

Chapter 12

Archaeology Dreaming: Postapartheid Urban Imaginaries and the Remains of the Prestwich Street Dead¹

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“All that is buried is not dead”

– Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

Ten years and more after the political transition of 1994 South African archaeologists found themselves at the center of a divisive and bitterly contested public dispute.² At stake was the fate of an early colonial burial site in Prestwich Street, Green Point, a rapidly gentrifying district of Cape Town close to the Waterfront, the city’s glitzy international zone. The Prestwich Street exhumation has been a moment of truth for South African archaeology. It is also – in my telling – a story of failure and of lost opportunities. That is, a failure in a quite specific sense on the part of the heritage managers in the newly reconstituted South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), and in a general sense on the part of the discipline of archaeology in South Africa.

Archaeologists generally defended the exhumations in the name of a notion of instrumentalist science, distanced from broader issues of culture and society. They tended to be resentful of public intrusion into what they construed as a contractual relation with the developer, and a technical exercise in recovering the “facts in the

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ground.” For their part, SAHRA’s heritage managers showed little political will to take on entrenched interests in the city, or creativity in acknowledging the trauma of both the deep and more recent pasts. Instead they opted for a narrow, and at times questionable, interpretation of the heritage legislation. Both archaeologists and key SAHRA officials acted with a concerted, at times bewildering disregard for broader discourses of restitution and reconciliation, as though archaeology takes place outside of history, or as though the unrequited yearnings and energies of the past are an inconvenience to heritage managers that must be neutralized, instead of being the very stuff and substance of the making of the new nation.

Writing in a special issue of the journal *Public Culture* focused on Johannesburg, Achille Mbembe says: “Our sense of urban totality has been fractured – hence the juxtaposition of different images, memories of a past rejected or fantasized. Specific historical objects are ripped out of their context even as the state busily tries to memorialize and museumize, to build new monuments and historic landscapes that are supposed to bring together different fragments of the nation” (Mbembe 2004: 404). According to Svetlana Boym: “In cities in transition the porosity is particularly visible; it turns the whole city into an experimental art exhibit, a place of continuous improvisations ...” (Boym 2001: 77). Porosity, continuous improvisation, fractured urban experience, objects ripped from their contexts, fragments of the nation, the unquiet and resurfaced dead, a useful set of notions to take with us as we consider the case of the Prestwich Street dead.

Time-Line Prestwich Street

Green Point is a part of Cape Town strategically located between the central business district and the new waterfront development at Cape Town’s harbor. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it lay outside the formal boundaries of the settlement, a marginal zone which was the site of the gallows and place of torture, situated on a prominent sand dune. It was also the site of a number of graveyards, including the graveyards of the Dutch Reformed Church and the military, and of numerous undocumented, informal burials. Those buried outside the official burial grounds would have made up a cross section of the underclasses of colonial Cape Town: slaves, free-blacks, artisans, fishermen, sailors, maids, washerwomen and their children, as well as executed criminals, suicide deaths, paupers, and unidentified victims of shipwrecks (Hart 2003). In the 1820s, Green Point was subdivided and sold as real estate, in time becoming part of the densely built urban core. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, black and colored residents of Green Point were forcibly removed, and relocated to the bleak townships of the Cape Flats, a series of events which have entered popular imagination via the fate of the residents of District Six, on the other side of the city. Green Point is currently undergoing a process of rapid gentrification, driven by escalating property prices. For many former residents, this means that even as the political space has opened up in which they might reacquire property in the city center, so they face new forms of economic exclusion.

In mid-May 2003, in the course of construction activities at a city block in Green Point bordered by Prestwich Street, human bones were discovered. The developer, Ari Estathiou of Styleprops Ltd., notified the SAHRA in accordance with the newly passed National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999), and construction was halted. Also in terms of the Act, the developer appointed the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO), a University of Cape Town affiliated contract archaeology unit to do the archaeological investigation. The ACO applied for and was issued a permit by SAHRA for a “rescue exhumation of human remains” (SAHRA 2003b). This was not the first such exhumation in Green Point. In 1994, the ACO had been involved in the excavation of an unmarked burial site in Cobern Street, a short distance away (Cox 1999). The Act provides for a 60-day notification period and for a public consultation process. Antonia Malan, a UCT-based historical archaeologist, was contracted by the ACO to run the public consultation process, which she did in the name of the Cultural Sites and Resources Forum (CSRFB), an advocacy organization with a track record of involvement in heritage issues. The SAHRA is the national statutory body in charge of the protection and management of heritage resources in South Africa, and replaces the apartheid-era National Monuments Council.

On the 11 June, exhumation of the bodies began. Seven weeks later, on the 29 July, a public meeting was held at St Stephen’s Church in central Cape Town. At this point, the remains of approximately 500 individuals had been exhumed. Most bodies were shallowly buried without grave markers or coffins. Earlier burials were intercut by later ones. The site was fenced with wire-link fencing and was open to public view. Estimates of the total number of bodies stood at 1,000 (up from an initial estimate of 200), on the 1,200 m² site. In the mean time, a Special Focus Reference Group (SFRG) had been set up, mainly of UCT-based archaeologists and human biologists. Malan and the SFRG framed the agenda for the public meeting in terms of consultations regarding the relocation of the bodies and the memorialization of the site. Judith Sealy, an archaeologist on the SFRG, presented a proposal which she envisaged reinterment of the bodies “in individual caskets, in a crypt or mausoleum.” This would be a place where “one could honor the dead” while allowing “access to the skeletons for careful, respectful, scientific study, by bona fide researchers” (Sealy 2003).

The public response was angry. The minutes of the first public meeting record “[a] general feeling of dissatisfaction, disquiet and disrespect” (Malan 2003). Questions were asked as to why the demolition permit had been approved without the requirement of an archaeological survey, why the exhumations had continued through the 60-day notification period, and why the first public meeting had come so late in the process. Opposition to the exhumations came from several quarters: community leaders, many of whom had been active in the struggle against apartheid; Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders; academics from the historically black University of the Western Cape (UWC); heritage-sector NGOs; and Khoisan representatives. Zuleiga Worth, who identifies herself as a Muslim Capetonian, said “I went to school at Prestwich Street Primary School. We grew up with haunted places; we lived on haunted ground. We knew there were burial grounds there.” “My question to the City is, how did this happen?” (Malan 2003: 5) Joe Marx said: “These bones

are not unknown, they're known. These people were descendants of people in the Cape." (Malan 2003: 6) Zenzile Khoisan said: "... these archaeologists, all they want to do is to dust off the bones and check them out with their scientific tests and to put them in the cupboard!" Storming out of the hall he shouted: "Stop robbing graves! Stop robbing graves!" (Malan 2003: 6).

On 1 August 2003, SAHRA announced an "interim cessation" of archaeological activity on the site until 18 August, to allow for a wider process of public consultation. This was later extended to 31 August. On 16 August, the CSRF convened a second public meeting. It also collected submissions by telephone, e-mail and fax as part of its mandate of public consultation. Just over 100 submissions were collected. Mavis Smallberg from Robben Island Museum said "my strong suggestion is to cover up the graves ... Apart [from] the recently renamed Slave Lodge, there is no other public space that respectfully marks or memorializes the presence of slaves and the poor in Cape Town society ... Only scientists are going to benefit from picking over these bones – of what purpose and use is it to the various communities to which the dead belong to know what they ate 150 years ago or where they came from?" (Smallberg 2003). Imam Davids wrote on behalf of the Retreat Muslim Forum to say "[we] view the work and approach of the CSRF, based at UCT, with dismay ..." (Davids 2003).

On the other side, there was a sharp reaction against those who had been critical of the process, and against the growing antiexhumation lobby. A comment by the UCT-based human biologist, Alan Morris, is logged as follows: "Members of public/prominent academics (especially UWC) suggested development stop and site is made into memorial. They have totally misjudged the reason for having a public process. NOT opportunity to control development of the city, but IS opportunity to join process of memorialisation ... don't let pseudo-politicians benefit at [our expense]" (Malan 2003: 4).

On 9 August, the synod of the Cape Town diocese of the Anglican Church, under the leadership of Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, the successor to Desmond Tutu, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the exhumations and calling for "[the] appropriate institutions and organizations to be guided by African values and customs with regard to exhumations, burials and cemeteries," and for "[our] government, though its heritage agency ... to maintain the integrity of the site as that of a cemetery" (Wheeder 2003).

On 29 August, SAHRA convened a third public meeting at St Andrew's Church in Green Point "to wind up the public participation process" (SAHRA 2003a). The verbatim transcript of the meeting records a number of comments from the floor. An unnamed respondent said: "There is this kind of sense that it is a *fait accompli*. There were 60 days. The 60 days are over, now it's will the developer be kind enough to us. Now to me this is not about the developer. This is about those people lying there and the people that were part, historically, of that community ... [the interests of the developer] must be of secondary importance. The same with the archaeologists as well ... they have a social responsibility first before they have a responsibility towards the developer" (SAHRA 2003b: 15–16). Another respondent

said “there are multiple implications for this burial ground and its naked openness in the center of the city ... in this city there’s never been a willingness to take up [the issue of genocide and the] destruction of human communities that were brought from across the globe ... This is an opportunity to get to the bottom of that and time means different things to different people, institutions, stakeholders. Time for the dead – we need to consider what that means” (SAHRA 2003b: 17–18).

Michael Wheeder, who was later to play a central role in the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee, said:

Many of us of slave descent cannot say “here’s my birth certificate.” We are part of the great unwashed of Cape Town ... The black people, we rush into town on the taxis and we need to rush out of town. At a time many decades ago we lived and loved and labored here. Nothing [reminds us of that history] ... and so leave [the site] as a memorial to Mr. Gonzalez that lived there, Mrs. de Smidt that lived there. The poor of the area – the fishermen, the domestic workers, the people that swept the streets here. Memorialize that. Leave the bones there ... That is a site they have owned for the first time in their lives *het hulle stukkie grond* (they have a little piece of ground). Leave them in that ground. Why find now in the gentility of this new dispensation a place which they have no connection with? (SAHRA 2003b: 18–19).

On 1 September, despite a clear weight of opinion at the third public meeting opposed to the exhumations, Pumla Madiba, the CEO of SAHRA, announced a resumption of archaeological work at the site. In a statement to the press, she said: “[out] of respect the skeletons will be moved.” She said: “Many of the people who objected were highly emotional and did not give real reasons why the skeletons should not be relocated (*sic*)” (Kassiem 2003: 1).

On 4 September, the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee (HOC) was launched. At this point, opposition to the exhumations shifted outside the officially mandated process of public consultation, to civil society and the politics of mass action. On 12 September, the Hands Off Committee lodged an appeal with SAHRA calling for a halt to the exhumations and “a full and extended process of community consultation” (HOC 2003). The appeal document notes that “[for] a large section of Cape Town’s community, whose existence and dignity has for so long been denied, the discovery and continued preservation of the Prestwich Street burial ground can symbolically restore their memory and identity.” It continues “[the] needs of archaeology as a science seem to have been given precedence over other needs: the needs of community socio-cultural history, of collective remembering and of acknowledging the pain and trauma related to the site and this history that gave rise to its existence.” In opposing the exhumations, it argues that “[exhumation] makes impossible a whole range of people’s identifications with that specific physical space in the city. Such a removal echoes, albeit unintentionally, the apartheid regime’s forced removals from the same area” (HOC 2003: 8).

The 23 October was set as the date for a tribunal hearing to consider the appeal. In the run up to the hearing the Hands Off Committee organized regular candle-lit vigils at the Prestwich Street site on Sunday evenings. A billboard was erected outside St George’s Cathedral, a symbolic site of antiapartheid protest, with the slogan: “Stop the exhumations! Stop the humiliation!” Lunchtime pickets were held in the

city center. On 19th November, the SAHRA-convened Appeals Committee handed down a written ruling. The excavation permit awarded to the ACO was revalidated and the rights of the developer upheld. The Hands Off Committee reconvened as the Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC) to launch an appeal directly to the Minister of Arts and Culture. A letter of appeal was lodged with the Ministry on 12 January 2004. Supporting documents call upon the Minister to expropriate the site and “to conserve Prestwich Place as a National Heritage Site” and a site of conscience (PPPC 2003). The vision of the PPPC was to preserve the Prestwich Street site as a *vrijplaats*, an open space for memory and identity. The term is Christian Ernsten’s, a graduate student in the Center for African Studies at the University of Cape Town who followed events closely. He writes: “The Dutch word means something in between the English ‘shelter’ and ‘free zone,’ a space of security and creativity at the same time” (Ernsten 2006).

By this stage, all of the human remains on the original site had been exhumed and were in temporary storage in Napier House, a building on the adjacent block, itself to be demolished as part of the Prestwich Place development. During the SAHRA appeal process, the ACO had applied for permits to disinter human remains believed to occur under West Street, and the adjacent block containing Napier House. This was expected to result in the exposure of a further 800–1,000 bodies. On 21 April 2004 – Freedom Day in South Africa – the remains were ceremonially transferred from Napier House to the mortuary of Woodstock Day Hospital, on the other side of the city. Some of the remains were carried in procession through the city center in eleven flag-draped boxes, one for each of the official language groups in the country. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders blessed the remains in a ceremony at the site prior to the procession. On 22 July, the developer was informed that the appeal to the Minister had been dismissed and that construction activities on the site could continue. Terry Lester of the PPPC was reported to be “deeply saddened.” He said: “We’re acting the whore in this instance, bowing down to the god of development and selling a segment of our history” (Gosling 2004: 1).

Subsequently, the focus of attention has shifted to issues of memorialization and access. On 6 April 2005, two of Morris’s graduate students, Jacqui Friedling and Thabang Manyapelo, made a presentation to a combined meeting of SAHRA and the PPPC as part of an application to conduct basic anatomical research on the Prestwich Street remains. Their application was turned down, mainly on the basis of a negative response from the PPPC. In response, Friedling said: “SAHRA has denied all South Africans the right to know about their heritage ... The information we can get from these bones will make these people come alive again” (Gosling 2005).

Points of Fracture

A starting point for my own reading of these events is the notion that Prestwich Street constitutes a “point of fracture” (Edwards 2001; Hayes et al. 2001) through which might be glimpsed the working out of a range of forces and interests in

postapartheid society. These forces and interests have not only to do with issues of culture, identity, and memory, but also with issues of citizenship, the possibilities and limitations of participatory politics, and the emergent shape and nature of a postapartheid public sphere. In this sense, there is more at stake than the ultimate provenience of the Prestwich Street dead, important as this is as an issue. It is through the unfolding of events around Prestwich Street that we catch the drift of contemporary practices and guiding ideas, that we descry the future.

A number of interesting divisions emerged, as it were, at the sharp end of the trowel at Prestwich Street. One was in the different institutional responses of the two public universities most closely tied to events, the historically black University of the Western Cape and the historically white University of Cape Town. UCT-based scholars were generally proexhumation. In the early days of work on-site, the institution championed the excavation as a research opportunity. UCT provided most of the specialists that sat on the SAHRA-appointed SFRG. More recently, Alan Morris has become the most widely quoted UCT-based scholar in the public media on the matter of Prestwich Street (for example, in a statement in September 2005 describing the HOC/PPPC as a “small, very vociferous, very bitter” group) (Gosling 2005). UWC, on the other hand, has been a significant source of support for the HOC, as well as being the institutional base for the majority of scholars critical of the handling of the site by SAHRA and the ACO. In part, this reflects disciplinary differences. UCT’s response was led by archaeologists and human biologists. At UWC, which has no department of archaeology, the response was led by historians in the Department of History and the Institute for Historical Research.

As well as differences between institutions, there were significant differences within institutions, with key individuals playing a role in determining institutional responses in different periods. A close reading of the transcript shows the extent to which Janette Deacon, a trained archaeologist and chair of the relevant permitting committee, and Mary Leslie, the head of archaeology at SAHRA, were responsible for orienting SAHRA’s institutional response in the crucial period leading up to the first public meeting. Two features of this response are of particular significance. The first is the manner in which the notion of total exhumation came to be accepted by SAHRA and the SFRG at an early date not only as a preferred option, but as a given. This was despite the fact that the National Heritage Resources Act explicitly provides for the possibility of nonexhumation in the case of contested sites. The second is what has been termed the “archaeologising” of the research process around Prestwich Street: that is, the extent to which the problem was framed as an archaeological one, to the exclusion of other methodologies and forms of investigation, notable social history, and oral history.

Finally, a number of tensions emerged between national and regional heritage priorities which are instructive to the extent that they cut to the heart of issues of race and class at play in the events around Prestwich Street. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why the PPPC failed in its appeal to the Minister was that this was seen as a “Cape” issue, tied to Colored identity politics. In a South African context, the notion of Coloredness denotes a complex amalgamation of creole or mestizo identities, with the descendants of Khoisan groups and people imported as

slaves from the Dutch possessions at Batavia. The creolized nature of identity politics at the Cape, much like the hybrid nature of Prestwich Street site, with its hotchpotch of the urban poor, is in tension with national heritage priorities articulated in terms of “Africanisation,” and accounts of essentialized (black) African cultural histories. Thus, it is relevant that most of the archaeological contractors and students who worked on the site are white, and that many of the activists of the HOC are colored, just as it is relevant that the CEO of SAHRA at the time and the Minister of Arts and Culture are black and that the developer is white. However, rather than finding in the events a simple fable of racial antagonism, they arguably represent a more complex convergence between new (black) and historical (white) elites, and the continued marginalization of black and colored urban working class histories.

More generally, they speak of a conception of heritage in postapartheid South Africa which remains essentialized around the inverted terms and tropes of colonial discourse: in which the “blackness” of “Africa” replaces the whiteness of apartheid. Part of the value of Prestwich Street – a value whose loss we may only see clearly in the years to come – was in reminding us of the essential nature of Cape Town as a creolized and cosmopolitan place, an entrepot and incipient world city in the globalism of colonialism. It was this conception of Cape Town that was replaced by the apartheid conception of the *moederstad* (mother city), a little bit of Europe on the dark tip of Africa. And it was the practice of forced removals, like the forced removals that affected the black former residents of Green Point, that gave form to this conception.

Rival Languages of Concern

Perhaps more than anything else, Prestwich Street presents itself as a struggle over language. We encounter Prestwich Street through a substantial, and growing, archive, which takes the form of records, minutes, reports, transcripts, submissions, film recordings, photographs, reminiscences, e-mail exchanges, and so on.³ One thinks of the different theaters or spheres of performance through which events were played out: the theater of excavation, framed by the wire-link fence, with its crowd of curious onlookers; the theater of public consultation, with its more or less conscious echoes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process; the theater of street protest, with its more or less conscious echoes of the antiapartheid movement.

³Part of the story of Prestwich Street is the story of the dispersal and proliferation of sources. At the same time, the status of these sources is ambiguous, existing as they do in a semipublic domain, or in a public/private domain. I would like to place on record my appreciation of the role played by Antonia Malan, and by Andre van der Merwe, the Project Facilitator acting for the developer, in allowing substantial access to their personal archives on Prestwich Street. SAHRA, a publicly accountable body, only allowed me to copy material from their archive after protracted negotiations, and after I had signed a release form saying that I would not use the material to “perjure” the organization or its representatives.

At an early stage, two distinct and opposed discourses emerged: on the one hand, the institutionally situated heritage management discourse of the proexhumation lobby; on the other hand, a nascent or emergent public heritage discourse based on an empathetic identification with the dead, and the needs of social restitution and reconciliation. Each, in turn, gave rise to what might be termed rival languages of concern. Those arguing for exhumation did so on the basis of the scientific value of the remains as a source to access “hidden histories.” The proposal circulated by the SFRG at the first public meeting states: “These skeletons are also – literally – our history, the ordinary people of Cape Town, whose lives are not written in the official documents of the time. They did not leave possessions or archives. If we want to recover their history, then one of the most powerful ways to do so is through the study of their skeletons” (Sealy 2003: 1). In this case, the semantic slide from “our history” to “their history” is instructive.

A number of tropes emerged and were recycled by archaeologists throughout the process. At the second public meeting, Belinda Mutti, an archaeologist, argued in favor of exhumation “to give history back to the people” (Malan 2003: 12). Liesbet Schiettecatte argued that “[leaving] bones leaves information unknown. Studying them brings them back to life ...” (Malan 2003: 13). Mary Patrick argued to “[continue the] exhumation – otherwise half a story is being told” (Malan 2003: 13). At a public level, this desire to “give history back to the people” and “bring the bones to life” was mediated by the technical discourse of cultural resource management, with its rituals of “public consultation,” and its circumscribed notions of value, need, and interest. The double valency given to notions of “respect” and “dignity” by SAHRA and others had its counterpart in a pragmatic language focused on “real reasons,” “sensible decisions,” and the fact that “life must go on.”

In opposition to this discourse, the Hands Off Committee emphasized the language of memory and personal reminiscence. They sought to articulate an alternative set of values (African values, spiritual values), and alternative notions of space/time (the notion of the site as a heritage site or a site of conscience; and in one memorable intervention, the notion of “time for the dead”). They insisted on recalling a more recent past of apartheid and forced removals, as well as a deep past of slavery and colonialism. More generally, they sought to insert the events at Prestwich Street into a prevailing debate in postapartheid society around notions of truth, reconciliation, and restitution. Building on this, it is possible to observe a number of instructive convergences in the events around Prestwich Street. The first is a convergence between the practices of troping that I have described and a positivist conception of archaeology as science, resulting in the production of observable data and “information.” The notion of history that emerges – the history that is to be “given back to the people” – becomes severely curtailed, as essentially archaeological data relating to the provenience of the burials and physical, chemical, and anthropometric measurements of the bones themselves.

A second convergence is between the discourse of cultural resource management and a political strategy of containment. Particularly instructive in this case, I would argue, was the manner in which the language and practices of CRM actively discouraged the emergence of radically new identities and refigurings of the public

sphere, through a narrowed conception of need, interest, value, and the mechanics of public participation. The notion of “heritage” that emerges is itself narrowed and ambivalent, internally divided between the promise of individual restitution and reconciliation and the practice of restricted access and bureaucratized control.

For myself, writing as an archaeologist in South Africa with a position on Prestwich Street that is different from the majority of my colleagues, in that I have been opposed to the exhumations, and supportive of the arguments of the HOC, what has interested me most in the events around Prestwich Street has been the glimmer of an alternative set of possibilities – of “newness” – present in the discourse of the HOC. Prestwich Street encourages us to revisit and reexamine core disciplinary practices and ideas, and to consider alternative ways of knowing the archaeological past, and approaching the problematics of heritage and memory in postapartheid society. It raises the possibility of alternative archaeologies, even of alternative epistemologies. We associate archaeology with a radical – a prying – “will to knowledge,” every excavation a mini-enactment of the Enlightenment injunction to know, to uncover. Prestwich Street makes the argument for an alternative kind of archaeology: an archaeology of silence, of secrecy, of closure (rather than disclosure). Adapting a term from Derrida, the archaeologist Keisuke Sato has written of “archi-violence” as the violence done against sites and remains in the process of archaeological investigation (Sato 2006). This violence is physical and material, but it is also disciplinary and epistemological, the violence of certain methodologies and of certain ways of knowing.

How has the archi-violence of Prestwich Street differentially affected the communities of the living and the dead? In what sense do physical and chemical measurements of human remains and notes on their provenience constitute history, and more specifically a history which is “given back to the people” as “their history”? Are there cases in which the current of sympathy between the living and the imagined community of the dead might be more profound in the absence of such information? How do we mediate between the multiple possible ways of “knowing the past” in the case of a site like Prestwich Street, beyond simply asserting the priority of archaeology as science? As archaeologists in the postcolony how do we take account of the discipline’s own history – its gaps and silences, its unexamined practices – in formulating our approach? Do we enter the debate from the perspective of the priority of positivist science, flourished like a banner before us, or more modestly, as belated arrivals at a society-wide discussion on science, citizenship, and accountability? The events around Prestwich Street raise a tangle of epistemological and ontological issues, but these resolve themselves around a simple set of questions: Are the bones of the Prestwich Street dead artifacts? Or are they ancestors? And under what conditions might they be both?

In an immediate sense, there were a number of things at stake at Prestwich Street, and not the least of these is the nature of archaeology as a discipline in the postcolony. The surfacing of the buried dead is always experienced as a traumatic moment, as an eruption into the fabric of the present of the past in its most literal and inescapable aspect. But it is also a moment that takes us to our deepest selves and, socially speaking, confronts us with profound energies. In a transitional social context (and

what society is not in transition?), these are among the energies that transform us and the society of which we are a part, that aid us in our task of “becoming.” Perhaps, after all, Prestwich Street describes what the historian Premesh Lalu has called a “history of the present” (rather than a history of the future). By this, he means that the condition of postcoloniality requires a form of history that constantly interrupts and unsettles the present, especially the narratives of the “nation” (Lalu and Harris 1996). Swirling, heterodox, contested: the energies of the Prestwich Street dead are still among us. For the living, the task becomes how to interpret these energies as a force for the good rather than as a threat, how they might be harnessed to generate not only heat but light, and a greater understanding of the place in which we find ourselves as fellow citizens who stand on opposite sides of a divided history.

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