MORE THAN JUST LAND:
A BROADER FRAMEWORK FOR SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC AUTONOMY
IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

A group of about 80 protesters, including small children, demanded attention from housing authorities and waved placards with demands such as "We want land," and "We want houses and electricity," while singing and shouting freedom slogans. They blocked the roads with rubbish bins and burnt tires, forcing motorists to take alternative routes. One of the residents expressed, “We are angry...after 10 years of democracy we still don’t have houses and land...” Some roads were closed at about noon after the people clashed with the police by throwing stones at them after one was arrested. The protesters claimed they had asked the Mayor to speed up land allocation, but their pleas fell on deaf ears and they have been given dead promises.

- Cape Times, 7 July 2005.

Access to land is a hotly contested issue that people in South Africa want addressed. Presently all around South Africa, addressing problems concerning land means tackling other and sometimes greater questions of equity. Struggles over land are one of the most central aspects of efforts to overcome the legacies of apartheid. Yet overcoming the spatial separation and exclusion that characterized apartheid has been slow and difficult. Despite limits, the victories that particular communities have had in gaining access to land serves not just as a developmental opportunity, but also serves as a spiritual triumph. Specific land issues are not limited to space and place, but rather they transcend geographic boundaries to include the spirit of communal identities.

The spiritual dimension of communities’ victories in getting access to land are not simply symbolic, but helps marginalized black\(^1\) South Africans’ gain capacity that helps them claim the rights made available to them in the new dispensation, and strengthen their ability to decide their futures. The micro-struggles concerning land are not only critical in helping level out centuries of dispossession, but resolving them is necessary to execute deep-seated and meaningful democracy. To be truly effective though, these

\(^1\) See Note on Racial Terminology located at end of document
micro-struggles have to be linked together into broader struggles that can be more effective in addressing the larger-scale spatial inequalities that continue to characterize South Africa. Environmental Justice movement—a set of ideas that strive for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, in respect to equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work—provides a broader network in which these struggles can have a powerful voice and create change.

This paper shows how the notion of land frames concepts of rights and equity, as defined as the right to a healthy environment, right to a livelihood, and a place they can call ‘home’, through the critical analysis of three case studies of community struggles over environmental resources. The research project critically analyzed three case studies based on a three-week research-intensive trip to South Africa. Questions explored include: How has the concept of land been used to frame and wage struggles of social justice in South Africa? Is the adaptation of land unique to different regions in South Africa or do recurrent themes exist? How do these interpretations affect the ability of poor communities to organize powerfully? In a broader context, how does their framing of social justice struggles shape their effectiveness? What implications does this have for the future?

The paper begins with a background to South Africa’s social history and the unresolved issues it has inherited from a troubled past. South Africa’s present context is exemplified by the three case studies that are intertwined with apartheid’s inherited legacies. Then, an analysis of the three communities is offered to show that specific community struggles transcend geographic boundaries to include the spirit of communal
identities. In conclusion, the paper recognizes the limitations of these micro-struggles to create bigger structural change and the value of linking these particular struggles together into broader ones, like those of the Environmental Justice movement.

**BACKGROUND**

The legacies of a colonial past and apartheid policies are severely felt in the black communities of South Africa today. Current patterns of inequality can only be understood by going back to the past – to the history of land dispossession and the manner in which European settlers accumulated capital and laid the foundations for their own well-being at the expense of the indigenous people.

The development of apartheid and of power structures is firmly rooted in the colonial era. Since the arrival of Dutch settlers in Capetown in 1652, a steady encroachment of white colonists into the interior of Africa followed. The result was the rapid appropriation of the best agricultural and grazing land across the subcontinent and the dispossession of its occupants (Christopher, 1994, 14). Consequently, millions of South Africans were continually forcibly removed from their land and homes through various legislations, the most notable being, the Natives Land and Trust Acts of 1913 and 1936, and the Group Areas Act of 1950.

The Natives Land and Trust Acts of 1913 was one of the first attempts to draw a permanent line between the races. These laws designated ‘reserves’ or ‘homelands’ in rural areas that account for about 13% of South Africa, in order to consolidate the black population into restrictive boundaries (Hall, 2004, 1). The Group Areas Act of 1950 specifically targeted urban areas to be strictly divided into ‘group areas’ for the exclusive
occupation of a racially ascribed group; African, coloured, Asian, or white. This legislation shifted blacks to the margins of urban areas. With rigorously enforced apartheid laws on residential location and movement, they were given no option but to live in sprawling, squalid dormitory townships of undifferentiated ‘matchbox’ houses. In general, these were relatively poorly serviced with infrastructure and urban amenities, and were virtually devoid of work opportunities or shopping and entertainment facilities. The apartheid city was consciously designed to separate races and classes into distinct segments of the city. The figure shows a model for a typical apartheid city that informed many urban master plans (Cities Network: State of the Cities Report 2004). A large part of the city was set aside for white residents. The size of this slice was generally far out of proportion to the numbers of the white population. White residential areas were generally well laid-out and well-serviced tree-lined suburbs, conveniently located close to employment and major urban facilities.

The various laws issued excluded blacks for voting, and denied them a political life, dispossessed them from their land, stripped them of their rights to own land, exploited their labor and resources, and countless other atrocities. The racist lawmaking intended for the creation and achievement of complete apartheid, or “separateness” in the Afrikaans language, as an ultimate goal.

Formal apartheid, a gradual transformation from previous legislation, formally began when the National Party took control of the state in 1948. This era covered the
time from 1948, when the formal framework and set of policies were produced to ensure apartheid, to 1990-1994, when the apartheid legal code was dismantled and the first free elections were held. In addition to the inequality stemming from the colonial period, the racist white minority government implemented and strictly enforced a grossly unjust social system that created 2nd class citizenship, and enslaved blacks to a life of servitude for the white minority, and humiliation. Consequently, these horrid conditions oppressed the black South African communities and entitled them to a life of socioeconomic deprivation that has forced them to live in extreme poverty to this day.

Asset ownership and distribution patterns remain very similar to those formed by apartheid. Landlessness and over-crowding persist in the former ‘homeland areas’ (May, 1998). A huge backlog in rural infrastructure persists, and urbanization runs the risk of simply relocating rural poverty into urban slums. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in collaboration with Andrew Whiteford, a South African economist, has generated estimates of poverty that show the proportion of people living in poverty (57%) in South Africa has not changed significantly between 1996 and 2001, and that in addition, those living in poverty have sunk deeper into poverty and the gap between rich and poor has widened.

As an effort to address inequities, the new South African government is currently implementing policy programs centered around land in order to create equitable access to land and natural resources across the whole country. The government is committed to securing people’s rights to land and resources, in both law and in practice and strongly institutionally supporting them. A comprehensive response to poverty both in the rural and urban context provided for various land policies required to meet multiple needs in
different situations. Some of these include people’s needs for secure title to residential land, access to land for livelihood purposes, access to land and related support services, and in so doing, to provide historical redress and promote national reconciliation (Hall, 2004).

A performance review issued in December 2004 by the South African government highlighted the progress made by these policies. The Department of Land Affairs reported that at the end of December 2004, the total size of land delivered from the restitution, redistribution, and state land was about 3.5 million hectares or 8.6 million acres benefiting about 1 million people. The land delivered includes agricultural land, non-agricultural lands (for example protected areas) and land already under black occupation to which tenure has now been secured. Part of the land reform process, is the Commission on Restitution of Land who have settled about 57,257 claims settled out of 79,694 filed by the end of 2004 (Dept. of Land affairs).

However, about 80% of the land is still in the hands of the white minority, while Africans used to occupy, not own, only 3% of South African land before 1994. At the end of 2004, about 3.1% of commercial agricultural land has been transferred from white to black hands, although the official target for redistribution is 30% of agricultural land by the extended deadline of 2015 (Hall, 2004). It is reported that at the current rate of transfer it will take 54 years to meet the 30% transfer goal. In addition, there is a limited amount of land in which the state has control to allocate. State land compromises about 20% of the total area of South Africa of which only 5-7% is available for allocation to land reform beneficiaries (DLA, 2004, 20).
Several perceive the government’s land reform program to be inadequate and believe that continuing racial maldistribution of land will either be resolved through a fundamental restructuring of the government's land reform program, or it will be resolved by a fundamental restructuring of property relations by the people themselves. The direction, which the country follows, depends to a large degree on the urgent and immediate responsiveness of the government to the needs and demands of the country's mostly poor, black and landless people (Cousins, 4).

Anyone who travels over the vast expanse of South Africa is immediately struck by the great variations in its landscape and the differing contexts and conditions under which black people live in. Despite these differences, the communities share similarities the first is the abject poverty and underdevelopment, the daily battle for survival that confronts the poor, and the strong spiritual connection to land. The three community case studies outlined below reflect land in different contexts, but in all, there is a history of injustice and all perceive access to land essential in making their futures better. These micro-struggles are symbolic and vital to the process of reconciliation, but are limited in some aspects. Nonetheless, the community struggles exemplified has gained a spiritual triumph that is fueling their material struggle to access land.
EBENHAUSER “THE STONE OF HELP”

About four hours away from Capetown and about 10 kilometers away from the mouth of the Oliphants (Elephants) River on the West Coast of the Western Cape Province, a small rural community is tucked away. The area of Ebenhauser is one of 23 coloured rural areas with a population of about 3,500 remaining. Countless relatives and family members fled for the city throughout the years due to the lack of economic opportunity; however they are very much of the community even though it is difficult to quantify this extended population.

White colonial expansion during the late 1700s initiated a process of erosion of the land rights of the Ebenhauser community. They were forcibly removed and stripped off their titles of two portions of land, Ebenezer (4,514 ha) and Doornkraal (5,615 ha), 10,129 ha in total. Then in the mid 1800s the farm Elsje Erasmuskloof (23, 444 ha), was set aside by white settlers in recognition of the land rights of the indigenous people of the area. However, the brief flutter of consciousnesses quickly phased out as the demand for more land for white settlers exacerbated and their needs took precedence over the locales.
In a continual pattern of dispossession, the community of Ebenhauser was forced to live on the least desirable land in 1926 by the terms of the Ebenezer (Van Rhynsdorp) Exchange of Land Act No. 14 of 1925. In this case the community was additionally dispossessed of 3,485 hectares. Of these, 1,566 hectares were allocated for exclusively white occupation. The community was granted 11,045 hectares of low-value marginal land without water as “exchange land” to offset the dispossession. Water rights were also granted to the community on its small retained portion of riverbank land, but they proved to be grossly insufficient, because the water would be used up by white farmers first before it could reach these portions. This exchange was thus deliberately unfair and immoral.

The land that the community of Ebenhauser currently lives on is infertile red karoo soil and is not properly irrigated due to its location at the far end of the canal. They are always last in receiving water after the white farmers have had their share. The community lost its best land, only to be uprooted and relocated 15 kilometers further away. Their dispossessed land constituted one of their most prized possessions. It was the most fertile and consisted of the best quality of soil. It was situated higher in altitude which safeguarded against salination. Most importantly they had lived in the area since time immemorial and it had been in their hands for generations and they too hoped to one day pass it on as well (Morris, 2005).

When the Ebenhauser community learned of the government’s land reform policies they immediately saw an opportunity to reclaim their dispossessed lands and after intensive investigation, research, and effort brought forth by members of the community, they submitted their land claim. They took a chance on the new government,
hoping that for once, perhaps this time they would work for the betterment of their community. They submitted their land claim in 1996 in hopes of reclaiming something that was once theirs. Eight years later, on March 21st of 2005 they won their land claim. Today, the Ebenhauser community is ecstatic and full of hope and celebrating sweet victory.

However, victory is in the form of R100 million, which is equivalent to 15 million U.S. dollars that is to be used mostly for the restoration and acquirement of original land of which 52 privately owned vineyards are involved. Most of these vineyards are highly successful and are million dollar enterprises. The struggle that faces the community today is to figure out how to strategically approach the freshly acquired victory and learn to deal with the set difficulties that are inevitably embedded, like complicated processes of negotiations, transfer of skills and management, and social relationships lay ahead.

In the broader South African context, surrounding this community are successful vineyards and flourishing businesses, the most notable being the multi-national DeBeers Diamond mining company. DeBeers owns the largest diamond mining reserve in the world, which is located in Namaqualand and near the community. Disturbingly, Ebenhauser does not share or reap benefits from the wealth acquired from these establishments due to a history that has socio-economically deprived them from opportunities through the dispossession of their lands and the exploitation of their labor. These set of circumstances has forced upon communities, in particular Ebenhauser, a present situation that urgently requires substantial change in order to offset the ‘survival for today’ condition that people live in. Low-skilled jobs are created from the existence of these businesses, but the sharing of resources is not present. In fact, Ebenhauser has
virtually no access to the resources surrounding them and it is unclear how effective the
R100 million will be, in terms of the transferring of capital from white ownership to
black ownership.

The rural areas of South Africa suffer from a legacy of inappropriate production
and investment decisions by government and the rural population. For many rural people,
who constitute 16.9 million people or 45% of the countries total population (May, 1998),
economic and social decisions remain habituated by their unequal and distorted access to
markets, services and opportunities. In contrast, other rural areas, like the vineyards, are
characterized, by an over-capitalized, over-mechanized, job-shedding commercial
agriculture.

**Masiphumelele “We will succeed”**

In Capetown, 600,000 people are
currently living in informal settlements and
48,000 people without jobs come into the city
yearly and often establish themselves in
settlements. One of these settlements was first
known as Site 5 and later was renamed
Masiphumelele by its black African residents, which is a Xhosa word meaning "We will
succeed". It is located about 20 kilometers south from the bustling heart of the city.

A result of apartheid was the forced displacement of large numbers of African
people, who might otherwise have been permanent residents of urban centers, to sites of
so called displaced urbanization. These are densely populated areas with tightly clustered
village settlements, informal settlements and micro-sized town centers jumbled together and they have been mushrooming in and around black townships or available land.

During the early 1980s, a group of about 500 people settled into an area that was located near the township’s present location. Under the restrictive apartheid laws these settlers were relentlessly harassed and forcibly removed to the suburb of Khayelitsha, over 30km away, but the numbers began to grow as apartheid began to unravel from 1990 and onwards. By 1990, about 8000 residents were reported living in the area mostly in informal dwellings. In 2005, over 26,000 people are estimated to reside within Masiphumelele. Many arrive from the old Eastern Cape’s Ciskei and Transkei Bantustan or homelands in search of employment and a better life. Although there are people from many tribes in Masiphumelele, most of the township residents are Xhosa. The migration of different people from different areas has added an “emergent” communal identity rather than a “cohesive” one, in contrast to rural communities (DAG, 1997).

Masiphumelele is a formal settlement with informal elements within it. This means that the state formally recognized the settlement, however since that time the formal boundaries of the settlement have been extended by the rapid influx of migrants. It is pretty visible to see what parts are formally recognized in which ones are not. Behind the formal housing one often sees shacks in the backyards with various wires leading from the house to various shacks located behind it in order to receive electricity after they pay the formal household. Informal elements like these are visible throughout the community due to the lack of recognition by the City and its slow delivery process. Those who could not find an empty backyard would be left to construct their shack in the periphery of the community and even in the wetlands surrounding the community.
The shacks are often victims to floods, either through heavy rains or the water seeping through the ground, and fires due to the close proximity of shacks, use of paraffin stoves, and other preventable mishaps. These shacks are built on unsuitable ground resulting in structurally unstable conditions. The marshy, muddy, and mosquito breeding wet area leaves little opportunity to grow plants, gardens, or even have a recreational place for children. People are chronically sick mostly due to the lack of services and infrastructure which drastically impact their quality of life. Even so, the ugly set of conditions that besets those living in the wetlands does little to deter people from living there.

These migrants settle where they can, constructing their shacks from porous or flammable materials or whatever they can find and wherever they can find to build upon. That means that people migrating to Masiphumelele build homes next to storm drains, next to sewage, and even within the wetlands bordering the community. Of course the people know it will be wet, but as Michael Page, an informal housing expert working for the City of Capetown, said, “need overrules education” (Ramirez, 2005). The people need space. There is space in the wetlands and people live there.

Conservationists and other environmental groups express the risks in and the dangers of harming the wetland habitat to be very detrimental. One of such groups is the South African National Parks (SanParks, SANP) who have approached the community to work with them to arrive at an agreement. SanParks would like to rehabilitate the
wetlands and include the wetlands within the park. In the past SanParks (previously known as National Parks) exercised the prevalent colonial philosophy of exclusion and domination of indigenous peoples, and forcefully removed them at gunpoint, and completely neglected the cultural and archaeological significance of the dispossessed communities. Protected areas in many ways reflect the relations of power and privilege that have shaped South African Society (McDonald ed., 132).

In recognition of their past lack of regard for indigenous communities in acquiring land for parks, SanParks, in an effort to not repeat their past mistakes, have allocated land for the community to relocate on. The land is adjacent to the formal Masiphumelele township and plans to build proper housing for the residents is in the process of being worked out. However, there are politics in several aspects. First, the land has been transferred from SanParks to the City that is overburdened and has a limited budget. The City is trying to respond to urgent basic needs of many similar settlement situations, but some are considered more of a priority.

In addition, the politics of land within the community is another dimension that is to be considered. Those living in the periphery and in the wetlands are the most recently arrived migrants and not the established residents who have been there longer. Questions that must be dealt with included; who will move in the housing built? Who decides who will move onto to the new land?

Since before its formal recognition as a township, the town has experienced conflicts surrounding land and it currently continues to deal with them. Land in this context, is in one sense unstable, but in the other it is headed for prosperity. Although the residents have won their right to stay, it is with some reservation to say that this has
created big change. The township of Masiphumelele is cut off from their surrounding area. There are high stone walls with barb wire and security signs visible everywhere where middle class white residents live surrounding the township. There is one main road into and out of town signifying the socioeconomic deprivation that is visible throughout the settlement. There is a 52% unemployment rate and the jobs that are available to them are often times contractual and very distant. Masiphumelele is still living in spatial inequality in that they are segregated away from the rest of the population and distant from economic opportunities.

**ST. LUCIA**

Centuries ago the greater St. Lucia area, located in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province, used to be populated all over by the Zulu people and other tribes. Historical research suggests that the region has been inhabited since time immemorial. The surrounding Duku-Duku forest provided food and building materials and shelter for cattle and ivory. After its ‘discovery’ in the 1500s by the Portuguese, the African coastline has been continually attractive to various players, including businesses, environmentalists, and others due to the desirability of the land. The following illustrates two communities within St. Lucia that are very close to each other.

The endemic and rare plants found throughout the region have ranked it one of the top ‘biodiversity hot spots’ in the world. Various land usage proposals have been discussed, ranging from mining to establishing a massive conservation area. Although the
The majority of the southwest parts of South Africa are economically depressed, it continues to hold much promise for economic development, in particular through eco-tourism. However, for the local people, acquiring land rights and having secure livelihoods is the top priority.

Throughout the past, large portions of land have been increasingly fenced off and reserved for game parks or other conservation efforts in which communities have been forced to relocate. As the space they had to live was made smaller and smaller the resources around them depleted, one being the Duku-Duku forest, which had significantly decreased in size. In 1991 the department of planning and provincial affairs provided R6 million to relocate the forest community to space bordering the forest. One of these relocated communities is called the Khula Village. The population of Khula Village is roughly 17,000 with about 1,500 households.

Today the Duku-Duku people strive to make their living from tourism with the help of the Wildlands Conservation Trust, formed in 2005 through an amalgamation of the KwaZuluNatal Conservation Trust and Wildlands Trust aims to protect and conserve the natural heritage. Taking a people-oriented approach they are also involved helping the surrounding communities create sustainable development. They have been involved in helping the Khula community plan and establish a tourism precinct. Khula village has been advertising itself as a cultural village that offers the tourists the opportunity to experience Zulu culture by sleeping in traditional huts and offers the
opportunity to go on historical and cultural tours. Owners of such establishments, are Maura and Philip who were able to seize the opportunity by invested their earnings and developed their own tourism project in 1998. Today, the authentic Zulu Veyane Cultural Village & Restaurant is a successful stand-alone business.

Near the St. Lucia area, a community is also victim to a land dispossession history. The residents of the area were one of the last remaining communities in the region to be annexed by the British (UMHLABA, Dec. 2004). In 1919, the Mkambati people of South Africa’s Wild Coast were dispossessed of the land they lived on, stretching from the rolling hills of Pondoland to the Indian Ocean.

Taking advantage of the land restitution process, they filed a claim and on October 17th, 2004, the process came to a successful resolution. The community received the physical restoration of the claimed land for specified purposes (conservation), monetary compensation to the relatives of those who were forcibly removed, and the government hopes that several investment projects, like eco-tourism, will be developed in order to benefit the seven villages involved in the claim process (Umhlaba, Dec. 2004 p. 5) Recently, the awarding of World Heritage status to the Greater St. Lucia Wetland Area has now opened a myriad of investment potential to develop the area.

The Black empowerment that is evident through the establishment of 49 businesses in Khula Village and the success of their entrepreneurs is limited in certain aspects. Presently, the Khula Village still continues to struggle and the competition from established businesses that are better equipped. Khula village is easily accessible from the main road leading to developed area of St. Lucia, but the residents of Khula village find that not too many people turn off the road to visit their community. The common tourist
is not attracted to places like this, it’s a different kind of tourist that ventures into a place where their comfort levels may need a bit of adjusting.

Khula village is situated in one of the poorest provinces in South Africa and the homelands are the poorest parts of that province with over 70% of people in these areas living in poverty (UMHLABA, June 2005). The businesses started are a great start, but they benefit only a few by the limited jobs they offer. The community continues to have a 65% unemployment rate and those that do have jobs mostly commute to St. Lucia to work in the town, usually white-owned guest houses or other businesses, even those that have just finished their matric or the U.S. high school equivalent. Khula village is only a couple of kilometers away and there are significant differences in the quality of life between these two areas.

**ANALYSIS**

Despite the fact that the various community struggles discussed are micro-struggles, they are spiritual triumphs that are difficult and at times beyond understanding for an outsider. The meaningful attachments that are related to these victories add to an economic solution that lacks a reconnection to their past that allow oppressed South Africans to participate in the reconciliation process of their country. As I heard a South African once say “our people live on hope –that’s all they have”. This rung true in the communities of Ebenhauser, Masiphumelele, and of St. Lucia in that hope was ingrained in every aspect of the land.

Rev. Rupert Hambira (1998), who is part of the Botswana Christian Council, active in community struggles, and has been an invited speaker to several world wide
conferences, explains that in Africa like in other parts of the world there has always been a very close link between people’s faith and their relationship to the land. He states that spirituality seems to be always socially, culturally and even economically conditioned, as well as, determined and shaped. He goes on to use The Bible, as an example where the book of Exodus, starts “with a story of a people, of a community in transit, a community in search of a promised land, a community in motion on a journey that has been prompted by a promise, a community with a goal, a goal that has taken precedence over everything else in their lives: the search for land they could call their own, a piece of land they could call home”.

Home is a difficult concept to express, to translate its importance, and most importantly it is a notion that can not be quantified. The journey black South Africans are on is not just physical but also spiritual. It is a spiritual process undertaken that motivates, drives and empowers them. There is undeniable spirituality in having a piece of land to which their identity as a people is linked or from which their identity can be traced, and possessing their own land that they can have in their own name.

The African worldview for many is that life is an unbroken cycle and a continuum that links people including the yet unborn, the living and the departed and that throughout these levels of existence are embraced by a sense of community, fellowship, communication and even mutual counsel. They are an important link with the life behind and at the same time serve as important signposts for the journey that still lies ahead of us. The place and places at which people throughout the centuries have buried their dead are of great historical as well as cultural significance to the life journeys of many South
Africans (Hambira, 1998). The spiritual importance of land is reflected in these three communities.

Ebenhauser elders are joyful, motivated, and hopeful that the victory of their land claim is a starting point for much awaited growth for their community. In a meeting hosted at the community center, Ebenhauser elders engaged us in a discussion that included listening, questioning, discovering and understanding what exactly the land mean to their community. They shared with us their aspirations, goals, and sentiments about the future of Ebenhauser. One elder interviewed expressed that he was the only one left from his generation and gaining access to his land once again meant that he can have something to pass onto his children, a place called home. He is empowered by the possibilities the future holds. He imagines families that have left for the cities to return, grow roots once again, and share in the growth and hope that has overtaken the community.

The elders and other community leaders see the value and the potential that the youth of Ebenhauser now have that the access to land has opened opportunities. The youth being a significant part of the population, the elders passionately expressed a great need to communally own the land so that they can pass the land to future generations and for it to stay in the hands of the community. They envisioned the youth prospering rather than being limited by their surroundings. Elders expressed the importance of the youth to be able to understand their history, the struggles fought to reclaim their land, and the value as a community identity the land around them holds.

The future is theirs to take. They are revived, optimistic, and motivated by the hope that lies within the victory of their land claim. Although this particular battle won
perhaps may seem insignificant because it may be seen only as a small patch of land in the larger South African context, the enormous restitution of faith and spirit in a community is enormous in the ability to keep the momentum of moving things forward.

This momentum to keep on going and uphold the little that one may have to the highest degree is also evident in Masiphumelele. Masiphumelele authentically upholds the meaning “We Will Succeed” because throughout the town hope is visible in the way people live their lives and think about the future. Their vision for their township is seen through their aspirations that are embedded in the slightest detail.

As one walks through the main spine road of Masiphumelele one is filled with the buzz and vibrancy that fills the air. Numerous informal vending and other shops are situated on the main road. The noise of construction overtakes the town. Men are brick layering and building sidewalks, a playground and a preschool. Meanwhile as one walks a bit further into the neighborhood and the streets get smaller there is a homely atmosphere. Many homes have vegetable and flower gardens that may not be the most fruitful but are evidently well kept. Women diligently tend their piece of land with the utmost care; brushing off dust and rubbish from the surrounding area, push dirt away from the stems in order for the leaves to have room to breathe. They construct flower pots from old tires and decorate the inside of their homes with matching make-shift wall paper, meaning finding similar colors and designs in newspapers, magazines, or other paper products thrown out. Throughout
Masiphumelele one cannot help but feel the tremendous aspirations and attachments residents have to a piece of land that they can call their own.

Land has a communal dimension whereby all members of the community are expected to share its resources, especially in the rural community of St. Lucia. Zulus, like many other communities, view land as a resource of livelihood because it produces food and water, which gives life to all living things. Maura and Phillip are proud owners of Veyane Cultural Village. Phillip had been a taxi driver for a majority of his life and finds the Veyane as his lifetime accomplishment. Phillip and Maura can now manage to send their children off to school and even the University. By taking advantage of the access to land and their Zulu cultural roots they have provided several others with jobs, inspiration to start their own business, and a hopeful future for themselves.

In addition, the cultural and spiritual connection to specific land is somewhat lost. In the case of the nearby community of Mkambati, land acquired by the SANparks has them at loss with gravesites of ancestors, family histories associated with place, and deep cultural attachments. Jikonia Nhlanga, a long-time Mkambati resident is overjoyed with the victory of the land claim. However, one sees the limits to the land claim process when Jikonia Nhlanga explains and remembers the various sites where his family and ancestors lived and the obvious separation that now exists between these memories of home ingrained in the land that is now part of the nature reserve.
On a guided tour of parts of his former community he points to what may seem to an outsider simply a beautiful landscape. However, his stories translate an immediate connection to the trees, lakes, and earth around him. A story of his community resonated from something tangible in the environment. Nhlanga remembered the legends told to him by his elders. He tells us of historic battles or triumphs over the white settlers. The Chief made the water rise in the lake to stop the settlers from invading. On a more personal note, he points to a tree and explains that exactly under that tree is where his grandmother was buried. The tar roads built throughout the park disturbed burial grounds that have been there for ages and that their forebears revere as nothing less than sacred. Signs, symbols and shrines have always had a very important spiritual value. Removing these people or just denying them access to such important landmarks in their world-view is a terrible misunderstanding of their cultural roots as well as a denial of a fundamental spiritual and religious right.

The formal recognition of passed atrocities serves as a transition to a better future in which they are in control to decide their fates and to be able to reclaim their past. Several find it difficult to understand why Indigenous communities register their land-related claims as a spiritual and human right without which a dignified life is not possible (Hambira, 1998). Struggles of land facilitates oppressed communities the ability to reclaim the past, to forge forward and believe in a future.
The three community case studies outlined show land in different contexts, but in all, land is perceived as being essential in making their futures better. These communities see opportunity, hope, and happiness in their land, thus reclaiming a dimension of their spirituality through it. Although these struggles are waged in opposite and remote ends of the country, they have similarities that transcend their geographic boundaries. I believe that these individual struggles in the broader context of South Africa, will be more powerful and effective in creating greater structural change if embedded within a larger body, rather than having disparate rural and urban groupings of landless and land-hungry people.

Building the capacity for marginalized people to claim their rights and decide on their own futures serves to create both spiritual and economic autonomy. However, these struggles waged will only be effective if embedded within a broader movement that compromises a strong indigenous and institutionally supported network that reflects the concerns of the marginalized people of South Africa. I believe that the Environmental Justice movement can be that vehicle.

Apartheid was not only an example of political injustice but it was also the most glaringly example of environmental injustice (Durning, 1990). The term environmental injustice refers to the “experience of those who are excluded from the benefits of development and/or who carry the burden of its costs and externalities” (Hallows, McDonald, 52). This general definition allows the inclusion of various communities across boundaries and the globe.
The landmark study, *Toxic Wastes and Race* by the United Church Of Christ’s Commission on Racial Justice in 1987, found race to be the greatest predictor in locating sites of toxic waste in the United States. Other studies followed that confirmed and expanded on those results, which outraged and mobilized several communities. These communities gathered together to form the Environmental Justice movement.

Environmental Justice in the U.S. continually defined throughout the years. When it first began it was primarily about the location of undesirable facilities, like toxic waste, in or near minority communities.

Today, Environmental Justice pitches a big tent in which linkages can reach even further. Seeing the causes of injustice as intertwined, and environmental injustice as but a symptom among other multiple manifestations of injustice, help us to understand the interconnection of issues and to form a vision for a better society (20, Pellows). Today the meaning of environmental justice includes an even more people-centered, holistic, and socially just approach to the environment, which broadened the environmental justice movement beyond its anti toxics focus to include issues of public health, worker safety, land use, transportation, housing, resource allocation, and community empowerment (McDonald, 27). In light of this, environmental justice is considered by several to be the 'new civil rights' of this era due to its wide-ranging reach and the interconnection of issues not only in the U.S. but in other countries like, South Africa (Pellow, 2002, 16).

There are close similarities between the history of both countries; the U.S. and South Africa. In both countries a history of racial discrimination, institutionalized black poverty, and political powerlessness are central to the environmental discourse (McDonald, 27). Although an environmental justice discourse and movement exists in
South Africa that is compromised by a diverse set of bodies, few can claim to fairly represent the views and concerns of black communities, and fewer still to have significant black support (McDonald, 37). I believe if the environmental justice movement is more thoroughly integrated, like in the United States, structural change can be achieved in the future.

In the three communities studied, environmental justice can be manifested as the realization and the creation of opportunity for people’s highest potential that is supported by decent paying jobs, quality education, decent housing and adequate health care, democratic decision-making and most importantly personal empowerment.

As Rev. Rupert Hambira expresses:

“People are the subject of development. It is supposed to be aimed at the betterment of the quality of life of every citizen of the world. Development is supposed to follow the people, not the other way around. Development is supposed to suit the people and not the people to suit development. If Africa does not learn this lesson now, all our efforts at development will be in vain, because Africa is ultimately only as strong as its communities”
Note on Racial Terminology*

Although apartheid-era racial classifications are a social construct with no objective significance, the legacies of apartheid and the heavy correlation between race and class in South(ern) Africa are such that racial classifications remain an integral part of political analysis in the region. There are, however, many different versions of racial terminology and a brief explanation of the use of terms in this book is in order. Following the tradition of the democratic movement, “African,” “coloured,” “Asian,” and “white” will be used to describe the four major apartheid racial categories in South Africa, with the most common use of upper-and lowercase letters being adopted. The term “black” is used to refer to Africans, coloureds, and Asians as a whole, in recognition of their common oppression under apartheid.

*Taken from the David A McDonald’s, Environmental Justice in South Africa © 2002 by Ohio University Press
References


