Earth Songs

Paul Weinberg

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"Life is the binding and connecting way....if you are alive, you are connected to everything that one has around us and that oneness is the land...the land owns us."

Bob Randall, Aboriginal elder

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by

Paul Weinberg

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Author's statement

"Our belief is that land is a gift from God and from our ancestors who have not left us. We continue to see ourselves as stewards of God's resources, especially of communally owned land."[1]

Z. Nkosi, Spirituality, Land and Land reform in South Africa

Earth Songs explores and celebrates spiritual connections to the land in South Africa. While the ownership of "land" in this country is a highly contested issue, people have long marked and celebrated their spiritual connections to the land in ways that signify and re-imagine what it means for a variety of its inhabitants. Such meaning-making often etches the landscape, turning it into a natural canvass through which layered stories, manifest or buried, are expressed.

In quiet ways beyond the news and headlines, people of all traditions, persuasions, faiths and spiritual engagements partake in formal and informal rituals that mark the land in ways that align with their beliefs. They may go on pilgrimages, or re-ritualise places of archaeological, historical and cultural significance. Such rituals may take place in makeshift places of worship, in caves, next to rivers, or in churches, temples and mosques. In some instances, these spiritual sites are well-known, like Mount Nhlangakazi, the endpoint of a 50 km pilgrimage for thousands of followers of the *Ibanda lamaNazaretha* (Shembe Church). In others, as in the case of Twee Rivieren, where a small statue at the confluence of the Swart and Liesbeek rivers in Cape Town pays homage to the brave *Goringhaiqua* Khoi who defeated the first colonisers in 1510, these sites are less known. The lesser-known sites often tell stories of contest and simultaneous spiritual significance that need to be told more volubly and heard more widely.

My project explores many of these lesser-known, lesser-recognised, off-the-beaten-track, unusual sites of spiritual practice and ritual, bringing to the surface histories that are often

muted or erased. Collectively, this work is an amalgam of spiritual connections to our land that celebrates our diversity, engages with our past and, for many, transcends the everyday. This project complements and expands on the extensive book I did on rituals and spiritual practice called *Moving Spirit* (1996–2006). It hopefully offers another way of understanding our country and reflects the essence of spirituality that lies deeply embedded in our land.

Paul Weinberg

Foreword

Land remains one of the most political and contested elements of South Africa's past and present. From the first encounters between indigenous inhabitants to later colonialists, segregationists and the more recent democrats, land has been used to divide the country and her people.

But it has also drawn her people closer to her, enfolding them in a very sacred embrace. In this pristine collection of visuals, Paul Weinberg takes us to this side of the continuum, elevating the meaning of land to this higher, more spiritual plane.

Weinberg has traversed the breadth of the South African landscape to portray its deep and intrinsic meaning and encapsulate the inter-connections of cultures and peoples across the spectrum of time. He traces these intersections from the first peoples, the San and Khoi, whose domain this land was for centuries, to those who came from elsewhere on the continent and from across the seas. His moving imagery harnesses the spiritual rituals of a cross-section of southern Africa's belief systems – indigenous, Muslim, Jewish, Zionist, Roman Catholic, Buddhist and more. As you page through these visuals, you will have the unique opportunity to gaze differently, and with deference, at the world we inhabit.

In a sense, *Earth Songs* eloquently draws together the ethereal or intangible realm of belief and ritual with the very tangible soil that makes up our landscape. As the title indicates, it chants the songs of the people who inhabit this southern stretch of African earth.

Karen Leigh Harris, PhD
Department of Historical and Heritage Studies
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Sanctuary

Sanctuary is what we seek — not cure, not vaccine, not care. Sanctuary is a place where we can fly through the open doors of redemption, lay our confessions down and be redeemed. This is a place where every knock is answered and every plea is heard. Sanctuary is the fountain of clear, cool water where we seek to quench our thirsts. It is the place where our knuckles will not be torn and bruised by constant banging. It is the place where we imagine we will find ourselves again, dream the dreams we had forsaken, embrace the loves we had rejected and re-ignite the passions we had quelled. In our febrile imaginations, sanctuary would right all the wrongs and cleanse all our iniquities. It is why, in our dark corners, we mutter prayers to unknown gods and neglected ancestors. It is why we are attending to our supplications and bowing to our discarded gurus. It is that hour when to be human is to be a groveller, a penitent, a worm, raising hands skyward in the hope that providence will offer succour. This plea for sanctuary is at present parching our throats and cracking our lips because we are the unknown gods and neglected ancestors. This is the invitation that Paul Weinberg's *Earth Songs* delivers to us — come and live in a sanctified world.

In making these opening statements on Weinberg's photographs, I am not attempting to argue that, as humans, we don't deserve the modernity we have crafted. This is not even an attempt to hold up Nature and argue that it is her who has exhausted her patience and is now throwing us off her tired back. This is not even to argue that there is a "lesson" here, that this is a teachable moment, that those who fail to heed the parable will live to reap the whirlwind. There are no sermons here. There is only the stark and painful reality of an event without precedence and of the innumerable and unthinkable consequences. That is the sanctuary we cannot have; the future has been wiped from our foresight and we are left groping in the darkness for a shard of understanding. In Weinberg's photographs, we are witness to

multiple and polyphonic congregations. Mothers, wives, husbands, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandmothers and grandfathers are photographed in a state of grace — leaving evidence of their humour, incomprehension, irony, tenderness, carelessness, satire, exasperation and fortitude. These communities have been brought together, torn apart, reconnected and reconstituted, and in the instant when I looked at the photographs, I searched for the familiar tropes, the habitual, worn-out and recycled dictions. And just as I was about to fall back on the dependable maxims, I caught in the wind Miles Davis blowing on his horn and I heard it for the first time, the lilting and pulsating desire for a place where there are no sinners, only saints. In the intervals between propulsive and sharp phrases, Davis opened the space for the drummer to gallop in — fast, furious, unbridled. This is the sound that would open the caverns, the haunts, the fountains, the wellsprings of the sanctuary.

Rather than writing an erudite cogitation on the history of spirituality in South Africa, I have chosen to listen several times to the Wayne Shorter composition "Sanctuary"; Miles Davis included it on his electric and funk-inflected album *Bitches Brew* (1970). The word "sanctuary" comes from the Latin words "*sanctus*", which means "holy", and its derivative "*sanctuarium*", which means "holy place". According to the laws of the early Christian Church, a fugitive could seek sanctuary from prosecution or arrest by entering a church or even lying at its doorsteps. This is why, in some countries, one still sees homeless people sleeping in the doorways of churches. Beyond this etymology and history, "Sanctuary" is a jazz tune and a piece of liturgical music — "*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*...". It is as if the incantation becomes the forgiveness, the refuge, the respite. It is as if when the cantor throws their voice into the vaulted ceiling of the cathedral or synagogue or temple or mosque, the words become the benediction. This is what sanctuary is for — the words that annul punishment, the words that proclaim innocence. We need sanctuary for the same reasons we have needed prophets. Every generation births its own Jeremiah; its own Zarathustra; its own Enoch Mgijima. Every generation needs its voice in the desert to prepare the way for salvation. *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*.

Paul Weinberg's photographs reflect our human desire for sanctuary. When the eye meets the stillness of a river estuary, or the isolation of a San rock painting, or the pantheon of deities decorating a Hindu temple, it is not "god" that comes to mind but the image of the believer, the faithful, the acolyte who comes to this place to seek the soothing balm of absolution. The places that Weinberg photographs have not necessarily been consecrated by an organised body – priests, imams, rabbis, *izangoma*; they are places that history itself has chosen as relics; wailing walls, *kramats*, *amaliba* (graves in isiZulu), groves, caves and hills. This assortment is a testament to how broad the spirit ranges in search of divinity; it is an affirmation of the psychological thirst for a higher being who intercedes in our mundane and not-so-mundane human affairs. To write about spirituality or sanctuary in South Africa is therefore to write about history – the history of damnation and redemption, a history of penitents and seers. This is not, however, just an innocent historical story about the human condition; the history of spirituality in South Africa is the history of clashing gods, clashing ancestors, clashing dogmas and clashing prophecies. It is a history of iconoclasms – gods living, gods dying, ancestors resurrecting, ancestors dying. Whereas the philosopher Friederich Nietzsche could declare, "I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar," in South Africa, our deities are polyglot; they speak in many grammars. Our *Götterdämmerung* – the Norse word for "twilight of the gods" – is forever suspended in a sea of languages. But this is not the only problem with mapping spirituality in South Africa. Language itself is the victim, since so many of the cultures and persons who have brought us "holiness" are controversial and their stories are unfinished.

Nongqawuse (1841–1898) is one example of an unfinished prophetic story. This young woman gave the *amaXhosa* the words that the ancestors had spoken to her – "...the cattle have been reared with defiled hands..." – and her utterances sparked a search for answers. In most accounts, her story begins with the prophecy that the cattle should be slaughtered, that there should be no cultivation and that new granaries should be dug in preparation for the dead who will arise. As Helen Bradford has pointed out, the "defilement" accusation is just as

important as the prophecy. What could it mean for a young unmarried woman to speak of defilement and witchcraft? Bradford's feminist interpretation positions Nongqawuse in a net of competing male dominators and guardians — the colonial state, her uncle Mhlakaza and the Xhosa chiefs who had supported prophets before. Equally important, however, are the many women who supported her pronouncements on the cessation of cultivation since it was their labour. Even then, Nongqawuse was a prophetess torn asunder by the "defilement" she perceived around her and the desire to cleanse the Xhosa nation, perhaps so that it may rise to fight yet another anti-colonial war. That strange word "defilement" then repeated itself throughout the history of prophecies — purgation, extrusion, purification became the new buzzwords for speaking about the world of the spirits. How much of this was the effect of Christian conversion and how much the desire for a receding pre-colonial idyll? Paul Weinberg's photographs of the Gxarha River mouth, where Nongqawuse first heard the ancestors speak, evoke this emerging bilingualism and polytheism — on the surface, the river is an impenetrable surface, but in the background, one can glimpse the green rushes which rustled their beckoning words to the young prophetess. Seduction and stillness, words and motion, power and restraint — it is all there in the world that confounded Nongqawuse and led her to speak of a nation defiled.

These nomadic journeys of the spirit continued in the 1920s and 1930s as new prophets and prophetesses looked at the world and only saw devastation — the influenza epidemic of 1918, the First World War, the consequences of the Natives Land Act of 1913. The world was once again at loggerheads, and the spirit of Nongqawuse rose to animate and mark new sanctuaries. Nonthetha Nkwenkwe (c. 1875–1935) and Enoch Mgijima (1868–1928) emerged from an already extant history of independent African Christian churches and self-made prophets. Unlike Nongqawuse — who in the aftermath of the Cattle Killing of 1856–1857 became a colonial curiosity — both Nkwenkwe and Mgijima faced the full might of the colonial and post-Union state. By this time, white religious leaders, politicians and officials had become suspicious of what they termed "Ethiopianism" — an expression of exegetical,

liturgical and ritual independence by African Christians. Nkwenkwe was labelled as "mad" and placed in two different psychiatric hospitals. Her arrest and eventual transfer to an institution in Pretoria did not deter her followers who walked to Pretoria only to be arrested and returned to the Eastern Cape. Mgijima – whose life story is more widely known – didn't even have the luxury of being committed; his Israelite sect was at first tolerated and then declared a threat by Jan Smuts' government. On 24 May 1921, his followers were mercilessly ambushed and killed by police and soldiers after several failed negotiations to evict them from their sanctuary, which Mgijima had named Ntabelanga. Neither the Nkwenkwe congregation nor Mgijima's Israelites dissipated; their followers are still making pilgrimages to their holy places and waiting expectantly for the prophets to return. The photographs attest to these constant gestures of renewal – Ntabelanga reborn; faith revived. The images that Paul Weinberg has produced of these holy places give the viewer the opportunity to think on multiple dimensions – there is the physical beauty of the landscape, the sometimes-inconspicuous markers of human presence, the candle burning next to an open bible, the cockerel that inhabits a cave. These are psychic and spectral powers that draw you in; even if you didn't know what you were looking at, you would find yourself looking for signs of enchantment, signs of ethereal beings.

The sanctification or beatification of the body is a practice as old as time. One can imagine, for example, a Viking chieftain being sent floating on a fiery ship to Valhalla in the same way that one can imagine a Zulu king, tied up in the foetal position, being interred with his worldly goods and his *insila* (body-servant). History reveals to us more and more how porous the barrier between the terrestrial and the celestial has always been. We are probably the first humans to attempt to live in a purely secular world, and so such practices seem distant to us. In Paul Weinberg's photographs of royal graves, he doesn't attempt to recreate this bygone beatification; instead, the lush and verdant vegetation seems to index the fecundity of the body that lies there entombed. Whether it is the *Vha-Venda* or the *amaZulu*, kings and queens lie in eternal repose surrounded by briars and ferns, the whisper of the leaves being their unending death prayer. These graves are often kept secret exactly because, as in life, so in

death, and the bodies of royalty remain sacred and therefore spiritually potent even when they are deceased. The overgrown greenery is therefore both coincidence and consequence. It is as if their bodies continue to offer ministration and vitality even after they are long gone. By evoking these powers visually, Weinberg's photographs translate into any context where being royal meant a posthumous life of veneration and rapture.

Forests, rivers and caves are not the only markers and symbols of the spirit which we humans veer towards. Mountains and their peaks also seem to invite our imagination to ascend upwards to the skies and heavens. Ever since Moses descended Mount Sinai with divine commandments written on stone slabs, every prophet and sage has attempted to replicate his journey. Again, there may be logical and historical reasons — mountains and hills have also been places where human beings built military fortifications; therefore, it makes sense that shrines, temples, churches and monasteries would also be built on elevated planes. There may also be climactic considerations; the higher you go, the colder it becomes, we were taught, and so it makes sense that if one is going to spend several days fasting and praying and waiting on the divine, one would want to do it in the coolness of a cave. Regardless of these possibilities, the images in this book affirm the connection between ascension and religiosity; the higher you go, the closer you are to the divine, the images seem to affirm. The isolation and elevated position of the Bidklip of Richtersveld draws the eye upward and into the lofty holiness and solitariness of the oblong obelisk on the mountain's peak. The coral hues of the clouds and sky mimic the colour scheme of this obelisk and thus confirm its otherworldliness. It's a mountain in need of its own Moses, ready to commune with divinity.

If Paul Weinberg's only interest was in producing images of quaint and whimsical sects and cults, then this wouldn't be a compelling book. Moreover, there have been plenty of other books and photographic collections of African independent churches, and so Weinberg would be taking a stab at an already worn-out photographic genre. What makes this collection unique is that Weinberg also attends to our post-modernist, post-Enlightenment mysticisms — the various versions of ecofeminism, new ageism and mindful esotericism. Thus, he travelled

to the African version of the American-based "Burning Man" festival site. Here too, the interaction between human and spirit, terrestrial and lofty symbols creates an inviting and evocative visual language that takes seriously the expressions of spirituality that are being planted there.

One of the complicated aspects of attempting to visualise African spirituality is that unlike Judeo-Christian teachings, which focus on the binary split between this world and the next, African spirituality is based on a seamless imbrication of gods and mortals, spirits and deities, flesh and ghost. Weinberg's photographs attempt to walk that line – animism without the patronising "fetish" assumptions. Even the word "animism" contains the taint of colonial interference in which outsiders assumed that the African was living in a world of ghouls and vengeful sprites, rather than just a world of constant spiritual alertness. In devising this photographic project, Weinberg had to be careful not to repeat that overbearing and judgemental understanding that the African spirit world was already an idea that was past its time. The photographs in this book bring into the present tense themes that have intrigued the South African imagination for centuries. From Wilhelm Bleek's interpretations of San rock art to Bengt Sundkler's photographs of "Zionists", the realm of the spirit has always captured the imagination of scholars, photographers and amateur anthropologists. It is therefore necessary to pay careful attention to specificity and context if one wants to produce images that don't simply repeat the conclusions that have already been drawn.

By definition, the art of photography relies on the past – a photograph, as Susan Sontag has argued, is an "incitement to reverie". The function of the photograph is to give us the illusion that we have fixed the past; that we have accessed that past; that, in some faulty and incomplete way, we can relive the past. In its infancy, it was very popular for photographers to add faeries, sprites and nimbuses to photographs in order to imply the presence of a higher power. In this way, photographers attempted to bridge the yawning gap between photography and painting by applying to the photograph the logic of the reliquary. Intriguingly, these touch-ups were not used (at least not to my knowledge) when photography travelled to the colonies. Thus, for

example, when Alfred Duggan-Cronin photographed African diviners, he did not add signifiers of spiritual power. This may be because African ingenuity made such additions redundant — African diviners already wore headdresses and insignia that identified their profession. It may also be that photographers like Duggan-Cronin didn't want to elevate the *inyanga* (herbalist) and the *isangoma* (diviner) to the level of the hallowed and beatified. Spirituality, according to this mindset, was earthly and bounded by culture and location. Not so in Paul Weinberg's photographs. By ranging so widely over the South African landscape in search of sanctuaries, Weinberg has opened wide the sanctified worlds that have blessed us with a pantheon of gods and deities of which we are so undeserving. In this book, Weinberg has revealed the divine surfeit that enlivens the religious practices of millions of South Africans. In this way, he has given us a glimpse of what a truly ecumenical spirituality could look like. Imagine the beneficence of a whole country that is a sanctuary.

Hlonipha Mokoena

The San signified their spiritual connections to the land through rock engravings and paintings. Here, the */Xam* people would invoke the rain, Springbokoog, North Northern Cape.

Diepkloof cave is an early archaeological site where engraving and art dating back 60 000 years have been discovered, Elands Bay, Western Cape.

There are over 50 000 rock paintings in the Drakensberg area. While it was thought that the *Abathwa* (Southern San) had been wiped out during the late 19th century, a group of San survivors continued to practise their beliefs and traditions in secret. The Duma clan regularly return to this part of the Drakensberg to perform sacred rituals, Kamberg, KwaZulu-Natal.

Camissa, a Khoi name meaning sweet waters, has spiritual connotations. The city of Cape Town has a unique underground system of rivers and aquifers throughout the city, near Khayelitsha, Cape Town, Western Cape.

There are various *kramats* (Muslim shrines) throughout Cape Town. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) brought practising Muslim slaves (including a number of high-ranking *imams*) from Indonesia and Malaysia to the Cape, *Kramat* Valley, Cape Town, Western Cape.

Tashlikh, the emptying-your-pocket or casting-off-your-sins ritual performed by orthodox Jews during *Rosh Hashannah* (New Year), takes place annually, Mushroom Park, Johannesburg, Gauteng.

The confluence of the Liesbeek and Swart rivers is simultaneously a site of conflict and one of spirituality. It is the site of the first conflict between European settlers and indigenous Khoi people in South Africa. On this site, on 1 March 1510, Viceroy Francisco D'Almeida, the first governor and viceroy of the first Portuguese State of India, was defeated by the *Goringhaiqua,* an event commemorated by this sculpture, Twee Rivieren*,* Cape Town, Western Cape.

For many surfers in South Africa and around the world, there is a strong connection between big wave surfing and spirituality, Dungeons, Hout Bay, Cape Town, Western Cape.

Phiphidi Falls, a sacred site of the *Vha-Venda* people and the Modjadji Rain Queen, near Makhado, Limpopo.

The valley at the Gxarha River mouth is where 19th-century Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse received her revelations from the ancestors, setting off a massive wave of ritualised cattle-killing, Gxarha mouth, Eastern Cape.

Every year, the followers of the *Ibanda lamaNazaretha* (Shembe Church) embark on a 50 km pilgrimage from Inanda to Mount Nhlangakazi, the Shembe Church's holy mountain, where the founding prophet is said to have received revelations from God, Nhlangakazi, KwaZulu-Natal.

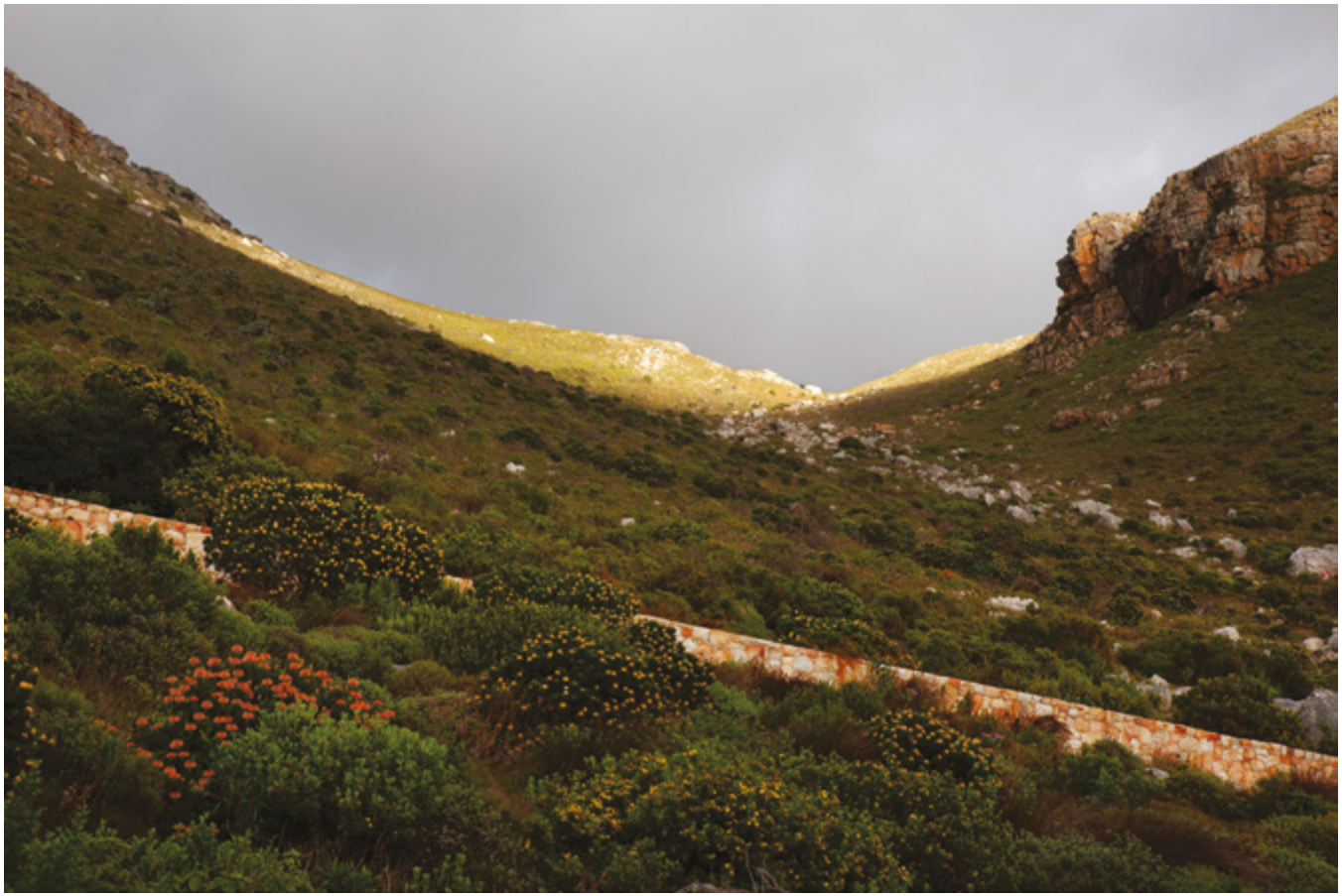
On 24 May 1921, 800 white policemen and soldiers confronted an African prophet, Enoch Mgijima, and some 3 000 of his Israelite followers, killing 200 of them, Nthabelanga, Bulhoek Massacre site, Eastern Cape.

Melville Koppies, one of the few rich prehistoric sites that were left in Johannesburg after the development of gold mines. Today, various spiritual practices of ancestral worship and Zion church services occur at the Koppies, Johannesburg, Gauteng.

Boegoeberg is a revered spiritual site for the once-nomadic Nama people. Historically, communities stayed here on their travels south and north for summer and winter grazing. Today, the Boegoeberg is within the Alexkor mining area and is inaccessible to the public, Boegoeberg, Alexkor mine, Richtersveld, Northern Cape.

There are about 3 million foreign Africans living in South Africa who practise a multiplicity of faiths wherever they find sanctuary, Nigerian Church site, Signal Hill, Cape Town, Western Cape.

A non-stop church meets every day on the mountain behind Muizenberg for worshippers, mainly from Burundi, but is also a haven for many other foreign Africans. Many believers travel from townships on the Cape Flats to attend ceremonies, Peck's Peak, Muizenberg, Cape Town, Western Cape.



Ratelgat is the spiritual home of the Griqua, a group of Khoi people. It was founded by Paramount Chief Andrew le Fleur and is now a heritage site, Vredendal district, Northern Cape.

This Roman Catholic Church was a sanctuary for refugees in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 1880s, Father Simon and Brother Wolf established a church that survives to the present day. Throughout its history, the church has been a hallowed site for various indigenous communities afflicted by ongoing internal strife and colonial struggles, Pella, Northern Cape.

Mik, a cave church next to the Orange River, has been used by the Nama community as a place of worship for centuries, Pella District, Northern Cape.

Bidklip has remained a spiritual loadstone and source of inspiration in the Nama community's contested relationship with outsiders, Richtersveld, Northern Cape.

Izangoma (healers), *izinyanga* (herbalists) as well as followers of various Zion-based churches often frequent the Motouleng caves for spiritual fulfilment. Formal and informal pilgrimages are common occurrences, Motouleng Caves, near Clarens, Free State.

The cave church of *Lekhalong la bo Tau* region (the Pass of Lions) has had many iterations. Established as a mission by Canon Henry Beckett, the Superior of St Augustine, many different spiritual practices also find sanctuary here, Mantsopa Cave Church, Free State.

Madimatle, meaning “beautiful blood”, is a holy mountain and cave that has been a site of spiritual practice for centuries. In recent years, it became the site of a dispute over a mining claim. Among *Setswana* communities in South Africa and Botswana, the oral history on Madimatle is revered and dates back centuries, Thabazimbi, Limpopo.

Lake Fundudsi, near Makhado, Limpopo, is a sacred site of the *Vha-Venda* people. It is believed that an albino python is its guardian, and the lake is inextricably linked to the *Domba* (snake dance) performed annually by young Venda maidens.

Thulamela, a sacred site of the *Vha-Venda* people, is linked to Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe kingdoms, Kruger National Park, Limpopo.

Molokwane, a one-time large settlement of the Sotho-Tswana people, where healing practices of all faith groups take place today, North West Province.

The Peace Pagoda near Barrydale is believed to be the only such structure in Africa and is sadly a contested spiritual site. The pagoda clashes with the beliefs of the landowners who are Seventh Day Adventists. They have closed access to the site, Barrydale district, Western Cape.

The Shree Ambalavaanar Hindu Temple is considered a holy shrine for practising Hindus in South Africa. The first temple, built in 1875 at Bayhead, was washed away by floods. Some of the original deities were relocated to this site, Umbilo, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

eMakhosini, the site where Zulu kings like Shaka had their royal kraals and where other kings are buried. It is a site that embodies the connection between Zulu royal ancestors and their "Zulu spirit", Valley of the Kings, Ulundi, KwaZulu-Natal.

The first Zulu Christian martyr, Maqhamusela Khanyile, was killed by Cetswayo for refusing to serve in the Zulu military on 7 March 1877. The site is visited regularly by church groups and traditional healers, Mpondweni Hill, Eshowe, KwaZulu-Natal.

Prophetess Nontetha Nkwenkwe, an *inyanga* (herbalist) who survived the devastating flu epidemic of 1918, turned the event into a personal mission. As a seer, a diviner, a Christian and ultimately a prophet, she was interned at a mental institution at Fort Beaufort in 1922, Old Mental Asylum, Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape.

AfrikaBurn, an annual gathering of revellers, follows the principles and practice of the American Burning Man festival. Its principles align with a transformative new age philosophy, Karoo, Western Cape.

Modjadji Forest is a sacred site for the Rain Queen of the Balebodu Kingdom. The Rain Queen is thought to have magical powers, including the power to induce rain, which have been passed from mother to daughter for centuries, near Tzaneen, Limpopo.

Thate Vonde, a sacred forest of the *Vha-Venda* people, where all chiefs and royalty are buried near Makhado, Limpopo.

Cetshwayo's grave is considered a sacred site for the *isiZulu*-speaking people, who hold him in high esteem for defeating the British army at Isandlwana in 1879, Nkandla Forest, KwaZulu-Natal.

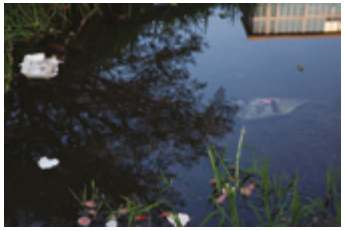
The San signified their spiritual connections to the land through rock engravings and paintings. One San group, the */Xam* people, would invoke rain through a ritual rain-maker who would lead a water-bull to a site where they wanted rain to fall. The bull would be sacrificed, with the flow of blood signifying the flow of rain. Archaeologist Jeanette Deacon's research has connected physical engravings with 19th-century testimonies of */Xam* informants who shared their stories with Bleek and Lloyd. She notes, "the cosmos that linked the ground and waterhole with the spiritual realm in the sky is referred to in the rock engravings through metaphors and activities of the *!gi:ten* (rain-maker) as they communicated with the spirit world."[2]

Diepkloof cave is one of the earliest sites where art engravings on ostrich shells were discovered, dating back 60 000 years. Archaeologists found 270 fragments with geometric symbolic patterns in the cave. They claimed that these artefacts form "a system of symbolic representation in which collective identities and individual expressions are clearly communicated, suggesting social, cultural, and cognitive underpinnings that overlap with those of modern people."[3] Indeed, Shigeru Miyagawa of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) suggests that "art is not just something that is marginal to our culture, but central to the formation of our cognitive abilities."[4] The caves also have representations of later San and Khoi rock art.

There are over 50 000 rock paintings in the Drakensberg area that span millennia of the San hunter-gatherers' existence in southern Africa. While it was thought that the *Abathwa*, the last living San of the Drakensberg, had been wiped out during the 19th century, a group of San survivors continued to practise their beliefs and traditions in secret. After South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, the Duma clan, once considered one of the original Zulu clans, claimed their San heritage and regularly return to this part of the Drakensberg to perform sacred rituals among sites with rock art. Scholars like David Lewis-Williams and others have argued that rock art is connected to the San people's cosmology. They argue that San spiritual leaders who were connected to the spirit realm through trance would translate these experiences by painting them onto the surfaces of rock shelters.

The city of Cape Town has a unique underground system of rivers that flow from Table Mountain and the surrounding highlands through the city. It also has an integrated seasonal wetland system. Perhaps not surprisingly, the original inhabitants of Cape Town called it *Camissa*, a Khoi name meaning sweet waters. Various San and Khoi groups lived harmoniously within this ecosystem in which they grazed their livestock, hunted the many species of wildlife and harvested bushfood. Like other indigenous groups, the linkage between the natural environment and the spirit world was axiomatic. When the first settlers arrived, they were astounded by this paradise and the abundance of wildlife.

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) brought practising Muslim slaves (including a number of high-ranking *imams*) from Indonesia, Malaysia and other colonies to the Cape. Many were relocated to the Cape for resisting colonial invasion in their own countries. With them, they brought Sufism, a mystical expression of the Islamic faith in which devotees enter a trance state to personally experience God. Still widely practised in the region, Sufism had a profound influence on indigenous people and emerging spiritual practices. The work of these early devotees can still be read in the landscape, and particularly in the number of *kramats* throughout Cape Town. A *kramat* is a spiritual site where Muslim saints and *Auliyah* (friends of Allah) are buried. There are at least 31 *kramat* sites in Cape Town, of which the most prominent ten form the so-called "circle of tombs" that encompass the slopes and top of Signal Hill, sites in Oude Kraal and Constantia, Zandvliet farm and Robben Island



Tashlikh, the emptying-your-pocket or casting-off-your-sins ritual performed by orthodox Jews during *Rosh Hashannah* (New Year), has been practised since the 13th century. The ritual symbolises ablution and a return to a purer self. Water, central to the creation of life, is also associated with the cleansing of the body and spirit. This ritual is practised throughout the world by people of the Jewish faith on this holy day. By 1914, 40 000 Jews had settled in South Africa, peaking at 120 000 in 1970. Today, the Jewish community numbers around 80 000 people, including the Lemba, whose DNA has been proved to link to the 12 tribes of Israel.

Twee Rivieren (literally "two rivers", referring to the Liesbeek and Swart rivers) is at once a site of conflict and one of spirituality. Widely acknowledged as the site of the first conflict between European settlers and indigenous Khoi people in South Africa, the actual site of the battle is unknown. However, "the historicity of this site draws significance from the precolonial inhabitation by the Khoi, the hippo, the lion and wildlife that were wiped out by the intrusion of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). It is an area of contact with the Portuguese in 1510 when a great battle was fought between Viceroy Francisco D'Almeida, the first governor and viceroy of the first Portuguese State of India, and the Goringhaiqua. On 1 March, he was defeated in battle by the Khoi."[5] Twee Rivieren is also the site of a present-day contested development project

In South Africa, as in some other parts of the world, there is a strong connection between big wave surfing and spirituality. Dungeons, near Hout Bay, is one of the top big wave surfing spots in the world. People refer to the connection between surfing and spirituality as a release, a meditation, and a oneness with nature. Soul surfer Keith Glendon describes this connection as follows: "The sea holds a magic for those of us who know her. A magic so simple, pure and powerful it works as an unseen force in our souls. We're drawn to her. The spirit of the sea moves in us as we move within her, undulating folds in pursuit of our peace. As surfers, we inherently know this to be so. The sea brings comfort, solace, release and escape. The sea brings healing. The spirit of the sea, for some of us, is the very essence of life.[6]

Phiphidi Falls is a sacred site of the Ramunangi clan of the *Vha-Venda*. Traditional beliefs hold that ancestral water spirits reside in the pool and waterfall. To appease these spirits, descendants regularly need to pour libations of grain and beer at the site, while local clan members regularly pray there for rain, health, good harvests and peace. An interlayered set of beliefs, laws and rituals determine cultural and spiritual practice at Phiphidi. In 2010, the traditional custodians of the site warned of its "defilement" at the hands of careless tourists and property developers, but today it is successfully managed by conservation authorities and local authorities.

In the mid-19th century, the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse received revelations from her ancestors at the Gxarha river mouth valley that would have a profound impact on her people. Her prophecies arose in a context where the colonial government persistently intruded on Xhosa territories and where locals responsively resisted such aggression. At the time of her visions, the region experienced a severe drought and bovine lungsickness. Nongqawuse prohesised that the mass slaughter of their cattle would see the Xhosa ancestors rise from the dead, defeat the colonists, and return the Xhosa nation to its former glory. Her prophesies started a millennial movement that threw the Xhosa nation into a tragic spiral that hastened the colonisation of the area.

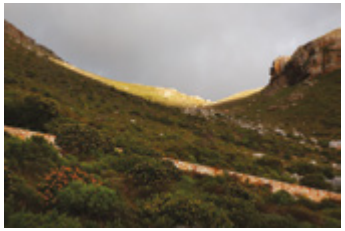
Every year, the followers of the *Ibanda lamaNazaretha* (Shembe Church) embark on a pilgrimage from Inanda to Mount Nhlangakazi, 50 kms away. Church followers believe that it was on this holy mountain that the church founder, Isaiah Shembe, received the revelations that constitute the bedrock of their faith. Here, they pray several times a day and dance a slow Zulu rhythmic beat accompanied with drums and at one time, horns, but by trumpets today (not unlike a *vuvuzela*). It is a performance which one devotee described as, "dancing for God."

On the morning of 24 May 1921, a force consisting of 800 white policemen and soldiers confronted an African prophet, Enoch Mgijima, and some 3 000 of his followers at their holy village of Nthabelanga in the Eastern Cape. Called the Israelites, Mgijima's followers had been gathering at the holy site since early 1919 to await the end of the world. They refused all attempts by the authorities to remove them from the site. With rifles, machine guns, and cannons, the government forces killed nearly 200 Israelites who challenged them with knobkerries, swords, and spears. This massacre has been likened to Sharpeville and Marikana, but while political convictions animated the resistance in 1960 and 2012, the so-called Bulhoek massacre saw state forces arraigned against the visions of a prophet and the religious beliefs of his followers.

Layers of history are buried in the Melville Koppies landscape on one of the few remaining archaeological sites in Johannesburg. Archaeologist Revil Mason found early hominid sites dating back some 250 000 years, a San settlement in a cave dating back 100 000 years and more recent Iron Age Tswana settlements from about 500 years ago. Mason was able to show a grouping of people who practised pastoralism, agriculture, metal craft and were involved in trade. The Tswana people lived in this area until about 1820 when they fled from Mzilikazi who in turn was on the run from Shaka. The discovery of gold and the subsequent development of mines in the late 19th century led to the destruction of much of this region's rich social history. Today, a variety of Zion Church groups and *izangoma* (spiritual practitioners) regularly visit this space, adding further layers of cultural life and history.

Boegoeberg is a revered site for the once-nomadic Nama people. Historically, Nama communities stayed here as they travelled south for summer and north for winter grazing. Boegoeberg is situated between Alexander Bay and Port Nolloth on the West Coast. Today, it is within the Alexkor mining area and is inaccessible to the public. When Boegoeberg was excavated for diamonds, the miners found Nama graves and middens created by Nama ancestors. Archaeologists who studied the graves found rich information about Nama burial rituals and deep insights into the lives of the once-nomadic Nama. There are moves afoot by government and planners to turn Boegoebaai into a deep-water port.

There are about 3 million foreign Africans living in South Africa, among which is a group of about 30 000 Nigerians. On Signal Hill in Cape Town, a group of Nigerians meet daily to pray and practise their faith. These are not members of the well-known and often large "prophet healing" Pentecostal churches for which Nigeria is famous and that South Africans often see on televangelism shows. Using a small pile of rocks as a pulpit and seating themselves in a clearing around it, these practitioners spend many hours quietly singing and praying in their native languages. Xenophobia, marginalisation and the need for self-identity all contribute to the proliferation of small church groups such as these.



A non-stop church meets every day on Pecks Peak behind Muizenberg in Cape Town. The group is mainly from Burundi but also offers a haven for many other foreign Africans who come from townships on the Cape Flats to attend these ceremonies. Like the small Nigerian church gathering on Signal Hill, this small outdoor church attracts a steady flow of followers. I met Zimbabweans, Rwandans, Malawians and people from the DRC on the way up the mountain. The preacher told me his story, which could probably be repeated by all on the mountain trail. "It was very difficult to get here. I left my country because of unstable politics. I do piecework to support my wife and two children. Even though I've been here for 14 years, I still struggle to get formal work because I am not registered as I don't have citizenship." The view from the church site stretches from the Indian Ocean to Cape Town's Flats and endlessly north, to those places from which the congregants have come. Two days before my visit, there were attacks against foreigners in the country. Lost in prayer and speaking in French, snuggled in the fold of the mountain, this small group were safe amongst each other in their temporary sanctuary.

Ratelgat is the spiritual home of the Griqua, a group of Khoi people, who have lived in various parts of South Africa for over 200 years. Founded by Paramount Chief Andrew le Fleur, Ratelgat is now a heritage site. As Yvette le Fleur, the representative of the Griqua National Conference expressed it, "For us the acquisition of this piece of land is not only an inheritance in the land itself but even more significant to the Griqua, is the inheritance of the spirit of our ancestors; who could survive through very difficult circumstances the onslaught of colonialism on this very arid piece of land in the heart of the succulent Karoo."[7]

The Roman Catholic church in Pella, in the Northern Cape, was a sanctuary for refugees in the 18th and 19th centuries. Established by the London Missionary Society, the first church on the site was attacked by a group of marauding San in 1815 and lay abandoned for much of the 19th century. In the 1880s, Father Simon and Brother Wolf re-established a Catholic church and community on the site, both of which survive to the present day. Throughout this recent history, it has been a hallowed site for various indigenous communities engulfed in ongoing struggles with each other and colonists.

The Nama of the Northern Cape used to be a nomadic people, but a range of factors from the mid-19th century onwards led to radical socio-economic changes, the slow erasure of their traditional lifestyle and the loss of their language. In increasing numbers, mining prospectors, white farmers and missionaries encroached on their land and parcelled it off while mission education discouraged the use of Nama. Settled, many Nama became farmworkers and labourers. When the Catholic mission was established in the late 19th century, the resident priest made regular visits to the farmers who lived on the outlying livestock posts and held services in the Mik, a cave church. Attendance at the Mik was largely by the Nama community, who continued to worship there and welcomed other denominational services. The community saw the influence of the various church denominations as a means to share, commune and engage with outsiders.

The Nama community's deep roots in the Richtersveld landscape created a repository of intangible knowledge which continues to serve as spiritual inspiration in their struggles against outsiders. While the Richtersveld has been declared a heritage site, the proliferation of mines and low-key tourism compete with indigenous Nama farmers' grazing space and rights. Growing volumes of mine waste also inevitably leach into the landscape and corrode its physical beauty. In the face of these pressures and the scars on the Richtersveld, Bidklip is an indigenous symbol of meditation, remembrance and spirituality.

Izangoma (healers), *izinyanga* (herbalists) and followers of various Zion-based churches often frequent the Motouleng caves near Clarens for spiritual fulfilment. Formal and informal pilgrimages are common occurrences. Motouleng is especially regarded as a site where women who struggle with fertility issues can find succour. In African ancestral veneration, geographical places have long been viewed as both physical and spiritual spaces, with certain caves in particular serving as conduits of the "living dead" (*Bodimo*, ancestors) and the means through which ancestors reveal a path to a greater divine power (*Modimo* in *SeSotho*).

The Mantsopa Cave Church of *Lekhalong la bo Tau* region (the Pass of Lions) has had many iterations. In the mid-19th century, Canon Henry Beckett, the Superior of St Augustine, established a mission here, but with time, the cave became a meeting point of many different spiritual practices. As anthropologist David Coplan noted, "Pilgrims to the sacred caves practise every form of African religion from pre-Christian Basotho ritual and medicine to independent Apostolic to established mission church Christianity."[8] It is also where prophetess Makhetha Mantsopa, niece of King Moshoeshoe, is buried. She predicted the *Mfecane,* which caused widespread chaos, disruption and warfare among indigenous communities in the 19th century, and the short but decisive battle with the British called "the hail of bullets". She fell out of favour with the king's son, Letsie, who drove her over the Orange River border into exile, where she lived for the rest of her life. Later in her life, Mantsopa converted to Christianity.

Madimatle, meaning "beautiful blood", is a holy mountain and cave that has been a site of spiritual practice for *Setswana* communities in South Africa and Botswana for centuries. Its revered oral history dates back hundreds of years. People from these communities regularly visit the site for spiritual ceremonies, healing and initiation rituals even though they were removed from the land in the 1930s. Today, Madimatle is subject to a land claim by the Manaiwa family and community who once lived there. In recent years, there has also been a dispute over a mining claim on the land. The South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) has determined that it should be granted cultural heritage status.

Lake Fundudsi is a sacred site of the *Vha-Venda* people. It is believed that an albino python is its guardian. The lake is inextricably linked to the *Domba* (snake dance) performed by young Venda maidens who come to bathe in the lake as part of the *Domba* dance ritual and connect with *Vha-Venda* water spirits. The water from the lake is considered holy, and collecting firewood from the region is not allowed. It is believed that an unseen community lives under the lake because local people report hearing drumming at night. Legend has it that the lake once ran dry. In response, traditional healers advised that a young maiden needed to be sacrificed to restore the lake. After Nangomi, the chosen maiden, was sacrificed, locals testify that the lake never ran dry again.

Thulamela is a sacred site of the *Vha-Venda* people that is linked to Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe complex of kingdoms. The historic and heritage value of Thulamela and its related spaces carries meaning into the present. It is hard to draw a line between tangible and intangible heritage here as belief systems of earlier periods speak in the present and through the lay of the land. Communities with historic linkages to these sites regularly visit to perform rituals here. As anthropologist Joost Fontein has noted, "Sacred spaces in the landscape act as 'vehicles' through which the social and sacred worlds meet. Not only are these liminal places on the landscape marked by specific customs, taboos and rules...it is through these practices themselves that their sacredness is achieved." [9]

At one time, Molokwane was a large settlement of the Sotho-Tswana people. The stone wall structures are reflective of early occupation and contemporary settlements. The patterns of macro (*motse*) and micro (*kgoro*) units represent one of the largest Iron Age Sotho-Tswana occupations from around the 14th century. While these early settlements provide evidence of vital and sustainable communities, the last two centuries saw the area suffer enormous hardship and trauma as a result of wars, colonisation, apartheid and the dispossession of indigenous land. Today, people of all faiths participate in healing practices at Thlolego Ecovillage and Learning Centre on a neighbouring farm, among the stone enclosures that were once part of the Molokwane settlement. Healing sessions focus on human restoration and the land.

The Peace Pagoda near Barrydale is believed to be the only such structure in Africa. Donated by Burmese monks shortly after South Africa's new democracy, the pagoda is, according to Steven Aung, president of the International Buddhist Friends Association, "a key part of a series of pagodas constructed by caring and dedicated people around the world that all represent and pay tribute to a shared, universal mission of attaining peace." Today, sadly, the pagoda is a contested spiritual site. The current landowners are Seventh Day Adventists and have denied access to visitors and practitioners of Buddhism because this clashes with their own beliefs.

The Shree Ambalavaanar Temple in Durban is considered a holy shrine for practising Hindus in South Africa. The first temple, built in 1875 at Bayhead, was washed away by floods. Another temple built in its place was forced to make way for a motorway. A number of the original deities housed in the original two temples have been relocated to the Shree Ambalavaanar site, which is now called the Second Temple. Annual firewalking ceremonies, *draupadi*, are held at the temple venue. It is a major attraction for Hindu and non-Hindu visitors. The resident guru believes that the South African version of Hinduism is very different from that practised in India. Because of colonisation, apartheid and oppression, he said, "our system is much more egalitarian – we cast away the caste system."

eMakhosini, the valley of the Kings, is a site that embodies the connection between Zulu royal ancestors and their "Zulu spirit". This is exemplified by the praise poem dedicated to King uSenzangakhona: "He plaited a long rope, son of Jama, he plaited it until it reached heaven."[10] It is at this site where Nkosinkulu, a forefather of the Zulu royal lineage, arrived in the late 17th century and where seven of the Zulu kings lived over a period of 200 years. In the 19th century, the valley saw much conflict – first among neighbouring clans during the *Mfecane* and then with the Boers and the British. At the time, Zulu kings like Shaka had their royal kraals here while other kings were buried in the valley. Nearby are the famous battles of Isandlwana, where the Zulu army defeated the British, and Ulundi, where the British finally defeated the Zulu nation.

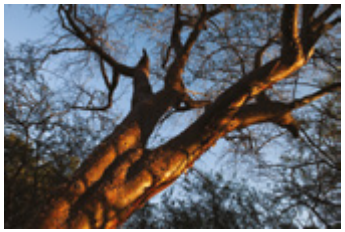
On 7 March 1877, the first Zulu Christian martyr, Maqhamusela Khanyile, was killed for defying orders to serve in the Zulu military. He refused to join an *ibuthu* under King Cetswayo and was executed on Mpondweni Hill in Eshowe. In modern terms, he would be regarded as a conscientious objector. The Zulu military system was built on the institution of compulsory military units called *amabutho*, established by King Shaka in the making of the Zulu state. It was based on groups of men and women who worked together in service to the king for economic and military reasons. Men mainly served as soldiers while women provided grain and food. In life, Khanyile was not a simple martyr; he was a far more complex character. As one missionary observed, Khanyile was "serving the (Zulu) King while giving his heart to God." His death was one of the events that led up to the British-Zulu wars that followed, and his execution was one of the factors the British Empire used to justify their decision to go to war with the Zulu Kingdom. Today, the site is visited regularly by church groups and traditional healers.

Prophetess Nontetha Nkwenkwe was an *inyanga* (herbalist) who survived the devastating flu epidemic of 1918. She interpreted her survival as proof of her spiritual calling. Regarded as a seer, a diviner and ultimately a prophet, she began having visions and "read" messages from God by looking at her hands. The authorities were concerned about her growing following among "Red" Xhosa (traditionalist Xhosa) and interned her at a mental institution at Fort Beaufort in 1922. Her followers gathered there and then followed her on a pilgrimage of grace when she was later transferred to Weskoppies, another mental institution, in Pretoria. Today, there are more than 30 000 followers of her church.

AfrikaBurn, an annual gathering of revellers in the Tankwa Karoo, follows the principles and practice of the American Burning Man festival. Its 11 principles align with a transformative new age philosophy. A focal point at AfrikaBurn each year is its "Temple". The organisation described it as follows, "AfrikaBurn's physical and emotional landscape [is] a space of contemplation and reflection, an area of sanctuary, a site of calm on the edge of the chaos and cacophony of Tankwa Town. A space to spend time with one's own thoughts, reflect on one's life, the lives of others, those recently passed, ancestors." [11]

The Rain Queen, who is thought to have arrived in South Africa about 400 years ago from present-day Zimbabwe, is believed to have magical powers including the power to induce rain. The Balobedu Kingdom is matriarchal, and rule has been passed from mother to daughter for centuries. Traditionally, the crown is passed down to the queen's eldest daughter. The queen is not allowed to formally marry but may have sexual partners. Every November, the queen oversees a rainmaking ceremony of which the Modjadji Forest forms the epicentre. This unique forest has the largest collection of certain cycad species in the world. The Modjadji Forest and the Rain Queen hold an important place in the South African imagination of indigenous cosmology and the power of animist spirituality.

Thate Vonde is a sacred forest of the *Vha-Venda* people where chiefs and the royal family are buried. It is not accessible to ordinary people, and collection of firewood from the forest is prohibited. Legend has it that wood collected for fires will turn into snakes. Venda chiefs are buried here at night in a sitting position and with a leopard skin draped over them. The broader Venda community, who had lived here for centuries, were removed from this area during apartheid and pine forests were planted on the land. A small indigenous forest, the nucleus of the Thate Vonde, survives today but is surrounded by encroaching pine trees.



Cetshwayo's grave in Nkandla Forest is considered a sacred site for the *isiZulu*-speaking people, who hold him in high esteem for defeating the British army at *Isandlwana* in 1879. With the annexation of the Boer Transvaal Republic in 1877, British strategy was to federate white-ruled provinces and destroy the autonomy of self-sustaining black kingdoms. The Zulu nation was an identifiable threat, and Theophilus Shepstone, Governor of Natal, and Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape, waged a propaganda war against the Zulu Kingdom, which set up the inevitable war against it. During his reign, Cetshwayo militarised his people in preparation for war. Given an ultimatum to de-militarise his troops within 30 days, Cetshwayo refused. The British-Zulu wars followed. While a high-water mark in the resistance to the British empire, the battle at Isandlwana was followed by defeat at Ulundi. After Cetshwayo's capture, the British parcelled off the now-defeated Zulu territory between themselves and Cetshwayo's enemies. Nkandla forest was a significant place in Cetshwayo's life where he sought sanctuary and retreat in various battles. Local communities believe that the forest is alive with spirits and refer to it as *Amahlathi Amnyama* (Dark Forest).

End Notes

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Paul Weinberg

EarthSongs

Paul Weinberg

Paul Weinberg is a photographer, curator, filmmaker, writer, educationist and archivist. He began his career in the early 1980s by working for South African NGOs and photographing current events for news agencies and foreign newspapers.

He was a founder member of Afrapix and South, the collective photo agencies that gained local and international recognition for their uncompromising role in documenting apartheid, and popular resistance to it. From 1990 onwards he increasingly concentrated on feature and in-depth project based photography.

He has produced 19 books as a photographer and author in his own right and been published in many anthologies and group projects. Weinberg has exhibited widely, locally and internationally.

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Together with David Goldblatt, he founded the Ernest Cole Award for creative photography in South Africa. He has worked extensively in the field of photographic archives and presently works as the curator for the Photography Legacy Project.

"This remarkable book is a catalog of ritual practices in place, yet it imagines a religiosity not fettered by territory or culture. Weinberg is a sage among visual storytellers. By gently following the paths of people in prayer, he gives testimony to the value of land beyond property and production, and to the spiritual power of photography itself."

– Staffan Löfving, Karsltad University, Sweden

"Although our connection to the land, whether it be spiritual, metaphysical or political, is rooted in the past, it is in no way limited to the past. We are driven by a belief that there is something larger than ourselves, something that helps give our lives meaning and purpose. This collection is an attempt to give form to that belief while inspiring us to marvel at the simple beauty this country offers."

– Prof Vasu Reddy, Dean: Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria

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