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# Contested Heritage in South Africa: Perspectives from Mahikeng

## ABSTRACT

Mahikeng, the seat of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District and capital of South Africa's North West province, has identified tourism as an economic driver based on cultural heritage related to Batswana, Boer, and British contestation. However, the colonial heritage is underutilised as visitors come to Mahikeng (formerly Mafeking) in search of experiences relating to the siege of Mafeking, the Anglo–Boer War, and the origins of the Boy Scouts movement but leave disappointed. This heritage has been downgraded in democratic post-apartheid South Africa as there is an agenda that seeks to highlight African cultural heritage, particularly relating to the anti-apartheid struggle. This formerly suppressed cultural heritage needs to be promoted as it is crucial to South Africa's history, identity, and social cohesion. However, other heritages that are also important are falling by the wayside with the result that the country's diversity as the 'rainbow nation' is being eroded, and heritage tourism opportunities, which could prompt Local Economic Development (LED), are missed. A more critical engagement with the colonial heritage by including African perspectives, critiques, interactions, and roles within the narrative is needed.

*Keywords: heritage tourism, South Africa, colonial nostalgia, Mafeking, cultural heritage*

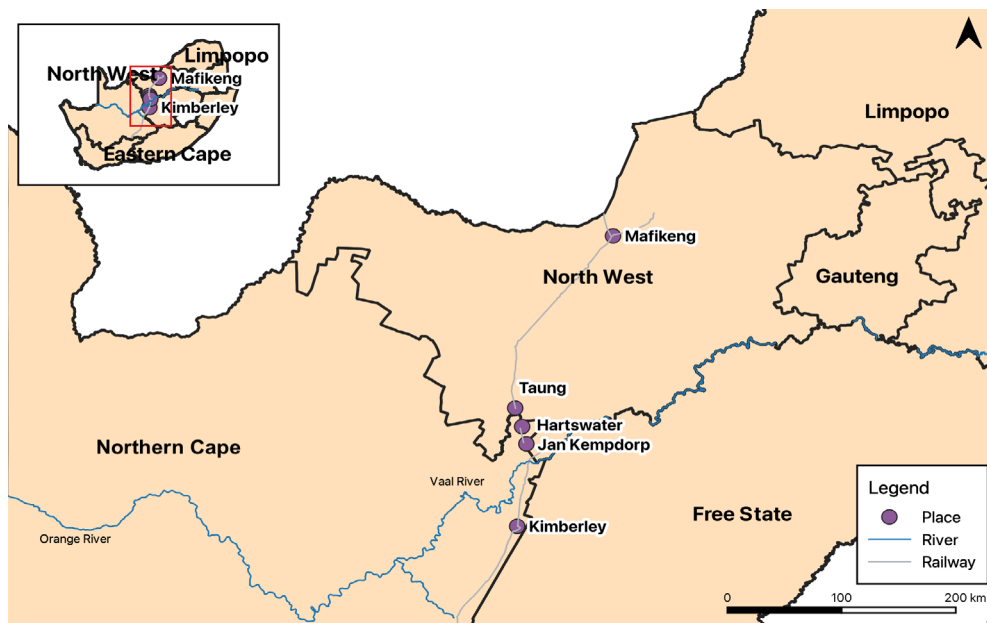
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## INTRODUCTION

A recent study (Pentz & Albert, 2023} has emphasized the importance of preserving and archiving cultural landscapes. Further, protecting heritage and encouraging cultural heritage tourism is a “challenge for developing countries, particularly where heritage sites are widely spread in rural areas and may not include impressive buildings and monuments” (Snowball & Courtney, 2010, p. 563). The Ngaka Modiri Molema District in South Africa’s North West province (see Figure 1) is a remote area in need of economic stimulation that has identified tourism as a potential economic driver. Local Economic Development (LED) strategies related to tourism in rural and remote areas often take the form of route tourism, which links several smaller attractions under a unified theme and collectively markets them. It is hoped that route tourism will encourage increased domestic and international tourist numbers as well as repeat visits, that people will stay longer, spend more, and that there will be significant spillover effects for local communities providing goods and services to the tourist market, thereby promoting economic development (Lourens, 2007; Rogerson, 2009).

Figure 1. Location map showing Kimberley–Taung–Mahikeng in South Africa



Source: Author

In order to develop a tourist route, an area needs to identify a number of attractions. Mahikeng itself is in a good position of having several diverse heritage sites that are of domestic and international significance (Drummond, Rogerson et al., 2021). The town’s main claim to fame is the 217-day Siege of Mafeking during the Anglo–Boer War (now the South African War) in 1899–1900 and the subsequent birth of the Boy Scout movement. International tourists come to Mahikeng searching for this heritage but leave disappointed. This is not unique to Mahikeng, as it has been reported that “the experiential encounters of international tourists engaging with South African cultural heritage have frequently been reported to be of significant concern” (Butler & Ivanovic, 2016, p. 69). Furthermore, the town’s

historical transport, and social and religious interactions with Kimberley suggest that a tourist route linking the towns would resonate with tourists interested in battlefield tourism.

In the post-apartheid era, there has been an explicit political change in government policy, focusing on the need to promote efforts to decolonise South Africa's cultural heritage and right the wrongs of the past, which suppressed African cultural expression. A sustained and comprehensive body of work by Witz (2006, 2010, 2011, 2022) and by Witz and his co-workers (Murray & Witz, 2013; Rassool et al., 1996; Witz et al., 2001) has advocated for a South African history which is accurate, reflects the lived experience of the African majority, and is representative of worker and community struggles which should be commemorated and curated in the country's museums. In Mahikeng, this national re-orientation has resulted in colonial heritage being comparatively neglected. Museum displays of the Siege and founding of the Boy Scouts are limited, while the role of Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone in the area is relatively unknown. There is also silence around the lives of Christopher Bethell and Charles Warren, two prominent British colonial officials who were to different degrees supportive of the Batswana (Manson, 2022; Shillington, 2021). Although Lester (2022a) emphasises that their lives did not in any way counterbalance the negative effects of colonial dispossession and violence, they did, in some ways, help to secure the Bechuanaland Protectorate, which would gain independence as Botswana. Mafeking was the extra-territorial capital of the Protectorate for seventy years, and this period as a British colonial capital is worthy of scrutiny.

This paper does not in any way call for an exclusive focus on British colonialism, but it does suggest a critical engagement with the historical experience. This also resonates with contemporary debates internationally on the "culture wars", such as the removal of Confederate leaders' statues in the USA and those of individuals associated with the slave trade in the UK (Lester, 2022b). The former Mafeking museum exhibits on colonial life have been replaced by a focus on the anti-apartheid struggle and indigenous culture. This is also evident in the annual Mahika–Mahikeng festival, which is itself a celebration of Batswana culture and the Setswana language (Drummond et al., 2021a). This Africanist slant could be linked to aspects of the colonial experience. For example, the African role in the Siege of Mafeking was extensively documented by the noted African writer and political leader Sol Plaatje (Comaroff, 1989). Opportunities to develop cultural heritage tourism are not being pursued, and this is due to a political programme to downplay the experience and legacy of British colonial rule (Drummond et al., 2021b). A missed opportunity has been the failure to develop heritage routes that critically engage with the Siege, Boy Scouts, and David Livingstone. Highlighting interactions with colonials by African heroes like Montshiwa, Sol Plaatje, and Modiri Molema would portray African agency and resistance. Analyses of festivals show that out-of-town visitors are crucial in terms of their economic spend and impact. If Mahikeng could attract visitors from further afield, including Botswana and overseas markets, this would boost museum and accommodation coffers and promote business for tourist guides. That this is not done is evidently counterproductive in terms of lost economic tourism potential since interest in the colonial heritage exists. Questions of whose culture and whose heritage thus become important for reasons of identity, preservation, and tourist-related LED.

## Heritage tourism strategies and development

Defining cultural heritage can be problematic as it includes both tangible aspects (buildings, monuments, historic sites) and intangible aspects such as traditions and customs (Throsby, 2007). However, what ultimately determines heritage is the socio-cultural value that is placed on it (Peacock & Rizzo, 2008). The question now arises as to who decides whether a certain heritage is valuable or not. This tends to shift over time with changes in political power so that the cultural heritage that was important to one group or culture, may not be important to another who wants to tell their stories and highlight their culture and heritage (Peacock & Rizzo, 2008). Timothy & Boyd (2006) assert that heritage tourism is an inherently political phenomenon that can be used to exclude certain cultures, heritages, and histories. On the other hand, heritage tourism can also be used to emphasize certain perspectives and build nationalism, social cohesion, and patriotism (Kim et al., 2007). This process has been termed ‘collective amnesia’ by Kim et al. (2007), as some histories are neglected and allowed to fade away while another is favoured and actively promoted till it becomes the dominant narrative, as is the case in North Korea.

A similar process appears to be occurring in South Africa as “many cultural tourist guides bemoaned the fact that certain heritage sites receive preferential treatment from the government and that a biased history seems to be portrayed in many sites across the country” (van der Merwe, 2016, p. 125). It is perceived that the heritage tourism market is a specialized market, which is dominated by the apartheid history of South Africa so heritage sites like the battlefields in Kwa-Zulu Natal which relate to colonial engagements between British, Boer and Zulu forces are not promoted to the same degree as sites like the Hector Pieterse Museum which focuses on apartheid liberation/struggle heritage (van der Merwe, 2016). This seems to be linked to political gain for local leaders and authorities as comments were made that “the government appears to be becoming increasingly selective on which aspects of heritage should be promoted/celebrated, and forgets the role played by other groups of people” (van der Merwe, 2016, p. 125).

The issue of whose culture and whose heritage are commemorated is contentious in countries across the global South with colonial legacies, due to the cultural diversity within the countries and post-colonial legacies and politics (Butler et al., 2012; Butler & Ivanovic, 2016; Hannam, 2006; van der Merwe, 2024). For example, in Fiji, the ‘native’ Fijian or *iTaukei* culture and heritage are preserved and celebrated over the Indian ‘migrant’ or *Girmitiyas* cultural heritage (Cheer & Reeves, 2015). This stems from British colonial rule, where the two cultures were set up in opposition to one another, with the *iTaukei* being favoured over indentured labourers from India who were later freed and granted legal dispensation to permanently settle in Fiji (Cheer & Reeves, 2015). Since independence in 1970, cultural issues have ensued with pro-*iTaukei* socio-cultural anxieties and political movements resulting in sociopolitical turmoil and *iTaukei* cultural heritage being preserved, celebrated and marketed for tourism (Cheer & Reeves, 2015). These cultural dynamics and questions about whose culture and heritage are complicated by recent tourism development strategies, which seek to refurbish British colonial buildings in Fiji in the hopes of prompting LED related to colonial nostalgia tourism (Cheer & Reeves, 2015).

Similarly, in Malaysia, the state seeks to promote Malay–Muslim cultural heritage to the detriment of the country’s minority Chinese and Indian communities (Tan & Choy, 2020). After the Singapore–Malaysia separation in 1965, official government policies sought to identify suitable elements of Malaysian culture, heritage, and history to be promoted as representative of Malaysia’s post-colonial national identity (Crouch, 1996, as cited in Tan & Choy, 2020). This led to the official marginalization of non-Malay cultures and is proving problematic for Malaysia’s heritage tourism strategies, as there is a lack of Malay–Muslim architecture in the old quarters of most of the older towns and cities (Tan & Choy, 2020). Instead, there is a wealth of European colonial and Straits Chinese architecture which reflects the long, deep and lasting multi-cultural identity of the country, which does not fit in with the dominant Malay–Muslim narrative and heritage that the government wishes to promote (Tan & Choy, 2020). Until recently, the British colonial history of Malaysia had been absent from museums and official tourism promotions (Tan & Choy, 2020). However, this heritage has been revitalised as the wealth of colonial buildings provided a tourism opportunity that could not be ignored due to its potential for generating income (Tan & Choy, 2020).

Colonial nostalgia-based tourism has the potential to be highly lucrative for developing countries with colonial legacies. Indeed, there has been a boom in colonial nostalgia, with tens of thousands of British tourists visiting former colonies (Bandyopadhyay, 2018). For example, this tourism-driven economic potential has been recognised in Zanzibar, where space and culture have been harnessed by the government in an attempt to transform the old Omani sultanate section of Zanzibar City, now called Mji Mkongwe but known as Stone Town in English, into a global tourist attraction which trades on the Omani and British colonial nostalgia exotic idea of Arabian nights (Bissell, 2005). Lowenthal (2005, p. 4) described nostalgia as follows:

*Nostalgia is today the universal catch word for looking back. It fills the popular press, serves as advertising bait, merits sociological study; no term better expresses modern malaise. If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all.*

India is a prime example of the tourist demand for colonial nostalgia as British tourists travel to India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, in search of a colonial heritage, which is important to them and offers a return to an imagined and romanticized past to escape from current and future struggles (Bandyopadhyay, 2018; Bissell, 2005). “Nostalgia requires an object world to seize on – buildings, fashion, images, and the ephemera of everyday life” (Bissell, 2005, p. 221). British tourists to India want to experience the luxurious lifestyle of the Raj by being pampered, surrounded by colonial-style hotels and restaurants and visiting important historical sites (Bandyopadhyay, 2018). However, it is not just tourists from the former colonizers that are attracted by colonial nostalgia as a sanitized elite colonial lifestyle is being marketed to domestic tourists (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008). For example, the former French colonial capital of Pondicherry (now Puducherry) has a wide array of all things French and has been called ‘the French Riviera of the East’ (Jørgensen, 2019). This French colonial heritage has been preserved and enhanced as it provides a distinctive place identity which is used as a unique selling point on which to market the city to international (mainly French) and domestic tourists from regional urban hubs like Chennai and Bengaluru (Jørgensen, 2019). The

majority of tourists are domestic as the Puducherry government and private sector have successfully marketed the city to young professionals as a French colonial and cosmopolitan experience weekend destination for a break from a hectic working lifestyle (Jørgensen, 2019). The main focus of domestic visits to Puducherry is not to engage with French colonial narratives but rather a mixing of East and West or Tamil and French culture based on the built environment and intangible French cultural experiences (Jørgensen, 2019).

The tourism industry and popular media often emphasize “nostalgic experiences of a sanitized colonial history” which is often at odds with government narratives of resistance against colonial powers and representations of the brutality of colonialism (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008, p. 790). At the national level, the Indian government utilizes heritage tourism to build a Hindu-centric national identity, despite the country’s vast religious diversity, by promoting a narrative of India enduring and overcoming foreign control from European colonial rulers and Muslim emperors (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008). However, this is not the case in Puducherry, where the local government supports the tourism industry in marketing the innocent French colonial experience, as it is a significant economic driver (Jørgensen, 2019). A similar situation exists in Goa, a former Portuguese colony, which has become a popular tourist destination based on marketing its unique Portuguese colonial heritage in India, beaches and freedom from social restrictions (Gupta, 2009). In both destinations, “certain historical aspects are purposely taken up and put on display, while others are conveniently forgotten and relegated to the archive” (Gupta, 2009, p. 136). This shows the importance of place branding and marketing the unique heritage of a place to attract tourists.

In addition to the largely positive colonial nostalgia tourism framing utilised in Puducherry and Goa, none of the British tourists visiting Kolkata and Darjeeling interviewed by Bandyopadhyay (2018) wanted to talk about the dark side of colonialism but were content to reminisce on the ‘good old days’ when Britannia ruled the waves. The sanitised version of colonial history is problematic to post-colonial national identities and does not educate domestic and international tourists about the realities of colonial rule. Perhaps this would destroy the nostalgia and is problematic for the tourism industry and the developing countries like Fiji and India that are targeting colonial-based tourism since a sense of shame over the British Empire would surely discourage this type of tourism. Bandyopadhyay (2011) has commented on how in the twenty-first century, the attitudes of British tourists resemble colonial times as they retain power over the dominant narrative of colonialism. However, the brutality and violence of colonialism cannot and should not be ignored, especially considering the attraction of domestic tourists and national identity. In today’s world where confederate leader and slave owner statues are targeted in the USA and UK as well as the Rhodes Must Fall campaign in South Africa and the global Black Lives Matter campaign, it is clear that there is an interest in a more accurate historical record and a critical engagement with colonial histories and legacies. It is argued in this paper it is possible to present a critical engagement and more accurate historical narrative in Mahikeng where there are heritage sites and a wealth of information on African experiences and perspectives of life in a British colonial town. In this case, ‘the subalterns [can] speak’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 24).

A popular means of encouraging cultural heritage tourism and preserving sites and artefacts of significance is to create heritage routes, which highlight a number of historically significant sites under a specific theme, particularly in rural and remote areas (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). The aims of cultural heritage routes include protecting and documenting heritage assets (often smaller sites and sites of mainly local significance), improving conservation and management of heritage assets, increasing the sustainability of tourism products and initiatives, attracting more visitors through collective marketing strategies, dispersing visitor spending towards rural and less developed areas and increasing length of stay and tourist spending (Meyer, 2004; Rogerson, 2009). This increase in tourist activity relates to LED considerations which have been recognized at the national, provincial and local government levels in South Africa for their potential pro-poor outcomes and economic diversification. However, LED strategies in South Africa often do not generate the anticipated economic returns, are unsustainable in the long-term, reliant on government support and funding, so may collapse if it is withdrawn, or are private sector driven and so exclude impoverished communities (Rogerson, 2006). Therefore, Snowball & Courtney (2010) recommend that rather than basing decisions on heritage conservation on LED strategies and financial gain, it is the non-market benefits that should be considered. This is especially true given that most successful heritage routes take between 20–30 years to mature and generate substantial economic returns for local communities (Lourens, 2007).

Using heritage routes to simultaneously protect cultural heritage assets and attract tourists is a relatively well-established LED strategy in both the global North, such as the Camino de Santiago in Spain and Route 66 in the USA, as well as the global South, such as the Dandi Heritage Route in India and the World Heritage Route in Vietnam (Snowball & Courtney, 2010). Similarly, South Africa has a number of mature tourism routes that have a pro-poor LED focus, such as the Midlands Meander craft route in Kwa-Zulu Natal and wine routes in the Western Cape (Lourens, 2007; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011). More recently, in South Africa, there has been a focus on creating and establishing a series of heritage routes, which commemorate important historic events, places and people. These routes highlight predominantly local African heritages, such as the Liberation Heritage Route in the Eastern Cape, which recognizes the role of a number of local leaders and communities and sites of local significance in the struggle for political self-determination from colonial and apartheid forces (Snowball & Courtney, 2010). Under the apartheid government, African heritage was suppressed, and so in democratic South Africa, the ANC government has focused on narratives of the apartheid struggle, traditional African cultures, and African engagements and interactions with colonial forces. These heritages and narratives must be brought into the light, but South Africa has been described as the ‘rainbow nation’ due to the country’s cultural diversity, and so other cultural heritages should not be neglected.

In a study of South African tourist guides’ perceptions of cultural heritage tourism, 88% considered heritage to be important to the country’s tourism economy, offering the view that South Africa has a rich heritage, a wide range of cultural diversity and turbulent history, all of which needs to be preserved as it is critical for nation building and for individuals to understand and appreciate their place in society and the current situation in South Africa as well as attracting tourists and promoting LED (van der Merwe, 2016). The importance of diverse cultural heritage preservation and manage-

ment is laid out in the National Heritage Resources Act, which calls for the identification, protection and management of a wide range of cultural heritage and the need to educate the population about its value (Republic of South Africa, 1999). However, a number of guides also reported that heritage in South Africa has become a racial issue, which is continuously entrenched by the current ANC ruling party, and so it seems that policy implementation on the ground is lacking (van der Merwe, 2016).

## METHODS

Heritage tourism is inherently political and has been harnessed to promote a certain national identity (Johnson, 1999). The question of whose heritage and culture is preserved and promoted has been raised in a number of locations, including India and Malaysia that have undergone political change (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008; Tan & Choy, 2020). This is now the case in South Africa, and it is this question that is considered in this paper using Mahikeng as a case study. Different heritages and cultures have been celebrated and promoted over time in Mahikeng. The author has lived in the town continuously since 1984 and has thus become an “accidental research participant” since he has witnessed the ebb and flow of the promotion of the various cultures and heritages that intertwine in Mahikeng with changes in political power (Shaw, 2013, p. 1). In recounting the development over the last forty years of the displays at the Mafikeng Museum, the use and preservation of colonial buildings, and the activities at Lotlamoreng Cultural Village, the researcher has to track the evolution of heritage preservation and promotion in relation to tourism over time in accordance with the practice of cultural geography (Söderström, 2010).

The insights were further verified and triangulated through an analysis of the state of affairs of existing heritage and cultural assets in Mahikeng. This was combined with a thematic analysis of TripAdvisor reviews from people who had visited the town between 2015 and 2019 and comments in the Mahikeng Museum’s visitors’ book. Given the COVID-19 related lockdown in South Africa in 2020 and 2021, which prevented tourism, no surveys or interviews with tourists to Mahikeng were possible. Following the recent call for tourism research to be less present-minded and more explicitly historical (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2023) an approach that considers the past to inform present debates is apposite. To this end, a review of the Mahikeng Mail newspaper was undertaken at the South African National Library in Cape Town as well as a desktop study of archival records into local and national press reports and government publications.

## RESULTS

### **Tourism context in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District**

Mahikeng has a long history of cultural interactions between the local African Batswana people, the British under colonial rule, and the Boers (Afrikaners) before and during apartheid. The history of the town dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when the first settlement was founded by the Tshidi



Rolong on the banks of the Molopo River and named Mahikeng, which means ‘place of stones’ in the local Setswana language (Parnell, 1986). An alternate name given to the settlement was Molema’s Stadt, named after the chief of the fraction of the Barolong who settled the area (Parnell, 1986).

Due to its strategic location on the imperial road between Cape Town and Rhodesia, the British sought to secure the area from the Boer Republics and competing colonial powers of Portugal and Germany in Southern Africa by founding the colonial town of Mafeking (Drummond & Drummond, 2021; Drummond & Nel, 2021; Parnell, 1986). Mafeking served as the extra-territorial capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1895 to 1966, when the territory gained independence from Britain and the capital was moved to Gaborone in the newly independent Botswana.

The relocation of the capital to Gaborone and the departure of Britain as a colonial power meant that Mafeking began to feel the full force of apartheid legislation. However, in 1980 Mafeking was incorporated into Bophuthatswana, the mock independent ‘traditional homeland’ of the Batswana people, which was established in 1977 under ‘President’ Lucas Mangope. Motivated by economic opportunities, the decision by white residents of Mafeking to be incorporated into a black African-ruled ‘bantustan’ was unique for South Africa (Jones, 2000). Symbolic of the town’s new status, the name was changed to Mafikeng to better represent the Setswana language (Parnell, 1986).

The next political change came in 1994 when South Africa gained democracy and the ‘bantustans’ were disbanded. The African National Congress (ANC) government set about dismantling what had been built in Bophuthatswana as it was seen as an instrument of apartheid (Drummond & Drummond, 2021). An ANC policy was to reclaim the suppressed African heritage of South Africa; hence the North West provincial government sought to emphasise the African Batswana heritage of the town and returned to the original Setswana spelling of Mahikeng in 2012. Today, Mahikeng is the main town in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district and is the capital of the North West province. It is a secondary city with a municipal population of over 300 000 people of which 97% are African, the majority culture is Batswana and the main languages in use are English and Setswana (Nel & Drummond, 2019).

In terms of the South African space economy, Mahikeng is located far from the other major metropolitan and industrial areas of the country (Drummond & Nel, 2021). In both the Global North and South, tourism is recognised as a critical sector for promoting LED and economic diversification in rural areas and small towns (Rogerson, 2016).

### **Tourism opportunities in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District**

Cultural heritage tourist guides have identified distance as an issue in heritage tourism development and attracting tourists, as most South African heritage sites are quite remote, and the tourist facilities and infrastructure are insufficient once the destination has been reached (van der Merwe, 2016). Mahikeng is about 300 km from Johannesburg. In order to make Mahikeng an attractive tourism destination, there needs to be a diverse range of tourism activities to make the trip worthwhile.

Currently, there is a range of potential cultural, heritage, and nature assets that are underutilised and could be harnessed for tourism and tourism-led development in the district. These heritage assets, focused around Mahikeng, relate to the town's British colonial heritage, including the Siege of Mafeking, the Anglo–Boer War, and the founding of the Boy Scout movement, as well as African and Batswana cultural heritage like the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village and the role and lives of Batswana heroes like Ngaka (meaning doctor in Setswana) Modiri Molema. However, there are also tourism opportunities related to the life of David Livingstone in South Africa, Sol Plaatje, and the Mahika–Mahikeng Cultural Festival, which have not been identified.

Mahikeng is in the fortunate position of having a number of heritage assets that are of interest to both domestic and international tourists which means that the potential exists to develop them to create an attractive tourism destination. These assets could be unified under a theme to create a heritage route or an extension of existing heritage routes, such as Kimberley–Taung–Mahikeng–Gaborone, that create cross-border linkages. However, most of the town's heritage assets are currently being underutilised and neglected.

### **Colonial nostalgia for Mafeking**

The history of Mafeking as a colonial town has left its mark on present-day Mahikeng in terms of colonial architecture, heritage, and international reputation. The relief of Mafeking and the end of the Siege gave rise to jingoistic celebrations throughout the United Kingdom and the British Empire. In commemoration of the event, streets were named after Mafeking in cities throughout the Commonwealth. The origins of the Boy Scouts movement can also be traced to the Siege of Mafeking. It is this colonial heritage that still resonates with international tourists and attracts them to the town. This colonial nostalgia tourism has the potential to be developed as there is an existing base from which to build and could be harnessed for LED.

The Mahikeng Museum is at the center of the town's tourism industry and is the main port of call for tourists looking for information on the Siege. The Museum itself is housed in the old colonial town hall, completed in 1903. Over time, the museum's displays have changed to reflect shifting political power and ideologies. The displays relating to the Siege of Mafeking and the Boy Scouts are shadows of their former selves (Figure 2). Many of the artefacts are not on display. There is also no longer a curator in charge of the museum, which partly explains the reduced museum displays, lack of maintenance and preservation of artefacts, and the outdated manner of presenting the displays and information. Comments on Trip Advisor indicate a binary perception, which broadly indicates local support for local African history, whilst international tourists bemoan the lack of displays adequately reflecting the Siege.

Due to the interest in battlefield tourism in South Africa, the Anglo–Boer War sites in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District and the Siege of Mafeking sites could be marketed under battlefields tourism and connected to other prominent battlefield sites like Magersfontein, near Kimberley in the Northern Cape (van der Merwe, 2019). Cooperation between these inter-provincial battlefield sites could result

in the development of battlefield tourism in South Africa by increasing the number of attractions and diversifying the offering (van der Merwe, 2014, 2019). The Boer concentration camp graveyard and monument near Lotlamoreng Dam is an important heritage site for the Afrikaans community in Mahikeng. In recent years it has suffered from a lack of maintenance and is currently overgrown by weeds and in a state of neglect. The Boer perspective on the Siege and war generally is one that is not proffered in the museum.

Figure 2. Remnant of Boy Scouts Memorial



### **A celebration of African leaders and a critical engagement with the colonial narrative**

In post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, the ANC government has highlighted liberation heritage which has mainly focused on the apartheid struggle. This is part of an agenda to right the wrongs of the past and promote healing, as witnessed elsewhere in the world. In the case of Mahikeng, the colonial narrative can be critically engaged through the voices of African leaders who lived under British colonial rule and through the Siege of Mafeking. This process has already begun through museum displays, but it is underdeveloped and is a missed tourism opportunity in itself, as African leaders like Sol Plaatje and Modiri Molema should be celebrated more prominently.

The Mahikeng Museum could be the centre around which these African and Batswana narratives and cultural heritages are focused. The museum has a small collection of San artefacts, information on the settlement of the area by the Batswana, and displays on the apartheid struggle, which is generalised to a national level and does not highlight local historical events in any depth. Only a small cabinet displays Sol Plaatje's books and provides some information on his life and time in Mafeking during the Siege, while information on Dr. Modiri Molema is even sparser.

Sol Plaatje (1876–1932) was an intellectual, journalist, writer, politician and linguist who worked as a court interpreter during the Siege of Mafeking and kept a diary of his experiences which was published posthumously. He was a founding member of the ANC and fought throughout his life

for the liberation of African people. *The Mafeking Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: A Black Man's View of a White Man's War*, edited by Comaroff (1989), could be used to widen the lens, through which the Siege is viewed and discussed. This would result in a more inclusive and historically accurate record. Moreover, it fits within the current government agenda of promoting African cultural heritage and liberation struggles.

Dr. (Ngaka) Modiri Molema (1891–1965) was a member of the Royal family of the Barolong chieftaincy who was one of the first black South Africans to qualify as a medical doctor. He became the national secretary of the ANC in 1949, served on several councils that helped to set up the independence of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and was the author of *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa* as well as accounts of the lives of two Barolong chiefs. Molema's story is also not featured prominently in Mahikeng's current cultural heritage offering. The museum's information video features a number of Batswana cultural heritage sites like Dr Molema's home and practice, Maritiwa, which is open to visitors and is relatively well maintained, but there is not much other information at the museum or marketing to encourage tourists to visit Maratiwa or the Stadt.

### **Batswana cultural heritage**

It is important to represent the diversity of cultures that have intertwined over Mahikeng's history and to represent and celebrate the culture of the local people. The Mahika–Mahikeng festival seeks to celebrate the local Batswana culture and Setswana language through music, dance, drama, and arts and crafts (Drummond et al., 2021a). Research showed that the 2016 festival mainly attracted local Mahikeng residents and people from the surrounding areas in the North West province and Gauteng, which suggests that the appeal of a festival that celebrates one particular culture is highly localised to areas where Setswana is spoken widely and where the Batswana culture and people are found (Drummond et al., 2021a).

A unique cultural heritage asset that is currently not being utilised in Mahikeng is the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village (Figure 3), which was designed by Credo Mutwa, an “internationally acclaimed Isanusi [traditional healer/prophet], seer, sage, healer, teacher, philosopher, historian, artist, playwright, orator, sculptor, writer and indigenous wisdom keeper” (Credo Mutwa Foundation, 2018). The village is based on the African history, legends and customs that he described in his 1964 book *Indaba My Children* (Dixon Soule Associates, 1987). The village was once popular with locals as well as domestic and international tourists but has since fallen into a state of disrepair and neglect and has not been a site of learning, cultural practice, or open to visitors for many years. The Lotlamoreng Dam complex has been identified and targeted for potential tourism-driven LED by local governments. However, the investment into Lotlamoreng has mainly been related to the dam itself and water-based recreation activities rather than restoring the cultural village. (Africa, 2006; Mokgoro, 2019; Portfolio Committee on Tourism, 2017). The Lotlamoreng Cultural Village was once a popular tourist destination and could be so again in a similar vein to the Credo Mutwa Cultural Village in Soweto. There is an interest

in Credo Mutwa and his work at the national level as the minister for the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), Nathi Mthethwa commented that the DSAC would collect his work and ensure that it was properly curated (SABC News, 2020).

Figure 3. Overgrown weeds and ruins at Lotlamoreng Cultural Village



## CONCLUSIONS

During the apartheid era, African histories and heritages were deliberately suppressed while leaders in the apartheid struggle were imprisoned. In the democratic era, these people and stories have been celebrated. However, to more accurately reflect the historical record, be more inclusive, and better represent the ‘rainbow nation’, it is important that non-African heritages and non-apartheid histories are also included. There are historically intertwining cultures and heritages in Mahikeng that need to be better represented and could be harnessed for urban regeneration and LED (Rogerson, 2024), as there is a good existing base of heritage assets from which to build.

Across the board, heritage is not preserved and celebrated as it should be in Mahikeng. This has been taken up by the local newspaper, The Mahikeng Mail, which recently ran a front-page article (“Shame on you”, 2023) complaining about the poor maintenance of Theresa House, a heritage building dating back to 1899 (Figure 4). There are several missed tourism opportunities relating to colonial nostalgia; battlefields tourism; Batswana culture, heritage and experiences. Important historical figures like Christopher Bethell, Montshiwa, Sol Plaatje, Modiri Molema, Credo Mutwa and David Livingstone should be critically examined. There is no need to airbrush colonial heritage from history as there is an opportunity to critically engage with it in Mahikeng through the eyes of prominent writers, activists, and African intellectuals Sol Plaatje and Modiri Molema (Molema, 1966). There are varying heritage interests in Mahikeng, and marketing is needed that is inclusive, promotes tolerance, and encourages openness in people wanting to see and experience South Africa’s heritage. Knowledgeable tourist guides based at the Mahikeng Museum are needed to take visitors to all the sites of interest in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District.

Figure 4. Theresa House neglect



It has been suggested that consideration should be given to encouraging the development of a heritage route from Kimberley to Taung and Mahikeng (Sethiba et al., 2022). There are also several obstacles to the growth of heritage tourism identified by tourist guides which are under the mandates of local governments, including poor governance and management (Rogerson, 2020), particularly the poor or lack of infrastructure, maintenance and signage, high entrance fees, poor marketing, a lack of awareness and education about heritage tourism and finally, the highly politicised nature of heritage in South Africa (van der Merwe, 2016). The last of these is certainly afflicting Mahikeng and will need to be overcome if heritage tourism-led development is to be successful.

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