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INVESTIGATING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A HERITAGE SITE: THE CASE OF WITSIES CAVE IN QWA QWA

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SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS IN HERTIAGE STUDIES

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SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR CYNTHIA KROS

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DECLARATION

I declare that **INVESTIGATING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A HERITAGE SITE: THE CASE OF WITSIES CAVE IN QWA QWA** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged accordingly.

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Makashane Ntlhabo Date

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There are also a number of people I met and made friends through my study. These are the people whom I proudly call living libraries of our intangible heritage, Ntate Moses Moloi, Ntate Lesia Moloi, Ntate Lentshanyana Moloi, Ntate Tsibela, Ntate Morabe, Ntate Mathobisa and Mme Mathuto Moloi, your contribution is highly appreciated.

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To my late mother I would like to say – "Mme I am sure you are proud where you are, it has always been your wish to see me amongst the stars thank you for your spiritual support, you always stood by me, and to my three roses Mampolokeng, Mpolokeng and Relebohile this is for you girls."

And above all I would like to thank our supreme power – *Tlatlamatjholo* for making everything possible – Thank you Lord.

PREFACE

On the Maluti Mountains at the borders of Lesotho and South Africa, in Monontsha Village lies a horse shoe shaped cavern about 107m long, 35m deep and approximately 121m high with boulders at the entrance (Semela 2006:103). The cavern is known among the Basotho as *Lehaha la Oetsi* (Oetsi's Cavern) or Witsie's Cave after the contact between the Boers and the Basotho.

If caves could speak, Witsie's Cave is one of those that would come forward and tell its own story. The study of investigating Witsies Cave as a Heritage site revealed even more complex issues. Whether cattle were stolen by the Makholokoe from the Boers or the Makholokoe were repossessing the cattle lent to the Boers through mafisa system (a system of loaning cattle to the poor) and whether there are still souls trapped in a cave or not are still mysteries.

People who were involved in the events of the cave back then have parted this world. An attempt was made to try and find people who might have heard the stories of Witsie's Cave and can be the ambassadors of the Cave - people who can speak for the cave.

In 1995 the Heritage Sub-committee of Arts and Culture Task Group (which formed part of a team that worked on policy for arts culture and heritage) was mandated by the then Minister of Arts, Culture Science and Technology Dr Ben Ngubane to, amongst other things, ensure that historical and cultural collections, resources and sites fully reflect the many components of our cultural heritage and in particular, neglected and suppressed aspects of our people's culture that had to be conserved. This in a way, called for a new meaning and or interpretation of heritage. It opened doors to other aspects of heritage such as songs, dance, folklore and beliefs. Sites such as caves deemed as places that added spiritual, social, cultural or social value to a community also came to be revealed.

These efforts were made as a way of trying to answer to a call made by the National Heritage Act 19 1999. Provision has been made in section 3 subsection 2 (b) to accommodate those places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage. Currently many people are coming forward with claims using the Act to support them. This raises a number of quite complex issues around the recognition, particularly of sacred sites and other kinds of significant landscapes. Witsie's Cave is one of these sacred sites that are crying to be recognized along site monuments of the past eras. It happened with caves such as the Makapan's Cave that are world renowned.

This research report hopes to make a contribution to the transformation of heritage landscapes with a hope that some scholars will conduct further research that will restore the pride of our heritage, instill nation- building and the spirit of *ubuntu*. It is the wish of the researcher to one day see Witsie's Cave listed as one of the heritage sites in South Africa.

Terms;

Oetsi – Witsie

Makholokoe – A group of people that was led by Oetsi

Lekholokoe - Singular for Makholokoe

Difaqane – Times of troubles in Southern Africa

Mafisa – A system of loaning cattle from the rich to the poor

Lobola – Brideprice

Muti – Medicine

Morena – Chief