

A Cultural Appraisal of Sacred Sites of the Eastern Free State Adjunct to African Traditional Religion and Belief Systems

Dalifa H. D. Ngobese

University of Zululand, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa

Sacred sites are the preferred space for ritual performances and identity construction from which the issue of sensitive structures, distinctive features, individual interpretations and symbol, and meaning emanates. The importance of Motouleng, Mautse, and Mantsopa caves (Eastern Free State, SA) for different religious persuasions, indigenous knowledge, and ancestral veneration of Africans and traditional healers will be investigated amongst the following: namely, how sacred sites are exemplifications of African indigenous religion; why they form locations of cultural and spiritual expression, and why they may be regarded as pertinent nodes of identity construction in a vibrant changing South African society. This paper explores the way in which interpersonal experiences of the cave dwellers shape their sense of self and the conflict they encounter in the context of interaction, where identities are constructed and deconstructed in various ways. This paper provides a detailed personal experience and examination of the participant's life world on various issues pertaining to contestation and identity construction at the sacred space of the Eastern Free State. The existence of these sites poses a number of challenges to cave dwellers, land owners, and heritage practitioners and to continued preservation, management, and its restoration. Crucial to this debate is how these sites could be protected both physically and legally.

Keywords: sacred space, cave, contestation, belief systems, identity construction and African religion

Introduction

Sacred sites, in particular caves, have not been accorded their rightful place and meaning in the South African society at large both in concept and practice. The study argued that sacred sites have always been part of the historical, cultural, and spiritual landscape of various African indigenous communities. These selected sacred sites provide an ideal opportunity to study forms of African religion and belief in its local expression. It is, therefore, important to mindful throughout the paper how the findings of the sacred sites under investigation reverberate with generalized scholarly ideas of African religion.

The selected sacred sites are specifically Mantsopa's cave, situated at Modderpoort, near Ladybrand, Nkonkcomoni (to rise up like bread) or Mautse (Badimong) located in a valley between Fouriesburg and Rosendale and Motouleng (place where the drum beats), situated along the Maluti Mountain and Rooiberg Mountains, 12 kilometers from Clarens.

Dalifa H. D. Ngobese, Ph.D., lecturer, History Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Zululand, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dalifa H. D. Ngobese, P/ Bag x 1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886, South Africa.

What the cave dwellers practice and perceive the sacred sites remains a taboo to an “outsider” and also to a repository of indigenous knowledge. Thus, this study involves not only the discovery of pre-existing pattern but also the creation of relationship which does not exist in absolute term. Pilgrimages and cave dwellings have become an order of the day and traditional healers argue that they are ordered or called by the ancestors to the cave known as Badimong “place of ancestors”.

Tilley (1994, p. 24) portrayed, in his book *A Phenomenological of Landscape, Places, Paths and Monuments*, the connection between the indigenous sites with the powerful ancestral spirit. Berglund (1976, p. 75) appropriately argued that sacred sites possess certain symbols, power of ancestors to the living people, initiation, and divination from his book *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*. Bujo (1992)’s book *African Theology in its Social Context* is a testimony to the above that deals with faith, cultures, life as a unity, and cult of the ancestors.

According to Dreyer (2009, p. 2), “Historical and cultural significance of the caves and surroundings should not be endangered and recommended that the whole region should be handled with caution”. Mensele’s (2011) unpublished thesis titled “A study of Rituals performed at two sacred sites in the Eastern Free State” emphasized an important of sacred spaces as the place where ritual performances are occurred. Her study mainly highlighted the classification of rituals and the use of local language as mode of typifying different rituals performances.

Du Plooy (2016) referred sacred site as “sacred space” that provides the capacity and comprehension of the intellect and the needs of the emotion and spirit. It is interesting to follow how a sacred site, to a certain degree, generates a sense of being and how the place where the person and environment’s identities overlap the most. The study, therefore, involves the scholarly debate pertaining to sacred sites and sacredness as part of the landscape of the sites.

It is from this background that the study proposed to engage in a number of uncovered issues pertaining to sacred sites. The existence of these sites poses a number of challenges to cave dwellers, land owners, heritage, and practitioners and to continued preservation, management, and restoration of its meaning. Central to this debate is how these sites could be protected both physically and legally.

Sacred Sites as Defined by “Users”

There is no obvious common definition of sacredness in African vocabulary. The word “sacred site” is a colonial concept to cave dwellers from what it means in African context. Mokoena claimed that words, such as “*ke li haha le halalela*” (the glamorous cave) “*le nale modimo*” (it has an ancestry appearance), and “*sebaka sa di piri*” (a site with sacredness) are known to indigenous people and they have consensus in defining and better understand the meaning of the cave site (personal communication, 15 July, 2016).

Mokoena further attested that cave dwellers define sacred cave sites as spaces that offer both protection and shelter because of their spiritual disposition; they are associated with birth and regeneration (personal communication, 15 July, 2016). According to them, cave sites have the power to preserve and refurbish indigenous knowledge, and also to codify African religion and beliefs. Caves, as the dwelling sites for the Africans, traditional healers, and African churches, uphold tranquility as an important function of African communities.

Khumalo argued that by simply by entering the space, the landscape enables an individual to have a share in the power to hold communion with the sacredness (personal communication, 18 July 2017). Khumalo

explained that sacred sites should be treated with proper respect (personal communication, 18 July, 2017). The study concluded that sacred cave sites of the Eastern Free State are not only of places where the ancestors reside, but where both ancestor veneration and ancestor involvement are experienced at different levels.

Ancestral belief displayed at Mantsopa, Mautse, and Motouleng sacred caves by the pilgrimages and cave dwellers was witnessed in this study. The study suggested that sacred spaces are encoded within the African traditional religion and form part of the embodiment of African belief system. It is also used for the engagement of a generic view of ancestral belief and contributes to the general scientific debate.

Molefe narrated why the place is described as the university site (personal communication, 26 November, 2016). She provided an insightful knowledge and she explained as follows:

Mona ke sebaka sa Yunifesiithi ya lehaha, e tshwana le sekolo sa nnete. Ke Mona ho tla ithuta ka setso le hoba le lengolo a thuto ya setso. Hang ha ke qeta ke tla thola lengolo, mme ke ye hae. Ena ke sebaka sa thuto se bohlokwa haholo. O tla pasa ha fela o qetile dithuto tsa hao. Ka nako engwe ha re kwetlisetswe mona empa re kwetlisetswa lewatleng. Ha o fitla mona o tlameha ho itsebisa ho ba heno ebe Badimo ba lewatle batla tseba hore o teng mona mme ba o bolelle hore o tlameha ho ya sekolong sefeng.

This is the university cave site; it is like a real school. I'm here at the school to study for an African certificate; thereafter I will take my certificate and go home. This is an extremely important institution. Once you pass, your studies are completed. Sometimes we don't graduate here: we have our graduation ceremony in the sea. When you arrive there, you have to identify yourself, align with your clan surname, and then the ancestors of the sea will know that you are here and tell you which school must attend.

Monica Mongengene concurred with Molefe when she described the site as their African traditional university. Mongengene (personal communication, 24 April, 2017) added that sacred site is a school for ancestral worship:

Ke yunifesiithi ya bona hape ke sekolo se seholo sa badimo.
This is our university and big ancestral school.

The study observed that sacred space encompasses what could be the outcomes of their scary rite of passage from the day they enter sacred cave site until the last day. They referred to influence and knowledge the site possesses as they render ancestral insight, strength, and power to reveal divine healing for various pandemic diseases.

The study noted that there is also a popular catchphrase in defining the sacred cave as "*Ke yunivesiti ya roana*" (It is our university) which is referred by cave dwellers as their high education institution of learning. They referred to the knowledge and power of the territory as it sustains their life, knowledge, and ancestral worship, and renders strength and power to heal any diseases. This knowledge forms part of the "defenses" of the human spiritual legacy of the clan or group.

In most cases, the initiates are kept for a few months or years in a sacred and secret place of the forest, surrounded by prohibitions. *In toto*, most informants from Motouleng and Mautse sites confirm that the sacred space is where the solemn and secret ceremonies are performed, at the end of which the initiate takes another identity. They also stated that these sites are places at which *Badimo* (ancestors) are embedded with sacred power, and therefore at which initiation rituals could be performed.

The study concluded that caves of the Eastern Free State represent possibly the best codification of African indigenous religion and spirituality. The increasing popularity of pilgrimages to the cave sites provided

an ideal geographical context, in which peculiar aspects of African religion may be witnessed because of its importance and histories attached to the caves.

African Belief Attached to Sacred Cave

Although, there are a great number of beliefs and practices found in African communities which vary from one tribe to another, Mbiti (1969, p. 89) argued that African people have their own religious systems, with sets of beliefs, traditions, and values. These traditions have been handed down from the forefathers to the next generation. The study suggested that African communities assimilate cultural and traditional practices and cults by observing from their families.

Lerner (2000, p. 5) explicitly maintained that belief is attached to a particular religion but is not limited to its traditional meaning. Lerner (2000, p. 5) further argued that belief is legally defined as a conviction of truth of a proposition, existing subjectively in the mind and induced by argument, persuasion, or proof addressed to the judgment. Lerner (2000, p. 45) adopted an international instrument to cover the rights of non-religious person, such as atheists, agnostics, rationalists, and others in defining the word belief.

Belief in the existence of human spirits is widespread throughout Africa, specifically in African societies. Mbiti (1975, p. 75) noted that African beliefs remain intact amongst the African people and concluded that human life does not terminate after death, but continues beyond death. Mbiti (1969, p. 76) grouped human spirits into two types: spirits of those who died long ago and those who died recently.

Setiloane (1986) concurred with Mbiti that the process of dying amongst African society has not yet been completed, yet the dead are still part of the family. Setiloane (1986, p. 17) strongly opposed the epistemologically view regarding concept of “the dead” and “the living”, and he suggested that the departed people are wrongly interpreted from the beginning. Their role is to guide the people’s human affairs, traditions, ethics, and people activities. Apart from what the human spirits called folklore, legends, and myths, they visit in people’s visions and dreams.

In both Radebe (personal communication, 4 May, 2016) and Kokota (personal communication, 18 July, 2017) accounts, human life does not terminate at the death of the individual, but continues beyond death. They both described how cave dwellers perceived the ancestral beliefs:

Batho ba tlang mona ba rometswe ke Badimo ba bona, e kaba Bapostola, dingaka kapa baeti ba lehaha le batho ba kulang. Batho ba tlang mona ba tswa dibakeng tse fapaneng mona Afrika borwa le Lesotho. Ho bona lehaha la Mantsopa ke sebaka se halalelang. Ba dumela hore ba bua sefahleho le sefahleho le Nkgono Mantsopa ha ba le mona lehaheng.

People coming here are sent by their ancestors be it Apostles, traditional healers and cave dwellers and sick peoples. There are coming from places around South Africa and Lesotho. To them, Mantsopa cave is believed by everyone who came here as a holy place and they attest that they are communicating personally with Nkgono Mantsopa when they are inside the cave.

The study concluded that sites that are sacred are said to house spirits. The whole area is reflected by sacred features, symbols, and typical structures of a spiritual territory. Carmichael, Hubert, Reeves, and Schanche (1994) argued that the territory is made sacred by myth-time events that are said to have taken place there, in historic times, or by the presence of the supernatural beings that dwell in these places (p. 250). This was demonstrated by the many rituals that take place in and around the sites. Powerful ritual substances and objects remain behind when people leave such a dwelling, to live elsewhere.

The study suggested that there is an inseparable relationship between the land and spirits found at the sacred cave. Various rites are performed to fulfil a particular ceremony. Mbiti (1989, p. 71) observed, in his argument about territorial spirits, that African people consult their spirits at sites, such as ponds, caves, groves, mountains, and rivers.

The nature of territorial spirits and subtle connections between cosmology and socio-political groups, in particular, the relationship between the idea of the territory and practice remains unexplored. Novell (1998, p. 15) pointed out that territorial spirits, for example, in Amazon territory, remain within a house of spirits, irrespective of its identity. What he said could be related to a sacred space called *Masieng* (place of children and woman) at Motouleng sacred cave, where the whole site is specifically allocated to women and children for praying, offering, healing, *inter alia*.

Ancestral Calling to Sacred Caves

Some of dimensions which contribute fully to the understanding of African concepts and practices of initiation in the cave are ancestral calling to sacred caves. Hence, a diviner's call is devoted to an understanding of *ukuthwasa* (a divine calling). A diviner's call is a complex affair with tradition, religion, and ancestor's spirituality overlapping and inseparable.

Like Berglund, Masoga (2001, p. 46) referred to calling as actual entry into divination and its intricacies. This is the stage at which the ancestors reveal themselves to an individual or *ithwasa* (a trainee) through dreams, visions, or excessive pain, which is caused by ancestors as a symbol of their presence. Commonly, all the diviners found at the cave sites agreed that nobody can become a diviner by personal choice. Mnguni (personal communication, 5 August, 2017) was in accord with them, saying:

Sangomas had endured a definite way of calling to the institution of bungoma (in a possession stage with ancestral spirits) by the ancestors. Excessive headache, drowsiness, terrified dreams, body pain are an exceptionally signs or symbols through amadlozi (the ancestors) call their servants.

Penny Bernard's (2010, p. 144) unpublished Ph.D. thesis titled "Messages From the Deep: Water divinities, Dreams and Diviners in Southern Africa" enumerated some of the restrictions and taboos (codes of conduct) for accepting or rejecting the calling. She (p. 154) suggested that, in African belief systems, it is the ancestors who choose the person to be the diviner, not the other way around. Resistance to the "calling" may lead to misfortunes. Failing to accept the calling of the ancestors can lead to insanity or the death of the chosen one/s.

Bernard (2010, p. 145) further outlined some possible reasons for one to resist the calling that are mainly linked to forces of modernity, religious faith, and the inability of the relatives to afford the expenses entailed in becoming the healer. Reports from various traditional healers indicated that, should an individual who has been called to be a diviner reject the calling, this will be then transferred to their offspring.

Jacob Teboho Molefe known as Mokete, an ancestral name, (personal communication, 26 November, 2016) explained how he experienced his calling to the Badimong sacred cave as follows:

A young male traditional healer trainee from Botha-Bothe in Lesotho said that he was very ill before he accepted the calling of being a traditional healer, coming in and out in different hospital but the doctor could not detect the nature of disease. He was forced to consult a prophet who revealed that he is possessed with ancestral spirit and he should go to Badimong in Rosendal for initiation.

Personal communication held with Lerato Mofokeng, on 5 June 2017, from Katlehong in Gauteng, attests that, during her initiation, she used to dream about the site at night; one night her ancestors came to her while she was sleeping, directing her to leave her home and accept the calling. Ancestors gave her the vision of the site and gave her directions for finding that specific sacred cave. Without any money, she had to hitch-hike and sought lifts from passing cars until she arrived at the Motouleng cave site.

Mofokeng lived at the cave site for almost two years and she had to forfeit her original name and new identity emerged as a new initiate (personal communication, 5 June, 2017). She added that:

All her relations with the past have been terminated. She had to abandon previous boyfriends, certain behaviour and foodstuff taken before initiation has to be discontinued into her new life. Mofokeng points out that she had to establish a new family after the initiation through connection and guidance with ancestors. Lastly she had to spend her days walking around the cave, singing, dancing and learning various traditional medicine through instructions by the ancestors.

Cave dwellers argued that ancestral calling at sacred sites are revealed to them by the ancestors through dreams. The *ithwasa* (a trainee) had to consult an experienced diviner in order to establish the cause of the dream. Besides dreams, Berglund (1976, p. 136) noted that ancestors called through frequent sneezing, yawning, belching, and even by means of pains in the shoulders, sides, and upper and lower back.

Cave dwellers, especially the diviners from the Motouleng, testified that what is mentioned above portrayed how the ancestors manifested to a human beings and their role. Joseph Radebe and Mme Masichaba narrated their dreaming discourse, outlining what had happened to them before they knew about the cave sites (personal communication, 4 May, 2016). Their narrative was as follows:

Bekufanele ngihambe ibanga elingamakilomita angamashumi amathathu nesishiyagalombili ngezinyawo ngisuka eBetilehema kuya eClerense lapho umgede ukhona. Okokuqala ngahluleka ukuyibona lendawo ephusheni, ngaduka ngaya kwenye intaba ecishe ifane nayo. Kuthe sengihleli isikhashana ngathola ukuthi akusiyona, ngakhonjiswa futhi ngokuqhamile lomgedo onezimanga, iMotouleng. Yingakho ungithola la.

I had to travel a distance of thirty-eight kilometers by foot from Bethlehem to Clarens where the cave is situated. At first, I failed to follow the dream accurately, then I was lost. I had to travel to another mountain/cave similar to this one. After a while, I was told that it wasn't the cave; that I was supposed to go. I was again clearly shown the vision of the sacred cave called Motouleng. That is why you find me here.

In adding, Mme Masichaba's account did not differ from what Joseph Radebe (2016) narrated. She had also pilgrimaging to the sacred cave sites of Motouleng the same way. She described her journey as follows (personal communication, 4 May 2016):

Ke tswa Lesotho, Maseru. Ke bitsitswe moo lehaheng la Motouleng ka ditaelo tsa Badimo. Ba mpontsitse sebaka sena ditorong. Ho fihlile moya wa sefaha le kereke, jwale ha ke tsebe ke tla tswa neng. Ke Badimo ba tsebang ke tla tswa neng. Ke Badimo ba tsebang letsatsi la ho tswa.

I come from Lesotho, Maseru. I was called to the sacred cave by the will of the ancestors. They came to me and shoe me this place in dreams. Ancestral spirit and Pentecostal spirit did visit me. Presently, I don't know when I will come out. It's only them who know about the date.

Joseph Radebe (2016) continued to explain how the calling reconstructs his identity: He claimed that "he was a former mine worker from Johannesburg, he had to abandon his work and accept the ancestor's call to become a *sangoma* (personal communication, 4 May 2016). His excruciating pain was simply a revelation from his ancestors of the required service he had to undertake. Aligned with what he said, most of the healers residing at these sites had undergone a similar process.

Evidence provided by cave dwellers shows that there are good reasons for *sangoma* (traditional healers) being called by the ancestors to the cave. Indeed, sacred cave sites have power to evoke ancestral spirits. Most of traditional healers (sangomas) stated that a calling to divination varies from one healer to another. In the end, through this painful and traumatic process, healers have had to accept the ancestor's calling to be a *sangoma*.

Berglund (1976) offered another stunning account of ancestral calls to an individual. The author states that further signs of activities of the ancestors (the shades) in a person are realized by the pain experienced in the shoulders, sides, upper back, and possibly lower neck, known as *izibhopho* (p. 137). When human beings have pain from in these of the body, surely this might be indications that the shades are claiming him.

Ukuvuma idlozi is the phrase coined by Berglund (1976) when he portrayed the accepting of the calling by the Zulu *sangomas*. Then, *ukuvuma idlozi* (accepting the calling) is an essential step towards further training and receiving knowledge in matters pertaining to divination and healing. Subsequent to that, the training of *ukuthwasa* begins sometimes under supervision of an experience diviner or in the form of training guided by ancestors.

Question of "Accessibiity" to Sacred Sites

Throughout the period of this research at sacred sites, the study noted that there were looming tensions between the land owners and cave dwellers. Then, this study delves to some of this tensions which eventually resulted to inaccessibility of the site, collection of entrance fees, and looming tourist establishment in all sacred areas. This study paper also traces the local and national government involvement in resolving any contestation and conflict that may arise.

Landowner collecting of entrance fee

The large signboard on which is written "No Trespassing" and "Ha Hoe Kenae" indicates that the area is privately owned and permission is required for entering. Land owners argued that sacred sites have to generate money in order to be maintained preserved, conserved, and presented. The study, then, noted that all sacred sites have no fully-operational visitor's centre and adequate facilities, for an example, toilets, footbridge, water, and sanitation.

One comes across a newly constructed rock fence on which is written "Motouleng Heritage Site". The gate giving entrance to the site is always locked in order to control payment of visitors. A caretaker is always on the alert and awaiting to collect R20 entrance fee for everyone entering the sacred site.

In attempting to find out what lies behind the collection of R20 entrance fee before access is granted, Mokoena responded as follows (personal communication, 15 July, 2016):

Ke thontswe ke monga polasi hore ke patadise batho bohle R20 ba kenang sebakeng sena sa hae. O le mong kapa le le bangata hape ho sa kgathaletsahle merero wa leeto. Mafelo a beke ke fa monga polasi tjehelete ya hae. Ha ke tsebe hore o etsang ka tjehelete e epatadisang batho.

I have been assigned by the Mr. Roos, the farm owner, to collection R20 from any person entering his cave site, irrespective of the number of guests, and their purpose of visit. I give the fees to him weekly. I don't know what he is doing with the money collected before the access is granted.

Access is always controlled because the gate is kept locked to prevent any non-paying visitor from accessing the cave. It is clear that the caretaker does not know why this money is paid, nor whether it is meant for the development of the cave infrastructure development of the cave site.

Du Plooy (2016, p. 113) described the 1.5 km pathway from the gate to the cave site as a terrible experience, especially crossing the small Caledon River. This is the first hurdle; during drier times of the year, crossing is not difficult, just a little jump across the stream. During summer months, a balancing act is required as the steep and slippery incline randomly chooses casualties.

In an attempt to control the visitors' access to the cave, caretakers are employed to collect entrance fees rather than to guide visitors and tour to entire sacred space and landscape. Entrance fee differs from site to site. For an example, entrance fee at Mantsopa cave is presently R25 per person and Motouleng cave has just increased to R20 per person, while entrance fee at Mautse cost R50 per person.

Emanating from the personal communication with Mofokeng, 15 July, 2016, the caretaker at Motouleng, rendered an indication that farm-owner used the entrance fee for their personal gains, not assist the cave dweller. In an attempt to find out what are entrance fees use for, she passionately responded and said, "Ha ke tsebe hore o etsang ka tjhelete e epatadisang batho (I don't know what he is doing with the money collected before the access is granted)."

Looming Tourism Initiative

In contrary to a conservation initiative, preservation, and promotion of culture, religion, and heritage, the reality of preservation, conservation, and public access to tourism industry is presently a "booming" business. It is noted from all the sacred spaces of the Eastern Free State that the tourist market which require less investment and maintenance in fixed facilities look to expand its jurisdiction and tap to cultural tourism and sacred spaces.

Gill, tourism officer confirmed that they were happy to work with Dihlabeng Municipality Tourism office to promote tourism at sacred sites (personal communication, 4 September, 2017). Meaning that they do attract large number of tourist, coming from local and international countries, to sacred site on weekends and their itinerary involves Motouleng, Mautse, and Mantsopa caves, tourism sign written "Lekgalong la Mantsopa".

Olsen (2008, p. 175) stated that tourism is part of the broader capitalist systems with most stakeholders interested in turning a profit rather competition over sacred space for its own sake, tourism stakeholders, and businesses tend to work together in order to maximize tourism revenue. However, local tour operators have not negotiated access and cooperation with the cave dwellers or traditional healers in order to grow the industry and even informed about ethical consideration of the cave dwellers.

The study strongly believed the cave dwellers have no problem with the influx of tourist to ancestral land provided they do honour the sacredness of the site and ethical consideration attached to the site. Indeed, sacred caves are space where modern reflective subject-making in tourism takes place through encountering and interacting with different cultures and places.

Cave dwellers hope that cave visits on the sacred space will reconnect with one religious belief and reinforce cultural identities. Olsen (2008, p. 185) attested to the above that visitors should ideally not leave as the same people that they arrived, but rather should either have their religious identities deepened and strengthened.

Local and National Government Involvement

Officials from the local municipalities have been interrogated on pertinent issues regarding government involvement to control and management of sacred sites in the Eastern Free State. Personal interviews were held

on different dates with officials responsible for local economic development or tourism offices. The responses were diverse in particular their knowledge of the sites, role, and responsibilities, economic spin-off, and co-management and preservation of the sites.

The municipality in which Mautse cave fall under is Setsoto Local municipality that has no attachment irrespective of its size, popularity, and blessed with ancestral belief and practices. Oupa Khaoletsa, Local Development Officer, confirmed that the municipality has not priorities for the sacred site development in their integrated development plan (IDP) and programme (personal communication, 3 September, 2017). The study concluded that there is a lack of knowledge about the existence of the sacred cave within their area and its importance to immediate communities and diviners along the Caledon Valley areas.

Ngema, a tourism officer from Dihlabeng Local Municipality, also confirmed that there is no good relationship with the farm owner of Motouleng cave and municipality does contribute to cave operation (personal communication, 18 July, 2017). Although Motouleng sacred cave is under Dihlabeng municipality's jurisdiction, Ngema (2017) confirmed that the municipality has no interest to the site's control and management and even financial injection directed to the site is not yet budgeted. Ngema further argued that the municipality's interest is not on cultural site promotion and preservation but on key service deliveries like houses, water and sanitation (personal communication, 18 July, 2017)

Thus, Ngema portrayed Motouleng as sacred space, is solely neglected by the municipality authorities and also responded to annual visitor's statistics that the municipality does not keep records of tourist/visitors, visiting the site and also he was also surprised to learn that the farm-owner has commercialize the cave by collection entrance of R25 per person (personal communication, 18 July 2017).

Steve Shaull, director of Mantsopa cave complex, had a dissimilar view with one of Dihlabeng municipality and he pronounced that Mantsopa Local Municipality fully supported the cave site (personal communication, 19 July, 2017). It was seen when Mantsopa Municipality even took initiative of renaming the municipality from Ladybrand Local Municipality to Mantsopa Local municipality on the 9 August 2003 in honour of Nkgono Mantsopa, the seer. He further said that the municipality spent over 10 millions of rand to upgrade the whole complex: building and paved the pathway to the fountain, installed parasites, and walkway to the cave (personal communication, 19 July, 2017).

The South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) as an agent of the National Department of Arts and Culture do safeguard the protection of living heritage areas and sites in South Africa. *The South African Heritage Resource Act, No 25 of 1999* has endorsed that any cultural sites should be preserved and protected includes pools, caves, landscape, and mountains. No 4 of Section 5 of an Act recognises basic principles of heritage resource management that includes heritage resources form an important part of the history and beliefs of communities and must be managed in a way that acknowledges the right of affected communities to be consulted and to participate in their management.

However, the Act is silence on cultural sites situated within the privately owned land. Eventually, it portrayed negatively to individually and cultural activists who regards the sacred sites as ancestral land.

Rowlands (2002, p. 117) asserted that the absence of legal definition of cultural rights reflects a more general problem that of defining collective rights by contrast to those of the individual and the state. Many arguments avow a right to culture without defining what it that has a right. As enshrine in the international *Bill of Human Rights or 1992 UN Declaration* on the right of the person, cultural rights are personal insofar as they protect the right of the individual to a cultural life or the right of individual (Rowlands, 2002, p. 117).

Defining cultural property as a right means seeing heritage as part of the process or reproducing social relationships rather than simply the accumulation of things, Rowlands (2002, p. 128) stated that the link between the cultural rights and property is embedded in current and proposed international legislation. Rowlands quoted the resolution presented by the UNESCO Draft Declaration meetings, where the indigenous peoples should be recognized as a primary guardians and interpreters of their culture, arts, and sciences whether created in the past or developed by them in future and be protected against debasement of cultural significant items.

The above is the few of the list of culture property claims which should be protected. In a nutshell, this of course allows little room for the establishment of mutual respect in shared cultural property and no dispute for the right of indigenous peoples to protect their cultural heritage and prevent it being exploited.

National heritage of a particular country deems to be crucial for its socio-cultural cohesion and political autonomy. It rather reflects the ethos or lifestyle of a people according to which they practice, protect, and pass on their national traditions with keen interest to subsequent generations. The actual way of life prescribes that cultural and religious tolerance render successful consensus in promoting any forms of peaceful existence (Anthony & Ziebertz, 2012, p. 2).

It is for this reason that the paper is heavily involved in ameliorating the social impact of development on diviners and traditional healers and their culture at the sacred space. Rowlands (2002, p. 130) was triggered to state that the destruction of sacred sites went hand in hand with the gradual dispossession of Aboriginal from their traditional lands. The issue remains how to collaborate, negotiate, and participate with all stakeholders involved include government departments in alleviating tension and conflict that arises.

Protection of Sacred Sites

There is a strong dissatisfaction towards the farm-owners who use the boundaries outside the sacred cave to contest what they see as no farming activities. Contestation comes from cave dwellers, diviners, and traditional who perceive the sacred sites as religious space not as commercialize tourism facility where they are forced to pay entrance. Moreover, individual tourist operators and government department do want to increase their business by extending their cultural tourism initiatives at cave site.

Olsen (2008) worked on “Contesting Identity, Space and Sacred Time Management at Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah” thesis research what happens on Temple of Square as a sacred site and depicted similar contestation that relates to “power relation”. His work should be taken as stepping stone for the protection and management of sacred sites.

There is contested ideology regarding the dwelling at the ancestral place. Coplan (2003, p. 980) mentioned that the farmers attempted to forbid the building of permanent structures at the shrine and the pilgrims in order to preserve structures against modifications, to the natural environment, that might offend the ancestors landscape. Interestingly, the makeshift shelters as labelled by Coplan (2003, p. 982) built into the long cave wall reflect a spiritualized vernacular architecture designed in dreams and bear only an underlying, not a decorative resemblance to indigenous African housing.

According to Turner (1969), pilgrimaging continues to maintain a subsystem of beliefs and symbols derived from its historical origin. The constant contestation of supremacy and hegemony between advocates of the “nuclear paradigm” has made a major sacred a centre of conflicting discourse. Nthoi (2006, p. 78) argued that the conflict, competitions, and a variety of multi-focal discourse are the key concern of uniformity, peace,

and tolerance amongst the pilgrimages and cave dwellers.

This does not suggest that there is no control of the use of the sacred space by cave dwellers themselves and senior officials. David Kgoabane (17/7/2017) confirmed that there were ongoing conflict and contestation amongst the cave dwellers between the officials and visitors, and cave dwellers and farm owners (personal communication, 17 July, 2017); between the pilgrims themselves about the use of sacred space at Mautse sacred site. There is no doubt that the whole scenarios highlight the farm owners' attempt to stamp their authority and establish a semblance of orthodoxy in the use of sacred space.

A major controversy as crafted by Lerner (2000) related to the question of striking the balance between the prohibition of incitement against religious groups, pilgrimaging, and the freedom of speech or association, as enunciated in Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 (p. 39).

The study believes that there is solution to conflict and contestation in sacred sites depending on the constitutional systems of respective countries. In South Africa, provincial and national legislation has provided the guideline on how the sacred sites should be managed and preserved.

South African Heritage Resource Act, 25 of 1999 does instigate the promotion protection of sacred sites be it graves, landscape, mountain, rivers, and pool that have sacredness and use by communities for cultural practices. The precedent trends presently prevailing in connection with religion rights seem to indicate a growing understanding of the need to protect substantive social values against abuses of freedom of speech and association. Surely, there is a need to ensure protection of religious, ethnic, and cultural groups, irrespective of nature of the religion, color, and beliefs.

The preamble of the above legislation states that the primary aims to promote good management of the national estate, and to enable and encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may bequeathed to future generations. Our heritage is unique and precious and it cannot be renewed. It helps us to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing, shape our national character.

A Discussion: Way Forward

With religious heritage becoming an important cultural resource in competitive marketing efforts to attract visitor and tourist to tourist destinations, many religious heritage sites have becoming marked and designated as multi-use tourism attractions by government and tourism officials.

Olsen (2008, p. 187) envisaged that this overlapping of religious and tourism space an add complexity to the traditional management practices at religious heritage sites. The motive behind this alteration where the focus has historically been on cultural practices of pilgrims and worshippers rather that visitors with multiple motives and expectation.

The most concerned by many researchers is that all these religious sites have no rigid hierarchal management structure and tour guide and caretakers are not trained tourism professionals, rather, they tend to use volunteers or cleaners who have been appointed by farm-owners or religious leaders to run a particular site.

Similarly, to Motouleng cave site, Mantsopa is not originally created for tourism consumption the site quickly became a place of tourism when thousands of tourist from the South African provinces and neighboring countries flocked to the sites. The inability of sacred site managers to focus on tourism opportunities by focus on tourist or visitor aspect of overall tourism management creates a denting scenario. The study observed and confirmed from frequent visits that there is lack of infrastructure in particular site interpretation and guiding,

security, toilets, catering, etc.

Pungetti, Oviedo, and Hooke (2012, p. 444) articulated that a need for a thorough investigation is urgently required to document for what is happening at these sacred sites in order improve the conservation and management of the sites from endangerment and destruction of African practices because of their sacred value. However, in some cultures, the sacred site has a secret meaning that local people may be reluctant to divulge their sacred sites for the fear of desecration. In some cases, Pungetti et al. (2012, p. 445) maintained that landscape may be retain certain anonymity, the related lessons the landscape bring forward should be delineated and documented.

Sacred sites represent what is almost the largest and fastest conscious deliberate change of land use in history. People have been dispossessed of their traditional land to make way for protection. It is important to understand the variety of management and governance types in protected areas and variety of sacredness in nature. Of course, the study agreed with them that protected areas are not all managed uniformly but the term embraces literary hundreds of official and unofficial ways of protecting nature.

While management issues, such as maintaining a “sense of place” lies with the site owners, there is no co-ordination of collaborative tourism efforts at local, provincial, and national levels by allowing each department to manage their sphere of responsibly more effectively. Olsen (2008, p. 190) argued that in many cases, religious site managers are required to run a facility that is financially self-sustaining and therefore opted to “illegally” charge an entrance fee which is not regulated.

Conclusion

This study explored the way in which interpersonal experiences of the cave dwellers shape their sense of self and the conflict they encounter in the context of interaction, where identities are constructed and deconstructed in various ways. The study also demonstrated how sacred sites are exemplifications of African indigenous religion; why they form locations of cultural and spiritual expression, and why they may be regarded as pertinent nodes of identity construction in a vibrant changing South African society

This study raised some interesting questions that seek to bring sacred sites (cave) into the centre of scholarly debate and research. It is central to African life, culture, religion, and philosophy. It attempted to answer the underlying questions: Who owns the sites; who have a right of access to them; and what the sites means to an individual and to Africans relate to supernatural connotation. Such subjects are central to the discussion of landscape, sacredness, codification of African religion, and cultural identity.

The ongoing debate, disputes, and contestation between the farm owners and cave dwellers and pilgrims led to the closure of Mautse cave site and failure of government and authorities to intervene in the protest and contestation has been a crucial phenomenon in protecting the indigenous knowledge with regard to belief, healing, and practices. The study does not only contribute to African religion and belief systems but also protect people’s commitment to empower sacred landscape. It eventually addressed acute issues of identity, consciousness, ancestral powers, land, African religion, youth, rituals and initiation *tit a tat* from the sacred sites.

The study has been useful to a repository of indigenous knowledge that is performed and transmitted by the healers at the sacred sites. It facilitated healing and material and symbolic restitution and promoted new and previously neglected research into African’s rich oral traditions and customs. This study considered voices of parties concerned regarding contestation, land access, payment versus vandalism, and other related concerns for the study and attempt to reappraisal of site’s histories, cultural practices, and belief systems connected to sacred sites.

References

- Anthony, F., & Ziebertz, H. (2012). international empirical research on the influence of national culture on religious identity. In *Religious identity and national heritage: Empirical-theological perspectives*. Boston: Brill
- Becker, P. (1969). *Hill of destiny: The life and Times and Moshesh, founder of the Basotho*. London: Longman group LTD.
- Berglund, A. (1976). *Zulu thought-patterns and symbolism*. Johannesburg: David Phillips Publishers.
- Bernards, P. (2010). Messages from the deep: Water divinities, dreams and diviners in Southern Africa (Doctoral thesis, Rhodes University).
- Bujo B. (1992). *African theology in its social context*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Carmichael, D. L., Hubert, J., Reeves, B., & Schanche, A. (1994). *Sacred sites and sacred places*. London: Routledge.
- Coplan, D. B. (2003). Land from ancestors: Popular religious pilgrimage along the South Africa-Lesotho Border. *Journal of Southern Africa Studies*, 29(4), 977-993.
- Dreyer, C. (2009). *Report: First phase archaeological and cultural heritage assessment of the proposed residential development of the Farm De Vlugt 340, Clarens, Free State*. Retrieved from <https://sahris.sahra.org.za/sites/default/files/additionaldocs/Heritage%20Report.pdf>
- du Plooy, S. (2016). Pilgrimage to sacred sites in the Eastern Free State (Doctoral thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein).
- Gill, S. J. (1997). *A short history of Lesotho: From the Late Stone Age until the 1993 elections*. Reprinted. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Museum and Archives.
- Lerner, N. (2000). *Religion, beliefs and international human rights*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Lovell, N. (1998). *Locality and belonging*: London: Routledge.
- Masoga, M. A. (2001). Dimensions of Oracle speech in the Near Eastern, Mediterranean and African context: A contribution towards African Orality (Doctoral thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein).
- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religion and philosophy*. Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1989). *African religion and philosophy* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Mensele, M. S. (2011). A study of rituals performed at two sacred sites in the Eastern Free State (Masters dissertation, University of Free State, Bloemfontein).
- National Department of Arts and Culture. (1999). *South African National Heritage Act, No. 25*. Retrieved from <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Legislations%20Files/a25-99.pdf>
- Nthoi, L. S. (2006). Contesting sacred spaces: A pilgrimage study of the Mwali cult of Southern Africa. *Religion in contemporary Africa Series*. Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press.
- Olsen, D. N. (2008). Contesting identity, space and sacred site management at Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah (Doctoral thesis, University of Waterloo, Canada: Ontario).
- Pungetti, G., Oviedo, G., & Hooke, D. (2012). *Sacred species and sites: Advances in bio-cultural conservation*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowlands, M. (2002). The power of origins: Questions of cultural rights. In V. Buchli (Ed.), *Material culture reader* (pp. 118-125). Oxford: Berg.
- Setiloane, G. M. (1986). *African theology: An introduction*. Johannesburg: Skotaville.
- Tilley, C. (1994). *A phenomenology of landscape: Places, paths and monuments*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. New York: Cornell University Press.