Two Missions:
Case Studies in the Meaning of Tradition in Contemporary Development in South Africa

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This paper presents case studies of two mission settlements to examine different aspects of the prospects for traditional environments in contemporary South Africa and their uses in contemporary development. The paper is divided into two main sections and a conclusion, each section dealing with one of the case studies. These studies begin with a description of the history of each mission, illustrating each as a "traditional" vernacular landscape. The changing meanings of "tradition" arising from this history are then addressed, and the different role and significance of "tradition" in the likely trajectory of contemporary development that can be expected in each case is discussed.

Throughout the nineteenth century Southern Africa was one of the most intense mission fields on earth, where the 25 mission societies in operation by 1905 had created about 600 major mission centers with nearly 4,000 outstations, which even now constitute an important category of rural environment and infrastructure. This paper deals with the culture-development interface in two of these missions in the context of their different histories: Genadendal in the Western Cape, and Healdtown in the Eastern Cape.

For those who argue that development planning is typically blind to culture, "displacement effects" are often a key focus of analysis. When conceptualized as synonymous with modernization, "development" is argued to impose the thought models, values, products and processes of Western culture and the global economy on traditional societies, whose cultures are thought to be unable to adjust to change. This imposition leads to the displacement of various local practices affecting economy and ecology, and of societal and family structures, with three principal consequences. The first is the failure of development programs, because they are not articulated subtly enough to mesh with local ways of doing...
things. The second is the disappearance of local knowledges, technologies and skills that, if effectively harnessed, could have contributed to development. The third is the loss of regional identity, self-image, and sense of place.

As elsewhere, most South African missions were early standard-bearers for many of these processes of displacement, and were therefore one of the primary forces acting on local traditions, including architectural traditions. Most missionaries regarded the abandonment of traditional economic practices and material culture, including architecture, as a visible signifier of conversion, and strove to promote it. They were not always successful — this usually depended on the degree to which colonial dispossession had made local people dependent on the mission’s resources. Where traditional economies and social structures persisted, missionary attacks on tradition generally made less headway and mission populations remained small; where colonial processes of land dispossession were complete and mission land became a vital local resource, missionaries controlling access to it were sometimes in a position to decree traditional practices out of existence virtually overnight; and between these extremes, an uneasy tension sometimes prevailed.

Most South African missions, therefore, began as expressly intended sites of cultural modernization, and even today many rural cultural landscapes are literally a barometer of the degree of missionary influence in the area. However, power effects are rarely unidirectional, and missions also contributed to the establishment of new institutional traditions and helped to develop both new and hybridized building traditions; these were not the sole cultural property of the missionaries and came to be accepted by local people as their own. The environments produced by this interaction now face similar challenges and pressures to those with which the missionaries confronted their predecessors, and raise many of the same symbolic, economic, social and ecological questions.

Traditions and their meanings, therefore, constantly changed in missions, and continue to do so. This change sometimes occurred slowly, sometimes by virtually instant acts of rewriting, and sometimes with more than just a little irony, as the intersecting narratives of missionaries and missionized imposed, adopted, adapted, resurrected and redeployed traditions in the context of changing historical circumstances.

The questions we ask about identity, self-image, and cultural meaning in the two missions we have selected as cases must be asked against a background where colonial dispossession had made local people dependent on the mission’s resources. Where traditional economies and social structures persisted, missionary attacks on tradition generally made less headway and mission populations remained small; where colonial processes of land dispossession were complete and mission land became a vital local resource, missionaries controlling access to it were sometimes in a position to decree traditional practices out of existence virtually overnight; and between these extremes, an uneasy tension sometimes prevailed.

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The questions we ask about identity, self-image, and cultural meaning in the two missions we have selected as cases must be asked against a background where apartheid succeeded in compartmentalizing history as well as the land, and in creating a sectarian stock of officially acknowledged material culture. The new South African paradigm is multiculturalism. Tolerance of difference and acceptance of diversity are now basic tenets of public cultural policy and discourse in South Africa, and there is a widely expressed need for new cultural symbols that reflect on the one hand the varied historical experiences of all South Africans, and on the other the fact that their histories are indivisible. This rewriting of cultural history is a crucial post-apartheid project. Its main focus, obviously, is previously marginalized indigenous culture; but our field experience in missions around the country suggests that since the collapse of apartheid, many missions have transcended their colonial roots sufficiently to become part of this rewriting.

It is in this context that we examine the contemporary significance of Genadendal and Healdtown. Both have considerable historical importance in South Africa. Genadendal was the first mission in the country, the mother institution for a group of Moravian missions that collectively still contain some of the country’s most distinctive vernacular landscapes. It is not accidental that “Genadendal” was the name selected by President Mandela for his official residence in Pretoria. Healdtown was the largest and one of the most famous of a chain of mission institutions in the Eastern Cape, a core institution in the development of African education in South Africa, which taught many of the leaders of several generations of African nationalists. The two missions are, therefore, similar in fame and significance; but in many other respects they differ, and our paper sets out to explore this difference and its implications.

**GENADENDAL**

The history of South African mission environments began with the establishment of Genadendal (the Vale of Mercy) in the eighteenth century. Its origins, as Ross remarks, contrived to be simultaneously real and mythical. In 1737 the Moravian missionary George Schmidt established a mission at a place called Baviaanskloof (the Ravine of Baboons) in the Western Cape, among the kraals of the Khoi some 130 kilometers from Cape Town. His efforts there were soon frustrated by the officially sanctioned DRC Church, and the disillusioned Schmidt returned to Europe. When the Moravians returned to Baviaanskloof in 1792, they are reputed to have found remnants of Schmidt’s house, garden and congregation, including a certain Khoi woman who had been baptized by Schmidt, and who produced a bible from a leather bag and astounded the missionaries by having her daughter read from it.

The vision that this second wave of missionaries brought for the resurrection of Genadendal was inspired by the Moravian mother community at Herrnhut — that of an isolated, self-sufficient, theocratic and patriarchal Christian community based on religion and work as the twin pillars of the righteous life. Within a few decades the Moravians had managed to develop Genadendal in this image and to attract a larger population, by orders of magnitude, than any colonial settlement other than Cape Town. The main reason for this rapid growth was that Genadendal was reborn into a colonial environment that had been much changed by the intervening half-century since the departure of Schmidt. By 1800 there were few independent Khoi kraals left in the area. The inexorable pressure of trekboer expansion up the coastal plain had left those Khoi people who had survived European epidemic

diseases with few options other than retreat into the arid Karoo or incorporation and subjugation as the servants and herdsmen of colonists, stripped of land, cultural identity, and even language. Life on a mission may also have had its cultural price, but it was the only alternative to servitude."

On a mission as securely within the Colony as Genadendal, missionaries were in a good position to dictate the terms of residence. These terms were spelled out by institutional rules defining every aspect of life: access to land; the obligation to work; and the adherence to norms of behavior regarding such matters as cleanliness, sex, drink and smoking dagga. Noncompliance was punished with expulsion."

The economic basis of Moravian self-sufficiency was craft, small industry, and agriculture. The practice of agriculture — and, in fact, the entire social character of the mission — was closely related to the communal form of tenure and the pattern of land management to which it gave rise. At Genadendal the land was held in trust, initially in the name of the Church, then later in the name of the community."

It was divided into various categories: the building lots, the paglande, the staai-lande, and commongage for grazing. The right to occupy a building lot on the mission — the so-called woonreg — also gave access to land in various categories for agricultural purposes, which included the cultivation of vegetables, growing wheat, and keeping animals.

However, Genadendal was no mere agricultural center. During the early nineteenth century it was exceeded in social complexity only by Cape Town. It became well known as a center of furniture making; it had a well-known cutlery, making more than 300 knives a week; it had tailors, cobbler, wagon makers, carpenters, masons, joiners, cooper, smiths and tanners. By 1836 half of its inhabitants earned their living from one of these trades. The missionaries also started a printing press, and a water mill was built to which many surrounding farmers came to mill their corn.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century the mission environment reflected and helped to produce the Moravian ecclesiastical social vision (FIG.1). Greater Genadendal, comprised of a main settlement and three outstations, was situated at the foot of a mountain range. Each village
was located along a tributary of the Riviersonderend (River-without-end). In the main village, the werf — containing the church and mission house, the cemetery, the school, the mill, and the printing press and other workshops — stood out in the landscape as the symbolic and physical heart of the settlement (FIG. 2). Below the werf on the fertile valley bottom were individually worked vegetable gardens and fruit orchards, irrigated by water furrows, each section defined with hedges or trees.

Situated along the main river system linking the four villages were further pagtlande, the saailande, and the commonage for cattle grazing. On either side of the valley on which the main village was centered were rows of cottages set out along the contours, with stoeps facing down onto the vegetable gardens in the valley. Each street in the settlement developed its own character, as buildings and terraces responded individually to the topography, but the common house form and the uniform scale and materials maintained the consistency of the settlement pattern.

Indigenous building forms and techniques were soon conspicuously absent in Genadendal. To the Moravians the abandonment of traditional material culture — including architecture — was a primary signifier of conversion. The traditional Khoi house was the so-called matjieshuis (FIGS. 3A), a portable beehive structure made with a framework of pliable saplings covered by reed mats.

The pre-mission structures in the Genadendal area had been of this type. But these structures became a primary target of the missionaries, who were given power by the institutional rules for Genadendal to control the forms of all buildings, and who instituted practices which became the models for other Moravian missions at the Cape.

Using these rules, within a short space of time the missionaries had developed a new, uniform vernacular landscape (FIG. 5). This systematization of the settlement preceded the first formal building controls, which were introduced in 1828, and prescribed rectangular plans of 6 by 3.5 meters. This basic house form typically had two or three rooms in a row under a double-pitched, thatched roof, sometimes with a kitchen added at the back to form an L under a flat braakdak roof (FIGS. 6, 7). This form was promoted by incentive as well as prohibition — the missionaries offered financial rewards and building materials, such as roof beams and timbers.

The roofs were sometimes built with a wolwegewel over the front door. A fireplace and chimney were often placed against one of the end gables. The buildings were constructed with brand goods and had a misvloer. Windows, where present, were small, inward-opening casements. After a short period where wattle and daub was used, walls came to be built of unbaked brick or sod construction, with a clay and limewash finish. All of these features were derived from the vernacular buildings of the settlers in the Cape countryside. Later dwellings were similarly indebted to the settler tradition. They were typically two rooms deep and were roofed with corrugated iron, but in other respects retained the basic forms and materials of the earlier types. Some flat-roofed houses with modestly decorated stepped parapets were also introduced.

These houses, together with the general form of the settlement and the Neogothic religious buildings, created in the minds of at least some observers — Lichtenstein is an example — the image of a European rural settlement. But the architecture of Genadendal is in every respect an integral part of the Cape vernacular building tradition.
Genadendal and its daughter Moravian missions, such as Elim and Wupperthal, are today identified by the National Monuments Council as a unique and important part of the South African architectural and cultural heritage. The werf at Genadendal includes a number of structures declared as National Monuments, a local history museum, and public open spaces and gardens, all of which have been restored and maintained through the efforts of the Moravian Mission Trust, members of the local community, and the National Monuments Council. This process has involved the participation of local individuals and groups; it has addressed the training of local builders and artisans in restoration work; and it has been representative of the various religious, educational, tourism, and other enterprises now important to the community.

However, the conservation of the mission center has occurred within an environment that is rapidly modernizing, and the civic buildings of the werf may well soon stand as isolated relics in an environment to which they no longer relate. There is no identity which Genadendal uniquely represents, and the economy, the social structure, and the broader landscape of settlement at Genadendal are no longer self-sustaining, because of various pressures that will be familiar to those everywhere who study historical environments: demographic changes in the village; the economic marginalization of many of its inhabitants; interventions by technocratic planners whose models of development take into account nothing except bricks and mortar; the potential impact of new systems of tenure; and the effects of systems of local values that read the historic environment as symptomatic of poverty and deprivation — something from which to escape rather than to perpetuate.

The demographic processes affecting Genadendal have their origins in the nineteenth century, when the once-thriving mission economy was destroyed by global competition and changes to the colonial economy. As early as 1832, copies of Genadendal knives made in Sheffield flooded the Colony and destroyed the Genadendal enterprise. Toward the end of the century, increasing industrial competition, the commercialization of agriculture and the lack of capital to compete effectively in the evolving market marginalized other enterprises as well. The result of these processes was that more and more Genadendal residents were
forced to earn their living as migrant laborers or agricultural laborers on surrounding farms. At present, nearly half of the economically active population work and live away from the village during the week, and there is a high proportion of the old and the very young among the permanent resident population. While some agriculture and various small enterprises are still carried out from the village, the concept of Genadendal as a self-sustaining community has collapsed, and for many residents the village is now little more than a dormitory suburb.

The Genadendal environment has also been affected by the technocratic interventions of public-sector development agencies. These interventions are typically made with narrow, sectoral concerns, employing acontextual standards and with no culture of participative planning. Consequently, integrating various development opportunities holistically within the Genadendal cultural landscape is virtually impossible. At the settlement-planning level, attempts by the regional authority to improve the infrastructure (roads, water, electricity), to introduce new facilities (a school, clinic, administrative offices, and police station), and to provide new housing extensions have contributed to the process which is gradually transforming a unique regional environment into a suburban atopia, and have disrupted the functioning of key traditional systems.

Traditional patterns of house and settlement are no longer evolving, developing and changing; they are being replaced with entirely new models. The transformation of these patterns must be seen in the context of the economic polarization of the inhabitants. There is a significant local elite, but there is also a large group of residents living in conditions of extreme poverty. Historic Genadendal house forms are no longer a living tradition for either of these groups for reasons relating to costs, available skills, and also — and perhaps most significantly — to changing values. The relatively wealthy move out of houses in the Genadendal historic core to new residential subdivisions on its fringes, where the houses that they build reflect either the values and aspirations of global suburban culture, or the postmodern commodification of history (FIG.8). These constructions set the tone for alterations and additions to the historic buildings — where these can be afforded. In many cases, however, occupants lack the resources to have their houses maintained or the skills to do it themselves, and many houses are deteriorating rapidly, to the extent that they will soon collapse (FIG.9).

In summary, while portions of Genadendal may survive as a result of the efforts of conservation agencies or more sensitive development planning, the traditional environment of Genadendal no longer reflects a living, sustainable culture, society and economy, and the village has been unable to redefine itself around a shared vision of what it represents culturally and historically.

HEALDTOWN

The contemporary issues raised by the Wesleyan mission of Healdtown are the product of three phases of development:

its early history during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a period of rapid growth and reorientation during the first half of the present century, and a period of decline between 1950 and the present day. During the first phase much of Healdtown's physical structure was established, but it remained a small, parochial mission deeply implicated in the frontier politics of the colonial project. During the second, it transcended these origins to become both a national institution at the forefront of developments in African education and a vibrant center of local social life. During the third, the mission was destroyed by the education planners of the apartheid state, as they sought to implement the policy of "Bantu Education." The contemporary cultural meanings of Healdtown are embedded in all three of these historical phases.

Situated on the Eastern Cape frontier, Healdtown began its history at the razor's edge of colonial advance and policy and beyond the line of colonial landholdings. In this environment the role played by missionaries was even more ambiguous than in the Western Cape. Most Eastern Cape missionaries concurred with their Cape Moravian colleagues that the success of the Christian enterprise required an energetic challenge to traditional cultural and economic practices. For this reason, they were regarded by many Chiefs as threats to their sover-
Ayliff, they crossed the Kei with the departing British expedition around Healdtown, and the Birklands site was turned over to many chiefs as useful, even in certain circumstances indispensable. They provided the best available avenue of communication with the colonial authorities. They also gave access to education, which made possible direct interaction with the colonial authorities without the use of intermediaries, and they opened up trade. In some parts of the country, these conflicting imperatives resulted in a spatial politics of considerable delicacy, with missionaries pressing to be allowed access directly to the Great Places, and Chiefs assigning sites some distance away, where access to potential converts was severely constrained.

Healdtown’s initial role in this network of colonial power was perhaps more overt than some. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, colonial influence over the land west of the Kei — where Healdtown was situated — was stronger than over the land to the east of that river, even although the land was not settled by colonists. Sited near the British military outpost of Fort Beaufort, Healdtown began its life in 1844 — with the name of Birklands — on Xhosa land as a small London Missionary Society station. But it was quickly caught up in the broader regional politics involving a group called the Mfengu, who were refugees of various tribal origins who had been displaced from their original homes in Natal by the Mfecane.

Mfengu clans initially settled east of the Kei among the Gcaleka Xhosa under paramount chief Hintsa. Xhosa custom was to absorb outsiders who recognized the authority of their chiefs, but while Mfengu Chiefs were invited to Xhosa councils, Hintsa’s approach to the integration of the Mfengu left them feeling somewhat less than equal. Consequently, on the occasion of a colonial military expedition across the Kei, the Mfengu who had settled in Hintsa’s territory moved en masse to the Butterworth mission and appealed to become British subjects. Accompanied by the Wesleyan missionary, John Ayliff, they crossed the Kei with the departing British expedition in the belief that the British would give them the opportunity to reinstate their pre-Mfecane mode of life on new sites.

When the Xhosa were evicted from between the Great Fish and the Keiskamma rivers after the frontier war of 1850–1852, the Mfengu were resettled there, including on the land around Healdtown, and the Birklands site was turned over to Ayliff under its new name. Peires suggests that British Kaffraria was conceived by the colonial authorities as “a sort of infernal machine for civilising the Xhosa,” where a process of surveying and subdividing the land would destroy the basis of traditional tenure, where the Chiefs would be drawn inexorably into the system of English legal administration, and which would be “flood[ed] with missionaries, schools of industry and trade in money until the final triumph of European civilisation.” Healdtown and its surrounding lands, although not technically in British Kaffraria, and although initially not for the Xhosa, became part of this “great civilising machine.”

The type of mission that Ayliff set out to establish was similar in some ways to Genadendal. In particular, the Wesleyans owed much to the Moravians when it came to the concept of the mission as a community based on the association of religion and work. Like Genadendal, Ayliff’s mission was intended to become a self-sufficient center which would integrate all aspects of life within an ordered landscape controlled by the missionaries.

However, even although the Mfengu “supplied the missionaries with their first mass converts” and were constantly described by colonist commentators as “particularly amenable to being civilised,” and although politically they had much less room to maneuver than people in, say, the northern Transkei or Zululand where indigenous economies and social structures were still less affected by colonial expansion, for various reasons the Healdtown missionaries were unable to impose cultural norms to the same extent as in Genadendal. Only part of the Healdtown land was surveyed and subdivided; other land in the area was turned over to Mfengu Chiefs to be managed according to the norms of customary tenure; and the influence of the missionaries on this land was at first slight. Also, people were not tied to the Healdtown land to the same extent as were the residents of Genadendal, because it was easy to move elsewhere in British Kaffraria to land under secular control, or even to return east of the Kei.

Consequently, missionaries in the Eastern Cape who wished to keep resident populations could not entirely dictate the terms of residence, and there was generally a far more nuanced interchange on the question of maintaining local traditions. Sometimes there was even overt conflict. But if the missionaries did not have the power to decree new cultural norms into existence, what they offered was not universally rejected either. Some people responded immediately to the relative security of tenure on offer; and throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century a steadily growing group of Africans came to see education as the only road to social, political and economic equality in a world that was patently becoming dominated by racism and colonial values. They were opposed by adherents of the traditionalist branch of African nationalism, who saw missions and schooling as an extension of colonial domination in general and as destructive of indigenous culture. These opposing views produced two distinct, named identities — “Red” and “School” — which remained deep and precisely demarcated in the Eastern Cape until well after World War II.

At Healdtown missionary attempts to displace local traditions began with the organization of the land. Two villages were laid out around the mission during the 1850s. These villages were organized with building lots of a quarter acre in size arranged together in clusters, and with grouped agricultural lots of four acres each adjacent to them (Fig. 10). Inhabitants took occupation of a building plot and an agricultural allotment concurrently. Initially, people had only the right of occu-
ration, but as they demonstrated their desire for permanent residence by building improvements, they could apply for title on a quitrent basis.

This form of planning represented a radical departure from traditional patterns of social grouping on the land. The basic social unit of Xhosa (and Mfengu) domestic architecture was the homestead rather than the village, a circular grouping of round huts arranged around a cattle byre. Such homestead groupings were dispersed in the landscape rather than concentrated (FIG. 11). One obvious aim of the new village organization may have been, as Ayliff put it, “to bring people within the sound of the chapel bell”, but we can surmise that the planning of the Healdtown villages reflected three other equally important objectives. The first was to break the pattern of the kraal as the domestic unit — a unit spatially reflecting a cattle culture. From the missionary perspective, the core male activity of tending cattle — unlike the core female activity of tilling the soil — did not constitute “work,” and therefore a viable cattle culture militated against the desired combination of religion and edifying labor. Second, the ordering of the land in this way helped to break the power of the Chiefs — which was partly grounded on their right to dispose land resources. It is therefore hardly surprising that the patterns of land subdivision reflected in the Healdtown villages were developed in the face of strong opposition from Mfengu leaders. Third, the new pattern of land management was intended to increase the colonial tax base, in that the agricultural allotments offered an additional possibility for revenue gathering in addition to the hut tax.

The planning of the Healdtown villages shows some interesting differences from that of Genadendal. Whereas the former can be described as “organic,” respecting the site, following the contours, sensitive to the agricultural potentials of the land, and cast in the image of a small, Central European village, the latter was a series of crude grids overlaid on the complex topography with only the most simplistic attempt at accommodation. The first was reflective of the concept of the ideal community, the second of the extension of the grid of colonial power. As Figure 10 shows, the key planning idea was to create a system of standardized building plots and garden allotments, and to dispose the allotments around the rivers, from which they were clearly intended to be irrigated. The pattern laid out in the 1850s is still clearly visible in the present-day landscape of the mission and its associated settlements (FIG. 12). This arrangement, however, was a totally unworkable theoretical abstraction. Rivers in the Eastern Cape are deeply incised, and in practice the allotments could not be irrigated. Consequently, the land allocations were insufficient even to feed their occupants because the only source of water was rain.

For reasons alluded to previously, the Healdtown missionaries had less control over house forms than in Genadendal; but the mission, nevertheless, had a considerable influence on the domestic architecture of the region — an influence which is still visible in present-day building practices. Up until the mid-nineteenth century the typical hut form in the Eastern Cape was the thatched beehive, which by then had been brought to a high degree of technical refinement. Some of the earliest houses on Healdtown lands were such beehive huts (FIG. 13). Between about 1870 and about 1920, however, the predominant house form in the Eastern Cape changed to the cone and cylinder, with the dome and cylinder as an intermediate form (FIG. 14). The cone (or dome) and cylinder was also an indigenous form, but its cultural heartland was the interior of the country rather than the eastern coastal belt.

There are no universally accepted reasons for this change, nor is there agreement about its exact date sequence or pattern of diffusion. Although some commentators have suggested missionary influence as a reason for the change in form, this is most unlikely. For missionaries, any round hut was undesirable irrespective of other aspects of its form. The reasons for the change probably related more to declining resources for the construction of all-grass huts, and to the considerably less..
effort required to maintain a cone (or dome) and cylinder form. No change in the plan configuration of either hut or homestead was implied by the new type, and the symbolic structure of the homestead space could therefore be retained. In some Mfengu areas near to Healdtown — and probably also on Healdtown lands — the grass beehive was becoming rare by the early 1870s, and the dome and cylinder had already become the most popular form.

The familiar square-circle opposition as the signifier of convert and heathen was present in the Eastern Cape too, however, and this also influenced local traditions (FIG. 15). In both missionary and government literature indices of “advances in civilisation” were constantly sought, and one that was regularly quoted was the prevalence of rectangular or square building forms. For example, Figure 13 shows a few rectangular cottages among the circular huts. Ayliff clearly hoped that the typical house form in the Healdtown settlement would be rectangular, and referred to “cottages rising daily” in the village — but this was probably wishful thinking.

Rectangular buildings in the Eastern Cape were usually not simple derivatives of colonial cottage forms, as they were at Genadendal, but were hybrid in character. The development in parallel of the rectangular or square cottage form and the circular cone and cylinder hut during the latter part of the nineteenth century probably created possibilities for interaction and interchange, because both were wall architecture forms. Consequently, the rectangular or square form could be used with traditional wattle and daub construction methods, and new decorative traditions applicable to both rectangular and cone on cylinder forms could be developed (this interchange is still visible today).

Moreover, various forms often coexisted in the same area and sometimes even in the same homestead, and still do (FIG. 16). The reasons for this have also not been convincingly researched, but the most likely explanation is that some people felt (and feel) it necessary to retain at least one hut in the homestead complex of the earlier, more traditional type which would be recognizable to the ancestors.

The structure of the residential environment of Healdtown is probably little changed since the mission was founded. Beehive forms are now nonexistent, but cone and cylinder forms are still present in many household groupings. Sometimes these are built with traditional wattle and daub methods; sometimes even burnt brick or prefabricated structures are used. Many homesteads consist of both rectangular and circular forms, even when the main structure in the complex is an elaborate, conventional suburban house (FIG. 17).

At the center of the two Healdtown villages was the mission itself. Initially this consisted of a church, an industrial school, and living accommodation for the missionary. Healdtown was the first industrial training institution to receive financial support from the government, and its first building was designed by an officer of the Royal Engineers. This building no longer exists in its original form. Figure 13 shows it to have been a simple but substantial Neogothic structure. In the rural Eastern Cape landscape it was clearly intended to impress, and was somewhat grandiloquently described by a Wesleyan teacher as “a tribute . . . to the genius of this age, to the master spirit of our time and a mighty engine of intellectual improvement.”

The Healdtown Industrial Institution failed in the mid-1860s, and the Wesleyans replaced it with a seminary and a teachers training college. But for the remainder of the nine-
teenth century Healdtown remained small and continued to cater mainly to the Mfengu (by 1896 there were still only 52 students). The first phase of Healdtown’s development, therefore, ended with the mission still a relatively insignificant and parochial institution, on land initially granted by a Xhosa chief and then subsequently appropriated, and with a history firmly embedded in colonial machinations on the frontier.

Its contemporary reputation and symbolic power date from the second phase of its development when it transcended this dubious history, and relate to three aspects of the mission’s role and character. First, over the first three decades of this century the mission came to play a central role in the national development of African education. After the turn of the century, it entirely lost its parochial character, began to admit students from all over the country, and grew rapidly in terms both of student numbers and facilities.

In the context of subsequent developments, it is perhaps too easy to romanticize the character of pre-apartheid mission institutions such as Healdtown. In fact, the evidence suggests that paternalism was rife and that the education provided was designed to equip students for social roles that fell short of full equality. This and the rigid discipline of mission institutions were increasingly rejected by successive generations of students grounded in African nationalist politics, and during the period between 1930 and 1950 there was regular trouble on the mission campuses as students protested against various aspects of mission school life.

Nevertheless, in the context of what was generally available to Africans, the education provided at Healdtown and other institutions was of a very high standard, and was considered by most of their graduates to have “equipped them well for life.” Even as late as the mid-1930s there were still only very few schools in the entire country which provided full secondary-school education to African children; and within this small circle, Healdtown and its nearby competitor, Lovedale, were preeminent. These institutions, therefore, came to be recognized as a major national force in African education, and they produced a significant proportion of the social, economic and political leadership of the period — and, indeed, of the present day.

The second reason for Healdtown’s significance relates to the broader social role the mission played in its immediate rural environment. As with other missions throughout the Eastern Cape, local people still remember Healdtown as a vital center of rural social and economic life, offering access not just to education but to shops, medical services, agricultural extension advice and employment, and providing a setting for social gatherings in an environment otherwise devoid of social facilities.

The third reason relates to the relative quality of the mission environment. Most of the existing buildings were built in the three decades between 1905 and about 1935, by which time Healdtown had grown into a substantial campus of late-Victorian and Art Deco buildings (fig. 18). These buildings far exceeded in grandeur and quality anything constructed subsequently by the apartheid state for African education, and offered facilities equivalent to those provided at the time in most schools elsewhere in the country. Consequently, they were not read as inherently inferior institutions, as is indicated by the fact that today people want them “back the way they were.”

The third phase of Healdtown’s history began with the accession to power of the Nationalist government and its policy of “Bantu Education.” The tenor of this policy was spelled out...
with chilling clarity in a notorious speech made by Verwoerd, as minister of Bantu Affairs, introducing the Bantu Education Bill of 1953. The gist of this speech was that if the envisaged social role of the black man under apartheid was either to continue life as a peasant or to hold a shovel in “white South Africa,” then the provision of quality education was not only unnecessary but dangerous, since it would only inculcate frustration. Missions, educating as they did a significant proportion of rural Africans to standards much higher than envisaged by Verwoerd, represented an obvious threat to this policy, and the new government soon moved to bring them within the national system. An ultimatum was given to the missions: teach according to the dictates of Bantu Education, or be taken over, or close down. Most missions chose one of the latter two alternatives.  

While the physical property of Healdtown remained in the hands of the Methodists, the Healdtown schools, like those on many other missions, were taken over by the state in the mid-1950s. This act was perceived by every person associated with these missions with whom we have come into contact as an act of racist vandalism that led directly to their destruction. The destruction was both institutional and physical. Its precise pattern was not the same in every case, but there were common themes. In many missions some of the buildings and facilities were made redundant by the new state policy. Unused buildings in rural areas rarely survive, and mission environments soon began to deteriorate where this occurred. Redundancy did not happen immediately at Healdtown, which continued to operate as a state school throughout the 1960s. In 1970 it was taken over by the education authority of the Ciskei Bantustan government, which closed it down in 1977 after students, in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising, torched the administration building. To that generation of students, Healdtown and similar mission institutions seem to have come to represent many things other than merely the injustice of a patently inferior education. The missions as institutions and environments became the cultural symbols for the entire colonial project.  

After the closure, the disused Healdtown buildings were regarded by local people as sources of building material, and they were systematically vandalized, a process which has left little more than wrecked shells in the landscape (FIG. 19).

However, the current paradigm of multiculturalism and the focus on the history of institutions such as Healdtown in the context of resistance politics and the state-sponsored vandalism that destroyed them seems to have opened the way for a reevaluation of their cultural meaning. This reevaluation is now uniting various sectors of rural society around the missions as symbols of new possibilities with old roots, and draws heavily on a powerful image of what missions once were as places and as social institutions. Their physical reconstruction is coming to stand to both local communities and politicians as a symbol for new possibilities of integrated rural development. This process of reconstruction has already begun at Healdtown. A trust was established, which raised the funds to rebuild the high school. And the school and the local community are participants in a project intended to restore the entire physical fabric of the mission so that its educational activities can be expanded. They also intend to use the mission property as a center for generating employment and providing other facilities and services, using the restored or renovated old buildings wherever possible. The community aspires to “get it back the way it was.”
TWO MISSIONS, TWO HISTORIES, TWO MEANINGS, TWO PROSPECTS

To the extent that Genadendal as cultural place represents historical processes, unlike Healdtown, there are no grand symbolic negatives to create new meanings in the context of current social transformations. What Genadendal has become is the product of a long, slow process of attrition. The missionary ethos that emanated from Genadendal was partly responsible for obliterating Khoi culture in the Western Cape in a very short space of time, during which land, language, life-style and identity were all lost. The Khoi structures that stand in the museum grounds are now unfamiliar curiosities to the people of Genadendal, exciting and unusual places for the Saturday night games of children. In destroying Khoi culture, however, Genadendal helped to invent another tradition, using resources from settler culture: European social and formal concepts, the symbolic geometry of conversion, and the building traditions and techniques of colonists. This new (two-hundred-year-old) tradition became, as it were, "naturalized," but it too is now under threat.

While the mission environment is a unique response to a specific site and history, most of the cultural raw materials from which this environment was constructed were the raw materials of the colony in general, and are no more the specific property of Genadendal than of any other place. Genadendal as cultural place cannot be associated with a definable identity other than the place-bound identity that comes from the occupation of any site. Its modern identity is even less specific than its historic identity as a Moravian community, a place of Christianized Khoi, ex-slaves, and the children of interracial marriages — one of the few places where these people could work and live in relative isolation from a hostile external world. In the mid-nineteenth century the village represented a unity of circumstance that no longer applies. Some Genadendallers are Moravians, but not all, and there are now other churches in the village. The control of the church over the social affairs of the settlement has long since gone. The physical centrality of the werf has lost none of its conceptual beauty and grace, but it is the symbol of a departed world, a piece of conserved rather than living culture. The building and settlement forms are no longer fundamental supports for economic practices and family structures or for the social structure of the village. Genadendal has lost its isolation, and its people are now integrated into wider regional economic, social and bureaucratic processes. These processes help to form the values through which they look at home, and they do not all like what they see: the expression in the environment of a background of poverty, deprivation and inferiority. History to many of them will have meaning only if its potential to promote cultural tourism can affect these underlying issues; history will survive in Genadendal only if it can be commodified.

In Healdtown, on the other hand, one cannot discuss mission and settlement as a totality. The influence of the mission is still everywhere to be seen in the domestic and agricultural landscape. But because of the different balance of power on the Eastern Frontier, missionaries could challenge but not destroy local cultural practices. Their influence was absorbed, integrated, even developed. Now, the new cultural challenge of modernity is being assimilated into the everyday, just as were the cultural resources brought by the missionaries. There are practical reasons for this, and probably symbolic reasons too. For many people in rural areas in South Africa, traditional housing technologies and forms still represent the best chance for relatively good shelter (questions of adequate water and other services excepted). It is well known that housing standards in many Cape Town slums to which rural people migrate are far worse than in the countryside — one of the reasons being that the resources to build in traditional ways are not available, and that in the economic circumstances in which they find themselves, many people are forced to construct their world from resources thrown away by others.

But it is likely that the need for continuity in social and symbolic structures is also a key reason for the perpetuation of tradition in the Healdtown villages. In the fascinating cultural conglomerates that many houses have become, the stamp of tradition can be read even in many of the most proselytizingly modern constructions. The housing system therefore appears to be doing what it always did — adapt to change, incorporate the new where appropriate, and respond to resource issues as they come up.

The Healdtown Mission center itself is a special case. It was started by a missionary close to the colonial authorities, on ground granted by, and then taken from, the Xhosa Chief Maquomo — the chief who had wanted a missionary who was "neither a fool nor a child, and who prayed no more than one day in seven," but who was unable to maintain the balance of power on his land that these desires so clearly indicate. Healdtown's early focus was the Mfengu, long considered by the Xhosa to be collaborators in the colonial project of dispossession. But Healdtown transcended this dubious history and became famous as an important national educational institution operating from a huge and impressive campus. At the conclusion of this period, however, the meaning of Healdtown as an institution was far from settled. Paternalism, missionary discipline, poor food, and even poor living conditions were all contested by a generation of students increasingly schooled in African Nationalist politics. However, the destruction of Healdtown and similar institutions in a calculated and cynical act of political vandalism has led to a rewriting of their meaning — particularly since the new national paradigm of multiculturalism has helped to defuse the debate about colonial material culture. As a result, Healdtown and similar mission institutions and environments are rapidly uniting various sectors of rural society as symbols for what was lost but can and should be regained.
REFERENCE NOTES

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3. Multiculturalism is not a term for every taste in South Africa. For example, it is only recently that it has once again become possible to use the term "culture" at all, in a context where "the preservation of cultural forms" was a euphemism for racism and the imposition of difference rather than its tolerance. Politically mobilized ethnicity in Kwa-Zulu Natal and elsewhere in the country keep the two-edged nature of identity sharply in focus, and there are many who prefer the modernist identity politics of the uniform working class or national subject to the postmodern politics of difference. For them, the policy of multiculturalism in South Africa is more the product of a flawed negotiation process than a liberating idea to be welcomed after the fall of apartheid.
5. R. Ross, "The Social and Political Theology of Western Cape Missions," unpublished manuscript in the African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, pp.4-5.
6. As is well known, Hennrhut was established in the 1720s by a group of German Protestant refugees from Catholic persecution on the farm of Count von Zindorf, where it prospered, and shortly afterwards sent out the first wave of Protestant missions. It has been suggested by Ross that the Cape form of this type of community represents the full flowering of the Moravian concept, and acted as a model for similar Christian communities throughout the world. See Ross, "Social and Political Theology," p.8.
7. Precisely because it provided this alternative, relations between missions and the settlers on the surrounding loan-place farms were strained, to say the least. Missions were widely regarded by colonists as disruptive of the labor supply and as harboring places for criminals; and in its early years Genadendal was subject to threats of force and other forms of harassment. See I. Balie, "Genadendal: Its Golden Age," paper presented to the "People, Power and Culture" conference, University of the Western Cape, August 1992, p.2.
9. The Crown land on which Genadendal was located was initially leased to the Church, but in the mid-nineteenth century this land, like many mission properties elsewhere, was converted to a trust, held initially by the missionaries on behalf of, and in the interests of, the inhabitants. In 1909, after the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act was passed, the Church retained direct control only over the mission center and its associated buildings and open spaces (commonly referred to as the "welf"), and control over the remainder of the mission lands passed to a secular body of overseers, the Opsieneraad. The land on some Moravian missions was owned entirely by the Church, and while used in similar ways to missions where there were trusts, was more subject to disputes between Church and community about land rights.
10. The term means leased land — generally used for small-scale agriculture such as growing vegetables.
11. These were the larger areas for sowing wheat or other grains.
13. In the revised rules for 1877, the building of substantial houses was strongly recommended, and occupants were required to keep houses "near, clean and in good repair." They were also required to follow the directions of the missionary entrusted with inspecting both new and existing houses. In practice this rule gave the missionaries the power to prohibit certain building forms. For instance, a certain Van Riet was expelled from the settlement in 1886 for building a round hut in his garden, although he was a baptized Christian and had been born in Genadendal.
15. Ibid., p.15.
16. These were fireproof ceilings made of sun-dried bricks and puddled clay on a bed of reeds laid on the ceiling poles or joists.
17. These were floors of clay and cow dung, polished with milk and ox blood.
18. The people in Genadendal were formerly classified by the apartheid state as "coloured." This label was widely rejected then by most to whom it was applied; but in post-apartheid South Africa there is no identity that is more contentious or publicly contended. Hardly a week goes by without a press report. See, for instance, "A Debate Coloured By Change," Cape Times, (Wednesday, December 4, 1996). On the one hand, there are those such as Des. Duncan and Alexander, both quoted in that article, who wish to see only a South African identity ("there is no such thing as a coloured culture, coloured identity"). On the other are those who wish to create a politically mobilized coloured identity. The point is that not even the latter group could claim Genadendal and similar places as the unique, privileged expression of that identity.
21. See F. Todeschini et al., "Report No.1 to the Genadendal Community Association" (November 1993), which makes extensive reference to such problems, and from which our own understanding of these issues largely comes.
22. The introduction of new stormwater culverts altered the invert levels of the natural streams, making it impossible to irrigate part of the valley garden land, which was thereby rendered unusable for cultivation. See Todeschini et al., "Report
was established, Xhosa territory was conceptually to evict the Xhosa entirely. Third was because they saw the Mfengu as a potential buffer because they shared this emancipatory vision than the Zulu kingdom under Tshaka.

would be a buffer between the Xhosa and the colonial military influence was stronger, but from colonial presence was still limited to a few missionaries and traders and to military incursions during the frontier wars. Second, there was the land between the Keiskamma and the Kei, where colonial military influence was stronger, but from which the colonial authority still lacked the military power to evict the Xhosa entirely. Third was the area between the Fish and the Keiskamma, where colonial control was strongest and which would be a buffer between the Xhosa and the colonists. Healdtown lay on the fringes of this third area.

The name means those with no possessions.

This was the massive displacement of populations caught between advancing colonists and the Zulu kingdom under Tshaka.

The colonial officials welcomed the move less because they shared this emancipatory vision than because they saw the Mfengu as a potential buffer between Xhosa and colonists and as the solution to the serious labor shortage on colonists’ farms in the Zuurveld.

Industry and attention to business are no small part of the Christian Religion, for if the inhabitants are not rescued from indolence as well as vice, they are little benefited by their instructions.” Memorial from Barnabas Shaw to Somerset (August 2, 1816), CO 3904, No.269.

Peires, House of Phalo, p.75.

See P. Mayer, Townsmen or Tribesmen (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1971).

J. Ayliff, letter to the editor of the South African Commercial Advisor and Cape Town Magazine (November 8, 1878).


Chiefs were widely regarded as strong defenders of tradition, and undermining them was intended to remove an impediment to the diffusion of civilization and Christianity.


See, for instance, the report for 1877, Cape of Good Hope Blue Book on Native Affairs (Cape Town: Saul Solomon, 1874), p.4. This also makes it clear that the agricultural potential of the land was not investigated, since many of the lots were too stony or steep for cultivation.

Grass beehives had to be rebuilt at much shorter intervals than the cone and cylinder, because it was less substantial and more vulnerable to termite attack. The cone and cylinder, even though it was longer lasting, was simpler to build. We are grateful to Tim Maggs for discussing this issue with us.

This, it has been argued, was based on center-periphery and left-right oppositions to order the symbolic language of these choices, even at the serious labor shortage on colonists’ farms in the Zuurveld.

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