

## Latent Opportunities for Heritage Tourism in South Africa: Evidence from Mahikeng and Surrounds

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### Abstract

In many parts of the global South heritage is one of the major drivers for destination development. This case study builds upon the existing international scholarship on heritage as a driver for local economic development. The focus on the study is Mahikeng and the wider Ngaka Modiri Molema District in the North West province where there is a wealth of underutilised local cultural and heritage assets. This valuable asset base stems from the area's history of multi-cultural interactions and with important historical events that occurred in the area relating to the colonial town of Mafeking; the Siege of Mafeking, the founding of the Boy Scout movement and the Anglo-Boer War (South African War); the life of David Livingstone; the life and experiences of prominent African leaders like Sol Plaatje and Dr (Ngaka) Modiri Molema; and, African cultural heritage. However, many heritage assets in the area are underutilised due to the peripheral location of the town, poor marketing and low visitor numbers, as well as, poor maintenance. Arguably, Mahikeng and its surrounds enjoys a rich heritage asset base which offers latent opportunities for a future expansion of heritage tourism and an expanded contribution of tourism for the local economy.

**Keywords:** heritage tourism; local economic development; Mahikeng; cultural heritage; South Africa

### Introduction

Amidst the economic meltdown associated with the COVID-19 lockdown, South Africa recorded an official rate of unemployment of 34.4 percent in 2021, its highest ever. Arguably, the depth of South Africa's challenge of job creation underscores the critical importance of enhancing Local Economic Development (LED) as a lever for advancing inclusive economic growth as well as raising levels of local employment. Although for the past quarter-century LED planning has been accorded a high priority on the policy agenda in South Africa, it is officially conceded that - bar certain exceptions – it has yielded disappointing outcomes overall. South Africa's most recent policy document for LED, which is designed to cover the period 2018-2028, was released only in 2020 (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020). The *National Framework for Local Economic Development 2018-2028* stresses the importance of creating 'innovation-driven local economies' which, in turn, demands the maximization of the asset base of local municipalities. Accordingly, the need exists for further intensifying the





focus on LED most especially by building upon the lessons of (positive and negative) experience (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020).

The imperative for maximizing local assets applies particularly to the development of tourism which, in the pre-COVID-19 era, represented the most common sectoral focus for municipalities aiming to catalyse opportunities for local development (Nel & Rogerson, 2016; Rogerson, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). Indeed, for rural and marginal areas of South Africa “a tourism-driven approach is seen as one of the few opportunities to tap into underutilised or unused local assets and to draw in external expenditure given the exhaustion of traditional economic mainstays in many areas” (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2016: 99). This position is affirmed by the documented experience of local economic development occurring in several rural and peripheral areas of South Africa (Rogerson & Nel, 2016; Drummond & Snowball, 2019, 2021; Lawrence & Rogerson, 2019; Rogerson, 2019; Drummond, 2021). Tourism is viewed as a vital sector for promoting LED and economic diversification in many rural areas and small towns in accordance with the post-productivist shift. This has swept across rural South Africa in response to the contraction of the former economic mainstays of agriculture, mining and railways which has precipitated problems of economic decline, severe unemployment, poverty and inequality (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2016; Rogerson, 2016).

Tourism is an integral component for the establishment of place-based local development planning (Rogerson, 2014a). In a study of South Africa’s municipalities, it was disclosed that 85.7% of local authorities in distressed areas, including many small town and rural municipalities, were targeting tourism for LED futures (Rogerson & Nel, 2016). In this regard, the Ngaka Modiri Molema District in South Africa’s North West province with Mahikeng its major centre is one remote area which needs economic stimulation and has identified tourism as a potential economic driver. Arguably, the local heritage assets in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District offer the potential for the growth of heritage tourism. The region’s assets relate to the long history of intertwined Basotho, British colonial and Boer cultures. Mahikeng offers several diverse heritage sites which are of both domestic and international significance. The town’s main claim to historical fame is the 217-day Siege of Mafeking during the Anglo-Boer War (now the South African War) in 1899-1900 and the subsequent establishment of the Boy Scout movement by Lord Baden-Powell. The town’s rich history of cultural interactions has meant that Mahikeng “has long been something other than an ordinary South African country town” (Parnell, 1986: 204).

Against this backdrop, the aim of the paper is to investigate tourism development in Mahikeng with a specific focus on the prospects for growing heritage tourism across the local municipality and its district surrounds. The analysis takes a supply-side approach by documenting the cultural and heritage assets in and around Mahikeng that potentially could be leveraged for tourism. An audit of these assets was undertaken in 2020 and completed during January 2021. The audit involved visits to the tourism sites in order to evaluate their current state of repair, the activities on offer and the artefacts being displayed as well as to determine how the sites were being cared for and managed. Internet searches around the tourism assets and activities were conducted to determine the state of marketing information available to tourists and comments on TripAdvisor and visitor books were consulted for information on tourist experiences. In addition, the study draws upon a desktop review of archival records into local and national press reports and government publications (especially Integrated Development Plans) to trace the historical developments and future plans for Mahikeng’s cultural and heritage assets.

Three sections of discussion follow. The next section situates the study briefly as part of international and local academic research on heritage tourism. The subsequent section introduces the study region of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District. This is followed by a critical



discussion of the key heritage tourism assets identified for Mahikeng and district. The argument is made that Mahikeng and its surrounds enjoys a rich heritage asset base which offers latent opportunities for a future expansion of heritage tourism. Overall, the paper should be viewed as a contribution to tourism geographical scholarship on the niche of heritage tourism which was identified by Rogerson & Visser (2020) as one of the emergent growing points in South African tourism research. More broadly, the paper constitutes a further contribution towards understanding tourism and change within the global South (cf. Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021).

### **Heritage tourism debates**

Bhowmik (2021: 387) observes that “heritage tourism is a rapidly growing, specialized genre of tourism”. As an explicit form of tourism, it is argued that “heritage tourism was only acknowledged, defined and researched in the mainstream as recently as the 1980s, with a rapid rise in academic interest in the 1990s” (Timothy, 2018a: 177). The definition of heritage can include both tangible aspects (buildings, monuments, historic sites) as well as intangible aspects (traditions and customs) and always involves a valued inheritance from the past which is utilized in the present and hoped to pass on to future generations (Timothy & Prideaux, 2004; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2014, 2020). Timothy (2021) draws our attention to an important trend in the global North towards democratising heritage in more holistic ways “so that the past of ordinary people may be valued and valorised just as the past of the elites has been valued and valorised”. Arguably, heritage tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism and demarcates a product category involving cultural and/or heritage products that are built or intangible and which in many situations have been modified over time (Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Boyd, 2021). As is emphasized in several works by Timothy (2014, 2018a, 2018b, 2020) heritage tourism is one of the most ubiquitous forms of tourism, a developmental tool in countless locations in all parts of the world which provides jobs, local incomes and tax revenue. Optimizing tourism development must be a policy priority for heritage tourism destinations (Mandić & Kennell, 2021). Different heritage attractions, however, have different dynamics and appeal to unique target markets which might have personal linkages to the sites or alternatively seeking to be ‘othered’ and escape from mundane urban life (Timothy, 2020).

In many parts of the global South heritage assets are one of the core drivers for the development of tourism destinations (Laws & Pan, 2004; Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b). Nevertheless, the overall picture is viewed by Timothy and Nyaupane (2009: 249) that in many instances “developing countries are very rich in heritage; however, the linkage between heritage and tourism is weak”. The negative physical and socio-cultural impacts of heritage tourism in the global South are reviewed by Timothy and Nyaupane (2009). These authors highlight variously the dangers of the deterioration to the built environment, problems around conservation and preservation of heritage, and cultural commodification whereby culture becomes a product that is packaged and sold to heritage tourists. The impact of natural disasters such as earthquakes on local heritage tourism is analysed by Rindrasih & Witte (2021). In the realm of economic impacts, most of the outcomes of heritage tourism are “the same or similar to those of other forms of tourism” (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009: 63). For example, in the case of Indonesia Hampton (2005) documents both the benefits and costs of local heritage sites. In Indonesia also the reinvention of Sawahlunto a coal mining city into a cultured mining heritage destination has been tracked (Syafrini, Nurdin, Sugandi & Miko, 2021). Lak, Gheitasi and Timothy (2020) show that in Iran urban cultural capital can be utilized to regenerate a declining historic city and foster urban regeneration. The importance of engaging local residents in urban cultural heritage development is highlighted in a recent study conducted in China (Butler, Szili & Huang, 2021). From India there is evidence that colonial nostalgia based tourism has the potential to be highly lucrative as the



legacy of being a former colony (Bandyopadhyay, 2018). However, protection of heritage and the encouragement of heritage tourism is viewed as a special 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: 563).

As disclosed by bibliometric analysis the region of sub-Saharan Africa is demonstrably on the margins of international scholarship concerning heritage tourism research (Kumar, Sureka & Vashishtha, 2020). Nevertheless, the maximization of the region’s assets for cultural heritage including colonial and indigenous tangible and intangible heritage is becoming increasingly relevant for the African tourism product mix (Lwoga & Adu-Ampong, 2020). Among recent research contributions are, for example, works on Tanzania variously on resident attitudes towards heritage development for tourism (Lwoga, 2017, 2018, 2019), on Ghana concerning maximizing the assets of its slave castles (Mensah, 2015), on Malawi concerning resident attitudes to management of a World Heritage Site (Chauma and Ngwira, 2021), and a wider interrogation of the relationship of UNESCO and heritage tourism in Africa (Chirikure, Ndoro, Bugarin, Lernia, Ichumbaki & Lwoga, 2021). In South Africa benchmark works on heritage tourism are those by Rassool (2000), Marschall (2005, 2009, 2013, 2019) and Murray (2013). Of significance, however, is a recent stream of contributions on heritage tourism which have been authored by geographers. In particular the publications on heritage tourism and the geography of heritage in South Africa produced by van der Merwe and colleagues have carved out an important role for geographers in the scholarly debates around the development of South Africa’s assets for heritage tourism (van der Merwe, 2013; van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2013; van der Merwe, 2014; Masilo & van der Merwe, 2016; Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018; van der Merwe, 2019a, 2019b; Mohale, McKay & van der Merwe, 2020). The most recent overview of tourism geographical writings for South Africa flagged the niche of heritage tourism as attracting “several recent contributions variously about its participants, its geographies and its economic impacts” (Rogerson & Visser, 2020: 6). Our study of Ngaka Modiri Molema District (Fig. 1) builds upon this growing pool of heritage tourism research produced by geographers.

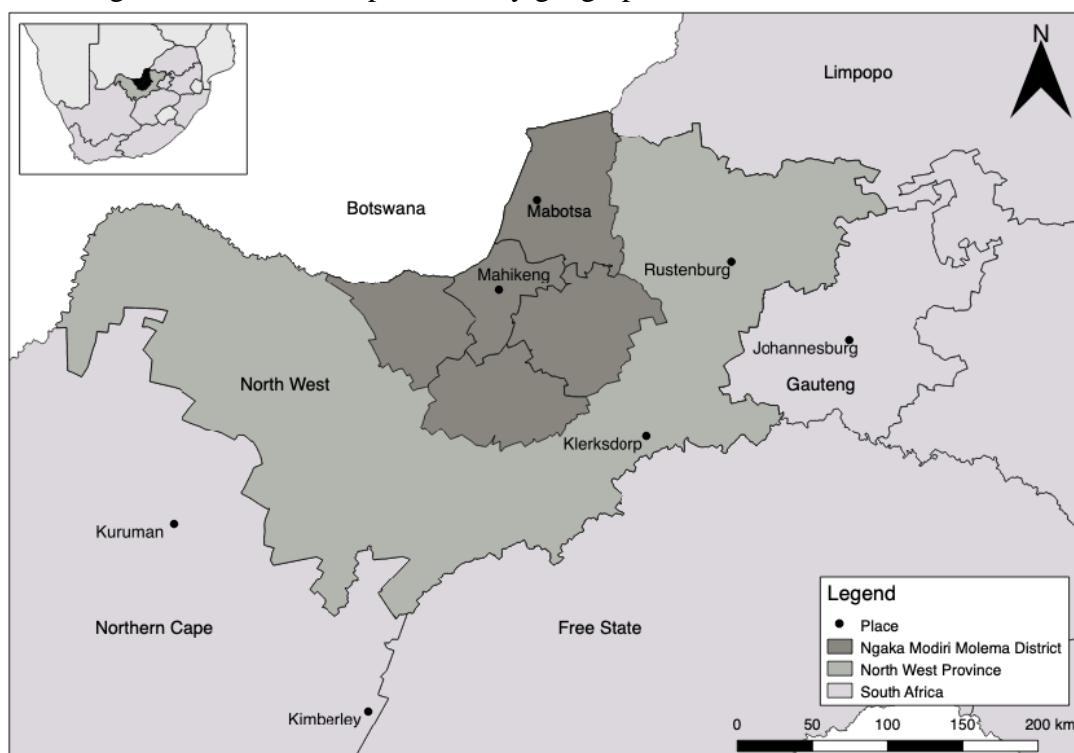


Figure 1: The Location of Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality, South Africa (Source: Authors)



### The historical tourism context of Ngaka Modiri Molema District

The town of Mahikeng (previously known as Mafeking) 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 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 meaning ‘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 faction of the Baralong 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 as well as competing colonial powers of Portugal and Germany in Southern Africa, by founding the colonial town of Mafeking. The town was laid out by General Sir Charles Warren in 1895 on land leased from the Batswana people adjacent to the African settlement (Parnell, 1986; Drummond & Drummond, 2021; Drummond & Nel, 2021). From 1895 to 1966 Mafeking served as the extra-territorial capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate until the territory gained independence from Britain and the capital was moved to Gaborone in the newly independent Botswana. Mafeking’s historical geography and its earliest links to tourism are thus an integral part of the somewhat overlooked scholarship on capital city tourism in Africa (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c).

The relocation of the capital function to Gaborone and the departure of Britain as a colonial power exposed Mafeking to the full force of apartheid legislation especially during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1980 Mafeking was incorporated into Bophuthatswana, the mock independent ‘traditional homeland’ of the Batswana people which was established by the apartheid government in 1977 with Lucas Mangope the titular President. 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 and revert away from the colonial anglicised spelling (Parnell, 1986). Another major political change came in 1994 when South Africa gained democracy and the ‘bantustans’ were disbanded. The new African National Congress (ANC) government set about dismantling Bophuthatswana as it was viewed as an artefact of Grand Apartheid (Drummond & Drummond, 2021). The ANC government also went about reclaiming the African heritage of South Africa which had been suppressed both during apartheid and the colonial period. Consequently, the North West ANC 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 of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the capital of the North West province. It is classed in terms of the national settlement system as a secondary city. In 2016, the municipal population was recorded at 314 394 people of which 97% are African; the majority culture is Batswana with the main languages being English and Setswana (Drummond & Nel, 2021). Overall, in terms of the South African space economy, Mahikeng is impacted by its peripheral location, being relatively distant from the major metropolitan and industrial areas of South Africa (Nel & Drummond, 2019). Although Mahikeng’s economy is not primarily anchored on agricultural activity and enjoys the benefits of capital status for the North West province, the area has experienced a period of economic stagnation which is inseparable from its remote location. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism had been identified by the provincial, district and municipal governments as a potential economic driver for the region with a focus on ecotourism related to game viewing and to heritage tourism (Mahikeng Local Municipality, 2020; Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality, 2020).



Table 1: Key Tourism Indicators for the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality 2008-2018

Year	Leisure Trips	%	Business Trips	%	VFR Trips	%	Other, Trips	%	Total	Domestic Trips	%	International Trips	%	Total Tourism Spend (ZAR billion)	Total Tourism Spending as % of Local GDP
2008	43300	8.8	32000	6.5	374000	76.0	43200	8.8	492000	451000	91.7	41600	8.3	2.4	8.9
2010	45900	10.0	35600	7.8	338000	73.6	39700	8.7	459000	412000	89.8	47000	10.2	2.3	7.3
2012	50700	10.4	43000	8.8	355000	72.9	38700	8.0	487000	434000	89.1	53000	10.9	2.3	6.1
2014	48400	9.6	46400	9.2	374000	74.5	32400	6.5	502000	437000	87.1	64400	12.8	2.5	5.7
2016	40500	8.2	47600	9.7	376000	76.3	29100	5.9	493000	417000	84.6	76400	15.5	2.6	5.0
2018	37800	7.9	39500	8.3	374000	78.6	24600	5.2	476000	397000	83.4	79000	16.6	2.6	4.5

(Source: Unpublished data extracted from IHS Global Insight data base)



During the pre-COVID-19 era, tourism had emerged as a notable sector for the economy of Ngaka Modiri Molema District. Table 1 presents a profile of the major features of the tourism sector in terms of trips by purpose, by origin, tourism spend and contribution of tourism to the local economy. It discloses a tourism economy showing clear signs of stress and decline, most especially since 2010. In terms of purpose of travel overwhelmingly the largest share of tourism trips is accounted for by visiting friends and relatives (VFR); by 2018 for the District VFR travel accounted for 78.6% of all trips. As Mahikeng is the provincial capital of North West it enjoyed a solid business travel base in the pre-COVID-19 period; indeed, from 2014 business travel becomes the second most significant purpose of travel for the District. Of greatest concern for tourism spend is the performance of leisure travel which has been on a declining trajectory since 2012; by 2018 leisure trips represented less than 8 percent of tourism trips to the District. In terms of origin of travel despite its borderland location domestic trips overwhelmingly account for many of the tourism trips to the District. This said, it is observed that there has been an expansion in the volume of international trips over the period 2008-2018. Indicators of tourism spend confirm the stagnant picture for the District tourism economy. The most striking indicator is that of tourism's relative contribution to local GDP. This has shown a consistent pattern of demise throughout the period 2008 to 2018; in 2008 tourism's contribution to local GDP was 8.9 percent, by 2018 this was diminished to 4.5 percent. As in 2018 the national assessment of tourism contribution to GDP was 6.1 percent the area did not fall within the listings of South Africa's most vulnerable tourism spaces at the close of the pre-COVID period (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020, 2021d). Nevertheless, the impact of COVID-19 on the area's tourism economy undoubtedly will have eroded further the declining contribution of tourism to the local economy (indexed by GDP) a situation which underlines the imperative for boosting tourism recovery by maximizing all tourism assets of the District.

The evolving character of Mahikeng's tourism economy is substantively influenced by its borderland location and the inclusion within the Ngaka Modiri Molema District of large swathes of former rural homeland areas which typically are characterized by a high proportion of split households resulting in significant movements of VFR travel (Rogerson, 2014b). As a borderland region the Ngaka Modiri Molema District faces particular challenges and opportunities. The border between the Ngaka Modiri Molema District on the South African side and Botswana is a political divide between the Batswana people (Drummond & Manson, 1993). This further explains the dominance of VFR tourism in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District as 'bonjala', meaning to visit friends and family and attend important events in Setswana, is an important part of the Batswana culture (Manyane, 2017). Nevertheless, the border is also seen as a constraint to international VFR travel movements because of the need for travel documents and sometimes long processing times at the border (Manyane, 2017).

In order for tourism-led development to be successful, the volume of leisure tourists would need to be escalated. This challenge has important implications for local tourism policy as cohesive marketing schemes need to be developed that target groups who would be interested in the unique heritage assets that Mahikeng has to offer. In addition, the opportunities around VFR travel – including from Botswana – need to be maximized. One positive aspect for future tourism development relates to findings from research concerning resident attitudes towards tourism development as tourism initiatives (including for heritage tourism) are most likely to be successful if support is forthcoming from the local community (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Studies of Mahikeng's residents by Prinsloo & Pelser (2015) and Potgieter & Litheko (2016) revealed that the majority of local residents held positive views on tourism development in pre-COVID-19 times. Attention now turns to investigate the assets of Mahikeng and the wider Ngaka Modiri Molema District where the area's interwoven cultures and heritages offer a unique tourism opportunity.



## **Heritage tourism opportunities in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District**

Arguably, there are a range of potential cultural, heritage and nature assets that are underutilized and could be harnessed for tourism and tourism-led development in the District. The 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 such as the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village and role and lives of Batswana heroes like Ngaka (meaning doctor in Setswana) Modiri Molema. In addition, there are further heritage tourism opportunities related to the missionary endeavours of David Livingstone in South Africa, Sol Plaatje and the Mahika-Mahikeng Cultural Festival. Beyond these assets the integrated development plans for the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality (2020) and Mahikeng Local Municipality (2020) list a number of other cultural heritage sites that could be harnessed for LED, albeit no dedicated tourism development strategy is in place for leveraging these assets.

### ***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 an international reputation. The relief of Mafeking and the end of the Siege gave rise to jingoistic celebrations throughout the United Kingdom and British Empire. In commemoration of the event, streets were named after Mafeking in cities throughout the Commonwealth. To some extent the origins of the Boy Scouts movement can also be traced back to the Siege of Mafeking where Lord Baden Powell used young boys as scouts to carry messages and assist in performing various duties in the besieged town. It is this colonial heritage that still resonates with international tourists and attracts them to the town. These assets of colonial heritage have the potential to be developed for colonial nostalgia tourism in a manner similar to that which has occurred in other countries, most notably the example of India (Bandyopadhyay, 2018).

At the apex of the town's heritage tourism industry is the Mahikeng Museum which is the main port of call for tourists looking for information on the Siege. It is also the only heritage tourism asset in the town that is featured on tourism websites. The Museum itself is housed in the old colonial town hall, completed in 1903 (Figure 2). 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 and have been relegated to one small room in the museum. Many of the artefacts are not on display as they have been put into storage to be catalogued and there is no indication of how long the cataloguing process will take nor any indication of when or if they will be put on display again. 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. There is no indication that a new curator will be appointed soon, and museum staff are currently employed on short term contracts, so there does not seem to be a long-term plan for caring for and upgrading the museum. A thematic analysis of visitor comments on TripAdvisor between 2017 and 2019 reveals international tourism demand exists for colonial nostalgia relating to the Siege and the boy scouts but that most visitors to the Mahikeng Museum found it disappointing and did not recommend the trip as worthwhile.



Figure 2: The Mahikeng Museum (Photograph: Fiona Drummond)

An information video at the museum provides a shopping list of heritage sites to visit in the town relating to both colonial and Basotho heritage with a brief overview of what they are but minimal information on their significance. At some point there was an attempt to upgrade tourism infrastructure in the town with information boards being placed at heritage sites around the town. However, many of the boards have become faded or have been vandalised over time so that it is difficult or impossible to read. There are also no tourist guides who can take visitors to these sites and provide relevant information on them. With regards to the colonial heritage of the town, a number of Anglo-Boer War and Siege sites are listed within Ngaka Modiri Molema District including the Kraaipan monument where the first shot of the war was fired, Kanon Kopje battlefield, grave sites and smaller places of interest like storage chambers. Due to the interest in battlefield tourism in South Africa, tourism to the Anglo-Boer War sites in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District and the Siege of Mafekeng sites could be marketed under battlefields tourism and connected to other prominent battlefield sites like Magersfontein in the Northern Cape or Ncome, Talana, Rorke's Drift, Isandlwana and Bloodriver in KwaZulu-Natal (van der Merwe, 2014, 2019b).

A variety of colonial buildings must be highlighted for their history and heritage. The Mahikeng Museum is one of the best examples of colonial style architecture in the town as the building has been relatively well maintained. Unfortunately, other colonial style buildings are derelict such as St Joseph's Convent which was built in 1899 (see Figure 3) and as the only double storey building in the town at the time, was used as an observation post during the Siege. In several heritage tourism destinations of the global South, colonial buildings help to create a sense of the 'old world' to which nostalgia harks back, and in many cases have been converted to hotels, bars and restaurants where visitors can imagine themselves in colonial times. Mahikeng possesses these assets and with potential for private investors to refurbish and convert buildings like St Joseph's Convent into accommodation, dining and entertainment spaces.



Figure 3: Exterior of St Joseph's Convent in Mahikeng (Photograph: Fiona Drummond)

A further element of colonial heritage that has remained unexploited for Mahikeng relates to the life and history of the Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone. The heritage of David Livingstone is well-documented and celebrated in Zambia and Malawi but relatively undeveloped in South Africa. The start of Livingstone's story is tied in with Robert and Mary Moffat of the London Missionary Society as he joined the Moffat Mission in Kuruman in the Northern Cape in 1841. Wanting to establish his own mission station, Livingstone established a base at Mabotsa, which is now in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District, where he was involved in developing irrigation and introducing new crops. It was here that he was famously attacked by a lion in 1844, an event which has become synonymous with David Livingstone's story and has been immortalized in a statue at the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre, Scotland as well as a number of artworks. Although Livingstone's time in South Africa is preserved in as much as it relates to missionary heritage through the unofficial Northern Cape missionary heritage trail centred around Kuruman (Jacobs, 1996), it is remarkable that there is currently no tourism information or infrastructure in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District which links to Livingstone's mission station in Mabotsa or the lion attack. The ruins of the Mabotsa mission station can still be seen, though they are difficult to access, and the irrigation systems that Livingstone helped to develop can still be viewed in Dinokana village near the station (Drummond, 1990; Drummond & Manson, 1993). It is these heritage assets which could allow tourist guides to extend the Northern Cape missionary trail into the North West province and even cross-border into Botswana with links to Zambia and Malawi. Currently, South Africa – and specifically Ngaka Modiri Molema District – is largely missing out on heritage tourism opportunities related to David Livingstone's colonial life and legacy.

### ***The Heritage of African Leaders and Batswana Cultural Heritage***

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 with 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 could be celebrated more prominently.

The Mahikeng Museum is the logical 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 generalized 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 Mafekeng during the Siege. Information on Dr Modiri Molema is even sparser and points to his medical practice and home Maritiwa, which is in the original African settlement of Mahikeng known as the Stadt. It is thus not only the Siege heritage, but also the Batswana cultural heritage which is not being adequately curated. Despite this, the Mahikeng Museum has attempted to highlight the role of the Batswana people during the Siege, as there is information and photographs which describe their roles and experiences. However, more could be done as there is an opportunity to use Plaatje's Siege Diary to present an African perspective, experience and critique of the Siege. Sol Plaatje (1876-1932) was an intellectual, journalist, writer, politician and linguist who worked as a court interpreter during the Siege of Mafekeng and kept a diary of his experiences which was published posthumously. He was a founding member of the ANC, fought throughout his life for the liberation of African people and was editor of the black-owned and printed first Setswana newspaper, Koranta ea Becoana, while living in Mafekeng. *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafekeng* could be used to widen the lens with which the Siege is viewed and discussed by including this perspective in displays at the Mahikeng Museum. This would result in a more inclusive and historically accurate record and align 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, earning his degree from Glasgow University in Scotland and returning to set up a practice in Mahikeng that served both black and white residents (Starfield, 2001). 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 (Starfield, 2001; Starfield, 2012). Despite his local and national significance Molema's story is 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.

Another unique African cultural heritage asset that is currently under-utilized in Mahikeng is the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village, 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). After leaving Soweto in 1978 Credo Mutwa was invited by then Bophuthatswana 'President' Lucas Mangope to create a cultural village based on the African history, legends and customs that he described in his 1964 book *Indaba my Children* (Dixon Soule Associates, 1987). Construction of the cultural village began in 1983 on the banks of the Lotlamoreng Dam just outside Mafikeng and was intended to be a living museum to serve as a cultural and educational centre for both local residents and tourists. The Lotlamoreng Cultural Village was replete with replicas of African villages to show the cultural differences between South Africa's diverse cultures; a missionary church and house with artistic representations of Christianity in Africa; a foundry where iron was smelted and forged into weapons and implements in the same way as it was done for centuries; sculptures telling African stories and representing the spirituality of Africa; as well as traditional craft, music, dance, drama and storytelling performances (Dixon Soule Associates, 1987; Grant, 2010).



Youth who studied traditional music and craft at the cultural village travelled to Europe to perform and showcase their crafts. Credo Mutwa, a controversial figure, was later evicted from the area and in the 1994 riots known as the Battle of BOP, the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village was partly destroyed (Grant, 2010). The village, once popular with locals as well as domestic and international tourists, 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.

In heritage development it is vital to represent the diversity of cultures that have intertwined over Mahikeng's history and to celebrate the culture of the local people, including through festivals. The Mahika-Mahikeng festival seeks to celebrate the local Batswana culture and Setswana language through music, dance, drama and arts and crafts. The aims of the festival include promoting cultural and heritage tourism, celebrating artists in the region and nation; repositioning and rebranding Mahikeng and the North West province as a cultural hub; stimulating economic growth; and creating jobs in the music and cultural industries (Drummond et al., 2021). 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 localized to areas where Setswana is spoken widely and where the Batswana culture and people are found (Drummond et al., 2021). The festival was successful in terms of its goals of rejuvenating Batswana culture, instilling pride in people and promoting social cohesion as 77% of festival attendees who were surveyed agreed that "the festival makes me feel proud of my cultural heritage" and regarded it as "part of what makes Mahikeng a special place" (Drummond et al., 2021). This indicates that there is a demand for a Batswana cultural festival. Given that the majority of trips to Mahikeng are for VFR purposes and that there is a large Batswana community across the border, the festival's poor marketing meant that an opportunity was missed to attract larger audiences from outside the region and thereby increase the LED impact of the festival. Unfortunately, the festival was not held in 2019 due to allegations of corruption in the award of tenders (Drummond et al., 2021) and cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19.

The finale of the Mahika-Mahikeng festival was held at the Lotlamoreng Dam complex which has been identified and targeted by local government for potential tourism-driven LED. At the dam location are a number of public art murals which celebrate local African leaders (Figure 4). However, the investment into Lotlamoreng has mainly related to the dam itself and water-based recreation activities rather than restoration of the cultural village. In 2005, the North West Provincial Government approved R5 million for the upgrading of Lotlamoreng Dam to turn it into a recreation destination for nature, leisure and water activities (Africa, 2016). More recently, the National Department of Tourism invested R15 million in Lotlamoreng to upgrade infrastructure around the dam but unfortunately does not extend to the cultural village (Mokgoro, 2019; Portfolio Committee on Tourism, 2017). Field observations at the complex revealed that currently, a strategic tourism infrastructure project is underway as a multi-purpose centre is being built, but it too seems to have no connection to the cultural village at this point. However, in 2016 the Portfolio Committee on Tourism made an oversight visit to Lotlamoreng Dam to report on the progress of the R15 million infrastructure project where "the committee observed that there is a site of significant cultural value adjacent to the dam. The dilapidated ruins of the original home of Credo Mutwa... lie unattended along the banks of the dam. This Credo Mutwa Cultural Village is in prime spot along a busy traffic route and could be restored and turned into a provincial heritage site. This site could then serve as an important cultural tourism attraction" (Portfolio Committee on Tourism, 2017). This illustrates that though the cultural village has largely been neglected since Credo Mutwa was forced to leave it has garnered recognition as a potentially valuable cultural heritage tourist attraction.



Figure 4: Selection of public art murals at Lotlamoreng Dam painted by L. G. Creative Artists 2008  
From left to right: Portrait of Dr Modiri Molema; portrait of Sol Plaatje; one of Plaatje's books, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916); Maratiwe; copy of Koranta ea Becoana (Photograph: Fiona Drummond)

A revival of the Lotlamoreng Cultural Village as an African cultural heritage attraction has been attempted but has been subject to discussion and negotiation between stakeholders for some time. The revival initiatives seemed to peak in 2018 when the North West government invited Credo Mutwa to return to Lotlamoreng. It was hoped that his presence would spark a renewed interest in the village and act as a catalyst for its development. The aim of this revival according to Ontlametse Mochware, the MEC for culture and traditional affairs, is to increase tourism activities, create jobs, “preserve our culture” and promote local economic development (SABC News, 2018, 3:18). Media images from Mutwa’s 2018 visit to Lotlamoreng showed that the cultural village had been cleaned up for the occasion (SABC News, 2018). However, this impetus has unfortunately not been maintained as the site is now derelict and is overgrown with vegetation which makes it relatively inaccessible. The space is now being used as a grazing site for cattle, the artwork is not being cared for and some of it has been vandalised. Local government reports, however, that “a truly African cultural experience can be enjoyed. This can be built on by expanding cultural activities and having tourists partaking in events. The centre has been refurbished” (Mahikeng Local Municipality, 2020: 86). This is clearly not the case.

## Conclusion

Heritage tourism scholarship is a growing theme of research in several parts of the global South. Arguably, it is a literature in which geographers have been major contributors and certainly so in South Africa (Rogerson & Visser, 2020). This study contributes to heritage tourism writings in the global South. A key finding is to reinforce the conclusion of Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) that despite the existence of potential assets for heritage the linkages and spinoffs to tourism remain limited in many cases. It has been demonstrated that the tourism economy of Ngaka Modiri Molema District is distressed and currently manifests signs of decline. The local



municipality – like many others in South Africa – prioritizes tourism as a potential driver for LED and much needed local job creation. Mahikeng and its surrounds enjoys an untapped and varied asset base which offers latent opportunities for a future expansion of tourism. Arguably, this area exhibits a rich asset base for the promotion of the niche of heritage tourism both in terms of its colonial heritage and nostalgia as well as assets associated with African and Basotho cultural heritage. This asset base is under-performing and in several respects is in a state of deterioration. For re-igniting tourism in this part of South Africa there is an urgent need for responsible political will and national and local policy stakeholders to understand and address the challenges that limit the maximization of these assets in order to allow heritage tourism to flourish and become a vital part of LED futures in the post COVID-19 environment.

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