

Creating an African Tourist Experience at the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site

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Introduction

Heritage tourism amongst other things is also an ideological framing of history and identity. This article looks at how heritage managers creatively use palaeo-anthropological theory in constructing a particular tourist experience at the fossil site of Sterkfontein in the Cradle of Humankind. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1999, Sterkfontein, in the Gauteng province of South Africa, is a site of immense palaeo-archaeological wealth. Heritage tourism in the form of fossil sites tourism is a strongly emerging field of tourism in some parts of the world, and South Africa has shown itself to be a world leader in terms of the hominid fossil artefacts found here.

Given this context, South Africa is positioning itself as a premier tourist destination for hominid or early human fossil sites tourism such as the site at Sterkfontein. Maropeng is the more recently built interpretive centre for the archaeological site of Sterkfontein. As such, Maropeng is the so-called “sales pitch” for Sterkfontein and is the instrument through which the information from Sterkfontein is “museified” and mediated to a popular audience. This article will show how a particular African tourist experience is constructed at Maropeng, attempting to create a sense of a shared *African* humanity and origin. Through meaning appended to a particular architectural design for the interpretive site, as well as slogans embedded in the official web sites of both Sterkfontein and Maropeng, a virile logo and narrative drawing from a particular anthropological theory of human origin, an experience of a shared African history is constructed for the tourist here. Finally the article attempts to show that the constructed experience is part of a larger emerging discourse to rearticulate the identity of the African. Ultimately the tourist, in the context of Maropeng, experiences the artefact of the constructed (African) narrative, in as much as the fossil artefacts themselves.

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The article is divided into three parts. Part I will deal with heritage tourism, II with heritage management and constructing a tourist experience, while III will look at the particular dynamics of palaeo-heritage fossil tourism and African identity.

I: Heritage Tourism

Tourism, History of Tourism, History and Tourism and “That Thing called Heritage”

Tourism like many phenomena able to be variously comprehended through a variety of disciplines – historical, anthropological, sociological, and others, suffers not so much from a dearth (of manners) of definitions, but from the very multiplicity and inherent plasticity in the way it can be unpacked within the methodological perspectives of the unpacking disciplines. For, embedded within the complex and seemingly universal activity of tourism, are notions of movement and travel, of visitor and host, curiosity and gazing, manufacture and consumption, authenticity and construction, of industry and labour, of leisure and its counterpoint, hospitality, of politics of economy, of hermeneutics of representation and so forth. A rich vein of academic enquiry has been undertaken into all of these concepts inherent in the complex phenomenon that has come to be known as *tourism*.

Positioned as a possible agent of change¹, tourism has a veritable marketplace of possibilities or articulated typologies of tourist activities. From this large marketplace, in so far as one aspect of tourism can, rather simplistically, be described as visiting and attempting to encounter a historical site, monument or memorialised event, we have what has come to be labelled, “heritage tourism”. Heritage tourism brings certain salient conceptual, theoretical and empirical discourses in tourism to bear on history. Burnett points out that “history and heritage are two different yet related processes” and refers to studies examining the “uneasy alliance”² between the two that go back to works of David Lowenthal, and his much quoted work, *The Past is a Foreign Country*.³ Debates around the very

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1. N. Macleod, “Cultural Tourism: Aspects of Authenticity and Commodification”, in K. Smith and M. Robinson (eds), *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World, Politics, Participation and (Re)presentation* (Channel View Publications, England, 2006), p 180.
 2. K.A. Burnett, “Heritage, Authenticity and History”, in S. Drummond and I. Yeoman (eds), *Quality Issues in Heritage Visitor Attractions* (Heinemann, Oxford, 2001), p 47.
 3. D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985).

definition of heritage flourish (as do they about what exactly history is), and writers like Catherine Kelly point to the contested nature of heritage, from being defined as something simply inherited from the past, to ideas of an incorporation of the natural and built environment, to heritage being viewed as a commodified product.⁴ Of understandable concern are issues of ownership, and permission to consume,⁵ with notions of authenticity and staged authenticity as important now as back in the seventies for writers like MacCannell,⁶ as are issues around the politics of representation.

In their chapter entitled “Repacking the past for South African Tourism”⁷, published in 2005, Witz and his co-authors look at three products attempting to market an African experience, and attempting to promote South Africa as an African cultural destination. They look at the “cultural village”, the “township tour” and the “Ratanga Junction theme park”. This article looks at the product of “archaeological experience” at Maropeng, which also seeks to promote itself as an African experience, and South Africa as a premier African destination because of the archaeological wealth at Sterkfontein.

In my analysis of tourism and the tourist experience at Sterkfontein, heritage is understood as a duality, being the material relics from the past, as well as being a product that attempts to sell this past in the present. While this approach may well mute other alternative understandings of heritage, it does gather and focus our gaze on seeing heritage in terms of objects from the past – in this instance of archaeological value – that become part of the face a nation offers up as a portrait of itself. South Africa has also, since 1994, become increasingly interested in looking back to a history where the black African majority was no longer invisible and where history is understood as a narrative and retelling of the past that was inclusive of these experiences. This “corrective history”,⁸ as Gerhard Schutte puts it, becomes a pressing need

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4. C. Kelly, “Heritage Tourism Politics in Ireland”, in Smith & Robinson (eds), *Cultural Tourism*, p 36.
 5. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*.
 6. D. MacCannell, “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 79, pp 89-603; D. MacCannell, *The Tourist A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), pp 91-107.
 7. L. Witz, C. Rassool and G. Minkley, “Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism”, in G. Corsane (ed), *Heritage, Museums and Culture An Introductory Reader* (Routledge, New York, 2005), p 308.
 8. G. Schutte, “Tourists and Tribes in the New South Africa”, *Ethnohistory*, 50, 3, 2003, p 473.

for a nation looking to redefine itself. Archaeological inquiry and fieldwork has not been immune from this transitioning as new discourses emerged that sought to retrieve the discipline from what has been perceived as a remnant of a colonial endeavour within South Africa. An added shot in the arm was the interest that the new government seemed to take in embracing palaeo-anthropological discoveries. Not only was there was no shying away from evolutionary talk, there was now interest in inserting the palaeo-archaeological finds into the heritage inventory of the country. It is in this context that the ongoing and fruitful excavations at Sterkfontein are spotlighted and embraced as part of South African heritage. While I may not go as far as saying that “history is gradually being bent into something called Heritage”, or “Heritage gradually effacing History”,⁹ I concede to the inevitable tension between the two and Sterkfontein and Maropeng are pretty good illustrations of this tension. From an anthropological sense, what interests me is also how this material culture unearthed at Sterkfontein, comes to be commodified and sold through the various mechanisms of interpretation, through words, images and in the case of Sterkfontein, through the architectural tenets of the visitor centre, Maropeng.

II: Heritage Management & Constructing a Tourist Experience

From Sterkfontein to Maropeng: Architectural Design and the Appropriating of the “Ancestors”

The Cradle of Humankind comprises about forty fossil sites, thirteen of which have been excavated to date. The palaeo-heritage here is immense, about forty per cent of the world’s hominid fossils – hominids being an archaeological term for early human ancestors – have been found here. A massive monolith at the side of the road beckons the visitor towards the entrance of the most famous of the caves, Sterkfontein. Also attached to Sterkfontein, is a newly revamped museum that is designed to house scientifically accurate fossil replicas.

While the various palaeo-archaeological sites of the Cradle may well attract the attention of both lay tourists and specialist scientists, the newly built interpretive complex of Maropeng appears to be intended for the tourist. Rather interestingly, the Maropeng interpretive complex has been designed in the form of a tumulus. As such the building is designed to look like an ancient burial mound. A tumulus is differentiated from grassy knolls and is itself a mound of earth and stones raised over a

9. R. Hewison, “Heritage: An Interpretation”, in D. Uzzell (ed) *Heritage Interpretation I – The Natural and Built Environment* (Bethaven, London and New York, 1989), pp 15-23.

grave. Tumuli are better known for their presence in Europe and Asia, and parts of North and West Africa. In fulfilment of what appears to be certain perhaps environmental, if not tumulus aesthetics, the Maropeng facade is grassed over and is made to have a naturalised feel and look, while the rear is enunciated in architectural vocabulary that aims for a modern visual and feel, with glass and steel.



Figure 1: Maropeng.
(Picture courtesy of Maropeng Centre).

Given that the architectural tenets of the tumulus are not specifically African, it is intriguing that such a design would have been chosen for the building that was to position itself as proudly African, and indeed South African, meant to showcase South African heritage. Some semblance of an answer appears to lie in statements made to the press regarding the so-called significance of the design. Consider an online article that tells us that the “significance of the tumulus form is to pay homage to the spirituality [!?] of burials by the previous societies in the area”.¹⁰ We are informed in the same press release that “the tumulus is meant to represent humanity’s myriad ancestors, who now lie buried in the African land”.

The explanation that is offered for the architectural form attempts to suggest that the marriage of the ancient and universal [sic] in the form of the mound roots us in the past, while modern materials and

10. L. Davie, “New-Look Sterkfontein puts Life into Fossils”, <http://www.Joburg.org> (accessed February 2006).

functionality place us squarely in the present. Along with the earthen mound, we are told that these are meant as covert pointers to our origins in the past and our evolution to the present. Or the same releases imply in reverse how our civilized present can be traced back to the ancestors in the rooted mound in Africa. Many members on the managing committee of Maropeng have articulated similar sentiments of rootedness and of what they claimed as the relevance of the architectural tumulus form to Africa.¹¹



Figure 2: Maropeng from the rear.
(Picture courtesy of Maropeng Centre).

However, a personal communication with leading palaeontologist, Professor Francis Thackeray, presents another face to the discussion. Thackeray presently is Director of the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria. This is where the renowned fossil, Mrs Ples,¹² is housed. Thackeray tells me that he felt strongly against the tumulus design, telling me that it had no meaning, *in an African context*, and that it was not an African-inspired design as such. Thackeray went on to state that, obviously, the tumulus design won, as the *others* were in favour of what *they* felt was an innovative design. Unfortunately Thackeray did not at the time elaborate as to who the other voices were. My assumption was that many of these other voices referred to by Thackeray, were from heritage management

11. See online articles, both by L. Davie, "Showcasing the Cradle of Humankind", <http://www.Joburg.org> (accessed February 2006); L. Davie, "Maropeng Brings Fossils to Life", <http://www.Joburg.org> (accessed December 2006).
12. Mrs Ples will be discussed in greater detail in the latter part of the article.

and brand managerial backgrounds, as opposed to having a background in palaeo-anthropology as such. There is at present a palaeo-anthropologist attached to Maropeng. It is with her that one liaises, as I did when making my video documentary of the Sterkfontein cave tour. However, aside from Thackeray's input as academic, it was not clear at that time who else from an anthropological stance might have been involved.

While the significance of the ancient facade and modern rear is eloquently explained in various press releases, there appear to be other functional dynamics to the design, for the tumulus houses much more than the story of our evolution from pre-human to modern human. Inside is also a restaurant, called "Cradle" too, serving, amongst others, African cuisine. There are other typical tourist facilities proximately placed as well. Consider how the popular media describes the tumulus:

It is called the Tumulus of Maropeng. Tumulus is the Latin word for an ancient burial mound, and that is exactly what it resembles as you leave the flat ground of the parking facility, magnetically drawn to the massive rounded triangle of turf and sod. And what a burial mound it is! Outdoor shops, restaurants and banking facilities, all in a broken circle inclining towards a building housing a state of the art museum, underground river, convention center and luxury hotel.¹³

Deborah Graham writes in *The Citizen*: "Are you looking for a convenient weekend getaway offering beautiful, historic scenery? If so, Maropeng is definitely worth considering ..."¹⁴ An online engineering publication even gives the building an almost salvific quality with its headline, "R189m Heritage-site Investment adds Flair to Drab Province".¹⁵ Perhaps most illuminating, is an article in the Summer 2006 issue of *VISI Magazine*, a home, décor and architecture magazine, which quotes Chris Kroese, Director of GAPP Architects, as saying that the structure is an essential part of the "discovery" aspect of the development.¹⁶ It is GAPP Architects, along with local architecture firm Mma, that appears to have been responsible for the design of the Maropeng building in a tumulus form.

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13. <http://www.everywheremag.com/articles/269> (accessed March 2007).
 14. D. Graham, *The Citizen*, 24 August 2006, <http://www.citizen.co.za/index> (accessed March 2008).
 15. P. Cromberge, *Engineering Online*, <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article> (accessed March 2008).
 16. *VISI Magazine*, <http://www.visi.co.za/Frontend/InsideAndLifestyle> (accessed March 2008).

The architecture at Maropeng, which is the interpretive site of Sterkfontein, is intended to symbolize the journey through time from our ancient origins to today. In that sense, the architectural language is meant to communicate our relationship to the archaeological sites of the Cradle and our relationship to the unfolding story of humankind's evolution here. In addition the tumulus echoes what by now is becoming a marketing mantra, an essential part of the branding of Maropeng, namely that humanity's common ancestors were all African.

The tumulus form is touted as more African than it is, through a kind of kinship talk of discovery, and by affirming that all the buried dead have their roots in Africa, further articulating the heritage story of shared humanity. The design is not local, but appears to be forced to speak in a way deemed as relevant to a South African and African context.

Inside the tumulus, the interpretive centre houses four stories with an underground lake at the basement level. We are also told in various press releases¹⁷ that having the bottom-most level underground, continues the metaphor of the burial mound. Visitors start their visit by moving along a delineated path, designed as a timeline. Then the journey continues through an experience highlighting the history of the world and humankind as a species. All of this is designed along the lines of a theme park and indeed these press releases refer to the exhibits and human prehistory as being brought to life via audiovisual techniques and theme-park technology.¹⁸ Some may well see this as a kind of Disneyfication of science, others, tolerantly understand that such interactive and innovative means may indeed be necessary to communicate scientific ideas to the lay public.

Perhaps in typical anthropologist style, punctuating the analysis with a personal reflexive moment may contribute. I am indebted to the reader of an earlier draft of this article who seemed confused by my "critical-reticence" in voicing my uneasy opinion of the highly narrativised space inside the centre. This comment struck a cord, while simultaneously revealing to me the reason for the initial reticence. The first time I visited Maropeng, it was in the guise of the self-confessed alter ego of the anthropologist – the tourist. It was me as tourist, with my son in tow, that went to Maropeng. I admit that I enjoyed the highly imaged, storied and interactive space as much as the kid. It was only *after* the visit, on my way out, that the full import of the constructed

17. Davie, "Maropeng Brings Fossils to Life"; Davie, "Showcasing the Cradle".

18. Davie, "Maropeng Brings Fossils to Life"; Davie, "Showcasing the Cradle".

space was felt. I was reminded of Edward Bruner's marvellous book, *Culture on Tour*.¹⁹ Carrying praising review inserts by the likes of Dean MacCannell and the late, eminent Clifford Geertz, it speaks of the convergence, on the same object, between the gaze of the ethnographer and the cultural tourist.

Relevant Architecture, African Architecture and then there is the Tumulus

Marschall and Kearney are scholars who have researched architecture in the new South Africa. Their book (2000) predates the construction of Maropeng (2004-2005) by a few years. They highlight numerous examples of architectural designs, as well as attempts at particular designs in their discussion of "architectural" opportunities for relevance. They point out that all too often attempts at Africanized architecture focus on the superficial inclusion of familiar "African" forms.²⁰ They rightly inform us that while the readily recognisable form of the African vernacular needs to be assimilated – in other words the stock coffee book images of the round Zulu hut and such – ultimately the most important concept in the African societies they studied, is *ubuntu*, which very loosely communicates the belief that an individual is only truly defined by his/her relationship to other people.²¹ This notion is indeed a vital construct of an African worldview. Thus, relevant architecture that seeks to speak in an African vernacular needs to be cognisant of such essential tenets in the way different parts of the building are relationally designed and positioned. Alongside this way of unpacking relevant architecture, is also the need to understand that post-apartheid sensibilities have ushered in an architectural vocabulary incorporating design indices of freedom and transformation. These are perhaps now the lens through which a large part of the younger generation seeks to refract their world-view. There are examples of this sort of "relevant" architecture as showcased in an exhibition entitled "Fast Forward Johannesburg", which was on show at Aedes Berlin, touted as Europe's best-known architecture gallery, in March and April 2005. An online publication carries the following text:

19. E.M. Bruner, *Culture on Tour Ethnographies of Travel* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005).

20. S. Marschall and B. Kearney, *Opportunities for Relevance Architecture in the New South Africa* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2000), p 167.

21. Marschall & Kearney, *Opportunities for Relevance*, pp 170-171.

Six Johannesburg buildings featured recently in a German exhibition showcasing the city's energy and optimism – and exploring how South Africa's new democratic order is being reflected in new buildings going up in its commercial capital.²²

The buildings showcased were:

- The Constitutional Court;
- The Apartheid Museum;
- The Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication;
- The Mandela Yard;
- The Faraday Market & Transport Interchange;
- The Metro Mall and Bara Taxi Rank;
- The South African Embassy in Berlin.

GAPP Architects were one of the architectural firms involved in the design and construction of the Apartheid Museum, while Mma was tasked with the South African Embassy in Berlin. Mphethi Morojele, an architect with Mma, is quoted: “The design space anticipates new ways of how people live. It reflects rural habits within an urban setting – a culture going through a transition.”²³

Both these highly lauded architectural firms were involved in Maropeng. Along with other notable architectural firms, they have been applauded for their design flair in designing buildings that are perceived as visually and symbolically affirming both iconic African and South African experiences. Maropeng, a partnership venture between the Gauteng Government and private enterprise, has won the UK-based award for the most recent innovative tourism project. More importantly, it has also garnered prizes for the architectural structure itself. As far as relevant architecture is concerned, the strategy in the case of Maropeng appears to be an attempt to link the design of the mound with the ancestors, or those who came before, claimed as lying buried in Africa.

This calling up of the ancestors with the meaning appended to the tumulus may appear ingenious, woven as it is in the “marketing mix”²⁴ of Maropeng, for, in African traditional religions, worship and respect are offered to the ancestral beings, and thus the belief in the ancestors (in a spiritual, as well as material sense, as in the bones!) becomes part also of the visitor's experience. However, this (either perceived or intended) linking of biological ancestors as in the hominids, with the cosmological

22. <http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/architecture> (accessed March 2008).

23. <http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/architecture> (accessed March 2008).

24. R. Sharpley, *Travel and Tourism* (Sage, London, 2006), p 86.

ancestors of Africans certainly conflates the issue. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the tumuli are burial mounds, behavioural patterns of relatively-speaking modern humans possessing a culture, as anthropologists might put it. There is an uneasy “disconnectedness”²⁵ between an academic understanding of the tumulus, and the meaning portrayed to public consciousness. To have a design structure that is part of the manifest cultural behaviour of modern humans, that houses the seminal fossil finds (or accurate replicas thereof) of *pre-cultural*, very early hominids, does not make sense, except, perhaps, from a marketing point of view. A host of noted specialists, as is pointed out in one section of the web site, were consulted for the anthropological details of human evolution for the displays inside the centre. However, the design of the interpretive centre meant to showcase the heritage itself, appears to have rested with the architectural and branding firms involved.

Heritage sites are places of multiple-consumption, and as such understandably are consumed at different levels by different categories of tourists.²⁶ Consumption presupposes a consumable, which in the instance at Maropeng is provided by the particular architectural tenets of the interpretive centre. If interpretation is the communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships, then the design and meaning of the Maropeng building, as articulated by the various managers of the centre, both inside and out, become a kind of narrativised space²⁷ and is meant to facilitate us, the visitors, discovering our relationship to our history, touted as our so-called *real* roots. Strategic branding of destinations increases the attractiveness of these places and better positions these destinations in a competitive global market.²⁸ Drawing attention to the site and further entrenching our relationship to our so-called *real* roots, is the Maropeng web site.

Branding and Selling: The Logo/Narrative

The web site is tastefully designed and proclaims: “From the moment the visitor arrives at the car park the journey of discovery starts.” Indeed the

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25. W. Corkern, “Heritage Tourism: Where Public and History Don’t Always Meet”, *American Studies International*, 42, 2/3, 2004, p 7.
 26. B. Graham, G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Tunbridge, *Geography of Heritage* (Arnold, London, 2000), p 20.
 27. D. Phillips, “Narrativised Spaces: The Functions of Story in Theme Parks”, in D. Crouch (ed), *Leisure/Tourism Geographies* (Routledge, New York, 2001), pp 91-108.
 28. H. Graham, “The Brand Images of Tourism Destinations: A Study of the Saliency of Organic Images”, *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 13, 1, 2004, p 7.

sustained refrain of Maropeng is entrenched in the slogan of “Discover Yourself”. The official web site explains that the name Maropeng means “returning to the place of origin” in the indigenous Setswana language. The narrative continues:

Maropeng has been chosen as the name of the new visitors centre at the Cradle of Humankind to remind us that the ancestors of all humans, wherever they may live today, originally, came from Africa. When visiting the Cradle of Humankind, people are actually ‘returning to their place of origin’.²⁹



**Figure 3: Enjoying the Interactive learning at Maropeng.
(Picture by Maheshvari Naidu).**

29. Maropeng web site, <http://www.discoveryyourself.co.za/sterkfontein/source/content/media/media/htm> (accessed January 2006).

Virtually every human society holds a fascination for our past and the Maropeng logo artfully exploits this fascination. For many researchers, the scientific study of human origins known as palaeo-anthropology as a sub-discipline of anthropology, is provocative and exciting because it investigates the origin over millions of years of the universal and defining traits that make our species what it is. Equally, the subject of human origins is of immense interest to a lay public amply fed by many documentaries put on by the National Geographic and Discovery channels.

There has also been much written about the wider teaching of archaeology beyond a specialist audience, and as having a role in heritage for the wider public. Certainly this is the intention of the educational wing of Transvaal Museum, as communicated to me by Thackeray re his project to have every classroom in South Africa being given a replica of Mrs Ples. The educational limb of Maropeng also engages in designing programmes in popular archaeology for various categories of learners.

The Maropeng logo initially explained on the web site, and now in pamphlets, appears to be an artistic depiction of this palaeo-anthropological theory of human origins that is designed to appeal to the visitor by presenting a “history story”³⁰ of what Boniface explains as a fixed narrative or interpretation about the object or site as opposed to an encounter with the object or site itself. This kind of heritage experience includes heritage imagery and the “commodified cladding of symbols of antiquity”.³¹ The narrative in the (original, early version) web page and pamphlet of Maropeng explains the interpretation embedded in the logo, stating that the depiction of the world (in the logo) denotes the universal significance of the Cradle of Humankind, the location of Maropeng.

We are told that it is the ancestral home to all people, no matter of what colour, culture or creed they are. The various executive members of Management in press releases have echoed these sentiments, speaking of the Cradle of Humankind as if it were a kind of bequest to the living.³² The picture in the logo depicts Africa and a foot in Africa stepping beyond Africa, and is explained as denoting humankind’s origin as a species. We are told that our hominid ancestors moved out of Africa northwards, and

30. P. Boniface and P.J. Fowler, *Heritage and Tourism* (Routledge, New York, 1996), p xii.

31. Boniface & Fowler, *Heritage and Tourism*, p xi.

32. See online articles for comments by the Brand Manager of Maropeng, Chrissi Brink and Maropeng CEO Rob King. Online articles both by Davie, “Showcasing the Cradle” and “Maropeng Brings Fossils to Life”.

spread across the globe, while continuing to evolve. We are informed in evocative language that:

Long, long ago, millions of moons back ...
Africa gave birth in her steamy jungles and great rift valleys and along her pristine coastlines to humankind. You and I, and all our ancestors, can trace back our bloodlines to our common ancestry in the heat, dust and beauty of this great continent.
A visit to Maropeng, in the cradle of humankind is to step back into the past and to ponder our origins as a species.”³³

Anthropology, Heritage (Story) and Narrative Making

The narrative of the logo draws from sound assumptions and palaeo-anthropological theories. Indeed, it carries a quotation from the world-renowned palaeo-anatomist, Professor Philip Tobias of the University of Witwatersrand, who states that: “In our quest to get nearer to the truth of how humans evolved, there is no part of the world that has yielded more secrets than the dozen or more fossil-bearing caves in the Cradle of Humankind.”³⁴

An image of footprints (on the logo) that originate on the continent of Africa, and then steps beyond, is indeed an evocative rendering of the Out-of-Africa Theory. There have been largely two contending theories for the emergence of modern humans. The first is the Multi-Regional Theory, which puts forward that early human ancestors, in the form of *Homo erectus* evolved in different parts of the world in geographically diverse spaces such as Java, China and parts of Europe, and migrated from these areas to populate other parts of the world. Until recently, this was the dominant theory. In contrast, the Out-of-Africa model affirms that modern humans evolved relatively recently, that they evolved in Africa, migrated into Europe and Asia, and in turn replaced all populations, which had descended from *Homo erectus*. The majority of the scientific community accepted the overwhelming fossil evidence, and now DNA studies, pointing to the Out-of-Africa Theory. Ongoing palaeo-archaeological discoveries mean, however, that the Out-of-Africa Theory is periodically nuanced and tweaked, in terms of which part of Africa can lay claim to the title of Cradle of Humankind. There are other relatively recent discoveries by Pickford, Senut and Brunet respectively, of hominid fossils dating back to approximately six million years, the

33. The official pamphlet of Maropeng and Sterkfontein, handed to the visitors and part of a publicity pack given to members of the media.

34. Maropeng web site, <http://www.discoveryourself.co.za> (accessed January 2006).

Orrorin tugenensis,³⁵ also known as the “Original Man” in Kenya, and the seven million year-old skull *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*,³⁶ nicknamed Toumai, in Chad. Both of these finds of *Gracile australapithecines* are older than the finds at Sterkfontein that only go back two to three-and-half million years ago. Although it is more complex than mere chronology, as there are several different hominid genus that are found, in terms of oldest common ancestor, the complexities of these discoveries mean that theories are only as good as the most recent fossil discovery, that is to say, in terms of sites in Africa that can proclaim themselves as the Cradle of Humanity.

Perhaps it is a bit of a non-issue that the Maropeng logo, as a “heritage tourism product”³⁷ is a rendering of a particular theory, since the Out-of-Africa Theory is a *fait accompli*. However, the logo’s narrative of humankind’s epic journey from pre-human to human, favours a particular thread in the Cradle of Humankind discussions. While the palaeo-anthropologist attached to the centre, and all specialist speakers invited here, stress that it is *Africa as a whole* that is the Cradle of Humankind, the displays in the centre, media attention, et cetera, does appear to privilege South Africa and the fossils unearthed here. In their treatment of the relationships amongst heritage, power and identity, Graham and his co-authors³⁸ claim that “images portrayed are selected by someone, thereby raising issues of privileging or suppressing particular viewpoints”. This can be considered to be true of the information in the Maropeng pamphlet. While it does not suppress any viewpoint as such, it offers a privileged presentation of the Out-of-(South) Africa Theory of human origins. The logo artistically shows the foot in Africa, stepping out of Africa, with a large red dot in the heel of the foot, strategically placed around where South Africa would be on the map. The logo story in the pamphlet tells us that this dot denotes the significance of South Africa. While all the palaeo-anthropologists giving talks at the Maropeng Centre point out that Africa as a whole is to be considered the cradle of humankind, the marketing mechanism in the logo works well to draw specific attention to South Africa.

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35. M. Pickford and B. Senut, “The geological and faunal context of Late Miocene hominid remains from Lukeino, Kenya”, *C.R. Academy Science Series*, 2, 332, pp 145-152.
 36. M. Brunet, “A New Hominid from the Upper Miocene of Chad, Central Africa,” *NATURE*, 418, 2002, pp 145-151.
 37. Kelly, “Heritage Tourism Politics in Ireland”, p 43.
 38. Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, *Geography of Heritage*, p 33

Eminent palaeo-scientists, such as Richard Leakey and Donald Johanson,³⁹ claim that most evidence points to the Out-of-Africa Theory because fossils of modern-like humans are found in Africa, and that stone tools and other artefacts support an African origin, with DNA studies suggesting a founding population in Africa. See Johanson's⁴⁰ chapters "African Genesis" and "Out of Africa" in his seminal work *From Lucy to Language* and Leakey's "From Africa to Agriculture" in his book on human origins. However, the words, "Trace our bloodlines"⁴¹, rather than trace our DNA; and "Africa gave birth to humanity"⁴² are not couched in any kind of scientific vocabulary.

Marschall states that "every new political order forms a group identity through a process of selective remembering and invention of usable pasts".⁴³ In the case of Sterkfontein, it is a prehistoric usable past drawn from science, but one that plays up South Africa in the whole Out-of-Africa Theory. The logo of Africa is thus not national wishful thinking, but founded on sound scientific theory. The narrative that wraps around this, however, is clothed in emotive language that celebrates the scientific theory as a vindication of South Africa (albeit in the context of Africa) as the original birthplace of humankind.

III: Palaeo-heritage, Fossils and an African Identity

We are All Africans: Palaeo-Heritage, Identity and Tourism

In an article on forging national identity, Marschall talks of the construction of a compelling foundation myth. She asserts that the foundation myth traces the roots and defines the birth of a new nation, and gives us the framework into which events and artefacts may be embedded.

In any society, certain memories are valued, because they are linked to that society's present sense of identity or a new identity it intends to

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- 39. Don Johanson, an eminent palaeo-scientist and the discoverer of the world famous fossil, *Australopithecus Afarensis*, known as Lucy and his discussion of the Out-of-Africa Theory.
 - 40. D.C. Johanson, *Lucy the Beginnings of Humankind* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1990), pp 40-70; D.C. Johanson and B. Edgar, *From Lucy to Language* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996), pp 38-39, 46.
 - 41. The narrative of the pamphlet of Maropeng.
 - 42. Maropeng pamphlet.
 - 43. S. Marschall, "Forging National Identity: Institutionalizing Foundation Myths through Monuments", *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 19, 1, 2005, p 19.

foster. Through institutionalized remembrance we want to ensure that selected individual or collective memories are incorporated into cultural memory.⁴⁴

In the case of the constructed tourist experience at Sterkfontein and Maropeng, it is not so much a myth, but a scientific construct that is appropriated. Appropriation of the Out-of-Africa Theory for human evolution in the context of Sterkfontein, may well be justified by the scientific interpretations rendered by leading palaeo-anthropologists. However, in the context of the “sales pitch” of the interpretive site, the appropriation of the Out-of-Africa anthropological theory is also pressed into the service of defining an African experience for the tourist.

Maropeng and the tourist experience here attempt to return the African people to what is assumed as their rightful place as pivotal actors in the saga of evolution and the culmination in humanity. This is also the thrust of the address entitled “Africa’s Roots of Humanity and Civilization”, given in 2000 for Africa Commemoration Day, by Runoko Rashidi, where he asserts that his paper is designed to help reconnect and refocus the history of the African:

... “That Other African”. This is not the stereotypical African savage, but the African that first peopled the earth, and gave birth to or significantly influenced the world’s oldest and most magnificent civilizations. This is the African that first entered Asia, Europe, Australia, the South Pacific, and the early Americas not as slave, but as master. We now know, based on recent scientific studies of DNA, that modern humanity, originated in Africa, that Black people are the world’s original people, and that all modern humans can ultimately trace their ancestral roots back to Africa. If not for the primordial migrations of early African people, humanity would have remained physically Africoid, and the rest of the world outside of the African continent absent of human life.⁴⁵

Embedded in this speech by a writer-historian of sorts, are a multitude of negations. There is a vehement negation of the African as other, as the native, as the barbarian, as the uncivilized, and as the primitive. Compounded with this denial are certain reclamations, that of the greatest antiquity, African as original, as civilized and as authoring humanity everywhere through his prehistoric migrations. This pride in *who* the African is, is echoed in the way the visit to Sterkfontein and Maropeng is touted to the public, for the claim to prehistory continues in

44. Marschall, “Forging National Identity”, p 19.

45. R. Rashidi’s address entitled “Africa’s Roots of Humanity and Civilization”, in 2000 for Africa Commemoration Day, <http://www.cwo.coml-lucomi/runoko.html> (accessed March 2006).

the words of the CEO of Maropeng a’Africa, Rob King, who asserts that the development “is not only part of our national pride, but of the world”, claiming that the centre’s logo “denotes the universal relevance of the Cradle of Humankind as the ancestral home to all, no matter what colour, culture or creed”.⁴⁶

Brand manager for Maropeng, Chrissi Dunk, states that “Maropeng and the Cradle of Humankind is not only part of our national pride ...” The rest of that sentence is an echo of the Rob King citation, except that she adds: “after all we share 99% of our DNA”.⁴⁷ This is not so much talk about world heritage in the sense that the fossils are understood as belonging to the world, but a kind of inverse where the world is understood in terms of the fossils found here, providing an intriguing continuation of other marketing machinery and public television advertising that seeks to position South Africa with slogans such as a “world in one country”.

President Thabo Mbeki formally opened Maropeng, just as he had Sterkfontein Caves a few years earlier. Here he stated that the Cradle could be compared to a massive 47-hectare library of archaeological and palaeontological information, with Maropeng offering an abundant reference section. He added that Maropeng is a twenty-first century contribution to recording the story of evolutionary human biology and geography. Mbeki states in the preface to the book *Field Guide to the Cradle of Humankind*:

... the book is itself an important contribution to the understanding of human evolution and emphasizes the centrality of South Africa and other countries on the African continent in unravelling the important subject of our origins ... We are able to proclaim that humanity emerged in the highlands and savannas of the vast African continent.⁴⁸

Mbeki, later in the same foreword, also states that:

As a result of rigorous studies by numerous scientists, we now know:

- 1 South Africa and other African countries have yielded fossils that prove that humans originated in Africa, and that it was here that that they first walked on two feet;
- 2 It was on the African continent that our early human ancestors developed larger brains relative to other primates;

46. <http://www.southafrica.info/pls/procs/iac.page>.

47. Maropeng web site, <http://www.discoveryyourself.co.za/sterkfontein/source/content/media/media/htm> (accessed January 2006).

48. B. Hilton-Barber and L. Berger, *Field Guide to the Cradle of Humankind* (Wits Press, Johannesburg, 2002), p 4.

- 3 Modern technology originated in East Africa, where the first stone tools were manufactured and used;
- 4 Our early human ancestors first controlled and made fire in South Africa.

He goes on to say that it is these very “innovations and inventions that are, in large part, evident in the Cradle of Humankind, and have allowed humanity to colonize the entire world, and develop a variety of civilizations at different points in our history.”⁴⁹

It is also perhaps skilful that the President, himself chief proponent of an African Renaissance – rather than a say, an anthropologist, was invited to write the foreword to the *Field-guide to the Cradle of Humankind*. The book is aimed at a lay audience and is written in a quasi-technical style. While it purports to position itself as appealing to both a lay and specialist readership, it has received a harsh to tepid response from the anthropological community. This response is due in part to the oversimplification of the material, as well as some of the assertions in the preface that appear to put a particular spin on the palaeo-anthropological discoveries of Sterkfontein. One example would be Mbeki asserting that:

Accordingly, as Africans, we must overcome the debilitating effects of an unjust past that sought to inculcate the notion that black people are by nature inferior [and we] ... should help Africans realize that, having given birth to humanity, we must reverse the effects of ... dehumanization that have characterized our recent past.⁵⁰

He ends by proclaiming his hope that “our [the government’s] investment in the Cradle of Humankind ... will give the people of the world an opportunity to better understand their own origin, evolution and development into sophisticated modern human beings”.⁵¹ This emerges as an exercise in a sort of postcolonial re-inheritance by those previously written out of history and points out that heritage is also a political resource.⁵² We are perhaps reminded that heritage tourism can be a potentially vital source of national identity and political communication, or even of socialisation.⁵³

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49. Hilton-Barber & Berger, *Field Guide to the Cradle of Humankind*, p 5.
 50. Hilton-Barber & Berger, *Field Guide to the Cradle of Humankind*, p 5.
 51. Hilton-Barber & Berger, *Field Guide to the Cradle of Humankind*, p 5.
 52. Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, *Geography of Heritage*, p 18.
 53. L.K. Richter, “The Politics of Heritage Tourism Emerging Issue for the New Millennium”, in Corsane (ed), *Heritage, Museums and Culture*, p 257.

Palaeo-anthropology, Disputed Fossils and (Retrieved) Heritage

In a paper in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*, Tobias and his fellow authors look at the establishment of palaeo-anthropology as a discipline in South Africa and point to the founding figures of the palaeo-scientists, Raymond Dart and Robert Broom. They point out that in the first half of the twentieth century, the preoccupation of many scholars was the search for the so-called missing link. In the wake of this obsession are two classic fossil finds, the Taung Child in South Africa and Peking Man in China. We are told, though, that the two discoveries of the 1920s were accepted differently,⁵⁴ and that the specimen from Africa was subject to immense resistance, which lasted for about thirty years. The fossil discovery from China had almost immediate acceptance as being that of an ancestral hominid.

Asia was considered by most researchers to be the cradle of humankind even though Charles Darwin had spelled out his prediction that Africa was humanity's birthplace. Peking Man appeared to be from the right continent, while the Taung Child was not.⁵⁵ The writers refer to a "geocentric" bias as deriving from European prejudice against both Africa and Africans, culminating in the rejection of the claims of the African fossil as the inauthentic "other". Europeans appeared to be less prejudiced and less rejecting toward the Orient, which appeared more alluring. The rejection of Africa and the African however, has been entrenched in deep intellectual superiority over the "other" that has expressed itself in the violence of the denial of that other. Perhaps one of Mbeki's motives for making the whole world African in origin⁵⁶ was to counterbalance such a history of rejection.

In the narrative representation for the artefacts found at Sterkfontein, the African or "native" is no longer the marginalized other of the imperialistic ethnologist. The narrative is designed in such a manner that the "other" is written into the story and positioned as the privileged one, while at the same time subsuming all others into the same humanity. All colonial dualisms are eschewed in a bid for a common past or heritage. Graham and his co-authors assert that the concept of a common heritage of humanity has universal appeal and serves to

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54. P.V. Tobias, Q. Wang, and J.L. Cormack, "The Establishment of Palaeo-anthropology in South Africa and China: with Special Reference to the Remarkably Similar Roles of Raymond A. Dart and Davidson Black", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 56, 1, 2001, p 1.
55. Tobias, Wang & Cormack, "The Establishment of Palaeo-anthropology", pp 1-2.
56. Also see: Davie, "Maropeng Brings Fossils to Life".

reinforce the ideals of human equality and common destiny, a forward-looking future.⁵⁷ In the context of Maropeng, it is common descent and common origins that are reinforced.

Colonialism is seen to have created a discontinuity in the history of the country⁵⁸, or rather, in the recording of the history of the marginalised categories of people. Throwing off the image of the so-called inferior “native” accompanies moves towards re-inserting the histories of those who had previously been ignored, and/or deleted from history. Witz, Rassool and Minkley point out that “With the ANC in power, the industry [of tourism] continued to invite visitors to ‘discover our new world’ – and also gaze on the ‘ancient rituals of Olde Africa’, exploring a ‘culture as fascinating as it is diverse’.”⁵⁹ They also point out that in the late 1990s, the policymakers in South Africa positioned themselves as proponents of an African Renaissance, wishing to repudiate stereotypical images of primitiveness.⁶⁰ This is the case for Maropeng. The narrative carried in the pamphlet and accompanying the logo also echoes what appears to be an emerging new African identity, as articulated by the political role players in the country.

Consider that in the address of the former Deputy President of South Africa, and newly appointed President of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, at the National Heritage Council Civil Society Conference, he referred to the birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994 and stated:

... We had to introduce the history and experience of the black majority into the archives and heritage architecture of our country. We had to reverse the legacy of apartheid, which had rendered black people almost non-existent in the cultural institutions and symbols of our country.⁶¹

Referring to the South African hosting of the World Heritage Committee in July of 2005, he listed the issues that he felt ought to have been raised at that gathering and underlined “the role of heritage sites in the development, production and transformation of identities”.⁶²

57. Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, *Geography of Heritage*, p 236.

58. C. Kruger and M. van Heerden, “The Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site: A New Statement of Significance”, *Historia*, 50, 2, 2002, p 242.

59. Witz, Rassool & Minkley, “Repackaging the Past”, p 308.

60. Witz, Rassool & Minkley, “Repackaging the Past”, p 309.

61. J. Zuma, Address at the National Heritage Council Civil Society Conference, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/zuma/2005/jz0312.html> (accessed January 2006).

62. Zuma, Address at the National Heritage Council Civil Society Conference.

Writing back in 1996, Goudie, Kahn and Kilian⁶³ referred to “reclaiming the invisible history” of the black South Africans where there was a dearth of heritage sites associated with “black history”. They also pointed to the increasing emphasis on the possibility of tourism as a catalyst for healing or social change.⁶⁴

Mrs Ples and Little Foot as Icons for Tourism

The transformation of identities and the introduction of the history of the African majority into the archives and heritage architecture of the country necessitate an archetypal narrative of one’s origin, which can either be drawn from the past, or newly constructed. In the context of Maropeng we have, through a newly constructed narrative for the tourist, a particular experience that allows them to become familiar with the genealogy of early humankind. The heroes are Taung Child⁶⁵, Mrs Ples⁶⁶ and Little Foot.⁶⁷ The founding fathers are Raymond Dart and Robert Broom. Raymond Dart was of course the one who provided the analysis for the contested Taung⁶⁸ cranial specimen, the specimen that was eventually accepted as a new species, *Australopithecus Africanus*, or the Southern Ape of Africa. More importantly in this context, his supporter, Robert Broom, was the discoverer of Mrs Ples, another *Australopithecine* specimen that vindicated Dart’s claims, and the more recent Philip Tobias and Ron Clark are the co-discoverers of the fossil skeleton nicknamed Little Foot. Both of these latter benchmark fossil finds were made in Sterkfontein Cave.

Mrs Ples was discovered in the embedded breccias at Sterkfontein and initially named *Plesianthropus Transvaalensis* or “near human of the Transvaal” and is the most complete cranium of *Australopithecus Africanus* found to date. Little Foot is the name given to the most

63. S. Goudie, F. Kahn and D. Kilian, “Tourism Beyond Apartheid: Black Empowerment and Identity in the ‘New’ South Africa”, in P.A. Wells (ed), *Keys to the Marketplace Problems and Issues in Cultural and Heritage Tourism* (Hisarlik, UK, 1996), p 70.

64. Goudie, Kahn & Kilian, “Tourism Beyond Apartheid”, p 66.

65. This specimen was not discovered in Sterkfontein, but in the Makapans Valley at Taung, hence the name. See: Tobias, Wang & Cormack, “The Establishment of Palaeo-anthropology”.

66. This specimen is now accepted as an adolescent male specimen. Originally named Mrs Ples, as it was thought to be a female, it is now Master Ples, but the popular name has stuck.

67. The fossil nicknamed Little Foot is still embedded in the breccia even after ten years of painstaking excavation.

68. See Tobias, Wang & Cormack, “The Establishment of Palaeo-anthropology”.

complete skeleton of *Australopithecus Africanus* – a three and half million year-old skeleton, which was also found at Sterkfontein. The web site of Maropeng that invites the tourist to visit Maropeng, presents Mrs Ples and Little Foot with a history that ties in with our present. A colleague asked me, only in semi-jest if these “characters” were presented as the average contemporary African “Joe” walking the streets of Johannesburg. This is not how they are museified, but rather positioned as the ancestors and fossil conduits that help in reclaiming the common past.

The hominid “models” at Maropeng, constructed by palaeo-artists, reflect an evolutionary state of pre-human (Ples and Taung), to early human. They stand necessarily naked under the gaze of the visitor. However, they are meant to be gazed at differently from figures such as the full body casts of the San at the so-called cultural village at Kagga Kamma outside of Cape Town, and the South African Museum in Cape Town. While the models at Kagga Kamma and the South African Museum are now understood to be examples of highly objectified “native” and project for the visitor an obvious (and staged) primitivism, the naked figures at Maropeng are attempted to be projected as the very beginnings of humanity. Although used in a different sense, perhaps it would be apt to borrow Patricia Davidson’s term, “recasting memory”⁶⁹ here, for the naked body of the so-called original African is re-remembered as not “backward and primitive”, but is positioned at the threshold of humanity. Although more scientific descriptions of the *Australopithecine* finds are made in the Sterkfontein web site windows, the Maropeng or the interpretive centre windows presents these hominids as characters that the tourist can relate to. Each short description culminates by endorsing the idea of humankind’s birth in Africa. Thus Mrs Ples, Little Foot and the Taung Child figure prominently in the genealogy of heroes of the new founding narrative. They have become the equivalent of heroes, the discovery of whom offers vindication to the supporters of the Out-of-Africa Theory of human beginnings. In the little tourist kiosk are replicas of Mrs Ples, so that the interested visitor can purchase his or her own “fossil” and take their shared history back home. As has been mentioned above, Professor Thackeray of the Transvaal Museum where the original Mrs Ples is now housed, shared his vision with me to, as he put it, “clone” Mrs Ples so “that every school in

69. P. Davidson, “Museums and the re-shaping of Memory”, in Corsane (ed), *Heritage, Museums and Culture*, p 192.

South Africa would have their own replica, and every child in Africa would be familiar with Mrs Ples and Africa's prehistory".⁷⁰

Conclusion

Perhaps it is a given that "heritage sites are destined to be sites of controversy"⁷¹ as different groups, the cultural as in the archaeologists, the economic as in the brand and heritage managers, or the political as in government and policy makers, cleave onto their (at times) competing narratives. Heritage, in the form of archaeological fossil heritage from Sterkfontein, is showcased through multiple vehicles, the Sterkfontein archaeological site and Maropeng interpretive site. At the latter, "meaning" is offered through a particular experience that is constructed for the visitor, where the logo narrative and architectural design are inextricably entwined with defining a new African self, rooted in the birth of humanity. The visit to the Cradle is robustly touted as a return to our common ancestral roots. The narrative and architectural representations are designed to reinforce each other, and are experienced by the tourist as much as the material artefacts, the actual bones, themselves assembled into the characters of Mrs Ples and Little Foot. Privileging certain representations of heritage, the Out-of-Africa Theory is appropriated and pressed into the homogenizing service of affirming an African identity for the world at large, with Africa declared as the home of the world's ancestors.

Regarding tourism in the new democratic South Africa, Marschall says: "In South Africa, ... since the advent of the post-apartheid period, the country has been fascinated – if not obsessed – with the identification, celebration, evaluation, reassessment and, not least, commodification of 'heritage'".⁷² The Maropeng experience is an example of both, at its best, a celebration, and perhaps not so best, the commodification of heritage packaged in a particular way for the tourist.

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70. Communicated to me on 11 September 2007, when I was interviewing him for a video documentary I was making as part of an African Origins Project. The video funded by a grant from the South African Association for Advancement of Science and Technology (SAASTA), was designed as a virtual tour of Sterkfontein and Maropeng and was eventually made available to Anthropology students.
71. K.M. Adams, "Public Interest Anthropology in Heritage Sites: Writing Culture and Righting Wrongs", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 11, 5, 2005, pp 436.
72. S. Marschall, "Making Money with Memories: The Fusion of Heritage, Tourism and Identity Formation in South Africa", *Historia*, 50, 1, 2005, p 103.

Abstract

This article considers the example of palaeo-heritage tourism at Sterkfontein Cave, situated in a geographic area designated the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, or Cradle for short. The article looks at how a particular “African” tourist experience is constructed through the architectural vocabulary and the narrative built around the Sterkfontein Cave, which, with the adept use of a particular theory of human origins, allows the visitor to identify with a trajectory of a shared prehistory and shared humanity. These appear to be constructed in an attempt to redefine the visitor’s image of himself or herself in terms of a shared African history. This sense of a shared history is attempted through the architectural design of the interpretive centre, the virile narrative contained in the logo of the centre, and the process of appropriating seminal fossil artefacts found here. The constructed tourist experience is itself fed by a larger emerging discourse to rearticulate the identity of the African.

Opsomming

Die Skep van ’n Afrika Toeristebelewenis by die Wieg van die Mensdom Wêreld Erfenisterrein

Hierdie artikel handel oor die voorbeeld van paleo-erfenis toerisme wat by die Sterkfonteingrotte in ’n geografiese gebied bekend as die Wieg van die Mensdom Wêreld Erfenisterrein, of kortweg die Wieg, aangetref word. Die artikel ondersoek hoe ’n spesifieke “Afrika” toeristebelewenis gekonstrueer word deur die gebruik van ’n argitektoniese woordeskat en die relaas gebou om die Sterkfonteingrotte, wat deur die vaardige gebruik van ’n bepaalde teorie oor die oorsprong van die mens, die besoeker lei om te identifiseer met ’n trajek van ’n gedeelde voorgeskiedenis en gedeelde menslikheid. Skynbaar word dit gekonstrueer as poging om die besoeker se beeld van hom- of haarself te herdefinieer volgens ’n gemeenskaplike Afrikageskiedenis. Hierdie sin van ’n gedeelde geskiedenis word geskep deur die argitektoniese ontwerp van die besoekersentrum, die kragtige narratief opgesluit in die logo van die sentrum, en die proses waardeur die uiters belangrike fossiele wat hier aangetref is, toegeëien word. Die gekonstrueerde toeristebelewenis word verder aangevul deur ’n groter opkomende diskoers oor die herdefinisie van die identiteit van die Afrikaan.

Key words

African; architecture; commoditisation; fossils; heritage; identity; logo; narrative; palaeo-anthropology; palaeo-tourism; representation; tourist experience; tumulus.

Sleutelwoorde

Afrika; argitektuur; kommodifikasie; erfenis; fossiele; identiteit; logo; narratief; paleo-antropologie; paleo-toerisme; toeristebelewenis; tumulus; voorstelling.