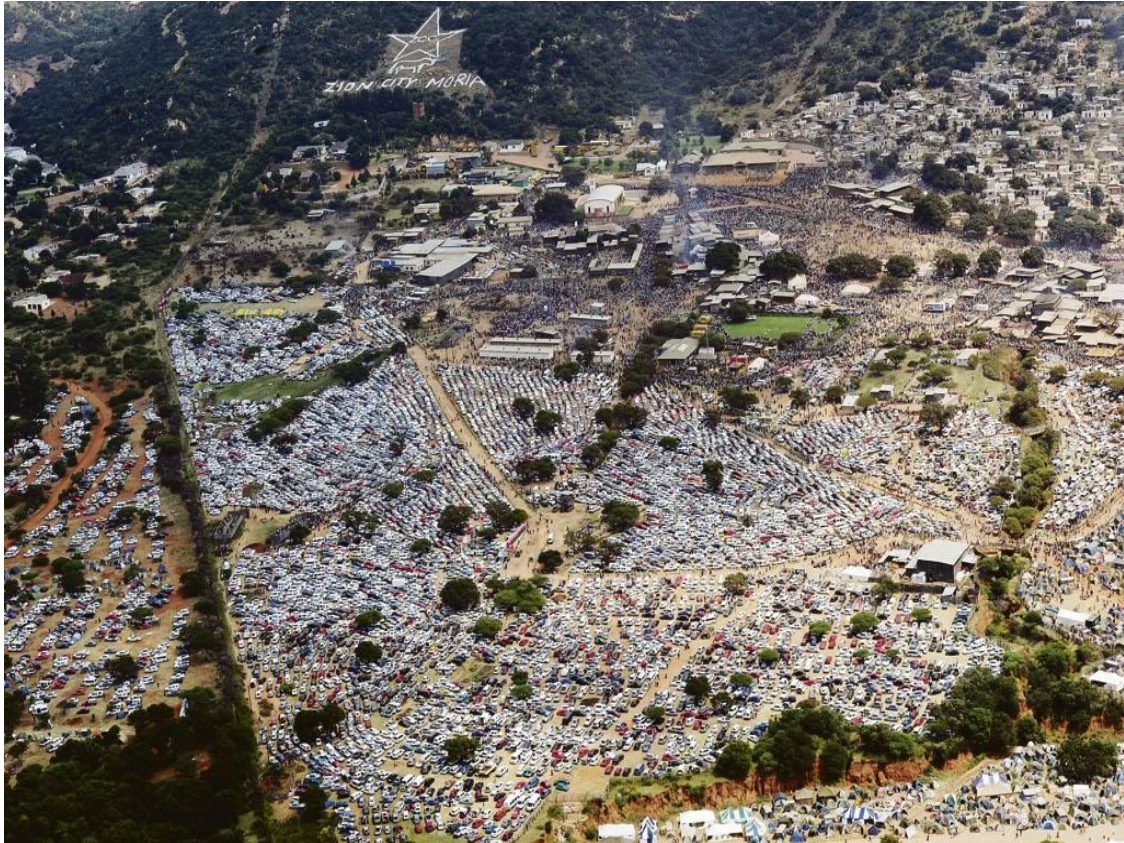


Image 1.4: Aerial view of Zion City over Easter © 2014 (netwerk24)

Source: www.netwerk24.com%252Fnuus%252F2014-06-21-tafelberg-se-moses%3B1024%3B681

Müller (2011) describes the atmosphere as ordered and controlled, militaristic, stately, structured, and showing a build-up towards a crescendo (Müller 2011:95, 107, 112, 118, 185). He further depicts the ZCC and pilgrimages to Moria as a “dialectical interplay between free-flowing charismatic chaos and bureaucratic orderliness ... order and charisma” (Müller 2011:103, 118).

Morning and afternoon worship services form part of the formal programme. Customarily three or four preachers give sermons and shouts, hiccoughs and snorts indicative of being spirit-possessed are common occurrences during these services (Müller 2011:108). The Sunday service, with the Bishop himself delivering the final sermon, is considered the climax of any pilgrimage. Other highlights on the agenda include the performances of the marching band – an outstanding feature of Moria pilgrimages. With militaristic precision the band marches back and forth, and on occasion the Bishop himself leads the band across the parade ground (Müller 2011:116); a sight that many pilgrims experience with delight.

Baptisms at Moria are also considered particularly meaningful, although many baptisms take place at local church level. The idea is that being a sacred place, the potency of the waters at the ZCC grounds is seen as superior, and so also the ritual functionary (Müller 2011:123, 127). The river that runs through the grounds is used for this purpose. Candidates are immersed three times in this running water believed to have considerable umoya (life, potency, power). Confessing one's sins precedes the baptism, as does the preacher's prayer for the *river snake's* exorcism.⁹

Although attending the church service on the last day of the journey is a major goal for many pilgrims, missing it for whatever reason does not necessarily imply a failed journey. Instead, being in attendance at the cultural-religious space of Moria as a whole is considered far more important (Müller 2011:137). Underlying the life-altering experience of going on pilgrimage to Moria is that, perhaps not for the majority but certainly for some, travelling outside their immediate communities renders the journey to Zion City all the more profound (Müller 2011:124). Müller says it becomes a "cultural, educational, and recreational opportunity" (2011:124). Business people travel to Zion City on lesser pilgrimages. On these more minor occasions, receiving orders (taelo) from the Bishop is deemed necessary for the success of business endeavours (Müller 2011:121).

Healing practices are foundational to ZCC activities. ZCC tea and fountain water (sediba water) are pivotal items, as is coarse salt. Elaborate river baptisms, dietary restrictions and endogamy are almost universally observed (cf. Comaroff 1985:242). The prophesy ministry of the ZCC, which runs parallel to the preaching ministry, forms a major part of the church's allure (Müller 2011:65).

Müller opines that ZCC pilgrimages, i.e. those to Moria as well as those forms of journey centred around the Bishop as he travels within South Africa and to other Southern African countries, are centred on the person.¹⁰ At the same time, however, the journeys themselves, are central (2011:9, 11; cf. Coleman & Elsner 1995). In fact he even refers to the ZCC as a *travelling church* (Müller 2011:11). ZCC pilgrimages, in Müller's view, are not attended by those people "nostalgically in search of a lost past, but rather by those who remain hopeful in the possibility of a future,

⁹ The river snake is a significant symbol in the mythology of many Bantu-speaking groups of Southern Africa (cf. Bernard 2001:33-35). It is connected with creation, fertility, a re-embodiment of ancestors, the *owner* of the river, and is thought to have superperson powers. For an interesting suggestion that this exorcism is in fact a form of connection with pre-Christian traditions, consult Müller (2011:127).

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, whether they are person-centred in the Eade and Sallnow (1991), as well as Coleman and Elsner (1995) sense, is worthy of exploration.

preferable to the travails of the present” (Müller 2011:11). Such a statement seems closely aligned with Comaroff’s (1985) contention of the ZCC’s role in general – offering hope despite untenable circumstances, “presenting a vision of wholeness” (Müller 2011:47).

Moria is considered an ideal-type sacralised home, Müller explains (2011:117). For the majority of pilgrims visits to Moria “serve the purpose of infusing the imagination with its spirit, so that it in fact accompanies them in their everyday life away from the center” (Müller 2011:117). Even if the Bishop is not personally present it is believed that he is present in spirit (Müller 2011:125). Zion City with all its sites within the *Kingdom’s centre* (Müller 2011:113) certainly invokes Eliade’s sacred centre. Müller (citing Werbner 2011:113), further views the journey towards the centre as:

“movement upwards in space, to the heights of a mountain or hill, with a corresponding ritual ascension from the communities of every-day life to the congregation cleansed of sin, by confession and acts of purification, and thus raised to the heights of holiness”.

By way of concluding the piece on the ZCC, I find Comaroff’s remarks particularly grounding. Despite the power, opulence and influence of the larger ZCC, it is the small face-to-face flock, the local unit that:

“forms the regular ritual community, the cosmological centre, the pool of general cooperative assistance, and the well of visions drawn upon by congregants in managing their everyday experience. Thus, while the macro-structure of the ZCC provides an extensive cognitive map and a social identity to rival the divisive categories of the apartheid system, the micro-structure of its constituent groups tends to define the main universe of action from a distinctively local perspective” (Comaroff 1985:240).

Cas Wepener and Gerrie te Haar’s (2014:89-104) chapter, *Sacred sites and spiritual power: One angel, two sites, many spirits*, tells of the CCSA and its significant Isitshisa service held in Mlazi, KwaZulu-Natal, at the end of October every year. Serving as an example of an organised, formal pilgrimage, Wepener and Te Haar (2014) argue that the spiritual power acquired by participants through attending the all-night service is transformed into spiritual capital.

Mlazi is simultaneously a fixed and fluid space (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:100). On the one hand, it is an actual, fixed place and space where sacrifice and the altar constitute the main ritual modes. On the other hand it is a fluid space because it is focused on a spiritually gifted person and proximity to him via others, e.g. his son and widow’s spirits (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:100).

Wepener and Te Haar (2014:100-101) use Paul Post's three-pronged model to analyse their data. They start with the two-prong ideal-typical temple and mobile model. Holiness of place is replaced by holiness of person where an encounter with this person is central. In reality, there is continuous movement between place-centred and person-centred sacrality. Mlazi is the place, the temple where God manifests himself and where sacrifices are conducted. However, the Mlazi experience is also mobile. The ash-remnants of the all-night bonfire and not soil or rock is taken to conduct rituals elsewhere. This ash has greater potency, i.e. more power than ashes collected elsewhere. Besides ashes, the participants' experiences at Mlazi are taken home with them to be shared with congregants there. According to Wepener and Te Haar (2014:101), the presence and activity of Spirit/spirits experienced at Mlazi is what renders the "church and grounds into a sacred site".

The third of Post's prongs states that holiness is related to a person (*persoongebonden heiligheid*). In this regard,

"a place or site becomes a place of encounter based on its connection to a specific person. This holiness of place as related to a certain person(s) is clearly part of the make-up of Mlazi as a sacred site. During Isitshisa the encounter is mainly between the Corinthians and the person of the Spirit of God, but also with the person of the spirit of Johannes Richmond, of his late son and successor. The spiritual power that is generated through this encounter is equally taken back to the other congregations of the CCSA" (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:101).

The headquarters of the CCSA is therefore rendered a place of spiritual power. As a place where important rituals are performed, Mlazi is

"filled with spiritual forces generating power that can be turned into spiritual capital by church members. It is a place from which blessings are believed to flow ... Africa's people's religious consciousness is to a large extent defined by their belief in a spirit world. Religion, in this case, is best defined as a form of active engagement with a world of invisible powers that are deemed to name effective powers over the material world ... Through communication with an invisible or spirit world, people can acquire access to a form of power that can actually transform their lives, both as individuals and as members of a community" (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:101-102).

Rituals performed and participated in at Mlazi are a form of spiritual empowerment; "a way of empowering people through spiritual means" (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:102). Spiritual power is

therefore an enabling power. For believers, spiritual empowerment opens up ways to achieve the good life. The empowering rituals performed and participated in at Mlazi convey that with the help of Spirit/spirits “one can lift oneself out of any adverse condition” (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:102). *Spiritual power* can therefore be transformed into *spiritual capital*. Spiritual capital is “people’s ability to access resources believed to reside in an invisible world that can be mobilised for the common good” (Wepener & Te Haar 2014:102). CCSA members do this via religious rituals, particularly at Mlazi, i.e. the spirit-filled place.

Although Southern Africa lacks the institutionalised Catholic past seen in Europe and Latin America, this does not mean that Catholicism and its history of journeying has not been imprinted on the Southern African journeying landscape. Particularly in KwaZulu-Natal one finds a number of catholic shrines, the most important of which is Ngome Marian Shrine in the diocese of Eshowe, which attracts visitation from a range of supplicants (www.icon.co.za/~host/shrines/index.htm). The visions of Benedictine Sister Reinolda May (aka Sister Mashiane), of a sacred place where seven streams converge, coincided with a place already revered by the local isiZulu-speaking population. Although the first official pilgrims had already visited Ngome in 1966, it was only in 1992, with the blessing of the diocese, that pilgrimages were keenly endorsed and undertaken. In the meantime the site was used for prayer and spring water was harvested for its special properties (www.icon.co.za/~host/ngome/index.htm). Ngome is associated with the international Movement of the Pilgrim Virgin (Roos 2006:151-152).

Between 2004 and 2010 the annual ‘Mighty Men’ gathering (of Christian men and boys) in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands began with 240 attendees and culminated in 2010 with 300 000 men and boys from all walks of life camping and worshipping in the outdoors. This three-day gathering grew into a revered journey for hundreds of thousands of men under the stewardship of Angus Buchan (cf. Buchan 2012). No longer organised by the Shalom Trust of South Africa, regional Mighty Men Conferences (MMCs) such as those held in the Karoo, the Cape and Bosveld conferences began in 2011 and continue to grow, even having expanded internationally. In scale they are somewhat smaller, but for attendees the spiritual might remains uncontested (cf. www.karoommc.co.za).

An example of a less typical sacred journey on account of its informal, domestic and spontaneous nature, constitutes the journeys to consult with MaRadebe at Cancele. Journeys to this Eastern Cape faith healer are the focus of Becken’s (1983:115-129) article titled “*Give me water, woman*

of Samaria". *The pilgrimage of Southern African Blacks in the 1980s*. Becken sums up the Cancele pilgrimages as a model in which the Christian faith is meaningfully integrated with traditional African worldviews (1983:126; cf. Chidester 1992:142). This is achieved in Becken's view by the unconventional use of symbolism and is not an example of syncretism (Becken 1983:127-128), but rather an example of hybridity (Christianity in its African shape).¹¹

Unlike evangelistic campaigns or revival meetings, Becken (1983:125) considers the Cancele journeys as people's movements, spontaneous movements, and religious movements. These journeys are not linked to certain festival seasons such as those of African Independent Churches (AICs), e.g. the ZCC or NBC. Instead, there is a "constant flow going and coming from the sanctuary by day and night, a dynamic popular movement" (Becken 1983:116). In addition, people of both sexes and all ages, speaking many languages, wearing Western or traditional attire and hailing from all regions, as well as from a range of church affiliations and social strata comprise the pilgrim community (Becken 1983:119, 125).

Found even further along the more atypical side of the spectrum of pilgrimage research is the work of Beverley Roos (2006) on inner journeys, Saayman et al.'s 2014 economic analysis of the ZCC's Easter pilgrimage, and Fairer-Wessels' 2005 exposition of visits to Robben Island as literary pilgrimage.

Instead of considering pilgrimages based on their faith-based divisions, Beverley Roos (2006) in *The inner journey: Pilgrimage in South Africa and the modern world*, drew up a typology of pilgrimages based on their functions. Amongst others these included pilgrimages of loss, veneration, healing, regret, barter or exchange. Considering pilgrimages in this way allowed Roos (2006) to consider journeys not always thought of as pilgrimages, particularly because these South African journeys fall outside the traditional pilgrimage scope, and particularly beyond the realm of major world religions (Roos 2006:6). Included are journeys to ancient Stone- and Iron Age sites, as well as struggle sites. The common denominator in all these pursuits is the importance attached to them by the journeyers, the gravity with which they are undertaken, and the expressed profundity of the inner journey.

¹¹ In anthropology, syncretism is generally applied to refer to the blending or combination of elements from different traditions to form a new system. During this merger, one set of beliefs, symbols or practices is foregrounded while others are relegated to a secondary position in an attempt to mask real felt resistance to those who are foregrounded. The key for me is a covert resistance and a pretence of integration. On the other hand, in a hybrid amalgamation, greater blending of features occurs.

Also writing about the ZCC, Saayman et al. (2014:407-414) analysed the economic value of the ZCC Easter pilgrimage to Moria. They found that this pilgrimage boosted the regional economy by ZAR400 million in 2011. As the single largest annual event in South Africa, both in terms of the number of attendees and its economic value, the ZCC's Easter conference is big business. What we see is that the cash injection such a pilgrimage – which falls under the banner of religious tourism – generates, is substantial. Although this figure doesn't come near to the USD8 billion generated by religious travel to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, it remains substantial.

Felicité Fairer-Wessels (2005) tested the hypothesis that visitors to Robben Island do so because of its association with the global icon Nelson Mandela and his 27-year incarceration, but particularly because they are inspired to follow in his footsteps after having read his 1994 autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. In the latter case, these journeys are referred to as literary pilgrimage.

Constructing, appropriating, owning and contesting the sacred

Terence Ranger presents an historical account of land and landscape appropriation as well as the creation of sacred places and the journeys to these places in Zimbabwe. In *Taking hold of the land: Holy places and pilgrimages in twentieth-century Zimbabwe*, Ranger (1987:158-194) draws attention to what rendered places sacred in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, initial missionary contact and mutuality in contrast with the modernising centralised church's agenda, the rise and influence of Apostolic churches, the Guerrilla War and its aftermath and the development of national sacred sites. Dissimilarities in the economic and domestic use of land may have existed between pre-colonial locals and early explorers, missionaries and colonists. However, differences attached to land for spiritual, religious and social expression are particularly important for a study of pilgrimages and are seldom recognised.

Although Ranger's (1987) work is very much a historical piece considering the theme of holy places and sacred journeys in Zimbabwe, I found it particularly insightful for its treatment of pre- and post-colonial perceptions of land, landscape and the sacralising process. What Ranger's (1987) article succeeds in doing is to lay the foundation for an understanding of the inescapable connection between land and the continued obligation of the living to maintain relationships with

ancestors, thereby forging connection with the afterlife and securing blessings and good fortune in the present. In this regard, we begin to understand the significance of graves and grave visitations. What we should be cautious of, however, is to make sweeping statements along the lines of saying, for example, that grave visitations by family groups have increased as an upshot of land claim applications in South Africa since 1994. Although this may be the case, incisive anthropological research is necessary before making such assertions. Many family groups do indeed travel to the grave sites of departed loved ones to report to ancestors and/or God and also, on a practical level, to weed and tidy the grave area. Ranger's article also demonstrates the continued rise and fall "between the local and central, the popular and the institutional. The holy place and the pilgrimage" (1987:191). This points to the unfolding development of a spiritual hybridity.

Mogomme Masoga's (2014a:267-278) chapter *Constructing "national" sacred space(s) – notes, queries and positions: The case of the South African Freedom Park monument* raises critical issues around establishing national sacred space(s). Although it does not directly address pilgrimage, what we learn about the construction of sacred spaces is crucial for studies of pilgrimage particularly if they are important for national identity or even reconciliation.

Constructed opposite the Voortrekker monument (a primary symbol commemorating South Africa's apartheid past) in Pretoria one finds Freedom Park, a 25 000 m² garden of remembrance and symbolic burial ground for the fallen heroes of the liberation struggle. This park comprises of a wall of names, a lake and trees, an eternal flame, amphitheatre and exhibition space, as well as the Pan African archives. This national heritage monument was imagined as a representation of "all the country's unfolding experiences and symbols" (Masoga 2014a:268). Bearing South Africa's highly contested past in mind, the intention with Freedom Park was to comment on and grapple with "gaps, distortions and biases [and] to provide new perspectives on South Africa's heritage, challenging traditional narratives through a re-interpretation of the country's existing heritage sites" (Masoga 2014a:268).

Masoga opines that, given all the forethought that went into the project, it falls short of being representative of all cadres of the South African population. He also poses a rhetorical question concerning the monument's mandated role in the spheres of nation building and reconciliation (2014a:268). What the memorial site should have done, Masoga argues, is: not alienate certain communities by excluding them from the "construction of a national historical consciousness"; not

impose a conceptual framework for dealing with the pain and loss of loved ones; and not to make selective use of the language structures of some communities. He feels that the memorial site should rather explore the use of fully representative forms of communication of all communities and shouldn't gloss over certain socio-cultural issues in favour of a selection that fosters particular political and ideological agendas because of a superficial understanding or a lack of information. Furthermore, the Freedom Park narrative should not be left to happenstance, hoping that it might miraculously appeal to the majority of South Africans at some future time, but that concerted effort and creativity should go into developing more common ground across groups (Masoga 2014a:276). In conclusion, the Freedom Park site should "mediate the past, present and future" (Masoga 2014a:276; cf. 268).

Philip Nel (2014a:135-146) contributes an insightful essay on the ownership and appropriation of the sacred. Since pilgrimages and journeys of reverence are often to a special or even sacred destination, his input on the matter cannot be ignored. In *Ownership of the sacred: Complex claims and appropriations*, the author opines that *to own* and *ownership* are not limited to legally defined parameters. Ownership may include, among others, cultural, spiritual, religious, political, symbolic and historically inherited ownership (Nel 2014a:137, 139). Within the context of sacred sites or spaces, ownership becomes all the more contentious. Property rights are often not figured within the ownership discourses of and at sacred spaces. For site users, "to own is to symbolically appropriate all immaterial associations of the site as part and parcel of one's own socio-political and cultural-religious landscape, as well as to possess it materially" (Nel 2014a:137). Visiting and using the site, being present (subjective presence), and demonstrating memory or memo-history seems enough for pilgrims to lay claim to ownership. In this regard, Nel (2014a:145) says:

"The sacred is increasingly dislodged from centralized religious and political institutions and authorities and even from entitled proprietors ... to become "owned" by individuals and groups sharing a common interest and memory or in search of the fulfilment of existential and spiritual yearnings".

However, this does not signal the end of ownership battles. In particular, the official spatial tactics adopted by the state (e.g. government departments) or authoritative bodies (e.g. churches) in terms of their position of authority in implementing access control and site management in the case of the latter, or "claiming national ownership of living heritage sites" in the case of the former (Nel 2014a:142-145) represent ideas about ownership. Seeking to "own the sacred as part and parcel of heritage" seems to echo Masoga's (2014a) critique of the Freedom Park monument.

Such spatial tactical strategies or moves frame what should be regarded as heritage and what not, or what should be regarded as sacred and what not.

What has become viewed as a natural consequence of the polyvocality of pilgrimage arenas is conflict and contestation. Leslie Nthoi's (2006) book *Contesting sacred space: A pilgrimage study of the Mwali Cult of Southern Africa* investigates the occasional journeys undertaken to Njelele in Zimbabwe. These are domestic pilgrimages by individuals or small groups to the Mwali cult or High-God shrines in the Matopo Hills of southern Matabeleland. The Mwali cult is a regional cult with a domain extending from Zimbabwe to Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique and as far as Tanzania (Nthoi 2006:1-2, 102, 125).

The climax of pilgrimages to Njelele constitutes *consulting the oracle*. As Nthoi (2006:105, 115, 192) uses the phrase, it means *to report* to high authority. It is therefore the early morning "ritual in which supplicants report and appeal to the High God and other divinities at Mwali cult centers" (Nthoi 2006:106). Pilgrimages to Njelele are so much more than "simple spirit mediumship. It involves contact with divinity and appealing to a higher moral order than is available elsewhere" (Nthoi 2006:106). Going on pilgrimage to Njelele brings journeyers into the substantive presence of the revered High God and is also a place where lesser divinities are particularly powerful (Nthoi 2006:128, 139).

Realising that there are other religious and spiritual beliefs that "co-exist, co-operate, complement and even compete with the oracular cult of Mwali" is important for our overall understanding of site use, and Southern African pilgrimages in general (Nthoi 2006:27, 126). The infusion of beliefs and practices related to ancestors with those associated with Mwali point to a developing religious hybridity.

The extraordinary, substantive pilgrimage sites of this regional Mwali cult, with a domain extending beyond ethnic and political borders is delineated by its heterogeneous pilgrim clientele. The flexibility and fluidity of its organisation, which has an adaptive advantage given our changing world (macrocosm), may be precisely why it has taken so long for an in-depth pilgrimage study to be conducted (Nthoi 2006:60-62).

Nthoi (2006:128-129) argues that the many and diverse motivations and personal conditions underscoring Mwali journeys lie at the heart of these pilgrimages. Implied religious and

cosmological beliefs do not satisfactorily explain the reasons that people journey. Hailing from very different parts of the world and proffering motivations unfamiliar to those of Western and Anglophone social scientists may also explain why many journeys of reverence are not recognised as pilgrimages. In addition, because of a lack of local knowledge on the one hand, and Turner's distinction between tribal rites and pilgrimage proper on the other, researchers are reluctant and/or ignorant to consider revered journeys such as rain and first-fruit festivals or grave visitations under the banner of pilgrimages (cf. Nthoi 2006:139). While the annual harvest and rain ceremonies at Njelele emphasise a collective dimension, the majority of pilgrims who in this case are women, undertake individual journeys to their sacred place (Nthoi 2006:129-130, 140-141). Nthoi's (2006:140-141) idea that pressing problems invariably motivate pilgrims to undertake further pilgrimages, is in line with Tanner's (2003:127) proposal that traditional sub-Saharan African religious activities tend to be crisis reactive.

What is important for Nthoi (2006:3, 62, 91) is the movement or traffic to and from the sacred centre and the flows of people, goods and services between the centre and peripheral areas. Nthoi's (2006:91) working definition of pilgrimage is therefore a "movement focused upon a sacred central place, and undertaken by supplicants in fulfilment of their relationship with a deity or its manifestation. The length of the journey involved, like the catchment area of the sacred center, is highly variable". He believes that this is a less deterministic view of pilgrimage as it accommodates the diversity of pilgrims, the meanings they associate with the journey and the multiplicity of motivations for undertaking pilgrimages.

Nthoi's (2006:155) main thesis, as reflected in the book title, is that the sacred is contested. Primarily this contestation results from the many types of pilgrims visiting Njelele, the variety of cosmological and religious underpinnings that these pilgrims subscribe to, the complex array of motivations cited for undertaking the pilgrimages, and the often divergent views of the shrines held by priestly officials, local community members, local traditional authorities and government representatives. In exploring these contestations, Nthoi (2006:155-158, 160) considers the intricate process of constructing site imagery. In this regard the various stakeholders and interest groups, both obvious (e.g. shrine priests) and not so obvious (e.g. uninvolved community members from surrounding villages) in his analyses. In addition, he deliberates on the impact of personalities, political interference, leadership disputes, the commodification of the centres, and anti-syncretic forces (cf. Nthoi 2006:157-186).

Having worked along the Lesotho-South African border, David Coplan's (2003) premise is that pilgrims journeying to the sacred sites of the Mohokare Valley do so as a political act. In *Land from the ancestors: Popular religious pilgrimage along the South African-Lesotho border*, Coplan claims that site users firstly consider this area as part of their sacred geography regardless of formal declarations stating that the area now falls within the bounds of South Africa's Free State province. Secondly, Coplan claims that it is because they consider the fertile river valley and other areas as belonging to the Kingdom of Lesotho, that the pilgrims are reclaiming this conquered territory (in a process akin to ethnicisation).

Philip Nel (2014b:165-186) takes the contestation debate further in his chapter *Economic versus symbolic ownership of sacred sites in the eastern Free State: Contestations of the sacred*. Entering into dialogue with Coplan, Nel (2014b) refutes the claim that pilgrims from Lesotho visiting the sites in the Free State do so in revolt, as an activist act of defiance and disregard of the area belonging to another sovereign state.

Telling it like it is

Working within the ambit of Oral Studies, in the chapter titled *The rhetoric of ritual: Sacred sites and the oral tradition in the Mohokare Valley* Stephanie Cawood (2014:203-224) interestingly explores narratives, the oral, from the perspective of the Anthropology of Gesture. She particularly draws on the work of Marcel Jousse in this regard, as well as Lakoff and Johnson's embodied realism. She argues that within the ritual landscape of the Mohokare Valley rhetoric, the persuasive nature of narratives and rituals (the mimodramas) are the "vehicles through which social reality is reconstructed" (Cawood 2014:203). The central mimodrama she ruminates on is that of pilgrimage. This is supplemented by all the other ritual actions that form the building blocks and constitutive elements of the larger pilgrimage ritual.

Rituals, and by implication pilgrimages, are formulated, expressed and communicated in oral narratives (Cawood 2014:203). Oral narratives not only contextualise but also legitimise rituals and, consequently, pilgrimages since they provide the substance or foundation of the rituals. A collection of oral narratives contributes to the emergence and development of an oral tradition. When the fantasy themes of a group of pilgrims converge one may speak of the chaining of fantasy themes and therefore the development of a rhetorical vision. In the Mohokare case,

certain fantasy chains persist and traverse the oral traditions of the three sacred sites. On the other hand, certain fantasy themes are contested, leading to varying degrees of conflict for individual pilgrims, as well as among groups of site users (Cawood 2014:206). The point to emphasise here is that the oral narratives, the shared fantasy themes and rhetorical vision – the rhetoric of Mohokare pilgrimages – construct the pilgrimage experience and meaning for pilgrims. When analysing the Mohokare pilgrimage movement, Cawood found the narratives to be embedded, dynamic, mythical, pragmatic, influenced by the political economy, a-historical, important forces in the formation of identity and community dynamics, conflicting, persuasive and symbolic (2014:207-218).

1.2 Problem statement, aim and objectives

South(ern) Africa abounds with special places that draw people to visit them. These include natural (heritage) sites such as Table Mountain (Cape Town, Western Cape), or the Vredefort Dome (North West province). These landscapes and land forms are visited by tourists or locals recognising them to have spiritual and/or sacred significance and symbolism. Cultural heritage sites such as Great Zimbabwe (Masvingo, Zimbabwe), Mapungubwe (Limpopo province), or the Cradle of Mankind, the fossil hominid sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and environs (Gauteng and North West provinces), Driekopseiland (Northern Cape) and thousands of rock art sites around the Karoo and mountainous areas are places where the San communed with their spiritual deities. These localities attract site users who recognise their cultural and spiritual significance and include places such as sacred caves and shelters, mega- and monolithic rocks and rock structures, whether they are natural, constructed, shaped, engraved or painted. Historical sites such as Robben Island, the Castle of Good Hope (Cape Town, Western Cape), Shaka's Kraal or Nelson Mandela's capture site in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands are places that attract many thousands of visitors every year. Many of the places referred to above are considered as tourist destinations. The large and increasing body of pilgrimage literature points to the expansion of the pilgrimage idea to include secular journeys such as these. The goals of such forms of travel are sometimes markedly different from journeys undertaken with explicit spiritual or religious intentions. Other times, journeys unexpectedly become pilgrimages with pronounced transformational character. These all hold the potential for developing exciting avenues for pilgrimage studies in South(ern) Africa.

Since 1994 there has been renewed interest particularly in the natural and cultural heritage of South Africa. They reflect, for example, interests surrounding the origins of man, cultural forebears and mighty kingdoms, history and political pasts. There are many current national debates surrounding the matter of sacred sites. Notably such debates include issues of heritage, heritage sites and living heritage (cf. for example Moore & Whelan 2007); tourism; conservation and management (both environmental and cultural); and land rights (landhold, property rights, rights to land resources and access). At the same time there has been a proliferation of religious and spiritual related activity in the country. There is a noticeable increase in the development and attendance of neo-Charismatic (born-again) churches and those of the AIC. By the same token, consultations with traditional practitioners have also skyrocketed. The dramatic increase in persons *called* to undergo traditional healer training, and related activities such as pilgrimaging, begs investigation. Concerning the former, for example, Richard Werbner's (2011) book *Holy hustlers* considers some of these more opportunistic spiritual entrepreneurs.

One of the main components of pilgrimage in its broadest sense is movement. Initially I use 'movement' and 'pilgrimage' interchangeably, for two reasons: a) because in pilgrimage theory some scholars treat 'movement' more generically; and b) because the nature of South(ern) African pilgrimages does not fall squarely within the more traditional concept of pilgrimage theory, whether that movement involves journeys on particular calendar days to monuments such as the 'Vrouemonument' (Women's monument), 16 December visits by black and white people alike to Blood River (iMpi yaseNcome), visits to Freedom Park for national reconciliation and healing, or whether these be visits to Shaka Zulu's main residence, Moshoeshoe's mountain stronghold, Lesotho's Thaba Bosiu¹² (cults and religion may be an overarching framework in this regard), or Robben Island.

For a moment, however, let's consider the early history and the peopling of Southern Africa. Fossil remains reveal that humans evolved in Southern Africa and migrated northwards. Besides migrations of early man *out of*, as well as migrations *into* the Southern African region (c. 6000 BC to 200 AD), nomadic hunter-gatherer communities followed age-old paths in pursuit of food. Khoe herding groups in turn sought grazing for their flocks (Gill 1997:3). The ancient kingdoms of Mapungubwe (the first kingdom in Southern Africa) (Saayman et al. 2014:408-409) and

¹² The three-day *Moshoeshoe Walk* 'pilgrimage' to his old homestead and culminating with a climb of Thaba Bosiu, this year celebrating its 10th anniversary, takes place during October. What is also interesting here is the fact that many tourists join in this procession to the mountain site (Mzolo 2016).

Zimbabwe (c. 1100, 12-15th century) were centres of commerce. Important trade routes connected these and other buying partners further along the east coast of Africa (also known as the Swahili coast) and traded as far afield as China, India and Egypt.

Four further noteworthy movements of people include those related to the slave trades; the Great Trek and Dorsland exoduses into the interior and up the west coast of South Africa, and a cohort of Afrikaners to Argentina in the 1820s and 1830s (cf. Du Toit 1995). The third, which is presently ongoing, involves migrant labourers from rural areas as well as neighbouring African countries (e.g. Lesotho and Zimbabwe). The fourth has played a pivotal role in South Africa of old, and has recently redemonstrated its might, i.e. public protests. The country witnessed a marching to the seats of power and in defiance of the state machinery in 1976, and, having started in 2015, student protests are currently holding the state hostage. Workers' unions and their go-slow protests in 2013 and 2014 quite literally brought the economy to its knees.

People have always moved, travelled and congregated. Ethnographic records inform us that pre-colonial African groupings regularly travelled and then gathered again for certain reasons. Unlike their European counterparts, African rulers were not buried in the ground with headstones to memorialise them. Their final resting places were often the caves where they were interred. The entire hill or mountain therefore became a place of remembrance. Annual journeys to these ancestral burial places are on 17th century Portuguese record and these places were considered holy. In some cases, the annual gatherings culminated in rain ceremonies. Besides rain ceremonies held in early October, first-fruit ceremonies (a second gathering) were held in early February (Ranger 1987:162-164). So too, Lovedu peoples converged on the Modjadji settlement soliciting the Rain Queen to call on the ancestors to grant relief for her people in times of drought (Krige & Krige 1947).

There is a scarcity of research and publications with pilgrimage as theoretical framework in South(ern) Africa. The majority of work has been conducted from a religious perspective where pilgrimage is treated as part of the belief system. In this regard I think of David Chidester's (1992) work on South African religions, G.C. Oosthuizen's 1980 publication on Independent Churches and the ZCC, and Martinus (Inus) L. Daneel's work among the Shona of Zimbabwe. In this latter body of work the reader finds an emphasis on the *African* sense of place, community, and environment (Daneel 1970a; 1970b; 1971). Daneel's more recent work deals with African Initiated Christianity (2007) as well as the African Earthkeeping Churches of Zimbabwe (1998; 2001). It is

in this regard that the tree-planting gatherings and the earth-healing ceremonies of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditionalist Ecologists (AZTREC) and the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC) become relevant for our discussion on important journeys. Always enacted in nature, the green army of earthkeepers work at soul-saving in conjunction with earth-care. Concerning the former there is a strong link to pilgrimages to sacred sites such as the Mwari/Mwali cult (cf. Nthoi 2006).

Early research on pilgrimages (religious movements) in South(ern) Africa include work by Hans-Jürgen Becken (1983), Claude Rivière (1986), Terence Ranger (1987) and Richard Werbner (1989) who largely contributed descriptive accounts of cult activities and religious movements with distinct historical and religious slants. Penny Bernard's scholarship of sacred sites, water spirits, dreams and healing (2013, 2010, 2008, 2007, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c) encapsulates elements important in many South(ern) African journeys of reverence, while Isak Niehaus' (2013a) interest in witchcraft also falls into this category. Retief Müller's (2011, 2008) theological work about the ZCC is also revelatory. Furthermore, Post, Nel and Van Beek's 2014 publication, *Sacred spaces and contested identities: Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa*, makes valuable contributions to understanding spaces and identities in the context of pilgrimage.

The scarcity of pilgrimage studies in South(ern) Africa naturally does not imply that pilgrimages (in the traditional sense) do not occur; they are very much alive. Their scale and formality, however, is not on par with Indian, Islamic or European pilgrimages to the Ganges River, Mecca's Hajj or the Camino (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:9; Margry 2008:13-14; Margry & Post 1998:74). The ZCC mass trek to Moria over the Easter weekend (Mueller 2008; Müller 2011), or the 80-kilometre Shembe Nazarite pilgrimage up the Nhlankakazi mountain in KwaZulu-Natal are cases in point and serve as examples of organised religious pilgrimages in South Africa, but they too are small in comparison.

Despite the fervour surrounding pilgrimage studies internationally, the ripple effects have not fully reached the shores of the southern tip of Africa. David Coplan's *Land from the ancestors: Popular religious pilgrimage along the South Africa-Lesotho border* (2003), and Leslie Nthoi's book *Contesting sacred space: A pilgrimage study of the Mwali cult of Southern Africa* (2006) represent recent approaches and signal an awakening interest in postmodern pilgrimage.

The purpose of this chapter is not to deal with the complexities of the pilgrimage phenomenon. Instead, these and other theoretical issues are dealt with in Chapter 4. Serving to contextualise pilgrimaging in South(ern) Africa I have in this chapter attempted a cursory, somewhat colourful presentation of the pilgrimage landscape in Southern Africa. I considered the ZCC's Easter conference, the Shembe pilgrimage up Mount Nhlankakazi, and the CCSA's Isitshisa service at Mlazi as examples of organised religious pilgrimages in South Africa. The informal journeys in the Makoni district and those to Njelele in Zimbabwe, the journeys to Cancele in the Eastern Cape and the journeys to the sacred sites in the eastern Free State offer interesting insights. I have also asked questions about the evident lacuna of pilgrimage studies in South(ern) Africa. In answering this question, I would like to offer insights concerning the factors below.

Some religious traditions have emphasised pilgrimage to a greater extent than others. For some it is a religious requirement to undertake pilgrimages such as the Islamic Hajj. Other traditions such as Catholicism (in comparison with Protestantism) incorporate regular ritual journeying (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxvi). Unlike in many European and Latin American countries, sub-Saharan Africa lacks an institutionalised Catholic past infused with a history of journeying; a history that validates journeying activities (Tanner 2003:127). Journeying for purposes of healing has also not received adequate treatment.¹³

I propose that we take our cue from Tanner (2003) and reconsider the so-called typical pilgrimage lens. He claims that it is "far too narrow to usefully describe the wide ranging social process in sub-Saharan Africa pilgrimages" (2003:127). Traditional religious activity in sub-Saharan Africa, according to Tanner (2003:127), tends to be crisis-reactive. By this he means that religious activity is engaged in as a response to misfortune rather than as a set of devotional activities as articulated in book-religions. Religious and spiritual activities do not require devotional exercises or wandering mendicants where individuals searched for personal enlightenment in the Western sense. It would seem that the same criticism that was wielded at the Turnerian model and assumptions of pilgrimage as "constraining analysis to a predetermined analytic structure that obscures and distorts the pilgrimage's critical features" (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xiii) is equally applicable to the Anglophone, Western European and American-driven lens of pilgrimage used as a template, i.e. it is counterproductive.

¹³ Healing refers to a restoration of or a return to wholeness and not necessarily curing, in the biomedical sense of the eradication of disease (Kleinman 1988:3-6). Compare Müller's (2011:47) comment about the ZCC presenting a vision of wholeness. I read this as a vision of hope, health and balance.

What is important to bear in mind is that portions of populations may be “invisible’ in the public domain” (Margry 2008:16) when they fall outside the research gaze of a research fraternity. An appropriate question in this regard is: whose ‘sacred’ and whose ‘secular’ are we using as the yardstick in our analyses? Related to this is Western ignorance, and long-established stereotypes about Africa and her people, lack of knowledge about research undertaken in South(ern) Africa, and local religious and spiritual practices and their histories (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:2). Illustrating such ethnocentric views and serving as a case in point are sweeping and ill-informed statements such as the following by Bhardwaj and Rinschede, the editors of *Pilgrimage in world religions*: “Christian pilgrimage centers are virtually absent in Black Africa probably because the veneer of Christianity is thin and the influence of its own nature religions still profound” (1988, cited in Müller 2011:10). Such narrow views are founded on the belief that a “‘Christian pilgrimage center’ in Africa would resemble its Euro-Asian equivalents” (Müller 2011:10).

Within pilgrimages’ changing milieu “simpler pilgrimage forms” may be found to be significant journey destinations (Tanner 2003:133) and ritually transformative. In this regard, for example, “[a]ny place where people meet occasionally or en masse to pay their respects ... soon came to be referred [as] a ‘place of pilgrimage’” (Margry 2008:17-18). It is within this context that grave visitation becomes significant. The presence of memory transforms places into places of pilgrimage (Margry 2008:18).

To address these deficits in broad terms, the general aim of this study is to explore and describe the journeys of reverence undertaken to sacred sites in the eastern Free State. The intention is to seek emic understandings of how the pilgrims make meaning of these journeys, and in particular to uncover the motivations underlying pilgrimage. The intention is not to describe and analyse these sites, the journeys to them or the site users by employing an external pilgrimage lens. In fact, the thesis aims to ask if these eastern Free State journeys of reverence fit the current classic pilgrimage lens since the pilgrims themselves do not refer to their journeys as pilgrimages. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives are set:

- Systematically describe the places/spaces to which pilgrims are drawn in the eastern Free State;
- Typify and describe the *boundless* sacred site communities, e.g. the nature and character of pilgrims to (and from) sacred places, and the relations between different congregations/denominations;
- Determine the motivations for undertaking pilgrimage;
- Compare evidence from popular pilgrimage sites in other South African provinces with empirical evidence from eastern Free State sites; and
- Theoretically situate (religious or spiritual) pilgrimages in the eastern Free State.

1.3 This study

Structure

The chapters of this study are grouped into three sections. In Part I, together with this chapter, Chapters 2 and 3 make up the introductory section. The research goal is formulated, the research process explained, and the research setting is introduced. In order to satisfactorily address the aim and objectives, the research process is explained in Chapter 2. Besides my underlying philosophy, the first part is devoted to the tools and procedures of data collection. Historical and current literary and empirical evidence were collected by means of literature review, participant observation, ethnographic interviewing and life story accounts from informants and key informants and captured through note-taking, photographs and digital recordings. Research participants were selected through purposive sampling and data collection continued until reasonable interview saturation had been achieved. A significant part of the chapter deals with researcher positionality. This is particularly appropriate since insiderness or outsiderhood has important implications for researcher stance as well as for methodology. Insider-outsiderhood also intrinsically affects the results and how they are interpreted and presented for wider consumption. The final part of the chapter describes the data analysis and interpretation processes applied in this study. Ethical considerations and procedures to ensure trustworthiness are also explained.

Chapter 3 introduces the research setting and its people. Research sites do not exist in isolation and for that reason I first give an historical overview of the Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley's inhabitants. This has important implications for the memories invested in the area as well as my

three research sites, where certain station names reflect this history. I also briefly and in very broad strokes sketch the way of life of these early inhabitants, ever mindful that such descriptions are not intended to convey the impression of static, a-historic or essentialist conceptions of a way of life. Secondly, I introduce my three research sites: Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng. This is a particularly descriptive section and my hope is that the reader can vividly imagine walking along the paths as I describe the most significant stations at each of the sites. In the final instance I briefly consider what it is about these sites that renders them important for pilgrims.

Part II explores the phenomenon of pilgrimage as the focus of Chapter 4. In this sense pilgrimage is largely seen as an external lens. As conceived here, the theoretical discussions of component parts are generated from the growing body of knowledge of pilgrimage as gleaned from the literature, i.e. an etic understanding. Firstly, I consider the constituent elements of pilgrimages. Secondly, I try and make sense of a magnitude of different pilgrimage types. Thirdly, the main moments in the study of pilgrimages are presented, while the final paragraphs are devoted to generating a working definition for purposes of this study.

Having delineated the phenomenon, Chapter 5 and 6 describe the journeyers and the journeys to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. The first section of Chapter 5 offers a description of the pilgrims and pilgrimages to Mantsopa, while the second section considers the pilgrims and pilgrimages to Mautse and Motouleng. In Chapter 6 the reasons for undertaking these journeys of reverence are presented. Broadly the following motif categories are discussed: religion and faith; individual and group healing; social cohesion, group and social bonding; reflection, contemplation, finding purpose and roots; seeking help and assistance, finding ancestor linkages and securing blessings/fortune; recreation, renewal, escape from work and city; political reclaiming (contesting the site/space); and ancestor commission/instruction.

The feminist Donna Haraway challenges us to diffract (1997, cited in Olesen 2005:251). By this she means that we should seek numerous novel combinations and interesting possibilities when analysing the phenomena under investigation. For this reason Chapter 7 firstly considers substantivist and non-substantivist approaches to, on the one hand, the study of pilgrimages, and on the other, to the fact that eastern Free State pilgrims largely consider their journeys and the places they journey to as experiences and places of substance, thereby justifying this differentiation. I contend that this has important implications for theorising about pilgrimages, e.g. the presence or absence of *communitas*. Secondly, I think of pilgrims, pilgrimages and sacred

sites as meshworks of entanglement. In so doing landscapes, dreamscapes and personsapes as entangled domains, reveal how the presencing of absences brings pilgrimages into existence.

Part III contains only one chapter in which I hope to show the value of this study. I discuss ethical and methodological issues arising from the study and the implications of these for further research. By way of synthesis and conclusion, the sites, the pilgrims and pilgrimages are considered as complex meshworks, and lastly I argue for an African perspective of pilgrimage.

In concluding Chapter 8 I'd like to share the anticipated contribution that this study could have for the fields of African Religion, Culture Studies and Anthropology. By shifting the attention away from broad generalisations of African religion to performative aspects, it operates somewhat below the radar. Firstly, this study on pilgrimages to sacred sites fills a lacuna in the current South African literature, but specifically concerning the Free State situation. In particular, it aims to make a contribution in the qualitative research tradition; a sorely needed ethnography. Theoretically, the gleaned information and analysis of this study is envisioned to qualify or contest both the older and more recent models postulated for our understanding of pilgrimages to sacred places/spaces. I anticipate that the socially generated meaning associated with the spaces/places and the individual motivations and reasons for undergoing pilgrimage will greatly contribute to the understanding of pilgrimages in general, but also specifically to pilgrimages undertaken to eastern Free State sites as well as the role(s) that the sites themselves have on the believed outcome of pilgrimages. The empirical evidence will also establish whether *African* eastern Free State pilgrimages, if you will, follow the prescriptions and conceptualisations contained in classic *Western* pilgrimages and scientific understanding, or whether it is a different phenomenon entirely.

Methodologically, the proposed project will likely reinforce the postmodernist assertions that inclusivity, polyvocality, intersubjectivity, reflexivity etc. are best dealt with by a flexible methodology including the ethnographically rooted participant observation, and the narrative-type accounts derived from the collection of life histories and the use of key informants.

The potential contribution of this pilgrimage study to current debate and discourse specifically concerning matters of heritage, tourism, conservation and property rights, is far-reaching. Among others I believe that many of the ill-informed disputes between interested parties – be they farm owners on whose land the sites are situated and pilgrims accessing the sites, the espoused

management of the environment and the sites and related areas, or the oftentimes financially motivated tourism aspect etc. – might be better dealt with, if the sacred site dynamics are understood in as far as pilgrims, pilgrimage and sacred spaces/places are concerned.

Conventions

For purposes of this study I use a number of conventions that the reader should note.

1. I use italicised words in three contexts. Firstly, an acceptable convention is that words in foreign languages are italicised. In this thesis, I apply this principle to all languages *other than* African languages. Words in African languages (other than person and place names) are underlined. I provide the English meaning in brackets and in selected instances use the Sesotho word thereafter. Secondly, words are italicised for emphasis. In the final instance, italics are used to differentiate between direct quotes from literary sources and those of informants. The former are indicated with double quotation marks while citations from interviews are italicised.
2. All photographs used in this thesis are my own, unless indicated otherwise. I have therefore only acknowledged photographs owned by persons other than myself.
3. I have included large portions of citations from interviews in various chapters. All text in italics is unedited and the verbatim words spoken by informants. To facilitate readability I was necessitated to provide context, and narrate reported speech and indirect statements and questions.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 General

Research “[d]esigns can be seen as falling along a continuum ranging from rigorous design principles on one end, to emergent, less well-structured directives on the other” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:376). In interpretative research, qualitative researchers may design procedures beforehand, yet these designs always have an inherent flexibility. Because of the nature of the research it must take into account new and unexpected empirical materials and the growing sophistication of the project. Unlike positivist, interpretive designs, do not profess to anticipate all the problems that may arise during the course of a study. However, a *roadmap* for the research is provided. For purposes of this study, I implement a set of qualitative research design procedures that are open-ended and methodical.

Working within a qualitative paradigm¹ this mainly empirical research², following an ethnographic strategy of inquiry based on three case studies, uses primary data for the most part. The study firstly seeks to describe the pilgrimages to and at Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng, the descriptive dimension of the study. Since very few systematic accounts are available about pilgrimages in the larger Southern African context³, in South Africa as a whole, in the Free State province more specifically, or in the eastern Free State particularly, this study aims to gain insight into, and an understanding of eastern Free State pilgrimages; the exploratory dimension. This is done to tease out and explain the reasons or motivations for why site users journey to the sites;

¹ Paradigm captures the interpretive framework or the “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba 1990:17, cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2005:22). Said differently, it condenses the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological suppositions into an interpretive perspective. In line with Babbie and Mouton (2003:270), I understand and use *qualitative* as a “broad methodological approach to social action” that involves interpretative and naturalistic slants of the world (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:3).

² This study, although qualitative apart from the literature study and theoretical accounts from the archival material from secondary sources and published scholarly views, has a basically empirical design.

³ Early research on pilgrimages in South(ern) Africa includes work by Hans-Jürgen Becken (1983), Claude Rivière (1986), Terence Ranger (1987) and Richard Werbner (1989). Studies by David Coplan (2003), Leslie Nthoi (2006) and Beverley Roos represent recent pilgrimage studies.

the study's explanatory dimension. What is important is to obtain thick data⁴ and emic (or insider) perspectives, which this approach and design allow.

This study focuses on two units of observation – the who and/or what of qualitative research. The first are individual pilgrims, and the second are the social/collective/group actions of pilgrimages. Both these units of observation consist of multiple persons and multiple processes (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:378). Individual characteristics are extrapolated into a combined picture of site users; the population of pilgrims. Age, sex, mother tongue, and frequency of and purpose for site visits might prove to be key individual characteristics. Simultaneously, the social dynamics operating within the populations of pilgrims will underscore interesting insights. Orientations such as religious and denominational affiliations, as well as governing or directing beliefs, e.g. certain cosmological conceptions such as vital force philosophy may be important points of focus. Everything that contributes to the pilgrims' framing (cf. Du Plooy 2014) is relevant in this regard.

Some characteristics of the social action of pilgrimages, e.g. where they occur, when they occur, why they occur, or if the outcomes are favourable or beneficial for pilgrims might be worthwhile points of discussion. Journeys may be directly observed, as may their accounts of their site visits. The stories and narrations of the participants themselves, the thick data, from which analyses and interpretations will be made, will be particularly sought after.

I describe the research process in this chapter. The tools and procedures of data collection, e.g. the modes of data collection, the types of data gathered and the techniques used to capture empirical material in this ethnographic study receive attention. Furthermore, the data analysis and interpretation processes are explained. A chapter dealing with the research process would be remiss if the ethical considerations and question of trustworthiness were not addressed. These matters conclude this chapter.

⁴ Clifford Geertz (1973) borrowed the term *thick description* from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (cf. Spencer 2010:445). Geertz used it to refer to the rich, comprehensive data gathered during the course of ethnographic fieldwork. Importantly, such data represents multiple perspectives and the numerous systemic influences on such viewpoints and actions. Multiple methods of data collection as well as making use of a variety of sources from which data is generated, is critical in this regard.

2.2 Data collection: Tools and procedures

I made my first fieldwork visit to the research sites in early 2008. Since then I have made some 36 field trips, each time conducting interviews with occasional visitors I'd encounter along the pilgrimage paths, as well as in-depth (ethnographic) interviews and life history narrations with more permanent site dwellers. Although I have been involved in the project for seven years, the approach I used was one of *many returns*. The fieldwork trips ranged from two to five days. Most often, I'd spend a day at each site during such site visits. Then again, working at a site for two or three days in succession allowed the opportunity to conclude certain interviews, explore a theme across the spectrum of participants present, and/or participate in certain events at the site. Intercurrent fieldwork visits had the added advantage of me being in a position to access and observe a greater cross-section of site users seeing that many pilgrims journey to sites over weekends. Arranging field trips to coincide with weekends thus made more sense. In addition, because pilgrims make their pilgrimages to the sacred sites at certain times, these bursts or high-impact visits allowed me to engage with a wider range of journeyers.

Classic methodological operating procedures of protracted stays at research sites is a mainstay of ethnographic fieldwork. My work method, however, was unconventional. Being in fulltime employ and having to manage these responsibilities alongside those of conducting ethnographic fieldwork at research sites some 250 kilometres from where I live and work necessitated a departure from more traditional fieldwork assumptions in favour of a creative redeployment of the classical methods and techniques associated with ethnography.

On a typical field day I would arrive at the site at around 09:30. I would normally talk with, mingle, observe, participate and interview site users until late afternoon, most often until a little before sunset, after which I would make my way to Ficksburg, chosen for its proximity to all three research sites. Here I would spend the night, returning to the same site the next morning or visiting another depending on any number of circumstances or factors. Among others, these considerations included the number of pilgrims present at the site, the anticipation that large numbers of pilgrims would visit a site, the presence of significant research participants, gaps in data that needed filling or clarification, or length of time since my last site visit etc.

A question worth considering is whether *deep immersion* is exclusively possible when living with the group under investigation for protracted periods? This was most certainly the older conception

(cf. Hannerz 2010:78-79) of this notion. Out of hand, I must explain my position: I contend that deep immersion is not contingent to long stays in the field, as I explain throughout this chapter. I concur that my method of *many returns* may be unorthodox for some, but the decision I took not to overnight at the chosen sites was made for practical reasons (relating to familial obligations and safety considerations).

Before I explain the types of data I gathered and which had been coproduced during fieldwork, it is important to clarify my understandings of ethnography. Skeggs' broad definition serves as a guide (2010:426). Ethnography is "a theory of the research process – an idea about how we should do research".⁵ She then continues to add the qualifiers of fieldwork in the natural setting and for protracted lengths of time, using a variety of research techniques, and acknowledging the importance of context. A fourth feature, a researcher who becomes immersed in the setting, experiencing it with all her senses, is also corroborated by Hannerz (2010:73). In the fifth place, the thesis, research report or monograph acknowledges the process of knowledge generation and its coproduction; and finally, the macro-micro relationships of settings should enjoy some attention. The profound difference, Skeggs (2010:428) explains, between just any form of empirical research that calls itself ethnography and anthropological ethnography, is that the latter requires an intensity and temporal duration for which few other approaches have the stamina. Ethnography should very well then be considered as anthropology's defining practice, as a "method of cultural representation" (Lather 2010:481) and immersive fieldwork as the "ideology of ethnographic research" (Marcus 2012:437). Hannerz (2010:74) sums up the fieldwork experience as follows: "[f]ield work of the immersion type can be an intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic pleasure – the kind of experience we feel makes both our minds and hearts grow".⁶

In this section, the modes of data collection, the types of data (i.e. empirical materials; cf. Denzin & Lincoln 2005:3) gathered/generated and the techniques used to capture data in this ethnographic study are presented.

⁵ If this is the case, then major theoretical issues such as reflexivity, subjectivity, partiality etc. will and should enjoy attention.

⁶ The implication is not that all ethnographic research is pleasurable; when not, rather that the researcher is changed by the experience. Perhaps a note of interest: Hannerz (2010:77, 79) distinguishes participant observation's classic characteristic of *anthropology of immersion* with its antithesis *anthropology by appointment*, for which he credits Tanya Luhrmann (1996) for the concept.

During the field investigation of this study, the following types of data were gathered and generated:

- Historical and contemporary data (based on archival, literary review and empirical research) related to the places/spaces to which pilgrims are drawn in the Free State.
- Descriptive, empirical evidence about the sacred site communities, among others: the nature and character of pilgrims to (and from), and pilgrimages to (and from) sacred places; the relations between different congregations/denominations; individuals' motivations for undertaking pilgrimages, etc.
- Literary evidence about popular pilgrimage sites in other provinces of South Africa.
- Extensive theoretical reading to situate (religious or spiritual) Free State pilgrimages.

I employed the following modes of data collection to collect these data types. Separating the methods and techniques applied in this study is a nonsensical exercise. I conceive of each as an extension of the other, flowing naturally from one to the other and through it, to the next (cf. Lofland 1971, cited in Fontana & Frey 2005:705; Du Plooy 2006). A natural extension of the framework of participant observation (cf. Crane & Angrosino 1992:64), for example, is developing relationships with respondents. Not only is this building of trust between myself and those I am researching a desired outcome of ethnographic research, but the establishment of rapport is a prerequisite for gathering the depth of data characteristic of ethnographic research (in the anthropological sense). Some relationships become more meaningful during the fieldwork endeavour and in exploring the theme of the investigation. Identifying key informants and life history candidates is thus an inherent part of the process. The type of information sought largely dictated the form that the interviews took. Applying purposive and sometimes snowball sampling, both the unstructured/unfocused depth interviews and those following a life history style were conducted until a reasonable response saturation point had been reached (in accordance with the original purpose of the study) (cf. Miller 2000:77, 95).

Being an ethnographic study, the qualitative research methods and techniques, namely participant observation, ethnographic (in-depth, open-ended) interviewing with a variety of informants and key informants, the collection of life histories and other narrative accounts are particularly suited to the research topic and the evidence needed to satisfactorily answer the set objectives. Among others they proved to be flexible enough to deal with an array of settings and

a variety of informants; particularly appropriate in collecting sensitive and personal information and accounts, since they allowed for follow-ups and extensive probing and are complementary in that they promote triangulation.⁷ Some may say that the kinds of ethnographic procedures are enriched by life histories/narratives and participant observation, including narratives of the factual experiences of the researcher herself. I am of the understanding that ethnographic research already includes case studies and life histories (cf. Hammersley 1990, cited in Babbie & Mouton 2003:279) as does it emphasise strong reflexivity. These modes of research prevented the ethnographic study from becoming an outsider-witness-report without emancipatory dimensions.

I planned to include as many as possible of the perspectives or voices (polyphonic representation⁸) of categories of individuals associated with pilgrimages and the selected sites (Marcus 1989:11; 1994:48-49). This plurivocality involves creating spaces for those previously unheard. Far more important though is the opportunity for participants to self-define and self-determine their reality and identity. This form of polyphonic representation in the final product includes quotations and at times longer citations from interview transcriptions and informant stories. In the main, these are ways to reduce the authoritative ethnographic representation that authors such as Said (1978) so vehemently opposed. I want readers to encounter, as I have, my informants, and not for a minute be unsure about where this writing has its origins – it comes from somewhere, not from nowhere⁹ (cf. Spencer 2010:444). This is not going to be “writing at arm’s length” or a denial of the “particularity of ethnographic experience” (Spencer 2010:448); it is a messy text (Marcus 1994, cited in Lather 2010:481) written in different registers. Ethnography further “benefits from a strong sense of informants as real people with individual experiences, dispositions, and perspectives” (Murchison 2010:201). To add to this multivoicedness, I present a number of my personal field experiences as autoethnographic vignettes. These representations

⁷ Denzin (1989:236, cited in Babbie & Mouton 2003:275), explains triangulation as: “...the use of multiple methods [and] ...is a plan of action that will raise [researchers] ...above the personal biases that stem from single methodologies. By combining methods and investigators in the same study, observers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator or method”. Some would say that triangulation is one of the best ways to improve and ensure validity and reliability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:5) expand on this by saying “[t]riangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry.”

⁸ Other concepts used in the literature denoting the multiple perspectives included in a text are plurivocality (Skeggs 2010:436) and multivoicedness (Lather 2010:483). Polyphonic interviewing arose from Marcus and Fischer’s mid-1980s concern with the impact of the researcher throughout the research process (Fontana & Frey 2005:709).

⁹ This is derived from Donna Haraway who said: “the view from nowhere” becomes “the view from somewhere” (cited in Olesen 2005:251).

are important in showing “how a situation evolves and how a person constructs a story about the event” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2010:364). In both these instances, their inclusion is to offer insights and greater understanding. Key aspects of information are often highlighted in these stories. They are also useful in showing the “practical, human dimensions of ethnographic research” and educating the reader’s empathy for the informants or researcher (Murchison 2010:199). The sensory markers they provide help the reader connect with the humanness of my ethnographic field research.

Besides these, much of this ethnography is composite description, a common ethnographic convention (Murchison 2010:201). Compiled from general or recurring characteristics from various parts of the empirical material, this standard or idealised version I present here does not describe a particular pilgrimage. Instead, it signifies my best fieldwork-based understanding of eastern Free State pilgrimages.

In accordance with cultural and research protocol, before commencing with observation and interviewing, access to the sites is negotiated with the landowners and *gatekeepers* as it were. The custodians of culture, of the sites themselves, were approached for permission to proceed with the research as is required by good etiquette, but were also interviewed as site and practice specialists.

I should mention that this study has formed part of a larger project by the name of *Communities in communion: Religious integration in South African sacred places in forming the new South African identity*. The project partners were colleagues from the Department of Culture Studies of the School of Humanities at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands, as well as colleagues from the Centre for Africa Studies (CAS) at the University of the Free State (UFS). This project was made possible by funding from the South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD). It was together with this team that preliminary discussions about the larger and component projects were discussed. An example of such talks involved a 2007 workshop where stakeholders including representatives of the Department of Arts and Culture, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission), Land Affairs, Traditional Leaders etc. defined the parameters and concepts of the project. By 2008 when my participation formally began, one of the project leaders had already made contact with and sought formal permission from the various gatekeepers (land

owners, traditional leaders, traditional practitioners in general, and a number of site users). It was through him and others familiar with the sites that the rest of the team members, and particularly myself became naturalised to the sites, to important stations within the sites, and to general theoretical aspects of sacred sites and pilgrimages.

My strategy, particularly during the early phase of contact and data collection, was to keep a low profile (if this is at all possible as an outsider researcher) but to build rapport and get to know the lay of the land. Observation was crucial during this time. As I was working with people (as opposed to immovable objects), I could not tell with any measure of certainty what approach I would be taking with a particular informant on any given day/encounter. The events which unfolded at the sites during my visits and the presence (or absence) of informants largely dictated how I proceeded.

I used tried and tested techniques to capture data. These included the staple of ethnographic fieldwork, the taking of systematic and continuous fieldnotes (cf. Emerson et al. 2010:352-368). The scheduled interviews were digitally recorded in audio, while I continued to build up a substantial photographic database of the sites and their peoples. I use these as illustrative in this thesis, but they have also proven to be invaluable during interviewing. In the main I have made liberal use of photographs as a data capturing technique (cf. Ball & Smith 2010:302-319). I have discovered that photographs taken over a period of time offer an opportunity to compare the physical changes to sites and stations. Although member checks (Babbie & Mouton 2003:275-276) were often used as a way to promote validity, I found that taking data and interpretations back to the pilgrim communities served as a valuable way to generate, capture and validate (and reconstruct) information/knowledge.

I accept that truth is fragmented and regardless of the level of sophistication with which I design my project and collect data, it can only reveal partial understandings of the social processes being investigated (Clifford 1986:1-27). I augmented this limitation by working at a number of sites. In the mid- to late-1980s Marcus (1986:171-173, 177; 1989:18, 22, 25, 27) referred to this kind of research as multi-locale ethnography. More recently, multisited ethnography appears more commonplace (cf. Coleman 2006:31-46). This study is a multisited ethnography since I worked at three larger sites in the eastern Free State (see Chapter 3). I was “there... and there...and there!” (Hannerz 2010:68). Each of the sites constitutes a case study and although this study does not

present them separately on every occasion, they are compared throughout, thereby demonstrating the comparative facet of ethnographic work (Murchison 2010:200).

Literature consulted

Any research, including a partially explorative, explanatory and largely descriptive study following a narrative-type of presentation such as is applied in this case, begins with a search and survey of the literature. The wide-ranging and directed literature review contributed to the formulation of the research problem and questions, as well as a well-grounded base from which to approach and address the said problems. This section presents five overarching literature categories that were consulted, surveyed and reviewed for purposes of conducting the study. Reviews of the literature are presented elsewhere. These categories include: a) works that *describe social science and anthropological research methodology and techniques*; b) theoretical sources analysing *pilgrimage and sacred journeys in broad terms*; c) general scholarly and *ethnographic works* pertaining to (popular) pilgrimage sites in South(ern) Africa; d) documents offering *historical data* about the peopling of the eastern Free State area; and e) literature enlightening theoretical constructs used in the *analyses of the data*.

Mouton and Marais' *Basic concepts in the methodology of the social sciences* (1990), Babbie and Mouton's *The practice of social research* (2003), Tesch's *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools* (1990) and *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) were consulted for their broad approaches to social science and qualitative research. Narrowing the focus, Russell Bernard's *Research methods in anthropology* (1995) and the edited volume *Handbook of ethnography* (Atkinson et al. 2010), Dobbert's *Ethnographic research: Theory and application for modern schools and societies* (1982) and Murchison's *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting and presenting your research* (2010) were highly valued for the anthropological and, more specifically, the ethnographical slants they brought to the research endeavour.

Clifford and Marcus' *Writing culture* (1986) and *Cultural Anthropology's 2012 Special Edition* (volume 27, issue 3) commemorating 25 years since the publication of the groundbreaking volume by these authors, was particularly important for highlighting the need for a new agenda in Anthropology. Furthermore, looking back at the strides that have been made, as well as pointing to unexpected developments and gaps in contemporary practice, was the primary value of the

latter. De Neve and Unnithan-Kumar's book *Critical journeys: The making of anthropologists* (2006) was also insightful in this regard. (Cf. Chapter 2).

The readily available body of pilgrimage literature is primarily centred on textual religions and major popular Western European pilgrimage routes (frequently related to Catholic shrines), and/or a research tradition primarily generated by such scholars. Eade and Katić (2014) address this gap with their recent publication, bringing central, eastern and south-eastern European pilgrimages, by local researchers to attention which had been largely absent in Anglophone scholarship. Reader explores other interest groups without whom pilgrimages would not be possible in his book *Pilgrimage in the marketplace* (2014). His unorthodox focus on the consumerist markets of pilgrimages is refreshing. A recent volume focusing on *International perspectives in pilgrimage studies* introduces studies of primarily Christian pilgrimages in Eurasia (Albera & Eade 2015). I consider *Contesting the sacred* (Eade & Sallnow 1991); *Pilgrimage: Past and present* (Coleman & Elsner 1995); and *Reframing pilgrimage: Cultures in motion* (Coleman & Eade 2004) as the pilgrimage literature I cut my teeth on. More recently Badone and Roseman's *Intersecting journeys: The anthropology of pilgrimage and tourism* (2004); Dubisch and Winkelman's *Pilgrimage and healing* (2005); Margry's *Shrines and pilgrimage in a modern world* (2008); and Harman's *A sociology of pilgrimage: Embodiment, identity, transformation* (2014a) have brought a far more inclusive understanding of pilgrimages to the table. For example, the parallels between pilgrimage and tourism as forms of travel have received much attention. The overarching commonality of undertaking pilgrimages to incur some sort of healing cannot be ignored and the increasing body of literature introducing secular, postmodern journeys to places as far-flung as Elvis Presley's Graceland, the Cancer Forest in Flevoland, or Vietnam war veterans' motorcycle advance on Washington's War Memorial, as pilgrimages, is astounding. The interdisciplinary contributions in *Pilgrim paths: Journeys of transformation* (Farrelly & Keely 2015) offer multidisciplinary perspectives and interpretations of pilgrimages and sacred journeys.

Of course the classic work by Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture* (1978), as well as *Pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition: A case study of west Bengal* (Morinis 1984), *Pilgrims of the Andes: Regional cults in Cusco* (Sallnow 1987), and *Permanent pilgrims: The role of pilgrimage in the lives of west African Muslims in Sudan* (Yamba 1995) raises important foundational assumptions in pilgrimage studies. Leslie Nthoi's book *Contesting sacred space: A pilgrimage study of the Mwali cult of Southern Africa* (2006) is a pioneering work on Southern African pilgrimages. (Cf. Chapter 4).

Retief Müller's *African pilgrimage: Ritual travel in South Africa's Christianity of Zion* (2011), although a theological account of ritual travel, provides invaluable information about the ZCC. Jean Comaroff's *Body of power: Spirit of resistance* (1985) was also a mainstay of information, as were Tishken (2006), Heuser (2005) and Becken's (1968) works on the NBC. Cas Wepener and Gerrie te Haar in their chapter *Sacred sites and spiritual power: One angel, two sites, many spirits* (2014) present an incisive description of the CCSA's Isitshisa gathering at Mlazi in KwaZulu-Natal, whereas further enlightenment is provided in Terence Ranger's account of land appropriation, ownership and sacralisation in the Makoni district of Zimbabwe (1987) and the innovative works on eastern Free State sites by David Coplan (2003), Stephanie Cawood (2014) and Philip Nel (2014a, 2014b). In addition, I relied on more popular literature and blog posts to reconstruct journeys to sacred sites in South Africa. (Cf. Chapter 1).

To explore the eastern Free State, but particularly the Mohokare (Caledon) Valley I relied on classic ethnographic texts and historical sources. These included works by missiologists Thomas Arbousset, i.e. *Missionary Excursion* ([1842] 1991), Eugene Casalis, i.e. *The Basutos* ([1861] 1997) and Fred Ellenberger's *History of the Basotho* (1912). More recent works have been produced by Hugh Ashton (*The Basotho*, [1952] 1967); Stephan Gill (*A short history of Lesotho*, 1997) and Robin Wells (*An introduction to the music of the Basotho*, 1994). (Cf. Chapter 3).

Besides the pilgrimage literature already referred to, of the proponents of certain theories and their ideas, I relied on Tim Ingold's work on dwelling, landscape and animacy (2000, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) for the analyses and interpretation of the data; Nurit Bird-David's reformulation of animism (1999); Ian Hodder's work on entanglements (2012); and Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen's ideas of absence and presence (2010). (Cf. Chapter 7).

Participant observation

Emerson et al. (2010:352) beautifully conceptualise participant observation as “establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting”. While participant observation entails “gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social worlds”, it is also about “producing *written accounts and descriptions* that bring versions of these worlds to others” (Emerson et al. 2010:352 – emphasis in the original).

Fundamentally, participant observation denotes ‘observing while participating’ or ‘participating while observing’. Both observation and participation lie on a continuum, from direct to indirect and from total (high degree of participation) to none, respectively (cf. Pelto & Pelto 1984:68). For purposes of this study, I observed both directly and indirectly. Additionally, the degree of my participation varied according to the situation. Some circumstances called for full participation (e.g. healing and cleansing rituals and submitting own dreams for interpretation, cf. Marcus 2012:437 for different sorts of participation), while others dictated lesser levels of participation (e.g. specific transitional initiation rituals marking novice healers’ passage to other levels). My overall intention was to interact with pilgrim groups as an insider and not merely observe as an outsider (cf. Pelto & Pelto 1984:68; Seymour-Smith 1990:216; Crane & Angrosino 1992:64; Huysamen 1993:175). In essence, the emic understanding (cf. Goffman’s *framing* cited in Niehaus 2013b:654) (and eventual reporting) of the cultural phenomena/social processes under investigation, i.e. learning from site users, standing in the shoes of journeyers and attempting to see the world through their unique spectacles was pursued.¹⁰ In so doing I was able to establish the necessary level of rapport (cf. Bernard 1995:137) to address the research problem and simultaneously comply with the criteria of the qualitative approach I was following. By concertedly pursuing the *strong* approach to reflexivity, I managed to reduce the bias created by my presence amongst the pilgrim groups (on the one hand) and by my preconceived ideas and own cultural framing (on the other) (Heyl 2010:378; Spencer 2010:450, 451).

The culmination of this investigation is the writing of this ethnography. It is therefore not surprising that the entire endeavour is aimed at presenting thick descriptions, descriptively narrating and presenting the biographical narratives shared by informants. Narrating is therefore an inescapable part of this ethnographic fieldwork, i.e. noting informant stories and then retelling them (cf. Emerson et al. 2010:352; Cortazzi 2010:387). Participant observation was therefore particularly suited to gather “the type and depth of insight and interpretative material” to achieve this purpose (Seymour-Smith 1990:216).

Nevertheless, it may be expected that any methodological technique has its deficiencies and participant observation is no exception. In the first place, I could not participate in all the pilgrim

¹⁰ The ongoing debate in anthropology regarding the pursuit of emic information is acknowledged. I elect to understand *emic* as using the concepts and categories that are relevant and meaningful to research participants (Ferraro 2001:381).

activities and much more information had to be accumulated about pilgrimages and pilgrims than I could glean from observation alone; limitations alluded to by Coertze and Coertze (1996:55) as well as Pelto and Pelto (1984:69). For these reasons it was essential to triangulate participant observation with other research techniques, such as making use of informants, conducting interviews, individual biographical narratives and life histories.

Having said this it is important for the former as well as subsequent arguments that I iterate the impossibility of ever knowing a total, whole culture, as was the pursuit of earlier ethnography. Instead, I can at best only discover/uncover and relay partial social processes (cf. Marcus 1989). It is therefore acceptable that, as a researcher, I could not and should not be expected to have participated in all activities.

Related to the former argument concerning the impossibility of the whole (Marcus 1989), and elicited from the earlier urging in anthropology to clearly distinguish real from ideal cultural patterns when conducting research, is the realisation that absolute, all-encompassing truths do not exist (Clifford 1986:1-26). Instead it must be realised that any given informant will only know a partial truth and that as a researcher I should expect that informants are only capable of providing fractional information. Said differently: the epistemological imperative is that all knowledge is situated, incomplete and conditional (Skeggs 2010:435). On the other hand, as ethnographer I might on occasion be aware of what I am not observing and seeing during observation. At most times, however, I must accept that I am oblivious to what I am missing and even misunderstanding (cf. Lather 2010:486).

As a researcher I tried to ensure that my key informants and other site users from whom information was obtained were relaying the truest knowledge of pilgrims and pilgrimages to which they were privy (cf. Niehaus' 2013b:651-652 argument about regularities and extraordinary events). The earlier concern about differentiating these from ideal culture patterns and the necessity to guard that informants do not present fictions instead (cf. Nel 1985:8; Haviland 1999:47) becomes redundant given these overarching assumptions. In fact, what I learn from my informants is constituted. What they impart is made up of part real fact, part hearsay, and part fiction. Stir memory and my presence, into this experience, add filters, experience and knowledge, and ultimately the result is coproduced knowledge.

This of course does not mean that knowledge does not have to be validated. I consulted a number of informants over a number of years as one way of doing this. Another way was to ask informants to comment on my understanding. In the third place, I used a variety of techniques to engage with the same issues repeatedly. A fourth method was to compare answers gleaned from different research sites (multisited ethnography).

Although there is no universal blueprint or template for evaluating social processes, Nel's (1985:8) warning to bear traditional continuing and discontinued culture forms, syncretism, dualistic and foreign culture forms that are adopted into the earlier or reinterpreted form in mind, remains a worthy consideration. I naturally acknowledged and was aware of the varying ontological realities held by the informants at the various sites since I deemed such shifts and movements important trends to keep an eye on.

The call for reflexivity, i.e. the inclusion of a "self-conscious account regarding the conditions of knowledge production as it is being produced", especially for ethnography, was made by George Marcus (1994:45). Adding to this call he believed that there is more to reflexivity and that it "constitutes the basis for hermeneutic practice" (Marcus 1994:45). "Reflexivity, then, means introducing a discussion of dialogic and collaborative relationships into the ethnographic text, that is, how informants and ethnographer collectively construct a text" (Marcus 1994:45). To do this I had to be very much present and written into the ethnographic text. Ethnographic effacement – the removal of the ethnographer from the text – in an attempt to promote so-called objectivity and the avoidance of emotionality, for example, is simply not conducive to the type of end product ethnography espouses in post *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986) anthropology. As a participant observer, I had to be reflexive, conscious of personal observational biases and had to develop a systematic and reliable observational style to limit distorted views of the particular social processes or events under investigation. I had to be acutely aware of how knowledge was produced. Reflexivity is not limited to observation. Reflexivity is required in interpretation and analyses as well. Reflexivity challenged me as the ethnographic researcher to turn the anthropological lens back upon herself. Heyl (2010:378) emphasises the importance of expanding the research lens to include the researcher and her place in the research. Doing this not only broadened my conceptual field; it recognised it and its complicity. It confronted me with my most foundational convictions about truth and objectivity (Heyl 2010:378). In retrospect, I realised that

I only truly became reflexive after a *shock* experience¹¹ – because only then did I and my interlocutors really scrutinise our assumptions (Karp & Kendall 1982:260-262, cited in Heyl 2010:378). Marcus (1994, cited in Lather 2010:488) distinguishes three kinds of reflexivity: confessional, intertextual and theoretical.

During my undergraduate and even early postgraduate training I often encountered cryptic footnote remarks about *culture shock* and warnings about the real possibility of experiencing personal discomfort due to uncertainty about appropriate responses or procedures when making initial contact with another group. For the sake of transparency a noteworthy remark for me to make here, in my opinion, is that I indeed experienced *culture shock* while undertaking my fieldwork. On occasion it was a mild sense of uncertainty and discomposure. What surprised me, however, was a period of time during which I experienced a concerted and very real *existential crisis*. In hindsight I ascribe this to the socialisation process, and how becoming immersed in another way of life, another way of knowing and being in this world unexpectedly and profoundly challenged me to the core: there was no returning to previous views of the world because they simply no longer made sense.

Key informants

For purposes of this study I gathered information of varying degrees of complexity and depth from different types of informants. I attained more *superficial* or commonly known information from a category of respondents referred to as informants. On the other hand, I obtained more detailed and in-depth information from key informants (some of whom became interlocutors). Paul's (1970:443) definition encapsulates the essence of this category of participant: "an articulate member of the studied culture who enters into a more or less personal relationship with the investigator for a relatively long time". To this Bernard (1995:166) adds: "[i]f you let yourself become the student, really good informants will educate you". I relied on key informants because the communities were too large to interview all of their members. Additionally there were limitations regarding time, money and other research resources (cf. Crane & Angrosino 1992:53, 54). Ultimately though, because of the fluidity of the pilgrim communities, as site specialists the key informants turned out to be essential collaborators during data collection and interpretation.

¹¹ Consult Chapter 6 for a description of this experience.

Instead of purposefully selecting key informants, I was organically led by the circumstances and my familiarity with the group under investigation. In so doing I was in a better position to determine which individuals were likely to be the best informants concerning the particular information required. I also considered whether certain key informants would limit access to other individuals and important information (cf. Bernard 1995:168). I followed this procedure even when relying on key informants for reference to potentially new informants (snowball sampling). Besides this, I selected key informants based on the criteria provided by Nel (1985:11-12), Bernard (1995:165-170) as well as Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999:84-87). At other times they chose me.

I am of the opinion that the issue of key informant compensation was satisfactorily dealt with in this study. As there is no golden rule (cf. Bernard 1995:178-179; Miller 2000:103; Skeggs 2010:434) I felt it proper to compensate my key informants with photographs taken during my fieldwork and token grocery items, for the time and energy they devoted in teaching me.

With these considerations in mind, the information obtained from key informant interviews was continuously verified by own observation, by other members of the community, as well as by posing the same questions at later stages of the research process (cf. Babbie & Mouton 2003:282-283). Similarly, interviewees commented on the accuracy of my understanding of previous interviews, which led to additional, reflexive discussions based on prior findings (cf. Miller 2000:103; Murchison 2010:122). Regardless of the cautions I was issued in selecting key informants and in accepting the information they offered, interlocutors were fundamental to the research process, particularly demonstrating their value when it came to meeting people and helping with background information, as well as divulging biographical narratives that pertained to certain institutions. They were thus the link that connected me with pilgrim groups (cf. Crane & Angrosino 1992:54).

Interviews

From the outset I must unequivocally state that I consider interviewing between researchers and interviewees as a complex social interaction and that the data is coproduced in these interactions (Fontana & Frey 2005:716; Heyl 2010:370). I also find Heyl's metaphor (2010:371), i.e. the traveller as opposed to the miner, most appropriate for this context. The traveller metaphor speaks of being on a journey and indeed I returned from these journeys with travel stories derived from the many conversations held along the way. This links to the original Latin meaning of

'conversation', i.e. "wandering together with" (Heyl 2010:371). Like pilgrims, traveller-researchers wander on and wonder at the planned route, making adjustments along the way. Direction is changed and new avenues of interest are excavated. Grappling to understand is the yoke of both the pilgrim and the traveller-researcher.

When making use of informants and key informants I was essentially conducting interviews, the nature of which were *unstructured*. The topic under investigation, as well as the design of this study, required that the method must leave room to clarify respondents' narrations, as well as to determine the interviewees' feelings and beliefs surrounding their sacred journeys (cf. Huysamen 1993:149, 178, 180).

Besides not being bound by a formal questionnaire, my in-depth, open-ended interview style departed from the very detached stance that characterises structured interviews, favouring interaction with respondents (cf. Huysamen 1993:178; Bernard 1995:209; Schensul et al. 1999:121-148; Miller 2000:88, 103; Fontana & Frey 2005:709). In line with this, Heyl (2010:369) emphasises a number of features of ethnographic interviewing that I drew from. These include respectful and continued relationships with interviewees; sufficient rapport for real exchanges of views; and sufficient opportunity and ingenuousness in interviews for interviewees to explore the meanings in the worlds shared with me. Arguably, this type of interview is particularly suited to exploratory¹² research (cf. Huysamen 1993:149). Moreover, when dealing with sensitive issues I was able to demonstrate genuine empathy and apply a flexibility suited to individual informants and circumstances. Compiling and using an interview guide also ensured the reliability and comparability of information (cf. Bernard 1995:209). This informal interview style, resembling a normal, everyday conversation further allowed me to ask follow-up questions, prompt and probe to get clarity. Not only did I recount previous data to verify it, I made further use of two specific aids during my interviews with key informants: photographs and dreams. *Photographs* are well-known interview tools used to elicit information from respondents, to both verify and corroborate information. The photographs I showed were particularly useful in pinpointing differences in dress, ritual activity, etc. (cf. Ball & Smith 2010:302-319). Furthermore, informants used the photographs as concrete reference sources in their explanations, i.e. they used them as sources of chronological reference, pointing out certain demeanours, or to expand on explanations. Presenting my own *dreams* for interpretation by significant functionaries proved to be immensely

¹² I accept the view of Schensul et al. (1999:121) that *exploratory* has to do with the "purpose of the interview – to explore domains believed to be important to the study and about which little is known".

fruitful. Methodologically, this move opened many doors. It was probably the ultimate way for me to yield to the field and the day I first did this was undoubtedly the study's watershed moment.

Alongside participant observation and an in-depth, open-ended interviewing style with a variety of informants, with the focus on key informants, and the collection of life histories, is being able to communicate in a local language is of paramount importance when conducting ethnographic research. I found that being able to speak Sesotho and already having an inherent understanding of Basotho ways of life, particularly significant protocol, was to my advantage. Being able to conduct interviews in the mother tongue of the informants and the local language of the region was significantly helpful as it reduced the danger of forcing Westernised ideas and concepts onto participants during these interviews.

I personally conducted all the interviews for the purposes of this study – the majority in Sesotho (the predominantly spoken language in the eastern Free State), others in English. Key informant interviews all continued for several hours at a time and often spanned successive days or field visits (cf. Heyl 2010:379). I was therefore able to record the interview in the way that the participants *language*d their narratives¹³ or factual information they provided. In this manner we were able to create what Fontana and Frey (2005:713) refer to as a “sharedness of meaning”. Besides my taking notes, interviews were all audio (digitally) recorded.

Life histories (stories) / Biographical narratives

As an additional data collection technique, life histories, with their characteristically “anecdotal or literary style” (Seymour-Smith 1990:168), are effective in presenting the individual experience of a particular cultural reality, as well as personalising the reader's experience. Niehaus (2013b:658) adds that the “mode of storytelling is appropriate to ‘conjunctive agency’ and ‘evential history’ (cf. Sahlins 2004) and a “redeployment of biographical narratives that seek to capture the interplay of structure and events in individuals' lives (cf. Niehaus 2013a).

¹³ For purposes of this study narratives constitute important elements of life histories and biographical accounts since, in their broadest sense, narratives include a variety of talk and text, but all have “structures of knowledge and storied ways of knowing” in common (Cortazzi 2010:384).

Life histories are biographical versions of individual experiences (micro-mechanisms) of a particular cultural institution through a process of *cross-referentiality* (cf. Seymour-Smith 1990:168; Coetzee & Wood 1997:3-4; Miller 2000:74-75). These personal narratives or life stories, as Plummer (2010:395) prefers to call them, connect the inner and outer worlds of the narrator, and are not necessarily chronological or purely factual, but include dimensions of interpretation – how the individual develops and copes within society (Crane & Angrosino 1992:75-76). Neither are they necessarily, in the common sense of the word, the entire autobiographical history of the particular person. Instead, when following a narrative approach the end product is a collaboration between me and my interlocutors and a compilation of their verbal accounts.

When used in conjunction with other research techniques, the value of life history research, as applied in this study, lies in the fact that it provides more discursive, informative accounts of the individual's experience, rather than the peculiarities and universals that have come to dominate much of the cross-cultural and ethnographical works. My decision to use life histories was motivated by the notion that information obtained and presented in this manner adds a necessary element of realism. Added to this, life stories offer thick descriptions of individuals' life experiences in relation to their social group of origin or current circumstances; “[t]hey make links across life phases and cohort generations revealing historical shifts” in social processes (Plummer 2010:395). Furthermore, the value of life histories as a methodological technique lies in the fact that, since people move and interact between numbers of social settings, their understanding of these settings is disjointed.¹⁴ To understand the individual's *social reality* it is necessary to apply a fragmentary technique when gathering and interpreting the data. It is here that biographical narrative accounts are most apt, since they provide “possibilities for understanding grassroots activities and for gaining profiles of everyday life” (Coetzee & Wood 1997:2-3).

Similar to the selection of key informants, these biographical accounts evolved as I became familiar with my interlocutors. This familiarity and level of comfort helped to contextualise the information, reduce misunderstandings, and prevent faulty interpretations. Very importantly, waiting to engage with key informants offered them the opportunity to become accustomed to my

¹⁴ The argument set forth by Coetzee and Wood (1997:1-13) concerning the value of life histories is fundamentally based on the revived interest in the Frankfurt school, particularly the works of Georg Simmel in *The field of sociology* (1976) and Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the philosophy of history* (1989).

presence. Neither was s/he immediately the focus of my attention, nor that of other community members.

I experienced no difficulty in convincing informants that I had a genuine yearning to hear their unique stories and experiences, and neither was it difficult for me to maintain motivation difficult. This is not always the case, as discussed by, for example, Miller (2000:80-81) as well as Crane and Angrosino (1992:80). I am convinced that my research participants had a sincere desire to impart their journey stories. My interlocutors were enthralled to have such an eager ear. As stated by Plummer 2010:395): "What matters to people keeps getting told in their stories of their life".

Ethical considerations

Feminist scholars in particular challenge the fact that "standards for quality are now intertwined with ethical ones, for example, the demand that the researcher conduct and make explicit open and honest negotiations around gathering materials, analysis, and representation" (Olesen 2005:254). What this citation reminds me of is the immense importance of ethical considerations and that they should not be relegated to the recesses of afterthought. Instead, ethical matters are foundational to research and in fact inform the entire research process.

Organically discussing many ethical considerations in the previous and forthcoming sections felt natural and unforced. This section contains a number of comments about my approach to informants, participant interviews, explanations of my agenda, and permission to use stories etc.

Maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality (Murphy & Dingwall 2010:341) of informants in this type of qualitative project is difficult. This is complicated particularly where certain functionaries and more permanent pilgrims exist almost synonymously with the sites and/or stations they staff. The use of pseudonyms is also not always effective in protecting the identities of informants for the reasons cited above. However, the multisited nature of this ethnography helps in making it more difficult to identify specific persons or certain events, unlike with single-site projects where it is more difficult to ensure that data is unattributable.

I had no reason to conceal my identity or my intention with my questions and repeated visits to the sites from the more permanent site dwellers. Because of our prolonged relationship and my immersion and participation in activities, I reciprocally shared personal facts about family and

myself with informants and key informants. It feels that when the levels of disclosure are comparable, the authenticity of the encounter is maintained. Hertz (1997, cited in Fontana & Frey 2005:711) referred to this as making the *self* of the researcher visible, maintaining that it is only one among many selves. I ensured that I always sought permission from key informants with whom long and repeated, recorded interviews were conducted. I did this bearing in mind that consent may “fade or alter” (Olesen 2005:254) over time. I did not feel that the chance encounters with pilgrims on the move and the fleeting exchanges with journeyers warranted in-depth discussions about formal consent. They oftentimes assumed that I was making a documentary and eagerly asked to be photographed. I did not set out to blur or conceal personal information or my agenda. Instead, these sometimes became “lost in the complexities” of these fleeting interactions “characterized by both participants’ and researchers’ mobile subjectivities and multiple realities” – a characteristic of everyday life (Olesen 2005:254-255). At other times I became the observed and covertly photographed anomaly. I sometimes described the events of these meetings in this ethnography, but I do not contend that they are revelatory of individual pilgrims’ identities. Strictly speaking, however, such instances might be considered as covert research.

Research encounters have the potential for being hotspots for exploitation and manipulation. For purposes of this research, however, I think adopting a somewhat moderate stance such as Haraway’s (1997, cited in Skeggs 2010:437) *ethnographic attitude* (i.e. always remaining mindful and accountable) is a worthy position to occupy in reducing power imbalances (cf. Murphy & Dingwall 2010:343). Fontana and Frey (2005:716) add that our ethical obligation should be to our informants first, then towards the study, and then towards ourselves.

A note on culture

I embrace a postmodern and sceptical view of culture. I reject the neat explanations and whole representations of bounded local units of culture (Hannerz 2010:67). Instead, my view of culture is open-ended and unbounded, fluid, and in the words of Starn (2012:412), a “terrain of hybridization, disjuncture, and heteroglossia”. These notions had their genesis when scholars began toying with ideas concerning the “implications of global interconnectedness for anthropological thought and practice” (Hannerz 2010:67). Local relationships and connections are considered important, as should the longer-distance relationships be acknowledged, together with their impact on those of the local. These assumptions of connectedness are important for

this study in that I later experiment with Tim Ingold's notion of meshworks and Ian Hodder's entanglements when analysing pilgrimages to and at the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. In addition, this view of culture as disjointed and heteroglossaic is reflected in the pastiche, fragmented style that this ethnography assumes.

2.3 Locating myself

Conducting empirical fieldwork is challenging at the best of times. I contend that a special set of manoeuvring skills is required of the ethnographic fieldworker in navigating the logistics of planning the fieldwork and getting out there to source informants, requires of the ethnographic fieldworker a different kind of manoeuvring. Since the researcher is in fact a tool of data collection, she needs to situate and deal with herself in a way that positivist researchers are seldom required to do. As such the ethnographic researcher finds herself in a complex interaction where she is both assigned and assumes an identity that may likewise hinder or facilitate communication with informants and the collection of significant data.

Drawing from my fieldwork this section aims to re-engage the dialogue and criticisms that sprouted from the *epistemological crisis* in the field of anthropology that arose in the 1960s and 1970s around the notion of researcher positionality (insider/outsider research). From the literature, and evident 40 and 50 years after these contentious issues were raised again, I find myself, and see others, still grappling with issues of insider-outsiderness and auto-anthropology, reflexivity and styles of experimental writing. On this matter, Eade and Katić (2014:11) remark that in their recent edited volume, *Pilgrimage, politics and place-making in Eastern Europe: Crossing borders*, this classic ethnographic question surfaces time and again. Even Nthoi (2006:xiii), who for all intents and purposes is an insider Kalanga¹⁵ in Zimbabwe, reports being acutely aware of his outsidership and its impact on his access to information and freedom of movement.

Working within the qualitative paradigm, I implement fieldwork reflection by an assumed outsider for purposes of this study and this section. I consider my own narratives, the narratives of the author, white and female (since we sometimes must have labels). Within these accounts I explain, regardless of my ascribed and assumed social identities (both imagined and real), how I

¹⁵ A regional ethnic group in Zimbabwe.

negotiated and re-negotiated my positionality as researcher from encounter to encounter and from one informant to another.

A hallmark of the postmodern scientific endeavour, particularly in anthropology, is being consciously and continuously reflexive throughout the research process. Reflexivity is a strategy that explains how knowledge develops and is produced within dialogic field relationships (Marcus 1994:45-46). Having originally used participant observation, ethnographic depth interviewing with informants and key informants, as well as life history accounts to collect data, I now critically engage with my reflections. It is to these reflections that I turn as the fluidity of my locatedness becomes all the more clear.

This section firstly situates researcher positionality, locatedness, insider-outsiderhood, shallowness/superficiality or immersion. This is followed by some researcher reflections. With these ruminations, I aim to dispel some of the commonly perceived advantages or disadvantages of the dichotomous and continuum approaches of researcher positionality, arguing instead for a much more flexible, situational and continuously negotiated approach. The third part offers some concluding remarks about researcher positionality.

Negotiating positionality

The insider/outsider debate can be traced back to influential philosophers as far back as Francis Bacon and the works of Georg Simmel ([1908] 1971) and Martin Heidegger (1927), for example. However, these arguments became pronounced during the *epistemological crisis* of the 1960s and 1970s, and for anthropology, during the *crisis of representation* as Marcus and Fischer (1999:7-16) labelled it in the 1980s and 1990s (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:3, 18-19). Marcus also referred to this as the limits of representation (1989:16).¹⁶ Within the research context, epistemological questions (what can be known) such as the following became common: 'Who should speak for whom?', 'Can an outsider ever understand the culture and experiences of insiders and speak with moral authority about them?', 'Can Whites study Blacks, straights study gays?' and so forth (cf. Banks 1998:6; Merriam et al. 2001:405). Of course there were also other raging debates concerning methods and techniques, and whether these can in fact "access the

¹⁶ In *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd edition), Denzin and Lincoln (2005:18) refer to this phase of qualitative research as the *fourth moment*.

real world?” (Heyl 2010:370). Just to situate this within the discipline proper, Geertz (1995:42-43) asks a number of other questions:

“Questions about discreteness... questions about continuity and change, objectivity and proof, determinism and relativism, uniqueness and generalization, description and explanation, consensus and conflict, otherness and commensurability, and the sheer possibility of anyone, insider or outsider, grasping so vast a thing as an entire way of life and finding the words to describe it.”

I conceptualise three broad approaches to the debate: the earlier dichotomous, subsequent continuum, and current situational approaches (cf. Merriam et al. 2001:405). Since an in-depth discussion of each broad approach is not warranted here, I will position myself in the current situational approach.

There appears to be a reasonably straightforward progression and development of ideas in the insider/outsider debate. Merton (1972) is the *founding father* (cf. Labaree 2002:101). For some time a persistent dichotomous view prevails. Then a continuum conceptualisation exists. This is followed by feminist and postmodern proponents' calls for more fluid, situational and negotiated understandings and refinement of the researcher positionality debate.

The dichotomous view heralds the notion that a researcher occupies one of two positions, that of insider or *native*, or that of outsider or non-native or *real* researcher. This position is determined by the distance or difference of the researcher in relation to the informant – her *positionality*. The closer the researcher and participant are paired, based on a number of shared identity markers such as age, sex, education level, ethnic affiliation, the nearer and thus more *inside* the researcher is perceived. Conversely, the more different researcher and informant are, based on status characteristics such as religion, mother tongue, or socio-economic class, for example, the further and thus more *outside* the researcher is perceived.

This dichotomous (insider/outsider) debate does not sufficiently address the issue of the insider as simultaneous object and subject (Labaree 2002:117; cf. Chavez 2008). In fact, my point of departure is that when researching and writing from a postmodern vantage point, as reflexive researcher and critical ethnographer, you are both subject and object, regardless of any other negotiated status. The desire for polyvocality and the realisation of the value of the communal generation of knowledge as a slice of social reality at that moment means that researcher and informant are concurrently inside and outside while conjointly subject and object.

Some identity markers are explicit, and both researchers and participants are in relative agreement about them. It is not difficult to evaluate a person's status based on sex, for example. However, there are ranges of *invisible* status characteristics that influence the intersection and agreed researcher-researched situatedness (Labaree 2002:118). These may include political party affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, or criminal record history, to name but a few. My contention is that, like other identity markers, these *invisible* status characteristics may be called upon by the researcher in the status negotiation process or not, depending on the perceived advantage of divulging such information. On the other hand, participants might invoke these *invisible* status characteristics precisely because they intend to exclude the researcher from the desired knowledge. In the case of the latter, for example, invoking invisible status characteristics to exclude a researcher may happen at almost any stage of the research process and is not dependent on length of stay. Quality of relationship is probably a better indicator.

Merton (1972:24), for example, contended that one cannot be positioned or located by a single *status set*, but that I as researcher occupy a range of simultaneous social statuses; what other authors (cf. Banks 1998:7; Chavez 2008:474; Kusow 2003:593) refer to as a multiplicity or polyvocality of statuses based on criteria known as identity markers or status characteristics. In this regard, Olesen (2005:248) cites a most insightful passage from Lincoln to argue just this point: "we are not single persons, but a multitude of possibilities any one of which might reveal itself in a specific field situation". The unique situatedness of every researcher during every encounter with informants creates a distinctive environment in which the positionality of the researcher-researched lives itself out or is located. For Merton (1972), the insider/outsider positioning is an epistemological principle centred on the issue of access. He cautions that it is not whether the insider or the outsider "has privileged access to social reality" (Kusow 2003:592), but "their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking" (Merton 1972:36). That is, "both insider and outsider perspectives are needed" (Banks 1998:6) in the construction of knowledge. It is easy to infer that if the roles of the researcher-informant are distinctive and that the interaction between researcher-participant are distinctive, that the truth emanating from that researcher-researched encounter is situational and therefore distinct. Such reasoning is very much in line with Derrida's (1992:251) reading of texts from "an infinite series of trajectories or possible courses". Davies and Davies (2007:1140) eloquently summarise that "[t]here are multiple possible trajectories in the tales that we, and our research participants, tell in the process of 'generating data'". In this regard Naples (1996:84) argues that rather than one *insider* or *outsider* position, we all begin our work with different relationships to shifting aspects of social life and to

particular knowers in the community, with this contributing numerous dimensions through which we can relate to residents in various communities. As such, she states that *outsiderness* and *insiderness* are not fixed or static positions, but instead are ever-shifting and permeable social locations that are differentially experienced and expressed by community members; sentiments strongly shared by Hannerz (2010:101). Naples continues with this cautionary note: “We are never fully outside or inside the community” (1996:84), as the positionalities are not ascriptive characteristics (Hannerz 2010:101). Narayan (1993:671-672) proposes that:

“at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status.”

Feminist scholarship’s important contribution to this debate relates to the realisation that knowledge production or construction “is a process in which the subject and object interact” (Banks 1998:6). Said differently, both the research participant with their subjective knowledge, and the researcher with their observed and concluded *truth*, are in a dialogic relationship where a truth for that particular situation is communally constructed (Bridges 2001:382; cf. Labaree 2002:99). Chavez’s (2008:490) suggestion to follow a dialectal perspective is appropriate here. She draws on Aguiler’s (1981:24) belief that insiders and outsiders meet different needs in knowledge construction. “... [T]he outsider must to some extent get into the native’s heads, skins, or shoes, whereas the insider must get out of his or her own” (Aguiler 1981:24). Narayan (1993:678) adds:

“the study of one’s own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known.”

Hirschon (2010) echoed these sentiments stating that “auto-anthropology needs confrontation with the *stranger*, for it to understand itself”. Griffith (1998:363) describes the “researcher’s social location and knowledges as ‘always located somewhere’, yet continuously moving back and forth between the positional boundaries of insiderness and outsiderness”. In addition, I propose that many situational truths are needed to ultimately come to a deeper understanding of a social reality

with its multiplicity of dimensions. My work method of *many returns* offers just such opportunities. On the one hand each field visit required a renegotiation of my positionality and each negotiation revealed a set of situational truths. Bringing these situational truths together leads to verifications and ultimately a deeper understanding. On the other hand some may argue that short bursts of fieldwork promote a different type of focus. Knowing that time is limited, much of the mundane everyday life silt that easily bogs one down does not cloud the pursuit of particular information.

The dialogic enquiry argument introduced above is underscored by the realisation that knowledge cannot be *owned* in the same way as property can be owned (Bridges 2001:382). Bridges (2001:382) explains:

“It has the distinctive virtue that (at least in terms of its educative function) it can be infinitely distributed without loss to any of those who are sharing in it. Similarly the researcher can acquire it from the people without denying it to them and can return it enriched.”

If one relinquishes power and realises the value of communal knowledge generation, one is at once doing away with positivist conceptions and embracing the strategies of dialogic enquiry so firmly founded in the dialectal perspective also foundational to participatory action research, for example.

What I am presenting here are postulations from poststructuralism, critical and feminist theory, postmodernism, multiculturalism, as well as participatory and action research, promoting the view of researcher positionality as dynamic and flexible, depending not only on the polyvocal identities that both researcher and participant bring to the encounter, but also the topic under investigation (cf. Labaree 2002:99; Merriam et al. 2001:407; Naples 1996:140). Current discussions point to the complexity intrinsic to status and recognise that boundaries are much more fluid than previously acknowledged (Merriam et al. 2001:405), and that status is *not either or but neither nor* (cf. Figure 2.4).¹⁷ Similar to Labaree (2002:103), as participant observers from and in various communities, I argue that researcher situatedness is a process of continuously negotiated achievement (cf. Narayan 1993:682; Hannerz 2010:100). I am not of the opinion, however, that positionality alone guarantees quality data collection and a quality end product (cf. Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Jones 1970, cited in Labaree 2002:104, 110). *Practiced skill*, as a combination of people

¹⁷ I must credit my colleague and friend Motsaathebe Serekoane with this phraseology.

skills and interview prowess, is crucial. This is just one other factor, together with a researcher's biographical profile, political views and attitudes, research agenda and rapport with the community from which informants come, that has bearing on doing fieldwork. However, the scope of the present argument does not warrant further unpacking of these ideas.

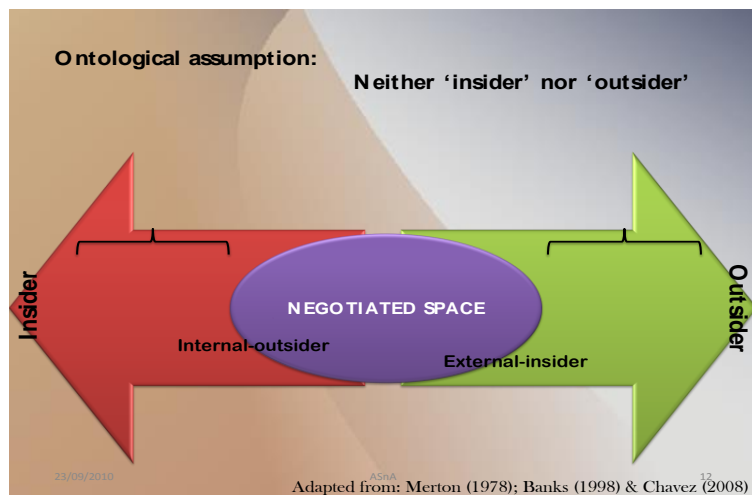


Figure 2.1: Neither nor: A participant observer's negotiated insight (It's not inside...It's not outside...It's negotiated and situational)

In the role of a daughter or a sister

My reflections for this section draw on pilgrimages to the naturally occurring sacred sites in the eastern Free State. Some would say that being a white, unmarried, English-speaking woman armed with camera and voice recorder is a recipe for disaster. Purely by virtue of my assumed *outsiderness* I should technically find it very difficult – impossible – to conduct my fieldwork, while satisfying the rigours of scientific enquiry.

From a methodological standpoint, and informed by paradigmatic and theoretical points of departure, seeking deeper and personal meanings related to pilgrimages required the documenting of narratives and life histories based on protracted socialisation and relationship building between myself as researcher, investigator and experiencer, and my informants and the communities they form part of. So too, these methods and techniques are aligned with the style of communication and cooperative relationships found in these communities, which was what

caused me to disregard semi-structured interviews in favour of unstructured, ethnographic interviewing styles resembling natural conversations.

The reflections I offer in this section roughly correlate with major moments in the research process. The first concerns itself with entry into the field; the second has to do with building relationships and securing trust; and the third involves matters of reflexivity, interpretation, analysis and presentation.

Gaining access to communities often fiercely guarded by gatekeepers who were suspicious of (especially white) people asking questions constituted my first hurdle. Following protocol and the edicts of time-honoured etiquette, permission was sought from appointed and self-appointed cultural custodians. Initial formalities take time and in my experience it was only after considerable time that an expert or someone in the know would be summoned. The pattern that was followed was such that my presence would be explained, they would then acknowledge their understanding of my request and try to provide an answer to my inquiry whilst doubting that they could be of any real assistance. Satisfied after some minutes that they had helped me, they would invariably fold their hands, nod their heads and say: '*Yes, that is it. That is what it entails. That is all I know*', signalling the conclusion of the discussion. Expressing my appreciation, I would appeal to verify the correctness of my understanding. As far as I was concerned, if they agreed, I felt that I had my foot in the door and realised that what lay ahead was the gaining of trust.

Of the themes explored, traditional practitioner initiation required the most intense period of socialisation. Shrouded in secrecy, talking about the medicines of the calling-sickness is prohibited among non-initiates.¹⁸ My questioning brought me nothing more than a resolute refusal to cooperate and admittedly I felt dejected; similar to a player in a game whose rules I knew theoretically but who had never imagined the complexity I would encounter in practice. I felt myself to be roaming blindly in a veritable minefield, where mortars were constantly being detonated by my whiteness, my calling status (or lack thereof), my non-membership to a Charismatic church or the AIC, my exclusion from any sort of healing profession, and my not having undergone any form of personal initiation (cf. Merriam et al. 2001:407). I had to become immersed as the quintessential participant observer (Burke 1989:219) and allow myself to be socialised into this *other* world. I

¹⁸ A *calling* most often precedes committing oneself to traditional practitioner training. Such a calling is identified by important messages in dreams and prolonged illness that does not respond to biomedical and cursory traditional treatments.

had to begin “*living the character*” to be successful (Hastrup 2004:466 – emphasis in the original) and worked side-by-side with the novices to fetch water for the making of traditional beer, apprenticing myself to its entire process. I underwent ritual cleansing treatments, I observed rituals – often acting as the token photographer of stills and video recordings, and spent hours just talking. We were negotiating my status and establishing a very different relationship than that which I had initially conceived to be necessary (cf. Narayan 1993:672). Even then, talk of traditional healer initiation was limited with a selected few although some progressive apprentices approached me with their particular stories and renditions of initiation. As I sat in courtyards, me often being the source of endless laughter through my transgressions of yet another normative rule of conduct, informants would correct each other and re-explain the intricacies of custom and the chronological order of events (cf. Labaree 2002:105; Narayan 1993:675).¹⁹ At each such occasion, information was being verified and triangulated, and so my *outsiderness* was becoming an asset to this part of the research process (cf. Merriam et al. 2001:410). Nthoi (2006:xiv) actually makes the recommendation that an “alien anthropologist” from far afield would have been received differently and may well have generated different empirical evidence as their questions would have been answered. In fact what he is saying is that, despite his supposed insider status, his questions remained unanswered and that he had to comply with behavioural rules that an outsider would not be held to. I believe he is saying that we associate outsider status with superficial or shallow data, which in reality is not always true. In my case at least, my initial outsider status exempted me from certain behavioural taboos. Because of this I was freer to pursue certain lines of questioning which eventually led to greater disclosure and insight, and possibly even deeper immersion. Again, this depth is not correlated with length of stay. Conversely, novelty of guest and conversation may have contributed to freer sharing.

The theme of traditional beer brewing evolved organically from the pilgrimage study. Traditional sorghum beer is homebrewed and used for ritual purposes by pilgrims (both permanent and occasional) who visit the sacred sites to communicate with ancestors and/or God. I found that asking about this traditional beer paved the way for me to engage with informants in a non-threatening manner, thus building essential rapport and trust. I eventually felt comfortable asking almost anyone about beer recipes and brewing techniques, whereas I felt that I was being more intrusive when asking pilgrims personal questions related to their motivations and rationale for journeying.

¹⁹ I was very fortunate as my *faux pas* could just as easily have closed doors instead of offering opportunities to verify and validate information (cf. Fontana & Frey 2005:708).

Feeling privileged on the one side to be doing the work I do and having the opportunity to be learning about the practices, customs and beliefs of people with lives vastly different from mine and who, despite these differences, graciously invited me into their spaces and *homes*, I must admit to also feeling marginalised (cf. Sherif 2001:444). The marginality I feel is not one of disconnect between myself and participant communities, but rather a disconnect between the two worlds I find myself moving in. Hastrup (2004:465) explains that the “anthropologist in the field engages in a world as a ‘double agent’, being both a trained researcher and a character in a local drama” (cf. Marcus 2012:433, 440, 442 fn. 3). I find myself constantly shifting between identities; between being researcher and translator and defender of an *other* when I am in my world. Like Sherif (2001:444), I am “constantly transforming myself”. Being aware of all the interpersonal politics of the ethnographic, fieldwork, and interview encounters is paramount – that is, how the *self* and *other* are created and defined within these encounters (Heyl 2010:375). When in the communities from which my informants come, and while engaging with my informants, I present myself as extremely respectful and in the role of a daughter or sister. Fontana and Frey (2005:707) emphasise the significance of one’s *presentational self* in the overall success of a study. I had not realised this until I had re-read Sherif’s (2001) account of her fieldwork experience in Egypt. According to Murphy and Dingwall (2010:343) the power differential between researcher and researched is equalised by some feminist researchers through their assumption of more personable, genuine and familial roles. It certainly was not a conscious decision on my part to take on the roles of daughter or sister. These evolved from the (fictive) kinship relationships that developed between some site users and me. However, in hindsight, it would be neglectful of me not to acknowledge how useful these positions were in reducing the inherent power imbalances. These may even serve as signals of having “surrendered to the field, and have been in a way absorbed by it” (Hannerz 2010:75). What I found even more revelatory was the realisation that my knowledge of cultural practices and beliefs²⁰ and my ability to speak Sesotho could be used to appeal, convince, and unwittingly manipulate informants in a society of which I am a privileged member (cf. Fontana & Frey 2005:716). Although we were differentiated through class and education level, participants received me as their guest (cf. Hannif 1985), a gesture which helped to reduce our assumed differences especially in the presence of other community members. The almost jealous disclaimer of ‘lekgoa laka’ (*my white person*), however, did not ring true. I am very aware of my whiteness and its impact on and throughout the research process. What my intuition was telling me was that an important power dynamic was at play, and what I was sensing was

²⁰ Cultural practices and beliefs are used here in their broadest sense.

that the curiosity generated by my presence, together with the supposed prestige of having a white guest, was privileging my informants. In my experience, informants pull no punches when you have overstayed your welcome (cf. Hammersley 1992, cited in Murphy & Dingwall 2010:344). Therefore, I can come to no other conclusion than that many of my informants felt that they had drawn benefit from my presence. This benefit is most certainly not meant in the financial sense, as I did not pay informants (cf. Skeggs 2010:434) but preferred to bring token grocery items as gifts, realising that these are insufficient for sustaining the informant and their family. So, what is it? The researcher-participant relationship is more complex than gaining permission to ask a number of questions. The nature of this relationship is less linear and more reciprocal and multidimensional.

This scenario causes me to ponder the notions of top-down (studying down) versus bottom-up (studying up) research (Hannerz 2010:63-65). If my whiteness is implicated with power differentials of a colonial and apartheid South Africa, then by virtue of those entanglements my whiteness in itself renders my work top-down. However, in my view I am very much engaged in bottom-up research. The pilgrims in general, the traditional practitioners and the more permanent site dwellers hold all the power and they dictate what will be disclosed, the depth of the disclosure, and whether any disclosure will even take place: they determine the closeness of our relationships. They determine my access to the larger sites, but they also determine access to the meaning of shrines and stations. In this sense they have all the knowledge and the power and I am learning from those who are knowledgeable, meaning that I occupy the lower rungs of the power continuum – I am the bottom, they are the top. Out of the field, however, I may be perceived to be more powerful than they are, as I hold the final editorial powers in writing this account (cf. Olesen 2005:255).

Showing my place in the setting that I am investigating (cf. Labaree 2002:107), i.e. the degree to which I include my personal voice in the constructed text of our truth, loudly announces the assumptions to which I subscribe. My commitment to describe my participating self and selves (cf. Narayan 1993:681; Sherif 2001:437; Hastrup 2004:465-466) acknowledges the political aspect of research in general but also the dynamic embedded in gaining access and entry to a research setting, negotiating status with informants, securing (privileged) information, and together constructing a reasonably acceptable version of a social reality.

At the intersection

Social and human scientists are still grappling with challenges imposed on their *doing theory* (cf. Bell 2009:5) within the changing theoretical enterprise. The matter of being an insider or outsider surfaces again, and again asks “how and what I can know?” (Bell 2009:5). Central to this is a serious reconsideration of the notion of researcher locatedness. Taking my argument forward, I proceed in highlighting some of the criticisms wielded against the dichotomous and continuum approaches, while endorsing the situational approach.

Underlying the self-serving and theoretically dated approaches, are notions of researchers who are either insiders or outsiders (cf. Merriam et al. 2001:405), as well as the boundedness of communities and the believed uniformity of understanding and experience held by community members. The latter smacks of positivist and colonial conceptualisations of neatly bounded social groupings and members who share blueprint-type experiences and understandings of their social reality.

The realisation emerges that there are subtly varying shades of *insiderism* and *outsiderism* (Hellawell 2006:489). The issue may be more one of empathetic, rather than spatial closeness or distance. Moreover, it is often clearly apparent that the same researcher can slide along more than one insider-outsider continuum, and in both directions, during the research process (Hellawell 2006:489; Hannerz 2010:101).

Insider/outsider roles are a product of the particular situation in which fieldwork takes place and not from the status characteristics of the researcher *per se* (Kusow 2003:591). The insider/outsider distinction lacks acknowledgment that insiders and outsiders, like all social roles and statuses, are frequently situational, depending on the prevailing social, political and cultural values of a given social context. I cannot permanently locate individuals according to a single social status. Rather, they occupy a set of social statuses such that one individual can occupy insider status in one moment and outsider status in another.

By recognising the fluidity of insider-outsiderness, the following two methodological points should also be acknowledged (Naples 1996:84): our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms but is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in particular everyday interactions; and these interactions are themselves located in shifting relationships among

community residents. These negotiations are simultaneously embedded in local processes that reposition gender, class, and racial-ethnic relations among other socially constructed distinctions.

My obvious outsidership has had its challenges. I contend, however, that it is precisely my marginal locatedness together with whiteness in our race-conscious society that has enabled me to conduct my research and conclude its writing up. I have received criticism for embarking on projects that mirror the colonial notion of *professional stranger* travelling to isolated places and undertaking research that exoticises people and customs. I would like to make two comments in this regard. Although having accepted the stance that ethnographers should be *label-free* researchers, allow me the indulgence to contemplate postcolonial scholarship's notion of privileging. Borrowing from Banks' (1998:7-8) typology I might locate myself as a *privileged outsider*. It must be added that this so-called privilege was not assumed by me, or ascribed by communities and informants. Rather, the privilege was hard-fought after a long and protracted socialisation and oftentimes unwitting negotiation process. Personal qualities, social and interview skills were found to be integral in this process. Borrowing from Moore (1994), I do not feel that I owe an anthro(a)pology to anyone – not for my whiteness, not for my field of interest, and not because I did not sleep at the sites.

To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of objectivity, because from particular locations all understandings become subjectively based and are forged through interactions within fields of power relations (Narayan 1993:679).

Such a stance ensures transparency and improves the validity of the represented *positioned knowledge* or *partial perspective*. Also crucial is the laying bare of all sides of the *power equation* (cf. Merriam et al. 2001:408) as these may have validity implications for conclusions that may seem undeniable. In this sense, distinguishing between real and ideal behaviour, beliefs or opinions is cardinal. So too, are the very real threats of researcher bias during observation, but also during analysis and interpretation.

Let me be clear, insider- or outsidership is not determined by physical characteristics alone; nor is immersion or shallowness determined by proximity of stay. As a positionality in flux, insidership and immersion, for example, encompass a complex array of factors (cf. Hannerz 2010:100). They include a physical presence, but also authentic understandings that one may conceive of as

insider moments. What I am arguing for here is a recognition that although a researcher might appear as an outsider, her understanding of the lived experience and of the informants might constitute a far closer insider-portrait than ascribers and assumers might have imagined.

I return to the question of *access*. Access certainly means literal access to the research setting and informants, but also implies access to certain types of knowledge (cf. Merton 1972). One could say that researchers/ethnographers have, depending on a host of variables, access to a situational or relative slice of truth, or to a view of social reality as co-constructed by the researcher and participants in a given moment. Absolute positivist truth simply does not exist; all truths are contextual. To do justice to my representation of that *contextual truth*, I must consciously write myself into the text, being honest and clear about the obvious and not so obvious power plays and uncertainties that surfaced during the research process.

I argue that there is an intersection of researcher characteristics (e.g. gender, socio-economic level and home language) with researcher qualities (e.g. empathy, personability, etc.); with participant characteristics and qualities, with community and participant expectations and imaginings; with the culturally entrenched research context as informed by the positionality of each component aspect, the power dynamic between and within them, and the eventual emanating truth. I hope that researchers will no longer battle with the intricacies of trying to situate themselves as insider or outsider researchers, or as falling into the bounded category of having been immersed or showing shallow engagement, but rather strive to be reflexive and transparent ethnographers.

All researchers embark on the ethnographic research process and all *researchers* quite simply have to gain access to the research setting. Once the necessary permissions have been acquired, rapport should be established. During the course of this process, informants will be identified and because of the nature of ethnographic research, data collection would already have begun. As data collection moves from general to more specific (and thus requiring greater depth), key informants will be consulted more regularly. Naturally, the type of research will determine the requirements of each stage in the research process. One might assume that once a degree of redundancy has been reached, the researcher will be satisfied. Furthermore, data analysis and interpretation continue to inform further or other avenues of exploration. *All researchers* need to continuously negotiate their positionality and consider the power dynamics in and of their context, as they need to truthfully represent and depict the social truth to which they are privy.

2.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Trustworthiness

For the sake of completeness, it is crucial to say something about trustworthiness. The empirical material that is gathered is coproduced and cannot be presented as facts or whole truths. In a study such as this it is difficult to ensure the type of validity and reliability expected within more structured investigations. However, I must at least show that the data has been obtained and interpreted in trustworthy ways and with the consent of the participants. The data is not entirely *ad hoc* and individualised views, or entirely subjective. I have at least attempted to present representative views and although this study does not profess to represent the phenomenon of pilgrimage in all its guises, it *is* representative of the journeys at the three sites. The fluidity of the pilgrimage population, the variety of pilgrimage narratives, and the hybrid nature of practices encountered at the sites, make this a difficult task.

The steps of triangulation are important in this regard. In the previous sections reference to triangulation was primarily concerned with the use of multiple methods and techniques of data collection to ensure that what was not captured by one method/technique would be captured by another. However, as we saw in Denzin's definition, triangulation involves not only multiple methods. It also involves the use of a variety of empirical materials and perspectives, as well as observers. Triangulation as a strategy not only adds rigour to a study but also expands the breadth, complexity, richness, and depth of the investigation.

Being part of a larger research project, the opportunity to test ideas, analyses and interpretations with team members promoted the trustworthiness of observations as well as more intricate interpretations. However, this same strength may also be a weakness. Early introductions to concepts, the sites and significant people took place via team leaders. In this manner unintentional biases are perpetuated if measures are not taken to guard against it. A way to counter this is to rely on emic categorisations and explanations. Site user conceptualisations, understandings, and theories formed the foundation of my understanding of eastern Free State pilgrimages.

I remember very early on in the project that I accompanied other members on a site visit. What struck me and remained with me was that the translator was not simply translating, but also made

interpretations about what the informant had said. Non-local language speakers would not pick this up. This is not necessarily the time or place for this, but I believe cognisance must be taken of this real threat to trustworthiness. In this case, and there are many other instances, the interpreter was unaware of what he was doing. He was not distinguishing what the informant was saying from his own local knowledge. What he conveyed, therefore, were his own thoughts about issues, instead of those that the informant had given. It was for this reason that I decided to conduct my own interviews. In this sense I was able to maintain the trustworthiness of my study pertaining to this issue.

Repeated visits to the sites and continued interaction with site users over a period of time all helped to contribute a sense of what it means to be a pilgrim visiting the sacred sites in the eastern Free State. Strictly speaking, the sites were preselected as part of the larger project, but the frequency and depth of the site interactions were essentially up to me. Throughout this process I constantly compared individuals, narratives, sites and stations as I was developing understandings of these eastern Free State pilgrimages.

Systematically preparing conference papers as well as writing for publication purposes has required that analysis and interpretation run simultaneously to data collection. This is another way in which trustworthiness has been advanced. Testing theories is a sure way to realise when data is too flimsy or if other tracks of questioning should be pursued.

To be clear, the modes of data collection, the kind of data collected, the techniques applied, as well as my ethical positioning for purposes of this study, all substantiate that this ethnography does not succumb to old-fashioned modes of ethnography.

Speaking about trustworthiness also means addressing the matter of contradictory data (data presented as if it magically forms an uncontested whole); relaying what data is left out and why; and confessing to any and all improprieties (e.g. concerning note-taking, filing, transcriptions or analysing) (cf. Fontana & Frey 2005:713).

Like anything in life, pilgrimages have their fair share of contestations and contradictions. The time of presenting only favourable data is a distant memory. Instead, I have tried to weave the contradictions and contestations highlighted by informants or groups of informants into the ethnographic narrative. The empirical material is also contrasted with literary evidence. I have

elected not to omit any data. Some might feel that a thesis such as this is not the place to include auto-ethnographical accounts and might suggest that they belong to another genre. I contend that presenting empirical material at different registers allows the reader to fully engage and realise the complexity of the research process and the profound human encounters that make up ethnographic research.

The style of this ethnography, as a “pastiche of fragments that overlap and even contradict” aligns well with the interpretative analytical framework of the postmodern approach (cf. Murchison 2010:206). Although I believe that there is a coherent golden thread running through this work, the inclusion of empirical material in different registers softens the master narrative style of older ethnographic representation. As a primary tool of data collection my personal stake in the empirical evidence cannot be denied and therefore first-person accounts and subjective interpretations are yet another register forming part of this semicoherent whole (Murchison 2010:184). Such a strategy works towards avoiding a false sense of wholeness and homogeneity that does not reflect the ethnographic reality (Murchison 2010:185). In fact, my assumptions about culture as hybridised, disjointed and heterogeneous are foundational to this decision.

The sense-making process

“Analysis connects the individual pieces to answer or address larger, more abstract questions” (Murchison 2010:190). For an explanation of the step-by-step ethnographic data analysis I have drawn on three primary sources as guides to help explain the analysis and interpretation processes followed in this study. The first is Marion Dobbert’s *Ethnographic research: Theory and application for modern schools and societies* (1982), the second is Renata Tesch’s *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools* (1990) and the third is Julian Murchison’s *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting and presenting your research* (2010).

The analysis of data for this study occurred on two broad levels. Level one entailed descriptive analysis, and level two major explanations. Level one analysis includes everything that is necessary to do ethnographic description. This means identifying patterns or regularities so that data can be categorised – behaviours and pronouncements are compared and grouped together in terms of similarities. This analysis process begins as the earliest speculative research questions evolve and continue until after the data is collected and final conclusions are formulated based on the findings (Dobbert 1982:270-275; Murchison 2010:116).

Analysis continues through a cyclical process. One starts by listing the categories and ideas anticipated to be important at project conception (Murchison 2010:118). Next is identifying key themes that emerge from the data. A hint is searching for recurring and reappearing phraseology, ideas or perhaps symbols. The frequency of their incidence correlates with their significance and sharedness (Murchison 2010:116). Two additional considerations include documenting outstanding research moments, as well as peripheral responses or exceptions to the rule. The lists need reviewing and revising to eliminate duplication and redundancy (Murchison 2010:118). It is also advisable to note questions or contradictions. Subsequent to identifying working categories is the linking of empirical materials to the categories, known as coding (Murchison 2010:178-181). We arrive at conclusions by illuminating the associations (linkages), relationship or process that creates the differences and similarities conveyed in the categories (Dobbert 1982:271). This includes, for example, seeking connections between people, events, ideas or symbols, and later even connections between categories, data and theory. At this level general characteristics or tendencies are differentiated. It is through the comparison of related categories, or data and theory that explanation is achieved (Dobbert 1982:271).

The cycle starts again and so it continues – data collection, analysis, data collection, analysis (Dobbert 1982:271; Murchison 2010:117). This is in line with grounded theory's prescription that analysis should not be left until the end of the project. Instead, initial and provisional analyses are continuously conducted as new data are generated. Sometimes the data fits into pre-existing schemata. At other times new categories are devised to accommodate new empirical evidence. This strategy ensures that you begin seeing connections. Testing analytical ideas and seeing gaps are two further advantages of this *modus operandi* (Murchison 2010:116). Added to these is the benefit of seeing the project in relation to the initial research objectives (Murchison 2010:119).

It follows that a set of conclusions can be made based on the low-level generalisations produced. Said differently, you might then proceed from these general connections and work towards building a broad analytic framework (Murchison 2010:186). This process of analysis might proceed from single units of observation to include the individuals as part of the composite group as unit of observation. So too, the analysis of events may link empirical data chunks to them, which in turn may point to the identification of novel relationships (Murchison 2010:186).

Up to this point, data has been sorted and linkages determined. The third step determines the importance or significance of the data (Murchison 2010:187). As the fieldwork progresses certain moments and findings stand out. As a self- and validity-check, Murchison (2010:188) advises that one should consider *what* another ethnographer may deem important, or *how* she may interpret the data. Further, he proposes to think of data as falling along a continuum of significance. At the one pole are key pieces of information. Whether these are anticipated or unanticipated, they bring your work in alignment with larger ongoing discussions (Murchison 2010:188). In particular, they may challenge or problematise previous findings, or they may bring disciplinary, theoretical or theme-related debates into focus. Falling along the continuum is empirical evidence with less significant analytical importance, which may or may not be relevant for the study. The research questions will determine their inclusion or exclusion. In a general sense, less important data is not likely to be the focus of continued analysis. Conversely, key data will be. For descriptive purposes, I have arbitrarily referred to signification as step three. However, evaluation is a continuous process (Murchison 2010:189).

Step four involves condensing vast amounts of empirical evidence through a process of generalisation (Dobbert 1982:277). Findings are correlated with the literature and used as illustrative.

Taking a moment to reflect, review and revise the fit between empirical material and the original research questions is immensely valuable. One may notice poor alignment between the two. In such instances, one of two corrections may remedy the situation. Firstly, avenues of inquiry are brought back into focus with the research questions. Alternatively, if the research experience is yielding valuable data, the research questions may be modified in order to accommodate these unexpected results (Murchison 2010:120). In my case, I did the latter. The original research questions were sufficiently broad to accommodate my developing fieldwork experiences. However, I felt it prudent to tweak them a little to allow for more sophisticated and unconventional analysis of certain aspects of the pilgrimage experience. I contend that opening this window offers a glimpse into the conceptual framework foundational to pilgrimaging.

This required that I rethink and ask different (interview) questions (cf. Murchison 2010:121). Because of my developing relationships with selected key informants the potential for exploring other avenues of inquiry presented themselves. Increasingly I was seeking different types of responses from informants that would yield other information types. The scale was tipping, and

this required a very different positionality on my behalf. Although the fieldwork experience was guiding me in this direction, it required surrendering to the field” (Hannerz 2010).

Many would be satisfied to simply describe the phenomena under investigation. However, if one wants to connect this to larger issues/questions, one may have to turn to philosophical or other theoretical analytical frames to evoke other possibilities for analysis for different sets of ideas (Murchison 2010:192). It is now that one enters the domain of exploratory analysis.

Level two analysis leads to major conclusions. These more abstract generalisations are of a higher-order and the outcomes are explanations (Dobbert 1982:279). For purposes of this study, certain explanations are suggested. Such explanations invariably provide answers to the *why* questions. Dobbert (1982:279) considers three stages of explanatory analysis: the functional/causal level, wide-spectrum inference; and theoretical analysis. The functional/causal level relates the patterns discerned during descriptive analysis with one another. This points to the parts that form the whole, as well as how this whole is maintained. Put differently, this shows how each part is necessary for the whole to function, as well as how each part functions as a necessary spoke in a wheel – each necessary for the whole to exist. Causal correlations therefore come from thinking across patterns (Esterhuysen 2000:71).

For Dobbert (1982:180), wide-spectrum inference occurs in two ways. The first is at a cultural level, and the second is at a cross-cultural level. On the one hand, explanations for practices and customs are compared within the culture’s context. The same practices and customs can also be compared cross-culturally (Esterhuysen 2000:71). With respect to the former, exploring each successive cultural level and its impact on the phenomenon under investigation solidifies and strengthens the explanation. Each is like a layer of an onion, contributing to a more comprehensive and informed understanding. Concerning the latter, cross-cultural comparison is significant when formulating the research questions, as well as grounding the interpretations. Besides these, cross-cultural comparison provides a framework removed from our embedded filters to consider the data with fresh eyes.

During level two analyses, we again turn to theory. This time we seek the insights that come from theory (Dobbert 1982:281). Comparing the findings with the literature is useful, and, according to Esterhuysen (2000:71), this points to the universality of culture. Theory may be applied to interpret the empirical material in order to come to new insight. Alternatively, findings may be presented to

challenge theoretical stances, thereby improving its explanatory ability (Dobbert 1982:281). If the research questions have not been satisfactorily answered, further analysis is necessary. As with the previous level, one repeats the phases, moving again from functional/causal analysis to wide-spectrum inference to theoretical deductions, until the research questions are answered to the satisfaction of the researcher. While the level one analysis applied in this study is inductive, some of the level two analyses are inductive, and some are deductive. Yet those of a more metatheoretical nature tend to be deductive.

The produced ethnography is significant and relevant and the ethnographic story is woven from significant and important empirical threads. Ethnographic research often leads to unanticipated avenues of investigation and opportunities of exploration. These might distract from the original purpose of the research. Alternatively, how the research relates to the original research questions requires rethinking. Sometimes the disparities can be reconciled and these other avenues add to the richness and uniqueness of the ethnography. However, one should not neglect to address the “big-picture interests and big questions” (Murchison 2010:190-191) that originally motivated the project. In addition to this, the analytical space between the specific ethnography and the larger debates needs filling. Murchison (2010:191) recommends that to broaden ones analytical sights, one should think of the various audiences for whom your ethnography has appeal (or potential appeal). This requires thinking of, for example, the assortment of scholars other than those working on the primary theme, governmental and private interest groups or members of the lay public.

For Dobbert (1982:282), quality interpretation is the “internal logic and consistency of the analysis and its ability to account for and explain all the data”. To this, Murchison (2010:191) adds that good analysis requires creativity and imagination, and particularly a willingness to consider out of the ordinary avenues. He proposes that the greater the number of possible explanations and interpretations one considers, the “more robust your analytical web” (Murchison 2010:191).

CHAPTER 3:

THE MOHOKARE (CALEDON) RIVER VALLEY: PAST AND PRESENT

3.1 General

This chapter firstly provides an historical and cultural overview to the Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley; the larger valley within which my three research sites are located. This not only serves as an important orientation to the area and its peoples, it is also vitally important as my research sites do not exist in a vacuum. It is imperative to historically and culturally contextualise the sites as end-stations for pilgrimage in order to reveal similarities and the significance of these to current surrounding groups – even for those from nearby Lesotho. All three the sites share a geographical proximity as well as historical legacy and cultural heritage. Although the sites are now popular to a wide range of “pilgrims” the majority of the informal pilgrims are from Sesotho-speaking backgrounds.

In the second place, I introduce the three research sites: Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng. This particularly descriptive geographical (topographical) background serves as an important foundation upon which this explorative and descriptive portrayal of pilgrims and pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State is built.

3.2 Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley: Introducing the area and its peopling

The three sites under investigation, namely Mantsopa (District: Ladybrand/Modderpoort), Mautse (District: Rosendal) and Motouleng (District: Clarens) are situated in an area locally known as the Mohokare or Caledon River Valley, forming part of the present north-eastern Free State (Coplan 2003:978; Esterhuyse 2008:10; cf. Gill 1997:23; Cawood & Vos 2010:49). The area borders on Lesotho’s western boundary. Figure 3.1 (aerial photograph) and Figure 3.2 (topographical map) assist in contextualising and locating the three research sites within the Mohokare River Valley.

The original inhabitants of the area in historical times were the San. Their rock art and place names in the region provide evidence of their earlier presence (cf. Gill 1997:3, 7, 12, 23; Ellenberger 1992:11; Eloff 1980:1; Ashton 1952:2). According to Gill (1997:23) the first Sotho groups to inhabit the area were the Bafokeng (c. 1600 AD), followed by Bakwena groupings (north-eastern Free State), and Sotho-influenced Nguni-speaking groups (Baphetla, Bapolane and the Baphuthi) in the south-central Lowland areas of present-day Lesotho (cf. Wells 1994:22).¹ This contrasts somewhat from other perspectives that claim that it was the Baphetla (c. 1600), followed by the Bapolane and the Baphuthi of Nguni descent who were the first Bantu-speaking groups to settle in the Caledon (Mohokare) area (Ellenberger 1992:21-22; Buys 1981:31; Lye 1969:192; Ashton 1952:2). Following them were Sotho groups of which the Bapedi, Baphuthing, Basia and Batlokwa were the first, after which came the Bafokeng, Bakwena and Bataung (Twala 2005:120; Ashton 1952:2). Not to dispute the evidence but rather to offer perspective when considering these flows of people into the Mohokare area, the Mapolane's trek to the Caledon (or the Bahalanga, as they were previously known), was not a once-off, directed migration, but took about 200 years (Ellenberger 1992:22, 23), which converts to a period of seven or eight generations. Because of this contact, mixture occurred (cf. Kriel 1976:35) – the Sotho often absorbing individuals and smaller groups of the other interior inhabitants into their ranks, but retaining the core cultural elements by which they identified themselves (Lye 1980:26-27). By the end of the 18th century the Sotho chiefdoms were distributed over most of the South African plateau.²

¹ Sotho, Fokeng, Phetla, Phuti, Peli, Sia, Tlokwa etc. are spelt like this in Ellenberger (1992) and others following an old orthography or that of Lesotho. For purposes of this thesis, I follow the new South African orthography and spelling rules. In this case for example, Fokeng becomes Bafokeng, Sia becomes Basia, Phuthi becomes Baphuthing, and so on. Basotho will be used to refer to the Sotho nation post 1846. Sotho will, however, be used to refer to groups speaking Sotho languages prior to the 1830 and 1840 establishment of a more unified group under the leadership of Moshoeshoe.

² Consult Lye (1980:27-28) for the areas occupied by the various Sotho chiefdoms by the end of the 18th century.

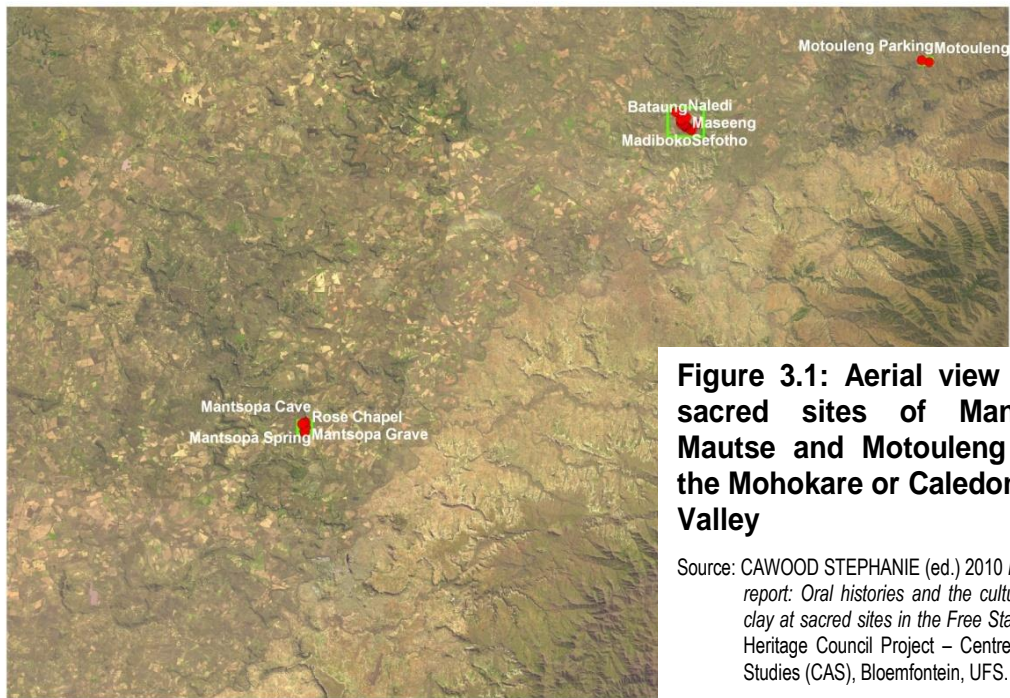


Figure 3.1: Aerial view of the sacred sites of Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng along the Mohokare or Caledon River Valley

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

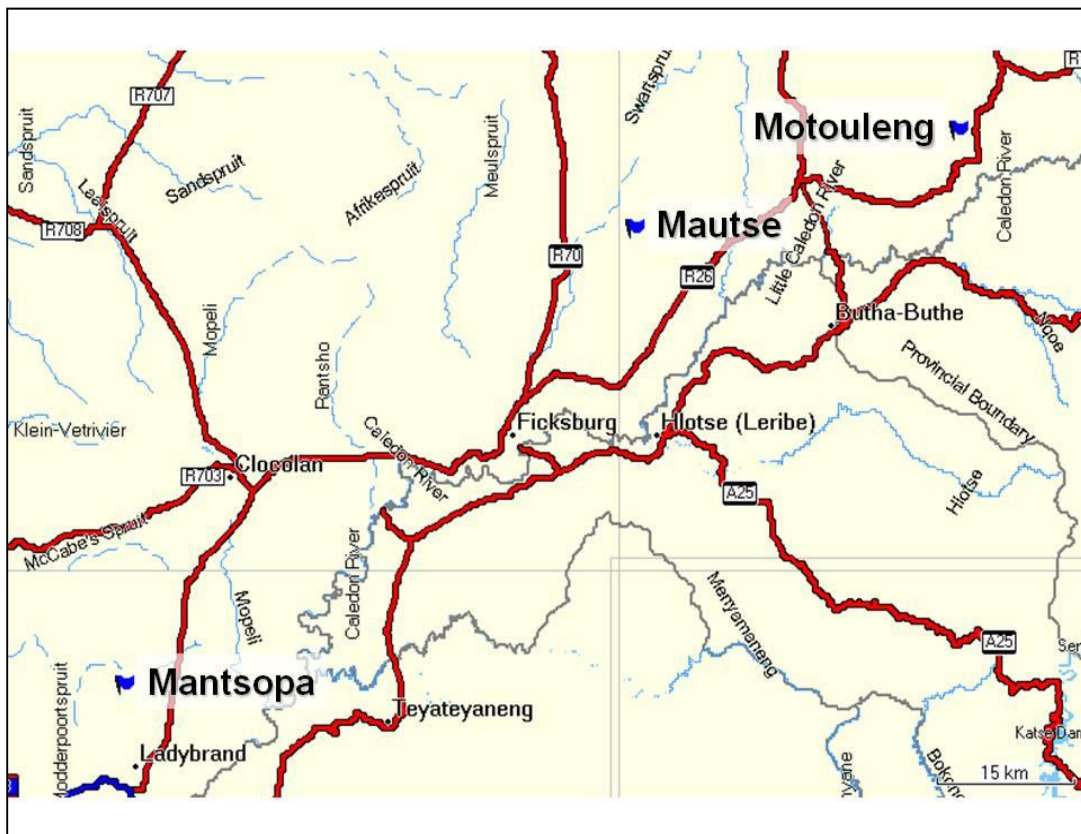


Figure 3.2: Topographical map of the areas of the Mohokare or Caledon River Valley

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

What concerns us for present purposes is a description of the history of the Mohokare River Valley. To achieve this, I consider some influences of the Difaqane³ – a period of great upheaval and change during the early 19th century, generally associated with Shaka's rampage and plunderings in order to extend the Zulu⁴ kingdom. Like any history, it is contested, as there are fierce debates about the Difaqane. I start my description with the dislodging of the Mahlubi in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands below the Drakensberg. The Mahlubi (under Mpangazitha [Pakadita], a lesser chief of the 'right-hand house') escaped across the Drakensberg, at Van Reenen's Pass, attacking the highveld Sotho south of the Vaal River. The Balokwa and Basia (South-Sotho chiefdoms) living near the Drakensberg passes were the first to come under attack, particularly the Mokotleng branch of the Batlokwa (who lived near the Wilge River, on the western bank of the Namahadi [Elands] River) under the regentess Manthatisi (c.1822) (Ellenberger 1992:110; Buys 1981:33; Lye 1980:31; Ashton 1952:2-3).⁵ Manthatisi led her followers westward (for her son Sekonyela was not yet of age), raiding the Bakwena and Bafokeng⁶ villages on her way (Buys 1981:33; Lye 1980:38; cf. Kriel 1976:55-57). Hot on her heels as they moved southwards along the east bank of the Mohokare (Caledon) River to Peka, the Mahlubi traversed the west banks to Maboela, just across the river from where Manthatisi had halted (Ellenberger 1992:126; Lye 1980:31; Kriel 1976:57). Conflicts continued until Manthatisi, together with the women and

³ Difaqane is a Sotho/Tswana word meaning the changes that occur during times of war or specifically *The Hammering* (1815-1830) (Bruwer 1963:20) or *The Scattering* (Lye 1980:31). Lifaqane is the previous spelling of this word, and according to Ellenberger (1992:117) it denotes "a state of migration". Contrary to the "ordinary expeditions of inter-tribal warfare in which as a rule only the fighting men took part", these migrations describe "the struggles of wandering tribes accompanied by their families, flocks, and herds" (Ellenberger 1992:117). Mfecane is the Nguni word referring specifically to *The Crushing* or "time of trouble" (Thompson 1995:81). Stevens (1967:15) refers to these wars as the *Wars of Calamity*.

⁴ Today, the word Zulu is collectively used to refer to more than 200 north-Nguni clans of KwaZulu-Natal. As we will see, originally, Zulu was the name of a small clan, and not an ethnic group encompassing many clans.

⁵ One wonders whether the Mahlubi's attack on the Mokotleng was coincidence, or whether it was fuelled by years of bad blood caused by incessant raids on their Mahlubi neighbours, first by Mokotjo and then by Manthatisi (for more information on the successive raids on the Mahlubi, consult Kriel 1976:50-51). Furthermore, one wonders about whether it could have been revenge for the murder of Motsholi, by Sekonyela and his young companions (cf. Kriel 1976:52-55; Ellenberger 1992:47-48, 110, 119). It should be kept in mind, however, that the Mahlubi's attack on the Batlokwa did not take place in a vacuum. Rather, at the time of their attack, the Amangwane were in full retreat from Shaka and fell upon the Mahlubi in their way. The Mahlubi in turn fled across the Drakensberg, and clashed with the Batlokwa. Yes, the Mahlubi might have chosen another route to escape the pressing Amangwane, but to trace the intention of actions that took place two centuries ago and that were executed whilst in the grip of fear lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁶ An example of a Bafokeng village raided by Manthatisi while fleeing from the Mahlubi is that of Sebetwane, a Bapatsa branch living along the Sand River. This attack came before that on Moshoeshoe at Butha-Buthe (cf. Ashton 1952:3), that is to say the Bamokotedi of Moshoeshoe, a branch of the Bakwena. This battle between Moshoeshoe's Bamokotedi and Manthatisi's Batlokwa ba Mokotleng will be remembered as the *Battle of the Pots*. Consult Ellenberger (1992:126) with respect to the meaning of the latter.

children (the men had gone foraging or were out plundering), brandishing hoes and arranged in fighting order, dispersed the Mahlubi attackers (from Tlapaneng) only to be further thrashed by the returning men, including the young Sekonyela (Ellenberger 1992:126; Lye 1980:31; Kriel 1976:59). The retreating Mahlubi fled back to Maboleta where they settled on a flat-topped hill. All the time the Mahlubi and Batlokwa plundered the Southern Sotho of the Upper Caledon.⁷

Manthatisi's⁸ marauding career of raiding and pillage indirectly stretched as far west as the Batswana. Her fleeing victims dealt out the same punishment on the Batswana as they themselves had received (Lye 1980:31, 37, 39; cf. Smith 1956, cited in Kriel 1976:59).

Sebetwane's Bapatsa branch of the Bafokeng, who were defeated by Manthatisi along the Sand River in June of 1822, sought refuge south of the Vaal and then fled northwards. According to Lye (1980:38) he changed the name of his people to Bakololo. An example of a Sotho community both tormented, and the tormentor, they eventually fled northward from the Ndebele, away from the highveld and settled along the Upper Zambezi River (Zambia) founding a kingdom over the Lozi people (Thompson 1995:86; Lye 1980:39, 46; cf. Lye 1969:193). Today still, the Lozi speak a language closely related to that of the Basotho (Bruwer 1963:20).

The Amangwane, old Nguni enemies of the Mahlubi from the midland days followed their route, first falling upon another Batlokwa branch and then the Basia who had remained near the passes (Lye 1980:31-32). Trekking to Senyotong, just north of Thababosia (Thaba Bosiu), where Moshoeshe (a Bakwena chief) had settled, Matiwane (chief of the Ngwane) continually plundered the local Sotho communities⁹, as had the Hlubi (Lye 1980:32). The fighting between the Nguni groups continued, until Matiwane killed Mpangazitha (1825), after which the Mahlubi

⁷ Consult Kriel (1976:59-60) with respect to the various attacks of the Tlokwa on groups inhabiting the Upper Caledon area, and Ellenberger (1992:154) with respect to the Hlubi attacks on the Sotho groups.

⁸ Manthatisi proved to be a competent leader and refused to relinquish power in the face of repeated adversity which often caused other chiefs to succumb to dominant forces. Although she did not physically lead her warriors in battle, "she planned their strategy and sat in court to make policy" (Lye 1980:35). In so doing she built up a reputation for being ruthless. Lye (1980:37) relates that frightened refugees blamed invasions "on a giantess with one eye in her forehead, who loosed swarms of bees in advance of her soldiers. Her name was Manthatisi". This led to many Tswana and even their European contacts to refer to the Difaqane as the *Wars of Mantatee*. However, her people loved and trusted her, affectionately referring to her as *the little woman* (Mosayane) (Lye 1980:35). Kriel (1976:51) states that his informants continually referred to her as 'morena (chief) Manthatisi' and seldom mentioned the fact that she was only a regentess. This substantiates the high regard people have of her, even in 1976 when he did his research among the Tlokwa of Qwaqwa.

⁹ Consult Ellenberger (1992:130-133) with regards to the Amangwane's raids on the Sotho, all the while in pursuit of Mpangazitha.

disbanded, basically resulting in Matiwane becoming the master of the Caledon area (Ellenberger 1992:155, 170; Lye 1980:32). Even Moshoeshoe and his Kwena followers became his tributary (Ellenberger 1992:111, 154, 170), while Manthatisi fled north to a defensible hill, Kgoro e betlwa.

Towards the end of 1826, Shaka sent a Zulu impi, led by his brother Dingane, to the highveld. Here they drove Matiwane and his followers south, capturing many cattle and although Matiwane counter-attacked, his Amangwane had experienced severe losses, for the Zulu returned home with his cattle (Ellenberger 1992:176-178; Lye 1980:32). Moshoeshoe's (supposed) involvement in the Zulu coming to the highveld¹⁰ resulted in Matiwane's Amangwane launching an attack on the Sotho stronghold (July 1827), but were driven off during a battle where sheer numbers and military acclaim was not enough to defeat courage (Ellenberger 1992:181-184). Mzilikazi's presence in the area was felt by other Amangwane near Hlohlolwane (Clocolan), and Matiwane himself had feared their attack. In early 1828 Mzilikazi had surprised Matiwane who had returned to Senyotong, by taking vast numbers of his cattle (Ellenberger 1992:185). Matiwane was disgraced in more ways than one, and decided to seek refuge further south in the Amathembu country where the herds of the Cape Colony served as further enticement (cf. Ellenberger 1992:185). However, this was not the safe haven he had anticipated. Those that survived the treacherous trek south¹¹ and did not succumb to the African and colonial (British) combined forces (August 1828) (Ellenberger 1992:186-188), returned to the Southern Sotho area, seeking the protection of Moshoeshoe whereas others remained in the Umtata area. As for Matiwane, he returned to his original home where he was killed by Shaka's successor, Dingane, in 1828 (Ellenberger 1992:189; Lye 1980:32). Shaka lost his life on 24 September 1828 to his two half-brothers, Dingane and Mhlangane. It was Dingane's treacherous murders of the Voortrekkers that marked the end of the great Zulu rule, and they were eventually conquered at the Battle of Blood River in 1838.

After the worst of the raids had ended, Manthatisi and her son Sekonyela settled at Jwalaboholo and Kowaneng, previously known as Marabeng (Rascher 1985:13; Strydom 1985:154; Ellenberger 1992:149; Kriel 1976:62; cf. Lye 1980:35, 46). With respect to the latter, Lye (1980:46) writes: "this natural fortress became the nucleus for the largest congregation of

¹⁰ See Ellenberger (1992:170-172, 176) regarding the circumstances which led Moshoeshoe to apply for Shaka's assistance in the Matiwane affair, as well as the clever way in which Moshoeshoe persuaded Shaka to make haste with his attack on the Amagwane.

¹¹ Ellenberger (1992:186-187) relates the hardships endured by Matiwane's Amangwane during their trek south towards the country inhabited by the Amathembu.

Southern Sotho for several years". Situated in the Ficksburg district, these mountain fortresses can be likened to Moshoeshoe's Thaba Bosiu, from whom Sekonyela had learned the value of such a safehold. It is here that Manthatisi died in 1845 (Ellenberger 1992:150; Strydom 1985:155).

Sekonyela's inherent weakness was that he continually desired the cattle of other chiefs and raiding them was the order of the day. Unfortunately this had far-reaching effects, since it attracted the attention of, among others, the Korana¹² (Kora) and Griqua¹³ (Griqua Bergenaars) (cf. Ellenberger 1992:215; Eloff 1980:1-3). The association between Sekonyela and the Kora-speakers, however, was not one-sided in that the latter desired Sekonyela's cattle, whereas Sekonyela in turn was impressed with the Korana guns and horses. He went as far as inviting them to teach his people to shoot and ride, but his impatience with the rate of progress irritated him and resulted in him attacking Kora-speaking groups and stealing many horses (Kriel 1976:66). Angered, the Korana sought the support of the Basters and subsequently drove Sekonyela over the Mohokare (Caledon) River to the Tsikwane, Leribe, Sebotwane, Thabapatswa and Kweneng areas. According to Kriel (1976:66) it was only after Moshoeshoe and the missionaries had interceded, settling the dispute, that Sekonyela could return to Jwalaboholo. Not having learned his lesson, Sekonyela again launched a raid on the Korana. Failing to secure Korana cattle, Sekonyela was driven back to Jwalaboholo, where futile attempts at defending themselves resulted in them being followed deep into the Maloti Mountains and their cattle taken by Kora-speakers (Kriel 1976:66). According to Kriel (1976:66) these losses brought significant loss of face for Sekonyela, so much so that many of his followers joined Moshoeshoe.

In the meantime, Mota had by 1829 gained more support from the followers than his brother Sekonyela, probably since he was not as war-like (Strydom 1985:155; Kriel 1976:64, 66, 81). It is Lye's (1980:47) contention that Sekonyela was happy to receive missionaries in 1833, in the hope that they could deter and dissuade the Korana from *eating him up* (cf. Strydom 1985:155; Kriel 1976:64).

¹² At the end of the 18th century, the Korana, a Khoekhoe group, settled south of the Orange River from where they undertook raids on the San who were north of the Orange River. In the decades to follow they settled in the present Free State near the Vaal, Vet and Modder Rivers. Some of the Korana groups also hunted in the present-day districts of Ladybrand, Clocolan and Ficksburg (Eloff 1980:1-3).

¹³ More or less in the early 19th century some Griqua groups crossed the Orange River and settled north-east of the confluence of the Orange and Vaal Rivers. Soon the Griqua moved eastwards, contributed to the annihilation of the San and claimed the entire area between the Orange, Caledon and Modder Rivers as their land (Eloff 1980:3).

However, Sekonyela's defeat by the Korana was not the last time his name would be uttered. Sekonyela gradually began raiding neighbouring bands, thus slowly increasing his authority once again. The land extending 50 kilometres to the north and east as far as the sources of the Caledon were inhabited by Sekonyela's mixed following of Batlokwa, other Southern Sotho, and some Mahlubi and Amangwane survivors (Buys 1981:34; Lye 1980:47; cf. Kriel 1976:62). His tactic was to allow small destitute communities to remain on the periphery of his area, in exchange for fair warning of advancing enemies (Lye 1980:47; Lye 1969:197).

Sekonyela increasingly launched larger-scale raids, some as far afield as the east of the Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, all under the auspices of gaining prestige. Kriel (1976:68-69) reports on such a raid in the Tugela area (1837). Aware that Piet Retief and his company were *en route* to Dingane, Sekonyela ordered his raiders to dress like Boers armed with guns. Knowing that they would be mistaken as white trekkers under the cloak of darkness, Sekonyela commanded his men to steal cattle from many of Dingane's subordinates. Piet Retief pleaded innocence, but Dingane required proof that Sekonyela and not the Boers were responsible for the raids. Retief embarked on the journey to capture the cattle stolen by Sekonyela in January 1838. Seizing more than was taken, Retief hoped to teach Sekonyela a lesson, returning to Dingane with evidence of their innocence.

The other major consequence of Sekonyela's coveting of other men's cattle was that he could not reconcile with Moshoeshe. The stormy relationship¹⁴ between the two chiefs lasted another twenty years, ending only when the Tlokwa were convincingly beaten by Moshoeshe in 1853 (Rascher 1985:13; Strydom 1985:155; Buys 1981:34; Lye 1980:47, 71; Kriel 1976:75, 79; Ashton 1952:4). Hereafter, Sekonyela and a handful of loyal supporters fled to Bloemfontein where he remained from December 1853 to c. August 1854, later acquiring land in the Herschel district after 5 September 1854, where he died on 20 July 1856 (Strydom 1985:155; Buys 1981:34; Kriel 1976:79-80; cf. Ashton 1952:4). After his death, splitting occurred among Sekonyela's Tlokwa, groups moving away to the Mount Fletcher, Matatiele, Makgotlong and Quthing areas (Buys 1981:34; Kriel 1976:80). Kriel (1976:75) also relates that numerous Batlokwa ba Mokotleng joined other Batlokwa in the area north of the Vaal River. In about 1880 Sekonyela's grandson, Lelingwana, assisted Moshoeshe's son Letsie I in his war against the Cape Government (the

¹⁴ Consult Kriel (1976:69-78) for a synopsis of the constant battles between Sekonyela and Moshoeshe.

Gun War of 1880-1883). As a result of this the former was given land in the Maloti Highlands, where they settled (Ashton 1952:4).

During the great clash between the Batlokwa and Bakwena at Jwalaboholo, Sekonyela's younger brother, Mota, and many of his followers were at the deeper mountain cattle posts.¹⁵ On their return, Mota gathered the remnants of the Batlokwa and conceded to Moshoeshe (Buys 1981:34), seeking permission to live again at his village, Makosane (Strydom 1985:156; Kriel 1976:81). After a short stay, however, Mota moved (early in 1854) eastwards through Lesotho to Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal (Strydom 1985:156; Kriel 1976:83). The following year (1855) they were ordered by Shepstone to leave, and returned to the Free State where they settled in the Harrismith district (Rascher 1985:14; Buys 1981:34, 39), to the south at the Bingham mountains and yet later at Kingshill, i.e. Moteng (Strydom 1985:156; Kriel 1976:83-84). Some of the Batlokwa, however, remained in the Bergville area. In 1861 Mota again moved to KwaZulu-Natal where they lived for a few years at the foot of the Tintwa pass, after which he and his son Hlubi (Tabana) relocated to the Escourt and Weenen areas, leaving behind Letswaka (Koos Moropotsana) a junior son and his following (Rascher 1985:14; Strydom 1985:156; Buys 1981:39-40; Kriel 1976:86, 88-89). According to Kriel (1976:89), Mota died shortly before 1870 near Escourt, on the farm Kwaggashoek (cf. Buys 1981:40).

During the second Basotho War of 1865, Koos Mota did valuable work for the Free State government, but his participation resulted in a retaliatory raid by Molapo (Moshoeshe's son), which was considered an embarrassment by the Natal government who requested Koos Mota to move (Strydom 1985:156; Buys 1981:40; Kriel 1976:89-90; cf. Rascher 1985:14). The move took him to a farm, Glen Urquhart, near Bingham'sberg, south of Harrismith (Strydom 1985:156; Kriel 1976:90; cf. Buys 1981:40). In 1872 he had applied to Commandant Raath to relocate to Witsieshoek. Permission was granted in 1873, but the move only began in 1875, probably due to old hostilities between the Batlokwa and Bakwena (Rascher 1985:14; Strydom 1985:156; Buys 1981:40; Kriel 1976:91). The area eventually settled in was between the Natal border, the Elands River and the farm Patrickdale (Strydom 1985:156). The village that developed as a result of their occupation was known as Matswakeng, as well as Tsheseng (Kriel 1976:91).

¹⁵ After Mota's initiation at Botjheletsana in 1824 a new regiment was formed under his leadership (Strydom 1985:154).

Before the wars, the Southern Sotho (and Batswana) recognised no central authority (cf. Kriel 1976:34; Lye 1969:191; Stevens 1967:15), so when they began, the Southern Sotho were divided in their traditional segmentary chiefdoms, affording the invaders less resistance than had they been united. According to Lye (1980:39), the worst of the Difaqane had passed beyond the Southern Sotho by 1825, at which time they had to begin rebuilding from the ravaged remnants of the wars. Moshoeshe¹⁶ took in refugees from fleeing groups (mainly Sotho, but also members of invading Nguni bands), as well as those returning to the Mohokare (Caledon) River Valley, eventually establishing the Basotho nation (Thompson 1995:86; Buys 1981:33; Matsela 1979:95-96; Kriel 1976:57). To be precise this was after they had warded off numerous attacks by Batlokwa, Mahlubi, Amangwane and Bergenaar raiders, from the flat mountain-top stronghold of Thaba Bosiu¹⁷ (Thompson 1995:86; cf. Ellenberger 1992:120, 215; Strydom 1985:149; Ashton 1952:3). As attested to earlier, Sekonyela too took in refugees, but Moshoeshe's reputation as a reasonable man of peace hung favourably with many who wished to rebuild a life for themselves. The fact that his territory fell in line with those returning from the Griqua, as well as from the Cape Colony, undoubtedly contributed to the development of a unified group (Lye 1969:204). Although, as we will see later, the unification of the Basotho may largely be the result of circumstances, Moshoeshe's long-time dream of building a more complex system should not be forgotten.

Before the Difaqane Moshoeshe (son of Mokhachane, previously known as Lepoqo and after his initiation as Tlaputle¹⁸) was the headman of a minor village of the Mokotedi Kwena (Bamokotedi), a junior branch of the Bakwena, whose senior chief, Mohlomi, had attempted, until his death in 1816, to achieve a measure of cooperation, thus being remembered as the precursor of a united Basotho (Lye 1980:45, 47). Before the wars, Mohlomi had counselled Moshoeshe, advising him to rule in peace and generosity (Lye 1980:48; cf. Ellenberger 1992:108-109, 229; Matsela 1979:95-96). This seems to have hit home, for Moshoeshe never directly partook in the

¹⁶ The name Moshoeshe (the Shearer) was adopted when he had consolidated his power. Apparently this name was taken because "he shaved the beards of all his rivals" (Casalis 1997:194; cf. Colley 2009:35). For purposes of this thesis I use Lesotho orthography to spell the great Basotho leaders's name as 'Moshoeshe', and not the new South African orthography that spells the name 'Moshweshwe'.

¹⁷ The name *Thaba Bosiu* essentially means "the mountain that grows taller at night" (Stevens 1967:16). When Moshoeshe first arrived at Thaba Bosiu in 1824, after escaping a long confinement on Butha-Buthe by Sekonyela's Batlokwa ba Mokotleng, he found the Bahlakwane, Lepheana, living there. It did not take long, however, for this chief to place himself under the protection of Moshoeshe. According to Ellenberger (1992:151), he was the first "chief of a broken tribe to place himself and his people under Moshesh".

¹⁸ Ellenberger (1992:107) regards Moshoeshe's name after undergoing his initiation to be Letlama, and that of his companions, Matlama.

wars, nor did he leave the area between the Caledon and Maloti Mountains (Lye 1980:47). Instead his tactic was diplomacy, avoiding attacks by paying tribute, thus temporary submission, and inducing third parties to fight his battles (Lye 1980:48; Lye 1969:197; Stevens 1967:16; cf. Thompson 1995:86; Ellenberger 1992:110, 229, 230). His survival and that of his followers was thus due to tact, as opposed to great military performances. With respect to the latter, his famed retreats to Butha-Buthe and Thaba Bosiu (1824), where invaders were warded off by rolling rocks at attackers, is but an example. Other strategies to unite the Basotho nation were by means of intermarriage and strategic placing of senior agnatic relatives as headmen in local areas (Thompson 1995:86; Strydom 1985:150; cf. Ellenberger 1992:108).¹⁹

After Matiwane's Amangwane had been expelled and Sekonyela had for the most part settled, Moshoeshoe could lay claim to the area across the Caledon to as far as Thaba Nchu (Lye 1980:48). The only one who could really challenge him during this time was Sekonyela, but it was Moshoeshoe who could offer more aid and protection to the broken groups and individual refugees, thus gaining their support and adherence (Lye 1980:48-49; Lye 1969:198). He was also successful in establishing alliances with direct neighbours as well as chiefs living further to the north, like Sekwati of the Bapedi, and Mokuwane and his son Moorosi of the Baphuthi to the south (Lye 1980:49-50). Ultimately Moshoeshoe was able to unite most of the Southern Sotho. He did this by "combining a secure retreat with astute political acts" and with his wealth in cattle "he appears to have obtained the submission of those whom he could dominate, to have accepted the alliance of those he could not, and to have submitted, at least nominally, to those whom he could not resist. He used time and circumstances to consolidate his power" (Lye 1980:50; cf. Matsela 1979:96).

Lye goes on to say that although the Difaqane "marked the most serious threat to survival the Tswana and Sotho had ever faced ... they would face even more troubles thereafter" (1980:39). By 1832 Moshoeshoe had received white visitors at Thaba Bosiu and in 1833 French missionaries²⁰ accepted his invitation to join him at Morija and Thaba Bosiu (Lye 1980:50; Lye

¹⁹ For a discussion on the various placements Moshoeshoe made to consolidate local areas, consult Strydom (1985:150), Kriel (1976:71, 81) and Stevens (1967:25-26).

²⁰ Ellenberger (1992:234-236) relates how these French missionaries came to join Moshoeshoe. Apparently, Moshoeshoe had come across a Griqua hunter who he asked for guns to better protect themselves against the Korana (probably the Bergenaar rebels) who were constantly raiding them. The Griqua hunter, Adam Krotz, instead convinced Moshoeshoe, who at that time was 48 years old, that there was something better than guns. He spoke of servants of God that lived among them that taught the way of pure living. Moshoeshoe deliberated the matter, and eager to restore peace, sent Adam Krotz back to

1969:197; Stevens 1967:17; Ashton 1952:3). These missionaries would contribute significantly as the future of the Basotho nation unfolded. They would serve as a buffer against the Griqua Bergenaars²¹ and Boers, as well as advise and serve as diplomatic agents in his interactions with the Boers and the British (Lye 1980:50; Lye 1969:200; cf. Stevens 1967:17).

The influence of the white trekboers²² in the Caledon area would have a marked effect on the history of the Basotho as a nation. By the 1820s these frontiersmen would already have reached the Orange River along which their cattle grazed (Lye 1980:58). Although the South-Sotho were concerned with their presence, it appears that a cordial relationship existed between the two groups (cf. Lye 1980:61-62; Stevens 1967:16-17). Between 1833 and 1835 they would have ventured onto Moshoeshe's land, but the expansion was replaced by a kind of invasion between 1835 and 1837, when vast numbers of European settlers (Voortrekkers of the Great Trek²³) crossed the Orange River and proceeded along the west of the Caledon (Thompson 1995:88; Lye 1980:58-59; Stevens 1967:17). The intentions and methods of acquiring land differed from that of the trekboers in that they aimed to establish their own independent state (Lye 1980:59; cf. Thompson 1995:88; Ashton 1952:3). Thaba Nchu became their base, but they soon spread over the surrounding land (Lye 1980:59, 62; Stevens 1967:17). The initial permission to pass through South-Sotho areas, and the transfer of those rights from Boer to Boer seem to have clouded the prior agreements, with the Boers eventually assuming title to the land (Lye 1980:63; cf. Thompson 1995:71; Ashton 1952:3). In the meantime Moshoeshe and representatives of the English had built up friendly relations, so when the former became frustrated with the Boers' claim to land title, he approached his allies, the British, for support in the matter (1842). Theoretically the Boers were British subjects and the latter reprimanded and warned the Boers not to interfere with the Basotho

Philippolis with gifts of cattle with which to secure himself with some of these men of God. Three young French missionaries, Eugene Casalis, Thomas Arbousset and Constant Gosselin, sent by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, were pleased to accept the invitation (cf. Ashton 1952:3).

²¹ Relations between the Bergenaars and the Basotho had for long been characterised by raids and counter-raids. In 1831 Moshoeshe and his people had suffered a severe attack at Ntlokhlo, where many cattle had been taken and many lives had been lost. The Basotho leader, although angered and wishing revenge, decided to pay tribute to the Bergenaars. However, they rejected this gesture and the raids continued until 1836 when Moshoeshe was able to deal with the Bergenaar leader Piet Wet Voet (Ellenberger 1992:215-216).

²² These trek-boers were descendants of the semi-migrant pastoralists who trekked from the Cape of Good Hope decades before (cf. Lye 1980:58; Thompson 1995). Their intention was to claim land beyond the control of the British of the Cape Colony for themselves, but natural forces like droughts and other hardships resulted in continual expansion further into the interior (cf. Lye 1980:58-59).

²³ For a comprehensive discussion of the routes and influences of the Voortrekker's expansion throughout South Africa, consult Thompson (1995:87-96).

(Lye 1980:63). It was only in 1843, however, that a concerted effort was made by Sir George Napier (the new governor) to address the issue, by drawing up a treaty with Moshoeshoe. The treaty admitted Moshoeshoe as a friend and ally of the Cape Colony and also stipulated the boundaries of his territory (Stevens 1967:19).

From Moshoeshoe's perspective the major problem with the treaty was that stipulated boundaries included part of Moshoeshoe's area, but excluded the land Moshoeshoe and Sekonyela had granted to Wesleyan missionaries and their charges in the west, and further allocated land that Moshoeshoe regarded as hereditary Bakwena territory to Sekonyela (Lye 1980:63). For the most part, failure to agree on the western boundary would constantly be a thorn in Moshoeshoe's flesh (Stevens 1967:19). The treaty was regarded as unfair by Sekonyela, since it accepted that Moshoeshoe was the undisputed chief of the entire area between the Caledon and Orange Rivers (Kriel 1976:71). The Wesleyans were also not satisfied when Moshoeshoe claimed that the land allocated to them was essentially his, by submitting counter-claims on behalf of the chiefs that they represented. Likewise the trekkers opposed the conditions primarily because they were being "placed under the jurisdiction of the African chiefs" on the one hand, and because the British, whose control they resented on the other, had made such a decision (Lye 1980:64). According to Kriel (1976:71) this treaty was not implemented because of all the unfavourable arguments against it.

The period between 1843 and 1848 was characterised by dissatisfaction between the Boers and Moshoeshoe on the issue of grazing right grants, land that was sold to trekkers without the king's consent, and revenues generated from *alienable* land occupation to the west of Commissie Drift on the Caledon and Buffelsvlei on the Orange River (Lye 1980:64). By 1846 disputes between the Batlokwa and Basotho²⁴ had once again flared up (Kriel 1976:71). Although it could be said that the Great Trek period in the Caledon area ended in 1845, the intrusion of the Boers continued, eventually resulting in Sir Harry Smith's proclamation of the Orange River Sovereignty in February 1848 (Lye 1980:64, 69; Kriel 1976:73; Stevens 1967:19; cf. Ashton 1952:4). The implication was that all the inhabitants within the borders of the Orange and Vaal Rivers became British subjects (although chiefs retained jurisdiction over their people), but the result was that Moshoeshoe's expansion became practically impossible (Buys 1981:35).

²⁴ According to Kriel (1976:71), Moshoeshoe's subjects were collectively referred to as the Basotho by 1846.

Regardless of the proclamation, border disputes continued between the Southern Sotho and the whites, as well as between the Basotho and the Batlokwa. In November of 1848 the British realised the severity of the situation between the latter groups and attempted to reconcile them by establishing boundaries (Kriel 1976:74). As before, trying to establish boundaries for those for whom it was a foreign concept was doomed to be unsuccessful. With respect to the Basotho and the British, we see that by 1851 the relationship was precarious, so much so that the British enlisted the support of the Boers and many other groups to try and bring Moshoeshoe's ever-militant forces under control (Kriel 1976:77). They failed on various occasions and as a result of many changes in the governing bodies of both the British and Boers, Moshoeshoe was freed from pressure from their side to launch a mighty attack on the Batlokwa in May 1852; an attack that would see them dispersed and defeated (Kriel 1976:78). By mid-1852 it became clear that the British were going to relinquish the annexed area, but before doing so Sir George Cathcart wanted to restore some British authority (Kriel 1976:78; Stevens 1967:19-20). The battle of Berea (20 December 1852) thus ensued, but as a result of Cathcart's involving Sekonyela by giving him a small amount of ammunition in exchange for assistance should the situation warrant it, hostilities between the Basotho and the Batlokwa flared up again (Kriel 1976:78). On this date, Moshoeshoe had written to Cathcart saying: "You have chastised, let it be enough, I pray of you; and let me be no longer considered an enemy of the Queen" (Tylden, cited in Stevens 1967:20). Cathcart's deduction was that Moshoeshoe was capitulating and thinking this was sufficient to restore British prestige, hastily retreated. However, the effect was not what Cathcart had intended or imagined, for in the wake of the British withdrawal, having inconclusively stated the requisites and consequences of abandoning the fight, Moshoeshoe was hailed the victor (Stevens 1967:20). Eventually in November 1853, Moshoeshoe overthrew Sekonyela at his mountain retreat, Jwalaboholo. In 1854 the British handed over the Orange River country to the Boers (Thompson 1995:101-102; Lye 1980:69; Stevens 1967:20; cf. Ashton 1952:4) and even then, conflict between the neighbouring groups was rife. An example is the 1865 war between the Free State and the Basotho (the Second Basotho War or the Great Basuto War) (Strydom 1985:150, 156; Stevens 1967:23), the cause of which was disagreement over the notorious western border of the Basotho territory, by then referred to as the Warden Line (Stevens 1967:21). During the war, Paulus Mopeli (a younger half-brother of Moshoeshoe) who had been stationed at Maboalela (near present-day Clocolan) on the northern border of Lesotho, was driven back across the Mohokare (Caledon) River (Strydom 1985:150; Buys 1981:38).²⁵ With the Treaty of Thaba Bosiu, he and his followers

²⁵ In this regard Thompson (1995:106) states that it was Moshoeshoe's son, Molapo, and not Paulus Mopeli who surrendered as a result of the mighty onslaught of the Boers.

obtained permission to return to the vanquished area, i.e. vanquished because Moshoeshoe was forced to cede the western border territory, which according to Stevens (1967:23), “contained half the total arable area in all Basutoland”. Yet more clashes ensued in 1867, but by then Mopeli had recognised the futility of fighting the Boers, and in June of 1867 he was granted permission by the Free State Volksraad to move to Witzieshoek and was further recognised as a subject of the Free State Republic (Rascher 1985:13; Strydom 1985:151; Buys 1981:38; Kriel 1976:90). Around June of the following year, Mopeli and his followers arrived at their new home which they called Qwaqwa (Strydom 1985:152; Buys 1981:38).

British influence in the area had not totally ceased, as can be seen by Moshoeshoe’s requests for British protection ever since the early 1860s until the Proclamation of March 12th 1868, when present-day Lesotho became a British protectorate (Basutoland) (Thompson 1995:106-107; Lye 1980:69; Buys 1981:35; Stevens 1967:24; Ashton 1952:4). With this, a clear distinction was made between the Basotho of Lesotho and those within the borders of the now South Africa (Buys 1981:35; cf. Kriel 1976:34). As for Moshoeshoe, he died soon after at Thaba Bosiu on either 1 or 11 March 1870 (Thompson 1995:107; Stevens 1967:25; Ashton 1952:4).

Although a British protectorate, Lesotho did not experience peace, for the frontier question between the Basotho and the Free State had not been settled (Lye 1980:71; Stevens 1967:24). At the Convention of Aliwal North on 12 February 1869, the Free State agreed that the land east of the Caledon would revert back to the Basotho. The latter however, were anticipating that they would receive the entire area that had previously been ceded, but to their dismay,

“Basutoland was to consist of the land between the Mohokare (Caledon) River and the mountain escarpment, minus a triangle between the lower Caledon and its junction with the Orange. Stripped of the fertile area north of the Caledon, the Sotho were confined to a small proportion of the arable lands that their ancestors had occupied before the Mfecane and far less than Governor Napier had recognised as coming under Moshoeshoe’s sway in 1843” (Thompson 1995:107).²⁶

Rivalry continued between the British (Cape Colony and Natal Republic), the Boers and Basotho groups, but some peace was restored in 1884 when the British assumed direct control of

²⁶ The Basotho still refer to the lost lands as “the conquered territory” (Thompson 1995:107).

Basutoland under the Queen (Lye 1980:71; Stevens 1967:25-28; Ashton 1952:5).²⁷ This may be seen as a consequence of the Gun War of 1880-1883 between the Basotho and the Cape Government. The cause for these hostilities was a result of Basutoland being annexed to the Cape (1871) and the placement of magistrates in the areas that Moshoeshoe had divided under his sons Letsi, Molapo and Masopha (Ashton 1952:4-5). Even in Qwaqwa peace would not be the order of the day. Old rivalries between the Batlokwa and Bakwena would continue as Koos Mota and Paulus Mopeli vied for land (Buys 1981:41).²⁸ It is Rascher's (1985:14) contention that regardless of the struggles between the Batlokwa and Bakwena, as seen by their tempestuous history, one may speak of a progression towards a sense of national unity because of the establishment of an authoritative political structure which was put in place.

Ever since Lesotho gained its independence in 1966 border violations and contestations have intermittently flared up with several cases tried at international forums, albeit without success (Esterhuysen 2008:13).

Describing the way of life of a group of people is a difficult undertaking. The statement is true whether one is talking about contemporary groupings or the inhabitants of the Mohokare Valley, past or present. Gill expresses this beautifully in the following statement: "Life was a fabric, and the components were interwoven" and provides a glimpse into what life was like for the 19th century inhabitants (from which I liberally draw) (1997:45-50).

What we know so far is that the Mohokare Valley inhabitants were dispersed, diverse groupings who found themselves in a state of flux. Some groupings spoke similar dialects (e.g. Bakwena, Bafokeng, Bataung and Batlokwa) and rallied around similar cultural practices and customs. Others spoke Nguni languages and shared cultural features. This was largely due to the Difaqane upheavals described earlier, and the presence of missionaries, the British, trekboers, as well as Korana and Griqua groupings also impacted on inhabitants' way of life. Not having yet become unified under Moshoeshoe, or against common enemies, the extended family or homestead was a significant social unit. A number of such homesteads formed lineages and clans, and relatives

²⁷ As a British Protectorate, Basutoland remained a British colony until 4 October 1966 at which time it received its independence.

²⁸ Consult Kriel (1976:92-96) for a discussion regarding the land disputes between the Batlokwa and Bakwena of Qwaqwa.

lived in settlement hamlets (motse – singular; metse – plural). Male agnates, their in-marrying wives, children and other dependants formed the core members of these homesteads.

Following a mixed economy, women were primarily responsible for domestic activities and the nurturance of children, as well as the subsistence cultivation of sorghum, beans and pumpkins (when they were sedentary for long enough) and men for the livestock (long-horned cattle, fat-tailed sheep and goats). According to Gill (1997:46), men also hunted wild animals, while gathering wild roots, vegetables and berries provided for satisfactory diets. During more peaceful times, the economy also centred on chieftainships. In this case, men formed matsema (communal labour groups; letsema – singular). This was their contribution or tribute to the polity (cf. Wells 1994:24). Agricultural activities, hunting and craftwork were such tasks. Raiding was also part of this mixed economy – offering opportunities to augment the community's wealth. In times of conflict, age-mates or regiments unified against common enemies, as they were charged with the overall protection of the group.

Legal and judicial authority was vested in the men (women remained minors). Men were household heads, heads of the extended family, and heads of the lineage and or larger polity. Male gathering places such as the kgotla (court) and pitso (general assembly) in the case of Sotho groupings, promoted male decision-making (as women were excluded) (cf. Gill 1997:48).

The homestead or extended family group was the focus of most religious activities. It was around family ancestors (badimo) that most ritual activity was centred (Gill 1997:48; cf. Nthoi 2006:27; Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:76-77; Comaroff 1985:82). Fundamental to the patriarchy, and by extension, religious activities are “intertwined and complicated patterns of rights and obligations” (Gill 1997:48). Maintaining social harmony and fulfilling obligations to both the living and those deceased (but still remaining part of family networks) were foundational to social life and cosmological underpinnings. According to Gill (1997:51), in the earliest missionary accounts of Sotho groupings, there was no conception of a supreme being or a creator mystery (modimo), a view shared by Wells (1994:25). Instead, this position was allotted to the “oldest known ancestor of any particular extended family or clan, and thus there were many *medimo* (gods)” (emphasis in the original). To substantiate this he offers the ancient prayer ‘modimo o motjha raphela oa kgale’ (new god intercede with the old god) (Gill 1997:51).²⁹ Family ancestors, Gill (1997:51)

²⁹ I've applied current South African orthography and spelling rules to Gill's (1997:51) quote which read: “*modimo o mocha raphela oa khale*”.

continues, were a “corporate reality, often known by name, were the focus of religious feelings, be it adoration and thanksgiving, or fear and dread”. The Comaroff’s add, “they are the gods ‘who know our faces’” (1997:76) and Gill reports that:

“The ancestors, collectively, represent and uphold social order and harmony, which is embodied in or preserved by various laws, customs and rituals, and personal qualities. These are to be obeyed, honoured or cultivated by the individual, family and larger society. In the process, one developed *botho* (fuller humanity or personality) and increased *seriti* (spiritual power). Consequently, one enjoyed a good life – well-being for oneself, the family and community, as well as one’s crops and animals. Conversely, to disobey or disregard the ways of the ancestors was to bring misfortune and illness upon oneself, as well as upon the family, community, animals and crops” (1997:51 – emphases in the original).

After the 1820s significant changes were taking place among those living in the Mohokare Valley. Paramount among these were political changes. Moshoeshoe was offering sanctuary and in so doing the Basotho nation was being born. Missionaries were bringing European conceptions of spirituality and morality; the British, their inescapable imperial views of superiority; and together with the trekboers vastly differing conceptions of subjugation and land ownership (Wells 1994:25-28).

3.3 Description of the sites: A picture painted

Before introducing the individual sites I would like to remind the reader of the importance of remembering the settlement history of the larger Mohokare River Valley (cf. Figures 3.1 and 3.2). In particular we should remember that the San as well as the small and scattered African-language-speaking groups occupied the area for some 300 years before it became an overwhelmingly Batlokwa- and then Basotho-controlled area. Many station names at all three the sites attest to a strong Sotho presence. Moshoeshoe’s Pool and Sekonyela’s Hat are but two exceptional examples (cf. Esterhuyse 2008:13).

I consider this Mohokare River Valley as a sacred area or, borrowing from Turner (1973:205-206, 223), an area with ritual topography. It is an area and landscape peppered with features which appeal to the cultural/ritual sensibilities of its inhabitants; features such as the mountains, and caves and proximity of water, to name but a few. The mountains’ golden-coloured sandstone

weathers in a particular way, giving rise to overhanging cliffs and caves particularly evocative in such ritual topographies (cf. Colley 2009:26).

Lekgalong and lehaha la Mantsopa (Mantsopa's Pass and Cave)

Travelling 20 kilometres on the R26 (N8) from Ladybrand towards Clocolan, three signs on the left indicate the turn-off towards Modderpoort. The first and most evident is the provincial road sign indicating Modderpoort, the second is a signboard signifying the train station at Modderpoort and the St Augustine's Priory: Conference centre and guest house, and the third is a brown heritage sign specifying Lekgalong la Mantsopa. To white townsfolk and tourists the locality is known as Modderpoort, for the Anglican diocese it is known as the St Augustine's Priory, and to black locals and the majority of site users the place is known as Lekgalong and lehaha la Mantsopa. For purposes of this study I refer to this area in the abbreviated form, namely Mantsopa. Aerial and topographical views as seen in Figures 3.4 and 3.5 provide illustrative pictures of the larger Mantsopa site together with the various stations of significance for Mantsopa pilgrims. The significant stations are summarised in Table 3.1.

To facilitate our understanding of the larger site relevant for this study, allow me to first explore the legendary figure Mantsopa, and then to consider the early St Augustine habitation of the area. Mantsopa, from whence the name of this site derives, had a long life and her story is complex.³⁰ As has been the case when considering the Mohokare history, so too conflicting accounts exist about the life of Mme Moprofeta Mantsopa. Born in the late 18th century, she grew up at Ha Ramakhetheng, on the western side of "Likotsi mountain overlooking the Mohokare at its confluence with the Phuthiatsana river", Lesotho (Ambrose 2010:3). She was named 'Koena-li-fule' (the crocodiles are feeding) and as a teenager acquired her famous name. She was a natural singer and story-teller, particularly captivating her audiences when recounting her dreams (Ambrose 2010:4). Her new name, Mantsopa (mother of Ntsopa) merely refers to her skills surpassing even that of the most creative granny, Ntsopa.

³⁰ Lesotho orthography would have the spelling 'Mantsopa'. Following South African orthography, one would spell the name with a double 'm', i.e. Mmantsopa without the apostrophe. David Ambrose cites that the Ladybrand/Mantsopa Municipal Council have opted for the tidier, simplified version Mantsopa (2010:2) – a version I too have adopted for purposes of this work.

Mantsopa was the daughter of Ramakheteng and granddaughter of Nkopane (Mathunya). She married Lekote, son of Makhetha, but upon his death and because of the levirate custom she became the wife of Selatile, Lekote's older brother (Ambrose 2010:4). She had four children from the levirated partnership: Ntsopa, Motsielehe, Tšiu and Sisilane.

Mantsopa became a famed rainmaker and had a reputation for using dreams to foretell the outcome of events (Ambrose 2010:5). Her forecasting the outcomes of battles during this time of contestation and change brought her into the spotlight. Notable events were Basotho victories at the Battle of Tihela (Viervoet over Major Warden and the Barolong) in 1851, and over British General, Sir George Cathcart, in 1852 (cf. Jolly 2010:37). Her powers grew steadily and in the late 1860s she was exiled to Modderpoort by Moshoeshoe who feared her influence was becoming too great, some say. A reason proffered by others is she had foretold that the Basotho would lose a battle, and, not heeding her warning, indeed they did. For protection from the angry generals she moved away, settling in the Modderpoort area. Here Mantsopa was baptised and given the name Anna on 13 March 1870 – the same day Moshoeshoe chose for his baptism. In his case, the event was not destined to happen as he passed away two days earlier.

Kgalong-la-bo-Tau (Lion's Pass) was the place where years earlier (1833) Thomas Arbousset, Eugene Casalis and Constant Gosselin, pioneering Paris Evangelical Missionaries, had outspanned with their Griqua guide Adam Krotz before crossing the Mohokare beneath the Spitskop hill (Ambrose 2010:8). In this very vicinity Bishop Edward Tweels, the Anglican Bishop of Bloemfontein, bought two adjoining farms, Modderpoort and Modderpoortspruit (Ambrose 2010:8) at the easterly foot of the Platberg mountain – a largely flat mountain, standing some 1776m at its highest point (Colley 2009:26). Arriving personally in 1867, Tweels inspected the site and began readying the place for his Anglican brotherhood dream. When the new members of the brotherhood arrived they used the rock shelter as their first dwelling. According to Colley (2009:27), the *Canon's cave* was enlarged by breaking away stone.

In a letter Canon Beckett wrote to Tweels and published in the *Quarterly Papers* of the Orange Free State Mission (14 April 1869), he mentions the cave, saying:

“By building up a wall of stones we have contrived to enlarge the area, so as to get a room, twelve feet by fourteen [3.5 by 4 metres], for a chapel, besides a small sleeping room, screened off by a large detached stone. Both rooms we have much improved by digging away the floors, so that I can now stand upright in the chapel, and *sit* upright in the

bedroom” (Colley 2009:33 – metric measures added by Du Plooy; emphasis in the original).

The sketch below (Figure 3.3) by Rev. J.W. Barrow, drawn some time in 1869, offers at least a cursory floor plan view of the cave (Colley 2009:28).

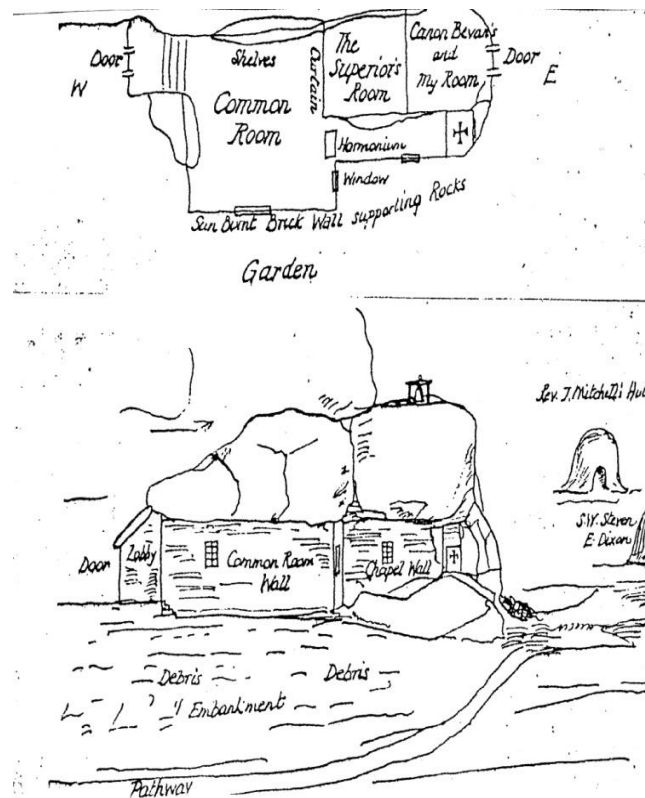


Figure 3.3: Sketch by Rev. J.W. Barrow, floor plan of the Mantsope cave

Source: COLLEY, ANDREW 2009 *Canon Beckett at Modderpoort 1867-1902*. Ficksburg, South Africa: The author.

According to Colley (2009:30), in August 1870 the brothers gathered at Modderpoort for the feast of St Augustine. In a journal entry Canon Beckett described the services.

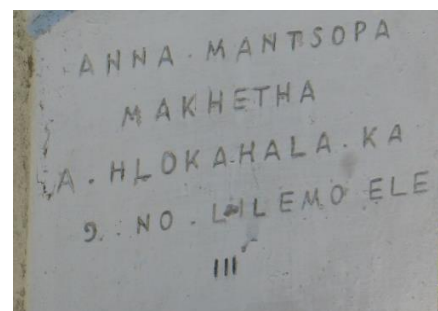
“The services began on the Evensong of Friday 27 August with Choral Evensong. The Holy Sacrifice was offered on five days during the Octave, when the service for St. Mark’s Day was used. At Mattins and Evensong special lessons were read, and the Collect for Sts. Simon and Jude was said through the Octave: and the proper Antiphons and Responses were used at the minor offices. A retreat was held on Tuesday 31st, and the Feast day was transferred from Saturday to Wednesday 1 September. {On Wednesday 1

September, [the Festival (by transference) of St. Augustine,]} ... a procession was formed from the house to the ground partially enclosed for a garden where Superior planted a Fir Cone..." (Colley 2009:30).

What was initially meant to commemorate St Augustine of Hippo became a thanksgiving event celebrating the founding of the mission station (Cawood & Vos 2010:124). The significance of this for me is that at the end of August every year, Anglicans from far and wide journey to Modderpoort for the Cave Sunday, Rose Chapel Service. It seems to me that the first steps of this pilgrimage were already taken in 1870 when the first *procession was formed from the house to the ground*.

As for the cave, according to Colley (2009:35) it seems that it served as accommodation and offered services until September 1870, after which it and a number of hut-like accommodations were used for storage. Today, the cave church is preserved and serves as a memorial to the pioneers – for the St Augustine’s Priory, the founding Anglican fathers; for traditionalists, as the original dwelling of Mantsopa – calling it Lehaha la Mantsopa. Evidence suggests, however, that Mantsopa lived close by at the foot of the Spitskop hill between the Platberg and Viervoet plateau.³¹

Although she was a baptised Christian in the French Protestant tradition (Ambrose 2010:6; Jolly 2010:39), Mantsopa’s spiritual expression continued to incorporate practices and beliefs related to her ancestors. Ambrose pays homage to her with these comments: Mantsopa “became the embodiment of the best of the old and the new” and “her fame as a prophethess and rainmaker was unrivalled” (2010:6, 8). The site has significance for Anglicans, these very traditionalists, and AIC members (notably ZCC and Apostolic Faith Churches). Serving as a place of pilgrimage for many, it is also her grave site (adjacent to the cave church) that attracts regular site users. Having died in 1906 at the ripe old age of 111, her grave lies within the priory cemetery alongside those of the Anglican Brothers (cf. Image 3.1).



The Cave Church (Images 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) and Mantsopa’s grave form the first and second stations that pilgrims visit along the pilgrimage path at the Modderpoort site. Sediba sa Mantsopa (Mantsopa’s Spring) makes up the third, a considerable distance away. Other sites that are not

³¹ “In Sesotho Platberg is Makulukameng (‘place of the coloured people’) or Litšehlong (‘place of caltrops’) and Viervoetberg (‘the mountain with four feet’) is Khunoanyane (‘the reddish place’)” (Ambrose 2010:8).

always included on this path are Mantsopa's settlement, Mantsopa's cave, and the baptismal fonts. On the vertical sandstone cave walls of the Platberg mountain above Modderpoort (Colley 2009:26), San rock paintings also attract visitation. "Letters to God" are often left as prayer requests by pilgrims (Jolly 2010:39), and, according to Jolly, these paintings are proof that this locality invited religious practice even before the cave chapel was excavated (2010:39).



Image 3.1



Image 3.2

Above: Image 3.1: Anna Mantsopa Makhetha's grave © 2015

Image 3.2: The Cave Church altar © 2015

Upon arriving and entering the St Augustine's Priory³², one's first stop is to the main office to pay an entrance fee. The beautifully manicured lawns of the old sandstone priory and the shady trees are inviting. The magnificent view towards the Caledon River and Lesotho beyond with its blue

³² There are many stakeholders who have an interest in the St Augustine's Mission and the larger area of Modderpoort. The result is that the area has seen flare-ups of conflict and contestation between these parties. For a synopsis of the broader significance of the site, consult Cawood and Vos (2010:121-126).

Maloti Mountains is a captivating vista. A demarcated path with clear signs directs one towards the cave church reception area. Well-established cacti on the right serve as a natural dividing line. More recently, a devil's fork security fence keeps site users on the path. The reception area, a clearing in front of the cave, has rows of sandstone blocks which provide all-year-round seating for meetings, school and university students on educational excursions to the site, and for sacred journeyers. Past these is the unassuming little cave church.

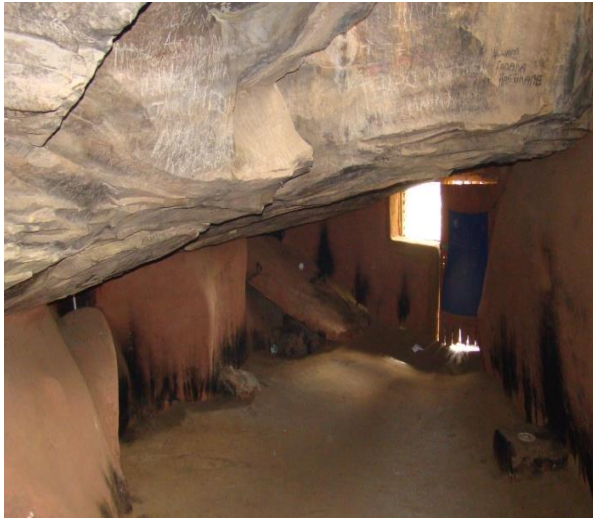


Image 3.3



Image 3.4

Above: **Image 3.3: Unfurnished interior of the Cave Church © 2015**

Image 3.4: Exterior of the Cave Church © 2015

Entering through a doorway and down a step into the 3.5 by 4 metre chapel, one is already standing in what Rev. Barrow called the *common room* (cf. Figure 3.3, the earlier sketch of the interior of the cave church). The interior of the cave has plastered walls, no furniture besides a table upon which a large candelabrum stands against the far-side chapel wall. On the left there is a square altar station on which the remnants of coloured candle remains is evidence of earlier use, as is a writing pad with prayer requests. Outside, and behind the cave there is a clay harvesting site. Pilgrims collect of this soil for use in healing rituals since it is believed that the clay has a significant potency.

Koena-li-fule Mantsopa Anna Makheta's (c. 1795-1906) grave has acquired sacrality for site users. Pilgrims light candles, offer small gifts (silver coins), sometimes standing or kneeling in

silent contemplation or singing at her grave site. I have even seen flowers placed on the grave. The third station on the traditional Mantsopa pilgrimage route, as termed by Cawood and Vos (2010:126), is not on priory grounds. Instead it is on the northern side of Spitskop hill, closer even to Viervoetberg. Water from Sediba sa Mantsopa (Mantsopa's Spring) is considered holy. Pilgrims making the trek to the fountain drink this water to maintain health or for use in healing ceremonies. It is also thought to cure illness or ward off malevolence (Cawood & Vos 2010:135). While standing in the slow moving queue, awaiting our turn to fill our water bottles, pilgrims told us that legend has it that this fountain will never dry up. The St Augustine's priory bottles and sells *Mantsopa's Spring Water* collected from this source (cf. Cawood & Vos 2010:135).

Cawood and Vos (2010:135) cite local informants who are convinced that Mantsopa used a smaller cave, closer to Spitskop, as her consultation venue. They used the fact that they found evidence of candle wax and other gifts of announcement as proof that at least some use this site as a station on their pilgrimage route, even if not all pilgrims are aware of it. Carved, rectangular basins, thought to be baptismal fonts (one larger and one smaller) are found on the north-western side of Spitskop hill. Local residents believe Mantsopa commissioned their carving from the softer sandstone for ritual baptismal use (Cawood & Vos 2010:137). I estimate that the larger basin is 1 by 1.2 metres wide.



Figure 3.4: Aerial view of the larger Mantsopa site

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

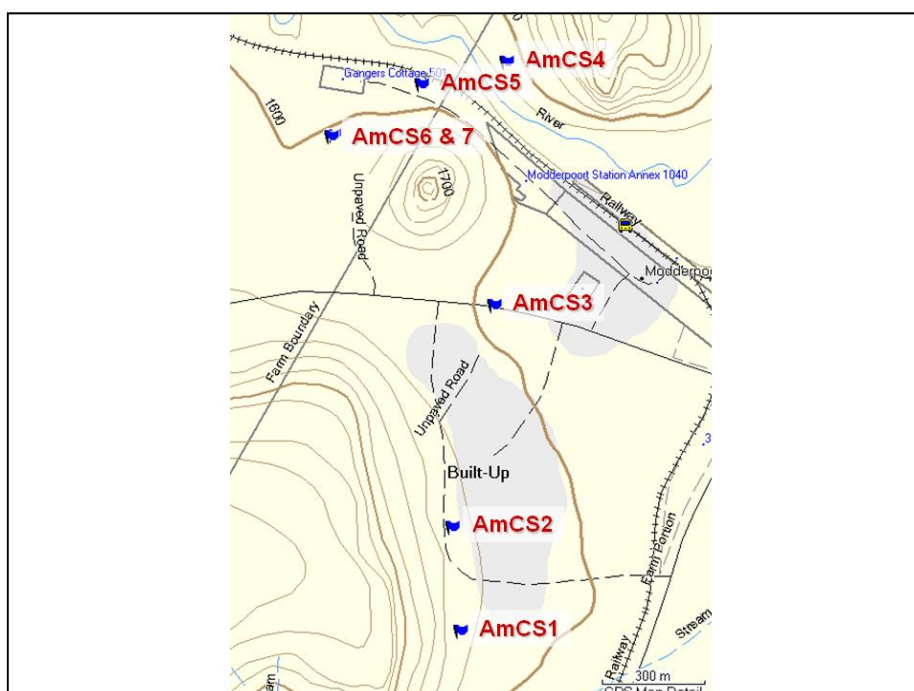


Figure 3.5: Topological map of the larger Mantsope site

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

Table 3.1: Significant locations of the Mantsope site

Name	Code	Type	Significance	Latitude (S)	Longitude (E)	Altitude (m)
<i>Rose Chapel</i>	1 (AmS1)	Church	Religious/pilgrimage	-29.11509	27.44615	1631
<i>Mantsope's Grave</i>	2 (AmCS2)	Grave	Pilgrimage	-29.11235	27.44591	1641
<i>Mantsope's Settlement</i>	3 (AmCS3)	Archaeological remains	Testimony: Mantsope's dwelling	-29.10646	27.44716	1604
<i>Mantsope's Spring</i>	4 (AmCS4)	Spring	Healing/prayer	-29.10002	27.44755	1607
<i>Mantsope's Cave</i>	5 (AmCS5)	Cave	Mantsope's 'practice'	-29.10063	27.44499	1597
<i>Baptismal font – Adults</i>	6 (AmCS6)	Rock-chiselled font (large)	Mantsope: baptism/ritual	-29.10197	27.44231	1615
<i>Baptismal font - Children</i>	7 (AmCS7)	Rock-chiselled font (small)	Mantsope: baptism/ritual	-29.10102	27.44226	1619

Adapted from: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

Mautse

The largest of the three sites, an entire valley and its immediate surrounds, is variously referred to as Badimong ('the place of the ancestors' or 'among ancestors'), Nkokomohi, Mautse or Valley of the Sangoma. For purposes of this study I have elected to refer to the larger sacred site as Mautse and there are a number of reasons for my choice. Firstly, Mautse was the "pre-colonial territorial 'district' of the Batlokwa chieftaincy" (Coplan 2003:981, 984-985). The entire district was considered the territory of Manthatisi, mother and regent of Sekonyela, leader of the Batlokwa and peer to Moshoeshoe and his younger brother Mota. Secondly, Thomas Arbousset, the French missionary and author himself referred to Mautse in his writings. It appears though that the name was derived specifically from a mountain that "dominates that region by its noble appearance and immense height" (1991:127). Arbousset was referring to the mountain today known as Sekonyela's Hat (Sekonyelashoed) by the white farmers and Tsullung by pilgrims. Ambrose and Brutsch, in their notes to *Missionary Excursion*, relate it as a "striking mountain with a characteristically hat-shaped summit at the southern end of the Witteberge Range" (Arbousset 1991:192 [note 283]). Thirdly, and most importantly, site users and the local community in general, use the name Mautse. This larger site is evident on the aerial and topographical representations of Figures 3.6 and 3.7, while the major stations within the Mautse Valley are summarised in Table 3.2.

Road signage does not warn one of the nearing site of Mautse (S 28.66228° E 28.00902°). Visierskerf³³, a distant landmark, looms large as one travels on the R70 in a northerly direction towards Rosendal. The Moolmanshoek (Private Game Reserve) sign alerts of the dirt road turn-off to the right. This road also leads to Natural Heritage site No. 199 (Vos & Cawood 2010:185; Esterhuysen 2008:21). For some 20 kilometres this gravel road guides one through the typical mixed farming activities of the current Mautse District. Narrowing and curving, the road slows one's pace as Visierskerf's sight points the direction and the oak trees lining the narrow farm track serve as beacons for the Wonderklip turn-off on the left. This half-kilometre track passes the Wonderklip homestead on the right and along and through a gate and past a number of farm worker dwellings. Each visitor reports to the entrance-fee collector and receives a numbered ticket stub for their R20.00 payment. A couple of hundred metres further along one finds the parking area where vehicles are left. From here on in, the journey is on foot.

³³ Visierskerf Mountain derives its name from the (rear hind) sight of a rifle.

Site visitors announce themselves first at an altar outside the formal gate entrance and then again immediately upon entering the hallowed grounds. Such *announcements* usually take the form of lighting candles, placing sorghum, tobacco, or a couple of coins upon the rounded altars, together with song and prayer (cf. Image 3.5). Sometimes an African drum accompanies the appeals for fruitful visits/encounters, and at other times melancholy laments hint at the gravity of such visits.

The Mautse sacred site lies in a north-westerly towards a south-easterly direction at the confluence of four privately owned farms: Wonderklip 722 (presently part of Heelbo Boerdery), Sekonyelashoed 96, Moolmansberg 226 and Waterkloof 502 (the last two are part of Moolmanshoek) (cf. Esterhuyse 2008:21; Meiring & Kitching 1995:10). The access road and entrance to the valley at the north-westerly point is located largely on the farm Wonderklip with Moolmanshoek bordering the mountain cliffs on the left as it tapers in the south-east with Sekonyelashoed forming the southerly border. In her description Esterhuyse (2008:22) divides the valley into three parts, whereas I conceive of the valley as consisting of four parts. The first is Nkokomohi and its surrounds, the second is the main valley (cf. Images 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8), the third is the right-hand side and right branching, and the fourth is the southerly area above the plateau (cf. Image 3.9).

The story goes that Nkokomohi – located on the farm Moolmansberg 226 (Esterhuyse 2008:21) – was the original site that attracted visitors. The name Nkokomohi means to rise up, and Coplan (2003:981) adds the qualifier, *like bread*. According to my informants, at times, and particularly in the mornings, the water vapour or steam layer blanketing the dam, stream and surrounding reed beds appears as if it is rising, hence the name Nkokomohi. Coplan (2003:981) as well as Cawood and Vos' (2010:85-91) version describes the Nkokomohi area as a sequence of springs in the north-western area of the valley that is made up of reed beds and wetland. The decaying subterranean organic material would smoulder, emitting smoke.³⁴ The chemical reactions together with the heat literally caused the reed beds to rise (and bubble), causing the earthen, yeastlike-bubbles to pop and sink, while yet others pushed up past, leaving an uneven surface of black, white and yellowish powder (sehwashō) believed to be very potent for a number of uses,

³⁴ Thomas Arbousset in *Missionary Excursion* refers to similar peat fires in the Tebetebeng valley and hints at the fear they evoked in locals (1991:73). Ambrose and Brutsch in their notes refer to at least two other locations, one near Roma and another at Mohlaka-oa-tuka where similar underground peat fires occur (Arbousset 1991:165 note 68).

most notably medicinal but also cosmetic (cf. Coplan 2003:981).³⁵ It is not difficult to understand the sacralisation of the place, as a place populated by ancestral spirits, who here make their presence manifest. Cawood and Vos present a number of other narratives, corroborated to some extent or another by my informants (cf. 2010:86-87). According to Coplan (2003:981), Basotho farm workers have made use of the powder from the decaying reeds since the 1920s, as have ZCC members. Esterhuyse (2008:21) contends that the Basotho have known of the place since they began settling in the region, which would mean since the early 1600s (cf. Gill 1997:23). As for the current state of Nkokomohi, it largely serves as a clay site from which visitors dig out some of the soil/clay/ash deposits. In Image 3.10 the path leading to the Tshenolo Lake and clay harvesting areas of the Nkokomohi site is seen. Despite its evident beauty, the majority of pilgrims to Mautse visit other stations, almost denigrating Nkokomohi to the status of secondary importance.



Image 3.5: A beautiful altar station with very visible gifts of announcement (lit candles, whole sorghum kernels and tobacco) © 2010

³⁵ The word sehwashō is derived from the combined Anglo-Nguni expression ukuwasha which literally translates as 'to wash'. Interestingly, this can be traced back to the 1850s through to the 1900s, which made up the South African migration stories of local community spiritualities. The urban contexts around Johannesburg gave rise to this new way of languaging on spirituality. The Afro-Christian expression (to borrow this jargon) became central and ubuprofethi or basebeletsj emerged at the time. Cleansing or purification rituals in the city space were introduced and language became central in communicating such expressions (Masoga 2016 – personal communication).



Image 3.6



Image 3.7



Image 3.8



Image 3.9

Above:

Image 3.6: Entering the Mautse Valley, with Kganyapa pond out of view on the left and St Mary's ahead on the right © 2009

Image 3.7: The entrance in the distance and lower Mautse Valley as seen from the path to the Taung Falls © 2009

Image 3.8: Looking into the Mautse Valley, in a southerly direction © 2008

Image 3.9: The southerly plateau of the Mautse Valley, facing in a northerly direction © 2008

The citation below is from an interview with an interesting informant, who tells about this place, Nkokomohi.



Image 3.10: Path leading to the Tshenolo Lake and clay harvesting areas at Nkokomohi © 2008

The lower lying area is Nkokomohi, whereas up here is Mautse. Nkokomohi is the dwelling for ancestors. You could hear them talk. But the truth is people who came long before us to Nkokomohi could hear the ancestors talking. They used to herd their cattle, light fires, and cook porridge. Legend tells us that there was a white foreman on this farm where Mautse is located, who got tired of hearing voices talking without seeing the people talking. And he fired his gun at the voices.

He was firing at the voices of the ancestors, who were making fires in the cave, and also herding cattle, and rattling dishes. But he died. That poor Afrikaner died on his horse's back. He was killed by the 'talking voices' that he could not see.

After the shooting incident, people were attracted to this place. People used to go as far as Nkokomohi for prayers, and they would return home immediately. They came on these

pilgrimages only when they were instructed by their ancestors. After the shooting, people believed that the ancestors have left this place. Around the late 1990s there was a great presence of the spirits when people were harvesting herbs in the morning. But people have caused grievous disharmony in this area.

Asking where this presence emanates from and whether she could clarify if the disturbance to harmony was caused by the white man who fired his gun, my informant concluded that: *Nothing is disturbed or spoiled. It is because he fired his gun in disbelief to the reality that ancestors live here. You believe somehow that ancestors live here, but he never believed that, to the extent that he wanted to destroy the ancestors.* [NSechaba, Mautse 2010-06]

On entering the valley (proper) one is not immediately confronted with an overwhelming number of stations of reverence. Instead, upon entry and to the left one sees a pond surrounded by reeds – Kganyapa (Coplan 2003:982) – the repository into which the stream flows. To the right of the gorge is St Mary's. Consultations here reveal the wishes and work required by the ancestors. A steep climb still to the right leads one to Naledi (cf. Image 3.11), a neatly kept station with a star, where steps beckon journeyers to its places of prayer. Back to the initial arterial path I now look to the eastern side of the gorge. As one follows it into the valley – running almost parallel to the natural fountain-fed stream – periodic altars mark the way that pilgrims have gone before. Under trees, alongside large boulders, in the gorges forged by years of erosion, places of announcement, prayer or contemplation are evident. Sometimes demarcated by packed rocks and a swept ground surface, candle wax remnants remain. It is around these lower lying and more accessible localities that one often sees groups of newly arrived site users engaged in fellowship or resting. The vegetation changes from green pasture and thorny shrub, becoming denser, lush, medium-sized trees and shrubs, with vein-like footpaths splitting off from the main trail. To the left they lead to the stream and the various coves and attractions to whistle-blowing pilgrims

acknowledging the spirits of the gurgling, swirling and clear waters, as well as to the sandstone riverbed, and then up and along steep paths to revered sites for infertility/fertility (Maseeng) and the University (Yunivesithi) (cf. Image 3.12). To the right, the path initially snakes gradually and then steeply to the Flats (Difletseng), to No. 8, and to Ha Madiboko (cf. Image 3.13). After the requisite ritual actions and consultations with significant functionaries at these sites and specific stations – just below the sandstone ridge overhang, hollows and natural shelters invite imaginative use of this natural environment – travellers move along the paths to more secluded and sacred places. Yet higher, and past Ha Monica, the narrow rocky path leads pilgrims on their way to Tempeleng (the Temple). Along this path they encounter a split in the rock surface. A very sacred place, Sefuthu(ng)'s power derives from steam rising from the fissure. Haled to heal the affected extremity (or body part) that is placed into the crack, remnants of rituals of appeasement and appeal are evidence of the various purposes that site users associate with the place. Tempeleng is an enclave consisting of part baptism pond, altar and *stairway to heaven*, as well as an area allotted for domestic use (cooking and sleeping) (cf. Image 3.14). Often, this is the ultimate destination for groups of pilgrims, predominantly weekend visitors. Tempeleng invokes a majesty and holiness not only in a lone researcher or visitor, but denominational groups can be seen expressing the reverence they hold for the place. Its obscurity from outside view and the implied journeying towards a centre (i.e. one feels to be walking *into* and not *upwards*) adds to the sensation of sacrality. Encountering pilgrims praying or singing around the altar, being drawn in by the African drum, waiting your turn to ascend the stairs and stand head-and-shoulders in another realm with individual pleas, or being witness to the very embodied/corporeal baptism rituals of full-body immersion in the dark waters, all confirm and reinforce the power of the place.

The third part, and branching to the right towards the west of the Badimong Valley, ends in a cul-de-sac. Generally referred to as Bataung, this area includes Taung Hut, Taung Village and the Taung Falls. For interest sake the Bataung (the people of the lion), a Basotho clan that has strong historical ties to this part of the eastern Free State, appropriated this area by naming it after their clan name and lion totem. Such clan affiliations are no longer strictly adhered to.

The southern part of the valley is more sparsely populated in terms of both stations and people, and is more secluded. Moshoeshoe's Fountain (Sediba sa Moshoeshoe), the Place of the Grandmothers (Ha Nkgono Mmamasengene) and the Place of the Grandfathers (Lehaha la Ntatemoholo Sebolai) are situated in this area and are far less accessible. For this reason, day or weekend visitors are not likely users of these sites. Along the rocky surface of the plateau there

are a number of rectangular rock structures. From their apparent disuse it is obvious that these demarcated areas have fallen out of favour. Heaps (cairns) of packed rock on the clear sandstone surfaces are said to be points of connection with familial ancestors. From this vantage point, and seen in Image 3.15, the deceptive proximity of Tsullung (Sekonyelashoed) becomes apparent. As the highest point of the Mautse Valley at 2300m, this mountain sentry is climbed for high prophesy purposes and it is believed that one should summit just before the sun rises.

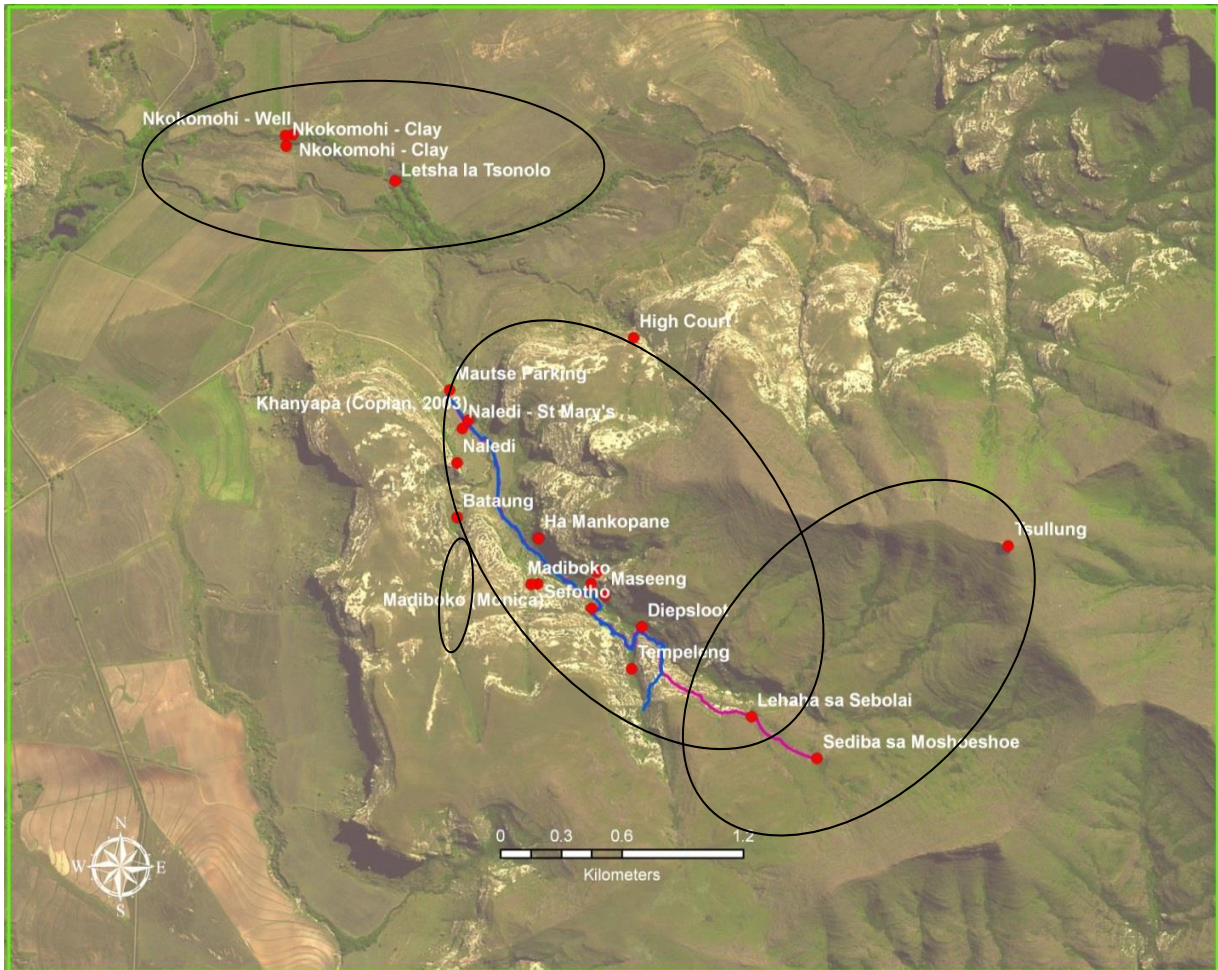


Figure 3.6: Aerial view of the larger Mautse site

Adapted from: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.



Image 3.11: Naledi: The Star © 2014



Image 3.12: Close-up view of Maseeng: Children and fertility site © 2013

Below the sandstone ridge overhang, millions of years of exposure to the elements has left natural shelters used by overnight visitors and those originally seeking refuge (Coplan 2003:981). Today, of these localities have been expanded and fortified with formally constructed walls – from locally sourced rock and mud, or a typical mixture of dung and mud. Increasingly, they have roofs; some thatch and more recently very shiny sheets of corrugated iron (cf. Image 3.9). These signs of settlement and dwelling are unmistakable. A few stand-alone rondavel structures are found – some forming part of the dwelling or worship compound at particular localities (for example at Difletseng, cf. Image 3.10), others standing as lone sentinels. “These circular structures have roofs of thatch and are reminiscent of the more traditional style of huts presently still found in some parts of Lesotho. At the “University” and Place of the Grandfathers, the huts also have the slightly elongated entrance that is typical of the traditional *mohlongofatse* which has almost vanished in modern BaSotho villages” (Esterhuyse 2008:22).³⁶ Also found in the more traditional

³⁶ Mohlongwafatshe is the correct spelling.

residence and homestead form, as well as at two stations (Maseeng and No. 8), one finds reed or thatched fences (seotlwana) (cf. Ashton 1952:24). These structures enclose a courtyard and offer privacy.

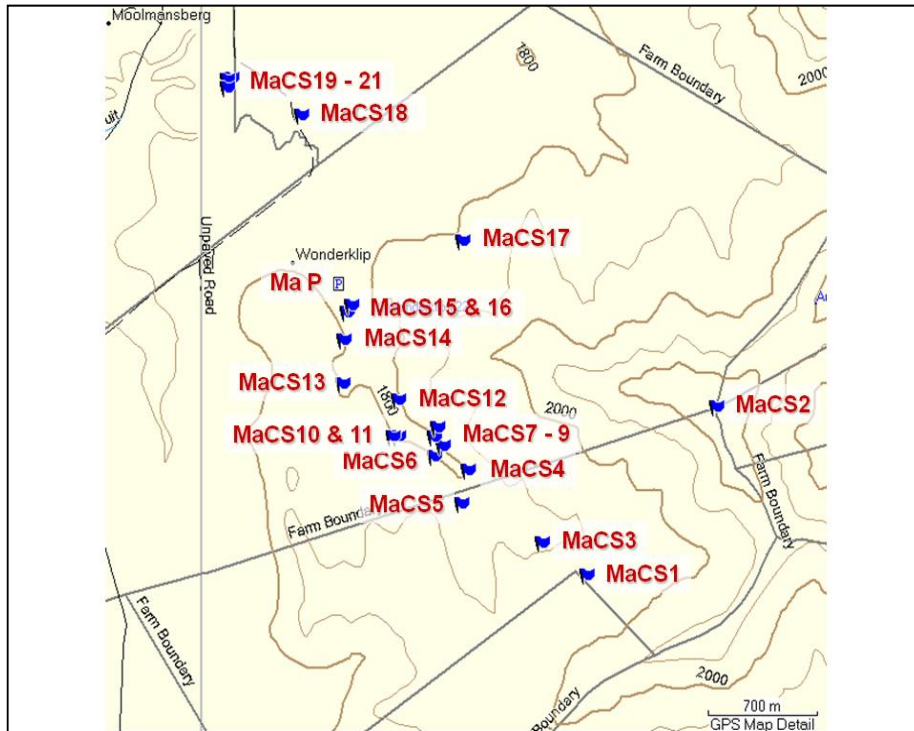


Figure 3.7: Topographical map of the larger Mautse site

Adapted from: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 NHC project report: *Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

The table below (Table 3.2) should be seen as a summary of the most important stations at the Mautse site and should not be considered exhaustive or static in terms of its significance, meaning and use. As is the case with traditional medicine, the same station may be used by different pilgrims for different ends since it is believed that ancestors direct site users to appropriate places, and/or site guides who interpret the instruction. What is presented therefore are rule-of-thumb notions about the successive stations. The inclusion of Figure 3.8, an artist’s account of the Mautse Valley, is for comparative purposes. Note – some station names differ from those I propose, nor are all those I refer to included in that diagram.

Table 3.2: Significant locations of the Mautse site

Name	Code	Type	Significance, Meaning & Use	Latitude (S)	Longitude (E)	Altitude (m)
<i>Letsha la Tsonolo</i>	1.01 (MaCS18)	'Lake'	Initiation / lake attracts horses	-28.65319	28.01066*	1710
<i>Nkokomohi – Clay</i>	1.02 (MaCS19)	Bog / wetland / reed bed	Ancestral presence / prayer / clay harvest	-28.65118	28.00205	1708
<i>Nkokomohi - Well</i>	1.03 (MaCS20)	Bog / wetland / reed bed	Ancestral presence / prayer / clay harvest	-28.65121	28.00172	1697
<i>Nkokomohi - Clay</i>	1.04 (MaCS21)	Bog / wetland / reed bed	Ancestral presence / prayer / clay harvest	-28.65167	28.00175	1699
<i>Mautse Parking</i>	2.01 (MaP)	Parking	Access point	-28.66228	28.00902	1741
<i>Kganyapa (Coplant 2003)</i>	2.02 (MaCS16)	'Lake'	Diviner training / ritual dress	-28.66358	28.00987	1741
<i>Naledi – St Mary's Jerusalem</i>	2.03 (MaCS15)	Settlement / church group	Molaoli St Mary's Christian Church Meeting place for prayer, sacrifice and worship. Permanent residence consisting of a group of lean-to's and clay huts. Meeting place of an Apostolic church group.	-28.66394	28.00959	1746
<i>Naledi</i>	2.04 (MaCS14)	Cave	Vision of star of Bethlehem / ancestral calling Meeting place for prayer, sacrifice and worship. It is a narrow cavern in the rockface, with an open space directly in front of the cavern. Mostly occupied during weekends, for worship by a specific church group.	-28.66544	28.00936*	1789
<i>Difletseng Botjhabatsatsi No. 8</i>	2.05 2.06		Overnight accommodation and altar. Semi-permanent /permanent residence consisting of two huts with one surrounded by a <i>seotloana</i> . It is sometimes used as a place of female initiation and training for <i>bongaka</i> . Also the meeting place of an Apostolic church group.			
<i>Madiboko (proper) [=mother of all the clan totems]</i>	2.07 (MaCS11)	Overhang / rockface /	Find identity / tribal / clan (totem) affiliation	-28.67073	28.01265	1802

			spring / settlement	Place of training of <u>sangomas</u> and treatment of patients. Permanent residence and sleeping quarters of Ngono Madiboko and her novices.				
<i>Madiboko (Monica)</i>	2.08 (MaCS10)	Spring / settlement	Spring / settlement	Monica Mangengenene Permanent residence and sleeping quarters of Gogo Monica and her <u>twasas</u> (apprentices). Gogo Monica passed away in May 2013.	-28.67071	28.01295	1877	
<i>Sefuthu(ng)</i>	2.09 (MaCS6)	Rock crevice	Rock crevice	Healing Place of healing; place of rebirth through the female/mother spirit ("steam" coming from a deep opening in the rock surface). Place of prayer; treatment of an infected part of the body by placing it over/in the opening to be treated.	-28.67177	28.01534	1806	
<i>Tempeleng Mamahohore</i>	2.10 (MaCS5)	Overhang / pool	Overhang / pool	Prayer / baptism / ritual immersion Meeting place for prayer, sacrifice and worship. Main place of importance for church groups to pray, sacrifice, confess, sing, baptise and obtain strength for the soul (<u>moya</u>).	-28.67439	28.01712	1808	
<i>Kitjheneng</i>				Cooking area next to Tempeleng. A small shelter without a roof that people could visit to prepare themselves spiritually for the Tempeleng; sacrifice and cooking area.				
<i>Maseeng</i>	2.11 (MaCS7)	Overhang / rockface	Overhang / rockface	Fertility Place of training of <u>sangomas</u> and treatment of barren women; altar for sacrifice. No children allowed. Semi-permanent residence of <u>dingaka</u> and patients.	-28.67112*	28.01594	1788	
<i>Yunivesithi</i>	2.12 (MaCS8)	Rockface / incline	Rockface / incline	Training/initiation	-28.67069	28.01533	1788	
<i>(Lehaha la) Yunivesithi (Cave)</i>	2.13 (MaCS9)	Overhang	Overhang	Training/initiation Place of training for <u>dingaka</u> through dreams, rituals and meditation, as well as a fountain with healing qualities. Consists of huts and shelters for semi-permanent residence. Altar for sacrifices.	-28.67019	28.01559	1799	
<i>Ha Mankopane</i> [=name of the mother-in-law of Mohlomi who was a herbalist and soothsayer of the	2.14 (MaCS12)	Overhang / rockface	Overhang / rockface	Bakwena ancestral calling/overnight Overnight accommodation. Permanent resident died recently c. 2008.	-28.66872	28.01298	1778	

Bakwena in the late 1800s (Coplan 2003:984)]								
Place of the Matabele	2.15							
High Court	2.16 (MaCS17)	Overhang / rockface / pool / waterfall			Prayer / baptism / ancestral calling / ritual immersion	-28.66001	28.01722	1790
Bataung Taung hut Taung village Taung Falls	3 (MaCS13)	Overhang / rockface			Bataung ancestral calling Permanent residence. Shelters that provide semi-permanent residence. Place for prayer, sacrifice. Natural shelter (hollow cave) with small waterfall for weekend visitors to sacrifice and pray. According to legend it was Moshoeshoe I's place of retreat. Nobody is permitted to dwell there permanently.	-28.66781	28.00936	1848
Diepsloot	4.1 (MaCS4)	Instream rock pool cascade			Dangerous/powerful place	-28.67257	28.01758	1790
Ha Nkgono Mmamasengwane	4.2				Meeting place of the grandmother <u>badimo</u> . Prayer and sacrifice. It is a permanent residence of at least one person. This woman is like a guardian and caretaker of the place.			
Lehaha la Ntatemoholo Sebolai	4.3 (MaCS3)	Cave			Lekgotla / Sebolai / refuge Meeting place of the grandfather <u>badimo</u> (ancestors) or <u>lekgotla</u> (gathering place and court). Prayer and sacrifice. It is a semi-permanent residence which also offers overnight accommodation. A traditional practitioner (<u>sangoma</u>) presently resides there.	-28.67648	28.02247	1887
Sediba sa Moshoeshoe	4.4 (MaCS1)	Spring			Healing / peace / Moshoeshoe I According to legend, Moshoeshoe bathed here and used the water of the well as a young man (Meiring & Kitching 1995:9). Presently individuals go there to pray, use and collect water for healing and strengthening (Esterhuysen 2008:23).	-28.67829	28.02539	1950

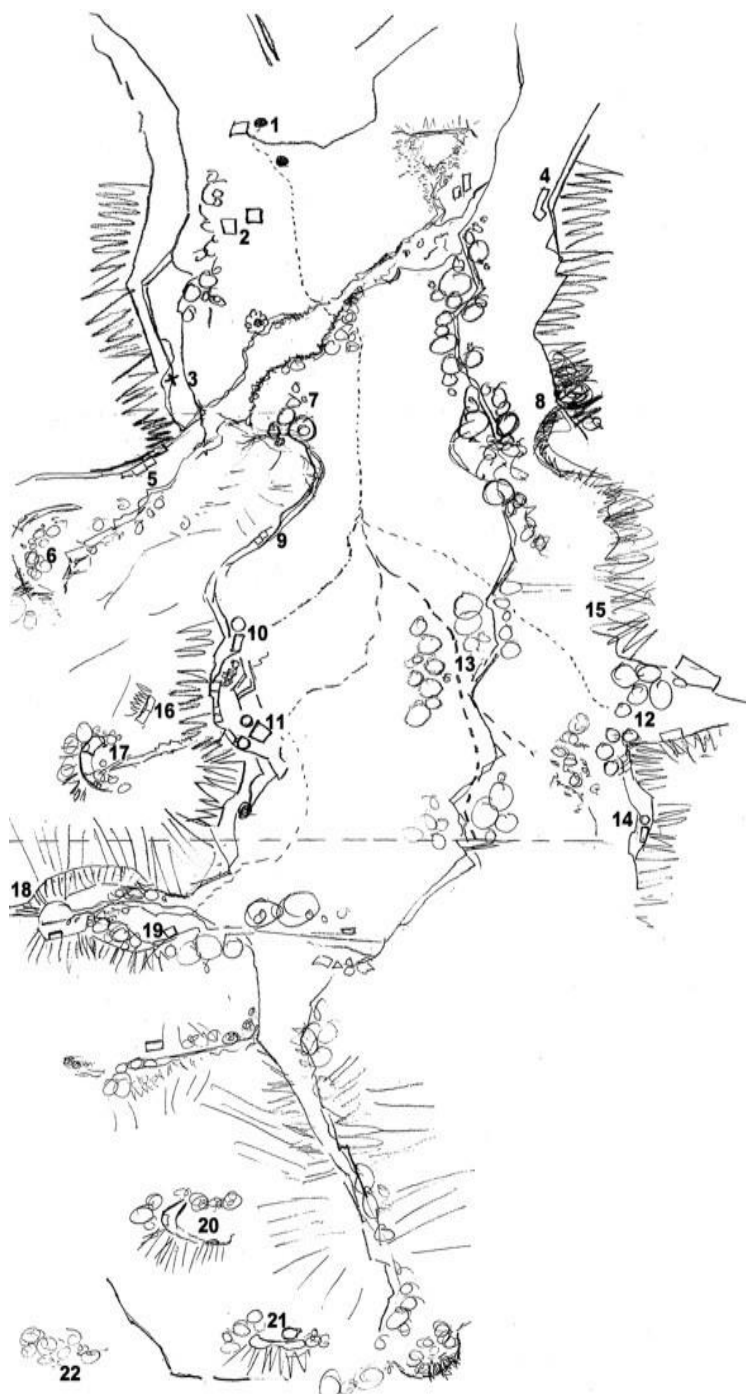
<i>Tsullung</i> (<i>Sekonyelas-hoed</i>)	4.5 (MaCS2)	Mountain peak	High prophesy	-28.66905	28.02339*	2300
<i>The following are not site or station names my informants used, but I include them for other researchers to corroborate.</i>						
Lehaha la modimo / Crèche for spirit children			Place for prayer, sacrifice, teaching and caretaking of the spirit children (spirits of non-adults). Retreat for prayer and meditation by an individual for the care and prosperity of the spirit children. Old place which was rebuilt 2 years ago.			
Seiponeng [=mirror]			Place of revelation. Visitors receive explanations for visions and dreams.			
Tempeleng for Madonna with the Child			Place for prayer. Rock shelter where one of the rocks suggests the form of Mother Mary and the Jesus child. Not very accessible.			
Letsha la dingaka/ Letsha a bopofeta cf. Meiring and Kitching (1995); Moephuli (2009)			Place of prayer and meditation of sangomas, dingaka and prophets of spirits. Holy place where healers pray/meditate and sacrifice. Daily visitors only.			

Adapted from: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 NHC project report: *Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

ESTERHUYSE PETRO 2008 *Research report on two living heritage sites: Badimong and Matabuleng*. Unpublished manuscript. Bloemfontein.

MEIRING JOHAN & KITCHING JOHAN 1995 *Inligtingsdokument: Wonderklip*. 24/10/1995. Unpublished document, HAS (JSK). South Africa.

* These are not accurate readings.



(Original concept from Roodt 2007 but revised and with more detail)

- Key:
1. Parking area
 2. Jerusalem
 3. Naledi
 4. Place of Matabele
 5. Taung Village
 6. Taung Falls
 7. Taung hut
 8. Tempeleng for Madonna and Child
 9. Difletseng
 10. Botjhabatsutsi Nr. 8
 11. Madiboko
 12. University
 13. Seiponeng
 14. Masieng
 15. MaNkopane
 16. Lehaha la modimo / Crèche for spirit children
 17. Letsa la dingaka/profeta
 18. Tempeleng/ MaMahohore
 19. Kitcheneng
 20. Ha ngonon mmamasengwane
 21. Ntate moholo sebolai
 22. Sediba sa Moshoeshoe

Figure 3.8: Artist's rendition of the Mautse Valley³⁷

Source: ESTERHUYSE PETRO 2008 *Research report on two living heritage sites: Badimong and Motouleng*. Unpublished manuscript. Bloemfontein.

³⁷ The footpaths are indicated with dotted lines from no. 1, almost bisecting the valley lengthwise. Variations indicate different paths, and to an extent, foot traffic. Conspicuous in its absence is the footpath between Tempeleng (18 & 19) and Maseeng (14). Admittedly, it is a rocky path that proceeds from high on the western side of the valley, down towards the stream, crossing the stream, and then up again on the eastern side of the valley.



Image 3.13: The rondavel-church at No. 8 and view towards the lower valley and entrance
© 2010



Image 3.14: Tempeleng's *Stairway to heaven* © 2008



Image 3.15: Tsullung/Sekonyelashoed: Standing some 2300m © 2008

Motouleng

By happenstance I came across a location that Thomas Arbousset, the 19th century French missionary to Southern Africa and ally of Moshoeshoe referred to as Ntlwanatšwana (1991:67). With its meaning of “place like a little house” and being situated on the right bank of the Mohokare, it was apparently a place he had visited and from which he had collected sekama (ilmanite) on an 1836 exploration of the territory together with fellow missionary Francois Daumas. However, it is Ambrose and Brutsch’s note to Arbousset’s *Missionary Excursion* that is most illuminating. According to them, in another publication Arbousset mentions “a village built in a huge rock shelter”, and this rock shelter is none other than Ntlwanatšwana. The thrill of is that Ntlwanatšwana is known in more recent times as Motouleng, and Motouleng is borne beneath the cliffs of the Sekameng Mountain (Arbousset 1991:164 [note 51], 182 [note 199]).

Motouleng (S 28.57998° E 28.38059°), the place where people are smithed³⁸, moulded and shaped (i.e. ultimately transformed), is an amphitheatre-size rock overhang and cavernous interior located on the farm Linnwood near Clarens (cf. Figures 3.9 and 3.10). This farm (No. 441) came into being in 2005 when the two farms De Vlucht and Ridgeroad were merged (Esterhuyse 2008:14).

On the R711 between Clarens and Fouriesburg the Surrender Hill turn-off signals the gravel road that leads to Motouleng, an informally-declared heritage site. The six-kilometre road traverses Neels Roos’ farms, i.e. Coerland and Lusthof (cf. Esterhuyse 2008:14). Just beyond the sandstone farmhouse at Lusthof a R20.00 fee is collected per person before access is granted to the narrow two-track path to the parking area where vehicles are left. The farmer Roos collects these fees since it is on his privately owned property that the access road to the sacred site is situated.

The first hurdle that site users negotiate is the first crossing of the Small Caledon River. During drier times of the year this crossing is not particularly difficult, but for a little jump (approximately 2 metres) across the stream. During the summer months this requires a balancing act as the steep and slippery incline randomly chooses its casualties. The 1.5-kilometre hike upstream along

³⁸ Drawn from a conversation with informants, ho toula is the smithing and moulding process when iron is hit and hammered before it can become an article with utilitarian value.

the single-file path increasingly focuses travellers. Lit candles, sorghum and snuff-tobacco, gifts of announcement along the trail, are the psychic and spiritual coordinates pilgrims stop at, add to and engage with as they become more pensive and draw closer to the first glimpse of the Motouleng entrance.



Figure 3.9: Aerial view of the Motouleng site

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.



Image 3.16: Motouleng beckoning © 2009

Strictly speaking Motouleng (or Salpeterkrans, as the local white farmers refer to the place), is not a cave but instead the spacious interior of a large rock overhang. For all intents and purposes the rock fall centre shields a view into the vast space. The breeze carries on it the waft of wood fires and voices not seen. Predominantly over weekends the African drums and the singing of the groups echo through the valley. Peeking through the poplar trees the skew smile of the Motouleng sacred site (proper) beckons (cf. Image 3.16), but first, the second river crossing must be negotiated. When the water levels are low, pilgrims must step on the tops of protruding rocks which serve as stepping stones across the river. However, when the water levels are higher the crossing is far less elegant. Some opt to walk through the swiftly running water, sometimes slipping or stumbling on rocks below, or being bullied by the underwater currents that swirl and twirl. Others select to climb up and over a series of boulders with nothing but the beckoning waters between. This side of the river is the farm Linnwood, which houses the Motouleng cave. An alternative crossing further along the narrowing valley is sometimes a last resort. Pilgrims' agility and stamina are tested as they first climb up the left rocky incline to just below the sandstone plateau and then down and over (sometimes under) large boulders along the waterway. Where the river's incline is less pronounced, pilgrims negotiate the crossing. Navigating from one large boulder to the next is by no means a graceful feat. I found that keeping my centre of gravity as low as possible reduced my chances of slipping and hurting myself.

After crossing successfully parcels are readjusted and the pilgrim takes on the steep climb along the rocky path that guides site users to the entrance. The exertion usually requires a number of stops to catch one's breath. Looking around to the left the valley ends in a cul-de-sac. High on the plateau the coloured garments of certain faith denominations dot the path on the way to the waterfall. From this vantage point, looking down towards the river, a number of crosses mark significant spots, as do the planted flags decorated with Christian symbols. And then the ascent continues.

The cave proper may be divided into two sections (cf. an artist's sketch of the cave, as seen in Figure 3.11). The first is where the majority of the activities, both domestic and spiritual, take place. The second is clearly demarcated for much more contemplative interaction with spirit guides and all matters of the divine. At the formal entrance on the far left visitors are channelled between hip-height rock-packed walls. Almost immediately one is confronted with two flat slabs of rock – one lying horizontally on the ground, the other placed vertically, forming a shelf from which an eternal flame seems to burn (cf. Image 3.17). Immediately after adding to these candles,

the requisite prayers and stepping into the cavern, Maseeng is on the left, i.e. the fertility station for which Motouleng is renowned. A bit further along, but still along the fissure wall, one finds the low-walled domestic quarters of a number of more permanent site users. Notably, two of these are where the white-bearded prophet and gatekeeper to the cave, Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo, and the blind faith healer (Nkgono Mantahli Paskalina Makwele) live. Image 3.18 demonstrates the vastness of the cave site's interior. The large rock on the ground is called Tafoleng, (i.e. the Table). Pilgrims must take caution not to step on it since, like with dining tables, no feet are allowed. Sometimes this table is set with colourful candles, clay pots of traditional sorghum beer, etc. Behind these and into the deeper recesses on the left, one can see the paper-written requests for good fortune and blessings. According to Cawood and Vos (2010:104) this place is referred to Dingakeng, a place where the connection between God and the ancestors is particularly strong. The next stop is the large altar, Altareng; a wax- and soot-covered stalagmite. Visitors are invited to light candles and impart silent or spoken prayers. Denominational groups may be seen to crowd around this altar filling the space and beyond with songs of worship and the primordial rhythm of the African drum. Behind the altar, as the cave roof tapers into darkness, a number of smaller stalagmites resemble the earth mounds of the newly buried. One might argue that this is where the name, Mabitteng (i.e. place of graves/graveyard), derives its meaning. Informants indicate that these, together with other little stacks of rock or planted flags are signposts for where ancestors are sensed most intensely (by descendents) (cf. Image 3.19). Some of these mounds serve as more formal stations along which certain site users travel. It seems that they may even have specific names, e.g. the Authentic Rock Altar and Sangoma's Rock (Cawood & Vos 2010:108). In the deeper alcoves and to the right, water (Metsi a masea) siphoning through the cave roof is believed to be particularly potent and is collected in buckets and containers to be administered to those requiring healing of particular ills or to promote the general wellbeing of site visitors (cf. Esterhuysen 2008:16). The limelike residues are also believed to be of significant medicinal value and are therefore often chipped off the rock ceiling.

A large flat rock, Lejwe la ho hlabela (the slaughter table) is equipped with a metal spike onto which the rope of awaiting animal sacrifices are tied, and a shallow furrow into which blood and stomach contents is channelled into the most often only trickling small waterfall and stream bed. A little further on is the Lekgotla (the court). In more traditional Basotho culture the kgotla was a gathering place where the male elders heard and decided important matters. This rectangular structure constructed from packed rock is exactly that: a place where site users discussed and heard the outcomes on important matters as dictated by the(ir) Shades. Esterhuysen (2008:16)

explains that it actually serves as a type of confessional for bad deeds or transgressions against ancestors. In particular, guidance can be sought if it is believed that someone wishes to harm the site user.



Image 3.17: *Eternal flame* at the entrance of Motouleng cave proper © 2012



Image 3.18: Central view of Motouleng cave upon entering © 2008

Mokgorong, considered the most sacred of the stations at Motouleng, is a crevice in the innermost recesses of the cave. Only permitting access to a few pilgrims at a time, this dark hollow into which one crawls is obscured from view by both the dark and a number of stalagmites. It is not difficult to guess at the reasons for the sacralisation of this place. Spending some time in the oxygen deprived depths, one's very thoughts resound loudly. Mokgorong is sometimes referred to as the ancestors' TV (Cawood & Vos 2010:111). To the right of this hallowed place, the water (Metsi a sediba) filtering through the rock ceiling is garnered for domestic/drinking and healing purposes (cf. Esterhuyse 2008:16).

The collection of Dihwasho from various sites within this section of the rock overhang, i.e. the soil and clay believed to have spiritual, medicinal, and cosmetic value, is most pronounced at Thotobolong (Cawood & Vos 2010:113). One might describe this locality as the last section of the ritual area before the denominational and domestic structures nearing the middle of the cave and the *active* side of the sacred site. The ditches from which this valuable commodity is harvested vary from being shallow to knee-deep.



Image 3.19: Mabitleng: Place of graves/graveyard © 2008



Image 3.20: Interior of Motouleng © 2013

The stone wall enclosures (1 to 1.5 metres high) are prominent features of the layout of this cave. They are mostly without roofs, and serve as temporary domestic areas for occasional and more permanent site users. Besides the three on the left that are used by Nkgono Mantahli Paskalina Makwele, Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo and his partner, on the right of the cave, there are also a number of structures against the cleared rock fall slope, facing into the interior of the cave (cf.

Image 3.20). More recently there have been significant expansions and alterations to some of these enclosures. Some have raised the wall height, inserted glass windows, thatched the roofs, and added aesthetic features such as stairs and bathing facilities (complete with pipe plumbing to relay the water to the central stream bed after bathing) (cf. Image 3.21). Continuing towards the middle of the cave (cf. Image 3.22), and on both sides of the central furrow leading to the stone-walled boundary between the two primary parts of the cave, one finds more elementary but also very unique structures built by specific church groups. Theoretically, these enclosures are open to all visitors, even though some have particular symbolic markings identifying them as belonging to specific denominational groupings or to certain charismatic leaders.

The second half of the cave site is demarcated by a stone wall – replete with wooden gate and lock. Signage in white paint requests visitors not to take photographs, not to use this area for ablution purposes and to ask site guides for a walkabout tour. Beyond this point site visitors are confronted with a very different energy. This side is swept tidy, and the open area is cleared and levelled of any rock fall. The quiet, meditative quality is not punctuated by any animal sounds or evidence of habitation. Approximately eight structures allowing only one or two people to kneel inside, built in a variety of shapes and building styles (of thatch, reed or stone), closely hug the cave wall or use the “natural cavities and recesses between the boulders” as inspiration (Esterhuyse 2008:17). This minimalist depiction of a cool dreamscape invites reverence. These structures are not for habitation; only contemplative meditation.

At the very far end of the cave-sanctuary (cf. Image 3.23), there are three habitation structures built within a courtyard-demarcated area. This has been the residence of Ntate Sam Radebe Mantsoe and his wife Mme Malerato Josephina Moloji (and later their son) for the past eleven years.³⁹

³⁹ Since the death of Samuel Mantsoe (Radebe) in 2013 the gate and lock have been removed, providing all site users access to this part of the cave. Initially after Mme Malerato left the cave, citing that it was simply too painful to stay, this side was maintained by one of her ‘spiritual’ children (a woman who trained under her). In May 2016 a tertiary-level trained graphic designer was concluding part of his spiritual quest from the very locality that Ntate Sam had inhabited for such a length of time. More recently even (September 2016) two unidentified women were making use of the built domestic structures.

3.4 What is it that makes these sites 'sacred'?

Most sacred journeys require a form of travel, i.e. a journey and a way of undertaking the journey. The travel is often purposeful. Certain places or pilgrimage sites, their history and nature impact on the perceived power of such places. A site's spiritual magnetism – association with key historical and mythological events; wondrous occurrences and extraordinary cases of healing – enhance a site's credentials. The physical features of a site remain important. Adding to these criteria are astronomical, geomagnetic and other properties (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xviii).

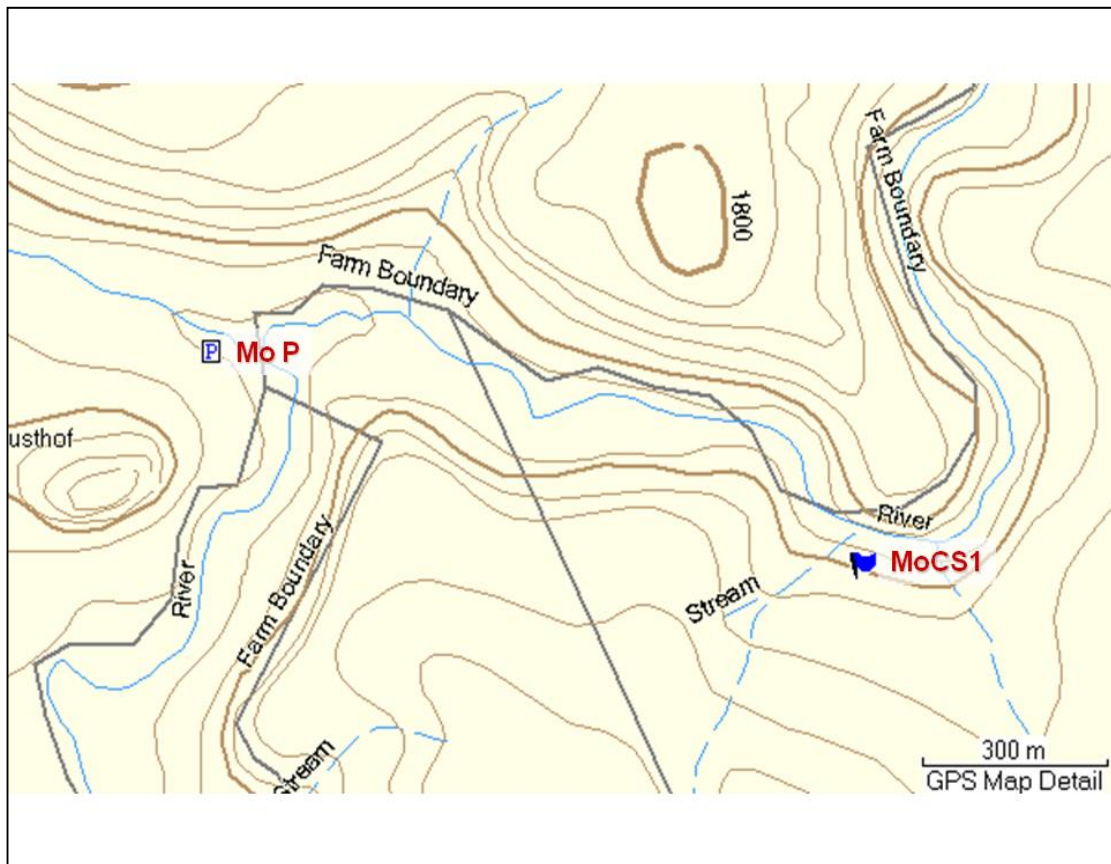


Figure 3.10: Topographical map of the Motouleng site

Source: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

Although these three sites are regarded as sacred to the vast majority of site users, they may not be sacred for everyone. For example, some of the neighbouring land owners or neo-Charismatic churches may feel differently about the same places. For the pilgrims with whom I spoke, the sites are ontologically and independently sacred, regardless of other people's opinions on the sacrality. In answering the question of whether site users who do not subscribe to the beliefs and views

shared by many pilgrims could make meaningful journeys to these sites, the answer is an unequivocal yes. These and other matters of a more analytical nature are dealt with in Chapters 4 and 7.

The sites selected for purposes of this investigation, Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng were not randomly identified for inclusion in this study. All three these sites comply with a set of criteria, which, for purposes of this study, are understood as the minimum requirements for a site to be accepted as sacred/sacralised. Firstly, sacrality is ascribed by the people. In the memories of people there is a perception that these sites are sacred. The reason for the power of the site might be lost, but the *belief* in its power remains (cf. Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xviii). Secondly, the narratives and stories (collective history and memo-history) attached to the sites, and told about the sites, legitimise their sacrality. Thirdly, the environmental features of the sites, e.g. the presence of water, caves, mountains, etc., i.e. their physicality or physical geography, are significant to African people and their conception and expression of cosmological beliefs. Such feelings of attachment to geographical locations may be referred to as *topophilia* (Ouzman 1994:4, cited in Müller 2008:827). Reijnders (2011:13-14) explains the concept further. It is our need, he says, to “identify certain places as holy, and to use these places as physical points of reference for phenomena whose essence is non-physical.” These sites are therefore understood to be *natural* sites, unlike the Women’s Memorial (*Vroue Monument*) in Bloemfontein, for example, which is a *commemorative site* but which does not comply with the sacralised typology. Fourthly, certain ceremonies and rituals, such as prayer or healing, are performed at the sites. And, finally, some form of pilgrimage or journey is involved at these sites.

Sacred sites, or pilgrimage sites as Coleman (2002:361) calls them, should not be understood as bounded or fixed, but as “contexts for dynamic historical and ritual fields of practice.” The sites must not be thought of as fixed in their physical geography, nor the understandings attached to them, nor the practices and activities that occur at them, nor should the human geography attracted to these places be remotely conceived of as fixed and bounded. Rather, the sites and all that goes on in them and is imagined about them makes us think of arenas of multiplicity.

An outstanding feature of all three the eastern Free State sacred sites is that they are created from the bottom up. There is no government department or church group that has promoted the sites as sacred sites in their official capacity, or has promoted the journeys to these sites as pilgrimages. The appropriation of the sites by communities of site users attests to this despite

private land owners trying to enforce boundaries or access control (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:9). They are living heritage sites because they are closely intertwined with cultural and customary practices of the local indigenous peoples of the area and even to groups foreign to the region, but identifying with the cultural and spiritual history and symbols of these sites. Naturally the acquisition of sacred status may be contrasted or viewed alongside more theoretical definitions of the sacred. I believe I offer a meaningful way of thinking about and understanding the sacred in Chapter 7, when making the substantive/non-substantive argument.

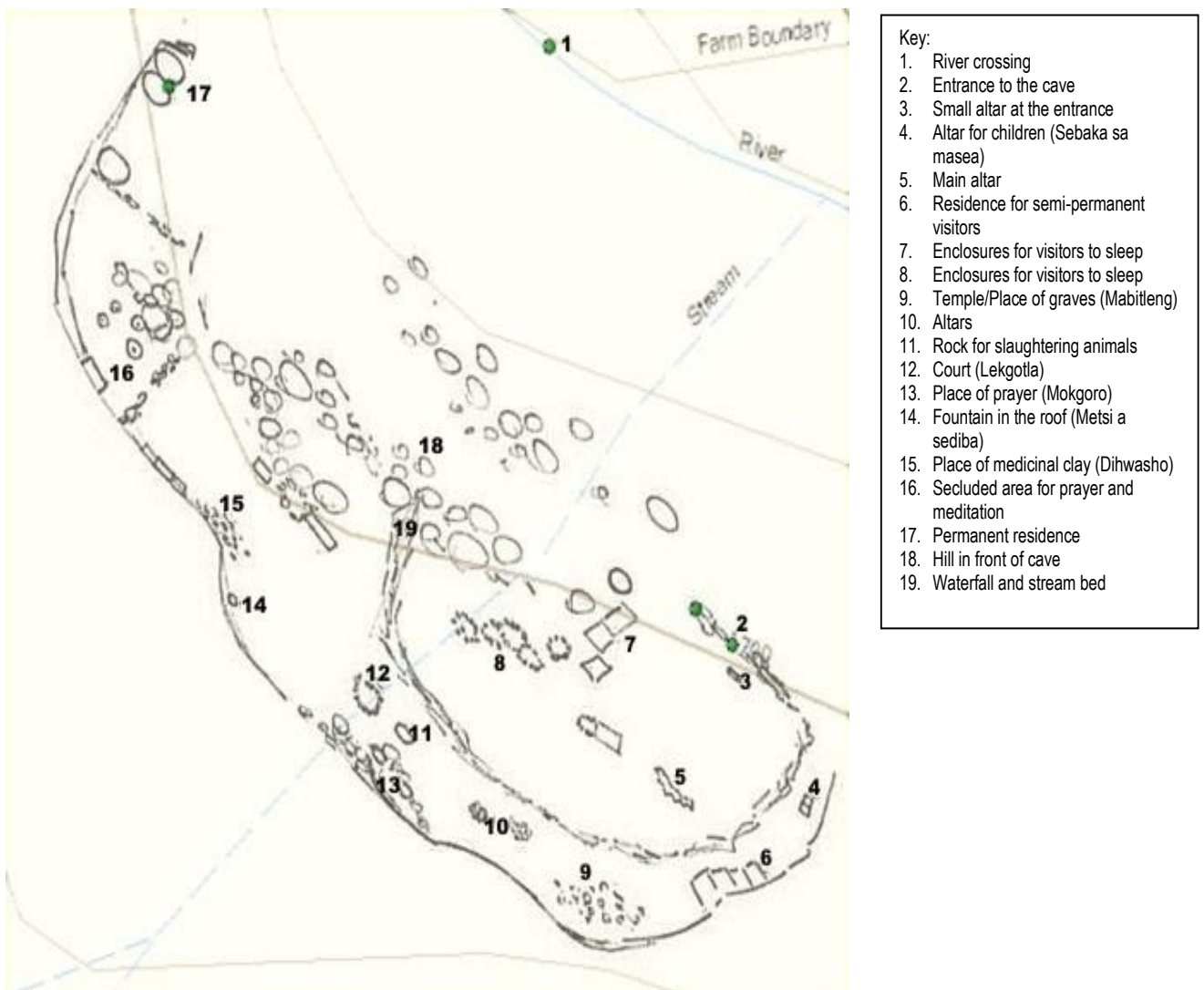


Figure 3.11: Artist's rendition of the interior of the Motouleng Cave

Source: ESTERHUYSE PETRO 2008 *Research report on two living heritage sites: Badimong and Motouleng*. Unpublished manuscript. Bloemfontein.

Table 3.3: Significant locations of the Motouleng site

Name	Code	Type	Significance, Meaning & Use	Latitude (S)	Longitude (E)	Altitude (m)
<i>Motouleng</i>	MoCS1	Cave / deep overhang	Pilgrimage / healing / infertility / training	-28.57998	28.38059	1707
<i>Motouleng parking</i>	MoP	Parking	Access point	-28.57697	28.36976	1683
		1 st River crossing	The 1 st river crossing of the Small Caledon River is significant as a place of announcing			
		2 nd River crossing	The 2 nd river crossing of the Small Caledon River is significant as a point of cross-over onto the hallowed grounds (proper) of the Motouleng sacred site			
<i>Cave main entrance</i>		Entrance way				
<i>Maseeng</i>		Altar	Fertility station. Altar for children (Sebaka sa masea).			
<i>Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo</i>		Residence	Residence of self-appointed gatekeeper and permanent site users.			
<i>Tafoleng</i>		Rock	The table – a large rock on the ground, sometimes set with colourful candles, clay pots of traditional sorghum beer, etc.			
<i>Dingakeng</i>		Deep cave recess	Deep recess on left where paper-written requests for good fortune and blessings are placed; where the connection between God and the ancestors is particularly strong.			
<i>Altareng</i>		Large stalagmite	Main stalagmite altar. Visitors light candles and disclose silent or spoken prayers.			
<i>Mabitleng</i>		Packed rock piles	Temple/place of graves; signposts of intense ancestor presence.			
<i>Metsi a masea</i>		Water collection point	Deep alcoves where water is collected as it siphons through the cave roof; believed to be particularly potent.			
<i>Lejwe la ho hlabela/Mahlabele</i>		Rock	Rock for slaughtering animals; the slaughter table.			
<i>Lekgotla</i>		Thigh-height rectangular	The Court. It serves as a type of confessional for bad deeds or transgressions against ancestors.			

	rock enclosure					
<i>Mokgorong</i>	Rock crevice		Place of prayer; the most sacred of stations. Also known as the ancestors' TV.			
<i>Metsi a sediba</i>	Fountain		Fountain in the cave roof. Water is collected for domestic/drinking and healing purposes.			
<i>Thotobolong</i>	Clay harvesting site		Place where medicinal clay (Dihwasha) is collected. The soil and clay are believed to have spiritual, medicinal, and cosmetic value.			
	Rock structures		Rectangular rock structures for sleeping and domestic purposes.			
	Wall & beyond of the 2 nd half of the cave		This area previously served as the lavatory of the cave, but has in the last 11 years or so been cleared and has acquired the status of a restricted-access area. Structures for silent meditation have only recently been opened for use by site visitors other than the site custodians.			
	Baptismal fonts		Most recent addition to the structures of the 2 nd half of the cave. The oval, waist-high fonts are decorated with symbols such as stars, crosses and doves.			
	Residence		The courtyard and residence of Niate Sam (Radebe) Mantsoe and Mme Malerato Moloi.			

Adapted from: CAWOOD STEPHANIE (ed.) 2010 *NHC project report: Oral histories and the cultural uses of clay at sacred sites in the Free State*. National Heritage Council Project – Centre for African Studies (CAS), Bloemfontein, UFS.

ESTERHUYSE PETRO 2008 *Research report on two living heritage sites: Badimong and Matouleng*. Unpublished manuscript. Bloemfontein.



Image 3.21



Image 3.22

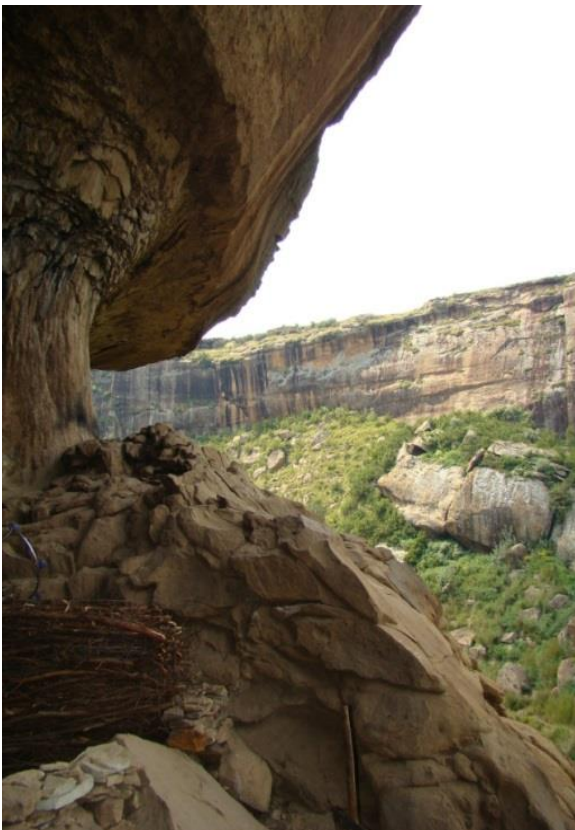


Image 3.23

**Image 3.21: Recently added
aesthetic feature of stairs ©
2009**

**Image 3.22: In the middle of the
cave looking towards the right
and official entrance © 2010**

**Image 3.23: Interesting wind-
weathered rock formation ©
2009**

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF PILGRIMAGE: OUTSIDE CONCEPT AND LENS

4.1 General

The focus of this chapter is pilgrimage. Derived from the Latin *peregrines*, it denotes “foreigner, wanderer, exile, and traveller” (Badone & Roseman 2004:10) and stems from the Latin root meaning stranger (Harman 2014b:263). Margry (2008b:44) contends that the Anglophone emphasis, as seen above, is on travelling and wandering (cf. *peregrination*). In Germanic languages the meaning centres on other aspects such as the German *wallfahrt* and *pilgerfahrt*, in Dutch *bedevaart* and *pelgrimage* and in Afrikaans *bedevaart* and *pelgrimstog*. *Bedevaart* denotes a religious or pious journey to a sacred place with prayer as a prominent feature. In this context, *bede* means prayer and *vaart* means journey, therefore *prayer journey*. Lighter, lesser and more secular journeys are denoted with the word *pelgrimstog* (Roos 2006:8). The Sesotho¹ words and phrases bohahlaodi ba leeto la semoya denoting pilgrimage; leeto encapsulates journey (sacred or inner journey), while ho hahlaula denotes touristic journeys, and bahahlaodi are the visitors to the sites.

Pilgrimage as (physical) action is experiencing a revival and consequently the theoretical debate surrounding pilgrimage is receiving renewed attention in the scholarly arena. The field of pilgrimage studies has developed rapidly, always evolving in new and exciting directions. Winkelman and Dubisch (2005:ix) offer a very plausible explanation for this renaissance of journeying on the one hand, and the study thereof on the other. They propose that anthropology and lay interest share similar suppositions. Because of its inherent flexibility, pilgrimage can embrace the needs and spiritual beliefs of many divergent participants (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:ix). In so doing, pilgrimages’ flexibility satisfies anthropology’s view of ritual practice as dynamic and creative, as well as current trends in (global) spirituality. Post, Pieper and Van Uden

¹ In South Africa the Bantu-languages, Sotho and Nguni, are prominent. Sesotho, together with Sepedi and Setswana, comprise the Sotho group, and isiZulu, isiXhosa and Seswati comprise the Nguni group.

(1998:1) add: “[u]nexpectedly and often outside the sphere of the organized church...there is an enormous interest in rituals and symbols ...In many places there is a flowering of rituals, public and private, which also...includes rituals from popular religious culture”.

To cover all the essential topics already well-researched, or to give a comprehensive historical review of well-known pilgrimages is a mammoth task, better suited for encyclopaedic pursuits. Instead I would like to map of the most significant tenets and trends in my understanding of them, concerning the term, the phenomenon itself and the study of pilgrimages. I consider this chapter as an attempt towards understanding pilgrimage, the lens through which forms of travel (for transformation) are examined. It is these developments and perspectives that are significant. To explain this, Greenia (2014:12) contends that “[e]very age explains religion to itself in its own idiom, and the language of pilgrimage has become a lingua franca among Christians and faith partners in many other traditions”.

One may assume that the earliest forms of pilgrimage are associated with rituals pertaining to sacred² places or sites. Thus, pilgrimages were initially understood as part of this ritual of the sacred. The sacred may have constituted geographical or environmental places such as mountains (where gods and/or spirits dwell), rivers, springs, the grave sites of ancestors and spiritual leaders; sites pregnant with supernatural revelations (hierophanies) or marked spots for communal ritual. The earliest roots of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism attest to this view. To a large extent this perception of pilgrimage has dominated religious, cultural and anthropological interest until the dawn of broader cultural and anthropological appreciation of the phenomenon.

The notion of travels for transformation, or sacred journeys, is broad enough to accommodate many forms of travel and journeying that are ultimately transformational. “Life-transforming experiences are at the core of both ‘traditional’ and more contemporary forms of pilgrimage” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxi). Common to these journeys is a necessity for a “reorientation in time and space that permits a release of aspects of the self” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxi). This includes both an unburdening as well as a form of radical self-expression (of inner aspects

² ‘Sacred’ is used in this context to denote important, special, revered or holy places. Durkheim’s influence is far-reaching in this regard, so much so that the sacred is thought of as the defining feature of the religious (Seymour-Smith 1990:252). The implication is that pilgrimages to sacred places or sites are of an immediately religious nature. However (cf. p. 131), sacred is more than religious.

of the self that require suppression in regular social contexts). Such release does not mean loss of self. Instead, pilgrimages very often result in a “reacquisition of self” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxi).

Debates into the similarities between touristic and pilgrimage travels were set in motion by Alphonse Dupront in the late 1960s, and later again by Reader and Walter in the early 1990s. If one accepts the assumptions of Durkheim and Geertz, as have Badone and Roseman (2004:2), that firstly, “divinity and the sacred arise from and symbolize the social collectivity”; and secondly, that religion is the “quest for meaning, interpretability, and the ‘really real’”, then making a categorical distinction between pilgrimage and tourism is no longer founded. Seen in this way, many collective experiences give rise to *religious* feelings (not always doctrinally religious, however). So too, the authenticity sought by touristic travellers is just as *really real* as those sought by pilgrims. It was in this context that Reader and Walter proposed that pilgrimage “need not be confined to explicitly religious settings” (Badone & Roseman 2004:6). This should be seen together with the realisation that pilgrims also have a number of secondary motives. Those that feature prominently are touristic activities and the sociability of the collective journey (Margry 2008b:28-29). To substantiate this, Reader (2014:8) proclaimed that “pilgrimages are embedded in the context of markets, consumer activity, publicity and promotion”. In this way sacred journeys also have secular aspects to them. Although a particular sacred journey is a pilgrimage, there are many mundane, everyday life activities that need to be performed and are indeed performed, such as ablutions. So too, secular pilgrimages or even touristic travels, however *secular* they appear to be, still *speak* to a value for the participants, and this value is seldom pure entertainment: they are life-enhancing activities. The binary between pilgrimage and tourism or even sacred and profane are not as rigidly drawn in reality. Events and situations are seldom profane or one hundred percent sacred. Instead, the two exist simultaneously and are expressed or experienced to varying degrees by the diverse clientele that visit sites and participate in journeys of reverence and/or exploration. The sacred is not exclusive. The sacred is intertwined with the profane although the ultimate purpose of the journey may be of a sacred nature. The sacred is not mutually exclusive to the profane. Instead they are entwined and occur all together.

To help understand the phenomenon of pilgrimage I firstly consider the constituent elements of pilgrimages. This is followed by a section devoted to making sense of the many different types of pilgrimages encountered in the pilgrimage literature. In the third part of this chapter I highlight the

major moments in the study of pilgrimages, and finally I work towards developing a working definition of pilgrimage.

4.2 Constitutive elements of pilgrimage

In response to people's questions as to the nature of my study, I often start by explaining that I am interested in the *people* who go on pilgrimages; the *places* that pilgrims travel to; the *narratives* and stories (both written and oral) that explain and give credence to such journeys; and the *actions*, including the specific journey but also the rituals and behaviours characteristic of these forms of travel. What in fact I have done is summarise the constituent parts of pilgrimages very briefly, i.e. areas from which pilgrimages are viewed and studied. These elements should not be seen in isolation but rather as standing in relationship to one another. The aim of a research project usually narrows the focus, and in all likelihood leads to the emphasis of one of these elements; but that they are dialectical is a reality. The nature of some pilgrimages is also more conducive to a greater emphasis on certain combinations of these elements.

Theoretical approaches to the study of pilgrimages have changed over time. Simplistically I might argue that pilgrimages were about journeying to *places* of reverence, i.e. place, site and location were focal points in the analyses of pilgrimages. Then, studies about pilgrimages became about encounters with cult functionaries and charismatic *persons* believed to be consumed by spirit and therefore able to impart this spirit when consulted. Thus, persons became the unit of analysis in pilgrimage studies. *Texts* as significant elements of pilgrimage have received considerable attention from researchers and pilgrims alike. We might therefore say that the constituent elements of pilgrimage studies have constituted *place*, *person*, and *text*. Coleman and Elsner (1995) introduced the proposition that pilgrimages encompass so much more than the places that people journey to, the people who do the journeying, and the texts, both written and told. In fact, when thinking about pilgrimage, it is about *movement* and mobility (Coleman & Elsner 1995:205). Initially it was conceived of as physical movement, but we have come to understand that movement might also constitute virtual and metaphorical movements and mobilities, thus adding a fourth coordinate. Coleman and Elsner (1995:202) warn that we must not think of these elements as unique to pilgrimage, but must understand that they are features of many other rituals as well. It is precisely because of this that pilgrimage is not viewed as a discreet phenomenon by some authors. Eade and Sallnow (1991) and later Coleman and Eade (2004) vigorously opposed

this view. They argued that pilgrimage is not extra-ordinary but indeed is ordinary and very much like many other everyday actions.

Much has been said about place, person and text as the coordinating elements of pilgrimage. The rest of this section deals with this new, fourth feature, namely movement. Morinis (1992:14) is acknowledged to have proposed that the journey, the act of pilgrimage, is of the highest importance when studying pilgrimages (Margry & Post 1998:78). However, it was Coleman and Elsner (1995:206) who first drew our attention to this fourth constituent element of pilgrimage. What was important for Frey (1998), for example, was not so much the place or reaching an ultimate destination in her road ethnography (Coleman & Eade 2004:12). Instead, the journey was her focus. This *new mobility paradigm* was obviously instrumental in the development of Coleman and Eade's notion of pilgrimage as *movement* in *Reframing pilgrimage: Cultures in motion* (2004). Mobility is also important for Collins-Kreiner (2010:440-441), for example.

Part of the journey, I contend, is the continual *imagined motion*, particularly when away from the sites and journey guides. Imaginative and virtual types of movement and changing or shifting landscapes between here-and-now realities and imagining the landscape of an informant-world, for example, also constitute movement (cf. Urry's (2000:49). For both pilgrims and researchers this represents metaphorical movement, and even movement between different ontological realities. Besides these imagined and metaphorical components, embodied movements are often part and parcel of pilgrimages (Coleman & Eade 2004:3).

Nthoi (2006:12) offers an interesting view of pilgrimage as "the flow of people, goods, services and ideas" to sacred centres or cult shrines (cf. Appadurai 1996). The sacred centres (cf. Eliade) are *open markets* in which there is "both exchange and redistribution of goods and services" (Nthoi 2006:12, cf. 148-152). Being a voice of reason, Margry and Post (1998:77-78) point out that these differences in emphases are not novel. In fact, how pilgrimage is defined is for the most part determined by the focus of the research or the project.

4.3 Types of journeys

The study of pilgrimages and what they entail includes many forms of *travel for transformation* (cf. Greenia 2014:13). Greenia is of the opinion that "[s]cholars now appreciate how pilgrimage

embraces many sorts of journeys freighted with special values for one's people, nation or eternal soul" (2014:13). Morinis' (1992) typology includes six distinct types based on pilgrims' motivations: devotional; healing; ritual or lifecycle; obligatory; wandering; and transformational (cited in Gorman 2014:220). More recent categorisations distinguish between two (seemingly diametrically opposed) broad types of pilgrimages, i.e. religious and secular pilgrimages (cf. Margry 2008b:13-14). Of course this plays into the Durkheimian distinction between the sacred and the profane, and the idea that pilgrims travel from the everyday world of the mundane with the purpose of encountering the divine, and then back to the secular space of lived reality (cf. Albera & Eade 2015:3). In the Durkheimian view the sacred is not the equivalent of the religious. Rather, the sacred, although it includes the religious, is a domain that extends beyond the limits of the religious. For this reason secular travel or journeying might not be religious, but certainly could be sacred, deeply meaningful and transformational, and by implication may also be considered as pilgrimage (but without religious doctrine and liturgy). Surveying the literature it becomes evident that there is little consensus about what pilgrimage is, and what constitutes a pilgrim. Using the broad characterisation of religious (with doctrine and liturgy) and secular (without doctrine or liturgy) forms of travel, this section (cf. Figures 4.1 and 4.2) presents the different types of pilgrimages gleaned from the literature.

Secular pilgrimage (cf. Dubisch 2004:128) is "not specifically religious in its organization or its destination". Conversely, religious pilgrimage is by implication specifically religious in its organisation and its destination (cf. Margry 2008b:17, 36). The journeys to Lourdes in France, for example, are religious pilgrimages (for some journeyers), although many touristic features are evident today (cf. Schramm 2004:134), as seen in the commodification or commercialisation of items that previously held religious significance but now are reproduced to satisfy touristic (secular) desires. Having said this, I must immediately qualify one's perception in this matter depends on the traveller's framing. In addition, the journeys themselves have a touristic purpose as their goal, which is contrary to pilgrimage undertaken for religious purposes. Margry (2008b:13-14) clearly distinguishes secular from traditional or religious pilgrimage. Traditional pilgrimage is also viewed as *group* pilgrimage (cf. Margry 2008b:22). Similarly, communal pilgrimages (Nthoi 2006:8) are undertaken simultaneously by a number of people as part of the same journey. It appears that traditional, religious pilgrimage had confession or penitence as one of its major motives. For this reason secular pilgrimages may be understood as non-confessional pilgrimages (cf. Margry 2008b:13). In contrast with traditional, group or communal pilgrimages, individual

pilgrimages are undertaken by individual persons who thus do not form part of a group (cf. Margry 2008b:21; Nthoi 2006:8).

Formal (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:9), organised or processional pilgrimages (cf. Margry & Post 1998:74) are journeys by a group of people to a particular place at a particular time. The primary distinguishing factor is that these occasions are characterised by formal and organised doctrinal ritual *en route* or upon arrival at the destination. Coleman (2002:364 fn. 4) points out that in the Turnerian view such organised group pilgrimages probably present the pilgrims with a greater opportunity to develop a sense of *communitas*. By implication one might therefore distinguish popular pilgrimages from the previously mentioned formal and organised kinds (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:9). However, a popular pilgrimage destination or centre might rather simply be one that both pilgrims and tourists frequent.

These traditional, religious, organised and formal pilgrimage types are contrasted with domestic, local and informal journeys. The latter are primarily of a smaller scale and the distance travelled is shorter. Because they are not formally organised by a religious institution the number of individuals constituting travelling groups also tends to be fewer.

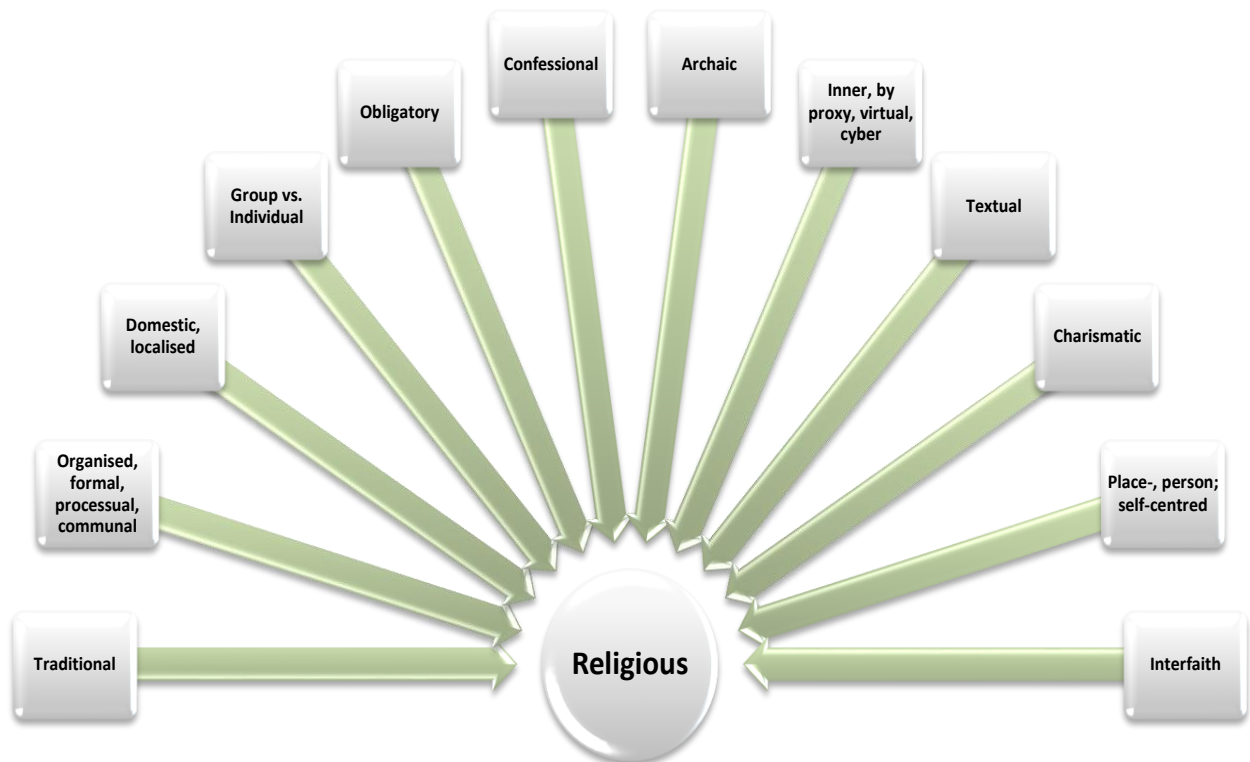


Figure 4.1: Types of religious pilgrimages

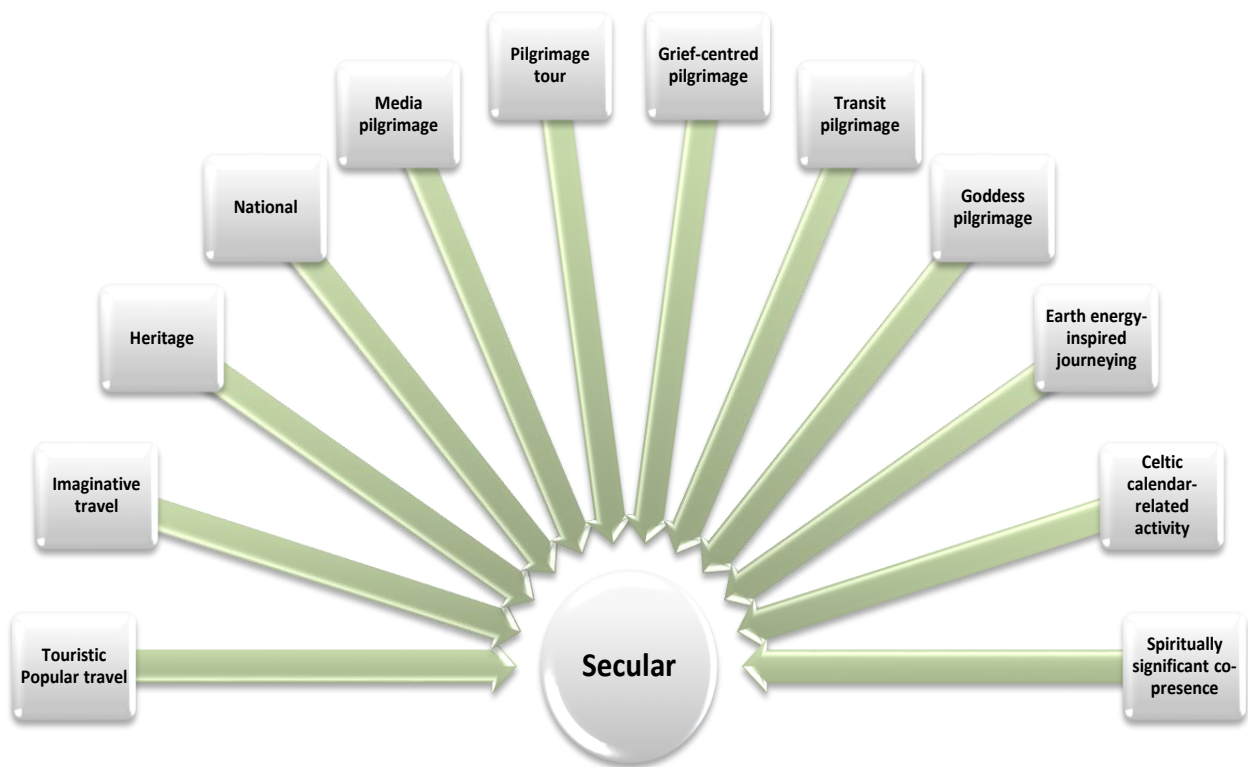


Figure 4.2: Type of secular pilgrimages

According to Schramm (2004:137), in archaic pilgrimage, the archaic centre “is associated with a pristine existence and is mythically constructed as a paradise... always longed for”; an *axis mundi*. “[T]he pilgrim is seeking to reach the centre of his own world” (Schramm 2004:137; cf. Collins-Kreiner 2010:449). This *axis mundi* may be compared with the Turnerian notion of the *centre out there* (cf. Coleman 2002:364 fn. 4; Collins-Kreiner 2010:449), or the encounter with *self*, i.e. the centre in Jungian erudition.

Inner pilgrimage (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:14) should be understood in the metaphorical sense as visualising or imagining travel “within the microcosm of the mind and body”. Strictly speaking there is no opportunity to develop a sense of *communitas* since it is not a literal journey, but rather more in line with what Urry (2002:256) calls imaginative travel, and the “socialities involved in... imagined co-presence” (Coleman & Eade 2004:7). In this sense, movement is a metaphor. Movement is evoked, rather than a physical enactment (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:17). Pilgrims in a state of imagined travel, who regard themselves as “being in transit”, are actually “perpetuating ‘an ideology of pilgrim-ness’” (Coleman & Eade 2004:17). Pilgrimages by proxy are

a category of travel where a person does not personally make the physical journey (cf. Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxv; Coleman & Eade 2004:20; Rosander 2004:68-90). For a number of reasons such as being too ill or financially unable to undertake the travel, the person sends *ex-votos* as gifts to the shrine on her/his behalf. Alternatively, a surrogate will literally represent the person along the journey. Religious souvenirs or holy water may be brought home to those on whose behalf the journey was undertaken. Those at home may also reap the benefits of those who themselves experienced profound change (and healing) as a result of the pilgrimage experience. These are contrasted with active pilgrimages which very much promote the group experience as well as the healing and spiritual elements of the journey and activity (Margry 2008b:26).

Obligatory pilgrimage, such as the Hajj to Mecca, is “rooted in notions of personal duty or, alternatively, personal gain” (cf. Nthoi 2006:73-74). Every Muslim is obliged to make such a journey at least once in his/her lifetime – it is one of the pillars of Islam. In this case the decision to undertake such a pilgrimage is motivated rather differently.

Textual pilgrimages are in effect movement through a particular written text, as is the case in a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem which takes one on a “spiritual recovery of Christ via the places he once walked, preached, suffered, and died” (Eade & Sallnow 1991:8). The authoritative accounts of Christ’s life and death by means of biblical accounts constitute an example of textual pilgrimage (cf. Bowman cited in Eade & Sallnow 1991:98-121).

Virtual or cyber pilgrimage harnesses the idea of offering multiple routes for pilgrims to have spiritual experiences (cf. Coleman 2004:49). This may include shrines’ official websites. Technological developments and advances have opened new avenues and conceptions of realities (cf. Margry 2008b:27). It follows that pilgrimage opportunities, too, would branch out to accommodate and be accommodated in such virtual worlds.

Under the banner of root-orientated travel, Badone and Roseman (2004:7) draw on the work of MacDonald (1997:923) who speaks of a *pilgrimage tour* to describe the journeys undertaken by persons seeking to confirm or create “an identity that is reunited with the (African) past” [‘African’ is not bracketed in the original], i.e. a homecoming or an attempt to “re-establish their linkage with ‘Mother Africa’” (Schramm 2004:133) or another place (even mythologically so). Schramm’s (2004:133-149) account sheds light on just how emotionally laden such forms of travel might be. Compare Ray’s idea about heritage pilgrimage as “not the individual pilgrimage of finding oneself,

but that of finding one's 'people' and one's 'place'" (cited in Basu 2004:164). Although this is different from the above, grief-centred pilgrimages also share the emotional pain that is opened up and revisited as the pilgrimage unfolds. A sterling example would be the 'Run to the Wall' motorcycle journey to the Veterans Memorial in Washington DC (Dubisch 2004:116).

Transit pilgrimage (cf. Margry 2008b:24) has emerged as a result of a shift in emphasis from place-centred pilgrimage to journey-centred (cf. Coleman 2002:360; Eade & Sallnow 1991:6-9) pilgrimage. According to Margry (2008b:24), transit pilgrimage does not really have a beginning or an end. The importance lies in moving, journeying, encountering nature, for example – the significance lies in the process of pilgrimage. Frey (1998, cited in Coleman & Eade 2004:11-12) highlighted this point in her *road ethnography*. She contends that the mode of travel, such as walking on foot, is important for experiencing nature, peace, freedom and grounding oneself temporally as the journey progresses (cf. Margry 2008b:24).

To these, Bowman (2008:241) adds: Goddess pilgrimage; earth energy-inspired journeying; interfaith pilgrimage; Celtic calendar-related activity; and one-off instances of spiritually significant co-presence. Roos (2006:147-221) expands further by including the following categories: initiatory; perpetual; obeying sacred time; political; protest; stationary; and women's pilgrimages.

Pilgrimages vary in their focus. Some are primarily concerned with a/the cult object; others on the journey, the movement, the activity; and yet others on the mode of travel. For some pilgrims a necessary prerequisite for a pilgrimage to be authentic is that it must be walked. So too, the entire route must be completed at once. This is not the case for everyone. Some pilgrims complete parts, particularly of longer routes, and return the following year to complete other parts.

4.4 Main moments in the study of pilgrimages

Broadly speaking studies on pilgrimage may be divided into a number of main moments (cf. Figure 4.3), including old (e.g. Turner 1974; Turner & Turner 1978) and recent approaches (e.g. Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman & Eade 2004; Nthoi 2006; Margry 2008a).³ These may of course broadly

³ Although exponents of the new multi-dimensional or pluralistic approach to pilgrimage studies have heralded a new methodology and paradigm, most authors of this persuasion acknowledge the influence of Turner and the Turners (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991; Nthoi 2006).

be thought of as structural and postmodern approaches. What former categorisation ignores, for example, are the early works by Robert Hertz (1913) on St Besse pilgrimages, Arnold van Gennep's pioneering pilgrimage studies in France and Algeria, and Alphonse Dupront's (1958) study of Lourdes, to name but a few. These studies fall outside the disciplinary traditions, theoretical orientations and linguistic backgrounds commonly considered by the English-speaking pilgrimage studies fraternity as foundational works (Albera & Eade 2015:11-12).

In brief, the Turnerian paradigm of pilgrimage attempted to formulate a universal model which encompassed all cases of pilgrimage, irrespective of historical and cultural background (Nthoi 2006:67). The two main features of this model are rooted in the ideas of *communitas* and *liminality* (cf. Turner 1967). Pilgrimage was thus understood to be transformative, aligned to Van Gennep's (1909 [1960]) rites of passage, i.e. involving the leaving of home (physically and spiritually), progressing to a marginally situated sacred place, and returning home as a transformed pilgrim. In the Turnerian model the essential character of pilgrimage is that there is a boundary between the sacred and the profane. Pilgrims travel from the profane into the sacred and then back to the profane (Albera & Eade 2015:3). Criticised for its over-generalisations, compulsion for dichotomies, and emphases on *communitas* and harmony (cf. Nthoi 2006:68-69, 75; Winkelmann & Dubisch 2005:xiii-xiv; Badone & Roseman 2004:4), the Turnerian approach does redeem itself through, for example, rejection of pure functionalism and the maintenance of social structure and order (cf. the Durkheimian traditionalist approach in sociological studies), and through pilgrimage as being individual-centred as opposed to purely group-centred (cf. for example Crapanzano 1973). Regarding the latter, refer also to notions of national or regional social integration cutting across group boundaries (Nthoi 2006:73).

Postmodern pilgrimage studies, which began emerging in the early 1990s, have seen considerable growth and branching out (Albera & Eade 2015:7-8). The variety of issues and themes, e.g. performativity, dwelling, identity, and landscape, has largely been influenced by the cultural, mobility and spatial turns within the social and human sciences. Over and above this diversification trend there is an inclination by some, such as Coleman (2002), to abandon pilgrimage theorisation. A case in point is the distinction between an anthropology *of* pilgrimage, and anthropology *through* pilgrimage (Coleman 2002).

In comparison with the Turnerian views, the liminal aspect of pilgrimage (cf. Sallnow 1987) is not too hotly refuted, but the notion of rites of passage and their initiatory quality as explaining the

structure of pilgrimage together with the pilgrims' change of social status, is rejected outright (cf. Morinis 1984; Coleman & Eade 2004). For Morinis, pilgrimages are simply too complex and diverse, as phenomena, to adhere to such a simplistic universal model (1984:257-260).

Furthermore, authors such as Sallnow (1987) highlight the occurrence of hostility and competition which exists between individual or groups of pilgrims and even ethnic divisions, very frequently demonstrating a lack of *communitas*. Sallnow (1987) as well as Coleman and Eade (2004), for example, add that there is little co-mingling of pilgrims from groups other than their own, and existing rank and status are not eradicated as pilgrims embark on pilgrimage, thus refuting the ritual levelling aspect of *communitas*. In fact, they argue, that the acceptance of the Turnerian view of *communitas* blinds us to the contestations, conflicts and tensions inherent to pilgrimages. An alternative proposition comes from Messerschmidt and Sharma (1981:572, cited in Albera & Eade 2015:4) who believe that instead of making sweeping cross-cultural generalisations such as that *communitas* is universal to all pilgrimages, pilgrimages instead emphasise the particular themes of the (religious) systems within which they take place. *Communitas* is therefore more likely to occur within certain systems, and not within other worldviews, ideologies or belief systems. *Communitas* must not be viewed as a blanket experience of all pilgrimages. Instead, there are moments of *communitas* where common humanity is experienced and expressed.

Eade and Sallnow (1991:5) took the pilgrimage debate by storm by proposing that they are arenas of contestation; heralding in the contestation approach. They emphasise the importance of the "heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process"; a view that sees pilgrimage as a "*realm of competing discourses*" [emphasis in original], among others, where religious and secular discourses compete, ultimately yielding "multiple meanings and understandings brought to the shrine by different categories of pilgrims, by residents and by religious specialists" (Eade & Sallnow 1991:2-6). Not only did Eade and Sallnow (1991) suggest that pilgrimages are arenas of multiplicity, but also religious voids—able to accommodate a diversity of meanings and practices by an wide array of different site users (Eade & Sallnow 1991:15). Struggles for power and control lie at the heart of these contestations. Eade and Sallnow also critiqued the grand narrative tradition of pilgrimage (2000:xxi) and advocated, for example, sites as convergence points for varied forms of travel such as migration and fleeing refugees (2000:xviii-xix). At the core of their appeal was an evaluation of each pilgrimage on its own terms (1991:5). They were distancing themselves from the Turnerian discourse *about* pilgrimage, promoting instead the manifold ways in which the range of pilgrims undertook and understood their journeys (Albera & Eade 2015:6). In the South African context

Cawood (2014), Masoga (2014a), Nel (2014), as well as Wepener and Te Haar (2014) heeded this call by considering the rhetoric of pilgrimage, the construction and ownership of the sacred, as well as pilgrimage as spiritual capital.

Coleman and Elsner formally put into motion an important trend in the study of pilgrimages, namely the addition of movement as a fourth coordinate (1995:206) to Eade and Sallnow's (1991:9) triad of competing discourses: people, place and text. Together with Dubisch (2004), for example, they considered pilgrimages as demonstrating the potential for both *communitas* and contestation.

Dubisch's flexible, postmodern approach maintained that *communitas* and liminality are not inherent to pilgrimage, but are "variable, situational and fluctuating" (Dubisch 1995, cited in Badone & Roseman 2004:5). What I appreciate most is her use of Turnerian propositions in a nondeterministic way. She argued that particular ethnographic situations highlight *communitas* or liminality, instead of an entire *communitas*-full or liminal ethnography (Badone & Roseman 2004:5). Considering the criticisms levelled at the Turnerian model, as well as at the functionalist approaches of some researchers, Nthoi (2006) terms his a dialectical approach to pilgrimage. He explains his stance as: "an approach that sees pilgrimage as having both integrative and disintegrative functions, and in which *communitas* is both present and absent" (Nthoi 2006:76).

Coleman and Elsner's (1995) addition of movement or action as a fourth constituent element of pilgrimages certainly was foundational to Coleman and Eade's (2004) proposition that pilgrimages are cultures in motion. This mobility paradigm had a profound effect on further study and the rethinking of pilgrimages. In this way, for example, ritual as a form of movement began to be seen as a way of paying attention. In line with Grimes (2006:102) and Smith (1987:103), pilgrimage (as ritual, as action) constitutes a manner for marking interest; a way to focus attention on what is important (Roos 2006:3).

Nthoi's *Contesting sacred space* (2006), for example, is built on two primary tenets. The first pillar is influenced by Eade and Sallnow's (1991) proposition of pilgrimages as arenas of contestation, and the second pillar draws from the notions of flow and movement which evoke Appadurai (1996) and then Coleman and Eade (2004). Nthoi's (2006:3) interest in the flows of people, goods and services then connects well to Reader's *Pilgrimage in the marketplace* (2014) – the commercial and economic interest groups and centres without which pilgrimages will not exist. A market

ideology may be more pronounced for certain pilgrimages, but there is minimally some form of barter or exchange in all pilgrimages, albeit in sacred power or knowledge (Nthoi 2006:148-149).

For me the subtitle to Eade and Katić's (2014) edited volume, i.e. *crossing borders*, is telling. It not only continues the tradition that pilgrimages are movement, but brings to attention the changeability, permeability and malleability of boundaries, whether these are demarcating political units or other entities thought to be discreet (e.g. pilgrim – tourist). It also calls to mind the idea of entering the unknown. It explicitly brings work from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe into the mainstream scholarship of pilgrimage. Continuing in this tradition, Albera and Eade (2015) have brought pilgrimage studies from across Eurasia into focus. In the first of two volumes, they bring an international flavour to the study of pilgrimages; purposefully exploring non-Anglophone, non-Catholic, non-European and American pilgrimage studies.

What Margry (2008a) has in common with Eade and Katić (2014), Reader (2014) as well as Albera and Eade (2015) is the continued interest in reconsidering the pilgrimage lens. Each is dedicated to rethinking pilgrimage as a phenomenon, taking the pursuit of its new itineraries and pathways seriously. Pilgrimage has therefore been “‘regained’, ‘localized’, ‘re-invented’, ‘contested’, ‘deconstructed’, ‘explored’, ‘intersected’, ‘reframed’” and more (Margry 2008b:13). Ways to do involved moving beyond the preoccupation with religious pilgrimage, Catholic pilgrimage, and Anglophone studies of pilgrimages. Within the South African context Saayman et al. (2014), Roos (2006) and Faier-Wessels (2005) moved ahead of religious pilgrimage studies by considering the economic impact of pilgrimage, inner pilgrimage and literary pilgrimage respectively.

Interesting and emerging developments in pilgrimage studies may be thought of as a move “beyond ontology towards ontogenesis” (Albera & Eade 2015:8). In this regard the dynamic and highly complex processes involved in bringing pilgrimages into existence are explored. The permeability and mutual interconnectedness between, for example, society and nature, and the relationship between landscape and pilgrim are some avenues being explored. Ross-Bryant's *Pilgrimage in the national parks: Religion and nature in the United States* (2013) and *Sacred mobilities: Journeys of belief and belonging* by Maddrell, Terry and Gale (2015) are cases in point.

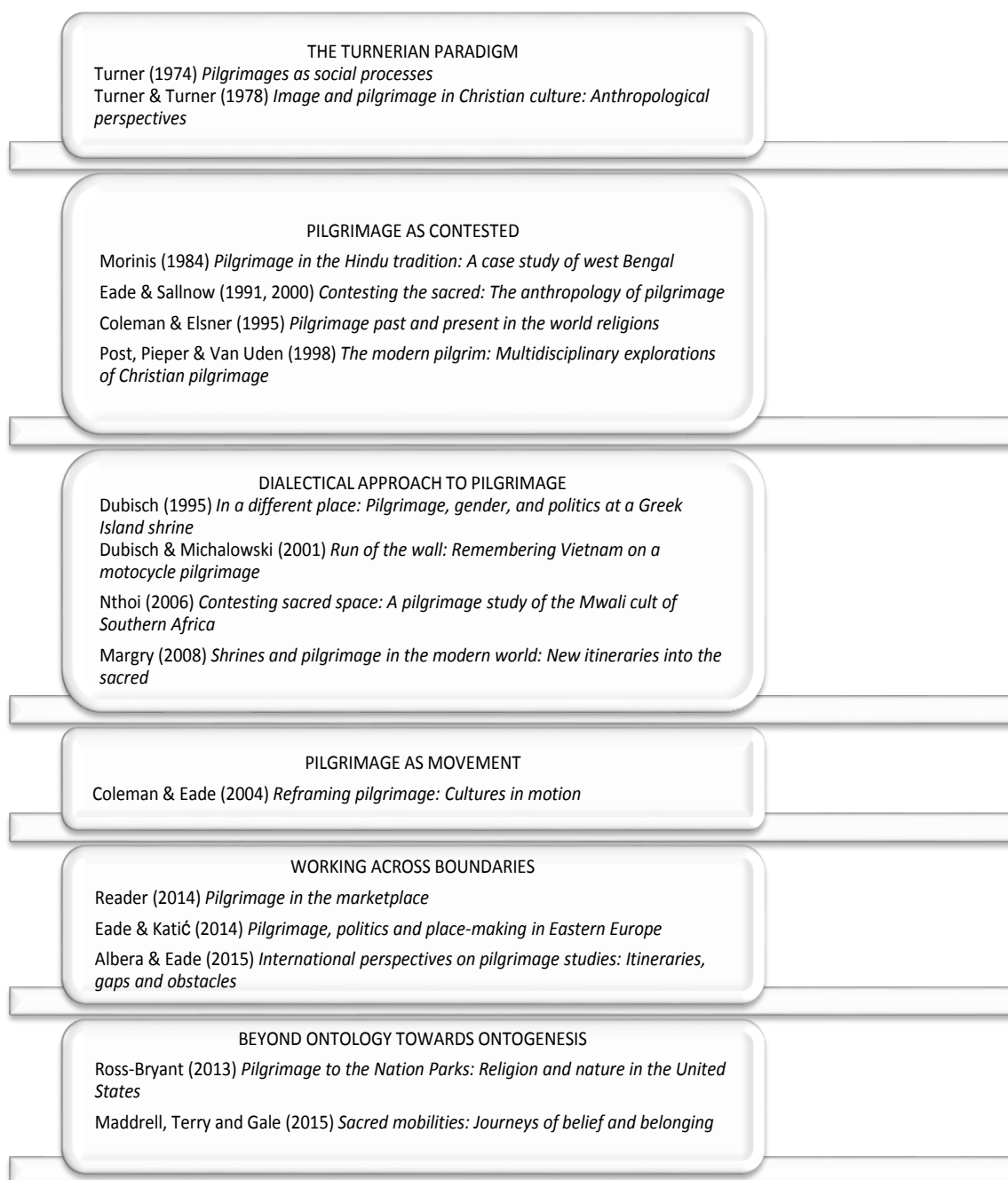


Figure 4.3: Main moments in the study of pilgrimages

Within the South(ern) African pilgrimage study context the focus of studies has been, given the belief that man has an inclination and desire to communicate with her/his divine, supreme beings or powers, beliefs and practices of a religious or spiritual nature as an avenue for achieving communion. It is also common that certain places/spaces for this communion have been identified. These South African studies help us to see how Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith

differ in their approaches to making place central. It is not unexpected that there are contradictory views in the literature concerning sacred sites. Eliade's (1963) work was highly influential in the study of sacred sites/centres and the Eliadean pilgrimage centre is a

“historical place associated with the believed manifestation of the source of the sacredness of the place. The pilgrimage deity is still believed to be eternally vital and a living presence in that very place. Owing to the permanent residence of the sacred power of the place, a sanctuary or enclave has been established and is set apart from the profane space surrounding it” (Nthoi 2006:77-78).

The belief is that a proverbial *stairway to heaven* exists at this spot, a bridge that can be transcended between heaven and earth, and earth and heaven (cf. Eliade 1963:373). In the natural world mountains rise up from the earth and seem to touch the sky/heaven. For this reason many sacred sites are found on or near mountains. Consider the concept *ritual or sacred area topography* (cf. Turner 1973:205-206, 223) in this regard.

How does Smith view place? In terms of ritual, Smith emphasises place as the key element and the context for *paying attention*. For Smith, ritual requires place, therefore emplacement, because place is principally sacred or religious. For him there is nothing distinctively sacral to any place or object separate from the use thereof in a sacred place. For Grimes on the other hand, place is not that central. The dominant element of ritual for Grimes is the action/performance. Ritual actions can therefore exist separately from any place, although it is mostly place-centred. Therefore, rituals may be transferable and are not necessarily attached to a certain place (Grimes 2006:101-113; 1999:261-273).

Smith's view of emplacement does not mean geographic place. In this sense he is closer to Durkheim because emplacement can assume any social place or position. Emplacement renders actions sacred and ritual action without emplacement is not sacred. According to Smith this social emplacement has a social and an intellectual function. The place does not have a substantive holiness as is the case for Eliade. Smith and Durkheim's ideas align narrowly concerning the social emplacement of rituals and the social recognition of the sacrality thereof. Smith is therefore likely to also see pilgrimage as ritual and as a means of emplacement. Therefore, pilgrimages provide the spots where pilgrims may pay attention to whatever aspect of the ritual is important to him or her (Grimes 2006:101-113; 1999:261-273).

The NBC pilgrimage to Nhlankakazi is very much place-centred (cf. Becken 1968). Ranger's (1987) article about the appropriation and creation of the sacred in Zimbabwe emphasises place. The burial grounds of chiefs and group leaders in particular, are understood to be sacrosanct, the primary reason being that those departed ones – the ancestors – retain authority over the land and therefore their final resting places serve as important places of connection between the living and the dead. It is here that the living enact certain rites to ensure the continued connection between the living descendants and the ancestors. So too, Müller's (2011) account of the ZCC pilgrimages to Moria imagine this hallowed ground as pilgrims' *axis mundi*. In each of these cases Eliade's sacred centre is evoked. All three the authors treat the geographical places as inherently sacred. They are thin spaces where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane promote communion with the divine. They are thought of as a "meeting-place between the pilgrim and the longed-for destination" (Roos 2006:15).

The Catholic Marion shrines at Ngome are significant because of their association with Mother Mary, but also because of Sister Mashiane. The place, Isikhwebezi, is also significant because of the unusual confluence of seven streams. In Wepener and Te Haar's (2014) description of the CCSA and their annual service at Mlazi, the pilgrimage is both place- and person-centred. The place is significant because the founding father (Johannes Richmond) established the church there, but also because his son (and now widow) continues the work he envisioned but also by virtue of his associated sacrality. Participating at Mlazi also allows CCSA members to transform the power of the experience into spiritual capital. This spiritual capital is not unlike that gained from consulting with MaRadebe, the celebrated faith healer who attracts pilgrims with an array of qualms to her reception area in Cancele (cf. Becken 1983). It is here that she consults with pilgrims, provides treatment regimens and emphasises the value of her blessed water in recovery. Although this is clearly a person-centred (*persoongebonden*) journey, the healing water that is taken home is but a material reminder of this spiritual capital.

For Cawood (2014), Coplan (2003), Masoga (2014a) and Nel (2014a, 2014b) the sacred they deal with is not limited to geographical space, the sacred centre in the Eliadean sense, but rather an emplacement in the Jonathan Z. Smith sense.

4.5 Pilgrimage: A working definition

What makes journeying pilgrimage? What defines a pilgrimage? Answering such seemingly simple questions is complicated by a range of existing contradictions (Roos 2006:5). Some pilgrimages are to far-flung centres while others are quite local. Sometimes the destination or site is paramount, while at other times the journey itself outstrips the site in its significance. Furthermore, some pilgrimages are permanent, in contrast to the transitory nature of others, whereas others are liminal and/or unconventional. Physical journeying is mandatory in some cases, while virtual travel is a feature of others. Is the visible excursion more important than the inner transformation? Other questions revolve around whether method of travel or intent is more important; or whether *communitas* is more desirable than individual fulfilment.

Dubisch (2004:113-114) uses a four-point check-list for determining pilgrimage status. For her, a journey must: a) be to a site/place/space; b) have a mission/purpose (e.g. political goal, or healing); c) be lengthy and difficult; and d) be transformative. The places of significance are not blank canvasses, but instead are imbued with the traditions and narratives of the place which, among others, give them their durability. The main determining factor of pilgrimhood is intent or purpose (Roos 2006:4, 17-19; Frey 1998; Morinis 1984). Margry (2008b:36) similarly posits that for pilgrimage to be pilgrimage, and not recreational travel (cf. secular pilgrimage), it must/should necessitate: a) “interaction between the sacred or the religious”; b) “an element of personal transition”; and, c) “the existence of a cult object”. Davidson and Gitlitz’s citation (2002: xvii) below highlights the very same features deemed important by Dubisch (2004) and Margry (2008b) as being foundational for pilgrimage.

“From long before the beginning of recorded time, three fundamental beliefs have launched human beings onto the roads of pilgrimage. The first is the conviction that there are forces infinitely larger than ourselves – gods, superheroes, the tectonic plates of history – forces with the ability to influence our lives. The second is that each of us has the potential to initiate a meaningful relationship with those forces. The third is that there are certain special places where the remote, transcendental power of these forces seems close enough for us to touch” (Davidson & Gitlitz 2002: xvii).

Greenia (2014:18-23) introduces an additional seven complementary aspects to keep in mind when thinking about pilgrimages. The first revolves around the belief in the transcendent; the

second has to do with memory; the third, timelessness of pilgrimage; the fourth, the surrender of the self; in the fifth and sixth instances, pilgrimage as performance and as body-centred enterprise; and finally the incompleteness of pilgrimages.

Often the first lay thought associated with pilgrimage is that it is for a religious reason or purpose (cf. Badone & Roseman 2004:10). The accompanying thought is that it is a form of travel. Such notions are immensely important for our understandings of the concept, and of the phenomenon itself. Below are a number of definitions of pilgrimage taken from the literature. From these, I hope to develop a working definition.

Since pilgrimage is irrevocably connected to religion (for many), it follows that many earlier definitions have highlighted this aspect. For example, Eliade perceives pilgrimage to entail “a religiously motivated journey to the very center of the world, or to one of its representations” (Collins-Kreiner 2010:449). Such pronouncements highlight a major difference between Eliade and the Turners, namely non-geographical locatedness versus geographical locatedness (cf. “center of the world” and the “center out there” by Collins-Kreiner 2010:449; cf. Nthoi 2006:67-68). According to Morinis, pilgrimages are the religious performances of individuals regardless of whether they form part of a group or not. For him, individual motivations and purposes underscore sacred travel (cited in Nthoi 2006:74). Barber (1993, cited in Collins-Kreiner 2010:440) adds another dimension, i.e. pilgrimage becomes “[a] journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding”. Aligned with this, the transformational/transitionary character of the travel must be so that it gives life meaning, or brings healing, or the like (Margry 2008b:36). Similarly, Stortz (2014:290) views pilgrimage as transformational, but explains pilgrimage as an “intentional dislocation undertaken for the purpose of transformation inviting the body to mentor the soul”. This is a cognitive formulation. Seen from the vantage point of the body, she adds that “pilgrimage emerges as an act of walking, unburdening, and uncoupling oneself from the familiar” (Stortz 2014:292).

“[P]ilgrimage is usually associated with strong and well-known elements of mobility, it may actually entail physical immobility combined with religious imaginary mobility” (Rosander 2004:70), a notion similarly taken up by Nikolaisen (2004:91) in his telling of the Mevlevi dervishes who:

“not only travel through geography, i.e. travelling *to*, but also travel of the mind – travelling *through*. The journey of the mind or the soul to reach God is intimately linked to bodily movement through ritual. Therefore, movement through geography, the soul’s journey

through bodily movement, as well as the process of passing the various stages of your training as a dervish all contribute to the higher goal of seeking knowledge” [emphasis in the original].⁴

In the new approach, pilgrimage is not “merely as a field of social relations, but also a *realm of competing discourses* [emphasis in original]” (Eade & Sallnow 1991:5; cf. Nthoi 2006:81). This includes the variant religious, as well as variant secular discourses (Eade & Sallnow 1991:2) that collide and bump up against each other within a particular arena.

Broadening the definition, pilgrimages may be defined as being “undertaken by individuals or groups, based on religious or spiritual inspiration, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object, for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit” (Margry 2008b:36). Complying with this way of thinking about pilgrimage, Roos (2006:24) defines it as an activity where people are “engaged in literal or metaphorical journey, with an urgent and profound sense of purpose, which offers a sense of transformation or completion”.

After Dubisch’s (2004:128) participation in the Run (to the Wall) journey to the War Memorial in Washington, she passionately expresses the polyvocality of pilgrimage. She says:

“it can be many, even contradictory, things at once: a political movement and a personal journey of healing, a celebration of the warrior and a memorial to the tragedy of war, an experience of liminality by the marginal and a mode of integration and the overcoming of marginality, a place of *communitas* but also riven with divisions and conflict, a journey and a coming home” (Dubisch 2004:128).

What strikes me about Dubisch’s explanation is the changeability of the meaning of pilgrimage for the same individual at differing moments of the journey. This not only highlights the multiplicity of meanings evoked for different pilgrims, but the multiplicity of meanings and associations that are foregrounded for a single pilgrim as the journey unfolds. A problem with binary thinking is that the two opposites are not mutually exclusive. This goes for *communitas*-contestation, pilgrim-tourist, sacred-profane, ritual-nonritual, extraordinary-ordinary (mundane), etc. However, both parts of the binary may be empirically evident within single pilgrimages (cf. Albera & Eade 2015:3), or may be entirely absent for that matter.

⁴ This notion resonants with of Urry’s (2002) imagined travel.

What is understood to constitute pilgrimage has expanded considerably. Given this widening, we may speak of a new genre of pilgrimage (Margry 2008b:37). The focus in this new genre is the individual and personal within the realm of the collective. In so doing, a range of conceptions, intentions, expectations and expressions concerning the meaning of pilgrimage and how to achieve the desired outcome are accommodated in the same place and journey, as are very different types of journeys undertaken to both more conventional and new places of sacrality.

What is my position? If our world and culture is disjointed, fluid and not exact, but rather a complex of interconnections across permeable boundaries, then pilgrimage – a representation of this cultural complexity – must reflect this. Trying to corset this imprecise phenomenon must be understood to be a futile task; but also a task that cuts pilgrimage off from the flows and forces that bring it into being. To do this is to focus on the *objectness* of pilgrimage, and in fact to perpetuate a hylomorphic, static and problematic view of the world (cf. Ingold 2010c). The very contribution of this research is to point to and reveal instead the *thingness* (and not objectness) of pilgrimage. To clarify, because thingness may also have for some people the implication of objectness, I think of the phenomenon in its dimensions of complexity rather than seeking to pursue an ontology or to look at it as a definable object in a logical sense. Instead of looking at it as a *Ding an sich* but rather considering the ambivalent nature of this phenomenon which can only be done by taking context and process into consideration. This way it is correct to state that it is also constantly transformed and recreated. In this view, pilgrimages will reflect the heterogeneity and multiplicity of meanings, people, beliefs, traditions, intentions, and outcomes of this 21st century world. It must constitute all of the ranges of possibility, and not be dichotomous, homogenous or externally bounded. Pilgrimages are open and in a process of constantly becoming or being created. Pilgrimages are ontogenetic.

By way of concluding this chapter, it is appropriate to remind readers that in terms of a layered theory of sacred sites, pilgrims have different motivations, different experiences, and different consequences. In this case the informal as well as the formal visits are geared towards perceptions of the sites as sacred, and intentionality on the side of the pilgrims to have faith-related outcomes. This does not mean that touristic visits are not possible – some of these may also become transformed into experiences of awe, as I have indicated (cf. p. 19, and p. 218 of this thesis).

CHAPTER 5

MANTSOPA, MOTOULENG AND MAUTSE PILGRIMS AND PILGRIMAGES

5.1 General

To aid our understanding of pilgrimage in all its guises, four constituted elements help direct our gaze. These include the people undertaking pilgrimages; the places to which people travel; the actions involved in pilgrimage (including journeying and all the rituals along the way); as well as the narratives associated with pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is most often understood to be a special journey to a special place of some kind. What we see is that it often, but not exclusively, involves physical movement to and within a particular space. Sometimes groups undertake journeys together, while at other times individuals embark on quests. Sometimes the pilgrimages are formal and organised, in contrast to smaller-scale, informal or domestic pilgrimages. Sometimes pilgrims freely co-mingle and experience co-journeymers as equals and share in a sense of communion, and at other times the journeys are fraught with conflict and hostility. Furthermore, pilgrimages are sometimes doctrinally structured, and at other times they come into being organically and in unexpected and astounding ways. Oftentimes the ultimate goal of undertaking a pilgrimage is some sort of transformation. Primarily informed by non-African literature, this operational understanding of pilgrimage is thus an outside concept and way of conceiving of these forms of travel.

Since the sacred sites of the eastern Free State have already been described in Chapter 3, this chapter introduces the pilgrims and the pilgrimages to the revered sites of Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng in the eastern Free State. A sector of society, crossing ethnic and denominational boundaries, converges on these holy localities. It is these pilgrims and their journeys – the empirical evidence of ethnographic fieldwork – to which I wish to pay scholarly attention. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first deals with Mantsopa pilgrims and pilgrimages. In the second, Motouleng and Mautse pilgrimages are presented. Because of certain similarities, some parts deal with both sites. On other occasions, the idiosyncratic nature of the pilgrims and pilgrimages to and within each of these sites enjoys attention.

5.2 Mantsopa

The Modderpoort site (St Augustine's Priory and its surrounds) attracts four kinds of site users. Oftentimes the least invested groups (i.e. spiritually invested) are the groups of school and university students who visit the sacred sites. The value of the site as one of historical significance has resulted in it being included on a list of stops for historical and heritage tourists. Some visitors may be religious tourists or interested in the history of the area. Others overnight at the guest facilities as part of going on a spiritual retreat. The third category, probably the largest portion of site visitors to the Priory because they attend the annual Sunday service at the end of August, constitutes the groups of Anglican members from participating districts. The fourth group comprises site visitors also attending this service for whatever reason, but also as individual or small groups throughout the year. These site users, although also officially associated with formal AIC religious organisations, e.g. Apostolic and Zionist churches, do not necessarily affiliate with the Anglican cohort. Particularly important for them is the diviner-healer Mantsopa and her (real or imagined) link to the place. The place is viewed by these pilgrims as a place of spiritual and religious reverence.

The trickle of habitual or once-off pilgrims to Mantsopa comprises mostly women who come dressed in their smart dark skirt (often black), smock, jacket or blouse and court shoes (notably the Anglican and ZCC members). The colourful capes and headcloths distinctive to the Apostolic churches are commonly seen. Some of these pilgrims are also seen wearing the characteristic beads of traditional practitioners.

Candles are regularly lit at the grave site and in the Cave Church while money is often placed on the grave or grave stone. Pilgrims announce their presence with these items. Prayers and singing accompany the small groups of journeyers as they travel from station to station along the Mantsopa pilgrimage route. Within the Priory grounds this process tends to be more contained, whereas at Mantsopa's Spring I have observed these performed with less reserve.

Some pilgrims to Mantsopa leave requests and confessions written on scraps of paper in the Cave Church. Such *letters for God* (cf. Image 5.1) are placed under a stone paperweight and are sometimes accompanied by a couple of coins. More traditionally orientated site visitors also collect little bits of clay or soil from around the back of the Cave Church. This material is believed

to be potent and is used for medicinal purposes. The water from Mantsopa's Spring, the same water she is purported to use in her healing practices, remains sought after (cf. Images 5.2a-d).

What is different about journeying to Mantsopa, as opposed to Mautse or Motouleng? Firstly, although each of the sites is situated on privately owned property, the Modderpoort St Augustine's Priory is owned by the Anglican Church. Since they profess to maintain the Cave Church, Mantsopa's Grave and more recently Mantsopa's Spring, they have implemented certain rules of access and conduct. In the main, site visitors only have access to the larger site during certain hours, after which the gates are locked. This means that site visitors may not continue with their ritual activities after dusk. Aligned with this, the Cave Church is often locked and special permission is granted once an entrance fee is paid. Site users are therefore restricted as to what actions and rituals they may perform. For example, blood sacrifices are prohibited on the premises. Of course, this is in line with Anglican doctrine. However, a significant number of regular site users do so because of their affiliation with Mantsopa the legendary diviner-healer and the belief that this is a place of power. Important rituals that may have to be performed or performed during the night are therefore disallowed.



Image 5.1: Letters for God © 2015



Image 5.2a



Image 5.2b



Image 5.2c



Image 5.2d

Image 5.2: Collecting water from Mantsopa's Spring © 2015

Secondly, no real spiritual leadership is found on the site. On the off chance that the run of the mill visitor to Mantsopa experiences spiritual enlightenment, there is no devout guidance or witness on hand with whom to consult. Although there is a beautiful church building, there are no prophets or Anglican, AIC or traditional functionaries to assist the pilgrims. In fact, pilgrims are conspicuously left to their own devices and treated as visitors only, instead of as spiritual travellers. This feeds into the third difference, namely that organised tourist excursions include Modderpoort as one of the stops on their heritage tours. Furthermore, groups of school and university students frequently call on the site for educational purposes. Therefore, the Departments of Sport and Recreation, Arts and Culture, as well as the St Augustine's Priory have an economic stake in promoting the site.

Fourth, the Priory has converted some of the buildings into conference and guest lodgings to generate third-stream income. Guests making use of these facilities seldom come to the site specifically to visit the Cave Church or Mantsopa's Grave (as regular pilgrims do). More precisely, their use of the site, which eventually may include the pilgrimage route, is more likely to be a group-organised spiritual retreat or break-away working weekend for corporate groups. Seeing as Mantsopa spring water is bottled and then sold to visitors on site, income is generated for the Priory.

Fifth, the site hosts an annual, organised event, i.e. the Rose Cave Sunday Service. Doubling up as a conference, groups from the various districts come to report on what they have amassed in collections and donations in the past year.

Thousands of predominantly Anglican pilgrims descend on Mantsopa for the annual Rose Cave Sunday Service at the end of August. Participants of the service charter buses, minibus taxis or travel with private vehicles. Although the service is scheduled to begin at 10:00, many arrive earlier than 08:00 in the morning. The primary reasons are to firstly stop at Mantsopa's Spring to collect water, to secure a good vantage point and seating for the service, and to prepare spiritually for the service with enthused singing. The representatives of the different districts engage in a good measure of competition as they begin hymns and songs of praise and attempt to out-sing their counterparts with inspired melodious innovations and vocal harmonies.

It would seem that more and more families attend the service in their individual capacities. Camping chairs and cooler-boxes filled with snacks make the outing all the more comfortable.

Although this is an Anglican event, participants from other AICs as well as traditional healers, wearing their distinct ceremonial dress and objects, also attend. Visiting Mantsopa's Spring to fill water bottles and passing through the Cave Church are the primary objectives of the day.

The service proper commences and is increasingly taking on a more Africanised character. Where in 2010 the majority of the service was performed in English with a number of African-language contributions, in 2015 all the main speakers delivered their presentations in one of the African languages, notably Sesotho. Although the Anglican vestment is a mainstay, the embroidered symbols on the stole are more indigenised, including even San rock art figurines and local fauna and flora.

Announcing the fundraising outcomes and encouraging attendees to liberally contribute to the collections was emphasised during the 2015 service. Collection envelopes were distributed and returned, to joyous applause by all present as the contributions were announced over the intercom system. In Image 5.3 we see how Holy Communion is also administered to all wishing to partake. With functionaries distributing the wafers and wine at a number of different points, this process remains time consuming. Ultimately, the benediction and blessing is conferred by the Bishop atop the Cave Church rock in a very interesting, syncretistic turn (cf. Image 5.4).

Besides these highlights of the service, access to the Cave Church is restricted for the duration of the service. The eager queue (cf. Image 5.5) of those gathered and who are seeking to make their way through the small church begins to come alive like a living organism. Personal space no longer exists as bodies press up tight against those in front, behind and on all sides. I read this restriction as a concerted effort by the Anglican Church to orchestrate the unfolding events of the day, but specifically to ensure that the service and the *legitimate* activities are concluded before the cave church and its visitors, together with their non-doctrinal beliefs and behaviours, may commence.

The undercurrent of conflict is not always apparent to the oblivious participant. Ownership of the site is contested on a number of fronts. One stakeholder is the Anglican Church, which holds the title deed to the land. Another comprises groups who have initiated land claims asserting it is their ancestral home. Government departments and their spatial tactics are also involved. In their case, they are primarily motivated by the promise of economic gain, while a fourth is that of the symbolic owners, i.e. the pilgrims.



Image 5.3: Receiving Holy Communion © 2010



Image 5.4: Benediction and blessing from atop the Cave Church rock © 2010



Image 5.5: Queuing to enter the Cave Church © 2010

The facade of openness and congeniality towards visitors who are not aligned with the Anglican mission is another subtlety of the process. These visitors' movements and expressions of core religious beliefs are impinged on by the orderly and civil restrictions imposed by the land owners. Bottling water which is believed to be holy, but selling it off in 500 ml bottles as drinking water is but one example of how core beliefs are undermined. Informants told me that these are the kinds of things that pilgrims fear will be the cause of their beloved fountain drying up.

5.3 Motouleng and Mautse

Pilgrims to Motouleng and Mautse include men, women, children; young and old; black and white; and denominational groups or lone journeyers. Coplan (2003:982-984) succinctly captures these fluid communities of site users as deriving from "every form of local belief from pre-colonial

divination to mainline Protestantism and Catholicism”, and he explains further that they are “not only welcome but they are mixed together”.

Although for an outsider the beliefs that pilgrims subscribe to and the practices associated with each, seem uncontained and even chaotic and downright messy, whereas in reality there is often a seamless transition for site users. The spontaneity with which ritual actions ebb, flow, and change from recognisable organised religious ceremonial formulae to individually inspired expressions of communion with the divine, is commonplace. Not only do people from a number of religious persuasions simultaneously participate in the same ritual actions; it is as if the occasion dictates the trajectory of the performance, most often infusing the eclectic practices of each. “[T]he ritual progression is characteristically from the most institutionally Christian to the most pre-Christian African, from sacraments to trance healing” (Coplan 2003:982).

I do not intend to overstate the seamless confluence of pilgrims in ritual practice at the sites. A clear ambiguity exists. On the one hand it is true that individuals and groups spontaneously join in ritual practices, but on the other, it is also true that tensions may arise between groups. This is particularly true in view of internal site conflicts and tension between ritual leaders. What this is, is the emergence of a certain hybridity¹ that does not necessarily ask questions about origin or conflicting traditional content. In a way, this hybridity has become authentic in its performance and relevance at the sites. There seems to be more mixing at Mautse; a phenomenon I will expand on later.

Site users fall into two classes: traditional practitioners and their neophytes and clients, and their organised religious counterparts, i.e. prophets, the denominational groups supporting them and clients (for lack of a better word). I have found it unfruitful to assign site users to unyielding religious and denominational categorisation – although Apostolic, ZCC and Roman Catholic groups predominate.²

¹ There is the anthropological view that all cultural activity, thought and belief is hybrid. The reasoning is that we are and everything else is always changing, incorporating, intermixing, etc. elements from other groups. The use of the term ‘hybridity’ in this manuscript, is to illustrate this multidirectional intermixture and blending of more traditional African religious practices and conceptions with doctrinally situated models and actions from the various Christian denominational groupings.

² A possible reason for the notable presence of denominational groups from these churches at the sacred sites is that Apostolic, ZCC, Roman Catholic and, more recently, Protestant churches accept and sometimes even encourage what Coplan (2003:983) calls “African ecstatic spiritualism” (cf. Sundkler 1961). In support of this argument, Gill (1997:37) explains that the popularity of these churches “points to a certain syncretism between indigenous and foreign spirituality”. Specifically writing about the Basotho

Some site visitors undertake travels to sites only once and others return at intervals (i.e. habitual or occasional site users). Yet others are called to undergo profound journeys of healing or to undertake long-lasting apprenticeships as they train to become traditional practitioners or remain as liminal beings before being released from their journey obligations. Habitual or occasional site visitors are non-regular journeyers (sojourners), i.e. staying at the sites for no longer than a week or ten days, but perhaps returning to the sites once or twice a year (cf. Coleman 2004:54), while the latter group includes more permanent site users who dwell at the sites (cf. Rosander 2004:74; Coleman 2002:365; Yamba 1995). Some stalwarts' protracted journeys have lasted as long as ten, and in exceptional cases, 15 and 20 or more years. The question is whether these site dwellers should be considered pilgrims; a question to which I answer an unequivocal yes. This view is informed by their own opinion of themselves; as journeyers not yet released to resume their everyday lives. They remain under commission of God and the ancestors.³ At Mautse more so than at Motouleng, there are a number of persons who have settled at the sites. These individuals are peripheral in regular society as are they admittedly not on any type of journey, sacred or otherwise. However, they are site visitors, but they should not be included in the pilgrim category. I have not included their narratives here, and where reference is made to them, I try to make this clear.

Children often accompany their parents to both Motouleng and Mautse. In some cases the pilgrimage and accompanying rituals involve them; sometimes they are the sole reason for the journey in the first place. In these cases, the children must be considered as pilgrims. Even when they happen to accompany their adult caregivers, they too must be categorised as pilgrims (albeit budding pilgrims). They may not yet be conscious of all the intricacies of journeying, but they are learning at the knee of their loved ones. Image 5.6 depicts a traditional practitioner specifically

of Lesotho, Gill's statement is just as applicable to sacred site users in the eastern Free State. He says, the "Basotho are particularly attracted towards the healing aspect of Zionist churches, an important aspect of customary Sesotho religious beliefs, which is peripheral to the major church doctrines" (Gill 1997:37).

³ Pilgrims do not have fixed understandings and do not use the term 'ancestors' to exclusively denote blood-related kinship tied exclusively to particular geographical localities. Informants/participants/pilgrims' use of 'ancestors' at the sacred sites of the eastern Free State reflects changing conceptions and include more inclusive and less static understandings. This deviates somewhat from established ideas about ancestors in African traditional religions as being territorially based and specific. Usually, a person responds to her/his ancestors in the geographic area from where s/he originates and particularly in the place where her/his ancestors are buried. It is normally in this area where sacrifices take place. When pilgrims state that they are coming to establish or maintain relations with ancestors, their statement instead reflects non-blood-related notions and refers instead to a generalised collective, i.e. the omnipresent *collective counsel of ancestor*. It would seem that there is an overriding of 'traditional' kinship practice because they perceive these pilgrimage sites to have inherently superior power.

calling the children for a photograph. What we see in the photo is how one little girl has a candle in her hands while another is carrying a stick, clearly emulating adults in the group.

Some journeys to Motouleng and Mautse are individual events/occurrences, while others are group pilgrimages. Undertaken by congregants of Apostolic Faith Mission daughter churches and the ZCC, these group pilgrimages to Mautse and Motouleng are most pronounced at certain times of the liturgical calendar such as at Easter and Christmas. Weekend visitors to the Mautse Valley over Easter easily exceed 1500 journeyers, and over 600 pilgrims vie for a spot in the Motouleng Cave at the end of October.^{4, 5} These group excursions are contrasted with the predominantly Anglican pilgrimage to the small cave site and burial place that has real and fictive connections to the legendary diviner-healer Mantsopa, which attracts as many as 3000 attendees at that single event.



Image 5.6: Children; pilgrims in becoming © 2011

⁴ The role of spiritual leaders is important here, as it is them who largely direct the journey and ritual stations.

⁵ Another question that arises is 'why the end of October?' since this period is not directly related to a Christian Harvest festival or even a First Fruits celebration. It also does not relate to any formal religions' liturgical calendar or to a solstice or equinox. Might it have something to do with a new or full moon, or with Halloween? Protestant Christians celebrate the anniversary of their *tradition* on 31 October – a day named *Reformation Day*. Less likely scenarios include the pagan belief that on the night of the 31 October the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds is thinnest. For them, this renders access to the knowledge of the dead possible.

The majority of site users to all three the sites are Sesotho-speaking, coming from the Free State province and neighbouring Lesotho, although pilgrims hail from all corners of South Africa, as well as other African countries and even Europe. They also verge on being practically destitute at the one end of the spectrum, to being tertiary-trained professionals, and decidedly middleclass, on the other. What is striking is that the majority of site users are female. Coplan (2003:983) ascribes this “multi-ethnic, ecumenical, hybridised character of ritual practice” and pilgrims at the sites to the numerical dominance of women. He argues that in-marrying wives frequently adopt the denominational affiliation of their husbands, resulting in them having less rigid and denominationally specific views concerning the expression of religious beliefs. Not only do they dominate numerically as journeyers to the sites, they more often than not assume the lead religious functionary role during rituals. Jean Comaroff (1985:49) has a slightly different idea about the ritual dominance of women (although her claims centre on Tswana groups). She argues that although women play a lesser role in political affairs within an agnatic system, women seem to be the cohesive factor in households as well as ritual performance, thus constituting stronger conduits of tradition and spirituality. In this sense their influence exceeds that of men. With the legacy of historical disruption and displacement in South Africa, this may imply that the women in even more dire circumstances maintain this ritual role. To these, Winkelman and Dubisch (2005:xxii, xxiii) add two additional reasons for the predominance of women at certain sites, in religious traditions, or during historical periods. One, pilgrimage is an acceptable venture for women, in that their lives are largely restricted in other domains, i.e. the pilgrimage may even be a form of silent rebellion. Furthermore, a second reason for this predominance is that women embark on pilgrimages in search of family health solutions, as well as for a range of special women’s concerns, such as fertility, pregnancy and child care. The woman becomes a metonymy for functioning bodies and healthy families, that needs curing (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxiv).

The ritual attire varies from “multi-layered, multi-coloured symbol-encrusted uniforms to the beads (lifaha)...[and] untanned skin cords” (Coplan 2003:982). This may include a range of colourful robes, capes and headcloths associated with Afro-Christian Independent Churches⁶, mixed with the beaded necklaces, wrist- and ankle-bands, as well as an array of amulets and the short or long dreadlocks of traditional practitioners and their required cloths (cf. Images 5.7 and 5.8), called

⁶ African Independent or Initiated Churches (AICs), as they are more recently referred to, were known for the longest time as Separatist Churches (Sundkler 1961).

kobo ya badimo (ancestors' blanket).⁷ The robes and capes are similar to the albs and capes worn in eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican or Lutheran traditions as liturgical garments. Denominational attire makes it easy to identify different groups of pilgrims. The robe, like the alb, is sometimes cinched with a woven cord girdle at the waist. On the cape and headcloth there are certain identifiable symbols, with crosses and stars being the most common. Wrist and anklets made from beads and leather thongs are signature articles worn by traditional practitioners. As different colours and colour-combinations (e.g. yellow-white, green-red, blue-white) and styles differentiate denominational affiliation and rank, so too the different bead colours (notably white, white-red, yellow) indicate the neophyte level of its wearer. Differentiating traditional diviner-healers from their church-affiliated cohorts (prophets) is the special cloth (i.e. *blanket of the ancestors*) draped around their shoulders, or worn like a sarong or a sash over one shoulder. The motif varies, with guinea fowl and lions being popular, and red, black and white colour schemes being dominant. Most pilgrims carry a staff of some kind, with a wooden stick being common among traditional practitioners, often decorated with beads or engravings. An essential part of any prophet's attire is a silver wand and I often saw doves, stars and the moon fashioned at the top of these rods.



Image 5.7: Apostolic pilgrims resting at Ha Madiboko, Mautse Valley © 2010

⁷ This cloth or shawl worn wrapped around the body or around the shoulders is known as the “cloth of the spirits” (Nthoi 2006:28). They are distinctive in their colours and patterning and a hallmark of traditional practitioners. The particular cloth that one is to wear is revealed in a dream.



Image 5.8: Novice traditional practitioners at No. 8, Mautse Valley © 2008

The different stations in the Motouleng site were described in some detail in Chapter 3. In the next couple of paragraphs I describe the activities in which pilgrims normally engage. Groups of pilgrims typically unburden themselves upon entering the Motouleng cave. Blankets, cooking paraphernalia, buckets of sorghum beer and other pieces of luggage are placed to the right, but still within the parameters of the cave. Catching their breath and retrieving candles, matches and snuff from carry-bags, pilgrims are led from the Maseeng to the Altareng stations by their accompanying spiritual leaders. Prayers and singing would have commenced and by the time they reach the great altar there is an increase in intensity. Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo usually stands to the side until they allow him an opportunity, as main caretaker, to lead in spoken prayers. In Image 5.9 we see how pilgrims move from one station to the next, as well as smaller group of pilgrims standing huddled in the Mabitleng area of the cave. Also visible are the twinkling lit candles from the deeper stations. New candles are lit, snuff is liberally sprinkled on and around the stations, and prayers and requests are made for successful journeys and intercession. In the case of groups, a drum, like the quickening heartbeat, picks up the tempo as pilgrims are drawn

further into the embodied worship. Only after the group has stopped at all the major stations will its members disband, going to collect their belongings and setting themselves up in the demarcated packed-rock structures. In the case of large groups this may take a number of hours. Their energy is very different now, with much talking and laughing. Clearly certain group members are responsible for making fire and getting water on the boil (cf. Image 5.10). And so, wave after wave of devotees makes its way along the station circuit.

For individual pilgrims the fanfare is far less dramatic, with on-site spiritual guides being quick to assist those supplicants who, like before, are taken around the stations. Certain site guides emphasise particular stations in their circuit, while others steer clear of certain localities. This is primarily due to the appropriation and symbolic ownership insisted on by some on-site spiritual leaders and the resultant respect shown, or the undercurrent of conflict (depending on one's perspective). I observed and was told about how solo journeyers often spontaneously join the animated activities of larger groups.

There are particular times at which ritual activities are deemed to be at their most effective. To understand this, see Table 5.1 for the broad distinction made between domestic time and spiritual time. In the two 12-hour cycles of the 24-hour day, the spiritually effective times are deemed to be 09:00, 12:00 and 15:00. This is mirrored at night, with 21:00, 00:00 and 03:00 constituting compelling times. The implication is that certain activities are better performed at these times.



Image 5.9: Pilgrims moving to the next station after leaving Altareng, Motouleng © 2008



Image 5.10: Taking refreshments after completing the station circuit, Motouleng © 2008

Table 5.1: Division of time

Day cycle	Division of time	Main purpose	Night cycle	Division of time	Main purpose
00:00	Spiritual	Ask for the morning Marks death of night and emergence of a new day Prayers of intercession – remove whatever is bothering	12:00	Spiritual	Prayers of intercession – problems to go down with the sun
03:00	Spiritual Emphasis: Ancestors	Morning star appears and the promise of a good day Ancestors meet again Waiting for sunrise 2 nd opportunity for sacrifice	15:00	Spiritual Emphasis: Ancestors	Sacrifices (feed the ancestors) Ancestors move from north to south Waiting for sunset
06:00	Domestic		18:00	Domestic	Ancestors sleep till next morning 09:00
09:00	Spiritual Emphasis: Prophets	Call on trusted guardian angels	21:00	Spiritual Emphasis: Prophets	Sacrificial ritual

Pilgrims often recount how they rise at midnight and 03:00 to ritually pray. Midnight is seen as the cross-over time when the night cycle concludes and the day cycle begins. Prayers are focused on asking for a new morning since it symbolises the death of the night, the darkness and everything that is dark. For this reason, pilgrims are encouraged to unburden themselves of all that is bothering them, believing that these problems will not return since they died with the night. Three o'clock is significant because the morning star appears, indicating that the earlier request for a new day (i.e. a clean slate) has been granted. If a sacrifice was made earlier during the day, the cooking activities will commence hereafter. By the time the sun rises people will begin gathering to share in the feast. It is important that these activities are concluded by 09:00.

I am particularly interested in the fact that dream-recall is enhanced when woken during and not after rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Having to wake up at these intervals to comply with obligations does just that; i.e. allows one to more fully remember dreams. The fact that this plays into the importance of dreams and dream messages is therefore not accidental.

Nine o'clock in the morning and at night are important times for prophets and the activities they are required to perform. Prayers request that the trusted guardian angels will intercede on their behalf. Moprofeta primarily use candles and water in their healing repertoires. The blessing of water thus takes place at these times.

Twelve o'clock midday constitutes the intersection of day and night cycles. The sun has turned and the hours are fewer before night, than the new day. Prayer requests appeal that misfortunes and bad luck go down with the setting sun and that they should remain suppressed. By 15:00 the ancestors have moved from north to south and are anticipating the sun going down. This is a very important time for making sacrifices; ancestors need to be fed. Goat sacrifices are particularly sought-after since I was informed that *goats scream loudly, calling the ancestors near*. The bleating of the slaughtered animal signals ancestor approval, i.e. the louder they bleat, the more satisfied the ancestors are. After this pilgrims turn their attention to domestic and everyday activities once more. Days are full at Motouleng and the perpetual ritual performances stitch the days together into quilts of continuous devotion. At the closing of the day another level and experience of Motouleng majesty stirs, accompanied by the distant hum of conversations and with firelight as the only illumination in the massive space.

This division of time is probably more applicable to permanent pilgrims than to the weekend visitors. Weekend visitors likely stay awake the entire night, participating in the spirited singing and dancing. The natural high from singing, dancing and drumming may be enhanced, for some, by the consumption of sorghum beer and an infectious and tangible energy.

Although exhausted, weekend visitors must perform their final rituals and call on stations that *spoke* to them one last time on the Sunday before they leave. It is of paramount importance that they must report to the great altar before departure. Here candles are lit and prayers of gratitude are said out loud. Water and sehwasho are packed, belongings are gathered and the journey from the cave begins. The return journey to the awaiting vehicles is frequently much faster, with more talking and laughing, i.e. bags, moods and the path are all lighter.

Groups visiting Motouleng commonly do so under the spiritual guidance of senior church leaders. These individuals act as primary functionaries, leading their delegates in prayer and song, as well as along the stations. Although many traditional practitioners and their apprentices visit the cave, there is no particular place where they have sole access or from which they are restricted. Nor were groups of trainee-healers dwelling within the cave space. Rather, they would accompany their teachers for shorter periods of stay.

Peak site visitations occur over weekends. The majority of Motouleng's visitors arrive on the Friday (throughout the day and even deep into the night or early hours of Saturday morning). They stay over, and the greater number leave on Sunday to return back to their regular daily lives. Some pilgrims stay for a week or two as necessitated by their condition or as instructed in their dreams. There are of course those who remain at Motouleng for a number of months and even years.

The greater Motouleng site probably has some 40 people who dwell there at any given time. Six or seven of them have assumed the roles of on-site spiritual leaders. In particular, the self-appointed caretaker and most senior of the cave-dwellers, Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo often leads prayers at the main altar. Others are seen consulting with site visitors at any given time about an array of matters. Abraham, for example, in quite opportunistic fashion, acts as guide, taking visitors on spiritual excursions of the cave for a nominal fee.

On-site spiritual leaders and guides do not always exist harmoniously with site visitors, with some of the clashes becoming quite vocal. One such incident was when a weekend visitor wanted to settle in a small shelter that a permanent dweller had prepared upon instruction in a dream. The weekend visitor was arguing that he too had been instructed by his ancestors to sleep in precisely the same place. He argued further that this sacred cave was not the property of any single person, giving him just as much right to occupy the space. More permanent dwellers consider themselves the custodians of the cave. In so doing, when occasional visitors transgress in-house rules of conduct it brings them into conflict with one another. More than one more permanent dweller mentioned the problem of designated areas for ablutions as a bone of contention.

It is also not uncommon that weekend or occasional site users who are associated with particular on-site leaders come into direct conflict with other on-site guides by virtue of this association. For example, one may observe a physical rift in the cave in that the stone wall, gate and lock physically mark off the two primary parts of the cave overhang from one another. Two permanent pilgrims have appropriated the second part of the cave for themselves. Thus, unlike the first part of the interior which sees a bustle of both domestic and spiritual activity, the second or back part only sees its two builders and their son living in a small cordoned-off section at the furthest point. The rest of this half of the cave, which has been cleared and sanctified by symbols (such as stars, crosses, doves and hearts), baptismal fonts and meditation structures, as well as narrative promise, is quiet and serene with large groups seldom entering here. There is not necessarily an untoward reason for this. Quiet meditation is primarily an individual activity and therefore, the activities of the loud, energised groups run contrary to this space's purpose. Furthermore, the strict rules forbidding the use of this space for blood sacrifices or ablution purposes means that groups generally avoid the area. Pilgrims to this section mainly do so to consult the spiritual leaders present there. Depending on one's vantage point, it seems that the friction between powerful site guides is what underlies the boycott of this section or the general prohibition to visit this area; friction which in turn seems to stem from fundamentally different journey and site narratives and ideologies.

The sacrality of the path, the special places along the way, the main stations, the larger sites and the significant persons are subject to continued re-making by re-marking through sacrifices and rituals (cf. Smith 2004:105). The cairns, the altars, the gifts of announcement, clearing spaces and demarcating them with packed rocks, planted flags, engravings, graffiti, and ritual regalia are

places, objects and actions; marks that suggest significance and sacrality to the pilgrims. They suggest naturally occurring sacred places and sites of historical significance (cf. Smith 2004:108).

Of the three sites, Motouleng has probably received the most inquisitive tourists. I encountered tourists from the nearby town of Clarens on at least eight occasions while doing fieldwork. These white, foreign and local travellers were usually journeying in groups of two or three. Having heard of the impressive fertility cave from inn-keepers in town, they were coming to see for themselves. A website also advertises fertility rituals by so-called authentic African practitioners and a faith healer triumphantly claims to have healed two white women of their conception difficulties in a YouTube video. A Swiss missionary stationed at a nearby mission school is also said to have visited the cave to familiarise himself with the practices and beliefs he found so tricky to understand.

Encouraged by my familiarity with site protocol, a young black urban couple struck up a conversation with me on their first visit to Motouleng and were curious to hear if I had been to the cave, *all the way to the top and inside*. The young woman told me that she had heard about Motouleng and felt that they had to visit it seeing as they found themselves in Clarens and surrounds; they could *simply not have been so close and not have come to Motouleng*. We walked together for a while but then they insisted I continue on my way. Visiting Motouleng can be emotionally overwhelming, i.e. a confrontation for which first-time site visitors are not always prepared. Much later I found the same couple back at the parking area. They had made their way to the second river crossing, but fearing that they were not sufficiently prepared (mentally and ritually), did not go up to the cave. She assured me with a beaming smile that they would return another time, adequately prepared.⁸

Hawkers at the second river crossing sell selected items that may be needed for the stay. Pilgrims commissioned to stay at the cave for some time can replenish some basic supplies such as milk and mealie (maize) meal from the tuck shop on the farm Lusthof, where the entrance fee is collected. It is here too that pilgrims can charge the batteries of their mobile phones, for example. Thus, there are certain aspects of pilgrimages to Motouleng that have become commercialised. The few rands that the hawkers generate is far less than the entrance fees received by the Lusthof

⁸ Curious site visitors may remain just that, but, for some touristic site users the experience may be unexpectedly exceptional, so much so that they may begin to think of themselves as pilgrims. So too, others might no longer think of these site visitors as merely curious touristic travellers, but as pilgrims.

farmer. Over the Easter weekend, for example, this may add up to R12 000. A further illustration of this commercialisation involves a permanent resident of the cave who starred in a Dutch television documentary. Taking a moral stance here, I do not fault the pilgrims for the above but what I do find reprehensible is the clearly scripted behaviour to feed into the appetite of the European notion of African *witch doctors*.

I feel that I cannot overstate the sense of awe that Motouleng incites in one and the extraordinary sacrality of the cave. However, the reality of the matter is that staying over at the cave or dwelling at the cave for longer periods is fraught with difficulties. Although the domestic spaces are cordoned off by packed rock, they offer very little in the way of privacy with most of these not having a roof. More recently, some groups have laid claim to certain structures by thatching the roofs. In staying over, however, regular pilgrims must expect to deal with not only the elements, but also other difficulties.

Although the climate is moderate for the most part, winter temperatures in this area frequently drop below freezing and it is extremely cold in the cavernous rock overhang. It would seem that renouncing the creature-comforts of modern life is a requirement of pilgrimage. For this reason, and because many pilgrims are poor, they do not take refuge under down duvets and insulated sleeping bags. Instead they fight off the cold with a couple of grey R50.00 blankets from PEP Stores. In winter, the indifferent sun does not hit the trail till well after 11:30, resulting in it remaining frosted till after midday (cf. Image 5.11) and by 14:30 the shadows grow long as the sun dips behind the mountain, allowing very little time to warm up at all.

Another difficulty faced by pilgrims is the dust, with the cave floor resembling a moon surface (see Image 5.12 for a photograph of the fine grey dust). The lightest breath of air stirs the dust, which pervades every crevice, necessitating that all containers must seal properly to protect edibles from the grit. Of course, food and edibles must also be protected from the rodents. I must admit not having seen a rat at the cave, but the recent addition of cats speaks to their unseen presence and nuisance.

Daily life as a pilgrim at Motouleng is not easy since there are no amenities and facilities at the cave. This means that pilgrims must find a place to answer the call of nature, and a way to dispose of waste. Pilgrims must harvest water for domestic use at points where it slowly siphons through the rock. The current drought conditions in this area of the country places an even greater

premium on this commodity. Fuel, in the form of wood, must be collected from the area surrounding the cave to use in food preparation and, if necessary, for keeping warm. These activities keep the pilgrims busy for many hours of the day together with the washing of blankets, clothes, crockery and themselves.

The cave dwellers, more permanent or perpetual pilgrims, are burdened with other responsibilities of which weekend visitors are seldom aware. The cave area is tidied and swept at least twice a week: once before the weekend and once after the weekend. Tidying does not simply mean packing things neatly but, particularly after weekends (when many visitors visit the site), all the excrement and other remnants of humanity such as toilet paper, used sanitary products, food waste and sacrificial animal blood, bones and offal/leavings are removed and burned. Without such routinised cleaning disease is bound to break out.



Image 5.11



Image 5.12

Above:

Image 5.11: The access trail to Motouleng at 11:30 in June © 2010

Image 5.12: Motouleng's moon-like cave floor © 2010 (T Prinsloo)

The two main items that pilgrims take home with them after having visited the cave are water and sehwashō (clay). The water may be collected in the cave as it filters through the rock ceiling in the recesses of the cave. For those that make their way to the waterfall, this water is also considered very potent. Inside the cave there is a particular clay harvesting site named Thotobolong. Within this one locality a number of different sehwashō colours are found, with different colours being applied for different purposes. This is clear in Image 5.13 as is demonstrated by the different sediment layers. Of course this also speaks to the age of the sehwashō (the older being deeper). For all intents and purposes the nitrous deposits on the cave roof are also thought of as sehwashō, and pieces are chipped and chopped off. These nitrified seepage residues (cf. Image 5.14) are what informed the Afrikaans name, Salpeterkrans (directly translated as Saltpetre Mountain).

Some site visitors come to Motouleng with the express purpose of collecting plant materials from the area in the vicinity of the cave. These plants are vital ingredients in traditional herbal medicines and these opportunistic harvesters do so to sell their wares at muthi markets. The caretakers and site leaders are acutely aware of and concerned about these site users, and are particularly worried that these secular activities reduce the sanctity and power of the site. Some traditional practitioners bring their apprentices to Motouleng as part of their training, to hone their knowledge and skills related to plant identification and extraction. In these cases the plant materials are taken home so that their healing and pharmacological qualities can be studied and applied.



Image 5.13: Clay harvesting at Thotobolong, Motouleng © 2009



Image 5.14: Nitrified seepage residue from the roof of Motouleng cave © 2009

Mautse differs from Motouleng in a number of ways. Firstly, the Motouleng site predominantly comprises the spacious interior of a rock overhang, while the Mautse site includes an entire mountain valley and the areas around it. They are therefore fundamentally different in size. Secondly, because the Mautse site is so much larger, there are so many more stations on the pilgrimage circuit and in fact, a number of distinct routes. Thirdly, and related to the former, each of these routes can service a very different clientele with vastly different needs as well as foundationally different ideologies. Fourthly, some stations have flourished to such an extent that dormitory-like services exist to accommodate the sheer numbers of pilgrims returning to the stations. An excellent example is Maseeng, i.e. the fertility site at Mautse. When I began my fieldwork in 2008 the site was small and undeveloped. Through the years, however, the popularity of the site has grown and so has its credibility. In Images 5.15, 5.16 and 5.17 the 2008 Maseeng site can be seen. This is contrasted with a 2013 photograph of the facade of the site (Image 5.18) taken from across the valley, as well as a photo one of the entrance to the station (Image 5.19). Images 5.20, 5.21 and 5.22 clearly depict how the accommodation, interior and facilities have been extended.



Image 5.15



Image 5.16

Above:

Image 5.15: The enclosed courtyard at Maseeng © 2008

Image 5.16: Interior of Maseeng courtyard © 2008



Image 5.17



Image 5.18

Above: **Image 5.17: Open-air sleeping area at Maseeng © 2008**

Image 5.18: Maseeng's new look © 2013



Image 5.19



Image 5.20



Image 5.21



Image 5.22

Previous page and above:

Image 5.19: Maseeng's renovated and attractive masonry work © 2013 (J Lowings)

Image 5.20: Thatched sleeping area at Maseeng © 2013 (J Lowings)

Image 5.21: Indoor fireplace with chimney © 2013 (J Lowings)

Image 5.22: Indoor kitchen and pantry areas © 2013 (J Lowings)

In 2008 when I first visited the Mautse Valley, access was gained via an entrance gate. Next to the entrance was a sign imploring site visitors to respect the place (cf. Image 5.23). A simple barbed-wire fence, typical of that encompassing South African farms, defined the official boundary to the site (cf. Image 5.24). Somewhere between October 2008 and March 2009, the four-month period between field trips, a solid brick wall with sandstone facade was built and large signage announced the site as a heritage site (cf. Image 5.26). In an interesting turn of events the Departments of Agriculture, as well as Arts and Culture apparently erected these walls and proclaimed the sites as such. The problem with this is that no site can simply be declared a heritage site; a lengthy process is involved and SAHRA is the only agency with the required authority to make such pronouncements. It was furthermore discovered that the farm owners on whose property these sites are situated had not been consulted or informed and that the name which had been placed on the wall was Nkokomohi. In fact it turns out that the Nkokomohi clay

harvesting area does not fall within the boundary of this new wall, but outside it, some distance away. I believe that had there been more inclusive discussions with all stakeholders, another name would have been selected.

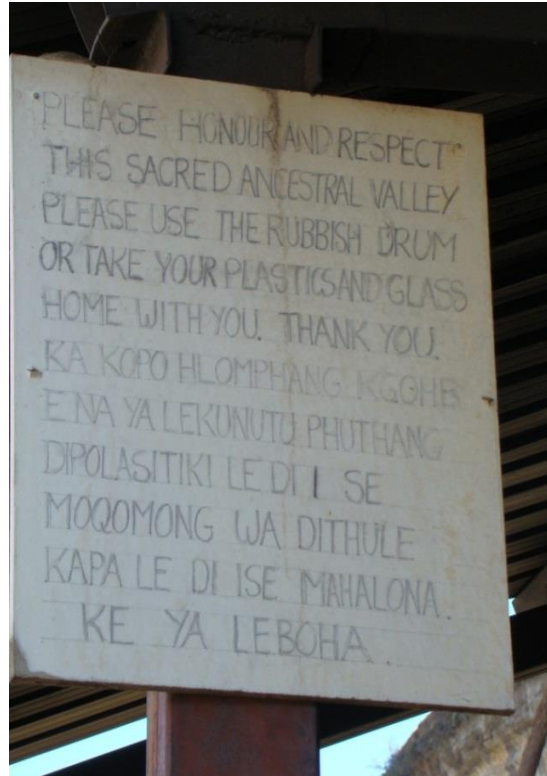


Image 5.23: Sign at entrance of Mautse Valley © 2008



Image 5.24



Image 5.25

Above:

Image 5.24: View from within the Mautse Valley looking toward the parking lot © 2008

Image 5.25: Looking upon the parking area and into the Mautse Valley © 2009

Another important feature encompasses two altars; one on the outside of the entrance gate (cf. Image 5.26), and one on the inside. It is at the former altar that arriving pilgrims first light candles, place whole kernels of maize or sorghum, and tobacco and/or snuff-tobacco (and even offerings of money), announce their arrival, impart their intention and request the blessing of successful pilgrimages. These ritual behaviours are repeated along the way at the intermittent altars and stations.



Image 5.26a



Image 5.26b

Image 5.26: Altar on the outside of the Mautse entrance © 2009

There is an increasing presence of self-appointed and opportunistic gatekeepers who sit at the entrance. The reader will remember that the farmer requires that all journeyers pay R20.00 as an admittance fee for use of this space. These so-called, self-appointed gatekeepers thus compel pilgrims to make a further entrance payment. Unsuspecting first-time site users make these payments and these fraudulent fee collectors then keep the money for themselves. A further irritation is that pilgrims have hardly started moving along the path when these same fraudsters grab the money offerings on the altars for themselves. For returning pilgrims these scammers are an unpleasant nuisance.

If ritualisation is understood as ways of acting that are planned and devised to distinguish a set of activities from more ordinary and everyday activities, then the various pilgrimage routes, their paths and stations within the Mautse Valley are ritualised by pilgrims in various ways. In the images below I share some of these creative enactments that are meant to imbue activities with a special quality. Sometimes colourful flags are used to mark and attract the attention of site users. Symbols such as crosses are sewn onto the flags (cf. Image 5.27), communicating to

potential clientele that certain services may be expected at the station. In Images 5.28 and 5.29 rocks are packed to demarcate the parameters of the locality. In the case of the former, the area is removed of any grass and is swept clean, while in the second photograph the circular arrangement of rocks on the left must be seen in conjunction with the shaded area in the middle and the altar to the right of the tree. In Image 5.30 I draw attention to the prayer inscribed on the rondavel-church's interior wall. Translated, it says: *Lord Jesus, we request your blessings. We ask for your protection Father. Shed light on us at all times and teach us to always know you. Amen.* This, together with naming the structure a church, sacralises it. Furthermore, this image also shows a novice making traditional sorghum beer for important rituals in the coming days. That this space is used for this activity may be purely functional, but it does no harm in ensuring that the ancestors will eagerly appreciate the beer and the gesture. The next photograph (Image 5.31) is of a sign fashioned by members of the Apostolic church who are loyal to the New Testament prophet, NM Mafereka, their archbishop. The wrought-iron sign forms the centre of an altar on the plateau of the Mautse Valley. Serving as a testament to the skill of its artisan-maker, the sign, topped with a flag, stands securely embedded in its anchoring foundation, announcing that it is appropriated by a particular denominational group. The final image in this series, Image 5.32, depicts frothing sorghum beer in a clay pot. The *ancestors' blanket* (cloth) on which the pot stands is vital for the upcoming rituals. Each of these symbols indicates the esteemed nature of the events, vastly distinct from the activities of everyday life.



Image 5.27



Image 5.28



Image 5.29



Image 5.30



Image 5.31



Image 5.32

Previous page and above:

Image 5.27: Flags at St Mary's © 2008

Image 5.28: Holy High Spirit Apostolic Church © 2008

Image 5.29: Rock circle © 2009

Image 5.30: Rondavel-church at No. 8 © 2010

Image 5.31: Wrought-iron sign © 2008

Image 5.32: Frothed sorghum beer © 2013

The pilgrim groups visiting Mautse are predominantly members of the Apostolic, ZCC and to a lesser extent, the Roman Catholic faith. They usually arrive at the site on Friday, during the day or night, and depart again on Sunday. Individual pilgrims may arrive on any day of the week. Although they may be visiting on a weekend excursion, their visits to the sites are more purposeful, and their stays longer lasting. It would appear that they are already under treatment of a prophet or traditional practitioner, or in training. In this regard a young apprentice diviner-

healer I met comes to mind. In the world outside Mautse this woman is training as an aircraft pilot but in her private life and leisure time, she is a novice practitioner who is successful in negotiating the terms of each domain. Every couple of months she returns to Mautse and her teacher, spending two weeks or so under her tutelage. This way, she is not expelled from the pilot-programme.

Groups of weekend visitors are drawn to the larger stations like Difletseng, Madiboko, Maseeng or Tempeleng, mainly for the space they offer. Space to perform the necessary rituals is important, as is the capacity to satisfy domestic needs for food preparation and sleeping. Added to these functional requirements, is the role of the station to comply with the spiritual needs of the group. The power of certain localities is known to be more closely aligned with certain needs or ailments. At certain stations, the charismatic personalities of the in-house functionaries are the primary reason that groups or individuals elect to visit these particular stations. It follows that it is easier to accommodate individual journeyers at smaller stations.

Some of the spiritual leaders in the Mautse Valley have gained certain reputations and a level of fame, and with that authority and power surpassing that of other on-site functionaries. The most outstanding case is that of Gogo Monica. On the one hand, this affords these leaders the respect and deference of Mautse inhabitants but it also brings them into direct conflict with certain Mautse community members, or the landowners or their representatives. Irrespective of the competing narratives of pilgrims or competing locality authorities, there is still a sense of community despite the fluidity of the Mautse community.⁹ The three examples below talk to the issues of reputations, contestation and conflict. Firstly, the well-known reputations and awed consultations with famed functionaries constitute a major reason for journeyers to visit the site and particular stations. This can be compared with wishing to consult a world-class medical specialist for a particular ailment. Secondly, Gogo Monica's reputation was of such a nature that, as one of the most powerful sangomas in the Valley, she regularly officiated at special events (e.g. baptisms and weddings)

⁹ The following events took place after this manuscript had already been submitted for assessment and therefore are not written into the text. However, because of their significance they are included in this footnote.

Perhaps a sterling but sad example demonstrating this 'community' has been evidenced since the new land owner (a Mosotho from Lesotho) evicted site users and tore down significant structures. The communal sense of loss, mourning and displacement is palpable in statements such as the following by a significant functionary at No. 8: *what are we going to do and where are we going to go?* The dislocation isn't restricted to the physical sense. Akin to a psychoanalytic process, apprentice healers and others on spiritual journeys have dejectedly sat in my office, enquiring what I know about the circumstances at Mautse, as they have standing appointments and required obligations to fulfil.

on neighbouring farms and in the district. This privileged reputation focused the spotlight on her. Other site functionaries' disquiet erupted on an occasion, leading to them restricting her from performing rituals at other stations such as Tempeleng. Thirdly, at the end of 2014 one of the major station functionaries at Madiboko had been told by farm representatives to vacate her station with immediate effect. Apparently, she had overstepped her authority by disallowing new site visitors the freedom to express their spiritual needs. The new site visitors had taken up their complaint with the managers of the farm consortium, who implemented a ruling prohibiting station functionaries from living at the stations for extended periods of time. This verdict has the potential to change the site dynamic drastically going forward.

To address the spectrum of pilgrims' needs, a range of services is rendered and available to them. These include, among others, consulting with site guides to direct the group or individual to the appropriate station for the particular need. When I first began my fieldwork, a lethuela (dance or trance-healer) at St Mary's used her skill to discover these connections between stations and functionaries and site user. Furthermore, some site visitors do not have an established relationship with the ancestors. Discovering pilgrims' ancestors is an important service that is rendered at the site. In addition, offering journeyers troubled by illness and unfathomable dreams with interpretations and treatment regimens is a service rendered by both diviner-healers and prophets. Moreover, certain stations offer female initiation and traditional practitioner training for novices. Besides consultations with fertility specialists at Maseeng, pilgrims also travel from far and wide to undergo full immersion baptisms at Tempeleng and ritual cleansing at Taung Falls. What is more, spaces for familial rituals and sacrifice are available in the Mautse Valley.

Certain aspects that are seen as external to the pilgrim sometimes reduce or even enhance the experience of the journey. These may be general, such as the presence of water. Many rituals such as baptism or the brewing of sorghum beer require water. Two instances where it had rained substantially illustrate the potency of water. The one was a sudden downpour which caught pilgrims unawares and out in the open. Being drenched to this degree was promoted by the functionaries as being nature's cleaning ritual. Another cleansing occurred when, due to extreme rain some years ago, a flash-flood swept through the Tempeleng site. This washed away the filth of human habitation along with the domestic utensils and belongings of those who were too slow to clamber to higher ground. Concerning this event, an important prophet remarked that the flash-flood was good in that God was cleaning the space of human contaminants. For others, external aspects are very personal. On one occasion a journeyer had been carrying a purple candle around

all day but could not find the place for it to be placed and lit. Dejected, and almost flippantly entering a hut shrine, he became immediately sure that it was here that he should place his candle. Perhaps the combination of circumstances, or the tangible presence palpable at the shrine contributed to the enhanced experience of that moment. On another occasion, a journeyer was distraught that the candle she was trying to light kept dying, consequently reading this as a bad omen.

As with the case at Motouleng, pilgrims to the Mautse Valley take certain items home with them. The water collected from the Taung Falls, Moshoeshe's spring, the fountain at Yunivesithi or the water seeping through the rock on the other side of Difletseng is sought after. Furthermore, the sehwasho from Nkokomohi and plant materials such as mphepha and others are harvested for personal as well as commercial purposes.

The idealised version of the Mautse experience as sacred site and where special activities take place and the divine is encountered, is but only a part of the pilgrimage reality. The other part, i.e. the mundane activities and experiences that make up journeys to Mautse, present a much harsher and harder reality. In the first instance, as is the case at Motouleng, there are no amenities at the Mautse site. Pilgrims urinate and defecate behind bushes and rocks. Keeping these secular spaces apart from the sacred spaces is sometimes challenging. Plastic bags, wrappers and other waste products are not disposed of responsibly, but instead are thrown on heaps. The ash from fires and the remnants of ritual activities also make their way to these offal areas. On a weekly basis farm workers drive into the site with tractor and trailer to try and collect this garbage. The inaccessibility of many of the stations, however, means that they are not serviced.

Secondly, water is collected from the stream, waterfall and fountains for both domestic and spiritual use. It is an arduous and back-breaking task carrying 20 or 25 litre containers of water over rough terrain. Some stations are fortunate enough to lie in catchment areas where large and smaller containers are permanently placed to receive these waters. The collecting of wood and fuel for fires is another important task. All food preparation takes place on open fires and they are simple, one-pot meals; mostly vegetable or chicken stews served with pap. Of course, the purpose of one's journey, the length of one's stay and the level of one's progress determine the type of food that pilgrims eat. Three-legged black pots are seldom not at work. Without the luxury of refrigeration food perishes quickly, and items must all be tightly sealed in plastic buckets or

other containers to keep it from the rats and other creatures. Strictly speaking these rats may not be killed and neither may any of the other animals, including snakes or rock rabbits.

Thirdly, sleeping out in the open in the summer is bearable and having to deal with mosquitoes and other insects is part of the experience, with the burning of dry cow-dung as an insect repellent. Sleeping under the stars in the winter is an entirely different matter. At the more settled stations enclosed sleeping quarters have been built. Here pilgrims sleep on a sleeping mat placed on the mud and dung floors, with a couple of blankets. A communal urinal pot is mostly kept in the corner.

The perpetual ritual performances of the smaller daily pilgrimages undertaken to special stations and localities in the Valley have become a living, integral part of the communal pilgrimage-life to the Mautse Valley. For some pilgrims, this living, continuous pilgrimage-activity is more pronounced since they also tour the entire Valley's shrines and stations. Those on longer journeys become a child and supplicant of each station, before moving to the next. For some the process is arduous and lengthy, and not just a matter of stopping off at each station during the course of a day. Video footage captured by a group of *Christen Bediening* members visiting the site in 2000, for example, shows interviews held with a pilgrim at Tempeleng. As my fieldwork progressed, I had encountered this same pilgrim as resident of a number of different significant shrines or stations. She was touring the site and taking advantage of the different services, prayers and healing approaches offered at the various localities. Nearing the conclusion of her commission, she expressed looking forward to going home. For other pilgrims, the focus of their journey is one, or maybe a second station.

5.4 Eastern Free State pilgrimages in a nutshell

Pilgrimages to the sacred sites of Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng in the eastern Free State are what we might conceive of as domestic, local pilgrimages. For the most part these are small-scale journeys to these revered places with the majority of site users undertaking individualistic journeys. This, however, does not mean that they travel alone. Commonly family and/or friends accompany the person on pilgrimage, or leeto, as Sesotho-speakers refer to such travels. Eade and Sallnow (1991:16) refer to these companions as lay helpers.

These journeys and excursions are unlike the formally organised, traditional religious, group pilgrimages which so often come to mind when thinking about Indian, Islamic or European pilgrimages (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:9; Margry 2008:13-14; Margry & Post 1998:74). Furthermore, they are unlike the ZCC's mass trek to Moria, Polokwane, over the Easter weekend (Mueller 2008; Müller 2011), or the 80-kilometre Shembe Nazarite pilgrimage up the Nhlankakazi mountain in KwaZulu-Natal. Instead, these pilgrimages share commonalities with the domestic pilgrimages such as that to the Mwali cult in Zimbabwe (cf. Nthoi 2006).

Habitually undertaken over weekends, the end of the month, on long weekends and on special occasions such as Easter and at the end of August and October, hundreds of lone journeyers or small groups visit these sites in the eastern Free State. Pilgrims arrive at the sites in buses, chartered minibus taxis, in *four-plus-one* taxis¹⁰, via personal transportation, or on foot. In Image 5.33 we see such a group of pilgrims readying to cross the river at Motouleng. Denominational groups invariably arrive already dressed in their Zionist or Apostolic church-specific dress, and some traditional practitioners travel in their full cloth, bead and barefoot attire without any feelings of self-consciousness. Individualistic journeys are driven by motives that are different to those proffered by pilgrims who journey on group pilgrimages. However, individualistically motivated travellers are also found travelling on these group pilgrimages. Such journeys are often undertaken with great personal sacrifice, the most obvious challenges involving financial implications. However, the toll on the body and health of pilgrims, particularly those on lengthy quests, may also be profound.

By way of conclusion, one way to think of the user-communities at the sacred sites is to see them as predominantly traditional practitioners and their neophytes and clients, and their organised religious counterparts. A second is conceiving of site users as occasional or more permanent pilgrims. In addition, a third is envisaging the user-communities as consisting of people with collective allegiances such as those belonging to AICs; official Catholic and Methodist denominations; and traditional or indigenous believers and practitioners. The spiritual leaders and ritual functionaries are closely aligned to these groups. Trainees of various kinds, including faith healing and traditional practitioner (diviner-healer) apprentices, make up an important cohort of

¹⁰ In local vernacular a *four-plus-one* taxi is typically a four-door sedan motor vehicle. The practice is that one passenger sits in the front passenger seat, and three in the rear; thus making up the 'four' and the driver, the 'plus one'. These taxis are differentiated from the common minibus taxis that accommodate anything from nine commuters.

site users who often are responding to a calling. Familial groups travelling to the sites to perform obligatory rituals, and journeyers seeking healing of both physical and spiritual ills are common. Ordinary lay folk accompany *formal* site users on initial visits to the sites, and may then visit and bring provisions or act as witnesses if the pilgrim remains at the site for some time. Then, there are also visitors who do so for merely touristic reasons. I witnessed bus loads of school children or university students from Lesotho visiting the sites as important places of cultural heritage. And, lastly, curious individuals or small groups are also often spotted at the sites. It is this fluid and unbounded community of site users with its diverse intentionality and narrative framing to whom I have paid attention in this chapter.

A final thought is appropriate to explain my use of the notion of ‘unbounded communities’. Pilgrim communities, more so than other non-bounded groups and communities, are even more fluid because they are constantly coming and going, arriving and returning. Added to this, the many different kinds of pilgrims who visit the same sites come with vastly different ideas, expectations and expressions of their desires. It is for these reasons and more, that these pilgrim communities are even more difficult to demarcate. Pilgrim communities the world over are diverse, and are acknowledged as such by all the leading scholars in the field of pilgrimage studies.



Image 5.33: Pilgrims at the river crossing at Motouleng © 2008

CHAPTER 6

MOTIVATIONS FOR EASTERN FREE STATE PILGRIMAGING

6.1 General

Scientific records portray a long history of sacred journeying. The suggestion is that it is embedded in early humans' nomadic lives as they sought resources for their survival, imprinting on our very beings, on the one hand, a need to move, but also on the other, to ensure health, we seek time out of time (cf. Roos 2006:26-29). The urge or intent to journey is so compelling that pilgrims often report not knowing, rationally, why they have this need, but just that it exists and must be heeded.

The purposes and intentions for people undertaking sacred travel are manifold. Some motivations include (Roos 2006:28): veneration; fulfilment of vows or promises; renewal of faith and thanksgiving; meditation and reflection; to confess sins; to request guidance; to pray for others; to ask for healing; as part of spiritual training or initiation; to process loss, recovery, reconciliation and outrage; to celebrate agricultural cycles; as well as for purposes of transformation, companionship, social fashion, commerce, marriage or even crime. In this chapter, I present the pilgrims' motivations for undertaking eastern Free State pilgrimages to Mantsopa, Motouleng and Mautse.

6.2 Motivations for journeys to Mantsopa, Motouleng and Mautse

The following overarching reasons¹ for participating in pilgrimages may be discerned from the data collected at Mantsopa, Motouleng and Mautse. It should be borne in mind that the distinctions I make are arbitrary and for analytic ends alone. In reality, pilgrims to the eastern Free State sites express any combination of a number of reasons for undergoing such travels. The eight broad categories of motivations relate to religion and faith; individual and group healing; social cohesion, group and social bonding; reflection, contemplation, finding purpose and roots; seeking help and

¹ Cf. Nthoi (2006:1, 83-85, 136); Winkelman and Dubisch (2005:xiii, xiv, xxvii, xxxvi); Frey (1998) for common motivations for embarking on pilgrimages.

assistance, finding ancestor linkages, securing blessings/fortune; recreation, renewal, escape from work and city; political reclaiming (contesting the site/space); and ancestor commission/instruction.

A holiness about it

The first, almost automatic responses that pilgrims give for embarking on such journeys comprise *to pray and make requests, and to report*. We could think of these motivations as relating to religion and faith. Divine beings (deities) are the targets of these appeals and prayers, signalling belief in the supernatural and consequently in their potency. The reverence with which site users approach and first encounter the sites is obvious in their immediate demeanour. Gifts of announcement and prayer rituals at entrances and at altars on the way *guide* the ritual process. Not only do these rituals set the tone for the rest of the journey, but it would seem that the success of the journey depends on the almost primal need to perform them *right*, or to the best of the visitor's ability. Barefooted pilgrims arrive and then kneel, light candles, liberally sprinkle snuff-tobacco and vocally engage ancestors (badimo) and Modimo (God) with song and prayer. The prayer and asking are ritual action processes that are often repeated more than once. Such performances of respect are repeated as journeyers encounter altars and stations along their way. Instead of petering out, the verve with which announcements and prayer requests are undertaken seems to gain momentum and intensity as pilgrims move along the paths from station to station. Such prayer and request rituals are clearly embodied performances of the pilgrims' faith. For some pilgrims these journeys then become ecstatic experiences in and of themselves. Few would not want, or actively pursue such an outcome.

I remember my first visit to Motouleng in particular detail, funnily enough years before I would become involved in the larger project. To this day the majesty of encountering the cave overhang, its cavernous interior and its people for the first time resonates at a core level. I equate it with the awe felt at entering and attending services at St Paul's Cathedral or St Peter's Basilica (in London and the Vatican City respectively). I remain awestruck! Moreover, this was a reaction from a detached touristic visitor (then).

The interview extract below sheds light on the above-mentioned aspects of pilgrimaging. Besides it being a narration about a particular place and the events that occurred at that place on that day, certain general deductions can be made about the meaning of the place and the event. It imparts

the considered and reflective process of meaning making. I found it necessary to edit the citation a little to promote the readability and it is not presented in dialogue form with questions and answers. Rather, the reported speech, indirect statements and indirect questions are presented in regular text – here I am narrating. Italicised text represents the direct speech of the informant that I have woven into the narrative; a procedure that I use from this point onwards and which will not be explained at every occurrence.

After the Cave Sunday Service at the St Augustine's Priory at Modderpoort in 2008, I had the opportunity to speak with the Sub-Dean of the Cathedral of Bloemfontein – who refers to himself as *a happy and honourary African*. During the conversation, I asked him about the significance of that day and service. This is what he said: *That is a very complex question, because the significance of today, actually works in different layers like the onion skin. I think the official significance of today, for the diocese of the Free State, is a remembrance of the first missionaries who came from England to bring the Christian faith in the 1860s. And we read from the memoirs and journals that they found this cave and excavated it so that they could set themselves up in it. And they excavated it further, sanded it and built up a wall to make shelter for themselves for worship, for sleeping and a place to eat. Today for the people...of the Anglicans of the dioceses of the Free State, this is a celebration of the arrival of Christianity. And it was focused on that cave until other buildings were built for a more comfortable and regularised existence. That would be the official and historical significance.*

Others would see today...a different kind of significance. They would see today as a traditional significance; in this cave they believed that their ancestors worshiped. Whether that is true, is still very much a part of academic research with no clear answers either way. But that's what the people today would want to

celebrate and commemorate; the badimo (the ancestors) who were here and whose spirits are here. The same people would see the special significance of one person, and that is the prophetess Mantsopa. She lived around these parts. The archaeological research that we have done would indicate that, contrary to popular belief, she did not live in this cave. That research indicates that she had caves on the other side of this site, quite a way away near her spring. And that's where she operated, and she probably came here to visit the missionaries. That's why she came here. But the jury is out under those who choose to ignore that evidence, and stick to their belief and their own traditions. So they would come here remembering Mantsopa, who was a great traditional prophetess in what we now call the Kingdom of Lesotho. She was a great friend of the great King Moshoeshoe I, and so they would feel that they are linking back to their roots in terms of who ruled this area. And Mantsopa would play a key role in that, as the one who made the bridge between traditional religion and traditional experience and this new religion of Christianity. She was baptised before she died. In fact the plan was that Moshoeshoe I and she were going to be baptised together, but unfortunately he died a few days before that was due to take place.

There is yet another layer as I perceived as a white European [from Brittan] that this place has for many black Africans, a significance in terms of healing. This is a sacred place. It's a place that

has a magic about it. And so some people will come and gather herbs and plants. They would scratch bits of the rock and they would take those artefacts away, believing that because they come from this place, they have miraculous powers. And they are something that they can put their faith and their trust in. Now those are the layers as I perceive them, but it's not actually like the layers from the onion because you can't peel them neatly; there is a lot of overlap. And so people who come from Mantsopa will also be coming for the magic; people who are coming to celebrate the Anglican heritage of this place will also be coming for the badimo. Therefore you actually cannot discriminate clearly the reasons for people coming here.

For him, there is also a personal significance. He narrates that *as someone who has worked in South Africa for just four years, this place for me has holiness about it as a Christian. It's where the faith was first celebrated in these parts. It has been a place of education and sharing of the faith for decades. And that for me rubs off not only from the stones of the buildings but the stones of the mountains here. We know that the monks have a secret place on top of the mountains here where there was a natural rock pool, where they used to ride up and bathe in the summer. This place has Christianity rubbed up against it in a unique way, and for me I feel that as a Christian. But I also celebrate what it means for African people, to explore and appropriate and culturise Christianity for their generation, which takes account of their traditional religion and practices.*

He continues that, *this event and this place is actually a huge challenge to organised religion. It is a challenge actually to say, what is an appropriate expression of, in this case, Anglican Christianity in 21st century Africa? So this place and this event actually is a massive challenge to us. A challenge, which, dare I say, the Anglican Church is struggling to face. That, for me, is what*

today is all about. It is a lot of hard work and preparation, a huge undertaking to put this event together. But it is worth it...We do it once a year, although we are tired at the end of it, we do it joyfully because the experience that people have is very, very special!

Gauging that at least 2000 people received Holy Communion during the service, he roughly estimates that there must have been around 3000 people in attendance, including the Bishop of Cape Town who officiated over the entire event.

His response to the question of whether this event could and/or should be referred to as a pilgrimage interested me. *That is a very interesting word*, he said, *because it has a European connotation, and we understand that from the great pilgrimage sites of Santiago de Compostela and all the other traditional European pilgrimage sites. I don't think we can interpret it in that European way. Certainly, there is a journey involved because everybody set out to travel here. And some of them have set out very early, and many of them will have travelled together like those pilgrims to Canterbury. They will have actually been in groups, they will have shared transport, they will have what we call 'pad-kos' – they will have food for the road that they will share together, so they will have had that fellowship. Many of them would have simply come as husband, wife, and a child in a car and here they are...It is multi-layered.*

He continues, saying that pilgrimage is often used as a *biblical metaphor...In that sense it is a spiritual pilgrimage. However, every act of worship is a spiritual pilgrimage because we would hope that people grow through exposure to the word and sacraments and that they move on a journey. But to say that this is spiritual pilgrimage in that European sense of the word, I don't think it would be fair to say that. But it's certainly an occasion that many would not dream of missing.*

Asking him how the Anglican Church deals with the different ritual traditions encountered on the day, but also those of day-to-day site users, and whether there is a convergence of ritual tracks, he responded as follows. *I think at this stage it's a very separate track of rituals. The Anglicans own this property and have done since the middle of the 19th century. There is no question about ownership...And to a certain extent, we call the shots, but we have a very relaxed and generous attitude towards people of other religious traditions visiting here. The cave which is the focus for many, is available to people of many religions and norms and there are those who come simply for academic interest and those who come for the Christian interest and there are those who come from traditional African religious interests. They are welcomed here. They come and they worship in their own way and respect is the key word. We hope that what we do as Christians does not offend others here. And we would hope that what they intend to do here or that what they need to do here will not offend others.*

As a Church, he explains its desire to *pattern an appropriate Anglican spirituality for Africa in the 21st century. Because traditional experience of Africans is not going away, it remains very much part of the domestic life of many of our paid up members. And we are well aware that those who come to church on Sunday and are very faithful in participating in the sacraments and the likes of the church will also practice traditional customs at home particularly around the...shall we say liminal moments in life; birth, marriage, death, sickness. Those liminal moments will call upon the Church but they will also utilise their own*

traditional practices and belief. What, and this is a personal point of view...I feel and think the institutional church is struggling to make sense of that dichotomy in individual people's life.

Prodding him on whether there is room for African expressions within the Anglican Church, he responds with this track of reasoning. *Many black Africans will say, if you look at the Roman model of the Cult of the Saints, what is the difference between that and the ancestor worship? Actually there is no difference at all. In Basotho culture when animals are killed almost every time it's a thanksgiving, it's not an appeasement. It is a celebration with the saints, not to the saints, not for the saints but with the saints. Now that varies in different cultures within Southern Africa...But in this part of the world, Basotho traditional religion is quite gentle really. Some of the practicalities of...sacrifice is very gentle. It is not atonement, certainly in my reading of that tradition, it is not atonement, it is not appeasement, it is thanksgiving.*

If it were atonement it would be difficult for Christians, he says, *who see Calvary as the one and only sacrifice which in the Eucharist or the mass is simply made anamnesis of, it is recalled it is not repeated. The epiclesis is there to call the spirits to transform and not to re-create, re-effect the sacrifices; the sacrifice is efficacious once and for all at Calvary.*

[Sub-Dean, Modderpoort 2008-08-10]

The Cave Church Sunday Service at Modderpoort is depicted in Image 6.1 below.

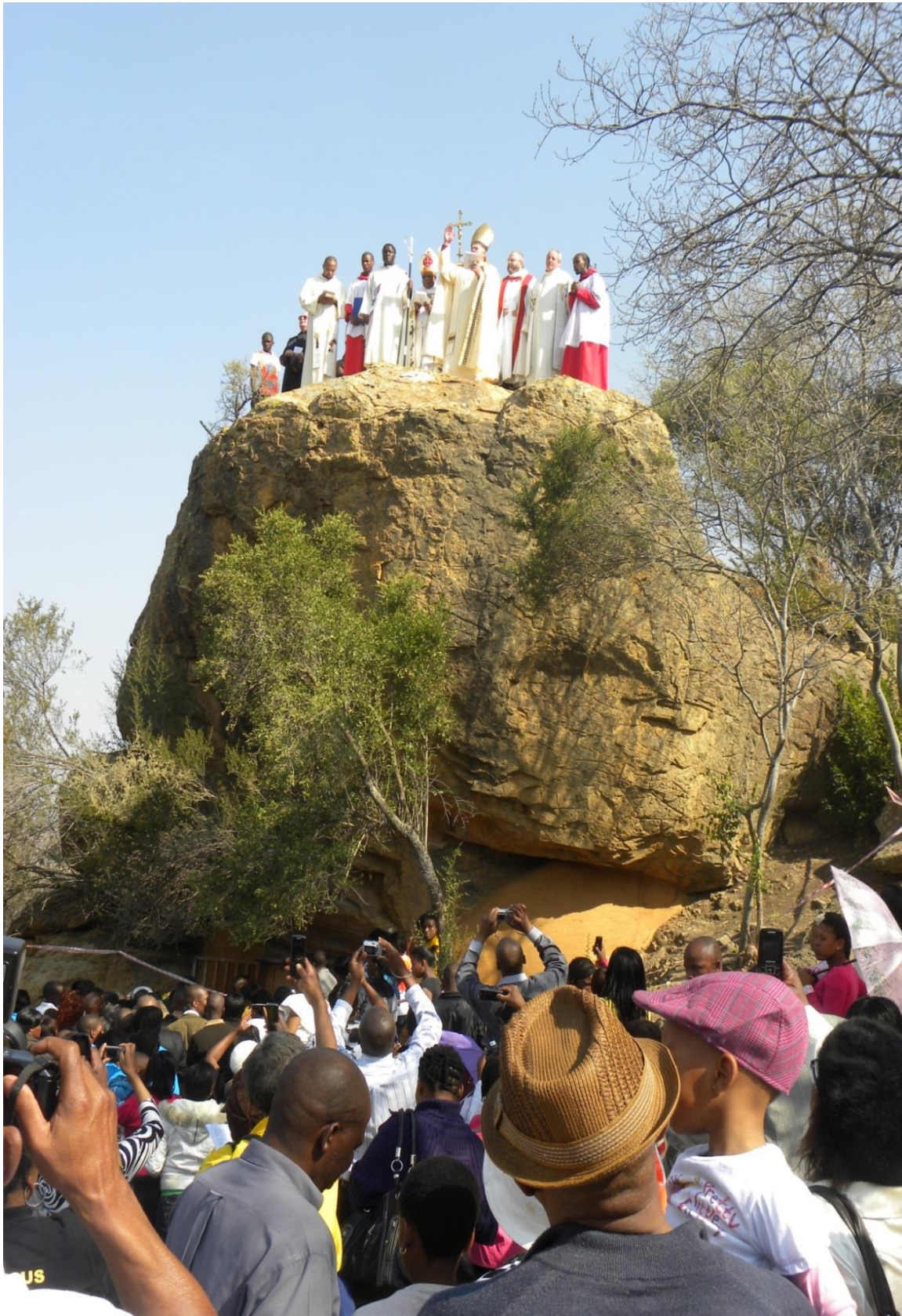


Image 6.1: Pilgrims queuing to enter Mantsopa's cave, and above, the Bishop about to give the benediction at the Cave Sunday Service © 2010 (PJ Nel)

Some may feel it inappropriate to include this interview, questioning the value that this white Dean is able to bring to a discussion on pilgrimages in Africa, especially since he has only been in the country for a few years. My reasoning for its inclusion is that although the Dean is not a pilgrim, he remains a site user and is also involved in the Church on whose property the Cave Service gathering takes place. In my view, the inclusion of this interview provides a voice from a church official.

A number of points stand out from the interview. On numerous occasions the informant mentions the multi-layered quality of the meanings associated with the place and the event. Included here are the official Anglican significance for both the Church and the church members; views held by more traditionally oriented visitors; ideas about healing; and metaphorical ideas about spiritual journeys. The idea of specialness or sacrality is also evident in his narration of the place. Furthermore, he considers the gathering on the day of the Cave Service as pilgrimage, although he is quick to add that it is different from European pilgrimages. Matters of ownership come through in this interview, as does the idea of hybridity. He explains that he has seen how embedded more traditional religious ideas are in the everyday spiritual expressions of the congregants.

Cosmological underpinnings

It is important that I say something about the pilgrims' cosmology, worldview, or their modes of thought. Without exception, every pilgrim I spoke to conceives of himself or herself as Christian. Enquiring as to the possible dissonance between mainline Christian doctrine and more *traditional* African beliefs and practices, informants had the following to say: *We are Christian! And, what we are doing here, is complying with and performing our culture.* Although Wreford refers specifically to the fluidity of Christian beliefs and traditional healer practices, a state she calls "porous positions on the spiritual" (2008:58-59), I contend it effectively sums up this (seamless) incorporation of both Christian and traditional cosmological conceptions.

However, groups and individuals may have weaker or stronger allegiances with traditional spirituality, but at the sites these differences are not always obvious. Some groups might not engage in the sacrificial slaughter of animals but this does not necessarily imply that aspects of ancestor belief are absent. Most spiritual leaders do not dwell on the difference between Christianity and traditional religion, and questioning along these lines is regarded as irrelevant.

Others maintain a conflict-free and far more fluid position, recite mixed formulae, and perform ritual action effortlessly. Gogo Monica is such a functionary and is very creative and imaginative in this regard. In an old testament-type of sacrifice, she inserts Catholic recitations, and seamlessly moves to indigenous chants and prayers from all traditions in the span of a single ritual (cf. Image 6.2). This is testament to the fact that that which may be observed by outsiders as syncretism is in fact a representation of hybridity as religious norm (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:10; Margry 2008:33; Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:85). Metaphorically, Gogo Monica compared herself with a teacher who teaches geometry, language and science. In the same way, she refers to herself as three in one: prophet, sangoma and faith healer. These also point to the services that one person may offer, without any experience of dissonance or conflict.



Image 6.2: Gogo Monica and her apprentices preparing for a ritual © 2008

Thoughts on religious syncretism and hybridity at the sites

To help think through the question of syncretism and hybridity, let's consider the following. If one were to have two normative systems such as that of the Anglican and Islamic faiths, the mixture or overlap can be termed and interpreted as syncretism. However, when we speak of *African Traditional Religion* we cannot do this because there is no dogma or framework to use in an authoritative way to show this normative text; it simply does not exist. What we do have is already a mix and what we can say with certainty is that a traditional practitioner (e.g. sangoma) already has a strong Christian influence. In her/his view though, this is *traditional*, and does not constitute a mixture. We do not have a purely normative view of this thing termed traditional South African religion.

Therefore, how do you compare these two things, when for one of them you already do not have a normative text, so that this may be called syncretism, for that which is perceived to be the original, a genuine version, is already a hybrid? This expression is simply a further variant of the earlier hybrid. The more contact with Apostolic or Independent Churches at the sites, the more this hybrid is plumping out and evolving. There is an interesting inventiveness and imaginativeness, but it is not controlled. In fact, each event directs this; it depends on how inspired the participants feel at the time.

Admittedly, at some point in history a real traditional version existed, before missionary influence. However, today, we cannot determine that. What we do have is a form of essentialising; an essentialist view is being adopted and ascribed as the normative system. It is a projection (cf. Edward Said 1978) of African Indigenous Religion, as it is believed to be. It is only a constructed thing by missiologists, Europeans, and academics. Mbiti for example, adheres to this idea by adding further features he believes to be related to African Religion. However, it has never existed in this way. Other indigenous adherents such as Mathole Motshekga and Credo Mutwa give it an Egyptological flavour or sheen. Again, it does not/never existed in this way; it is an ideologising and essentialising of what there is. In other religions you have the control point of a book religion, i.e. the normative point. They were formalised. It is a doctrine; a fixed reference point. What we therefore have at the sacred sites is an evolving hybridity that is becoming broader and richer. In this regard, Chidester (2011:157-168), for example, provides an analysis of Motshekga's theosophy from which it is evident that a kind of *African* religion predating Christianity is promoted, relying on old Egyptian symbols and skewed Christian concepts.

Pilgrimage site users conceive of their beliefs and practices as 'authentic'; not a composite of two or three other systems. Pilgrims come with a form of hybridity and then encounter other groups who too have their own form of hybridity. Each borrows from the other and incorporates it into their own repertoire, thus expanding this hybridity further. A tangible example that I witnessed not too long ago was the use of eastern incense at one of the stations.

On a simplistic level site users distinguish a supreme being (Modimo) and ancestors (badimo) (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:76-77; Setiloane 1988:29-33). The supreme being is the remote

creator and is equated with the Christian God. This brings me to the notion of ancestors; a mediating category of beings and spirits that often intercede on behalf of humans. Firstly, some lay understandings include conceptions of ancestors as a particular layer of worshiped deities in the supernatural pantheon, i.e. everything to do with ancestors is simultaneously relegated to the ranks of religion. Secondly, ancestors are viewed as a non-physical extension of the social group; generations going back as far as human memory extends. In the final instance, an array of spirits and beings are lumped together in the collective category of ancestors.

Although a significant body of knowledge exists, allow me to briefly and simply conceptualise what the category of spirits and beings means. The figure below (Figure 6.1) diagrammatically represents this conceptualisation of different beings and spirits. Belonging to the lowest stratum, the descent group pantheon are the most recently deceased. Respectively referred to as lineage and clan ancestors, these agnates can be traced back to common and founding predecessors of the patrilineage. Often referred to as the *shades* or *living dead* because of their genealogical proximity to the living, they frequently have human-like qualities such as being quick-tempered or jealous. The next layer of spirit beings is commonly referred to as the River People, Forest People, and Mountain People. The calling to traditional practitioners is often closely related to the revelations of these spirits. In an ascending hierarchy in which sacred power increases commensurately, the badimo/amakosi (higher spirits) are encountered below the supreme being (Modimo/uThixo) (cf. Setiloane 1988:29-33). For some, on a par with the badimo, one finds a category of foreign spirits. Wreford (2008:59-63) refers to these in isiXhosa as amandiki amandawu – the foreign but powerful spirits of the *other*, i.e. other tribes, neighbouring communities, or from far-off lands. From the interview extracts below, it seems that they are on a level with the River, Forest and Mountain People (between badimo and the living dead). Notwithstanding, they are a complex and revered category of beings.

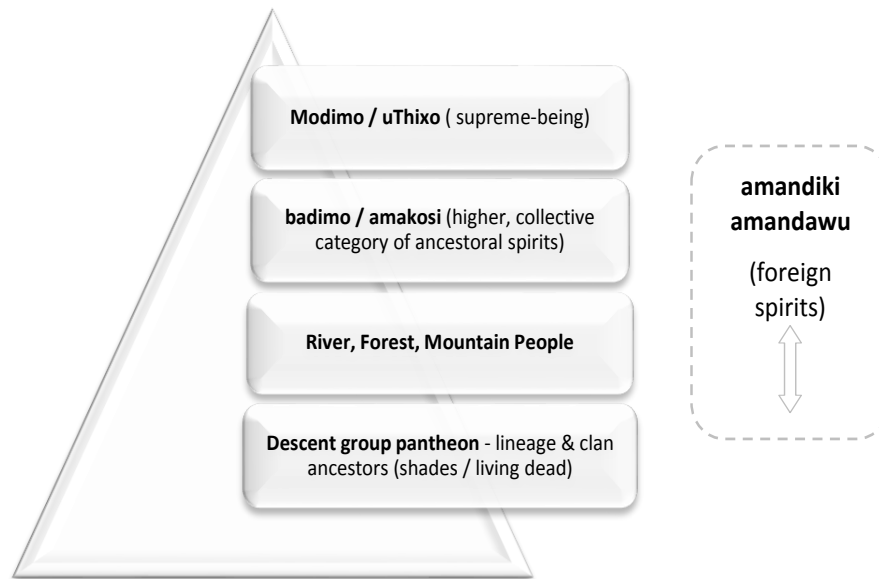


Figure 6.1: Hierarchical conceptualisation of spirits and beings

An extract from an interview conducted in August 2010 with a twice-initiated traditional practitioner (who also happens to be a Lutheran Minister and tertiary-trained professional) is insightful concerning the connection between snakes and ancestors, and his two initiations; the second having been conducted for what he calls Bandawu, clearly connected to Wreford's (2008) amandawu.

We pick up the conversation where I am asking him whether he is positive that the snake(s) he came across is/are linked to the ancestral world. *Yes. I have an experience with it. Growing up in primary school days, we had to cross over a forest which had a small river. I was alone, going to school late. There it was outside the water. A big one. I had time to look at it, and it looked back at me, and did nothing.* That was Mag's third encounter with snakes. Continuing, he tells us that *the fourth encounter was when we were swimming. I don't know what happened there, and I could not see properly in the water.* Contextualising his tale he explains that: *growing up as boys, we would cut a roof-top off a car and use it as a boat or raft. It overturned in the*

deepest end of the river. I was the only one who could swim. But I was pulled out of the deepest part. Asking him to elaborate on the snake, he clarifies that: *it was the type that is found in the river. It was like walking on water, and not drowning.* We'd been having a conversation about mermaids earlier. To be sure I understood he put it plainly: *I would not say mermaid, but I saw this, as I was in the water.*

Connecting his experiences with snakes, Mag goes on to give some details about his traditional practitioner training and initiation. *We did two initiations...both water and land ancestors. We were initiated on Saturday and on Sunday we were to go to a river...People had to work very hard to prepare me to go into the river in terms of the dress code and medicinal preparation, because we are not the same and these preparations are also not the same. They had to ask the water ancestors how my preparations should be. I was going for the Bandawu initiation. This was the second one [initiation]. The first one was OK. It was the land initiation – where you take blood and take it out [vomit it up]. It is also very dangerous. It is called Nthwaso. In Zulu they*

say: *Nga le phusa nga le phalaza*, meaning I drank it, to take out. This is to test if you are ready. You then go into a trance. Then they prepared us, and looking at the bones they told us that we cannot go; it was a difficult initiation. Most of them were taken into the water with the white cross, for *Bandawu*. I did not go with the same. I went in a *njethi*. I have not seen any research about the meaning of the colours. This is a cloth, and it has a meaning – how you use it, how you wrap yourself. They used the pearl, it used to be called the queen’s necklace; and I went to the river. They only found the pearls at 12:00 midday, as it took long to find the queen pearls, and we went to the river at 14:00. I was in a trance, but I know we went to the deepest point, and that’s when you meet the water snake which wraps around you and licks you. The enamel bowl is used to get soil from the bottom of the river. It is risky. I came out, and I could hear drums. I was half in a trance, I could now sense that I was coming back, but the drums were loud. I did not drink anything [to make me hallucinate]. They prepare you with drums. You get into a trance because of the music and the drums. That is the importance of the music, as every initiate has their particular song, which takes them into a trance. And the dance is performed with knees on the floor. The songs of *Bandawu* are war songs. The spirit of *Bandawu* demands absolute respect. According to Mag, one satisfies this spirit with

very real dreams. In them, he says: *I always dream going down a river. I come up and we sit and talk.*

Further, Mag shares an important insight about traditional practitioner training and initiation. *You are being prepared*, he says. *Prepared for what to eat and so forth to help the spirit to grow and mature...Initiation is the final stage. It will be training, yes. But I am not training per se. I am training the spirit in me. And when I am sure that the spirit is ready to be initiated...then you are given the blood and other things for initiation.* [Mag, en route to Bloemfontein, 2010-08]

When asked what some of the tools of her trade are used for, a particularly powerful *sangoma* from the Mautse Valley explained that: *The shiny short metal stick is used while praying – I raise it up during a prayer. The longer shiny stick, I use when praying near water, to collect water and performing water rituals. The spears are for *Mondawu*, the water spirit. The palm leaves are for blessing an initiate during gown graduation – you dip it in holy water and spread blessed water onto the clothes with a burning sacrifice.* Further, she explained that there is no danger in the water, but that the spears represent complete armour when performing and visiting the water spirits. [Gogo M, Mautse 2010-05]

Vital force is not used in this context as being synonymous with animism – a belief in spirited objects. When objects such as trees, plants, stones, water, etc. are viewed as spirited, this does not necessarily imply vital force. The way I understand and use animism in this study resonates more closely with Nurit Bird-David’s (1999) cognitive reformulation as a relational epistemology (cf. Ingold), not as a “religion but rather a way of relating to the nonhuman world” (Saliba 2013:21; cf. Roos’ sacralised cosmos 2006:30).

The vital force philosophy, like mana, is the transfer of power/energy from one entity to another. As a guiding framework, the notion of vital force then directs attention, and this attention must be directed by something. Here is an entire symbolic experiential world that induces attention in a particular direction, with particular aims, objectives and goals. Vital force philosophy in this local context is the conduit of attention. It forms part of a cognitive or conceptual map or model. Such a model maps the conceptual relationships that are foundational to explanations of informants' lived experiences (Murchison 2010:139). They become "a reflection of conceptual 'landscapes'" (Murchison 2010:139). When we understand informants' conceptual models, we begin to understand their actions and explanations. Of course, the reverse is also true. By paying close attention to informants' behaviour and interpretations, we slowly open the window to their internal conceptual world, thought processes and categories. The following is a working conceptual model for many site users (cf. Setiloane 1988:29-33).

Part of pilgrim conceptual maps is that a person consists of a material and two non-material attributes: mmele (the physical body), and moya (breath, spirit), and seriti (essence, character, aura) (cf. Gill 1997:53; Kriel 1997:2; Comaroff 1985:82). The separation of mind and body – the Cartesian duality so strongly emphasised in Western thought and biomedicine – is a limiting view here, although there seems to be an inclination to consolidate the two non-material attributes. Developing this notion of the whole further, so too an individual always forms part of a family and community. Moreover, each component part of the person is not seen (or treated) in isolation. Instead, each influences the other and therefore needs to be considered in totality to ensure a state of overall wellness (cf. Gill 1997:51; Comaroff 1985:82-84). Healing can therefore not be viewed as exclusively addressing physical symptoms or a private resolution of problems. Rather, it is collective, communal and public. Integral parts of this collective constitute ancestors in all their guises. Ancestors in pilgrim cosmology are pivotal (cf. Wreford 2008:54, 57; Gill 1997:51). In fact, there is an existing reciprocity between pilgrims and ancestors. Wreford writes "in return for submission to the numinous that empowers the resolution of ancestral patterns – of debt, grudges, regrets, and so on – the wounded ones are healed and may eventually become healers themselves" (2008:55). This demonstrates the cyclical and interrelated nature of such cosmological underpinnings.

A fourth attribute contained within the universe and possessed by God and the deities, humans, animals, plants, and places is matla (cf. Gill 1997:52; Kriel 1997:3). Literally translated, matla is power or strength (Casalis 1998:86, 117). Anthropologically, it is understood as *vital force*. One's

vital force can be supplemented via the intercessions of ancestors deriving a portion from the supreme being and in turn strengthening the seriti (cf. Gill 1997:52-54). Similarly, the water that filters through the sandstone rocks or bubbles up from fountains is considered holy, or said differently, is deemed to possess significant power. Soil and clay (sehwashho) harvested from the sites is also thought to be considerably potent, as are herbaceous and bulbous plants growing naturally at the sites. These plant materials, by virtue of being powerful plants, but also because they grow at these sacred places, serve as primary ingredients for an array of traditional medicines. Each of these is actively sought and harvested at the sites and used during ritual activities on site, or taken home for later use. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous characters harvest the plants to the point of depletion to sell at traditional muthi (medicine) markets in urban areas. Elliot Ndlovu, a renowned traditional practitioner, raises similar arguments and, unlike these swindlers, he is making it his life's work to educate his peers and community members. He grows these plant types at his ancestral home in the KwaZulu-Natal side of the Drakensberg mountains (Reeder 2011).

Having a strong seriti is desirable. Traditional practitioners and their organised religious counterparts seek to have an essence that is able to resist or is immune to the malicious trickery of evil or the malevolent acts of disease-causing agents. That the sacred sites of the eastern Free State are considered places where this can be achieved is a major motivator for undertaking pilgrimages.

It is interesting that Comaroff (1985:84) makes the following distinction regarding ritual practice: There are rites of ho alafa, which means to *heal* or *reconstitute*; and there are rituals of ho thaya, which means to *strengthen* or to *confirm*. It is clear that they are also two dimensions subsumed in the ritual of pilgrimages – as motivations for undertaking journeys.

What I have so far is an understanding that the sites are powerful. People coming to the sites can harness this power in various ways. Having harnessed this power, pilgrims are strengthened. What we have not yet considered is what needs to be strengthened and why. If in this cosmological conception it is accepted that sometimes things just happen – people simply become ill or experience misfortune – it is accepted as a natural course of events. However, sometimes there is no reasonable explanation for the persistence or severity of ill health or misfortune (in its broadest sense). This means that something or someone must be responsible for causing such events or circumstances. Kriel (1997:7) introduced the concept of risology to

explain that the illness episode or bad luck can be ascribed to agentive forces or powers, i.e. disease-causing agents. The supreme being and ancestors are sometimes believed to be such agents. However, and this is the point I wish to make, it sometimes happens that fellow human beings are *senders*. Cases of accidental transmission of misfortune are more easily remedied. Such bad luck or ill health is the result of transgressing taboos. Conversely, when the sender intends to cause harm, what we call witchcraft, it takes much more than a simple sacrifice to forestall it. Such senders are referred to as baloi (Kriel 1997:11-12; Comaroff 1985:84). Diagnosing and correcting cases of witchcraft sometimes brings people to the sacred sites.

One should also account for the fact that interactions with the ancestors and spirits are not always positive. Some people are burdened with their ancestor contact and this may be perceived as affliction. Often the ancestors are not understood, and demands are often clouded in uncertainty. Some of the pilgrims remaining at the sites for some time are slightly confused and uncertain about ancestor commissions. It is just to say that ancestor (spirit) involvement is not always positive and may indeed be quite troublesome.

Because time is not understood in a linear fashion, but cyclically within this pilgrim cosmology, it allows for the acceptance of different ontological realities. Expressions such as living in two worlds – as with the title of Vera Bührmann’s book (1986) – and the parallel universes of the here-and-now world and the world-of-the-ancestors are accepted as existing simultaneously. Said differently, and central to an analysis presented later, is that such a temporal conception “allows for an acceptance of non-material realities” (Wreford 2008:56) – realities which are equally real for pilgrims to the hard-surfaced material realities of the physical surrounds. Hammond-Tooke (1989:19, 21) ascribes these realities to differing “modes of thought” that are not necessarily unintelligible, but “that their premises are opaque to us” and Wreford minces no words with a citation from Shweder (1991:38, cited in 2008:114) that there is “more than one objective world”.

The reality of the presence of the ancestors is also expressed through geographic proximity. At Motouleng the belief exists that the cave is a *gateway* to the ancestor realm. In an ascending spirituality, the *trembling* of the ancestors can be felt under the feet. They also reside at different locations and are, in a way, just around the corner. A spiritual practitioner at Lesedi in the Mautse Valley believes that he is able to hear the *voices* behind the back of his rock shelter. To him, metaphorically, it is a real *place of God*.

The co-presence of geographic proximity with divine presence is further illustrated by the increased observance by AIC groups seeking to establish themselves at the sites, in particular at Mautse. One notices additional stones marked (with name and date) by specific *orders* of such church groups. A ritual of claiming this site (also perceived to be under divine guidance) is performed and soon, at that very spot, a structure will arise to represent a station of that particular church group. The popularity of the larger sacred sites attracts more groups and they in turn start claiming locations at the sites, with this again sparking visitation (pilgrimage) by followers of the group to that particular locality.

Symbols on rock overhangs and on thatched roofs, such as Biblical verses and graffiti on rocks and cave entrances, remind visitors of the deep-rooted religious and spiritual destinies of pilgrims. Pilgrims who have gone before seem to leave traces at the sites of their spiritual journey, and often leave their names at the localities where they have found healing, comfort or transformation. These traces are silent witnesses of spirited journeyers and reminders to visiting pilgrims of the spiritual destiny they pursue.

Commission and calling

The greatest motivation for pilgrims to go on pilgrimages involves the set of reasons relating to commission and instruction from God and/or ancestors, and/or the yearning and desire for communion; reasons that often have a healing component. Sometimes the commission is revealed in dreams; in illness that does not respond to biomedical, local healer or prophet treatment and intervention; or through misfortune or ill luck that defies reason. However, sometimes the commission to undergo pilgrimages to the sites of the eastern Free State is akin to a relentless compulsion; a deep need or yearning. Below are two extracts from interviews conducted in July 2011, which speak to both, acknowledging a calling and also the narration of the early stages of such a journey. In the one interview, M explains how she had to lose her business before she acknowledged her calling; how all the *clever had to be taken out of her*, before she could even envisage the daunting road that lay ahead. In the other interview, J animatedly gives the details of how rocks spoke to her, her grandmothers galloped like horses across a riverbed, and her having to pass computerised maths tests before being granted admission to the next phase of her journey.

M's leeto (journey) began in 1999 when she was ordered to Mautse. After a six-week sojourn her ancestors instructed that she should phone her mother in Gauteng to come and fetch her. She wasn't destined to go home though. Her leeto was to take her to Motouleng next – where her 'things' already awaited her; the cave where her son was to be born and to which she is still obligated some ten years later.

At Mautse, she first came to a place she would later learn was called *Maseeng* and was then sent to the most holy of holy places, *Tempeleng*. Others remarked at this 'clever' naive one, she told me, who was being released after a month (or so she thought), while they, many of whom had been there years, were still working to the conclusion of their obligation. She tells how she imagined she could speed up the process by anticipating every instruction and message from her forebears by working incessantly.

She relates her first night at *Tempeleng*, where she lay all alone between the trees, with the water pools and the fright/fear throbbing in her head. When she finally fell asleep again a flash of light (mahadima) and wind blew through there, frightening her. Praying, she asked for safe keeping and for the spirits not to frighten her, but requested courage. In reply, the big rock (lefika) spoke in a deep echo, saying that she should not be afraid. After that, she spoke with the spirits for a long time. Later she slept soundly until dawn – no longer afraid of the sounds of the place, when three grandmothers came running thunderously like galloping horses. She explains that, like gazelle, they flew over the rocks ululating as they approached. Almost out of breath they arrived ecstatic that she was truly there. Apparently her grandmother had notified them of her presence, and she had requested them to come and act as guides. The instruction was that she should leave

this place to that called *Maseeng* (the place she did not yet know the name of); the place of children. She had to go there to await further orders. It was there and at the *Yunivesithi* that she was meant to pray and where she revised her tasks/lessons. In particular, she was told to go directly there without detours or delay. It was also there that her ancestors revealed themselves and gave her a new name. With this they gave her her 'certificates' for successfully completing their requisites and told her to next visit Motouleng; the 'big *University* and place of computers', i.e. the control centre. When they revealed the place to her she was astounded by its size as she had never imagined that so many ancestors could sit in council at one place. In particular, her grandmothers sat to one side, with the white one sitting on a chair next to a very large computer, the other behind it. The second typed something in and said: *my child, if only you'll pass the maths, you'll be helping us so*. She typed again, and said: *add the following numbers*. Mentally doing the calculation, J gave the answer which was typed with great joy: *You've got it; you've passed the maths; move on, we are waiting for you*. [J, Motouleng 2011-07]

As if experiencing an intense memory, she gets a far-off look in her eye as she shares, almost as a footnote, the significance of heeding ancestor or familial communications. *Sometimes, the messages are not understood, or you are not listening enough. The whispers with which they may initially communicate will become increasingly loud, like, for example, destroying my business. In my case they had to ensure that people [clients] didn't make their payments to me. They waited until I had really tasted the joys of a good life and then they ripped the carpet from under me; regardless of my plans for my life; regardless of my wants and desires. They will*

keep bothering and pestering you until you have almost no other choice but to heed their call. Back from her reverie, she animatedly narrates how she was well-warned about the consequences if she didn't acknowledge their call. She explains that as a successful business person she didn't take these warnings seriously. Now that she is *ashen-pale from dust and*

hardship constantly finds herself with her hindquarters in the air like a gardener or gravedigger, the warnings she didn't heed, come to her loud with hindsight. They sure took out all my cleverness, she chuckles. She therefore encourages all people who she encounters to be receptive to messages conveyed in dreams. [M, Motouleng 2011-07]

My informants do not regard badimo (ancestors) as gods, and vehemently deny that ancestors are worshiped, but rather that these beings and spirits are revered, appeased and approached. It follows then that healing as a generally conceived motivator for undertaking pilgrimage, is not religious (healing) *per se*, but rather that the sacred power that ancestors possess is harnessed and employed in the reciprocal relationship between the living and the living dead. At the same time, however, I would be remiss if I rejected my informants' claims that many experience the journeys to the sacred sites and the resultant healing as profoundly spiritual. In a conversation with two permanent pilgrims at Motouleng they make a distinction between site users who rely on ancestors almost to the point of worship, and those that claim God alone as spiritual authority in their lives. In the case of the latter, the strong Zionist influence is evident.

The more talkative of the two makes a remarkably insightful distinction – dare I say reminiscent of that drawn by Temples – while explaining the distinction between her use of the phraseology baholo ba hao, your forebears, who function with the sanction (tumello) of God, and ancestors, who are worshiped in their own right as a belief (tumelo) separate from the belief in God. Pensively, her fellow wayfarer describes that there are pilgrims *like us, who believe God is almighty but approachable through the spirit*

(moya). Those most often coming the cave however, he opines, believe that the ancestors (badimo) can disseminate graces (mohau) and power. To this, the other adds: *The former are easily recognised by accrediting all to the power of one God. They frequently and consistently acknowledge God as the director of their lives; the commander-in-chief, as it were. The latter always accredit their badimo, ancestors, as god-like, with a small letter 'g', but also in the plural.* [MS, Motouleng 2011-07]

Not one of the informants I interviewed described their journeying as anything other than for religious purposes. Viewed narrowly this is indicated by the expressions ho rapela (to pray) and ho kopa (to request and appeal). However, it is clear that it encompasses so much more. Ancestor reverence, ancestor remembering, learning their wishes, and being guided by ancestor wisdom

(Bühmann 1986:27) are actively pursued and sought by the vast majority of site users. Pilgrims, both occasional and permanent, indicate that they have come to converse and commune with (their) ancestors and God.² Only one case presented itself where a pair of pilgrims considered their purpose exclusively to pray to God, without the intermediate communion with their or anyone else's guardian angels or *badimo*. They were not coming to pray for themselves, but rather for all those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. Many pilgrims come to all three the sites seeking transformation. Primarily, pilgrims embark on the journey to effect change.

Ancestors are called up in a number of ways, i.e. through ritual gifts of announcement, through singing and dancing around the altar aided by regular rhythmical clapping and drumming, and through the consumption of traditional sorghum beer. I present three instalments aimed at illustrating this. The first has to do with the differently coloured candles that are used (cf. Image 6.3). The second presents a typical greeting, and the third anecdote illustrates perhaps a novel way and explanation of how to achieve this by means of commercial beer.

The lighting of candles is customary when approaching ancestors. The vast majority of pilgrims visiting the sites use snuff-tobacco and whole kernels of maize or sorghum, together with candles as gifts of announcement. On approaching the sites, on prepared altars or naturally occurring surfaces, candles are lit and the gifts are presented. These serve as acknowledgement of reciprocally enmeshed relationships with ancestors, and announcement by these travellers of their intention to visit the sites. Furthermore, they serve as tokens of appeal for successful journeys.

Candles are frequently used during other ritual activities as well. Some, it would seem, prefer only white candles, but others use every conceivable colour. The explanation given is that these coloured candles represent the ancestors of all people (the collective category). The insinuation is that in our rainbow nation no one

can be excluded. In fact, on three separate occasions, two pilgrims from Mautse and one from Motouleng shared that they had (and were proud to have) white ancestors as well. The lighting of a range of coloured candles is a beautiful gesture of inclusive invocation. Seen not only as a gesture, however, it represents an enlargement of kinship boundaries and a redefinition of what it means to be kin. Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo, for example, said, as substantiation of this idea that *All our blood is red even though our skin colour may vary or where we come from differs*.

There is a clear link between the lighting of candles and the customary greeting explained below.

A typical greeting between fellow pilgrims along the paths at Mautse and Motouleng would be to say *Lesedi!*, with the appropriate response being

² The ancestors referred to here comprise the collective, inclusive category and not the limited kinship and territory-specific deceased relatives (cf. the living dead in Figure 6.1).

Kganya! This is said with the accompaniment of cupped handclaps, and the body bowed or even kneeling. *Lesedi* means light or rays of light, and *kganya* (*kgantsha*), to light. A woman called Lesedi explained that her name means *God's light*.

Contained in this greeting is the acknowledgement that life is hard and often coloured very darkly, sometimes so darkly that not only are the shadows recognised, but the abundant sin and evil of humankind is a lived reality. For that reason, when a fellow pilgrim is encountered, the desire is expressed for them to not only be witness to the light, but also henceforth to *walk in the light*.

In addition, this greeting among those who recognise the light in their fellow travellers as those walking in grace, is reminiscent of saying *Namaste*, i.e. the light in me recognises the light in you.

Traditional sorghum beer is a major food of the ancestors. Brewing it according to prescripts and particular criteria for ritual use at the sacred sites is of paramount importance. Weekend visitors can often be seen carrying full 20 litre buckets of beer along the paths to the stations that they will be using as bases for their weekend activities. Normally taking three days to ferment, the beer-making process must therefore have begun at home for these journeyers.

Sitting with NM in her consultation hut one wintery mid-Saturday morning we were exchanging usual pleasantries. About half an hour into the visit, she reaches into a box and retrieves a dumpy bottle of Hansa beer. Without ado she opens it, drinks until the bubbles burn her throat and cause her eyes to water. *Buuurrrp*, she belches

loudly. *I'm just loading some airtime*, she explains. She points at the Hansa bottle, saying *this is MTN and MTN is the best airtime!* She says she has them all: *Vodacom (Black Label)*, *Cell C (Castle)*, and a number of others, and points to the bucket of traditional sorghum beer as well. *There's no denying the importance of the jwala ba setso*, but she says that *MTN works very well; it gets that search-light training for reception*. She says: *here between the mountains signal is not always a sure thing*. And now she laughs from her belly at what I imagine was my astonished face.

I'd like to make two remarks, one about belching and hiccoughing, and another about the beautifully syncretic analogy of airtime. Firstly, belching and hiccoughing (and some other less gracious gaseous emissions) are ascribed to ancestral presence. These are all welcomed without any hint that either is inappropriate or requires apology. Although traditional sorghum beer is essential for the ritual activities, commercial beer with its higher levels of carbonation get burps built up and out with far greater velocity, signalling ancestral presence. Secondly, in our mobile phone dominated worlds, the airtime metaphor is appropriate. That it is used as an analogy that illustrates the almost instantaneous ability to communicate is telling. As I write this I cannot help myself humming, nor resist making a reference to a Sheryl Crow lyric about 'a good beer buzz, early in the morning' (All I wanna do – 'Tuesday night music club' 1994). After all, a good beer buzz certainly does loosen things up! The communion with spirit and enhanced capacity to see, perceive and understand, as indicated with the *search-light* reference, is certainly facilitated. [NM, Mautse 2011-04]

Ancestors are not only called up³, but they leave trails of ancestral evidence (Wreford 2008:137-151), or proofs that serve as signals of pleasure (or displeasure). Certainly not the exclusive domain of pilgrims or pilgrimages, they are integral indications that must be deciphered. They may signal whether an avenue of treatment is having the desired effects, or if new, novel or other approaches should be followed. As a graduation gift I brought a jar of honey and seshweshwe⁴ material; a gesture that my friend was ecstatic about. She furthermore remarked that she had known that there was an ingredient missing from her treatments. My gift was a sign that a little honey would henceforth be her signature item.



Image 6.3: Candles © 2013

³ Cf. Müller's (2011:126) reference to ZCC tea and coffee and the use thereof as a replacement for traditional beer.

⁴ Seshweshwe is a cotton print fabric that is customarily used in making traditional outfits for Basotho women. Brown, blue and red are more time-honoured colours, while an array of new designs and colours are fashionable these days.

The healing net

Whether belonging to Apostolic, ZCC, or Catholic denominational groups or alternatively being a traditional practitioner, a client or a novice, ancestors and the power of healing are foregrounded for journeyers to the sites in the eastern Free State. Healing is a largely undisputed reason to undertake pilgrimages but should not be conceived of in narrow terms. Instead, healing may be directed at the individual or group (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991:16). If we consider Winkelman and Dubisch's (2005:x) introduction of the concept *biopsychosociospiritual*, then the healing effects of pilgrimage may include Scheper-Hughes and Lock's (1987) three bodies, thereby considerably expanding the healing net to include the personal, social and/or political. By implication therefore, ill health, unwellness or misfortune is not the sole domain of the individual. Families, communities, societies and nations may also be understood to be unwell and in need of healing. Another way to think about healing would be to acknowledge that the individual always forms part of some or other social group and if the individual is unwell, members of their immediate social group should also participate in the healing regimen. Conversely, if the social group is unwell, so too should its constituent members be included in the healing. This is a sentiment reiterated by Bührmann (1986:25), to which she adds that family members have to fulfil certain obligations and that "no ceremony can hope to succeed without the guidance and co-operation of the 'living dead' kin – the ancestors". This last qualifier further expands the healing net to traverse different temporal zones. In Image 6.4 the heartfelt plea directed at all the site deities is evident.

Sometimes the healing that is sought is physical healing from a bodily ailment or affliction such as head, neck, backache and pain. However, very often it is a wounded soul that brings pilgrims to the sites (cf. Schramm 2004:138). Infertility or difficulty conceiving and marital problems fall into both these categories. The Maseeng sites at both Mautse and Motouleng are specialist stations for such cases. Why, we may ask, should infertility, difficulty conceiving, difficulty carrying the foetus to term and other reproductive and urological problems warrant specialist stations at the sacred sites? Quite simply, these symptoms are all ascribed to ancestor activity or, more precisely, the withdrawal of their protection (Bührmann 1986:30). This means that something must be done to correct the imbalance and restore good favour. The rituals are aimed at doing just that, i.e. to take the ancestors home (cf. Bührmann 1986) to regularly perform the requisite duties and hold them in hearts and minds on an everyday basis.⁵

⁵ Cf. Strathern's idea of to *dividuate*, see also Chapter 7.

Spirit cleansing also forms part of healing. A spiritual leader at Motouleng guides his clients through a number of prayer rituals. Then, inside the lekgotla, he balances black and white chickens on the clients' heads. Those with black (evil) spirits calm the black chicken on their heads and, alternately, the white chicken on the head of people with clean spirits. Different rituals then proceed, involving the slaughtering of the chicken to drive out the black spirit, with a possible ritual bathing process to follow. Spirit cleansing is therefore among the services that are on offer at the sites. One may assume Christian demonology as influence in this regard. Although it is a form of exorcism, the ritual processes differ.



Image 6.4: Calling on all the deities for blessings © 2013

Social status ills such as poverty, conflict, crime or social alienation are also reasons for seeking healing or solution while on pilgrimage. Winkelman and Dubisch (2005:xxvii) view these as social suffering within the larger economic and political conditions of life. Journeying to the sites may very well be a way to place ills and misfortune within meaningful site narratives. In so doing, distance is created; distance from the intensely personal placed within a broader collectivity, and the prospect of resolution.

I can see so, my Sister

“[T]ransformational journey brings a sense of vitality in connectedness with family and community, reinforcing cultural pride” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxii). Undertaking journeys together often strengthens the ties between fellow travellers. If, as is hinted at in the previous sentence, these fellow travellers already have established relationships, then undertaking such excursions invariably also bolsters the bonds between them. The groups of Apostolic and ZCC congregants visiting Mautse and Motouleng, and the large Anglican pilgrimage to Mantsopa, have as reuniting, reaffirming and renewing solidarity to their denomination, their specific church and to other parishioners as an objective (cf. Images 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7). Such groups often make annual journeys or accompany church leaders who have had occasion to visit the sites. The familial groups visiting the sites to periodically venerate ancestors (mpho badimo) do so in acknowledgement of their continual connection to and with their deceased forebears.

I am caused to think of a particular familial group who we encountered at around 10:30 on a Saturday morning, as we were making our way to Motouleng. We came upon each other around a bend on the single file trail in a section of the path densely populated with Birch trees. Carrying large and heavy plastic bags, the five or six men could hardly lift their heads for their exertion. We stepped off the trail to allow them to pass and greeted each as they lumbered under the uncomfortable loads they were carrying. The third or fourth man stopped, lowering his load to the ground and enquired if we would go all the way into the cave. ‘Yes’, I replied, and remarked that they were leaving so early – intimating that they were going to miss the strong communion planned for later that afternoon and the all-night prayer-singing and drumming characteristic of Saturday nights. *Not to worry*, he replied, indicating to the black bags: *we have already slaughtered everyone in the cave*. There are two possible interpretations to this statement: one, the sacrificial beast is a literal embodiment of the ancestors (i.e. the beast is personified and therefore also addressed as such - its slaughter is on behalf of the collective); and two, he may have been teasing us and playing on what he assumed to be ‘white fears’ about barbaric blacks and their bloodthirsty rituals. I assumed the remark to mean ‘we have already slaughtered *for* all the ancestors’, and not ‘we have already killed everyone inside the cave’. It was then that we noticed a hoof still connected to a shin sticking out of the bag, and the rest of a large bovine hindquarter. It became clear that these men had come to Motouleng to slaughter their ox. The obligatory ritual slaughter was performed and the rest of the carcass was carried to their vehicles to be transported home, where the rest of the family and ceremonials were waiting. This is a

classic example of the type of social cohesion reinforced by a group of agnates on behalf of the larger family group. But, besides the here-and-now cohesion between the family members, that reaffirmed with the badimo and sealed with sacrificial blood, would be immensely strong. This may appear culturally problematic and counter-intuitive. The agnates however, as representatives of the family (as not all the members could make the journey) came to the site as a place of power, to begin the mpho badimo rituals that would be completed back home. The size and cost of the beast, the effort exerted in taking the animal to the site and slaughtering it at a site holier than many is the family's emphasised expression of gratitude and wish to maintain relationships with both the collective category of general ancestors, as well as their specific kin and territory-based deceased relatives.



Image 6.5: A denominational group of pilgrims praying at Altareng, Motouleng © 2008



Image 6.6: Pilgrims making their way to Tempeleng for baptisms © 2010



Image 6.7: In the throes of ecstatic singing at Altareng, Motouleng © 2009

Two very different types of bonding became explicit in other chance meetings on the Motouleng path. The first was as we were arriving and negotiating the second river crossing. Carrying grocery-laden daypacks and inelegantly clambering from one large boulder to another, a stranger ahead of us turned and offered a strong hand which my partner accepted with a strong grip. Once safely on the other side the man asked my partner what she was coming to do at the cave, to which she replied that she was coming to seek her ancestors. The man replied: *I can see so, my Sister*. In that moment, the occupational therapist and the paramedic from Vereeniging were united by something transcendent; i.e. much more than their shared health professions. There was an intuitive and mutual respect and interconnectedness at so many levels.

Late that afternoon as we made our way down from the lip of the cave high above to the river below, the crossing seemed simple. On the far side, as we adjusted our packs and turned with grateful hearts, I found the comment of the man readying to cross profound! In English he said *It is amazing, that all this* [gesturing at the landscape], *was created with a word*. This imposing figure of a man was clearly referencing the Christian creation story that God spoke the world into existence with a word. I know for the two of us, at least, that the man's observation could not have been more appropriate. I take from that snapshot encounter a glimpse into the sophisticated reverence with which this pilgrim approached his journey and the place. In addition, I was reminded of the inextricable intertwinement of meaning-making and the critical importance of site users' narratives. Also captured in that snapshot moment were three people's synchronised moments of awe; both these constituting very powerful episodes of *communitas*.

Such powerful, thin moments of connection also imply a release and renewal – opportunities for a “redefinition of self in relation to others at multiple levels – symbolic, social, personal, and physical. That contact with others can lead to the creation of a sense of relationship to others that is both personal and physical, and the elimination (at least to some extent) of social distinction” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxxii).

Realising the purpose

Our modern world poses us many challenges. Pilgrims cite the forging of bonds, finding a purpose and one's roots, seeking opportunity for reflection, etc. as desired outcomes of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. Furthermore, the following also serve as very powerful reasons for undertaking pilgrimages: dealing with loss, seeking fixity (cf. Meyer & Geschiere 1999,

cited in Coleman & Eade 2004:15), searching for identity (cf. Bauman 2000) and determining self (i.e. who are we and, more pertinently, who am I?) (cf. Nikolaisen 2004:98). What becomes more and more apparent, particularly at Motouleng and Mautse, is a search by the *displaced, dislocated* or *disorientated* of society, to find *placedness*; a sense of rootedness and connection. To those displaced people hailing from almost ghetto-like townships and squatter settlements, pilgrimages provide an *escape* to a founding and grounding environment (cf. spaces of representation in the Lefebvre sense – Schmid 2008:29, 37).

Seeking understanding and insight into their circumstances and perhaps even their purpose in the larger scheme of things, is a powerful precursor for undertaking journeys to the sites in the eastern Free State. Furthermore, on numerous occasions more permanent site users would tell stories about how they came to be there as well as the physical, mental and spiritual hardships that they had endured. Without exception, a moment of profound insight was experienced at realising the purpose of their journey. I think I will call this a retroactive reason for journeying, i.e. it is only recognised after the fact.

Coming to deeper understandings is a process that is not always accompanied by drum rolls and crashing cymbals. In fact, sometimes they are uncovered in uncanny exchanges. The narration below illustrates this.

I was visiting with an apprentice traditional practitioner who was soon to graduate and from whom I was receiving instruction in making traditional sorghum beer. Another stalwart of the Mautse Valley, NMas was also present. The elder encouraged the protégé not to be demure. Apparently they had been discussing my visit on the previous evening. My arrival that morning was therefore greeted with much excitement. Why this is remarkable is because my visit, like all other visits to the sites, was unannounced. For this fluid group of journeyers who flow to and from the sites, not announcing arrivals or departures does not signal a breach of etiquette.

To return to the story, we sat flat on the mud and dung floor of the enclosed rock overhang with our

legs straightened out in front of us, and keenly grateful for the small fire warming the shelter. NMak wanted to know what I had deep in my bag. I laughed nonplussed, seeing as I had already removed all the grocery gift items I'd brought from the bag. *No-no-no*, she said, *there is something else deep in that bag of yours that you do not show anyone*. By then I'd picked up my daypack and had it on my lap, all the while assuring the two that it only contained some disposable tissues, a container of Zam-Buk, snuff, water and snacks for the day. Still refusing to accept this, my peer was insisting there was something that I carry with me that my grandmother had given me. By now I was thoroughly flummoxed and somewhat unsure if I was being played for the fool.

I soon realised that I was indeed carrying something with me that my maternal grandmother had given me. In a small vanity bag that I always boast is my survival kit (containing pain tablets, anti-histamine tablets and lotion for insect bites, an energy bar or two, a small pocketknife, matches, plasters, transact patches and a bandage) there is also a silver whistle and large African sea bean that belonged to my grandmother and mother respectively. These two items are fastened together with a thin leather thong.

Retrieving these items and asking them whether this was what they meant, their jubilant squawks, incantations and three-rhythm handclaps celebrated NMak's divining skills, and reassured me to continue explaining. I then proceeded to tell my audience what these items meant in my here-and-now life.

I deem the whistle to be significant in the African context as a way of summoning the ancestors. At the pilgrimage sites particularly, they are used when approaching water and are blown during

rituals involving submersion in large pools of water, e.g. with baptism and cleansing. Subsequent to the encounter described here, I have on numerous occasions seen African sea beans used as representative objects of divining tests for graduating healers. NMak's insights (or seeing) clearly extended beyond the mere material reality of the items. Her instruction was that I should wear them and that they should not be relegated to the deep recesses of my daypack. She further explained that they are items to be proud of, and should also be worn with pride and used when needed.

I have come to appreciate NMak's message to mean that we are all beautifully unique creatures of this earth and need never feel it necessary to shut parts of ourselves off or out, burying them for the comfort of others. We are who we are! And, as whistles have been used to announce danger or attract attention when distressed, she was intimating that I need only blow the whistle to activate and access assistance in such situations. [NMak & NMas – Mautse 2010-04]

Coming across a solitary pilgrim simply sitting or in deep contemplative prayer was not something I saw over weekends (cf. Image 6.8). Such reflection was more likely to take place during the week when there were less site users and those that I encountered were all journeyers who had been, and were likely to be, at the sites, for some time still. It was also on such occasions that I found the silence and the immense natural beauty (or perhaps the magnetism of the places) particularly suited for my own wandering thoughts. I always left on such days feeling a pronounced connection to the places and fellow wayfarers – sentiments my informants repeatedly shared in their narrations.

The shop, is here

Journeyers to sacred sites also cite the following as reasons for pilgrimage: finding ancestor linkages; seeking help and assistance; and invoking blessings and good fortune are not uncommon for journeyers to the sacred sites. Not quite Basu's (2004:155) roots-tourism (i.e. journeying to real or fictive places of ancestral origin), the discovery of ancestor linkages is deemed important. People who were born out of wedlock and grow up in the region of their mother may not always know their paternal ancestors. A pilgrim from the Eastern Cape told how it was only when she acknowledged the calling to undergo treatment and traditional practitioner training that she could find a sense of true connectedness, and that this process explicitly involved making discoveries about her father's ancestors. In this regard, pilgrims might specifically seek out the assistance of Ngoni Matankiso Madiboko from the Madiboko site and the mathuela (trance healers) at *St Mary's* (both at Mautse) to seek out their ancestor linkages.



Image 6.8: Contemplative meditation, river crossing, Motouleng © 2013

A father who cited bringing his son to Motouleng to introduce him to his ancestors as a token of thanksgiving for the years of fortune experienced, serves as another example of forging ancestor

linkages. The father, realising the necessity to give back, speaks to the matter of connections to realms and things so much greater than himself.

Seeking ancestor linkages or restoring and reaffirming bonds between pilgrims and ancestors is essential for healing and a general sense of wellness (cf. Bührmann 1986:28). Familial groups perform rituals such as mpho badimo in remembrance of their forebears but also as part of the mutuality between descendants and those who came before. In exchange, as it were, these contented and satisfied ancestors look favourably upon their living descendants by ensuring good fortune.

At Mantsopa's cave church, at Motouleng (behind Ntatemoholo Taba-tsa-badimo's dwelling space and tucked deep behind the main altar) and at Mautse (at Tempeleng some steps up toward the hole in the rock – what I call the stairway to heaven), there are always many letters and notes requesting and seeking blessings and fortune. Such blessing requests are sometimes related to very specific circumstances such as winning the lotto or passing an exam. Other appeals are for general wellbeing and health.

Help and assistance may also be sought from prophets and traditional diviner-healers in interpreting dreams or the meaning of events or symbols that defy regular understanding, as well as for cleansing and blessing rituals. The compilation of interview transcripts and fieldnotes below illustrate just such an instance, i.e. the kind of *services* that pilgrims might expect at the sites.

Mme Malerato is a permanent pilgrim at Motouleng. Permanent pilgrims remain at the shrine for a period of years, unlike the temporary pilgrims who come and go. Mme Malerato lives in the cave with her husband Sam and their four-year-old son. Inside the cave they have constructed a three-room domicile with a thatched roof. Mme Malerato and Ntate Sam have both undergone full traditional healer training and subsequent training as water healers. Neither of them still uses dithhare (plant medicines) or ancestor intercession during their healing practices.

In one interview, Mme Malerato recommended that I pay attention to my own dreams; a practice that had not been customary for me. I initially paid little attention to this recommendation. However, later, when transcribing a recorded interview, I took notice of this advice with greater attention as it had been the third time I'd been told to do so. Consequently I decided to begin recording my own dreams. While many dreams were recorded over a period of time, I chose two in particular to recount to Mme Malerato.

In order to visit the cave site, I must undertake a kind of pilgrimage of my own. I drive

approximately 270 kilometres from Bloemfontein to the mountainous regions of the eastern Free State. I then hike for about half an hour with my backpack and walking stick. Next, I cross a river, stepping carefully on the boulders which enable my crossing. Finally, I climb a last slope and enter the cave. This journey, the visit, and return make up a very full day.

On this occasion, I found Mme Malerato who indicated that I sit next to her, touching shoulder to shoulder, on a rock outside her dwelling.

In the first dream I enter a small general trading store in the mountains of Lesotho. This is a typical store of the kind I have frequently seen in remote villages. When I enter the store we first browse around a bit and at the back of the store, on the ground but under a rack of shelves, my attention is drawn to two bright yellow buckets. One is inside the other. They are not standing upright, but instead are lying on their side.

In my waking life I wonder about the meaning of the yellow buckets. In addition, I'm particularly curious about the store itself. Mme Malerato, knowing me rather well, recounts that:

The buckets, almost concealed under the shelf, represent those things that were hitherto hidden and that you are now making known and coming to understand. Other people didn't see them; you saw them and you took them from under the shelf (to make them known). The fact that the one bucket is inside the other indicates a 'secret', i.e. that which is not yet known (sephiri, se-sa-tsejweng) but will be revealed or become known – revealing the hidden. When you come to the cave you are rifling through people's stuff, in their proverbial cupboards, under the shelves. This place is like a shop to you. You come and shop here. You are buying with your kelello (intellect, understanding, studies/research). You are seeing these hidden (sephiri) things. The bucket tells of the fountain/water pools; the work

with or the gift of water. There is a task that you must come and do. But the task/work is related to two things (like the two buckets – the one 'riding' on the back of the other).

Wanting to know more about these secrets that I'm 'uncovering', I ask whether they are my informants' secrets or my own. Malerato responds that *you are the one that saw them, not me. You are the one that saw the buckets and took them from under the shelf. They are your secrets. They are yours because you are the one that found them. What their nature is, what their purpose is, will become known.*

Ntate Sam had joined the conversation by this time. She asks him for his insights. She says that when our three interpretations are joined, perhaps a clearer picture/understanding will emerge.

Upon hearing the dream but not having conferred with his wife, Sam jumps right in and declares: *That person that you are walking with, it is here; this place – this place that you are coming to. And, the buckets, are your things.*

Mme Malerato takes up the interpretation again: *She's got a neo (gift, talent). She has twin talents. She must unpack the meaning of these buckets. She must bring them. Not literally. But, what they represent. What message they are conveying. You will come to understand, she directs at me. It's a gift that will reveal itself/that you will be given.* Ntate Sam almost interjects, saying: *She already has it. But the person that will reveal it must be found. My feeling is that that person is Mme [referring to Mme Malerato]. The question is, he continues: who will pick up those buckets? Who will help you decipher their meaning? What is the purpose of your visit today? You told me earlier, you came with dreams that need deciphering. Right?*

Mme Malerato then said, *Let's hear the second dream.* I narrated the second dream while drinking a mug of hot, sweet tea.

In the second dream I am in a modest old sandstone farmhouse – not out of the ordinary in the eastern Free State. I am working on my laptop at a makeshift desk in the living room. While working, I become aware of the very distracting rustle of something lodged in or nesting behind the boxes that line the wall, underneath the large dining room table and other furniture. I poke a stick into the source of the rustling, trying to rouse the creature from its hiding place. The quick rustle of plastic and paper signal that whatever had been seeking shelter there was now moving in the direction of the open door. I keep up my rustle-and-stir tactics and behold a snake speedily slithering out of the door and into the front garden. Wanting to discourage the snake from returning to the house, I ensure that it disappears into the veld well beyond the garden. It was of cardinal importance for me to get the snake out and clear without harming it.

Further on in the dream, it might be a second day, again I find myself working on my computer at the table in the house. I hear a rustling sound like a mouse moving around. As before, I get a stick and use it to coax the creature out. However, to my surprise, when I pull the stick out, I find that the creature is a snake that has wrapped itself around the end of the stick. I'm not frightened, although I am surprised. Again, I move outside beyond the garden and release it into the bushes.

And yet again in the same dream, on what may be a third day, I am working on my laptop. There's a commotion outside and I hear the voices of farm workers in the garden. They are clearly upset. I go out to see what is happening and discover that

the group is upset because a snake has appeared. This time, however, the snake is aggressive. Goading it back beyond the garden boundary is not going to work and it hisses and strikes purposefully at me. I realise with reluctance that I will have to kill it. Looking for a stick, I find the long handle of a polo mallet. This is a familiar object to me since the men in my family play polo. It is not uncommon for a mallet in need of repair to be lying around. I try to kill the snake by hitting it with the long handle, but it turns out that the handle is too pliable. It is therefore not useful for driving off the snake. I find another stick and use it. I swing at it twice, and kill the snake with a powerful swipe that severs it in half. I do not like doing this. I realise in the dream that it would have been better to use a spade to kill the snake. It would perhaps have been kinder.

Mme Malerato says, *I like this dream!* For many Basotho, if you see a snake in your dream, it means that you are receiving communication from the ancestors telling you to become a traditional practitioner. [Charles and Leah Fisher noted that this is at variance with the Achuar tradition of the Ecuadorian Amazon where, if you dream of a large snake such as an anaconda, it means that you will soon be in the *presence* of a shaman – 2011-11 personal communication.]

Mme Malerato asks: *Ntate Sam, what do you say? She [indicating me] chased it away, and on the third time she killed it.* Sam is clearly interested in the stick images, but we'll come back to them later.

In the meantime, Mme Malerato is already in the throes of interpretation. *This person, intimating me, has a purpose/task/job. It is a path on its own. The buckets told us that there are two paths/talents: traditional healer and prophet. The twin paths came to a head in the second dream.*

These are yours, Mme Malerato continues. While you've been coming here, you have been asking research questions. In the meantime, you've been 'walking/going on your own ticket as well'. Your love and interest in these customs and traditional practices... You've been on a journey of discovery as well. Your own questions have arisen.

That snake-person that was following you, that is your gift/talent (neo). That person is like/the same as lehlosi (ancestor). Haven't you heard people call you lehlosi? The snake/ancestor is the one that has been hassling you. Causing you to ask so many questions ...

You have the power of water. You have the power of a traditional healer (with digging sticks and beads). This is a powerful one that has been distracting you and preventing you from achieving many of your wishes. Today, however, we know that it, that path, has been cut off with your killing of the snake in your dream. You killed it; you removed it; denied it by killing it with that stick.

It's a good thing. Traditional healing is tough. It is challenging. The life you'd live is not a nice one; it's not an easy life. It will take from you. If you don't understand what it wants, it will destroy you. Praying to God is very different. God's path is easy. The ancestral path is tough.

I want to know if she can tell who this ancestor is. Mme Malerato replies that: *If you'd acknowledged it [in the dream, and not killed it], it would have fully revealed itself to you.*

Taking a deep breath, she exclaims, *dreams are amazing hey! You see, your hardships/difficulties are over. Your star will rise.*

And then she's back to sharing insights about the dreams themselves. *It didn't help that you chased it [the snake] away, it kept coming back; disturbing your work at the computer. In exasperation, you eventually killed it. You have*

work to do on the computer. You will be shown the work you must do; it will be revealed.

Her task involves using computers... You do get that, right, Ntate Sam says to me?

Yes, she'll be using computers. But, that's a better path, Mme Malerato reciprocates.

You will see when you are inside, inside the shop, what is expected/required of you, Ntate Sam says.

Mme Malerato directs her attention to me again: *Not only do you find yourself in the mountains, you are also on farms – just like your old farm, sandstone house.*

Continuing, she instructs me: *keep documenting your dreams. Those that are beyond your understanding... come with them [for elucidation]. Keep working on that computer of yours with these matters. Use your kelello (understanding, brains, studies/research); the pieces will fall into place. All your things will come right. They will work out well. I'm giving you a good 'handclap'. Well done!*

It was clearly important for Mme Malerato that I was at work each time a snake appeared. For her, the snake represents a distraction for me from my work. Further, the dream is a good dream in her opinion, because in the end, I succeed in overcoming the distraction.

I was not prepared for the next layer of interpretation that was ushered in by an innocent question about her thoughts on the polo mallet in the dream. Mme Malerato says, *the stick you killed the snake with, appeared like a polo mallet. However, it was that very same walking stick (lere) of yours [indicating at my stick]. What it looked like in the dream is inconsequential. That lere, your father gave you. What does it look like to you? What colour is it?* She asks the questions in quick succession.

'It's yellow – a quince kerie' (walking stick), I say, bringing it closer, and handing it head-first, to her.

It was now possible to see more deeply into the first dream. For her, *the snakes...* [she shows her index and middle fingers crossed one over the other]... *are the two buckets.* They are nesting (almost as she and I were sitting, shoulder to shoulder). *There is a terrestrial one and a moya (spirit, air) one,* she explains. The outer one is in contact with the ground. *It represents the terrestrial snake – the traditional healer that makes use of the earth's resources like herbal and clay or soil materials in their healing regimens. Of the buckets... you chased the one away that stands on the ground. The second bucket is contained within. It is the inside bucket, the water one. This one, has the power of the water (pools), the water one – you did say that the buckets hold water, right? It represents the faith healer; who is called by the spirit of the Supreme Being.*

By this time I felt increasing discomfort from a tea-filled bladder. With all this interpretation going on, I'd not noticed that when Mme Mathabo had prepared the tea, she had asked the other woman to *get the water ready.* Besides, I'd imagined that I'd leave just after the 'reading', first, because there was no place to urinate inside the cave, and second, because I had been there for quite some time and there was a long trip home ahead of me. What's more, I had a lot to process and felt satisfied with how the day had unfolded. But Mme Malerato said, *You can't leave yet.*

The other woman brought over a bucket of water. She told me to scoop the large coffee mug full of water, which I did. She then made it clear that they expected me to drink. I won't deny that I was concerned about the safety of the water for drinking, but knew that I must not offend my hosts. I took a sip of the water. It was very cold [as if refrigerated] and had a smoky taste. I asked about the source of the water and was told that it dripped down from a source in the cave. Mme Malerato and her family are the only ones who have access to this hidden water source. She takes the bucket, scoops a mug full and drinks deeply.

It was clear I had to finish the entire contents of the mug, despite the protestations from my full bladder, and qualms about its safety.

Once again, the women indicated that it was not yet time for me to leave. In various stages the other woman poured a bit of water on the crown of my head and rubbed it in in a circular motion. Then, a teaspoonful into each eye. This was followed by very cold water poured into each of my ears, which was held there for some time. The first ear ached with stabbing pains of intense cold! With the first pangs of earache in the second ear, my consciousness clouded, the goings on of which I now have no recollection. When I became conscious I had no idea how long I'd been out, nor any memory of what I did or what was being done with/to me. Enveloped by a powerful disorienting feeling, I still wanted to get up and leave. When I was finally able to stand, my balance was quite disturbed and my legs felt weak. I rather harshly reprimanded the healers, saying that they should have told me what was going to happen. Mme Malerato had not left my side (still sitting shoulder to shoulder). She put her arms around me, laughed but encouragingly added, *You did very well. Some of the others actually faint!*

She then instructed me to hold my hands palm-up – onto which some water was poured. The process was repeated on the back of my hands. And then, without any forewarning, the remaining contents of the mug were thrown forcefully into my face. 'Wow, I did not see that coming', I exclaimed! Everyone laughs and the seriousness of earlier is replaced by congeniality.

The ritual was still not over. Now Mme Malerato and Mme Mathabo started praying and singing. The former anointed my walking stick with the water, together with accompanying incantations. Mme Malerato then revealed that I'd been given special powers. I could, according to her, now use the stick to heal others simply by pointing the stick at them; pressing it to the physical source of

pain; or enveloping the person within the circle of my arms and stick. The stick, a bright yellow polished quince kierie has a head that looks like the head of a snake with a discoloration that resembles an eye in its head. I keep it in my car and therefore take it everywhere I go. According to Malerato it has already become very strong from our journeys together. *Use this stick*, she instructs, *to pray for people. This is your bucket*, she concludes.

[Mme Malerato, Ntate Sam & Mme Mathabo, Motouleng 2011-08]

The instillation of cold water into the ears is not a technique unique to the cave or Mme Malerato's repertoire. Neurologists and psychiatrists both use vestibular stimulation via cold water in the ear, and neurologists also use it as a test for basic brain function. In neurology, to administer cold water to the ear canal, a practice known as caloric testing, induces *nystagmus*, the rapid jerky back and forth movements of the eyes (Lewis 2005:141-141). This is accompanied by marked vertigo. Mark Solms and others have reported that the instillation of cold water to the ear results in temporarily overcoming *anosagnosia* in patients with left-sided stroke damage (Kaplan-Solms & Solms 2002:157-160).

I can but imagine the elaborately crafted stories that are recounted by onlookers when confronted with eyes involuntarily darting back and forth, and the strength of the possession causing even strapping young men to fall down, leaving the host with no recollection of events. Surely, this all attests to the skills and powers of healers and their

deities. These are the type of things from which myth and legend are created; extraordinary events that can surely only be ascribed to the all-powerful God and the/his ancestor minions.

Symbolically, the ritual serves both as a cleansing but also a blessing in that water is such a potent component of these ritualised actions. Principally, water both washes clean and also cools. Drinking quantities of water flushes out impurities from the system. It also fundamentally prepares the recipient of the cleansing blessing for the very specific sequence that follows. Water is dripped and then rubbed into the crown of the head, into each eye, and then into each ear to promote receptiveness to, and of, spirit by specifically advancing clarity of thought, sight and hearing. Water poured onto the front and back of the hands concludes the cleansing blessing and guarantees that all that is touched is done so with pure intent, and if intended, with healing power. I imagine that the final action of the ritual is more functional than symbolic. It immediately brings the candidate back to the here-and-now. In hindsight, it also emphasises an alertness and awareness, a wakefulness.

I subsequently received this cleansing blessing three more times. Moreover, each time I am newly surprised at its impact. It is simultaneously a very corporeal (embodied and disembodied) experience, as it is tremendously emotional. Two of these occasions have been enormously meaningful because of the profound and spontaneous sense of *communitas* (connection and interconnectedness) it left us, having received the cleansing blessing together.

The significance for me of this watershed moment cannot be overstated and could even be considered as an arrival scene, i.e. arrival at a new understanding. The inclusion of this lengthy encounter brings to attention socio-cultural dimensions that would have remained implicit had I not brought my dreams for interpretation. Besides being illustrative of the kinds of services that

pilgrims can expect at the sites, the dream interpretations highlight key aspects of pilgrimage culture, and the practice of dream interpretation that underscores much of African pilgrimage. The dreams are interpreted in culturally appropriate terms, with the snakes and the two buckets brought into focus with the gifts of healing. Through my recounting of this experience I am able to present these key aspects.

It's not a deep-seated hankering for spiritual communion

Not all journeyers are drawn to the sites because of a deep-seated hankering for spiritual communion and nor do they all expect a profound experience. Some are simply accompanying others or bringing supplies for friends or family. Furthermore, yet others come to the sites to satisfy a curiosity. I must add that this lot of travellers are in the minority. These reasons may therefore be said to relate to recreation, renewal and escape from work and city life.

Pilgrims have expressed their desire to escape the rat race and stresses of everyday life. To quote from Coleman and Eade (2004:11), it is as if pilgrims are “seeking to engage in bodily and temporal modes that subvert or transcend the rushing, mechanized world of modernity and postmodernity”. It has occurred to me on a number of occasions when visiting (particularly the Mautse Valley) that there are increasing numbers of more permanent pilgrims chiselling out not only a place of reverence, but also a dwelling place in the sandstone cliffs. Is it possible that this valley is fast becoming a socially accepted place where a life can be eked out away from urban crime and the financial pressures of modern life? What is impossible to ignore is that pilgrimage is emerging as a phenomenon which is “deeply embedded in peasant life” (Coleman & Eade 2004:13). My reading of Coleman and Eade (2004:13) is that the Andes pilgrimage is in fact enmeshed in the local lives of the people as a whole. What I wish to convey in this instance, however, is that at the Mautse Valley, more and more of what appear to be destitute people are merely squatting at the site under the auspices of being on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages may offer a sense of empowerment to the disadvantaged and marginalised of society via the special spiritual connection evoked and developed during journeys of reverence. So too, pilgrimage may be a form of “protest against the marginalized condition, a protest that may itself be part of the healing” (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:xxii). However, we must not ignore how neo-liberal market forces impact on and mould pilgrimages (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:10).

That some visitors to the sites come for purely recreational purposes is also affirmed by the more permanent dwellers who find themselves locked in a battle of wills with these visitors who conduct themselves inappropriately, i.e. not showing the expected level of decorum (cf. Nthoi 2006:4). The following extracts from interviews with permanent Motouleng pilgrims illustrate the recreational purpose with which some pilgrims visit the sites. The two camps clearly have very different conceptions of sacred centrality.

Some ... that come here bring their girlfriends (nyatsi) or apprentices and instead of conducting themselves appropriately in this holy place when others are praying at night they come and have sex with them here. The rules of conduct are ignored and disregarded. They ruin this place with their bad judgment and misdeeds (metlolo). They have made this place a hotel. The people of the 'Heritage Council' are no better. The filth that they come and speak here and bring here, is atrocious!

Anyhow, when we have cleaned here, there where we have swept, the people come on purpose to urinate and defecate – leaving it out in the open to aggravate us. At the end of the weekend, we pick up the faeces parcels they have left, again sweep in an attempt to restore a semblance of order.

[MM, Motouleng 2011-07]

Many visitors to the 'mountain' are people who come to pray (borapedi). Others come just because it's a nice getaway for them. Many deface this place with their immoral behaviour, he continues. A common justification that such visitors proclaim is that they are going to the holy mountain where their forefathers will commune through the physical act between the two people. *It's all a big disgrace. These people are not only making a mockery of themselves but also of this place, and also of us, who revere it and take our calling very seriously. They degrade us, and*

tarnish the name, but also the power of the cave. Over and above that, they discredit their calling and the profession of traditional healer.

[NS, Motouleng 2011-07]

Diviner-healer training has recently adopted a confusing methodology, in particular amongst those belonging to Independent Church branches. Some do not apprentice themselves under a senior sangoma in the proper traditional manner. Instead, they are trained directly by the ancestors. Some certainly appear opportunistic if the less traditional mode is accepted as norm.

The two interlocutors are clearly outraged at the way some site visitors blatantly demean the cave's sanctity with their dishonourable conduct. These visitors unmistakably transgress a number of behavioural restrictions held in high esteem by the more permanent residents of the cave. The two main issues seem to revolve around appropriate ablution practices and abstinence from sexual intercourse.

Sometimes too, what begins as a touristic excursion develops into a deeply meaningful encounter with the supernatural. I witnessed this expressly as a convoy of two cars filled with young people, obviously on a weekend getaway, entered the Mautse Valley as detached travellers and by the end of the experience were engaged, and forever changed, participants. One could say that their journeys and experiences had intersected (cf. Margry 2008:29).

Although I have been unable to ascertain reasons relating to political reclaiming of contested land or the contestation of sites or spaces, it is important at least to mention Coplan's (2003) claim; a researcher who has been vocal about the area along the Caledon River border between Lesotho and South Africa as contested land. A rich history underlies his assertions that pilgrims visiting particularly Motouleng and the Mautse Valley are doing so for political reasons to symbolically reclaim what Moshoeshoe lost to the Free State Boers. Like African American pilgrimage tourists to Ghana, Basotho pilgrims are, in Coplan's view, "dealing with unfinished historical business" (Coleman & Eade 2004:22). He also add the qualifier that such advances are not likely to be conscious but instead are deeply nestled in the recesses of the subconscious. Even if this might underlie the motivations of some pilgrims to these sites, I have hitherto been unable to verify such assertions. I do accept that some pilgrims use site visitations as social and political instruments against, perhaps, former political ideologies, or even against the secularisation of many aspects of social life. They may even be silent protests against a very repressive patriarchy. In this regard, feelings of uncertainty and dissatisfaction directed toward social and political systems underscore pilgrims' sense of security and destabilise their ability to perceive life promisingly (Margry 2008:33-34). Naturally this has dire consequences for senses of individual and group identity, as it affects foundational notions of both external and internal truths.

Not falling within the categories of recreation, renewal and escape from work and city life, some site users travel to the sites for purely economically motivated reasons. Although pilgrims may harvest plants and clay for various purposes, there are also hawkers who visit the sites and who have no spiritual motifs for doing so. They simply come to the sites to collect medicinal clays and plants to sell at their markets elsewhere.

For many site users, their leeto (sacred journey) is not miraculously concluded having made the journey only once, i.e. for many, the necessity or urge to visit particular revered localities serve as an initial motivator that sets them on a further path. One should not wrongly assume that the essence of pilgrimages is limited to the journeying towards the site and its associated experiences. The return from the site and the after-effects may serve as important motivations and incentives for return visits or even explorations further afield. In this regard, the following citations powerfully convey the return and after-effects of sacred journeys:

“As an event, pilgrimage can be calendared: the journey begins and ends on certain dates. As an experience, though, pilgrimage is ongoing: it refuses the container of calendar time. Pilgrims return to their quotidian in different shape: physically, psychologically, and spiritually” (Stortz 2014:286).

“After having moved through challenging and often unfamiliar aspects of geography and unexplored regions of the inner self, the pilgrim can discover newfound strength in body and soul too good to lay to rest at the end of the road” (Sawicki 2014a:342).

“No pilgrim seems to wrap up his or her journey satisfied that they exhausted the experience. The memory of a transcendence just out-of-reach or imperfectly glimpsed is nearly universal among sacred travellers. One can affirm that the power or truth sought on this quest is indeed there, but certainly not drained of its meaning. One lingers at the shrine site, mountain top, river bank or temple precinct only so long before returning home nostalgic for joys of a cup only sipped” (Greenia 2014:23).

Informants commonly cite a number of concurrent reasons that have encouraged them to embark on these journeys; a finding that largely correlates with Coleman and Eade’s (2004:8) assertions that motivations for undertaking pilgrimage may be singly expressed or may be mixed. A pilgrim is “not a fixed or one-dimensional being” (Schramm 2004:136) and because of this individual complexity, one can expect an array of multifaceted reasons that are cited as justifications for undertaking such journeys. The concerns of everyday life mostly lie at the heart of these endeavours and it is these concerns that require articulation and the concerted pursuit for resolution (cf. Winkelmann & Dubisch 2005:xi). It would seem that at least six of the eight categories of motives for pilgrimage to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State are in line with what Margry (2008:33) calls the existential insecurity of human beings. In this case, the exceptions are the recreational, touristic reasons for visiting the site, as well as those related to a political reclaiming of previously annexed land. As can be seen from Image 6.9,

for example, the demeanour and dress of the University of Lesotho students does not hint at any existential reason for visiting the site.

Each of the sites is a historically relevant and sacred place, renowned for the presence of a council of divine supernatural beings and spirits that provide an opportunity for extraordinary religious and spiritual experiences. Some revive traditional beliefs and practices and even confirm Christian beliefs (cf. Esterhuysen 2008:18, 27). Such experiences help enhance the self-perception of the individual and the value of his/her own/indigenous culture. Journeyers generally believe that they have been directed to the sites by God, ancestors or guardian angels, rendering the sites significant places of power and communion with the numinous. For this reason, many opportunities abound for training, reflection and transformation, as well as for treating patients/clients with diverse needs.

Some localities are particularly potent, such as cavernous spaces for intense prayer, singing or sacrificial offerings, as well as fountains and other sources of water. Visits to the sites afford pilgrims an opportunity for unusual religious and spiritual experience that fortifies and enables journeyers to cope with their everyday lives. Besides power, the sites provide important ingredients for traditional medicines, as well as holy water and prime quality clay (sehwashō). These, among others, are the reasons offered for frequenting the sites for personal use as well as in the company of clients and patients.



Image 6.9: National University of Lesotho students on a cultural excursion © 2011

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

7.1 General

There are certain assertions about pilgrimages emanating from the literature with which I agree. One such example is that pilgrimages may be defined as journeys or a form of movement to a special, significant place. There is a transformational quality to such journeys that cannot and should not be forced into the discrete categories of religious or secular, for instance. Sometimes pilgrimages transcend these narrow ways of thinking to accommodate far broader spiritual, sacred or even touristic ends. I also agree that pilgrimages are arenas of polyvocality, and often contestation and difference.

I contend, however, that much of the well-trodden theoretical discourse on pilgrimages (cf. Chapter 4) offers a partial view of the phenomenon of pilgrimage. The ethnographic evidence from this research has led me to think differently about these special journeys in that I have encountered the development of other analytical frames that evoke alternative theoretical possibilities and have made novel and innovative contributions to pilgrimage study. The empirical evidence has thus been checked against classic pilgrimage theory but, more profoundly, the empirical evidence has pointed to new considerations that have found expressions improving the explanatory ability of pilgrimage studies. From these, more abstract applications and higher-order explanations emerged. This has led to exciting theoretical contributions in our understanding of pilgrimage. No theoretical contribution (of which I am currently aware) brings all of these aspects of pilgrimage into focus. I was therefore necessitated to express the findings of eastern Free State pilgrimages in a language that borrows from the work of Ingold (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 201c), Hodder (2012), Bird-David (1999) and Bille et al. (2010). This languaging is novel to the pilgrimage studies discourse and therefore is an outstanding contribution of this research. Said differently, my disquiet with the inability of existing frames to satisfactorily explain and account for my findings demanded that I turn to philosophical and other theoretical frames to evoke the possibilities of analyses for different sets of ideas (cf. Chapter 2, *The sense-making process*, p. 68).

Lévi-Strauss (1966:248) said: “[s]cientific explanation consists not in a movement from complex to the simple but in the substitution of a more intelligible complexity for another which is less”. This is what I attempt in the present chapter. Firstly, I present two ways in which the

pilgrimage phenomenon is conceived: from substantivist and non-substantivist perspectives. This positionality influences whether pilgrimages are thought of as special and extraordinary, or merely as extensions of the everyday. Of course, pilgrimage literature can be read in this way, as it includes the views within which journeyers conceive of the journeys they undertake.

To be clear, what I am presenting here are emic explanations put forward by informants of and participants in eastern Free State pilgrimages. It is not an ontological position I myself have chosen. These pilgrimages are expressed and experienced within a relational epistemology and ontology of relatedness and entwinement. I happen to use scientific language and theory, a more intelligible complexity (as Lévi-Strauss has said), to explain the complexities of pilgrimage experience and its expression. I use etic concepts to explain, analyse and interpret emic understandings and experiences of pilgrimages. In so doing, I think of the animacy of the sites and the pilgrimages to them via the ideas of meshworks, entanglements, and the presencing of absence. This discussion is found in the second part of the chapter.

7.2 Pilgrimages as exceptional or ordinary: Substantivist or non-substantivist assumptions

Reviewing the pilgrimage literature I was struck by the wide-ranging forms that pilgrimages can assume. These include traditional, formal, domestic, heritage, grief-centred, earth energy-inspired, and touristic journeys, to name but a few. Two categories are often distinguished from this diversity: sacred and secular pilgrimages. However, what I am interested in, irrespective of these, are two emerging main streams of pilgrimage study. On the one hand there are the substantivist perspectives on pilgrimage, whereas the other presents non-substantivist perspectives on the same. I borrow the *substantivist* idea from religion studies and extrapolate it to pilgrimage. Substantive, the adjective, means having a separate and independent function, i.e. separate as well as independent resources and/or existence. The word originates from Middle English *substantif* (c. 1350-1400), from Anglo-French *sustentif*, having or expressing substance, from the Late Latin *substantivus* equivalent to Latin *substantia* (or essence). The noun 'substance' encapsulates the essence or most important part of things; it affects the essential nature underlying phenomena. Substantivists therefore

assume that there is an essence behind things and, for this argument, that this essence is religion and therefore pilgrimages, in contrast with reducing it to society or the mind).¹

Based on analyses of empirical evidence gleaned from the three sacred sites in the eastern Free State, I propose that encountering the heart of the sacred depends on how pilgrimages are perceived. I use *communitas* – mutuality, interconnectedness, communion and reciprocity – as a vehicle to seek out the core of the sacred. *Communitas* is that sense of communion experienced *inter alia* between pilgrims as the proverbial playing field is levelled and participants are stripped of the rank and standing associated with everyday life as they enter, encounter and transcend within the liminoid (Turner 1969, 1974; Turner & Turner 1978).² The assertion is that “*communitas* provided ritual and ontological space for the expression of human commonality” (Albera & Eade 2015:5 – emphasis in the original); that all pilgrims on the journey are equal. That *communitas* is a characteristic of pilgrimage, or whether it can ever exist, is a notion challenged by many (e.g. Morinis 1984; Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman & Eade 2004) whose point of departure rejects events, journeys, transitions, places and people as being substantive – as having an own substance. The mutuality implied by Turner and embedded in the notion of *communitas*, is, I argue, limited to very specific images of mobilities. I hope to show that how one thinks about pilgrimages determines whether they are extraordinary and transformational, or whether they are relegated to the everyday and the mundane.

Communitas: A working understanding

We will remember that the idea of *communitas* was coined by Victor Turner, first in relation to rites of passage – particularly related to the liminal (cf. van Gennep’s tripartite scheme of rites of passage), during the ritual process, and then later applied in his and Edith Turner’s work on pilgrimage. *Communitas* is that sense of communion and interconnectedness experienced (among others) between pilgrims or ritual participants as the proverbial playing field is levelled and the rank and status distinguishing participants in everyday life falls away as they enter, encounter, and transcend within the liminoid (cf. anti-structural). *Communitas* is that sense of solidarity and commonality that is, as recently expressed by Edith Turner (2012:1), almost “beyond strict definition, with almost endless variations”; it is that spontaneous joy felt when

¹ Economic anthropology also uses the notion of *substantive*. As used here, however, is not in economic anthropology’s understanding, but rather is adopted from religion studies.

² Liminoid (liminal-like) is in fact the concept Turner used. For many drawing on his work the less cumbersome word, liminal, is used (Winkelman & Dubisch 2005:221).

“life together takes on full meaning” (Turner 2012:1). It is when you are in the *flow* or in the *zone* as a musician playing a piece of music or an athlete competing at the highest levels.³

Considering this slight re-interpretation of *communitas*, it hardly ever occurs that co-pilgrims or more permanent site pilgrims query the right of individuals or groups to undertake pilgrimage. Self-appointed spiritual leaders do indeed emphasise protocols and respect for the sites and stations, but do not prohibit entry to the sites. In this sense the mere fact of being part and being accepted as part of the *congregation* of pilgrims invests a sense of togetherness, thus alluding to *communitas*. However, this does not negate the fact that pilgrims are often distracted from experiencing *communitas* by interfering gatekeepers. Underlying this hindrance is the reality of internal strife and conflict between competing personalities and competing narratives at specific localities within the larger sites. Service rendering is pivotal and vying for recognition and legitimacy is paramount to its successful achievement.

Important perspectives on pilgrimage

Broadly speaking, anthropological studies on pilgrimages may be divided into two main branches: *the old* (cf. Turner 1974; Turner & Turner 1978) and *recent approaches* (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman & Eade 2004; Nthoi 2006; Margry 2008).⁴

In brief, the Turnerian paradigm of pilgrimage espoused to formulate a universal model which encompassed all cases of pilgrimage, irrespective of historical and cultural background (Nthoi 2006:67). The two main features of this model are rooted in the ideas of *communitas* and *liminality* (cf. Turner 1967). Pilgrimage was thus understood to be transformative.

Recent studies have tended to (cf. Sallnow 1987) highlight the occurrence of hostility and competition existing between individuals or groups of pilgrims, and even ethnic divisions often indicating an absence of *communitas*. Sallnow (1987) as well as Coleman and Eade (2004), for example, add that previous rank/status is not removed as pilgrims embark on pilgrimages, thus refuting the ritual levelling aspect of *communitas*. Eade and Sallnow (1991:2-6) emphasise the importance of the “heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process”; a view that sees

³ The notion of flow adopted by the Turners was drawn from Csikszentmihalyi’s work (Nthoi 2006:85). They consider this the healing aspect of pilgrimages when you are in and out of time – able to go beyond the immediate, be in the flow.

⁴ Although exponents of the new multi-dimensional or pluralistic approach to pilgrimage studies herald a new methodology and paradigm, most authors of this persuasion acknowledge the influence of Turner and the Turners (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991; Nthoi 2006).

pilgrimage as a “*realm of competing discourses*” [emphasis in original], among others, where religious and secular discourses compete; ultimately yielding “multiple meanings and understandings brought to the shrine by different categories of pilgrims, by residents and by religious specialists”.

For purposes of this section, I envisage two main pilgrimage perspectives, namely *substantivist* and *non-substantivist* streams.⁵ The former is challenged by many (e.g. Morinis 1984; Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman & Eade 2004) whose point of departure rejects the substantive nature of events, journeys, transitions, places, and people.

Drawing on their theorising about religion and ritual, in their broadest, and by implication pilgrimage in particular, the following proponents of the substantivist stream include Rudolf Otto (1923), Mircea Eliade (1959, 1963), Victor and Edith Turner (1974, 1978), Rupert Sheldrake (1991), and Ronald Grimes (1999, 2006), while the non-substantivist stream draws its strength from Emile Durkheim (1976), and includes Jonathan Z. Smith (1980, 1987), John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991, 2000), Simon Coleman and John Elsner (1995), as well as Simon Coleman and John Eade (2004). I include Grimes as a substantivist, but acknowledge that his propositions occupy somewhat of an in-between case, as we will see below.

The substantivist view draws on the older comparative religion tradition, while the non-substantivist approach privileges ritual emplacement. Ritual’s sociologically subservient role in the Durkheimian tradition is foundational to this perspective. Actual ritual is subordinated to ritual emplacement, rendering ritual spaceless (Grimes 2006:106, 111). Although dichotomised as two opposing streams, i.e. substantivist versus non-substantivist, it must be acknowledged that this does not imply that there is no difference of opinion on certain matters within the streams. The distinction I make between substantivist and non-substantivist should not be seen as the exclusive domains of the sacred and the profane, the religious and non-religious. Even though Grimes (1999, 2006) emphasises performance as the key element of ritual, he also admits to non-religious ritual. Therefore, he does not make the sweeping statement that all rituals have religious or sacred substance. Instead, ritual may be inspired by an array of human societal and cultural needs or experiences. The implication is that pilgrimage as ritual, is not exclusively linked to sacred or religious purposes but realising that pilgrimage is deeply embedded in what Reader (2014) calls the marketplace; the postmodern

⁵ Some scholars may consider the debate between substantivist and non-substantivist approaches as outdated, even a residue of the days of phenomenology in anthropological discourse. For further reading, consult the fine 2010 chapter by Arie Molendijk, *The notion of the sacred*, which addresses substantial and situational approaches to the sacred.

environment. Reader argues that pilgrimage has always existed parallel to market forces and the living of daily life. In so doing, even in a *Disney-esque* environment, phenomenal and extraordinary journeys are possible (2014). Acknowledging this, the next couple of paragraphs illustrate the moot exercise of treating these as separate and presenting their main features.

My aim here is to set out how these two major streams view pilgrimages. The substantivist perspective views pilgrimage as having an own ontology, a substance. Pilgrimage is a thing, it is a total social phenomena with a reality in its own right; it has an own identity (cf. Coleman & Elsner 1995:199). The non-substantivist view conceives of pilgrimage as a human and social construction. Strongly influenced by Durkheim, this approach views pilgrimage, like religion, as a response to societal needs. Religion, and pilgrimage, is a “product of societal forces” (Coleman & Elsner 1995:199). Pilgrimage might then serve the need to unite people or promote social cohesion. However, because it has no substance, there is no God and there is no sacred; it only serves the sociological purpose. Smith’s idea of ritual placement as “ritual’s role in maintaining intellectual and social order” (Grimes 2006:106) helps us understand this. Religion (and ritual) is created by the sociological dynamic to motivate social order and relations at an *other* level to acquire status or authority to make it enforceable and believable. Therefore, because of the structure of society, one needs something higher to be able to say that it is divinely imposed and required – it becomes legitimated. That is, people can be indoctrinated to such an extent that they feel compelled to comply. God, the sacred, is therefore a projection of the needs of the society and symbolises the social collective (Badone & Roseman 2004:2), i.e. the sacred is society “projected in material form” (Smith 2004:107).

This non-substantivist approach denies the substantive part of religion, the sacred or ritual. From this view pilgrimages do not include the notion of having an encounter with the numinous – it cannot, because for them the numinous does not exist. The nature of pilgrimage is such that it is a human and social construction. Pilgrimage is therefore seen as simply a construct that people believe in, an ideology, and therefore serves the purpose to unite people or reinforce the leadership or identity of the group. As such, pilgrimage might strengthen the moral codes held by the people. Thereby, pilgrimage serves socio-cultural and psychological aims. Pilgrimage might very well be a form of social control and a way that authority is enforced. Therefore, the idea of God or spirituality serves the goals of society. This is why all events that serve this aim, be it a sports match, rock concert, or activist march are considered as *new, postmodern, secular forms of pilgrimage*. They serve the relational, positional, linkages and power to suit society. In so doing, appeals are made to the otherworldly to give sanction to the quest for societal order or what you are doing, or to convince people to believe. Religion, the sacred, ritual and therefore pilgrimage, is made substanceless and the

sociological becomes the substantive. Myth or religion, and for our purposes, pilgrimage, are the constructs that serve the substantive sociological. In this frame, pilgrimage, the phenomenon, therefore falls together with all that is human movement. It is not unique as a phenomenon because another substance resides in the phenomenon; a reality of a numinous. There are those, e.g. Eade and Sallnow (1991), who are even willing to abandon the idea that “pilgrimage as a sociologically discreet phenomenon even exists” (Coleman & Elsner 1995:200; cf. 1995:198). Religion is not built around a substance and thus, pilgrimages have no substance and places have no substance. Space is not the constitutive ritual component; it is sacralised by how people act in it (Grimes 2006:108-109). Journeys have no substance and sacredness or sacrality is based exclusively on what is done there. Something happens there and therefore it is holy. It is not holy and therefore something happens there. This idea was recently brought to the fore by Tanya Luhmann (2013) from Stanford University, who posits that, for example, people are not Christian and therefore go to church, but rather that they go to church and therefore become Christian. The “‘sacred’ is a product of human agency, this or that is designated ‘sacred’” (Grimes 2006:111). There is an idea of what the phenomenon entails, and then it is given structure or form according to that idea. The substance of the idea gives form to other things/ideas. Following this line of reasoning, the idea of the immense presence of ancestors and God at my research sites gives content to the idea of pilgrimage. A sacred site is constructed or conceived of around a thing that has substance.

Scholars who may be included within the rubric of a non-substantivist approach to pilgrimage are also those looking at pilgrimage as a ritual. For them the ritual is empty, implying that ritual is not about something, but exists for its own sake. Pilgrimage as ritual will therefore not exist because of basic essence, function or intention other than the ritual itself. Therefore it does not embrace a particular meaning but only ascribes meaning through the ritual itself. Even Van Beek (2007:18-19) follows this view when he cites Frans Staal (1975) who expresses the view that the rite is empty. The implication is, however, not to minimise the importance of ritual in ancient and modern times, but to seek its essence in its own created rules designed for its own purpose as ritual. An *outer* substance, function or meaning is absent, for the ritual devises and changes its rules for its own sake and meaning. Paul Post would not be in full agreement. Of course he is correct in his view that pilgrimages acquire new meanings depending on the circumstances together with the array of journeyers and all their framing. However, that it exists only via the meaning that it generates as ritual, is a stretch. Although the reasons, goals and meanings that eastern Free State pilgrims have may differ and may proliferate even, it is difficult to deny that the contents revolve around something. What is implied is something very

substantive. For these pilgrims, there is *substance* to the idea that the divine and the ancestors are involved in every aspect of the site and the people making journeys to the sites.

As an adjective, substantivist means a connection to the concrete, thus giving expression to the concrete or the material, as it were. It is not merely a mental construct, but lends content to deities, places and pilgrimages. There is a thing such as a God, deity, pilgrimage. There is the possibility of transcendence and communion with the supernatural during pilgrimage, along the way, or at the final destination of the journey; these are the pilgrim's realities. Therefore, pilgrims believe that something can happen to them (e.g. punishment by the supernatural) if they do not heed the call or concede to the obligation of undertaking and participating in pilgrimage. For the substantivists, the substance of pilgrimage posits the possibility of encountering the supernatural not only as a distant ideal, but in effect inviting otherworldly communion in the here and now. Pilgrimage therefore becomes a phenomenon of spirituality and meeting and *communitas*. The exceptional materiality of the sites and the stations along the way are offset from everyday life – they are sacred and they have substance. However, the use of *communitas* in this study does not reflect the Turnerian conception to the letter. *Communitas* as utilised here excludes the idea that it is a collective destiny with positive transformation experiences for participants as the only outcome.

From the non-substantivist perspective, pilgrimages are empty vessels, voids (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991:15), i.e. they are arenas of polyvocality with many meanings and many actions (Coleman 2004:54; Coleman & Eade 2004:15; Nthoi 2006:9, 11). Such arenas can accommodate varied site visitors with their diverse intentionalities and modalities (meanings and practices) “into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers, and aspirations” (Eade & Sallnow 1991:15). They are also arenas of contestation (Coleman & Eade 2004:93; Nthoi 2006:82). Having said that, this view therefore acknowledges the heterogeneity of pilgrimages (Nthoi 2006:11, 83).

Pilgrimages are not extra-ordinary, exceptional or special (cf. Coleman 2004:53; Coleman 2004:7-8), non-substantivists say. Rather, their social structure is a confirmation of the everyday (Margry 2008:21). Not only is the ordinary reflected in the social structure, but it reflects other societal features such as conflicts and non-unity. Substantivists on the other hand conceive of pilgrimages as exceptional, special and extraordinary; they are “irregular journeys outside habitual social realms” (Morinis, cited in Coleman & Eade 2004:3). They “transcend the everyday world” (Coleman & Elsner 1995:201) but are also distinctively different from profane travel or journeys, i.e. they are phenomenologically different from other human, social and cultural acts with an intrinsic identity. Unlike in the case of the non-

substantivist view, their social structure does not reflect the everyday. Using Turner's vocabulary, they are anti-structural. It is contained within this precise proposition that Turner's notions of liminality and *communitas* find fruition. Deriving from van Gennep's work on rites of passage, the liminal is the intermediate phase of his tripartite scheme of rites of passage; the proverbial threshold – the neither here nor there. This evokes an Eliadean sense of timelessness (cf. Eade & Sallnow 1991:14), of the otherworldly. Of course this is not to say that everyone who sees pilgrimages as movement, views pilgrimages from a non-substantive perspective. In fact, if we consider Margry's (2008:36) definition of pilgrimage, we can clearly see that the journey is thought to be an extraordinary and phenomenal experience.

From my reading of the literature dealing with touristic types of travel, I want to argue that here too we can place the arguments into the two overarching categories of substantivist or non-substantivist forms of tourist travel akin to that presented above. What emerges from the work of Graburn (1977, 1983, 1989) and MacCannell (1976) (as cited in Badone & Roseman 2004:5-7) is that non-religious travel in this fast-paced, modern, profane world is the need of travellers to periodically leave the things of everyday life behind; to seek a reprieve, a breather and opportunity to recharge; and a need for "spiritual renewal" (Badone & Roseman 2004:5) from urban alienation (cf. Gaburn 1995:167, cited in Badone & Roseman 2004:183). Very often this is accomplished by seeking out the *real*, the so-called authentic, that that really matters. Other words that may be used to capture something of the desired outcome of the journey, but not as conclusive as something *authentic* as though desired outcomes have fixed borders of meaning or essence, may be *indisputable* or *beyond doubt*. I argue that the sacred that the pilgrim seeks out is not unlike the really-real that the touristic traveller seeks. The genuineness of the touristic destination or experience has just as much substance as the sacred that the pilgrim seeks to encounter (cf. Badone & Roseman 2004:2).

Journeys of substance

Connecting this section to the theme of the *limits of mutuality*, let us go back to *communitas* – connectedness, interconnectedness, reciprocity. Within the context of pilgrimages it therefore depends on which theoretical perspective one aligns oneself with. I argue that if pilgrimage is understood to be just another form of movement; one that resembles and is an extension of the everyday – the ordinary; an empty vessel and void; an arena of polyvocality and competing discourses; as substanceless, then *communitas* seldom develops or exists. And, if there is no *communitas*/communion, there is no interconnection and no mutuality.

However, if pilgrimage is conceived of as journeying to a destination with substance, to encounter the supernatural or the numinous, and pilgrimage is conceived of as deeply meaningful and sacred (of substance), pilgrims at times develop and experience a sense of *communitas*. This *communitas* is not necessarily universal in the Victor Turner sense, but is certainly profoundly meaningful, in the connectedness sense. Pilgrimage is transformative and transcendental.

The mutuality implied by Turner and embedded in the notion of *communitas*, is therefore limited to very specifically conceived of mobilities. Where there is pilgrimage of substance, there is *communitas*. Where there is *communitas*, there is mutuality. Where there is no *communitas*, there is no mutuality, reciprocity or interconnectedness but only the secular, the mundane and the ordinary.

Journeyers who consider their journey as mundane and secular travel are not likely to think of themselves as pilgrims, nor are they likely to call their journey a pilgrimage. Journeyers whose travels are thought of as special and transformative, are more likely to think of their journeys as pilgrimages. When researchers study these journeys, they are more likely to consider transformative, exceptional journeys as pilgrimages, and the persons undertaking such excursions as pilgrims. Of course, if the theoretical assumptions held by researchers are non-substantive they will explain even significant and important journeys as mere extensions of the mundane and everyday life of travellers.

7.3 Meshworks, entanglements and the presencing of absence

“There is nothing wrong with enjoying looking at the ocean itself, except that when you finally see what goes on underwater, you realize that you’ve been missing the whole point of the ocean. Staying on the surface all the time is like going to the circus and staring at the outside of the tent” – Dave Barry

The quote above can be likened to the study of pilgrimages, but only including the observable. Ethnographic fieldwork to and at the sacred sites of Mautse, Motouleng and Mantsopa have left no doubt as to the animacy of the sites, their pilgrimages, and occasional and more permanent site users. I have thought of these relational ways of knowing and being in the world via meshworks, entanglements and the interplay between presences and absences. In particular, I consider landscapes, dreamscapes and personsapes as such pilgrimage

meshworks and entanglements. These are also examples of the materialised forms of impermanent or absent things. Once materialised, they have duration and can act back, and engage more concretely involving and re-involving themselves in the dependence-dependency relational dance of pilgrimages, eastern Free State-style.

Scholars working from a culturalistic position are adamant that people give meaning, make meaning; and inscribe onto what Ingold (2010a:126) calls hard surfaces, the cognitive and symbolic ascriptions needed to construct social reality. Two foundational assumptions underpinning this thinking are: one, there is a unilinear directionality to impacting, and people do all the impacting, constructing and ascribing. One could say that humans are therefore the only agents of construction. Hodder would call this a very human-centred view (2012:89). Two, arguments are formulated as if the cognitive thought-spark is always the genesis of meaning. This is in line with Smith's proposition that "[p]erformances in specific places are superseded by systems of classification in minds and in societies" (Grimes 2006:109). I believe, however, that by applying ethnographic evidence gleaned from domestic pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State, I demonstrate that landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes are inextricably entangled, demonstrating dependence and dependency, and not simply inscribed by human agents as advocates of the culturalistic perspective propose. To do this I argue via Tim Ingold's work on dwelling, landscape and animacy (2000, 2006, 2010a, 2010b), Nurit Bird-David's (1999) reformulation of animism, Ian Hodder's work on entanglements (2012), and the ideas of absence and presence (e.g. Bille et al. 2010). I show that the ontological claims of the hylomorphic model⁶ do not sufficiently account for the full pilgrimage picture. It blinds us with reductive logic to consider only a partial account of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. Instead, employing a *textility of making*⁷ approach we come to realise that within a relational ontology everything is richly enmeshed. Furthermore, Hodder and Ingold, among others, have contributed to a body of literature under the ambit of materiality and objectification. Such work shows that "cultural, spiritual and individual lives are inherently dependent upon and constituted by their interconnections with organic and inorganic things" (Bille et al. 2010:7). Within such a distinctive material culture perspective, that which is materially not there is called immaterial.

⁶ Derived from Aristotle's proposition that things require form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*), a problem with this *hylomorphic model* is that form necessitated an agentive actor who would imprint on it. Matter became seen as inert and unresponsive, becoming what is acted upon by a conscious agent (Ingold 2010a:92).

⁷ Unlike with the hylomorphic model, the *textility of making* emphasises the importance of the process of formation, making and becoming. In the *textility of making* scheme, objects are given agency and matter can now act back (Ingold 2010a:92-95). Antecedent for Ingold (2010a) are the philosophical propositions of Deleuze and Guattari (2004). The hylomorphic model is therefore deposed by the *textility of making*.

I am arguing that three incorporated domains, namely landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes in the context of pilgrimages, are non-linear, multi-dimensional and often unpredictably interconnected as they come into existence. In addition, the presencing of absence is articulated via these three scapes. My ethnographic fieldwork at the sacred sites of Mautse, Motouleng and Mantsopa have left no doubt as to the relationality of the sites, these pilgrimages, and occasional and more permanent site users.

Relationally knowing and being

The world is one of hard physicality. Within such a dominant conceptual framework, everything that is immaterial, i.e. not of the physical landscape and the “solid objects resting on its surface” (Ingold 2010a:132), is literally unthinkable. The world of the sacred sites of the eastern Free State and the cosmologies of their pilgrims fall within the realm of the immaterial and what is immaterial within such a framework is of little import.

The pilgrimage sites of the eastern Free State are not hard-surfaced worlds (Ingold 2010a:126). They are not devoid of furnishings, featureless, and neither are they barren (Ingold 2010a:126). Instead, they are animated. Not only are the nooks and crannies, mountains and rivers animated by spirit beings, but pilgrims also believe that these revered places are inhabited by a collective council of ancestors. I would like nothing more than to say that the inert objects and materiality of the sacred sites are imputed with spirit life; that the sacred sites are places populated by “mobile, self-propelled entities”, anthropomorphised and viewed as personal and impersonal supernatural beings and forces – elfin or demon-like; powers or energies (Ingold 2006:14).

This Tylorian view of animism, however, remains enduring in both lay and scholarly contexts. I embrace a very different animism, one that is firstly more closely aligned with R.R. Merrett's initial idea of animatism, i.e. “all objects and beings are imbued with an impersonal power, often referred to as mana”, than with E.B. Tylor's view of animism as being animated by personal spirits (Saliba 2013:20-21). In this instance, it is vastly removed from the notions associated with it as the origin of religion or even a prereligion, as was initially proposed. Rather, it resonates more closely with Nurit Bird-David's cognitive reformulation as a relational epistemology, not as a “religion but rather a way of relating to the nonhuman world” (1999; cf. Saliba 2013:21). Tim Ingold expands on the idea some years later and speaks of relational ontology (2006). This animism is a relational way of knowing and being in the world. This is foundational for the ideas of meshing and relationality; networks of entanglement and

interconnectedness, or meshworks, in which there is continuous and mutual impacting and therefore continuous *becoming*.

For Bird-David, animism is about a plurality of epistemologies (1999:68).⁸ To explain this view she borrows the idea of *dividual* from Strathern (Bird-David 1999:72).⁹ In her treatment of the Strathernian concept, to *dividuate*, this verb implies not only a consciousness of that person, but being

“conscious of how she relates with me ... I am conscious of the *relatedness with* [her] *as I engage with her*, attentive to what she does in relation to what I do, to how she talks and listens to me as I talk and listen to her, to what happens simultaneously and mutually to me, to her, to *us*” (Bird-David 1999:72 – emphasis in the original).

In such dividuating relationships, Bird-David holds, we learn to know others not in themselves, but instead as they interrelate with one another and with us. We sense them as *dividuated personalities* (not separated, but related) (Bird-David 1999:72). In this manner a cooperative relatedness is forged (Bird-David 1999:77) and an attunement to its response develops when you act towards it. At the same time, one is keenly aware of changes in oneself as well as in the other. Bird-David gives a beautiful account of this in the next citation: “It is expecting response and responding, growing into mutual responsiveness and, furthermore, possibly into mutual responsibility” (Bird-David 1999:77).

Bird-David uses the practical example of kinship to explain. Kinship is established by means of repeated social behaviours, such as cultivating sharing relationships or a *cosmic economy of sharing* (Bird-David 1999:73). At particularly Mautse and Motouleng, mpho or phasa badimo is an example of such a recurring social action or obligation in which relatedness with ancestors is made and remade, established and re-established. Although this social action is directed towards ancestors (i.e. the living dead, those no longer earthly but instead intangible, immaterial and absent), it is due to the kinship bond that they are sensed as ones with whom one shares. In the context of pilgrimages (and other social settings I am not reporting on here), such an objectified category, namely ancestors, is addressed in kinship terms. Grandmothers (bo ngkono) – the gendered term – is collectively used to address and refer to ancestors.

⁸ Bird-David (1999) promotes the idea that there are many ways of knowing. Of course this is a reality in almost every encounter between people. The potential for misunderstanding and contestation and of course the very real consequences when people are unable to understand one another because of these different epistemic assumptions, has far-reaching implications for transformation or reconciliation in a country such as South Africa.

⁹ As a noun, *dividuals* are, according to Strathern, “‘partible persons’ – that is persons are the products of chains of socially reproductive acts, so there is not division between the social and individual persona” (Hodder 2012:90). The term enchainment is used to refer to such chains of obligations (Hodder 2012:89).

Some pilgrims divduate deities at the sites and they are “attentive, and work towards making, relatedness” (Bird-David 1999:73). The deities, although immaterial or absent, are sensed and attended to by means of certain ritual actions (forging sharing relationships), and are made personal. Similar to Bird-David’s ethnographic example, i.e. the Nayaka, many pilgrims to eastern Free State sites establish relatedness in similar ways, with not only the superpersons of the sites, but other things (animals, plants, places) as well.¹⁰ In so doing, their differences become redundant and they become bound into a *we-ness* category. Even a material object, such as my walking stick, becomes a kind of person; that with whom one interrelates (cf. Bird-David 1999:73).

Sensing such related essences, such animistic knowledge is “understanding relatedness from a related point of view within the shifting horizons of the related viewer” (Bird-David 1999:77). This points to related ways of knowing; a relational epistemology. This way of knowing

“grows from and *is* maintaining relatedness with neighboring others. It involves divduating the environment rather than dichotomizing it and turning attention to ‘we-ness’, which absorbs differences, rather than to ‘otherness, which highlights differences and eclipses commonalities” (Bird-David 1999:78).

Even the environment is relationally framed as nested relatedness (Bird-David 1999:78). Such a relational epistemology is not the only way the pilgrims know; it may very well also not be the dominant way of knowing. But, for pilgrims, whether they know it or not, and whether they like it or not, this relational framing is foundational to superpersons and material things. With respect to the latter, this animic epistemology is foundational to the notion of sacrality of the sites.

Pilgrimage and true connection does not come easy. Pilgrims are frequently in denial about what they must do, and what must be changed so that they can truly understand the essence of this connection that they seek and it often poses challenges to them that they do not want to confront (i.e. it is so far outside their regular frame of reference). However, only when they learn to understand and develop these very different ways of knowing (from those needed in the “normal” world), and practice, embody and live them, will they be privy to the light, the insight and the healing. It is not me, the author, who has made these decisions on behalf of the pilgrims. Their calling, their being on a journey, undergoing transformations and training, requires the development of epistemic assumptions that may be dialogically opposed to the ones they set out with when embarking on their pilgrimages.

¹⁰ Superpersons are persons with extra powers (Bird-David 1999:68, 71).

My immersion into the life-practices and beliefs of a group of trainee-traditional healers and herbalists has made me acutely aware of bees. *Bees are a manifestation of our ancestors and it is through them that we can see their presence*, my informants would say.

After returning home from a particularly successful fieldwork trip in June 2010, my habitual custom of walking my dog after work again became that ‘something to look forward to after a long day at the office’. The sun was westering and we were walking in a westerly direction. Late winter afternoons are beautiful! Before I heard their intense buzzing, in the path ahead I saw what looked like a darkish mirage. Preoccupied with inner thoughts it was almost too late before I realised what I was seeing. ‘I must not run’, was my only tangible thought. Veering off the path, my

dog and I were able to avoid the busy swarm of bees. It was when I looked back to see if we were in the clear and the setting sun caught this translucent droning mass, that I knew that my key informant was communicating with me on a plane that my senses had not previously known.

Questions that flooded my awareness included: “was it induced by the intensity of a profound field experience, the result of a deep connection with my teacher’s culture...was it...real or imaginary, and does the distinction matter” (Wreford 2008:127). The experience was definitely real, but what had happened was that the meaning I ascribed to the event became filtered not through my own, but through the worldview-grid of my interlocutor. Because we were in *we-ness*, I began understanding as pilgrims understand.

Meshworks, entangled domains and entanglements

To explain the stringently dualistic manner in which things are seen in the world, Ingold (2006:12-13) uses a circle to depict the (bounded) object; it could just as easily be a person, self, or organism (cf. Figure 7.1a). The clear inner part of the object is viewed against the outer world or environment. One might say it is *in here* and everything else is *out there*. He goes on to explain that the thing may be depicted differently, however. In this instance a line is used to represent the thing (cf. Figure 7.1b), meaning that now there is no inside or outside. There is no thing *in here* that interacts with a world *out there*, but instead he calls it a

“trail of movement or growth. Every such trail traces a relation. But the relation is not *between* one thing and another – between the organism ‘here’ and the environment ‘there’. It is rather a trail along which life is lived: one strand in a tissue of trails that together make up the texture of the lifeworld” (Ingold 2006:13 – emphasis in the original).

This illustrates the relational field in which things exist and this is what Ingold means when he speaks of meshworks – intersecting, interconnecting, interweaving and immersed trails and threads (cf. Hodder 2012:93; Ingold 2010c).¹¹

This only deals with one of the domains. Instead of conceiving of the environment as surrounding these webs; bounding them *in here* and it *out there*, Ingold (2006:14-15) suggests viewing the two domains as inextricably entangled; ultimately forming a domain of entanglement (cf. Figure 7.1c).

Ian Hodder’s book *Entangled: An archaeology of the relationships between humans and things* (2012) looks at the non-linear, multi-dimensional and often unpredictable ways that things are interconnected. Furthermore, in his article *The textility of making*, Tim Ingold concerns himself, among others, with things, i.e. how things can be acted upon, but also how they can act back (2010b). In yet another paper he significantly distinguishes between objects and things (Ingold 2010c), and so they are caught up in “trajectories of movement, responding to one another in counterpoint” (Ingold 2010a:96). Here, *things* enter into the argument:



Figure 7.1: Ingold explains meshworks (2006)

Things are not isolated, i.e. there is an interdependence between them (Hodder 2012:3). Having the knowledge to recognise an object for what it is, is part of this interdependence. I imagine that not all pilgrims have absolute knowledge of the sites or the journeys to and in them. Many site users rely on tacit knowledge and accumulate further insight along the journey as they encounter site ‘things’ and other pilgrims and their narratives, for example. According to Hodder all things are “part of inter-related eco-systems” (2012:4). Things may be found in symbiotic relationships with other things. Furthermore, at other times though, the relationship takes on very different characteristics.

¹¹ For interest, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceived of such webs as rhizomic, while Ingold preferred the fungal mycelium metaphor (Ingold 2006:13).

Things are not inert and I do not operate from the assumption that things are stable or fixed with hard-surfaced, external boundaries. The sacred spaces, as examples of material things, are also not inanimate (Hodder 2012:4). The charges or weights, forces or velocities, heat or viscosities, hydration or dehydration levels change. There are “flows of matter, energy and information” (Hodder 2012:4). Understanding things as merely “stages in the process of the transformation of matter”, energy or information, helps us understand this impermanence and lack of fixity (Hodder 2012:5). Such a lack of inertness is associated with a lack of isolation, Hodder says. This means that things need other things.

Things endure across different temporalities. Some things endure over very long periods, while others are fleeting. A human lifespan is longer in comparison with the duration of a rain cloud, for example, but so too, many things have temporalities that far exceed the average human life. Our desire to journey, the stories about pilgrimages, journeying individuals, the places that we journey to, all flow from somewhere, and, in turn, flow somewhere else (cf. Hodder 2012:5). The indebtedness to these origins of flow, or histories, cannot be overemphasised.

Things often appear as non-things. Our familiarities with things oftentimes make them appear to us as if they do not exist – they are merely background to our existence (cf. Hodder 2012:6). Such relationships between things are non-discursive. These may be thought of as non-things or non-places. I think that sacred journeys to places of significance are the inversion of this. The things and places become focal points – not non-things and places, but neo-things and places, i.e. they become foregrounded. This idea is closely aligned to Hodder’s *forgetness of things*, in the next paragraph.

With the familiarity of things mentioned above, the characteristic features of things and acknowledging the dependence of things on other things recedes from consciousness; we forget them. It is only when humans and things bump up against each other again that we recognise that our temporalities differ (Hodder 2012:6) and take notice. Hodder (2012:6) refers to this as spatial and temporal forgetting. The multitude of connections between things and other things is mostly irrelevant to us. We forget the connections that make the thing possible, this applying to both spatial and temporal connections. While temporal connections between humans and the sites change, the various spatial connections that produce pilgrims and pilgrimages, for example, grow with the ebb and flow of journeyers to the sites, as well as over periods of time.

Having considered some features of things, perhaps we are a little closer to being able to explain what a thing is. Entities are contained and definable and a host of things are contained in defined entities, even for brief moments. For Hodder (2012:7) they create “bundles of presence or duration in the continual flows of matter, energy and information. Just by having duration and presence we say they are things”. Things, therefore, are entities that have presence, an existence (Hodder 2012:7-8). The flows and relations into which things are drawn into configuration/patterning vary greatly. Hodder (2012:8) speaks of matter, energy and information being brought together into heterogeneous bundles; the gathering together of things. Things are therefore “temporary bundles of matter, energy and information” (Hodder 2012:9). All of the things involved in pilgrimages “co-constitute each other” (Hodder 2012:16).

My approach in this thesis is not to consider pilgrimage as a distant object but instead to consider pilgrimage as a particular type of patterning of connected things (cf. Hodder 2012:10; Ingold 2010c).

How do we claim to know that something leads to different ways of connecting to things (Hodder 2012:12)? As we saw above when talking about animism, heralding a relational epistemology drastically changes one’s perception, and in turn how one interacts with things. If sacred sites are understood to be inanimate and static material objects, I would be writing about a very different type of pilgrimage experience. Because of pilgrims’ relational epistemologies and ontologies, many more connections are acknowledged. There are relations to and with the sites, stations at the sites, other journeyers, the material and immaterial, and superpersons. “The presence of an entity depends on its use as a thing in relation to other things ... Knowing the existence of an entity is linked to the use of that entity as a thing” (Hodder 2012:13).

What is missing from this line of reasoning is exactly that: the absences. The pilgrimage picture is not complete without the very real encounters with non-tangible deities. I will consider these, incorporating the idea of presencing absences. But first, a brief look at Hodder’s treatment of entanglement.

Perhaps not quite as Ingold would view entanglements, Hodder brings important insights to the conversation. His sophisticated treatment of entanglement is too advanced to include a full review for purposes of this chapter. What is relevant here is that he highlights other aspects of entanglements (than perhaps the kumbaya, Gaia and oneness impression I might have had). Still within the context of relationality and connectedness, for him entanglement is the “dialectic of dependence and dependency”, or “sets of inter-linked dependences” (Hodder

2012:89, 105). Producing this dependence-dependency are humans and things (HT), humans and humans (HH), things and things (TT), and things and humans (TH). They may be identified as streams of information, power and materials. Some are extremely connected and widespread. Others are local, short-term and detached. Dependence (i.e. plural, dependences) involves “reliance and contingency, and constraint in the notion of ‘dependency’” (Hodder 2012:112). Said differently, there is a reliance (dependence) on things, and also a need to reproduce the things that have been made (i.e. dependency, [dependencies: plural]) (Hodder 2012:112). “Entanglements are about being caught up in real things in specific conjunctural ways that come about through complex interactions” (Hodder 2012:222).

Things have a separate world and this world draws us in (Hodder 2012:89). Our social worlds, material worlds as well as immaterial worlds are “entangled together by dependences and dependencies that create potentials, further investments and entrapments” (Hodder 2012:89, cf. 107). Entrapment develops from all the forms of dependences (HT, TH, HH and TT). Theoretically, entrapment occurs when “each node in the web is hyper-connected to other nodes, so that all nodes are maintained in position by the overall structure of the entanglement” (Hodder 2012:98).

Being both material and immaterial, entanglements may be characterised as being “strong, weak, integrated, redundant, concentrated, dispersed and so on” (Hodder 2012:107). It makes logical sense that they will not all be equally strong or concentrated. So too, entanglements are situational in that they are related to perspective, purpose, or the function and beliefs of the involved parties (Hodder 2012:108). The core and peripheries of entanglements are determined by the “power of the dominant groups at the centers” (Hodder 2012:109). Because of dependence and dependences, developments on the outskirts of the entanglement are restricted and regulated by the happenings at the centre. A core entanglement at the sacred sites would be that of ancestors (understood here as a broad, general collective category). Ancestors and the relation to ancestors are linked to many of the site narratives, e.g. a counsel of ancestors, communication with ancestors, the role of ancestors in healing, gifts of announcement to ancestors, sacrificial rituals directed to ancestors, etc. They are nodal points “around which dependence and dependency are aligned and controlled” (Hodder 2012:213).

The relevance of such understandings for the discussion is that everything is interrelated, entangled and entrapped with everything else. This includes all human and non-human things; everything that is material and everything that is immaterial; everything that is present and everything that is absent. All things are entangled and enmeshed, connected and

interconnected. This is a relational epistemological and ontological view of the world; a world viewed animically.

Absence and presences

Initially when thinking about materiality, it is equated with presence, and immateriality with absence. However, as we will see in this section, immaterial things may also be present, albeit in a non-tangible form. The “sensuous experience of something which is materially absent” is what is meant when referring to absence (Bille et al. 2010:3). Besides being sensuously present, these absent elements also exist for people at an emotional and ideational level. From the ethnographic record these absences materialise or become articulated through a number of means. These include narratives, commemorations, enactments of past experiences, and the visualisation of future circumstances (Bille et al. 2010:4). Although things are materially absent, they nevertheless influence people’s experience of their world.

There is a complex relationship between what is there and what is not there. The properties of absence and presence point to a contradiction in terms. Absence’s power lies in the capacity of such absences to “imply and direct attention towards presence” (Bille et al. 2010:4). One might even say that a mutuality or dependency exists between the *materially present* and the *materially absent*. Such conceptions point to ontological and material categories that are contextually conceptualised.

Patrick Fuery’s philosophy of absence revolves around two categories of absence (1995, cited in Bille et al. 2010:5). He calls the first primary absence, and the second, secondary absence. The former exists without any relation to presence; it is merely absence. The latter exists because of its connection to presence; it is inherently intertwined. “Something is absent because it is not present”, but importantly “the absent something is figured as potentially present” (Bille et al. 2010:5). Concerning pilgrimages, secondary absence is applicable. Divine deities or vital force (power, spirit, energy), the *absent something*, is considered potentially present. Because they are not materially tangible, this does not mean that they are absent. Instead, they are sought after and believed to exist. They are present in their absence.

Matthew Engelke argues for a dualistic view of presence (cited in Bille et al. 2010:9). He opines that on the one hand there is material presence and, on the other, there is immaterial presence. The latter (for that is what concerns us here) includes the presence of God in spirit, and therefore, I argue, ancestors as well. Engelke’s immaterial presence and Fuery’s secondary absence, because the something is configured as potentially present, speak to the same thing in this case, i.e. the immaterial divine. Furthermore, for Engelke “the absence of

one thing attracts attention to or even provokes the production of the other thing, mediating the absent thing is a stand-in, or surrogate or proxy” (Bille et al. 2010:10). At the eastern Free State sites, building structures or paying attention to dreams serves this very proxy-purpose. On the one hand, because of the absence of the divine, the stand-ins draw attention to them. On the other hand, because of the presence of the surrogates, attention is inextricably drawn to the immaterial deities.

This exposition translates into theory/jargon what the empirical evidence is saying: pilgrimages are open and ontogenetic. Everything to do with pilgrimage is connected, interconnected and interrelated. To understand pilgrimages more fully, all these things need to be acknowledged as significant.

Setting the landscapes

In the animic, relational ontology animacy is the

“dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds ... continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but rather ontologically prior to their differentiation” (Ingold 2006:10).

The water, clay and soil, vegetation, the mountains, the caves, the spirits, the ancestors and God have agentic powers and agentic presence in their own right (Ingold 2006:16; Fowles 2010:24), i.e. they are alive and vital. We know this because of their characteristic trails and patterns of movement. The water gurgles and drips; herbaceous and bulbous plants grow and have potent properties; and the clay and soil have important nutrients which facilitate healing. The mountains stand guard and the caves offer sanctuary. The spirits, ancestors and God play in the swirling and siphoning water, whispering and whistling through age-weathered crevices, and in the dark. Ancestors and God conjure in dreams paths and instructions of their pleasure or not. This presents some of the tangle, the relational field within which pilgrimages, pilgrims and the sacrality of the sites is brought into existence. They are also sensuous presences and identifiers of that which appears not to be there; the absent divine (Bille et al. 2010:12).

The sacred sites comprise points of cross-over, interfaces between “the relatively solid *substances*” of rock and ground, mountain, cave, valley, pilgrim and the “relatively volatile mediums” of the spirits, ancestors and God (Ingold 2010a:124). Water and soil, vegetation,

mountains and caves do not “rest on the foundation of the earth’s surface”, but instead they encompass all aspects of formations of that surface (Ingold 2010a:125). They do not exist *on* the world, but *in* the world, and “woven into their texture are the lines of growth and movement of its inhabitants” (Ingold 2006:14). These in turn are manifested in the dreams and visions of pilgrims and their human geography, amongst others, in adornments and postures and actions. In Image 7.1 we see a novice apprentice traditional practitioner wearing the required garments and articles of her trainee level and respectfully approaching a water source. Kneeling and with cupped hands she makes the requisite three-clap signal and incantation to those inhabiting the water. Firstly, these surfaces are experienced kinaesthetically. We feel them through embodied experience, such as modes of activity in ritual and journey, for example. Secondly, they are differently experienced and perceived and understood. Each pilgrim’s framing or the multiple domains of entanglement brings forth varied mixes and manifestations. Thirdly, each tangle of intertwined trails results in a new and unique representation, implying constant and continual growth and development of different meshworks/webs.

I may argue that sacred sites and pilgrimages (as surfaces) are in fact convergence points between the mental and material: with intentions already constructed and inscribed, that pilgrims alone have agency. The idea is that pilgrims imagine, create, share, adjust, reconstruct and project; that pilgrims’ framings are *stamped* onto landscapes, personscapes and dreamscapes (cf. Ingold 2010a:129). However, sacred sites, pilgrims, pilgrimages and narratives¹², as forms of such creation, are not stamps. They differ from stamps “in their texture, in their temporality, and in their embeddedness in the ground of habitation” (Ingold 2010a:129). They too are inextricably interwoven through their interlocking. Sacred sites, pilgrims, pilgrimages and all their stories are not ready-made. They become through the thinking, dreaming, and ritual actions of the pilgrims as they journey through landscapes. The sites, for example, are impressionable. Pilgrim trails, i.e. traces of presence (Nel 2014a:143), are left behind, indicating their having passed that way. Series of such trails can be seen in the paths leading pilgrims to yet other series of trails, such as the successive stations and altars. Image 7.2 demonstrates these traces of presence in how paths literally imprint on the landscape, and how spaces are appropriated by successive site users along these paths. When viewed together, the eastern Free State pilgrimages take on characteristic patterns.

¹² According to Cortazzi (2010:388), narratives have the important function of forming and/or maintaining identity. In these ways, narrators make sense of themselves, others or places. And, this is part of the argument I am trying to make here, i.e. narratives are told, and in their telling the identity of the teller or the places that are being spoken of, are gaining ground, included with other parts of stories and thereby legitimising the places as significant. Plummer (2010:395) adds that life stories, or segments thereof, “help establish collective memories and imagined communities”.

Furthermore, pilgrims too are impressionable. The landscapes of the sacred sites impact on them, leaving impressions and imprints on their minds, on their bodies, and on their being. For example, in Image 7.3 we see that site visitors smear their faces (and bodies) with sehwashu, the nutrient-rich clay harvested at the sacred sites. A representation of the landscape, in the form of clay, is literally smeared onto the personscape. Another example involves memories of the caves, both collective memories and those individually experienced and impressed on pilgrim personscapes. The site spaces harbour, generate and kindle memories of different sorts and thus contribute to the *at-home* feeling of pilgrims. The sites themselves also *speak* to site visitors and their symbolism, and the embedded *scapes* establish an accord of identification and impact on the identity construction of the pilgrims.



Image 7.1: A novice traditional practitioner © 2008

Often the material and immaterial creatively converge. Mabitleng, the *grave* location at Motouleng, portrays the material forms; the heaps of soil and rock piles that may be associated with the shape of graves. However, the attention drawn to the grave site is not its material shape, but the immaterial belief that it represents the graves of ancestors. One may even argue that the idea of graves is construed in terms of a more general belief in the presence of the ancestors in the cave. A reciprocal dialectic then exists between the presence (material) and the absence (immaterial): the material physical shape of the *graves* could have led to the

narrative (immaterial), or the immaterial narrative/belief could have given rise to the viewing of the *gravel mounds* as ancestor graves. There is no evidence, historical or factual, however, that the mounds are indeed those of ancestors' graves.

Furthermore, the symbolic markings of site localities with phrases (or verses) from the Bible are indicative of the immaterial belief that has taken physical/material form. Metaphorically the Bible is given material shape; *the Bible is taken place*. A locality such as Gethsemane, a smaller rock shelter some distance from the Motouleng cave, identifies the specific site of female initiation, with the affliction associated with the biblical experience at Gethsemane.

Like the literal paths along which pilgrims journey, pilgrimages are not linear. As paths veer this way and that as natural obstacles are avoided and negotiated, pilgrimages cannot follow pre-determined, one-fits-all templates (cf. Ingold 2010a:130). Instead, pilgrims track spirit-threads along their journey, starting at one end of the thread, rolling it up, and then reeling it in. At the same time pilgrims leave traces of their presence for others to track and follow. In Image 7.4 the layers upon layers of presence traces can be tracked and followed, each adding a dimension to the one before, and those still to come.



Image 7.2: A main pathway leading into the Mautse Valley © 2010



Image 7.3: Pilgrims with sehwasho-smeared faces and bodies © 2010



Image 7.4: A specific station inside the Motouleng Cave © 2012

Landscape

Landscape is difficult to define. Scholars most often treat landscape in one of three ways. The first is as an impartial setting to activities – the naturalistic perspective, and the second perceives landscape as “a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space”, i.e. scenes of land permeated with human meaning – the culturalistic view (Ingold 2000:189). Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, adopting a culturalistic position, state that we humans have an uncanny knack of writing our “presence on our surroundings” (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2006:13). We inscribe that setting (real or imagined), imbuing it with social meaning and ultimately referring to these meaning-filled settings as landscapes.

In the third, Ingold proposes that landscape should be understood as a record of those who came before, dwelt there, and left trails of themselves – what he calls a dwelling perspective. In presenting this perspective, Ingold explains that landscapes are stories (2000:189). It is a “world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them” (Ingold 2000:193). Explicitly different from the culturalistic view, Ingold holds that “landscape takes on its forms through a process of incorporation, not of inscription” (Ingold 2000:198). He argues that histories (human and natural pasts) and the narratives of lives are knitted together with the twines of animal and plant lifecycles as well as vibrations and resonances all forming part of the “domain of interactivity” giving rise to landscape forms (Ingold 2000:198-200). Landscapes are “actively involved in our being” (Hodder 2012:221). In this regard, the animate and inanimate, material and immaterial, present and absent are acknowledged. “This means that in dwelling in the world, we do not act upon it, or do things to it; rather we move along with it. Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world’s transforming itself” (Ingold 2000:200). The dwelling perspective as presented by Ingold subscribes to the same principles as that of an animic epistemology and ontology.

Three scaped domains: Landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes

Drawing broadly from Arjun Appadurai’s (1996:33) use and conception of *landscapes*, *scapes* are understood as permeable and unbounded clusters or sites where meaning is made of the world (Grau 2005:157). Each *scape* is subjective and variable depending on the point of view of the perceiver. As *perspectival constructs*¹³ Appadurai believes that (land)scapes are “influenced by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors”

¹³ The concept *perspectival construct* is taken from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *perspectivism*, which means that ideations take place from particular perspectives.

(1996:33). Wanting to retain the suffix *scape*, I would like us to free our narrow thinking and our use of it, to include Ingold's "tangle of interlaced trails" (2006:14), or domains of entanglement to denote these intersections of interwoven lines.

For the purpose of this thesis three *scaped* or incorporated domains, i.e. landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes, are considered in the context of pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State. These *scapes* are "constituted within a relational field. It is a field not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines, not a network but a meshwork" (2006:14; cf. Ingold's rhizomatic animism 2006).

Rudimentarily explained, landscape is often understood to be constituted of solid forms. In this study, I hold that it is so much more. The entirety of landscape includes all that is material and immaterial; all that is present, and that which is present in its absence. Person- and dreamscapes therefore constitute parts of the larger landscape. For analytical purposes, however, landscape is the physio-geo-socio-topological space of the sacred sites. Personscape – the human component of landscapes (Ingold 2000:191) – are all the constituted bodies, minds and selves and all their interlocking; the human geography. Understood in this way, personscapes are partly individuated, yet inextricably part of other persons and things (within the socio-mythic domain) (Grau 2005:152).

Here, dreams are collectively referred to as both what is revealed during REM sleep and what is made known during conscious activity or waking life, i.e. often commonly understood as visions (Erasmus 2010:100). Dreams are our most intimate, subjective, material productions of our inner world (subconscious), and when interpreted within the context of pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State, certain kinds of dreams are outward expressions or ways of making the supernatural tangible (Chidester 2011:15; Ingold 2006:11). An old healer from the small cave not far from Lower Madiboko (Mautse Valley) claims that in his dreams he can hear the angels through the rock at the back of his hut. He hears them singing and this brings peace to his mind. In this sense place is spiritual space and his dwelling is *home* – meaning the closeness to the realm of spirits/ancestors – in actual fact the angels of heaven!

The inclusion of dream(scapes) is not accidental. Many of my informants told me that mostly their travelling to the sacred sites originated from significant dreams. Likewise, pilgrims tell of the importance of paying attention to dreams, during and while at the sites, but also after returning home. The idea is that they are an important means of communication (Erasmus 2010:79; Nthoi 2006:28). It would seem that such communication or contact occurs within the relational field of "beings inhabiting different ontological realms" (Kohn 2007:12). Sometimes

they convey directives from God and/or ancestor intermediaries (cf. Chidester 2011:113). At other times they reveal significant insights necessary for successful pilgrimage. Within the context of traditional practitioner training, Wreford refers to *ancestral evidences* – the proofs that are used as justification and substantiation that the courses of action carry the sanction of the ancestors. And even in this wider context, dreams as such are evidence (Wreford 2008:137-151). The statements by my informants and those offered by Wreford, in my mind, confirm Lyotard’s assumption that that which has been dematerialised in his case, and materialised in the case of eastern Free State pilgrimages, constitutes systems of communication. Dreamscapes might therefore be thought of as the landscape of minds and psyches, where dream images occur and through which meaning grows.

Although the sites are considered to be thin places¹⁴ because of the proximity of the otherworldly, pilgrims’ imaginations, emotions and religious understandings are stimulated by the landscapes, dreamscapes and personsapes they encounter and feel propelled to create (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:9). The sites are now no longer only thin places, but thick places as well. Like thick ethnographic descriptions, the sacred sites of the eastern Free State, the pilgrimages and the pilgrims, together with all the other entanglements add to the layers of enmeshment.

Pilgrimage, eastern Free State-style

“My destination is no longer a place, rather a new way of seeing” – Marcel Proust

“[P]erhaps the very wisdom we long for is right before our eyes; we just need to use the lens of the sacred in order to see it. We need to engage our pilgrim eyes” (Cousineau 1998, cited in Harman 2014a:305).

Individuals or groups go on pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State and some are once-off visitors, others are habitual or occasional journeyers, while others are permanent pilgrims. The paradox of this label, as a group perpetually seeking, is not lost on me (cf. Smith 2004:109). Often charismatic, these more permanent dwellers frequently become guides for first-time site users. Included in their repertoire are physical structures through and via which

¹⁴ Thin places are locations “where the veil between Heaven and Earth is thinner thus allowing us to feel closer to the ‘other side’” (Gorman 2014:227). Profound encounters – thin moments – may be experienced at these intersections of physical and spiritual worlds (Sawicki 2014b:324).

people are channelled from one station to another. Journeyers become ensnared (entrapped) by “symbolically loaded ideological and material resources” (Coleman 2005:94-95). Constructing structures for prayer, baptism or training are also ways of making ancestral spirits and God visible and real (cf. Ingold 2006:12). Image 7.5 gives the impression of being suspended, between worlds even, or simultaneously in both. It evokes the idea of being midway between the earth and heaven. Elliot Ndlovu, in *A sangoma’s story*, explains that water is also such a cross-over point. It is a “place where the physical and spiritual worlds mingle” (Reeder 2011:xxv). The interface between the dreamscape and physical landscape is particularly interesting to me. Grau suggests that the resultant landscape and space is where “cultural coherence, ambiguities and contradictions can be played out” (2005:148); a sentiment that calls to mind Victor Turner’s liminality. Oftentimes these structures are enactments of dreams (cf. Grau 2005:147-148). Image 7.6 exudes the cross-over qualities of both dream- and wakeful states; it serves as an excellent example of metonymic dreamscape. By means of such enactments, pilgrims engage with their dreaming on a bodily level. That is, when pilgrims project their dreams onto the landscape by constructing structures, they are bodily, but also materially engaging with their dreaming.¹⁵ These serve as physical manifestations of the immaterial dreamscape, but also serve to legitimise the ancestral/Godly instruction given in the dream.

Each area has a narrative creating and adding to the authority of the place. Opposing narratives sometimes develop as the trails of so many pilgrim types become entwined with landscape and dreamscape meshworks and entanglements.¹⁶ New visitors to the sites are more easily persuaded by one of these alternative site narratives, often becoming thoroughly convinced of the guides’ and the stations’ authenticity and legitimacy. This is a good example of the dependency relations that exist between more permanent and occasional site users, i.e. an example illustrating that dependence has its costs and how what one actor does has implications, sometimes unforeseen, for other aspects of the entanglement (cf. Hodder 2012:92). Pilgrims are dependent on the sacred landscape, e.g. at Tempeleng (cf. Image 7.7). Yet, they are also dependent on the landscape for fuel in the form of wood. To satisfy this need, pilgrims have chopped down all the shrubbery around the revered locality, meaning that the very sacrality of the place is endangered by pilgrim actors whose dependency resulted in them desecrating the site. The cost has been significant and the natural landscape will take many years to recover (if ever). With the destruction of the natural landscape, the sacrality of

¹⁵ Cf. Grau’s (2005:154) idea of recreating the dreaming.

¹⁶ The Turners referred to these original or dominant narratives as the *nuclear paradigms* of the sites. Accompanying these and sometimes in opposition to these nuclear narratives, are what they call *subsequent borrowings* (1978:20).

the place has depreciated significantly; a depreciation which makes it easier for site users to further exploit the area, causing the sacrality to become almost undetectable. In this way the most revered is fast becoming the least revered and it demonstrates that “activities have complex and often unpredictable effects” (Hodder 2012:92). The complexity and variability at the sites, and the journeys towards and within the sites are important. In this way, site users are both confronted with and contribute to this process of narrative development and entanglement. However, what pilgrims seek has never existed except in narrative, and, for this reason, it is perpetually absent.



Image 7.5: Between worlds © 2010

We now turn our attention to this unbounded and fluctuating community of pilgrims with its range of intentionalities and narrative framing. What we see is that pilgrims' journeys begin long before their physical arrival at the sites. Real-world problems entangle us in “entrapments and necessities” (Hodder 2012:95) and much as we engage in these necessities through our socially constructed worlds, “they nevertheless draw us into webs of interconnections” (Hodder 2012:95). Sacred journeys entangle us and they place significant financial and time burdens on journeyers. However, these in turn are entangled with the ways we construe and value our journey obligations, and obligatory relationships with kinspeople, both past and present. I am thinking of the cost to procure the necessary animals for sacrifice as part of ritual

rebalance and healing, for example. A goat may cost anything from R1200, a sheep R2000, a young (3 years old) heifer or bullock R6000, or a larger mature cow or ox R12000. This cost often exceeds what many earn in a month and therefore those in employment need to shoulder the brunt of these costs; sometimes even borrowing money for the occasion. It is within the wider system of beliefs and the forms of obligations that underpin these entanglements (Hodder 2012:96). The practical nature of entanglement is well-illustrated by this example in that it involves debts, duties and obligations, with Hodder (2012:96) explaining that “[t]here is a continual interplay between our relationships with things and a generalized system of discourse and value”, and also that “[m]aterial entanglements are simultaneously and seamlessly conceptual and social”.

Ceremonial dress and objects for the journey are made and bought in advance. Furthermore, the narrow paths directing pilgrims along their way, the richly woven landscape (Østergaard & Christensen 2010:247), rouses a very deep and almost primal imagining of possibility and spiritual potentiality within pilgrims.¹⁷ The terrain not only stirs with promise but as pilgrim intention-trails are interwoven with the route, its authenticity is constructed through mythologisation and ritualisation (Østergaard & Christensen 2010:245-249). The physical landscape obviously inspires pilgrims. Simultaneously, the pilgrims’ physical passing, their traces of presence (e.g. the gifts of announcing) are woven into the physical landscape, sometimes becoming signposts of meaning that have developed for the individual pilgrim and for the site community as a collective, hence the frequent sightings of candle wax, dried grains and snuff-tobacco. These trails become tangible representations of the immaterial or the numinous (cf. Image 7.8).

¹⁷ I acknowledge the use of the word *potentiality* by the Turners (1978:3), here using it to mean the potential to transform, transition, a process of becoming, eventually morphing; undergoing substantial change (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:2).



Image 7.6: A symbolically rich structure demonstrating here-and-now functionality, together with dream cross-over qualities © 2011



Image 7.7: The desecration of Tempeleng © 2014



Image 7.8: Gifts of announcement along the way to the Motouleng Cave © 2013

Pilgrims' embodied movements become cultural performances or dramas through which pilgrims become transformed (Coleman & Eade 2004:17; James 2005:108), i.e. they become embodied spirituality (Sawicki 2014b:310). "Through movements, people can switch their identities and become somebody else, or return to the people they used to be" (Eade & Katić 2014:9). The activities performed at the stations become the existential authenticity, the *textility* by which pilgrimages become possible. Walking along the paths at the sacred sites, which is but one mode of movement, allows pilgrims to become engaged with the landscape. Walking is so much more than "the mere mechanics of locomotion" (Ingold 2010a:135). It is a kinetic experience, yes, but it is also a "way of thinking and knowing" since it takes place not only through the pilgrim's feet, but also through their heart and mind (Ingold 2010a:135; cf. Sawicki 2014b:310). The pilgrim's personscape is not bound by the body, but extends along pilgrim's sensory pathways and all they encounter into the texture of the world or domain of entanglement. In this manner, the personscape seeps and filtrates into the ground as pilgrims pass that way, and then again becomes entangled with fellow wayfarers as they too move along the same trails. The physical interactivity with the landscape is an important ingredient in achieving the pilgrims' transformation. "Walking the pilgrimage route", therefore, "becomes a walk toward oneself" (Østergaard & Christensen 2010:250). The ways that pilgrims dress and behave are further repositories of the interweaving between landscape, dreamscape and personscape. These cultural movements are influenced by site and station narratives which are knitted together by the intentionalities and projections onto the physical and metaphorical landscape by pilgrims and it on them.

Two comments are relevant in this regard. Firstly, narratives are encountered and taught, and then assimilated, reinterpreted and ultimately interwoven as trails with the physical environment, with other pilgrims and with selfscapes. Secondly, it may be argued that these journeys are in fact *self centred*. The logic goes that although pilgrimages to the eastern Free State sites might initially be conceived of as place-centred,¹⁸ it is clear that some of the journey guides and/or traditional practitioners are enigmatic, so much so that some pilgrimages are indeed very person-centred (i.e. pilgrims visit these specific sites pilgrims to actively seek out the help of very specific site guides). The change, transformation or transcendence that is sought, however, is within a person. York terms this interior pilgrimage (cited in Margry

¹⁸ Cf. Eliade's place-centred pilgrimages in Eade and Sallnow (1991:6). Place-centred pilgrimages are journeys towards a sacred centre. Within the newer approaches to pilgrimage, a "*deconstruction of the center*" is evident (Nthoi 2006:81 – emphasis in the original). This is the realisation that sacrality does not need to be restricted to a geographical place, but may also be within a person or even the self, i.e. emplacement (cf. Grimes 2006:112). Hence, the person-centred and self centred journeys I refer to. Nthoi (2006:82) thinks of the sacred centre as a triad: place, person and text. I contend that a fourth modality for localising the sacred or the divine, namely that of self, completes the quadrangle.

2008:45; cf. 24) and thus all the imaginings, intent and manifestations are contained within particular pilgrim meshes and tangles. Although they are all centred on and within the self, pilgrims do not have sole agency over their construction and inscription.

The weather, for example, certainly falls outside a pilgrim's control, but it may have profound implications for the pilgrimage outcome. A drenching downpour of rain, for example, may mean that other paths are sought and other river crossings are negotiated as the rapidly rising waters make regular crossings impassable. Not having dry clothes or blankets, or dry kindling for fire, the long cold hours of night may play tricks on the pilgrim as momentary lightning flashes may exaggerate the shadows, or moaning winds may carry distorted messages. Sleep may be peppered with vivid dreams and the surrounding environment inspires the dream images that emerge from these dreams. The interpretations of these dreams are not removed from the dreamers' surroundings and the events that led them there in the first place. Alternatively, good fortune might even be ascribed to nature's powerful cleansing ritual!

What we see here is that weather conditions leave trails which are woven with ways in which the physical landscape reacts; perhaps groaning river banks as dry walls funnel torrents of muddied water. Being sodden-wet, pilgrims' immediate bodily experiences revolve around getting very cold. Pilgrims imaginings are in turn woven into entanglements with foundational myths about lightning and ancestor wrath, possibly resulting in some elaborate narrative that emerges as pilgrims become awake. The absence of dry clothes or blankets and the absence of bodily comfort (e.g. getting cold) are sensuously experienced by pilgrims in a present time. The absences do not gain presence status in the thoughts or imaginings of the pilgrims.

Embodied activities such as ritual washing to heal and cleanse in the sacred water pools or river-crossings at the sacred sites may very well be a way in which site users' bodies are purified. The personscape is created and prepared, as potential contaminants (dirt and heat – ritual pollution) are washed away. Grau (2005:154, 158) proposes that ritual washing and cleansing of bodily secretions such as sweat are also a way in which (fictive) kinship – a bond between personscape and landscape is established. I would like to add that this demonstrates the un-individuated but diffused personscape of pilgrims, as substance (e.g. sweat) is washed from the body but then mingles with and becomes absorbed by the physical environment, forging connection. While this is true, washing, i.e. the removal of dirt or heat pollutants, is also the purposeful creation of absence.

Included below is an extract from an interview with two key informants.¹⁹ Its inclusion serves foremost as an orientation into the conceptual worlds of a couple of more permanent site dwellers, and also the architects of many structures at Motouleng (cf. Image 7.9). Particularly the references to both Ntswanatsatsi and the significance of dream messages are important for my later arguments.²⁰



Image.7.9: Baptismal font © 2012 (C Bester)

¹⁹ Interview with JMM and SRM, 9 July 2011.

²⁰ The area surrounding Ntswanatsatsi (also spelt Ntšwana-Tsatsi), between the Free State towns of Frankfort and Vrede, takes on its name from the hill (Tafelkop). Ntswanatsatsi means the *Rising Sun*, and Basotho legend has it that the ancestors of these people sprung from a cave surrounded by marshes and reeds (Ellenberger 1992:18). When asked, the Basotho would say: *we originate from where the sun rises* (c. 1550-1650) (Ellenberger 1992:17; cf. Gill 1997:23). Wells (1994:23) presents a narrative with which I am more familiar. He proposes that the name was in all likelihood a continuation of a succession of lakes inhabited by Sotho groups and consequently became part of their folklore. He adds that at the bottom of the hill, Ntswanatsatsi, was a small lake surrounded by reeds, and the ethnographic record reveals a common belief that ‘humans originated “among the reeds”’ (Wells 1994: 23).

About their current locality, JMM narrates: *We were given this space (sebaka) and told to tidy it up. Remember, ‘this side’ was terrible. It was used as a toilet by all the visitors to the cave. We were instructed to clear and clean (ho hlwekisa) it. For years, the visitors had been digging holes from which to take the clay (dihwasho). These holes were used by others as latrines...We dug out human waste from the holes and under the rocks. You can’t believe the stink. That was March 2003, JMM recounts. Until now they are intermittently given instruction, that is to say, what work they should do, and then some time goes by to recuperate from the exertion (both physically and psychologically). *The living [domestic] structures themselves, we completed in 2008.**

On 10 March 2003 the couple received the decree/commandment (taelo) to build of these shelters. They are adamant that they did not conceive of the notion to build these places; *they all are a result of being instructed*, JMM explains. When the three domestic shelters were completed, however, the other pilgrims or site users would disregard their place of living. She makes it clear that proper conduct dictates that when you come into the vicinity of a place where people live, you should announce yourself (for example, say ko-ko, knock-knock), not treat such a place as if you have a right to it. *That is bad manners!* It was thus that they began the building of the walls, to minimally demarcate and announce to people that this is not an area of open, free access.

Another accusation wielded at the pair was that they were constructing a guest house. A popular opinion according to the couple was that they planned to host foreign tourists visiting the country for the *2010 Soccer World Cup*. JMM incredulously remarks that they began building the structures in 2003, long before *Soccer 2010* was even thought a possibility. She continued, *our detractors were insistent that these places were to accommodate overnight guests. These places are for prayer and prayer alone. If you*

have been commissioned and instructed here, it is here that you will encounter your ‘great ones’ (baholo ba hao) [forebears, not ancestors]. It’s like the place where your great ones, where your guardian angels (manyeloi) – the ones you know – lie slumbering, where your new beginnings commence, it’s your Ntswanatsatsi.

Instructions to do the work that they do, were primarily given in their night-time dreams (toro), JMM explains. *Other times, when you don’t heed them or understand them they become known in visions (pono) so subtle that you might think it’s your own thoughts. Yet other times, something just drives you to get up and do such-and-such. ‘They’ communicate best with you though during your dreams. However, sometimes deciphering them is quite the task since you may think it is just a regular recurring (phetela) dream. But, the message comes to your understanding (kelello) during your waking day. Other times, when you are in conversation with someone, it is as if you have a breakthrough, ah-ha moment. The meaning becomes apparent. Their singing/song/message begets meaning in ways that we must be in awe of. God is so resourceful that we, as mere mortals, can’t comprehend – it just is. His power is astounding!*

[JMM & SRM, Motouleng 2011-07]

In thinking about Ntswanatsatsi – the mythological place of origin of the present-day Basotho of Lesotho and Sesotho-speaking people of South Africa – and linking it to their side of the cave, JMM and SRM were demonstrating their spatial intelligence, i.e. being “physically aware not only of their immediate space but of their whole” cosmoscape (cf. Grau 2005:158). Their structures and constructed space is meshing their mytho-temporal situatedness with the sacred site (cf. Grau 2005:158; Ingold 2006:13). A web is established inclusive of all that is metaphorical and real, between site stations, pilgrims, ancestors, God, earth and origins. Through the aesthetic transformations of the landscape, the personscape and dreamscape, their side of the cave becomes a place of birth and rebirth, of change. The physical landscape is changed rather dramatically; cleared and altered from the cave’s ablution area and fashioned into what undoubtedly resembles a minimalist and even-toned dream scene (cf. Image 7.10). By representing dreams in this manner they are made real: the relational field of epistemological and ontological animacy is confirmed for all to see. The smaller meditative structures are, according to their builders, places where one may encounter your guardian angels and where one is transported back to the mythical reed bed from whence the Basotho originate.



Image 7.10: Minimalist even-toned dream scene © 2012 (C Bester)

Pilgrim identity exists.²¹ Various identity forms are unmistakable at the sacred sites in the eastern Free State. Ascribed and assigned identities are most overtly observable in dissimilarities in dress, demeanour, and relationship with deities, etc. Pilgrimage status is reconfigured with the personscape and made visible; a material manifestation of the innerscape and the entire entanglement domain of the pilgrim (cf. Grau 2005:157; Ingold 2006:11). One aspect of a pilgrim identity revolves around transformation and change. One can expect that the transformational impact for permanent pilgrims – because of the nature of their journeys – is likely to be longer lasting. Although not mutually exclusive, the tendency is that because of their lengthy stay at the sacred sites there is more time and opportunity to become enmeshed with all the trails – locked into and with all the threads, traces and paths in a state of *becoming* (transformed) (cf. Ingold 2006:15; Coleman & Eade 2004:2; Turner & Turner 1978:3). Hodder would say that because of their longer stay at the sites, the links are likely to be longer and longer (2012:106). From analyses, the protracted opportunity for enmeshment leaves more blurred interfaces between material and immaterial; between landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes. When viewed together these densely woven tangles and deeper series of trails take on the patterning that I term *pilgrimage, eastern Free State-style*.

A revelation of pilgrimage is “[w]e tend to forget the history of things” (Hodder 2012:102). We use things on a daily basis seldom considering the “complex entanglements that have great historical depth”, or that they are likely to have sizeable consequences for the future. According to Hodder (2012:102), “one of the reasons we are entrapped in things is that we do not see them or we forget them, even though they are still present and potentially active”. The majority of our engagements with things take place without much thought of the intricate webs of relationality, i.e. we are often blind to them.

When we see the parts of the whole that are often concealed from view or everyday life, we depunctualise (cf. Hodder 2012:102). Pilgrimage is a process of depunctualisation. Everyday life is fast-paced and filled with numerous challenges, sometimes even overwhelming, and much is relegated “to the back regions of daily life” (Hodder 2012:102). To drown out all the noise, as it were, we go through life with blinkers on, paying attention only to the immediate.

²¹ The identity formation potential of pilgrimages is immense at all levels (global, national, regional and local). In particular, shrine or station symbolism and the identity-forming powers thereof are profound (Margry 2008:15). This is one reason why contestation is often centred on site and station use and appropriation. It is apparent at the sites that, more so for denominational groups, these site visits “generate, stimulate or revitalize religious devotion and religious identity” (Margry 2008:15). Sites and individual stations may be important identity markers. For example, they may symbolically represent a pilgrimage place; national or regional identity; and/or a community of like-minded individuals (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:8).

The pilgrimage process opens us up to appreciate the parts we thought we did not have time for, yet, we realise without which meaningful connections and dependences leave us yearning. The journey helps us understand the complex strings of entanglement that are difficult for people to understand. Journey guides such as prophets or traditional practitioners may help us decipher the meanings emanating from such entanglements.

Tying up loose ends²²

Although everything is relational it must be remembered that “materials and objects have affordances that are continuous from context to context” (Hodder 2012:94). Affordances are the potentialities of that thing/action (cf. Hodder 2012:49). Hodder (2012:94) continues, saying that

“[t]hese material possibilities (whether instantiated or not) create potentials and constraints. So rather than talk of things and humans in meshworks or networks of inter-connections, it seems more accurate to talk of the dialectical tension of dependence and dependency”.

For Hodder it is instead about “sticky entrapment” than enmeshment. “It is the focus on being caught in all the forms of human-thing dependences that leads me to ‘entanglement’”, he says (2012:94).

The thesis for the second part of this chapter is that the topo-geographical landscape of the sacred sites is unavoidably tied to the human bodies, i.e. the personscapes, of the pilgrims on pilgrimages. Similarly, both landscape and personscape are irrevocably connected to the pilgrims’ dreamscapes. The land-, person- and dreamscapes as encountered at and among site users, are all eternally connected. The landscapes, personscapes and dreamscapes become representations of pilgrims on eastern Free State pilgrimages. They are accumulated domains of entanglement and impressions on the geography, bodies and minds of individual journeyers and the collective category of pilgrims. Each is threading a unique path through the meshwork and entanglements of pilgrimages forever becoming anew.

Absences are paramount to this becoming and are not merely theoretical antonyms of presence. They are phenomena experienced bodily, emotionally and via the senses, that

²² Everything has trails. These trails cross, influence, entangle and enmesh with the trails of all other things. This happens equally so during pilgrimage. The heading is a play on these loose trails that are now brought together to form a coherent understanding of the chapter’s discussions; a synthesis if you will.

become manifest for the pilgrims on sacred journeys in very particular material, political and religious ways. Eastern Free State pilgrimages are intersections of presence and absence, with some perhaps even calling them thin spaces joining different ontological realities.

Because of the dependence and dependency of journeyers and environment/landscape and things they launch each other into joint movement, i.e. what we may call the evolving pilgrimages in this case. Depending on pilgrim motivations for embarking on such quests, their debts and obligations entrap them in relation with the journey. We might even think of pilgrimage as a way to untie certain knots of entanglement and entrapment, thereby leading to desired and unforeseen transformations and paths (i.e. a type of unburdening). In so doing, for example, impermanent things are translated into some other form, such as landscapes, dreamscapes and personscapes. They are given significance and duration in their materialised form and their durability acts back, thereby creating the necessary dependency. In turn, pilgrims invest in them, as they also become entrapped in their intricacies and logics. Translating into these durable forms they become central parts of the entanglements of eastern Free State pilgrimages.

What discussions about relational ontology, meshworks, entanglements, and the presencing of absence highlight is that pilgrimages and pilgrims are complex combinations of interconnections, entrapments and relational ways of being and knowing that come into existence because of the entanglements that exist and develop between an array of material and immaterial, pilgrim and non-human and superpersons that determine and depend on one another. I believe it raises questions and in fact demonstrates that boundaries and borders are permeable and fluid. These assertions are aligned with Eade and Katić's (2014) underlying argument in their volume *Pilgrimage, politics and place-making in Eastern Europe: Crossing borders*. Borders and boundaries are not only those which demarcate nations over the passage of time, but between shifting identities and assumed discreet entities. The challenge is acknowledging the varying thickness or thinness of boundaries, the permeability of demarcations and the commonality or disintegration of such margins (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:11).

The concept of *ambivalence* may be useful for the syncretism/hybridity debate because it is non-historical and non-systematic whilst it trains the focus towards the simultaneity of aspects in the same context or frame. This is even so for aspects that one would not expect to find in close proximity (sometimes even opposites). The same holds true for pilgrimage as a *phenomenon of ambivalence*. The pilgrimage may be an unresolved process that may include aspects that one would not necessarily expect to be part of pilgrimage. The pilgrimage may

include any number of aspects in non-conclusive modes, even those features/aspects that one would consider to be exclusive of one another, or sometimes even contradictory.

CHAPTER 8

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Methodological positionality and project framing

The reflective insights I have come to in this study are primarily due to the qualitative approach I have followed. The fundamental assumptions of qualitative research within a postmodern framing constituted the parameters within which this study was undertaken. These parameters were foundational to my overall disposition, my approach to the topic and the communities of participants, the type and depth of relationships that my interlocutors and I established, my interpretation and application of the methods and techniques of data collection, my analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as the type and degree of conclusions to which I have come.

Methodologically, the study reinforces the postmodernist assertions that inclusivity, polyvocality, intersubjectivity, reflexivity, etc. are best dealt with by a flexible methodology including the ethnographically rooted participant observation, and the narrative-type accounts derived from the collection of life stories and the use of key informants. Simultaneously, the coproduction of knowledge between ethnographer and informants is confirmed, as is the acknowledgement that an end-product such as this thesis is but a partial truth and account of all possible versions of pilgrimages to sacred sites in the eastern Free State. Perhaps not reflective of all South African pilgrimages, it is however representative of journeys to the sites of the eastern Free State.

Having conducted my own interviews it was essential throughout to be aware that there are no exact equivalents between English and Sesotho terms. The threat of a wrong interpretation necessitated that data-collection techniques had to be triangulated, and also that informants had to be repeatedly consulted to ensure the best possible understanding. In addition, the use of co-readers and the discussions that ensued were of paramount importance in securing the trustworthiness not only of the data, but also of the interpretations drawn.

As an outsider/insider, I become an honorary member and guest, ever building relationships and accruing obligations. I feared that, fundamentally, my being privileged in so many ways was a relic of South Africa's apartheid history. As a meta-methodological matter related to the

insider/outsider researcher positionality, informants were in part privileging me because of the status, credibility and acceptability that my presence incurred for them. Informants' willingness to engage with me and grant me access not only to pilgrim communities, but also to privileged information, I have come to believe, has a great deal to do with what informants stand to gain, with prowess as researcher taking backstage. It is advantageous for informants to nurture our relationship, as also it is advantageous for me to do the same. We need each other, and find ourselves in a mutually beneficial relationship, i.e. the power play is reciprocal. Informants can dictate when, where and to what degree they will divulge the information that I seek. I, on the other hand, by virtue of being present, impart a privileged positionality for my informant. Interlocutors become teachers and counsellors and mentors. Furthermore, participants are also actively engaged in manoeuvring to gain power amongst the powerless; they jostle for clients and emphasise their legitimacy, sometimes at the expense of others.

An epistemological issue arising from this has been 'not fully sharing the beliefs' of my informants about ancestors. On the one hand, a hindrance I encountered is that I could not fully understand as my informants understand and give meaning to experience while on pilgrimage, or, so I thought initially. Having come to terms with foundational beliefs over a period of time, I now fondly refer to my *existential crisis* as probably the most profound blessing having emerged from embarking on this journey.

Within the ambit of interviewing, a postmodern development known as interpretive interactionism is centred upon the notion of epiphanies. These are "interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person" (Fontana & Frey 2005:709). Upon reflection, many informants shared with me the *existential moments* that led to their undertaking pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. These existential moments thus became the impetus (for many) to journey to the sites. For others, the pilgrimages stand out as epiphanic, transformational experiences. My existential moment is but another in the polyphonic representational character of this ethnographic study.

It is noted that epiphanic moments in and of themselves do not remove epistemological barriers when conducting cross-cultural research (cf. pp. 217-222). Rather, the sharing of dreams and consequently better understanding the kinds of services rendered at the sacred sites constituted a watershed moment for me because I felt that I was a full participant. I felt that the interpretation of my dreams and the events that unfolded around the interpretation gave me greater insight, i.e. that I was now in possession of true insider information. I saw and experienced things that my interlocutors had never told me about previously. Secondly, I

experienced being treated differently from this point onwards in my journey in that the practitioners involved experienced me differently and I no longer felt that I was coming to rummage through people's cupboards with my questions; I was now arriving with a personal request, as one real person to another. Thirdly, having brought dreams for interpretation, together with experiencing the subsequent events, set in motion a process of self-discovery. I experienced this entire process from beginning to end as epiphanic. I found that the act of presenting dreams for interpretation did not in itself remove epistemological barriers, but that it was the process set in motion which cast epistemological understanding. Furthermore, I found that the particular research methods and techniques enhanced my opportunities to deepen rapport with informants. The degree of participant observation that was eventually necessitated (i.e. becoming immersed and sharing personal information and dreams for interpretation) was the catalyst that allowed me to ultimately experience the relational animacy enveloping to the phenomenon of pilgrimage to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. In order to comprehend this, I found it crucial to establish an attunement and we-ness between the participants and me, and between myself and the sacred sites. I do not wish to create the impression that this existed throughout the process. In fact, at times I felt starkly disconnected from the research participants and the environment. Understanding and insight, however, came with entanglement, enmeshment and entrapment.

The outsider-insider positionality I adopted advanced intersubjectivity. Certain insider moments allowed me to share maximally in the cultural setting of my informant communities, whereas my outsidership had me hovering *above* as it were, in a hermeneutic hiatus. An advantage of this is that it grants one the critical distance necessary to make significant analytical observations and interpretations. However, as a researcher I feel that I will always make sense of what I hear or experience, and the participant is to become trapped in the sense-making process; the circumferences of these two processes will never overlap completely.

Nonetheless, one seeks to be as clear as possible about the status of one's research report, but there is still the question of whose representation it is. The unavoidable position is that the researcher is ultimately the person who languages the findings and who narrates the discussion and makes the representation. Even when seeking to maintain multivocality, the final version remains the researcher's representation. To be clear, I would like to emphasise that in my reporting I attempted to avoid an absolute author representation by including as many as possible other views and voices.

Towards a theoretical statement of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage studies is a burgeoning field and within it, pilgrimages are understood in particular ways. For some, pilgrimage is about the destination whereas for others, it concerns the pilgrims. Furthermore, some perceive it to involve the narratives and stories associated with journeying, and yet others regard the journey and its actions as central. A dominant view of pilgrimage sees it as a religious procession by a group of people to a holy shrine. Pilgrimage is thought to be about transformation and a sense of shared communion with fellow travellers, and by implication long and challenging journeys. Naturally, pilgrimages may indeed involve these very things, but they may also be so much more, or less.

Pilgrimages may be undertaken by individuals who have individually motivated reasons and pilgrimages need not be organised or associated with religious institutions. A group of pilgrims may converge on a site for very different reasons and perform a range of activities explained in starkly different registers and drawing on myths and narratives from an assortment of traditions. What is thus far agreed upon is that pilgrimage involves movement.

Pilgrimages are not always harmonious and in fact may constitute arenas of contestation. Tensions develop between journeyers themselves, between site visitors and shrine custodians, and friction often develops between religious institutions and site visitors. Sometimes this sense of disquiet is founded in moral and value differences deriving from religious and liturgical dissimilarities. Some pilgrimages are provocative and confrontational by their very nature. With yet other pilgrimages, conflicts may arise from the heterogeneity of discourses surrounding the people, the places, the texts and the actions related to pilgrimaging.

This does not mean that *communitas* is unattainable. Journeyers report experiencing intense and mutual feelings of connection with co-travellers, with deities and/or the sites themselves. Empirical evidence proves, however, that this is not magically sustained throughout the entire journey process; *communitas* ebbs and flows. Pilgrimages may also be simultaneously in and out of time, i.e. partially liminal and anti-structural. However, for someone to be extricated from their everyday life, for a period of time to exist as if in a vacuum with their ordinary life suspended and paused, is inconceivable. The evidence I have provided hopes to prove that the liminality is not all-encompassing, but that there are indeed liminal moments to be had.

The meanings that pilgrimaging holds for journeyers are not static and may well change over the course of the event. These meanings may also change depending on who is asking. The narratives associated with pilgrimages are important in the meaning-making process. In a

similar vein, the motivations for embarking on pilgrimages may change as the journey progresses and may also change across the span of pilgrims' lives, taking on different hues depending on unique life circumstances and the production of memories surrounding the events.

I am partial to the notion of pilgrimages being many things at once. In my opinion pilgrimages can be simultaneously contradictory, short-lived, enduring, confrontational, healing, soothing and quieting. Furthermore, sometimes pilgrimages can be orthodox and rule-bound, and sometimes they are creative expressions of hybridity.

I do not deem my position on pilgrimage as a cop-out because my data points to the fact that everything related to pilgrimages is interconnected, interrelated and continually becoming new or being expressed in slightly different ways. This all depends on the types of entanglements and entrapments that become highlighted during the single pilgrimage event. These findings add substantially and innovatively to very recent and uncharted trends in pilgrimage studies (cf. Albera & Eade 2015:8).

What one can say is that all components typically defined to form part of the pilgrimage debate (the journey, persons, destination, places, motivations, transformations, and rituals/performances) are multi-layered and complex entities. The fact that there are so many variants renders a single deduction in terms of a particular pilgrimage theory almost impossible. The investigation into eastern Free State pilgrimages may have highlighted a few aspects that are peculiar to these particular sites, e.g. ancestor guidance, but this in itself is not sufficient to warrant an exclusively eastern Free State definition of pilgrimage. At the most I feel that one can venture to say that the eastern Free State sites call for a more substantive definition of pilgrimage. However, this does not accommodate aspects to the contrary so that a generalized substantive view can be claimed in terms of the current field data.

The nature of eastern Free State pilgrimages

The nature of eastern Free State pilgrimages is founded on an interesting hybrid articulation of traditional African religion and Christianity. The domestic or local pilgrimages undertaken to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State by individuals or groups of journeyers reflect a hybridity that site users express as really-real African custom and practice. This is most vividly demonstrated in the rich mix of rituals and practices that flow from various traditions into site and station repertoires. Foundational in this regard are the dominant and competing or

alternative narratives. In this way the memory of the larger sites and smaller stations gains legitimacy (cf. Cawood 2014). They acquire reputations that in turn attract a range of pilgrims. Site and station guides contribute significantly to this narrative formation and these spiritual leaders also gain recognition, which further attracts pilgrims.

The colourful assortment of pilgrims to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng visit the sites on their own or in groups. Primarily affiliated with organised religious denominations such as the ZCC, the Apostolic Faith Mission and Roman Catholic churches, some pilgrims also strongly identify with traditional African beliefs. Thus there are two broad pilgrim cohorts. On the one hand there is the formal religious cohort, and on the other, traditional practitioners, their clients and their apprentices. These pilgrims express their reasons for undertaking these journeys in a variety of ways and combinations. Most often sites are visited to pray, request and report. These communiqués are almost universally directed to God and the ancestors. Furthermore, matters related to healing and rebalancing of individuals and their immediate familial groups and even larger communities, also draw significant numbers of site visitors.

The multi-layered nature of the purposes or motivations for these pilgrimages is substantially different from that which is cited for other types of pilgrimaging, although naturally there are points of convergence. However, the plurality of motivations for journeying to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng reflects a certain creativity and in my opinion this constitutes a large part of this study's unique contribution. The bouquet of reasons for pilgrimage cited by site users is beautifully colourful. Journeyers are constantly crafting their own reasons for and meanings behind their site visitations. The "absence of formalized procedural rules and regulations...allows for the continuous reinvention of tradition" (Wreford 2008:141). And, while there is an invention and reinvention, a societal framework is being constructed (Plummer 2010:409). This framework is what makes it possible to tell pilgrimaging stories. Without these frameworks these stories and narratives have no hat-pen and coat-peg.

Discussions of vital force, the presencing of absence, and distinctions between sacred and profane or material and immaterial are important for the construction of mental or cognitive models of pilgrimage (cf. Murchison 2010:138-139). Considering informants' conceptual map(s) allows us some understanding of the relationship between ideas and the use of the spaces at the sacred sites in the eastern Free State.

Since these are domestic pilgrimages, they are spontaneously organised by the group or individual planning to visit the sites, with the exception of the Rose Cave Sunday Service at Modderpoort. Therefore, there is little formal protocol. Instead, pilgrimages are constantly

being re-imagined and recreated by participating journeyers. Pilgrims to Mantsopa are day visitors only, while Motouleng and Mautse site users may be day- or weekend visitors. Some stay longer than a weekend, with some dwelling at the sites for anything from a couple of months to years. For purposes of this study, they are included in the pilgrim category.

The journeys of reverence to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State are representations of mobility; i.e. they become manifest in the observable physical travels of pilgrims to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng. However, the pilgrimages undertaken by journeyers also include all manner of non-physical and non-observable movement. Worth noting in this regard are the spiritual growth and personal transformations that are far more difficult to quantify (cf. Roos 2006).

The journeys themselves are forms of ritualised acts. Are they contingent experiences, with long term, transformative power? What legacy does pilgrimage have? What impact does it have? The Turnerian view maintains that they have potential to cause cohesive social bonding. Pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State are *exceptional* in the Turnerian sense; they are extraordinary and substantive in their own right.

A characteristic feature of these pilgrimages is a sacralisation of movement, persons and/or places (cf. Coleman & Eade 2004:18). In this study, I have not only considered theoretical streams as substantive and non-substantive. Empirical evidence indicates that the pilgrims journeying to the sacred sites of Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng deem these places to be imbued with substance. So too, certain persons are believed to exude an essence that is representative of the divine. The journeys themselves are approached and enacted in ways that demonstrate their sacrality. One may accommodate a reciprocal relationship: the sites are imbued with sacred assumptions and the journeys anticipate this *substance* as part of the journey and the destination. However, one should also remember that the act of the journey ascribes sacrality to the sites and the healing powers they represent.

Each of the sites is situated on privately owned property. In the case of Mantsopa, this property belongs to the Anglican Church, while the Mautse and Motouleng sacred sites are located on working farms where the farmers themselves are the legal owners. Ownership is a complicated issue, however, and there is the belief that land, thus place, forms an inextricable part of the mutual relationship between the living and their ancestors (cf. Ranger 1987). Ownership may be cultural, spiritual/religious, political, symbolic or historically inherited (cf. Nel 2014a, 2014b). In this regard, Coplan (2003) considers pilgrimage to the sacred sites of the Mohokare Valley as a political act. Similarly, the spatial tactics applied in constructing national sacred sites (cf.

Masoga 2014a), or those applied in claiming living heritage sites in the Mohokare Valley (Nel 2014a, 2014b), constitute political acts on behalf of the current South African government. What is important for the eastern Free State pilgrimages is that the pilgrims believe, regardless of these legal and political claims, that they are the owners of these sacred sites. These ideas are reduced not only to the sites, but also to the individual stations within the larger sites. Despite legal documents or political tactics, pilgrims contest these, thus claiming ownership. This ownership claim is based on tenure which is seen to include both physical and material occupancy, as well as symbolic possession.

Pilgrims journeying to the eastern Free State sites do so as a symbolic reclamation (cf. Müller 2008:829; Coplan 2003). I contend that this landscape instead becomes symbolically reclaimed within a newly accepted identity and within hybridised religious lives and expressions of the site users. The fact that these thick places evoke the imagination, emotion and religious understandings of site users testifies to this (cf. Eade & Katić 2014:9).

It is not far-fetched to contend that the openness with which pilgrims travel to the sites, often in groups and also oftentimes in full traditional African healer regalia, attests to an assertion of a religious identity (cf. Coleman 2004:56). In this sense pilgrimages are celebrations of religion and Africanness (cf. Coleman 2004:45). This celebration is not undertaken in an orthodox and/or AIC sense, but it is about coming into one's own as an individual or as a group. Some informants are very articulate about their intention to connect or reconnect, given the *placelessness* that they feel. Such motivations clearly relate to a desire to feel and become rooted in a long-ignored Africanness. This is in line with Coleman and Elsner's (1995:205) view. Here journeys and the movement to and through the sites of Mautse and Motouleng, in particular, link geographically and socially dispersed and disenfranchised citizens of South Africa, allowing them an opportunity to (momentarily) perceive a common *African identity*.

However, there are contingencies in the district who oppose such freedoms. A case in point is a group of church members from a local town and their satellite branches who visited Mautse in 2000 to sing and pray for the redemption of the *heathens* frequenting the site. From the video they made on the occasion, it is clear that they see their task as one of spreading the word of a *civilised* God. Unfortunately, their condescending and ethnocentric tones were difficult to ignore, even by the most serene of the pilgrims that they interviewed.

Pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State constitute arenas of contestation. There is contestation between leaders, permanent site users and occasional site users, and there is contestation between land owners (community members) and site users. Furthermore,

there is contestation about the legitimising of narratives. It is imperative, however, not to conceive of the main act of the journey as being an attempt to contest or to cause conflict. Such tensions and discord are an unfortunate part of the reality of pilgrimages to the eastern Free State sites. These contestations range from real instances of reclaiming, to more symbolic claiming, which may cause friction between competing claims. However, the degree of conflict does not approximate that which is encountered and associated with, for example, the Western Wall of Jerusalem (between Muslims and Jews)

The commodification or commercialising of the sites or aspects related to site-specific pilgrimaging also contributes to an element of marketing and observable jockeying for clients. The inevitable result is friction and even outright conflict between the spiritual authorities of the different site localities. Pilgrims get drawn into this dynamic and for some these circumstances disillusion their expectations of spiritual destiny. It is conceivable that the issue of entrance fees may also eventually become a bone of contention.

The sites, possessing place-centred sacredness and evolving into person-centred sacred geographies, are but two modalities with which to localise the divine. I have contended that a third, the self, becomes not only a modality in and through which the divine is located, but itself becomes the divine. In this regard I draw on Gabriel Mohele Setiloane's proposition that Motho ke Modimo (a person is a sacred being, a divine creature) (Masoga 2014b, 2012a, 2012b,). In this perspective, Africans live out their religion in that it is dynamic and practical, and is expressed in daily life. As a person you become whole or complete through your adoption of this perspective, and if those around you are also whole, the wholeness in you and in others is reflect one in the other. By the same token people become whole or 'one' with the divine, i.e. God, implying that they are also holy. In this sense the personscape becomes a personification and synonymous with the divine.

The sacred sites of the eastern Free State and the pilgrimages to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng are animated. A relational epistemology and ontology helps us to understand the enmeshment, entanglement and entrapments that bring them into existence. Instead of following the well-trodden culturalistic, hylomorphic model, I have adopted Ingold's (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) dwelling perspective and textility of making together with Hodder's (2012) entanglements. Seeing the pilgrimages, pilgrims and sacred sites of the eastern Free State in this way invokes a more comprehensive understanding of these pilgrimages.

Part of such an understanding is realising the influence and role that the immaterial plays in the larger eastern Free State pilgrimaging picture. The non-tangible denotes a presence that

is absent when narrowly viewed. However, the immaterial occupies such a large part of eastern Free State pilgrimages. Although this cannot be observed with these eyes, the immaterial in the form of forces and energies, spirits and beings, the ancestors and God, inspires all facets of pilgrimaging to these sacred sites.

There is a confluence of the material and the immaterial at the sites. The sites (the material) have obtained and embedded a geographical or physical awe intensified over time by stories and anecdotes, but also through the arrangement of the physical landscape to attract pilgrims. The physicality or materiality of the sites inspires and attracts. The site stations and special places highlight the sense of physical placedness in a space of reverence and holy ground. On the other hand, there is the immaterial in its dual presentation. Firstly, the sites have a capacity for memory and the symbolism of divine/ancestor presence; and secondly, the immaterial *scapes* of the pilgrims. Pilgrims seek an intangible cultural and spiritual fulfilment, believed to be satisfied only at these sites. Often the anomaly of both the material and the immaterial is seen to exist simultaneously. For example, pilgrims' dreamscapes take material form in the building of their structures devised to symbolically represent a dream. Conversely, it is also constituted when the material element of the cave becomes imbued with narrative to symbolise its significance as a sacred spot of divine intervention. In this way, Mokgorong, the narrow crevice at Motouleng, is believed to be a place of divine revelation.

The absolute statement that sacred sites of the eastern Free State are hierophanies¹ is problematic. The Eliadean hierophany is too strongly rooted in the fixed nature of place, without the inclusion of the dynamic of sacred ascription as an ongoing process. Hierophanic claims thus become a *strategic agenda* to bolster not only the sacrality of a specific spot, but also to emphasise its legitimacy vis-à-vis other sacred localities. The concept of hierophany is instead linked to influential memories and imaginative site narratives. I believe, however, that I have demonstrated that the sites, pilgrimages and pilgrims come into existence because of the peculiar and patterned entanglements, dependencies and relationality between the pilgrims and all manner of things, including immaterial deities.

¹ For Eliade, hierophanies are "anything which manifests the sacred" (1955:xii, cited in Nthoi 2006:25). Such arguments are used to explain why people journey to places. People's conceptions are such that the places are believed to be filled with sacredness. The critical element for Nthoi (2006:26) is that places themselves do not attract visitation. Instead, it is the beliefs that people have about the superpersons linked to the places and therefore that the places are sources of power, that appeal to prospective site users. Nthoi (2006:78) expands on this idea, saying "[t]he pilgrimage deity is still believed to be eternally vital and a living presence in the very place. Owing to the permanent residence of the sacred power of the place, a sanctuary or enclave has been established and is set apart from the profane space surrounding it. It is at this sacred centre that 'there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of the earth to the level of heaven'". These are what others would refer to as thin places or the *axis mundi*.

The complexity of eastern Free State pilgrimages goes beyond the criteria often cited in pilgrimage studies. These include the multivocality of the sites, the multi-layeredness of meanings and reasons for embarking on these journeys of reverence, the diversity of the site users, and the continuous invention and reinvention of actions and rituals. Eastern Free State pilgrimages come into existence because of intricately entangled, enmeshed trails and entrapments, as well as dependencies between humans and humans, humans and the geographic environment, humans and the material world, and humans and the immaterial world. The interconnections do not stop here but further include environment-human, environment-environment, environment-material things, and environment-nonmaterial things. They also comprise material things and human connections, material things and geographic environment, material things and material things and other material things, and material things and the non-material. In addition, it includes all the entanglements between the immaterial world and humans, the environment, the material world and other immaterial things. Because of the animacy of eastern Free State sacred sites, the pilgrimages and the pilgrims, the material and the immaterial, pilgrimage is not linear but comes into being in a relationally complex way. Pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the Mhokare Valley are ontogenetic. The eastern Free State sites and pilgrimages are thick places and thick experiences made up of layer upon layer of enmeshment and entrapment. This further implies that the meanings associated with these pilgrimages are complex in equal measure and very much part of a relational way of knowing and being in the world, i.e. they are a part of life. They are not relegated to the immediate trip or journey and they do not recede like memory foam after the pilgrimage.

My analysis of the sites, pilgrims and the pilgrimages in terms of entanglements, animacy, presence and absence evokes the possibility of a commonsense reality – a reality that can be considered as emergent or something new (cf. Marcus 2012:435-436, 441), i.e. a future anterior (cf. Fortun 2012). For this reason, I believe that the analytical web of this study is robust (cf. Murchison 2010:191).

An ill-fitting pilgrimage lens: Value, contribution and recommendations

There is a natural waxing and waning of interest in sacred sites as well as in the use of sites (cf. Coleman & Elsner 1995:199). Journeys to the sacred sites of Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng have no doubt increased or decreased in response to a number of factors. However, there has been a consistent and even amplified interest in journeys of reverence to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State for the last ten years at least.

Former ideological and political influences in South Africa may have subverted African pilgrimages to such an extent that they were almost undetectable (cf. Margry 2008:16) and this may have blinded the research fraternity from considering, researching or acknowledging such journeys of reverence. Although journeys of reverence do indeed occur in South Africa, scant in-depth anthropological investigations have been launched to systematically report on them. This study on pilgrimages to sacred sites fills the present lacuna in the South(ern) African literature. The study contributes an important ethnography in the qualitative tradition, where the fields of anthropology, pilgrimage studies and cultural studies are the main beneficiaries.

Firstly, the potential contribution of this pilgrimage ethnography to current debate and discourse, specifically concerning matters of heritage, tourism, conservation, property rights, identity and ethnicity, is far-reaching. For example, this ethnography of localised sites has wide-ranging implications and consequences for living heritage. The sites and the pilgrimages to them form part of living heritage. This study may therefore provide empirical evidence needed to support such claims and speed up measures for preserving the sites. Secondly, this ethnography contributes to the field of African religion. The hybridised beliefs and expressions of belief documented in this study may be valuable for religious studies of South African ritual and local religion. Pilgrimages may even be thought of as lived spirituality. Thirdly, I would not say that this study makes an explicit contribution to understandings of intercultural dynamics. What it does, however, is to enlighten other forms of factionalism based not on ethnic affiliation, but on other aspects of identity. In particular, it shows how dominant and alternative narratives are constantly being created and vie for attention and legitimacy. This points to the dynamic nature of identities (albeit that pilgrims experience them as fixed).

In the final instance, this ethnography of eastern Free State sacred sites aimed to bring viable and vital cases of *African* pilgrimage into the Anglophone-dominated fold of pilgrimage studies. The findings of this study prove that the classic pilgrimage lens is too narrow to accommodate highly complex pilgrimages such as those to Mantsopa, Mautse and Motouleng, thus necessitating an even closer future scrutiny of African pilgrimage itineraries on the research agenda.

What this thesis was hoping to address besides the description of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State, is the reasons why pilgrims embark on these journeys. Underlying this has been the question of whether this largely Western concept, pilgrimage, is relevant and applicable in these African cases of journeying and movement, i.e. I hoped to make revelations about how the eastern Free State pilgrimages described in this study differ from the contemporary Western perspective of the pilgrimage phenomenon.

Anglophone, Western pilgrimage lenses are problematic in that their schemes are too narrow to capture Southern African pilgrimages. There is no beautiful tree with faces, rock-surfaces that speak or water that lives. It is all too deterministic and deductive. Eastern Free State sites and pilgrimages show a very complex platform or arenas with all kinds of discourses and religious traditions. These pilgrimages are chaotic. What is happening here? The sangoma is there; the bishop is there; the cave is there; it is beautiful. The mixture of traditions, motivations and meanings associated with pilgrimages to the eastern Free State sacred sites simply does not fit classic conceptions of pilgrimage since they can be defined as fluid arenas. Not to totally discredit existing conceptions, they do help. They help to focus attention on specific points. But in the end, eastern Free State pilgrimages are very complex. They are fluid arenas. And therefore, a *seductive*² pilgrimage study was deemed the only way possible to capture the multi-variances of these South(ern) African pilgrimages. Many deplore such plurality. But, this modern world and its realities are so much more complicated and layered than previously understood. And, for this reason, pilgrimages in all their colours, frequencies, nuance and meanings need recognition.

Theoretically, the gleaned information and the analysis thereof partly qualifies and contests both the older and more recent pilgrimage models. The socially generated meanings associated with the spaces/places and the motivations and reasons for undertaking pilgrimage contribute to a general understanding of pilgrimage, but also to the eastern Free State sites in particular. The empirical evidence points to *African* eastern Free State pilgrimages following some prescriptions and conceptualisations contained in Western (mainly Anglophone) scientific understandings thereof. However, these domestic pilgrimages highlight unique features that call for a deepening of our conception of the pilgrimage phenomenon.

This chapter has built up to a theoretical statement concerning the complexity of eastern Free State pilgrimage, positing that current theories do not offer a suitable paradigm for analysis. This holds true for the profile of the sites, the pilgrims, the motivations for the journeys as well as the very nature of these pilgrimages. In this regard, the exclusivity of substantive and non-substantive forms of pilgrimage cannot be maintained, since both types overlap in terms of the acquired data. The motivations for, and destiny experiences, also put the eastern Free State pilgrimages beyond theories of *communitas* and contestation through the mere fact that both trends are actualised simultaneously. The same holds true for the sites as pilgrimage destinations. They are sacred for a myriad of reasons, so that emplacement (Smith 1987) or the action of ritual (Grimes 1999, 2006) are not sufficient to explain ascriptions of sacrality. The

² Robert Gordon refers to an inductive-deductive combination as a seductive study.

once-off visitors, the habitual and the more permanent journeyers involved in pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State constitute such a diverse population, that comparisons between these pilgrimages and others in Southern Africa are virtually impossible, let alone comparisons with classic international religious pilgrimages.

I do not propose that eastern Free State pilgrimages are somehow more complex than pilgrimages elsewhere. What I do contend is that the pilgrimage lens hitherto employed in South(ern) African studies of pilgrimage is too narrow to capture the complexity of (eastern Free State) pilgrimages. The classic or traditional pilgrimage lens invokes European/American Catholic pilgrimages, thus disqualifying many journey types because they do not fit these traditional conceptions of pilgrimage. Furthermore, this lens is blind to complex and complicated connections with things (routinely relegated to the background). The empirical data reveals the non-linear paths along which many of these immaterial and so-called absent things act back, creating unique pilgrimaging encounters. The traditional lens thus allows only a partial understanding of pilgrimage.

This study scratches only the surface of issues related to and revolving around the pilgrimage phenomenon. Described below are some recommendations that have not been covered by this pilgrimage study and which are deserving of attention. Firstly, a glaring question that has risen from the study and needs investigation is: are the eastern Free State pilgrimages presented in this study representative of undocumented and little-documented pilgrimages elsewhere in the province and in the rest of South Africa? Further research will reveal if this representation of pilgrimages is in fact anomalous (cf. Margry 2008:25). Secondly, a number of questions have emerged concerning the land owners of the properties on which the sites are located. What are land owners' experiences of having these sites on their privately owned property? How have they co-existed with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who symbolically claim the sites for themselves? What benefits do legal owners accrue? Thirdly, and linked to the former, investigations need to be launched into the regional economic value of the pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State. After all, some pilgrimages are big business. Fourthly, it is my opinion that South(ern) African pilgrimage studies will benefit from research aimed at probing the stories that pilgrims grew up with, on the one hand. On the other, an exploration of what other pilgrimage destinations pilgrims know of and have visited, as well as the stories associated with these, will provide a foundation upon which to categorise different types of sacred sites and the journeys undertaken to them. I believe that such research endeavours will uncover an interesting collection of motivations for participating in and undertaking pilgrimages, and perhaps even facilitate the mapping of sacred sites and

revered journeys in South(ern) Africa. Fifthly, in the tradition of cultural critique (cf. Marcus), pilgrimage as an institution with its “bounded category of action” must be investigated within the broader South African and African contexts (cf. Coleman 2002:363). I suspect that such projects will yield interesting and exciting findings.

Furthermore, directed attention needs to be paid to the vulnerability of the sites, which are susceptible to official and non-official exploitation. The gravity of these concerns is underestimated by many, and the very phenomenon of pilgrimage may be severely threatened in future. Lack of proper management and protection are particularly pressing issues. Studies investigating better human waste management and developing guidelines to decrease the human footprint at the sites must be made a priority. In addition, these pilgrimages do not have the formal securities of pilgrimages in the league of those of the ZCC to Moria and the Shembe to Nhlankakazi. There is a critical need for investigations which pose questions about what kinds of rules and systems (regimes) are necessary to keep the formal and informal aspects of these pilgrimages intact.

Coming full circle: Final remarks

This study could have gone in a myriad of directions. My point of departure could have been pilgrimage as ritual; pilgrimage as rite of passage; pilgrimage as performance; pilgrimage as meta-movement; or pilgrimage as political statement. And of course pilgrimage is all of these things and more. Instead, my investigation took me in other directions. Like a pilgrim seeking insight and understanding, I ventured deeper; an investigation that drew me close to different ontological realities. My investigation went beyond humans as sole actors, and also considered the agency, dependence and dependency of other material, immaterial and non-human entities.

In hindsight, the adage ‘in trying to understand *an other* we learn about (our)selves’ has become imbued with special significance in my own life, bringing Fontana and Frey’s (2005:714) hermeneutic circles into sharper focus. In tracking the journeys of others, this study inadvertently led me on my own. In trying to understand the cognitive maps and lived experiences of my informants, I came to challenge my own core values as well as my being and knowing in the world.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAEC	Association of Earthkeeping Churches
AIC	African Independent Church
AZTREC	Association of Zimbabwean Traditionalist Ecologists
CAS	Centre for Africa Studies
CCSA	Corinthian Church of South Africa
CRL Rights Commission	Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities
NBC	Nazareth Baptist Church
REM	Rapid eye movement
SANPAD	South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resource Agency
UFS	University of the Free State
ZCC	Zion Christian Church

APPENDIX 2:

LIST OF SESOTHO WORDS AND PHRASES

Sesotho	English word/phrase
Altareng	Altar; also an important station at Motouleng.
Amandiki amandawu (isiXhosa)	The foreign but powerful spirits of the <i>other</i> – other tribes, neighbouring communities, or from far-off lands (Wreford 2008:59-63).
Badimo Amakosi (isiXhosa)	Ancestors; higher spirits.
Badimong	<p>“Place of the ancestors”, “among ancestors” (Coplan 2003:981). The farm Wonderklip; “once part of the larger neighbouring property where reed bed of Nkokomohi is located – Moolmanshoek, owned by Willie Nel” (Coplan 2003:981, 985).</p> <p><i>Other names for this site are:</i></p> <p>Mautse</p> <p>“The pre-colonial territorial ‘district’ of the Batlokwa chieftaincy” (Coplan 2003:981). The “entire district around Badimong is known as Mautse, from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when it was the stronghold of the powerful warrior chief of the Batlokwa and rival to Moshoeshoe, Sekonyela” (Coplan 2003:984-985).</p> <p>When facing the valley, the left side is predominantly Pentecostals, while the western side draws primarily traditionally orientated pilgrims, including beginner and graduated/fully trained <u>dingaka</u>.</p> <p>Nkokomohi</p> <p>Located on the farm Moolmansberg 226 (Esterhuyse 2008:21) – was the original site that attracted visitors. The name Nkokomohi means to rise up, and Coplan (2003:981) adds the qualifier ‘like bread’, something that mystically rises up.</p>
Baholo ba hao	Your forebears

Baloi	Witches
Barapedi	People who come to pray
Bohahlaodi ba leeto la semoya	Pilgrimage
Leeto	Journey
Ho hahloula	Touristic journey
Ba hahlaodi	Pilgrims/visitors to a special place/ travellers
Bonkgono	Literally, it means the grandmothers. At the sites the gendered term is collectively used to address and refer to ancestors.
Borapedi	The act of praying / religion
Difaha	Beads
Difaqane	<u>Difaqane</u> is a Sesotho / Setswana word meaning the changes that occur during times of war or specifically: “The Hammering” (1815-1830) (Bruwer 1963:20) or “The Scattering” (Lye 1980:31). <u>Lifaqane</u> is the previous spelling of this word, and according to Ellenberger (1992:117) it denotes “a state of migration”. Contrary to the “ordinary expeditions of inter-tribal warfare in which as a rule only the fighting men took part”, these migrations describe “the struggles of wandering tribes accompanied by their families, flocks, and herds” (Ellenberger 1992:117). Mfecane is the Nguni word specifically referring to “The Crushing” or “time of trouble” (Thompson 1995:81). Stevens (1967:15) refers to these wars as the ‘Wars of Calamity’.
Difletseng	The Flats, a station at Mautse.
Dihwasho	Different types of soil, clay or salts believed to have spiritual, medicinal and cosmetic value.
Sehwasho	Soil, clay and salts believed to have spiritual, medicinal, and cosmetic value.
Dikereke tsa moya	Churches of spirit, e.g. the ZCC.

Dingakeng	A site at Motouleng; place of the traditional healers.
Ditlhare	Plant medicine
Ha Madiboko	A station at Mautse, upper Madiboko; place of the mother of the totems.
Ha Nkgono Mmamasengene	Place of the Grandmothers, a station in the Mautse Valley.
Ha so tswa lefehleng	In reference to apprentice traditional practitioners who have not yet been released.
Hloso	Mermaid. White ancestor
Kglosi wa a ka	
Hlosi	The animal skin/hide characteristically worn by a chief.
Ho alafa	To heal or reconstitute (cf. Comaroff 1985:84); used in the context of rituals.
Ho fehlela	Being in the dark; being kneaded and tanned. To train a novice into the tradition of bongaka (traditional healership).
Ho hahlaula	<u>Ho hahlaula</u> denotes touristic journeying, while <u>ba hahlaodi</u> are the visitors to the sites.
Ho hlwekisa	To clear and clean.
Ho kopa	To request and appeal; used in the context of prayer.
Ho lora	To dream.
Ho rapela	To pray.
Ho thaya	To strengthen or to confirm (cf. Comaroff 1985:84); used in the context of rituals.
Ho thwasa	“[E]nraptured speech and dance of divination” (Coplan 2003:982); the process of becoming a traditional healer.
Ho toulda	The smithing and moulding process when iron is hit and hammered before it becomes an article of use with utilitarian value.

Jwala ba setso	Traditional sorghum beer, used for ritual purposes, and one of the main foods of the ancestors.
Kelello	Intellect, understanding.
Kgalong la bo Tau	Lion's Pass, at the Modderpoort site.
Kganyapa	"The tutelary spirit of Basotho diviners, which takes the shape of a snake with the breasts of a woman, and instructs spirit mediums as to their dress and other matters in dreams" (Coplan 2003:982).
Kgotla Lekgotla	The <u>kgotla</u> (court) and <u>pitsso</u> (general assembly) are male gathering places the court
Kobo ya badimo	Literally, the blanket of the ancestors. It is used to refer to the special cloth associated with traditional practitionership.
Koena-li-fule	The crocodiles are feeding, Mantsopa's birth name.
Leeto	Journey
Lefika	Big rock
Lehaha la ntatemoholo Sebolai	Place of the Grandfathers, a station in the Mautse Valley.
Lehlozi (isiZulu term)	Ancestor. The animal skin/hide characteristically worn by a chief.
Lejwe la ho hlabela	The slaughter table or stone.
Lekgalong le lehaha la Mantsopa	Mantsopa's Pass and Cave
Lekgowa la ka	<i>My white person</i>
Lere	Stick or staff

Lesedi	<p>1) Typical greetings along the paths at Mautse as fellow pilgrims encounter one another would be to say <u>Lesedi!</u> The appropriate response is <u>Kganya!</u> This is said with the accompaniment of cupped handclaps, and the body bowed or even kneeling. <u>Lesedi</u> means light or rays of light, and <u>kganya (kgantsha)</u>, to light.</p> <p>2) Also a station at the Mautse Valley.</p>
<p>Lethuela (<i>singular</i>) mathuela (<i>plural</i>)</p> <p>Lethuela le nwele madi a pudi – ke pudi. Ha so hlabe kgomo</p>	<p>Dance healer, trance healer (Coplan 2003:982, 983).</p> <p>Drank the blood of the goat, is a goat, because hasn't yet slaughtered a cow</p>
Mabitleng	Grave yard; a station in the Motouleng site.
Madiboko	“(‘Mother-of-clan-totems’), a legendary prophet and healer who is said to have been the first to perform miracles at Badimong and to have established these caves as a site sacred to ancestors” (Coplan 2003:984). Also, the colloquial reference to a station in the Mautse Valley.
Mahadima	Flash of light. Lightning.
‘Mankopane	“The mother-in-law of the famed chief, herbalist and seer of the local Bakwena clan in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Mohlomi (d.1811?), said to have been mentor of the Basotho founder-king Moshoeshoe I” (Coplan 2003:984). Also, a station in the Mautse Valley.
Mantsopa	“The famous nineteenth-century prophetess and advisor to Basotho royalty” (Coplan 2003:984). Also the conventional reference to the Modderpoort sacred site.
Manyeloi	Guardian angels.
Maseeng	Infertility/fertility sites at both Mautse and Motouleng. Literally, the place of the children.
Mathuela	Trance healers.
Matla	Power or strength (Casalis 1998:86, 117). Anthropologically, it is understood as <i>vital force</i> .

Matsema (<i>plural</i>) letsema (<i>singular</i>)	Communal labour groups.
Mautse	<p>“The pre-colonial territorial ‘district’ of the Batlokwa chieftaincy” (Coplan 2003:981). The “entire district around Badimong is known as Mautse, from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when it was the stronghold of the powerful warrior chief of the Batlokwa and rival to Moshoeshoe, Sekonyela” (Coplan 2003:984-985).</p> <p>When facing the valley, the left side is predominantly Pentecostals, while the western side draws primarily traditionally orientated pilgrims, including beginner and graduated/fully trained <u>dingaka</u>.</p>
Metlolo	Misdeeds; stepping over magical /witchcraft traps
Metsi a masea	Literally, children’s water. Also, a station in the Motouleng cave.
Metsi a sediba	Literally, fountain water. Also, a station in the Motouleng site.
Mmele	The physical body (cf. Gill 1997:53; Kriel 1997:2; Comaroff 1985:82).
Motjholoko	Completed training to become <u>ngaka</u> (traditional practitioner).
Modimo <i>medimo (plural)</i> Uthixo (isiXhosa)	Supreme-being or creator mystery. God. gods
Modimo o motjha rapela wa kgale	New god intercede with the old god.
Mohau	Grace.
Mohlongwafatse	A traditional type of Basotho hut with a characteristically low, short passage type entrance.
Mokgorong	A station in the Motouleng site.
Morena	Chief

Motouleng Ho toula	To repeatedly beat drums. The name of the large rock overhang and sacred site close to Clarens. Moulding piece of iron bar or iron bar hit with a stone. Motouleng is the place where people are moulded and shaped, i.e. transformed.
Motse (<i>singular</i>) Metse (<i>plural</i>)	(Traditional) Basotho villages.
Moya Umoya (Nguni)	Breath or spirit (cf. Gill 1997:53; Kriel 1997:2; Comaroff 1985:82). Air or wind. Life, potency, power.
Mphepha	<u>Imphepho</u> (isiZulu and isiXhosa); <u>mphepha</u> in (Sesotho) is a pungent herb, <i>Helichrysum moesianum</i> used as incense to cleanse relationships with and draw on the authority of ancestors in the majority of traditional practitioner gatherings.
Mpho (phasa) badimo	A familial ritual to venerate, maintain and renew ancestor relatedness with their living decedants.
Muthi / moriana	Traditional medicine.
Naledi	Star; also a station in the Mautse Valley.
Neo	Gift/talent
Nga le phusa nga le phalaza (isiZulu)	I drank it, to take it out (vomit or purge)
Ngaka ❖ Ya ditaola ❖ Cards / Dikarete ❖ Ya meriana/ sangoma Moprofeta Mopostola	Doctor. Traditional practitioner (cf. White paper) ❖ Diviner-healer ❖ Tarot cards ❖ Herbalist Prophet given water that has been prayed over, pray with candles. Faith healer from apostolic groups, lays hands on as part of healing repertoire.

Nkokomohi	Located on the farm Moolmansberg 226 (Esterhuyse 2008:21) – was the original site that attracted visitors. The name Nkokomohi means to rise up, and Coplan (2003:981) adds the qualifier ‘like bread’, something that mystically rises up.
Nyatsi	Girlfriend or concubine / mistress.
Pono ya hao pono	The path your dreams have taken you on; the way they’ve directed you. Your vision.
Sangoma	The isiZulu word for traditional practitioner. The Sesotho equivalent is ngaka.
Sebaka	Place
Sediba	“Means both well and the ‘eye’ of a natural fountain” (Coplan 2003:984). “The Well of Moshoeshoe” (Coplan 2003:984). “The Well of ‘Mantsopa” (Coplan 2003:984).
Sediba sa Mantsopa	Mantsopa’s Spring
Sediba sa Moshoeshoe	Moshoeshoe’s Fountain
Sejeso	A sacrifice/offering; or food administered with medicine for malicious intensions.
Setjheso	Feast of Christian thanksgiving” (Coplan 2003:982). A sacrifice/offering.
Sekama	Ilmenite, a black rock ground to a fine powder used in rituals. It is the titanium-iron oxide mineral (FeTi ₃).
Seotlwana	A screened off courtyard.
Sephiri, se-sa-tsejweng	A secret, that’s not yet known.
Sephutu(ng)	A station at the Mautse site.
Seriti	Literally it is a shadow, but figuratively it means spiritual power. Essence, character, aura (cf. Gill 1997:53; Kriel 1997:2; Comaroff 1985:82).

Seshweshwe	A cotton print fabric that is customarily used in making traditional outfits for Basotho women. Brown, blue and red are more time-honoured colours, while an array of new design and colours is fashionable these days.
Sehwasho	Soil and clay believed to have spiritual, medicinal, and cosmetic value.
Shembe	A following of the prophet Shembe from KwaZulu-Natal who perform a pilgrimage to the sacred mountain. Devotees wear white during this journey, which takes place on the first weekend of the new year.
Taelo	Decree or commandment; used in the context of dream messages conveying the wishes and instructions of ancestors.
Tafoleng	The Table; a station in the Motouleng cave.
Tempeleng	The Temple; and important station at Mautse.
Thotobolong	A clay harvesting station at Motouleng; a place where you put dirt.
Toro Phetela Ho lora	Dream to tell To dream
Tshenolo lake	A clay harvesting area part of Nkokomohi, part of the Mautse Valley sacred site.
Tsullung	The high mountain at Mautse, the one which Me Masetjhaba climbed. Sekonyela's Hat (Sekonyelashoed) by the white farmers.
Tumello Tumelo	Sanction Belief
Lethwasane	Traditional practitioner apprentices or novices.
Yunivesithi	University; a station at Mautse.