

Table Mountain - South Africa's Natural National Monument

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Table mountain: a symbol and landmark

When I was an eight year old boy ... my father took me up to Kasteelspoort to initiate me in mountain climbing...After a spell of a few months I heard about the Scout Hut and decided to go and look for it. I ran away early one morning...to get to the top of Kasteelspoort. From there I somehow went wrong and ended up at the front of the mountain, very excited and in a frightful hurry as I was thinking of the 'hell-of-a-hiding' awaiting my return...Half jogging...I passed an old man sitting on a rock. He stopped me and asked me, quite rightly, why I had not greeted him. Ashamedly I apologised (sic) and greeted him...I dashed off again but he would not have it that way and again called me back. He asked my name, my school and my destination and...he started talking about the moss I was standing on, the weeds...etc...He asked me whether I knew the types of lizards and frogs still chirping...I was not impressed...as I was raring to go...As I charged away, relieved to be on my way, he again called me back...I wanted to ignore him but in our day the elderly were always to be treated with absolute respect...'Son,' he said, **'before you go, remember wherever you place your feet and footprints, it is your country – look after it...** I got home and received my hiding ...(also)... not very thrilled with the sermon on the mount...

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Yes, the man was Jan Christiaan Smuts.”¹

In the first half of the 20th Century in South Africa the presence and metaphysical presence of one man looms large on Table Mountain, almost synonymous with the mountain and its physical presence in the history of South Africa. This man was Jan Smuts. Many similar stories are told and he by the sheer weight of his presence on the mountain reveals his ‘soul’ attachment to this space in South Africa. He not only walked on the mountain, philosophized about the mountain, attended the Mountain Club of South Africa’s yearly Memorial Service at Maclear’s Beacon for approximately 30 years, was inspired by its regenerative qualities, but he called it a ‘cathedral’ and “of the soil and soul of South Africa.”²

Why? Well clearly, Table Mountain, which lies at 33°75’ S and 18°25’ E and forms the northern tip of the Cape Peninsula of the south-western tip of Africa, is a significant landmark around which one can arrange ideas of nation, colonialism and religion with reference to the history of South Africa. It is a vehicle through which one can discuss these concepts. The mountain also reflects in varying degrees of refraction how these concepts evolved and developed in the Cape Colony and later in South Africa, and how this emergent South Africa began to view, identify and project itself as a nation. To a lesser extent the mountain and its physical presence, in what became known as the mother-city of the nation, and what some have called the mother-city of Africa,³ shaped these ideas and helped the South African nation to see itself more clearly.

Table Mountain has been variously known and named: the “symbolic sentinel of South Africa”⁴, “Cape Town’s magnificent playground”⁵, the

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1. *The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1895, p. 22. Smuts’ contribution to the emerging science of botany has been largely ignored in works on him. If he did not collect and identify plants himself, he encouraged individuals, who ranked high in the South African botanical community, to do so. He also arranged scientific expeditions and organized the publication of several books all while he was either Prime Minister or in some other important political position. See also P. Beukes, *Smuts the Botanist* (Cape Town, 1996).
 2. From a 1923 address of Jan Smuts on Table Mountain as cited in D. Hey, *The Mountain* (Cape Town, 1994), p.3. Smuts had a special interest in the relationship between humans and nature and this in fact also even influenced the state’s interest on ecological issues and the conservation discourse in the first 3 decades of the 20th Century.
 3. ANON., “Cape Town – The Mother City of Africa,” *African Panorama*, 41, p.45.
 4. *Ibid.*, 1904/5, p.19.
 5. *Ibid.*, 1903, p.15.

“monarch of the Cape Peninsula”, the “grand old mountain”⁶, the “old gray father”, the “old Father Table”⁷, and “Fathermount.”⁸ The meaning that Table Mountain has come to hold in the eyes of many South Africans came through these repeated and varied descriptions that in turn produced a common shared feeling and experience. It also came through the mountain’s physical position at the bottom corner of the country and continent, and through its sentimental and psychological position in the lives of both Capetonians and South Africans. It has become a symbol of the nation as people both called it that, and as people identified with it as place and home.

An historic landmark and meeting place

According to African legend Qamata created the world. An old dragon, Nganyamba, who lives under the ocean, tried to prevent him from creating dry land. Qamata received help from Djobela against Nganyamba. Djobela, a one-eyed earth goddess, created four giants to guard north, south, east and west. After many battles the giants were defeated but before dying they asked to be turned into mountains in order for them to continue their work. Table Mountain became the ‘watcher of the south,’ Umlindi Wemingizimu.⁹

Table Mountain has long been an important landmark, not only to Africa and Africans, but also to those who have traveled around the continent by sea.

*Table Mountain as thou riseth
So abruptly from the sea,
Thou indeed to us presenteth,
Grandeur and sublimity.
Strangers from a distant clime,
Think thee lovely and divine.*

Correspondent¹⁰

From the late 15th century and onward ‘voyages of discovery,’ when countries of ‘Europe’ and what became known as the ‘western world’ sought new trade links and areas of conquest, the first sailor to spot Table

6. *Ibid*, p.39.

7. *Ibid*, 1908, p.27, and, 1931, p. 14.

8. *Ibid*, 1914, p.118.

9. <http://www.cnp.co.za/legends.htm>

10. *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1895.

Mountain from a ship on a voyage around the tip of Africa was usually rewarded with ten guilders and six bottles of wine.¹¹ This landmark was indeed then a welcome sight to many after months at sea in unknown and stormy waters. Both Table Mountain and Table Bay provided a shelter, a respite, and a refueling point and refreshment station for many travelers. The sight of the mountain elicited a wide range of emotions, from awe, relief, and inspiration through quasi-worship.¹² Table Mountain and its appendixes, Lion's Head and Devil's Peak, were well known to explorers from this inquisitive 'western' world, albeit by different names. Lion's Head was also referred to as "sugar loaf" and "King James's Mount"¹³ and Devil's Peak as "the other hill" and "the altar."¹⁴ Table Mountain was called "De Windberg."¹⁵ It became a continental landmark.

Table Mountain also became a meeting place, a place where nature, art, the sciences, and people, meet.¹⁶ And where people meet issues of colonialism, nationalism and religion are reflected and compete. Table Mountain is a place where the 'Old' World of Africa met the 'New World' of Europe, and where the West met, and meets, the East. The people of this 'old' world of Africa had long roamed the shores of the Cape and climbed the slopes of Table Mountain, while the people of the world of Europe, and from places in the East, came to view their arrival in terms of discovering a new world, all an ironic inversion of perspective. Here, while not wishing to conflate Table Mountain with Table Bay and/or Cape Town, the fact that Table Mountain was a backdrop to the World Parliament of Religions in 1999 is thus also symbolically significant. This space was used as a meeting place for a gathering of adherents from a multiplicity of religions. It was witness to this gathering and has thus become more than just a symbol for the nation-building process in South Africa, but it a symbol of a place of peace and

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11. L. DIESEL-REYNOLDS, "The Early Days of Mountaineering at the Cape," *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1926, p.65.
 12. E. BRADLOW, "Human History of Table Mountain" in D. HEY, *The Mountain* (Cape Town, 1994), pp. 5 – 7), and, W. BURCHELL, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol. 1, p. 8. Artistic depictions of Table Mountain over the years, although some rather fanciful, also capture some of these emotions (see those housed in the William Fehr collection at the Castle in Cape Town, and those at the South African Cultural Museum).
 13. *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1911, p. 115.
 14. E. BRADLOW, 'Human History of Table Mountain,' in D. Hey, *The Mountain* (Cape Town, 1994),, p. 6.
 15. *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1914, p. 29.
 16. *Ibid.*, 1906, p. 44.

power, a unifying space whereas its history has rather reflected fragmentation, division and contested space.

Continental landmark to mark of home and nation

As continued and expanded ‘exploration’ from the outside world took place, both Table Bay and Table Mountain also began to define the growing settlement (both literally¹⁷ and figuratively), which from a later white and colonial perspective was the birthplace of the nation.¹⁸ It was probably the point of entry through which most ‘Europeans,’ who entered into what is known today as South Africa, came. It defined their new ‘home.’

*‘Tis not of Alpine peaks which read and pierce the clouds...
Tis not of giant ranges o’ershadowing other lands...
‘Tis not of Hartz, the weird resort, where witches love to meet...
‘Tis not of Apennines, with loveliest venture clad...
‘Tis not of these I sing, I choose the **homelier** theme,
‘Tis grand old Table Mountain, majestic and serene.*

D.P.F¹⁹

Yet while on the one hand it became ‘home’ to ‘Europeans’ it was already home to a people who had lived in its shadow for many centuries prior to this. Prehistoric people first left their mark here more than 600 000 years ago while the Early to Middle Stone Age hunter-gatherers also left evidence of their life on the Peninsula.²⁰ Yet it was the Khoikhoi who migrated from the north with their herds of cattle and their sheep who became the first dominant settler group until the Europeans sailed into Table Bay.

Consider also:

“...both Men and Women and Children (were) dancing very oddly on the Green Grass by their Houses. They traced two (sic) and fro promiscuously, often

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17. The Mountain dictated the physical layout of the settlement, and the growing city over the centuries. See E. Bradlow, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
 18. ANON., ‘Die Bewaring van Tafelberg as Natuurlike en Historiese Gedenkwaardigheid,’ *Lantern*, 1952, p. 156. A translation here reads, “Table Mountain has become symbolic of the first white settlement from which the white community spread throughout the country.”
 19. *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1895, p. 14.
 20. <http://www.cnp.co.za/history.htm>, p. 1.

*clapping their hands and singing aloud. Their faces were sometimes to the East, sometimes to the West.”*²¹

Hromnik speculates that the worshippers in this early description of indigenous people at the Cape must have been either of Indian or mixed Indo-Kung (Bushman/San), or Quena origin. He traces an important connection between these people and argues fairly convincingly that this landmark (Lion’s Head) was the site of a temple or shrine that had its theological roots in the cosmological religions of India.²²

The Mountain also became ‘home’ to many from the East and defined their own “national’ identity. The Cape Peninsula, of which Table Mountain is an integral part (the spine), and its strategic position near the tip of the African continent, is also seen to be a bridge between East and West. This link can be seen in the variety of people who came to the shores that touch its feet. Table Mountain thus became significantly sacred to the slave and Cape Muslim culture and was looked upon as the cradle of the *Tauheed* (Unity of Allah) for these people at the Cape after their arrival from the later 17th century.²³ After the Dutch established a refreshment station at the Southern tip of Africa, as a stopover point on their route to the trade centers of the East in the mid-17th Century, significant numbers of Malays, Indians, Javanese, Bengalese, and even Arabians, were either shipped to the Cape as slaves or political exiles. They were shipped from their homelands where the Dutch, Portuguese and other European nations were competing for trade and political hegemony to the Cape, ironically to a place where the Dutch were also in the process of establishing their control.

William Beinart comments on the Dutch tobacco folk tale of the smoking contest between the Devil and Mijnheer van Hunks as being responsible for the tablecloth blowing down the front of Table Mountain. His view that this reflects the centrality of the weed and the associated guilt in the Calvinist Dutch culture²⁴ should also further reflect that this space at this corner of the continent had become sufficiently familiar to these people to now be viewed as home.

21. C. HROMNIK, ‘Exploring the possibilities of a moon/sun shrine on the slopes of Lion’s Head or a soma/suriyan koyil on !guru!goa’, *Cabo*, 5(1), pp. 26 – 35, quoting Dampier (April 1691), extract from “A New Voyage Round the World”, in *Collectanea*, 1924, p.127.

22. *Ibid.*

23. A. DAVIDS, “Oudekraal – Of saints and sinners,” *Boorhaanol*, 31(4), Nov.1996, pp. 9 –12.

24. W. BEINART, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 184/5.

A contested 'national' and sacred landscape

The physical formation and beauty of Table Mountain was also a landscape against which Mountain Club members and a wider public came to develop and express a love for South Africa and a growing South African white 'nationalism.' These sentiments, were for example echoed at the Mountain Club's annual dinner in 1910 in their toast to 'home and country.' The history of the membership of the Mountain Club, and also the Annuals it produced, reflected in varying degrees an aspect of the history of the nation at large. Distinctions were drawn to both gender and color.²⁵ Lady members were taken in as 'honorary' members, attended the annual dinner for the first time in 1899, and, although nowhere explicitly stated, it appears that the club did not admit members of color at this time. This later conclusion is supported by the fact that in the *Mountain Club Journal* of 1985.²⁶ we specifically read that the club was debating the implications of accepting people of colour into its ranks. While on the one hand the record of the Mountain Club is somewhat tarnished by this image of elitism, one must acknowledge on the other hand, that from the outset the club sought to keep the mountain 'open' and access free from restriction. They continually and consistently made their views known, and championed the rights of passage up, and public access on, Table Mountain. The point that needs to be made however is that the elite image that the club projected over the years was enhanced by its earlier Anglo-Saxon, predominantly male, and also colonial heritage.

Befitting this image, another male, of Afrikaner 'colonial heritage', Jan Smuts (then Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa and later Field Marshall within the British forces in WW II), in a speech resonating with colonial, national and 'religious' elements, referred to the mountain as a 'cathedral.' Table Mountain was the space used for his nationalistic and quasi-religious sentiments. Smut's evocation of Table Mountain, along with his memorial speech, was a real part of the development of 'South Africanism.' Saul Dubow argues that Smuts' "moderate brand of white nationalism was (also) famously expressed in terms of his scientific interests in botany and anthropology."²⁷ The occasion was the service that was held to unveil the Mountain Club's War Memorial on the mountain on 25 February 1923.

25. *Ibid.*, 1900, pp. 9 and 20, and 1906, p.8.

26. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1985, p.166.

27. S. DUBOW, "Human Origins, Race Typology and the other Raymond Dart," *African Studies*, 55(1), p. 6.

Part of the speech Smuts made is worth repeating:

“Those whose memory we honour to-day lie buried on the battlefields of the Great War, where they fell. But this is undoubtedly the place to commemorate them..., this, the highest point of Table Mountain, is the place to put the memorial. The sons of the cities are remembered and recorded in the streets and squares of their cities and by memorials placed in their churches and cathedrals. But the mountaineers deserve a loftier pedestal and a more appropriate memorial. To them the true church where they worshipped was Table Mountain. Table Mountain was their cathedral where they heard a subtler music and saw wider visions and were inspired with a loftier spirit. Here in life they breathed the great air; here in death their memory will fill the upper spaces. And it is fitting that in this cathedral of Table Mountain the lasting memorial of their great sacrifice should be placed...As Browning put it:

*Here, here's their place
Where meteors shoot,
Clouds form,
Lightenings are loosened,
Stars come and go.²⁸*

This speech is interesting from a number of points of view. For one, it appears to accentuate the image of elitism that the club somehow unwittingly projected. While the audience to receive this message were probably club members in the main, it seems inconceivable, despite the fact that Smuts was an avid mountaineer and had ‘soul’ attachments to Table Mountain, that, as Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, he could put any group of people and/or their memory on a ‘higher’ pedestal than those from the cities and towns commemorated in “their own cathedrals and churches.” All had made the supreme sacrifice. Yet this distinction between people was mirrored in all facets of South African life, and defined the nation for centuries. While one can argue that this memorial was the equivalent of the Memorial to the Unknown Soldier, and/or to those lying where they fell on the battlefields of the Great War defending the free and democratic world against tyranny, why did they deserve a loftier pedestal? It is also interesting to note that the annual memorial service which was instituted on Table Mountain from this time, was moved from the mountain for a few years because of the ‘type, number and behaviour’ (sic) and “lack of reverence” of the people it later drew.²⁹ While the Mountain Club of South Africa

28. [The Annual of the Mountain Club of South Africa, 1923, p.4ff.](#)

29. [The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa, 1954, p. 81.](#) It was, for instance, held at Bain’s Kloof in 1958.

advocated open access to Table Mountain, the memorial service it held had the appearance of a 'club' affair, and from this one can assume it was a predominantly, if not an all 'white' memorial.

Another point of interest that can be drawn from this speech is the allusion to the sacredness of Table Mountain. The mountain was sacred because it projected these "cathedral" qualities and because it had these qualities projected on it, and because of what it meant to Smuts, the 'nation' and South Africa as a whole. Smuts used the same occasion to reflect on the "religion of the mountain," and spoke of the great historic and spiritual meaning of the "Mountain." He called it the ladder of the soul, for from it came the Law and the Sermon on the Mount, and it thus was, he argued, the highest religion. It allowed humans to escape their burdens, it released the soul, and, it gave joy.³⁰ In the 1941 *Journal of the Mountain Club* Smuts talks of the "cult of the mountain (becoming) more and more a physical and spiritual necessity amid ...the wear and tear of our modern life."³¹

Others have also called the mountain a temple. Climbers and Mountain Club members made what can be termed 'pilgrimages' to this mountain, their cathedral and temple. The word "shrine" has also been used to refer to the floral beauty of the mountain, and visits to view this, as "pilgrimages."³² A history of mountain climbing in South Africa reveals the central importance of Table Mountain to the development of this form of sport and recreation in the country. The earliest annuals of the Mountain Club are full of references to 'the' mountain, and this reference, attitude and reverence for this mountain run right through the present.

*To me, the truest worship needs no other church than this,
Where Table Mountain lifts her head for Heaven's tender kiss
Up here above the stress of life and all its aching grief
A soul may hold communion with its God, and find relief.
To view the things that He has made, unmarred by man's rude hand,
It makes blind eyes to vision, and dull hearts to understand.
The rarer atmosphere effaces all that's small and mean,
Men learn to know right values up here where the world is clean.
The soul has room to stretch its wings up here, or seeking rest -
I find no place where life can shelter closer to God's breast.
D.B.³³*

30. Another South African philosopher, the late Martin Versveld, also reflected on inspiration that Table Mountain gave to people. He was speaking on the occasion of the centenary anniversary of the Mountain Club of South Africa in 1991.

31. *The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1941, p.8.

32. *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1912, p. 150.

33. *Ibid.*, 1923, p. 23.

As we have noted above Table Mountain also became significantly sacred to the slave and Cape Muslim culture and was looked upon as the cradle of the *Tauheed* (Unity of Allah) for these people at the Cape after their arrival from the later 17th century.

According to a prophecy made in c. 1750, a “circle of Islam” was to be established around the Cape.³⁴ It is now argued that the circle, which comprises the tombs of Saints and Auliyah (friends of Allah) who came to the Cape, is complete. The circle starts at the Tanu Baru on Signal Hill and moves around the mountain to the grave at Oudekraal beyond Camps Bay. It then moves around to Constantia, to Faure on the Cape Flats, and is completed at an old tomb on Robben Island.³⁵ Given the history of Robben Island, mostly used as a penitentiary for slaves and political prisoners over the past 300 years, and once also a symbol of the oppression of the Apartheid State, it is perhaps significant that the so-called circle is completed here. For many years Table Mountain, the landscape on which the circle begins, lay across the water from the cells of political prisoners and also the old tomb and now the shrine of Sayed Abdurahman Motura. The Island was once South Africa’s ‘Alcatraz’ and is now a cultural and heritage site and a symbol of “the struggle” and of freedom and liberation won.³⁶

It becomes clear that various interest groups and power brokers each ascribed their own unique ‘national’ identity to the mountain and used the mountain as a symbol of this identity. Both space and nature constitutes a significant element of humankind’s activities, but the problem lies where the meaning and significance of Table Mountain, or of any historical space, becomes easily perverted to a political, hegemonic, or symbolic course.

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34. An interesting comment attributed to Black Elk is cited in R. MICHAELSEN, “Dirt in the Court Room – Indian land Claims and American Property Rights,” in D. CHIDESTER AND E. LINENTHAL (eds), *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington, 1995), p. 59. Black Elk states: “You have noticed that everything that an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles....but the Wasichus (whites) have put us in these square boxes.”
 35. ANON., *Guide to the Kramats of the Western Cape* (Cape Town, 1996), pp. 11 - 55. Although no written documents testify to this “circle,” concrete and material evidence certainly does uphold it. It has also very clearly become embedded in Cape Muslim folklore and ideology. The “circle” also gives some idea of the passion and sacred value these people attach to the Table Mountain complex on which at least half of the most significant kramats and burial places are located.
 36. Originally a leper colony, Robben Island, situated just off Table Bay, became a maximum security prison (South Africa’s Alcatraz) to which political prisoners were sent from the 19th century through, and a little beyond, the period of Nelson Mandela’s incarceration. F. KHAN, “Symbols, shrines and sites of Struggle,” *Conserva*, 9(4), 1994, pp. 14 – 16.

Thus the words of Jan Smuts spoken in 1946, in which he said that the “mountain shrine” must be maintained as a place to which people go for strength and inspiration to tackle the difficulties with which they are confronted,³⁷ easily finds echo in the actions of the Cape Muslim people of the later 19th century. In their attempt to revere their predecessors and find their place in the cycle of life and the developing South African nation, the Cape Muslim community rose in revolt against the Government decree of January 1886.³⁸ The decree, closing the Tanu Baru - an important burial site situated on Lion’s Rump and part of the Table Mountain complex - elicited strong reaction from this Cape Muslim community. This cemetery uprising was probably the most significant act of political defiance by this community in the 19th century. A century later this sacred Muslim cemetery was once again threatened with desecration as the Cape Town City Council planned to cut a road through it. Once again the Muslim community protested against this action. These protests, along with the more recent Oudekraal³⁹ controversy of the 1990s, highlights the sacred value which this community attach(ed) to their burial grounds, many of which are located on the Table Mountain complex and which form part of the ‘holy circle’ of Islam, this once again significant for the emphasis it placed on humankind’s relation to nature and the symbolic meaning of space.

The Cape Muslim community was unhappy for the envisaged Oudekraal development would have disturbed the tranquility of the kramats (shrines) of Sheik Mubeen and Sayed Jaffer on adjoining land. Mubeen was apparently banished to the Cape in 1716 and imprisoned on Robben Island. According to popular legend he escaped and made his home in this desolate spot on the slopes of Table Mountain. The mountain refuge would also henceforth become a popular refuge for numerous runaway slaves. Runaway slaves took refuge in the caves on Table Mountain – even up to 1797. The slaves and ‘coloured’ races are reputed to have known the mountain fairly well, both as a place of refuge from justice or slave owners, or for gathering timber or herbs.⁴⁰

37. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1946, p. 88.

38. Surveyor General’s Diagram no. 205/1842 as reproduced in A. DAVIDS, *The History of the Tana Baru* (Cape Town, 1985), p. 10. See also pp. 2-10, 94 – 102. The Tanu Baru was an important burial site for Cape Muslims and was situated on Lion’s Rump (which forms part of the Table Mountain complex). The closure was promulgated in terms of sections 63 – 65 of the Public Health Act of 1883. The site is today located at the top of Longmarket Street in Cape Town.

39. Oudekraal is situated the Camps Bay side of Table Mountain.

40. L. DIESEL-REYNOLDS, “The Early Days of Mountaineering at the Cape,” *Annual of Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1926, p. 65.

A colonized ‘natural’ national landscape

This refuge humans took in the mountain, as well as the manner in which they gathered herbs and exploited Table Mountain’s other resources, reveals that the human and plant association runs deep through the history and meaning of Table Mountain: it is also evident on the mountain both through the spread of numerous invader and exotic plants, animals and humans.

The colonization of Table Mountain is perhaps best illustrated with reference firstly to its unique floral abundance and diversity. Much has been, and continues to be, made of this unique character, and, of the floral beauty and richness of Table Mountain. Table Mountain’s uniqueness is accentuated, especially **as it is compared** to the floral assets or the comparative lack thereof, of the British Isles. So the comparisons that the Cape Peninsula is the home of some 2 250 species of vascular plants, this larger than the 1 750 species of the British Isles, and that the flora of Table Mountain is made up of over 1 400 species, this richer than the whole of Tasmania over two thousand times as large, are made with much national pride, and are likewise perpetuated in almost every piece of literature that has been written on the mountain.⁴¹ It is interesting, but not surprising that a ‘British’ colonial framework is used for the comparisons that are made. Perhaps this need to compare oneself with others was also a part of establishing one’s own identity by this former ‘colonial’ outpost. In this context Table Mountain both stands for its own unique character, and, by extension, can be seen as a symbol of the nation as well. Table Mountain is portrayed as a national symbol of South Africa, an icon for a wild, untamed and natural beauty. This

41. *Report on the future control and management of Table Mountain and the Southern Peninsula Mountain Chain* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 41. This was a one-man commission of inquiry into the state of Table Mountain – Douglas Hey was the Commissioner. Hereinafter we will refer to this report as the ‘*Hey Report*’; E. J. MOLL AND B. M. CAMPBELL, *The Ecological Status of Table Mountain – a report on the present conservation status with recommendations for the future management of the National Monument* (Cape Town, 1976), p. 3, compares the plant species of the Cape Peninsula to the State of South Australia while adding that in area it is only six times larger than the Isle of Wight. Of the six floral kingdoms of the world the South Western Cape makes up one entire floral kingdom. One will struggle to find any book or article, scientific or popular, which refers to the mountain, that does not also refer to this unique character of the floral kingdom of which Table Mountain is an integral part, particularly in comparison to, the “whole of the British Isles”, or to “many of the old countries in Europe.” Comparisons are also made with reference to the 1 996 species of New Zealand, <http://www.cnp.co.za/main.html>

comparison is both a validation and extension of Benedict Anderson's thesis of *Imagined Communities* in his book by the same title. Why the comparison, and why this specific one? The Cape, which was under permanent British control from 1806 through to 1910, when it became a part of the Union of South Africa, began to both imagine itself as a unique national entity, and also looked for ways to express this. Whether a conscious strategy or not, the reference to floral uniqueness, diversity and richness, was and is still often cited and perpetuated. It is made with much national pride.⁴² Also within this context the South African Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch were established in July 1913. Kirstenbosch, situated on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, became the botanical laboratory and floral repository of the nation. It gave imperial, Commonwealth, and international stature to Table Mountain and the nation. It also became a living display featuring 4 700 of the estimated 20 000 species of indigenous South African flora, and close to 50 percent of the Peninsula's floral wealth.⁴³

F.H.S. McGibbon talks of "pilgrimages made to her shrine on top of Table Mountain during the flowering season" and even uses the word "stately" with reference to certain plants. Although the word 'stately' is used to refer to the appearance and height of the fern plant in this particular article and context - and one wonders to what extent this is merely descriptive and picturesque language that is used - it does lend itself rather well to the argument that the flora of the mountain assumed a 'national stately' character.⁴⁴ The Protea for one is presented as a symbol of South Africa, the national flower.

Carl Thunberg's climbs up Table Mountain in 1770 and 1779 were for "botanical purposes". Thunberg found the Red Disa flowering, and for the first and last time the Blue Disa. The Blue Disa was situated in an almost inaccessible place and was soon to be extinct. The Mountain Club also expressed concern in 1911 with the vulgarization of the mountain and the spoilation of its floral beauties.⁴⁵ A reflection on the article, *The Botany of Table Mountain* (1869), by W. Saxton in the 1912 *Annual of the Mountain Club*, drew specific attention to the fact that many changes had occurred to the flora of the mountain over the 40 years that had then passed. The case for the preservation of the wild flowers of the mountain was underlined in the

42. E. STRUBEN, "A Garden of Promise on Table Mountain Side", *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, 12, 1926, p.11.

43. <http://www.places.co.za/html/kirstenbosch.html>, p. 1.

44. *The Mountain Club Annual, 1912*, pp. 44, 146, 150/51.

45. *Ibid.*, 1911, p. 83.

number of articles written on the subject from the 1905 Act, onward. A number of articles were also written in the *Annuals of the Mountain Club*.⁴⁶ Under the Wild Flowers Protection Act, No. 16 of 1905, and its amendment of 1908, it was illegal to pick or ‘gather’ any wild flowers (included were bulbs, roots and ferns) on any Crown, Municipal, and/or otherwise public land. It also later became illegal to export any wildflowers.

A history of the flora of the mountain also tells the story of the rivalry and co-existence that formed between the old and the new, the indigenous and the exotic, the colonized and the colonizers. Although mountains can and do act as barriers to the migration of plants, they do also act as channels of communication and thus assist this migration.⁴⁷ While there were, and are, plants in the Cape that are closely related to species of plants occurring in Europe and in Australia, the point that needs to be made at this juncture is that Table Mountain was, and is to a large extent, an ecological unit of its own, and, that the exotic species which took root on this mountain by whatever means, quickly spread throughout the whole unit. Mountains are regions of constant disturbance, human and natural, and can be colonized fairly easily due to exposed patches of ground.

Oak and fir tree plants were brought to the Cape from Holland from 1655 onward. When Governor Simon Van der Stel’s tree-planting program began in 1689 with the introduction of some 16 000 Oak trees in some of⁽⁴⁸⁾ the remaining indigenous forest areas, this began a process by which much of the mountain became covered with these and other self-sown pest plants and by plantations.⁴⁹ These trees were introduced for numerous reasons - for timber to repair ships and for other maintenance and building ventures, for firewood, and for wind breaks and drift sand reclamation purposes. It soon became apparent that the trees on Table Mountain were being exploited for timber and firewood and that this was having a detrimental effect on the face of the mountain. The Cape authorities then issued an ordinance in 1687 to try and curb the firing of the ‘veld’.

46. *Ibid.*, 1916, pp. 29-31.

47. R. COMPTON, ‘*Mountains and their vegetation,*’ in *The Mountain Club Annual*, 1939, p.14.

48. R. COWLING, “The Ecological Status of the Understorey Communities of Pine Forests on Table Mountain,” in E. J. MOLL AND B. M. CAMPBELL, *The Ecological Status of Table Mountain – appendix to a report on the present conservation status with recommendations for the future management of the National Monument,*” p. 3.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Ironically however it was from the 1870s that the pines, which were planted on Table Mountain, exacerbated the problem which humans had now in ignorant benevolence brought to the mountain.⁵⁰ The trees were sown ostensibly to clothe the barren slopes and to act as a check to soil erosion and water run-off which had increasingly altered the 'natural' state of the mountain over two the previous centuries. Most of the other cluster pine planting and afforestation took place from 1892 onward when a plantation was established at Tokai. Other plantations were laid on the slopes of the mountain above Newlands and the Government Forestry Department undertook the original afforestation of the Back Table early this century. An indication of the effect the liberal scattering of seeds was to have can be deduced from the fact that while 5 lbs. of seed is today regarded as sufficient, 60 lbs. of seed per acre was scattered then.

Members of the Mountain Club of South Africa also aided the process of colonization by liberally scattering seeds wherever they wandered on the mountain; benevolently unaware of the long-term damage they were sowing.⁵¹ The planting of trees on Table Mountain and the adjoining Devil's Peak in the late 19th century was a notorious occurrence - - mainly from later 20th century ecological hindsight - - in the history of Table Mountain, and continues to affect the mountain and its management to this day. Tree planting was both planned and took place as has been noted above, indiscriminately. At the time it was stated that those who did this were doing much good in "getting hardy seeds from other countries and sowing them in likely spots on the mountain during their rambles."⁵² The mountain in this aspect again reflected this 'international' and imperial attitude of the time, that any tree planting was beneficial, and its later human managers were going to have to deal with the effects of this *Ecological Imperialism* that Alfred Crosby has written so well about. Nonetheless it was realized at this time that the hakea that was introduced from Australia was "unprofitable", and took up too many acres of good ground on the slopes of the mountain. The forest plantations introduced to Table Mountain and Devil's Peak at the turn of the century by forester Jarman spread quickly, and by 1931 they had reached either side of the ramparts of the rocky buttresses leading to the Gorge (Platteklip) and "had absorbed portions of the original home of indigenous bush and flora."⁵³ In 1936 measures were taken to control the spread of cluster-pine on the mountain, no easy task as these

50. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p.5.

51. *The Mountain Club Annual, 1906*, p. 14.

52. *Ibid.*, p.15.

53. L. MANSERGH, "Retrospections from the Mountain-top" in *The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1931, p.11.

efforts have continued through the present. The main object of the afforestation, according to the Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry in 1935, was to protect the mountain slopes against ever-recurring fires and the resultant erosion that took place. The invasion of the indigenous flora and fauna on Table Mountain by exotic species paralleled the human presence at the Cape and in South Africa. The effects of the colonization of this part of the African continent, by the Dutch through the English through this period, were mirrored in the ecology of Table Mountain. It is thus somewhat ironic though that it was the descendants of the colonizers who later first sought to protect the ‘indigenous’ flora and fauna. Maybe their subconscious goal of accentuating the uniqueness of the ‘indigenous’ South Africa was to reinforce and legitimize their position in the evolving nation. This all though begs the larger national political, social and ecological questions, of who, or what, is indigenous, and when is a settler a settler, or for that matter when does an invader become indigenous?

Accordingly the Secretary of Forestry stated in his 1935 report:

*“The objection against trees here is largely due to the fact that the cluster pine ... has spread along the face of the mountain, and on top of it, to an extent certainly not contemplated originally, and ... not desired now. The Minister (of Agriculture and Forestry) has stated it to be Government policy to maintain Table Mountain in its **natural** state as is reasonably possible to do so. Accordingly a scheme has been devised ... for removing cluster pine that has encroached on the veld ... where it threatens ... desirable aspects of the natural flora.”⁵⁴*

In 1951, C.A. Lückhoff in his book, *Table Mountain, Our National Heritage after Three Hundred Years* made a plea for the authorities to curb the spread of alien vegetation, veld fires and building encroachment on the mountain. In *On Protecting Table Mountain*, Lückhoff talks of the strangeness of protecting Table Mountain, a landscape that has existed for aeons of time and has stood at the gateway to Africa. He argues that it is the activities of a “modern, sophisticated and aggressive society” that desecrate and despoil the mountain. He claims that South Africa woke up late to the threats to Table Mountain, like the building encroachment and the exotic vegetation. Yet despite the mountain having “physical integrity” it was still threatened as the great fires of 1935 and 1950 proved. The major threats were the cluster pine and prolific Australian exotics – the hakea, wattles and albizzia. Burning is useless as the seeds are extremely fire resistant and re-growth occurs after cutting and slashing, and seeds could remain viable in the soil for as long as 50 years. There are thus so many human and natural forces working against the survival of the renowned Cape flora.

54. As quoted in the *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), pp. 13 – 15.

Table Mountain and the preservation and management of national monuments and historical phenomena

In 1904 the first organization dedicated to conservation in this country, The South African National Society, was formed. The Society concerned itself with both natural and cultural conservation matters, which amongst other things included wild birds, wild flowers and the establishment of a national botanical garden. The Bushmen's Relics Protection Act of 1911 was the first legislation concerned with the conservation of South Africa's cultural heritage, and made it a penalty to damage or destroy rock art and archaeological sites and relics. Then in 1923 the Natural and Historical Monuments Act was promulgated for the purpose of protecting monuments in the country. The broad definition applied to "monuments" expressed the holistic and inclusive nature of the concept. Land having distinctive or beautiful scenery, interesting or beautiful flora or fauna, and objects whether natural or constructed by humans, all, amongst other objects of aesthetic, historical or scientific value, fell within the definition of this definition and legislation. In terms of this legislation the Commission for the Preservation of the Natural and Historical Monuments of the Union was set up as the first official body responsible for preserving South Africa's heritage. In 1934 this Historical Monuments Commission was given increased powers in terms of the Natural and Historical Monuments, Relics and Antiques Act. Given this background Table Mountain was one of 300 monuments proclaimed over the following 35 years while today there are some 4000-odd national monuments in South Africa.⁵⁵

The words of Jan Christiaan Smuts are perhaps again appropriate, although rich in irony and ambiguity:

*"We, as a nation, valuing our **unique heritage**, should not allow it (Table Mountain) to be spoiled and despoiled, and should look upon it as among its most **sacred possessions**, part not only **of the soil**, but **the soul of South Africa**. For centuries to come, while civilization lasts on this sub-continent, **this national monument should be maintained** in all its **natural beauty** and **unique setting**. It should be **symbolic of our civilization** itself, and it should be **our proud tradition** to defend it to the limit **against all forces of man or nature** to disfigure it."⁵⁶*

How was this to be achieved? The 1951 Van Zyl Commission echoed these sentiments and called for the "restoration of the mountain to its natural state

55. <http://www.nationalmonuments.co.za/d.htm>, pp. 1 – 4.

56. Jan Smuts in a speech on Table Mountain as cited in D. HEY, *The Mountain* (Cape Town, 1994), p. 3. My bold for emphasis.

of beauty...”⁵⁷ This commission also recommended the establishment of a coordinating and advisory body, the Table Mountain Preservation Board, to achieve these goals. Subsequently the mountain was proclaimed a National Monument in 1958, 35 years after Smuts referred to it as such.⁵⁸ In 1959 the Scientific Advisory Council for National Parks and Nature Reserves called for the proclamation of Table Mountain as a Nature Reserve. This ultimately saw the establishment of the Table Mountain Nature Reserve in November 1963.⁵⁹ Although laudatory from a conservation point of view the unfortunate situation was created whereby two bodies with very similar objectives, the Table Mountain Preservation Board and the Table Mountain Nature Reserve Advisory Board, operating under different legislation, operated to manage and control the same area.⁶⁰

In the 1970s the Mountain Club of South Africa lamented the rapid deterioration of Table Mountain.⁶¹ While members of the Mountain Club certainly did more than their fair share of alien eradication over the years,⁽⁶²⁾ attention was now more frequently being drawn to the “old problems of fire and alien vegetation,” and to “new problems” resultant from the proliferation of Himalayan tahr, the behavior of baboons,⁽⁶³⁾ and the erosion caused by trail bikes and littering.⁶⁴ The face of the mountain was literally showing both the ravages of time and human impact. The Moll and Campbell, and the Moll and McLachlan reports on the ecological status of Table Mountain (1976), and on the network of pathways and the recreational use of the mountain (1977) respectively, were important for the renewed scientific focus they gave to the plight and management of the mountain.

Nonetheless the management strategies did not receive a consensus of opinion. One problem for example was the call for the culling of the

57. *Ibid.*, p. 17. This report period coincides with many other ecological and conservation measures nation-wide.

58. The South African Wildlife Society first proposed the idea of declaring Table Mountain a national park in 1929.

59. This followed a previous proclamation where the mountain was declared a Nature Reserve for all Birds and Plants, and for game for 3 years, by the Administrator of the Cape Province in 1931. *Journal of Mountain Club of South Africa*, 1931, p. 129). This was extended to include certain areas of Noordhoek and Simonstown in 1932.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

61. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 77, 1974, pp. 1 – 4.

62. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, 77, 1974. The Club had many work meets on the mountain, cutting down many thousands of pines and clearing alien vegetation with their chain saws, ropes, brush cutters, etc

63. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 73

64. *Ibid.*, p.49.

Himalayan tahr on the mountain. At the beginning of the 20th century various indigenous and alien animals were released on the Groote Schuur Estate on the slopes of the mountain. The one species that was to cause one of the biggest problems would be the Himalayan tahr. In the 1970s the Mountain Club of South Africa took a census of the number of tahr and found that they had increased to 600. The control program introduced in 1976 subsequently reduced the number to 200 by 1978.⁶⁵ Alien flora (more than 25 species)⁶⁶ and fauna have also come to dominate areas of Table Mountain over the years, and this colonization of the mountain, along with the denudation of its natural flora and fauna, has changed the face of the landscape.⁶⁷ These changes, along with the drastically diminishing forests, the 5 large dams built, the roads that have been constructed, the houses, the lookouts and huts erected, and the cable-way built and opened in 1929, enhances the opinion that the mountain is viewed as being ‘artificially natural.’⁶⁸ Thus the irony of the situation is that a National Monument is managed by humans to look natural. It is also estimated that noxious exotic plants have spread over 430 000 hectares of the Cape Fynbos and that perhaps several hundred indigenous plants are at, or near, extinction.⁶⁹ A survey of the mountain ascertained that some 25% of the mountain was covered by undesirable vegetation by 1976.⁷⁰ Over the past 30 plus years concerted efforts have been made by various groups of concerned citizens to rid Table Mountain of this foreign scourge and to restore the mountain to its ‘former natural and indigenous state.’ The call by some for the reintroduction of leopards which once roamed the slopes of the mountain was again a lamentation of the way in which the mountain had been colonized and a somewhat romantic quest to restore the mountain to its former wild state.⁷¹ ‘Naturally’ human

65. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 67.

66. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p.61.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

68. D. MCLACHLAN AND E.J. MOLL, *A Path and Recreation Report of Table Mountain*, December 1977, p.3.

69. R. COWLING, “The Ecological Status of the Understorey Communities of Pine Forests on Table Mountain,” in E. J. MOLL AND B. M. CAMPBELL, *The Ecological Status of Table Mountain – appendix to a report on the present conservation status with recommendations for the future management of the National Monument* (Cape Town, 1976), p. 32.

70. E. J. MOLL AND B. M. CAMPBELL, *The Ecological Status of Table Mountain – a report on the present conservation status with recommendations for the future management of the National Monument*, p. vi. The survey of Table Mountain was undertaken by various staff members and students of the Botany Department at the University of Cape Town and was under the overall supervision of Dr. E.J. Moll.

71. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p. 71.

encroachment on and surrounding the mountain has set severe limitations on restocking the mountain with certain animals.

Another significant problem that has faced those who have sought to manage the Table Mountain natural landscape has been the problem of multiple-ownership and the control of various areas of the mountain. The mountain complex has been variously controlled by the state through the Departments of Forestry, Public Works, Defence, and the trustees of the National Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch. Other areas of the mountain have come under the control of the Municipality of Cape Town, the Divisional Council of the Cape and a number of private owners.⁷² Consequently the *Hey* and subsequent reports⁷³ called for the appointment of a single authority to have final jurisdiction over all land above the 152m contour line, right from Signal Hill to the southern tip of Cape Point. Many twists and turns would be taken and much public and professional debate would be held en route to the establishment of such a body. What was emphasized was the importance to acquire all areas required for the preservation of the flora and fauna and other unique resources in the area. The Moll and Campbell paper on the *Ecological Status of Table Mountain* of March 1976 expressed the hope that with a “scientifically planned corrective management” strategy the natural vegetation could be restored to what it was in c. 1600.⁷⁴

The human managers of Table Mountain have sought to accentuate the natural and indigenous image of the mountain. As most visitors come primarily to admire the view from the top the “natural appearance of the area is important in supplying the necessary atmosphere of being on top of a ‘wild African mountain’”⁷⁵ and thus it was being managed to look both unmanaged and natural. The “natural appearance,” “natural systems,” “natural area,” and “natural state” of the mountain were repeatedly portrayed as its most valuable assets.⁷⁶ The tiny Cape kingdom, of which Table Mountain forms an integral part, is the richest of the six floristic kingdoms of the world. This kingdom contains over 8500 species, three-quarters of which are endemic to this region. This “priceless heritage” has featured

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 9 – 11.

73. *Hey Report* (Cape Town, 1978), p.33.

74. E. J. MOLL AND B. M. CAMPBELL, *The Ecological Status of Table Mountain – a report on the present conservation status with recommendations for the future management of the National Monument*, p. vi.

75. C.H. PETERSON, “The Vegetation of the western table of Table Mountain,” *Veld and Flora*, June 1983, pp. 50 – 51.

76. H J. VAN DER HOVEN, “A master plan for the Western Table, Table Mountain,” *The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, pp. 24 – 27.

prominently in all management plans and in the portrayal and presentation of the mountain as one of the nation's premier tourist attractions.⁷⁷

Because Table Mountain is also a recreational asset to the city of Cape Town and the South African nation and an open access area with a growing tourist market, the managers of this National Monument have the added tension of balancing these issues with preserving the monument as a historical phenomenon. The problem here of course is that Table Mountain is also a natural phenomenon and it is thus managed to appear as it appeared when it was first really taken note of and written about. The irony of course is that it is managed by humans to look natural. Another problem would be that the mountain is a natural ecosystem and these systems are not static but constantly changing and evolving to their climatic states – therefore to try and hold an ecosystem to an image of the past as humans perceived it to be is problematic. In fact humans are also part of the equation of an ecosystem. These are some of the problems facing those who manage Table Mountain as an historic phenomenon. Yet from a distance Table Mountain looks much the same today as it looked some 400 to 500 odd years ago. Although as one approaches the mountain and compares it to pictures, sketches and paintings of this past one notices that the face has constantly changed, with erosion being evident at times and the mountain slopes either fully or less covered with trees and other vegetation.

National monuments represent the country's national heritage as well as reflecting and propagating its value systems, but they are also very consciously designed to attract domestic and international tourists.⁷⁸ Our National Monuments thus serve the dual function of disseminating symbolic values to both the local population and a local and foreign tourist market. Table Mountain is no exception. It is a truly remarkable natural, scenic, historical, cultural and recreational asset locally, nationally and internationally.

Table Mountain, a National Monument and now, since 1998, managed by the National Parks Service as part of the greater Cape Peninsular National Park is a visual representation of South Africa's heritage. It tells us a story about itself and its own past and a story of South Africa. Its bold appearance, its unique flora and fauna, its mystique, its iconic and symbolic significance, its inspirational and sacred value...are all part of that story.

77. S. STEYTLER AND H. NIEUWMEYER, "The Fairest Cape – how much do we care?" *The Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, pp.18 – 20.

78. S. MARSCHALL, "Post-apartheid monuments – the visual representation of heritage," Abstract to paper presented at the South African Historical Association Conference, RAU, 24 – 26 June, 2002.

Smuts called it *part of the soil*, and *part of the soul* of South Africa. One must trust that those who visit it and those who are now its custodians will treat it as such and will recognize this connection and balance.

Opsomming

Tafelberg – Suid-Afrika se natuurlike nasionale monument

Die herkenbare en unieke geografiese eienskappe van berge het dikwels daartoe gelei dat dit plekke was waar mense geworstel het met vrae oor die betekenis van die natuur, die essensie van geloof, die uitdrukking van nasionalisme en groepsidentiteit. Hoewel berge plekke is waar betekenis aan belangrike aspekte gegee word, is dit ook waar mense dikwels die fisiese eienskappe van berge verander. Tafelberg is ook geen uitsondering nie. In die artikel word kwessies soos kolonialisme, nasionalisme en geloof soos weerspieël in die geskiedenis van Tafelberg ondersoek. Daar sal ook aangetoon word dat mense die nasionale en “natuurlike” bate “herskep” het. Dit ondersoek die dialektië tussen die wyses waarop dit bestuur is en die wyse waarop die berg homself projekteer. Tafelberg is as Nasionale Monument verklaar in 1958 en gedurende die afgelope 50 jaar is dit ook as Nasionale Reserwaat en Nasionale Park verklaar. Dit is deel van die natuurlike en nasionale erfenis van Suid-Afrika en diegene wat dit bestuur probeer getrou om dit as sodanig voor te stel.