



Walking through the stretch of former mining land along the Wemmer Pan road, one encounters evidence of several kinds of worship and rituals, from Sangomas and Nyangas using orange peel and eggs to evidence of fires and areas demarcated with stones.

The uniform of the John Masowe churches consists of white gowns for both men and women. They worship without shoes, belts, watches and cell phones on them as this is viewed as interfering with the descending of the Holy Spirit. The many different Masowe groups are mostly populated by Zimbabwean migrants although often times, other nationalities do come to seek help from the prophets. A place of worship cannot simply be chosen out of the available land, the exact location needs to be revealed by the Holy Spirit through prophets. After the Holy Spirit has revealed an appropriate place, the performance of sacralization rituals involves the marking and spiritual separation of the sacred from profane land. There is a general belief among respondents that the bush is an abode of evil spirits that the groups need to get rid of. Usually the first step involves a night vigil and strong prayer to spiritually claim and take over the place from contrary spirits. As one member said: "If there is something wrong in this place, we will definitely know through the spirit (it will be revealed to the prophets). We pray and sprinkle water around to cleanse the place."

Afterwards, it is the process of cleaning the place by removing dirt. One cannot start by removing the dirt before they spiritually possess the space by ritually chasing the former evil dwellers. The preparation for this kind of spiritual encounter requires days of fasting, retreat and abstinence from sexual activities and other daily concerns of life prior to the performance of the ritual. This step is followed by digging a hole and placing salt within it. Besides salt, sometimes sheep's tail can also be added in the hole and covered with soil. Traditionally the Nguni of southern Africa use sheep tails as amulets to strengthen their homes in order to withstand witchcraft attacks. After this ritual, a circle of hot ashes is drawn within the limit of cleared space; three prophets gather around it with a bucket of water in the middle. One mixes coarse salt in the water and then they start to pray over the water, simultaneously sprinkling it around.

In an interview with a member of one of the Masowe churches worshipping on the tailings dams around the site of the Village Main Mine, we were told that a site is marked at each corner with a few small stones. Mary (not her real name) called the stones 'preventers', hardly noticeable to the passer-by. Across the road more obvious markings, such as stones painted white and even a large cross made of stones are visible. Mary had come to Johannesburg from Bulawayo in 2008, when the economy in Zimbabwe had collapsed. She described how her conversion to the Masowe church was defined by the healing of an illness. She described how the prophet had put a stone inside the water in a plastic bottle and that when she drank the water her 'pain' had passed out of her.

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*Village Main Mine, erf 96/7, The Mine was established in 1896, and became one of the first Deep Levels Mines along the Witwatersrand Gold Reef*