

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

By

Noëleen Murray

Lecturer, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town. Researcher *Project on Public Pasts (POPP)*, NRF Team Project based in the Department of History, University of the Western Cape. (Grant holder: Prof Leslie Witz).

Abstract

Mission towns and their associated educational institutions in the Eastern Cape have been hailed as key historical 'sites' in the landscape of South Africa. Developed first by metropolitan missionary societies as sites for the promotion and development of African Christianity and education, mission centres went on to become sites of intellectual resistance to colonialism and late-colonialism in the form of apartheid. As sites which produced key political thinkers and movements, missions were a unique space in the Eastern Cape where ideas of African nationalism could take root. Later missions emerged as sites of resistance during the 1976 Schools' Boycotts resulting in the near destruction of educational activity in many cases and relegating institutions to a state of near collapse and ruin. Later, once incorporated in the Homelands of the Ciskei and Transkei, the history of mission settlements in the Eastern Cape has been one of underdevelopment. Nevertheless the 'legacies' of mission institutions remain central to struggle discourses as sites of memory for key figures in South Africa's history and as sites of political protest.

Missions pose a particular challenge to the renegotiating of space in post-apartheid South Africa. More than in many other contexts debates about the role of past and future are brought into sharp focus when problematising the place of these historic sites in the contemporary landscape. There are very real questions that arise in reconceptualising a role and vision for these spaces. Not the least being what form redevelopment might take; the individual histories of the various institutions; and prospects for their future as many are located in remote and inaccessible places detached from urban infrastructure.

In the mid nineteen nineties the ANC government recognised the need to assess the viability of the conservation and redevelopment of historic missions in South Africa in the face of acute social and economic difficulties. This paper intendeds to address two aspects of the ‘legacies’ of mission space in the Eastern Cape. The first intention is to re-open the debate on mission settlements as key areas for redevelopment in the Eastern Cape landscape through a reflection of on the *Mission Settlements in South Africa* project initiated by The Department of Environmental Affairs. The second is the problematise mission space more generally in developmental discourses and in heritage management in the contemporary context.

Introduction. ¹

Mission towns and their associated educational institutions in the Eastern Cape have been hailed as key historical 'sites' in the landscape of South Africa. Developed first by metropolitan missionary societies as sites for the promotion and development of African Christianity and education, mission centres went on to become sites of intellectual resistance to colonialism and late-colonialism in the form of apartheid. As sites which produced key political thinkers and movements, missions were a unique space in the Eastern Cape where ideas of African nationalism could take root. Later missions emerged as sites of resistance during the 1976 Schools' Boycotts resulting in the near destruction of educational activity in many cases and relegating institutions to a state of near collapse and ruin. Later, once incorporated in the Homelands of the Ciskei and Transkei, the history of mission settlements in the Eastern Cape has been one of underdevelopment. Nevertheless the 'legacies' of mission institutions remain central to struggle discourses as sites of memory for key figures in South Africa's history and as sites of political protest.

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In the early to mid nineteen-nineties the ANC government recognised the need to assess the viability of the conservation and redevelopment of historic missions in South Africa in the face of acute social and economic difficulties. This paper intends to address two aspects of the 'legacies' of mission space in the Eastern Cape. The first intention is to re-open the debate on mission settlements as key areas for redevelopment in the Eastern Cape landscape through a reflection on the *Mission Settlements in South Africa* project initiated by the Department of Environmental Affairs. The second is to problematise mission space more generally in developmental discourses and in heritage management in the contemporary context.

Part I

This paper is a first attempt at 'revisiting the field' of research for the *Mission Settlements in South Africa* project, commissioned by The Department of Environmental Affairs and undertaken by a team lead by Derek Japha from the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town. By 'revisiting the field' I am invoking my own brief history with this project when, as my first task back in the academy after an

internship in the commercial world of architecture, I visited four mission settlements in the old 'Ciskei' as a field worker commissioned to document the state of the existing buildings at Mgwali, St. Matthews, Enon and Healdtown.²

As an architect charged with the task of documenting the field, I was working to a brief that required me to measure up the buildings for the purpose of producing measured drawings of the individual buildings and a site drawing of each settlement. This is a time consuming task, requiring precise measurements be made of the structures from which scale drawings are then made. As such, the brief for my field work was to spend time at each mission and to do the technical exercise of measuring up the buildings and making field notes indicating the state of the buildings, identifying elements that I might judge to be significant and taking photographs that record the state of the structures and any other important construction details. This is a precise task for which we are trained as architects and the team of academics for whom I was doing the work developed the methods that I used.(Japha 1995)³

Equipped with a pack of information about each site, including maps and pre-arranged contact names in each place, and encumbered with an array of measuring equipment, I set off for East London by air. It is from here that my reflections on this field trip begin. What at first appeared to be a simple matter of getting to the field to do the work proved surprisingly different and it is from here that I wish to begin to raise questions about traditional architectural conservation practices and their role in heritage projects and research.

Briefly put, I shall argue that this single perception of a technical understanding of fieldwork is inadequate for dealing with complexities in the 'field'. In doing so, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'Field of Cultural Production', outlining as he does concepts of 'the habitus' and 'the field', has provided me with a theoretical starting point.(Bourdieu 1993) The Eastern Cape: Historical Legacies and New Challenges Conference has provided the opportunity to reflect on these questions from a perspective of practice.⁴ I would like to use this opportunity to discuss the different aspects of the research that the team has embarked on, and to debate this as an approach to heritage practice.

Competing ideas of the 'field' in heritage discourse and practice

The idea of the 'field' and of 'fieldwork' is central to many disciplinary and professional practices. In particular anthropologists, archaeologists, planners, architects, and natural scientists engage with the field as a site from which to gather information for objective study. The idea of the 'field' in architectural conservation planning is for the recognition of, and possible intervention in, historical landscapes and settlements. There are whole discursive sub-areas of architectural and planning studies that deal with what is loosely termed

'Vernacular' or 'Traditional' settlements, in order to gain information about their construction, form, siting and layout arrangements.⁵ Techniques used include aerial photography, interpretation of historic documents such as maps and layout plans, building plans, title deed diagrams, observation and documentation on site and surveys - producing measured, scale drawings and other supporting information.

In contrast to disciplines such as Social Anthropology, which advertised its 'reflexive turn' as early as 1985, studies of so-called vernacular environments are still undertaken in more or less uncritical ways.(Boonzaaier 1985) In practice, however, despite the absence of any overt or self-conscious reframing of the discipline with regard to reference points and methodologies used, heritage conservation architects and planners are working in parallel with new forms of practice, professionalised in the form of 'Public Participation' processes loosely framed as part of discourses of 'development'.⁶ However these are seldom integrated modes of practice and are usually present when dealing with (marginalised) 'communities'. Very often the role of negotiating with these 'communities' is done by NGOs and other independent agencies.

The result is that competing ideas of the 'field' often emerge in heritage discourse and practice.

It is here that Bourdieu's work on the cultural field constitutes a forceful argument against notions of the universality of the aesthetic in architecture and ideologies of cultural autonomy from external determinants. Like Foucault, Bourdieu sees power as diffuse and often concealed in broadly accepted, and often unquestioned, ways of seeing and describing the world. But unlike Foucault, Bourdieu's formulation of this diffuse or symbolic power is closely intertwined with, but not reducible to, economic and political power, and thus serves a legitimating function. (Bourdieu 1993)

In Bourdieu's terms there is the need to recognise the presence and intersecting relationship between 'fields' of knowledge and agency. He provides an analytical model which reintroduces, through the concept of the 'habitus', a notion of the agent without falling into the idealism of Romantic conceptions of the artist as creator (or subject) which still informs much literary and art and architectural criticism today. At the same time, with the concept of the 'field', he grounds the agent's action in objective social relations, without succumbing to the mechanistic determinism of many forms of social analysis.(Bourdieu 1993) In the case of mission landscapes in the Eastern Cape the idea of the intersecting presence of fields of knowledge radically repositions professional engagement in heritage sites.

In setting out to 'revisit' the field I am, on the one hand, invoking a critique of disciplinary modes of practice, where the field is viewed by professionalised eyes as a neutral, objectified space that can be recorded, or known through technical assessment. On the other hand, the act of revisiting is seen as a reflective act, one of critical re-observation of the processes at play in these landscapes, seven years after my visit.⁷

The case of the Mission Settlements in South Africa Project

In 1991 a team of researchers under Derek Japha, a Senior Lecturer and Conservation Architect from the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town, were appointed by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to undertake a project to assess the state of mission environments in South Africa.⁸ The Project was funded by the Department under the research area: ‘Socio-Economic Environmental Research’.(Marais 1994) At the time the Department was running registered projects undertaken by academics at (historically white) universities and at museums which were supported by its ‘Chief Directorate Environmental Management’, as part ‘the Department’s policy towards national environmental research cooperation and co-ordination’.(Marais 1994)

Since the initiation of the Mission Settlement in South Africa project in 1991, heritage practice has been the subject of much debate and a number of changes in both the forms of approaching heritage planning and management and in legal terms. In November 1999 the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) replaced the National Monuments Act, and with it the National Monuments Council (NMC) was replaced with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).(1999) With this, there is, following the promulgation of the NHRA of 1999, the stated need to transform the scope and nature of formally proclaimed heritage areas, sites and objects to be more inclusive of the diverse heritages that make up what is now termed the ‘national estate’.(1999)⁹

The context of the initial research – commissioned as it was in the early 1990’s – was categorised in a somewhat unprecedented way in the Portfolio of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. It is unclear why the Ministry initiated the study and the presence of the Project in the 1994 report is somewhat of an anomaly, placed as it is amongst a series of scientific environmental studies and projects aimed at raising awareness of environmental issues through education projects and the like.(Marais 1994) What is clear however is that in the categorisation of mission settlements under environmental research, alongside impact studies of informal settlements on the environment and projects to educate poor rural people about environmental values, is the implicit labelling of missions as ‘black’ spaces in the South African landscape. Whether the project was viewed in any way as having national significance, or a high profile, expectant of the new order, is equally obscure in the records but in the years post 1994, when the fieldwork was commissioned, this was certainly the case.¹⁰

Published in the 1992/93 Research Report for the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, there is a section under 'Socio-Economic Environmental Research' that reports on the 'Mission Settlement in South Africa' Project (Marais 1994). The objectives of the project were the following:

- Phase 1: this was concerned with the review of the main features of the historical processes of settlement formation; the identification of surviving conservation-worthy mission settlements at the national scale; their categorisation into various settlement – types and problem sets; a review of the prospectus for conservation and development of missions settlements.
- Phase 2: The work has focussed on policy dimensions and options and has overlapped with that of phase three. On the one hand representative and relevant case studies have been undertaken, aimed at better understanding of policy issues specific to the base and settlement type. On the other hand thematic research has been undertaken on the following: settlement role and the macro-economic factors; administration, legislation and planning procedures; community participation; land and tenure relationships; settlement modernisation; funding and development agencies.
- Phase 3: The focus here is on implementation. To this end we are actively involved with the Genadedal Development Forum in a strategic Planning exercise, which has short to long-term dimensions.(Marais 1994)

The research findings were:

1. Whilst very many missions settlements survive in South Africa, despite the often-ruinous effects of the application of apartheid policies, only a fraction of the total appear to embody prospects for development/conservation.
2. 78 specific missions settlements have been identified as most worthy of, and suitable for, development/conservation efforts. However most are characterised by economic deprivation, a number are potentially affected by land and tenure issues, most are likely to require adaptation to their traditional roles and local economics, whilst administrative and planning procedures require review.
3. Socio-economic development of mission communities will require the reorientation of development support structures.
4. Modernisation and upgrade is an essential component of development but should not be undertaken in the absence of appropriate conservation/development guidelines.(Marais 1994)

An expanded version of the study can be found in a booklet produced entitled 'Mission Settlements in South Africa: A report on their Historical Background and Prospects for Conservation'.(Japha 1993)

The subsequent work, for which I was commissioned in 1995, was seen as a pilot study for actual implementation as part of Phase 3. The work that was to be produced by visiting the field was to be incorporated in a funding proposal complete with cost assessments for construction by academics from the Department of Construction Economics and Management at UCT, from which funds could be raised.(Japha 1995) The four missions, Mgwali, St Matthews, Enon and Healdtown are all situated in rural settings in the area that was the 'Ciskei' Homeland. They were identified in Phase 2 of the Mission Settlements in South Africa project along with 74 other sites as 'most worthy of, and suitable for conservation/development'.(Japha 1993)

The suitability of these sites depended on various factors: Mgwali, situated about twenty-five kilometres north east of the town of Stutterheim, was supported by an active resident population of subsistence farmers and seasonal farm workers. The church, established in 1857 by the Church of Scotland, was still in use, as was the manse.(Adams 1999) The school buildings, including some identified as conservation worthy, dating from the early 1900's, were in a derelict state and some were abandoned or only partly used. St Matthews, situated five kilometres north west of Keiskamahoek, was established as a mission school by the Church of England in 1859 and was a large Industrial Institution.(Nunns 1921) The mission comprised a Church and hospital buildings as well as a number of mission houses and school buildings. Still used in parts, the buildings except the church were abandoned and dilapidated, some since the 1976 Schools' Boycott. The nearby farmlands were still being tended.

At Enon, a remote Moravian mission, in the Sunday's River Valley dating back to 1818 the mission settlement was still occupied and the small church, manse and school buildings were in use, but in bad repair.(Meiring 1959) In Healdtown, a large Methodist institution near Fort Beaufort, and established in 1844, the mission was almost entirely abandoned except for part the school buildings, which had been renovated in 1988.(Japha 1997) In general the architectural elements of each mission settlement was symbolic of a typology of broader missionary spatial practices internationally that relate to Christian missionary practice. However by 1995 each was characterised by devastation and poverty after years of deinstitutionalisation.

In all four missions there were historic, colonial buildings. These were noted as well as the later, less-attractive additions (even prefabricated structures) and their potential for reconstruction was recorded, along with perceptions of the general state of the landscape, and assessed for conservation/development

significance. Traditional conservation practices engage directly with the description of place that was the focus of the histories presented at the four missions.

In so far as 'layers' or different and intersecting moments of the field were recorded, only those that were visible were documented. As such the report to which I contributed to noted buildings from the colonial and apartheid period.

In attempting to find out what transpired at the various missions that I visited through investigating the current status of the project, I found a general lack of knowledge about the Project. From a conversation with Lucien Le Grange, one of the original members of the professional team, it appears that Fabio Todeschini had taken over the project since the death of Vivienne Japha and Derek Japha's move to live in the USA. At the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, their publication records and archive on the website date back to 1994 and there is only one reference to one report by Japha et al. Despite many phone calls to Bisho and the regional SAHRA offices, trying to track down people involved in the project – Denver Webb and Brian Jackson - no one seems to know anything about the project and certainly it is no longer a priority project at present. So what has happened? One answer is that the project has slipped off the regional agenda and has failed to capture the attention or gain support as a high profile project. Another is that it has disappeared in a pile of un-catalogued consultants reports dating back to the pre 1994 years.

What seems clear is that the project as conceptualised by the conservation planners has neither been adhered to nor adopted, and that while there continues to be some change in the four missions, the revitalisation of whole areas has not been realised as an example of an integrated conservation/development vision. (Japha 1993)

Part II

The concept with the most currency circulating in popular heritage discourse in South Africa at present is the idea of heritage as 'inherited tradition'. This concept is applied in many ways. The idea is manifest variously: in popular conceptions of history, through market-driven tourist narratives, in attempting redress in new school curricula, in the media, in new emerging institutions and in particular in the development of sites using heritage in various ways. Through appropriating heritage – in whatever form – there is always the underlying sense that representations of history and culture are authentic and fixed to stable sanitised inheritances, more often than not static in their representation. This postmodern approach, when applied to architectural space, is often realised as the worst stylistic caricatures of racialised history, packaged as heritage, to be bought and owned by a middle class consumer society. Look no further than the local mall or casino or at new themed

security developments in suburbia. (Judin and Vladislavic 1997) Much has been written in academic circles about the role of history in market driven heritage developments – from the select Victorian past presented at Cape Town’s Waterfront to the romance of lost Cape Town at Grand West Casino; from the Van Riebeeck Festival pageant to Heritage Park; and about the relationship between casinos and new museums. (Witz; 2000)

In this conception of heritage as an inherited tradition, missions are sites of hybrid inheritances and histories, caught at best somewhere between the colonial past and new visions of society and the nation. At worst they are presented as glorified sites of missionary activity and are being repackaged and appropriated on tourist routes. Heritage it seems is being widely used to narrate new forms of consumption serving new agents and forwarding new agendas. Another interpretation of heritage is the way in which concepts of heritage circulate in the growing sector of Cultural Industries. Heritage can also be understood as a means through which culture is being mobilised in this emerging new market and this is framed against developmental discourses that are conceptualised around ‘human needs’ and are without historical context.

The colonial field as a renewed site of prospect

In contrast to the objectives and recommendations of the Eastern Cape Missions project, and in the absence of any systematic state or provincial projects to develop and restore the missions, these sites have, with some exceptions, remained places of underdevelopment. In the face of the somewhat surprising lack of information or progress on the project, I turned to other sources, in order to update my knowledge of what has happened at Mgwali, Enon, St Matthews and at Healdtown. What I found was a series of disparate new developments and tensions, a far cry from the integrated development strategies suggested by the conservation planners.

On the most obvious level, at all four settlements there appears to have been a depressing absence of any directed initiatives at rehabilitation of the buildings and the environment, and poverty levels have increased, along with the problems of rural societies which are comprised mainly of the very old and the very young, who together are surviving through subsistence farming and on meager pension grants. In the face of continued underdevelopment, the historical significance and conservation worthiness of the architectural landscape must seem an ironic focus to these people. However, on another level, at Mgwali and Healdtown a new burgeoning industry has developed in the form of tourist groups passing through in search of missionary history.

In Bourdieu’s terms, the colonial field, intersecting as it does with the present sites at these missions, it appears, has enjoyed new interest. Advertised variously, ‘Heritage Tours’ such as Speirs [sic] Tours (the logo

overlaid on a map of Africa laid, literally, on crossed spears) offer packages such as the '4 Day Old Missionaries Tour'. On this tour (priced at R5572 per person sharing) you are invited to:

'Join us on this fascinating missionary tour to sites of early mission stations where people often of humble background became missionary pioneers and in their own small way helped mold [sic] our countries [sic] history.' (Speirs-Tours 2003)

The tour includes visits to both Mgwali and Healdtown, amongst others. Similarly in the Dispatch newspaper edition of September 10, 1999, there is an article entitled 'Marketing an area rich in history', in which project manager Connie Kakana for the Canadian International Development Research Centre, based at the Stutterheim Business Advice Centre outlines a project '...aimed at identifying tourist destinations and developing entrepreneurs in areas earmarked for tourist development.' (Staff-reporter 1999). In a potpourri of heritage jargon, Connie is reported to believe that the area '...has a rich concentration of national beauty, cultural uniqueness, political heritage and historical significance.'(Staff-reporter 1999) The accompanying photographs in the article show Mgwali's School building, devastated by the 1976 Schools Boycotts with the caption: 'OLD GLORY: The former Mgwali Mission, a beautiful historic building in need of restoration' and below that a view of the new Mgwali craft market, (completely empty) captioned 'WE STAND TOGETHER: The entrance to the market complex in Mgwali'.(Staff-reporter 1999)

While these tourist initiatives appear to be enriching the tour companies and others in the leisure industry, Mgwali also received the Eighth Annual Restoration Award from Sanlam in conjunction with SAHRA and the Simon van der Stel Foundation, worth the paltry sum of R150 000 in 2001.(Elias 2001) Quoted in the Dispatch, restoration architect Gawie Fagan, chairman of the adjudication panel said:

'The increasing number of applications hopefully points to a greater awareness of usefully heritage sites that are worth preserving can be applied in community life' (Elias 2001)

The award, made for the church and the oldest school building, must surely only have covered some basic maintenance and as such can it really be called restoration, when the rest of the buildings at Mgwali are still in a state of near ruin? As a gesture to the local community and its 'life', it seems that while welcome, the Sanlam Awards are more symbolic of big business' need to show a contribution to a previously disadvantaged society rather than any meaningful or sustained involvement.

Similarly at Enon, the future of the mission settlement is under threat despite being identified as a Heritage Area in terms of the NHRA. In a series of Specialist Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of

the Greater Addo Elephant National Park, no's 14,15 and 16, there is repeated mention made of the 'desire lines' for the expansion of the park to include privately owned farmlands and the Communal Property Association of Enon mission. (Timmermans 2000; Geach 2001; IMBEHWU 2002) In the Specialist Reports mention is made of the intended expansion of the park and ominously named 'buffer zones', as well as the establishment of the Addo Planning Forum, initiated to discuss issues of the planned expansion of the Park. Report no. 14 recommends that the Department of Land Affairs become involved in the planning process in terms of 'Land Development Facilitation' and 'Redistribution Policy and Systems'. (Timmermans 2000) Mention is also made of the eastern Cape Disadvantaged Farmers Union's interest in agricultural activities taking place at Enon and with regard to the planning for the possible relocation of farm workers. There is also a section '5.2.3 Heritage Sites' that fall within the desire lines of the Park, and the report alludes to tension between SAHRA and the Park administration in this regard (Letters contained in Appendix1). (Timmermans 2000) SAHRA has, at least, identified Enon as 'containing buildings of cultural and historical importance', and there are records of a survey conducted in 1995.¹¹ While the future of Enon is uncertain, the Park, wielding considerable power as it does over the Sundays River area, threatens the field at Enon.

In another bizarre appropriation of colonial history the still dilapidated St Matthews is visited by school children studying the setting for Marguerite Poland's novel 'Shades', which was a matric set-work in 1998. A visit to the romanticised setting of the mission just outside Keiskamhoek, according to East London high School Teacher Alan Webster, is supposed to '....give pupils a chance to find out where they come from' as the novel is infused with 'African culture and imagery...' (Webster 1998) The colonial field, it seems, is a rich site of prospect for revisionist histories and romantic novels.

A further romantic narrative attached to missions is that of the central positioning of Nelson Mandela in heritage discourses in the Eastern Cape and nationally. And at Healdtown, Mandela's high school, the legacies of past pupils are being used to promote the school, along the lines of the Eastern Cape's elite and mostly white private schools such as St Andrews in Grahamstown. In a press release by the SABC on 30 November 2002, Mandela launched the old boys network and a major funding drive aimed at old boys in prominent positions encouraging them to donate generously. (SABC 2002) Healdtown is probably the best developed of the mission institutions I visited despite its severe deterioration after 1976, and with Mandela's support is best placed to be reinvigorated as an educational institution, even if it does become an elite private school, along the lines of the colonial establishments of Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth.

Problematising mission space and histories of dispute in the landscape

The term mission has a particular racialised meaning in the South African context, and has all but disappeared in the 'new' South Africa. The Mission Settlements in South Africa working team allude to this point and suggest the use of the term as defined by 'planning and environmental concerns rather than through questions of historical usage'. (Japha 1993) In spatial terms missions occupy a particular place in the histories of a division in the South African landscape. Situated as they are at the margins, they were a distinct spatial category in apartheid South Africa - neither entirely urban nor rural – and often sites of refuge and resistance from the apartheid laws. Many were declared 'black spots', some were subject to forced removals and many were sites of protest and destroyed in the 1976 wave of Schools' Boycotts. In the colonial period many Eastern Cape missions were sites of refuge for the Fingo people who had no other place to go and as such missions are spaces of hybrid identity and sites that disrupt traditional ideas of indigeneity and community.

Conceptions of the 'field' in mission space remains an important site to problematise in the contemporary context, and particularly in the face of new environmental pressures and increasingly silenced histories of apartheid underdevelopment. On the one hand the 'legacies' of mission institutions as sites of educational excellence have to be read against colonial legacies of the 'Industrial Schools' and 'Normal Institutions' for the civilising and training of black South Africans for designated labour sectors.

Mission life affected identity constructions and promoted cultural hegemony. Mandela describes this in his autobiography:

'The educated Englishman was our model; what we aspired to be were 'black Englishmen', as we were sometimes derisively called. We were taught – and believed – that the best ideas were English ideas, that the best government was English government and that the best men were Englishmen.'(Mandela 1994)

If missions are spaces of hybrid identity, the landscapes of Mgwali, Healdtown, Enon and St Matthews can be read through other histories to those being presented in tourist and heritage discourses – through personal legacies, stories of dispossession and cultural transformation. And through colonial interactions, the 1976 riots and the subsequent Bantu Education policies and under the Ciskei govt, which resulted in the destruction of the landscape, deinstitutionalisation and underdevelopment. In some ways the historical legacies of missions continue into the present through the actual presence of the architecture and landscape of each site, which attest to missionary societies and their approaches to the building and ordering of life in space. Characterised by their rural settings with mission cores, (churches, institutional buildings and housing), laid out in ordered settlement patterns including agricultural commonages, and often surrounded by rural village

land, mission settlements still bear the traces of their historical identities and even if there have been new additions, such as modern housing.

On the present impossibility of restoring mission space in architectural conservation

In the title of this paper I refer to the impossibility of the realisation of the vision as proposed by the Mission Settlement in South Africa project team; I then relay the impossibility of revisiting the project through the department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and allude to problems within SAHRA, and at the level of provincial government in the context of national imperatives. In the process of attempting to revisit the Mission Settlements in South Africa project for this paper, I set out to find out what happened to the initiative and what, if anything, had transpired at the four missions. The notion of ‘impossibility’ is suggested not as a limiting factor but rather as a call for a more critical framing of traditional methods used in heritage practice. ‘Impossibility’ also alludes to the need to change the way in agencies operate with regard to heritage projects and in particular in the context of the Eastern Cape where processes and opportunities for development remain indecipherable. But ‘impossibility’ can also invoke its opposite and the field that I have described, if properly understood, is rich with possibility.

My own recent experiences through research into heritage sites in Cape Town has shown that perceptions of history and heritage vary both within local communities and between the broader community and the heritage agency authorities.¹² Histories of division and dispossession mean that the complex and sometimes arduous process that people are engaging in to realise their visions for heritage sites has to be seen within broader contestations over questions of memory and identity. It has become clear that many of these contestations are played out over questions of land. There appears to be a need emerging for a new approach to the identification, conservation and management of sites of heritage significance. The seeming collapse of the Mission Settlement in South Africa initiative is an example of this need. Mission spaces are symbolic of the long heritage of the Eastern Cape that has been neglected, silenced, misinterpreted and misappropriated in the past.

There is clearly still work to be done to provide substantive documentation for the realisation of Phase Three of the Mission Settlements in South Africa project and the execution of a carefully negotiated vision for these and other mission sites. Since the architectural surveys have established the extent of construction work necessary at each settlement, there will need to be, as suggested by the project team, a set of development principles and guidelines in place for this process. Given the national significance of these sites and the complex local histories there will, no doubt, be new challenges to be met by the heritage practitioners eventually appointed to achieve this vision. But in order to problematise future potentials for mission space more generally in developmental discourses and in heritage management in the contemporary context, I

suggest that there will need to be a radical reframing of the roles of the professionals and the agents that commission them. The province and the state, as agents in this process, will have to find ways to realise and assess the viability of new forms of conservation in terms of a vision of places that have been significantly transformed in a changed society, and continue to be affected by poverty and marginality.

But what form would this new practice take? It would have to be able to take into account a number of critical re-evaluations: the first through critically exploring the substantive procedures and methods through which mission space has been constructed in colonial frames and in conservation discourses. Secondly, a critical approach to practice would have to propose a strategy for reading the colonial landscape in a manner that departs significantly from the established binaries of colonial and apartheid pasts. The main aim in critically problematising the future role of mission space in the Eastern Cape is to suggest the enabling possibilities of a critical approach to heritage practice. Rather than a revisionist attitude to practice, which simply includes previously 'hidden' fields of South African histories, critical practice provides the opportunity to reconstitute the field of professional intervention and involvement by addressing the sites of heritage production and thereby addressing the colonial domination of space that continues into the present even though it has been transformed through the politics of resistance.

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NOTES

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² My colleague Peter Büttgens visited similar rural missions in the old 'Transkei'.

³ Letter of appointment as a researcher, 29 September 1995 (author's possession)

⁴ This is a case study and similar critiques have arisen in subsequent case studies in Cape Town with colleagues Antonia Malan and Abdulkader Tayob from the Cultural Sites and Resources Forum, a project based at the University of Cape Town(CSRF). Most recently we have been involved with the case of the Tana Baru burial ground in the Bo Kaap. The project has been a process of collaborative research between community members, academics from a number of disciplines at the University of Cape Town and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) since June 2000, towards an integrated vision for the conservation, management and development of the site.

⁵ The Vernacular Architecture Society in South Africa is one such grouping that still works within the the modes of practice established by James Walton.

⁶ Public Participation processes have come under sharp criticism recently, as practitioners who set out to establish 'community opinion' often end up missing out on key constituencies of public opinion. CSRF Seminar, 2003

⁷ This paper is written prior to an actual revisit to the sites which I proposed to do en route to the Conference in August, 2003

⁸ Other members of the team included: V. Japha, L. le Grange and F. Todeschini from the School of Architecture and Planning, University of Cape Town; M. Attwell, historian, Attwell and Associates, Cape Town; D.Blaney, Legal Resources Centre, Cape Town; R. Brusee, architect, Durban; A du Toit, architect, University of Pretoria; F. Frescura, architect, University of Port Elizabeth; B.Kearney, architect, University of Natal, Durban; m. Maughn-Brown, City and Regional Planner, Durban; m. Morkel, City and Regional Planner, Johannesburg; B. Southworth, architect, University of Natal, Durban; H.Smith, Legal Resources Centre, Cape Town; K Ström, architect, University of Cape Town; L.van Biljon, Town and Regional Planner, University of Pretoria; W.Wentzel, SALDRU, University of Cape Town; P.Wolmarans, City and Regional Planner, University of Cape Town.

⁹ *National Heritage Resources Act*, South Africa, November 1999, definition of terms

¹⁰ Correspondence with Ingrid Coetzee, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, October 1995.

¹¹ I surveyed Enon using the NMC survey forms these were lodged with SAHRA by the project team, in December 1995

¹² Projects that are an example of this are the St Cyprian's case, the Tana Baru Case Study and the Cape Peninsula National Park study, CSRF Projects 1999-2002