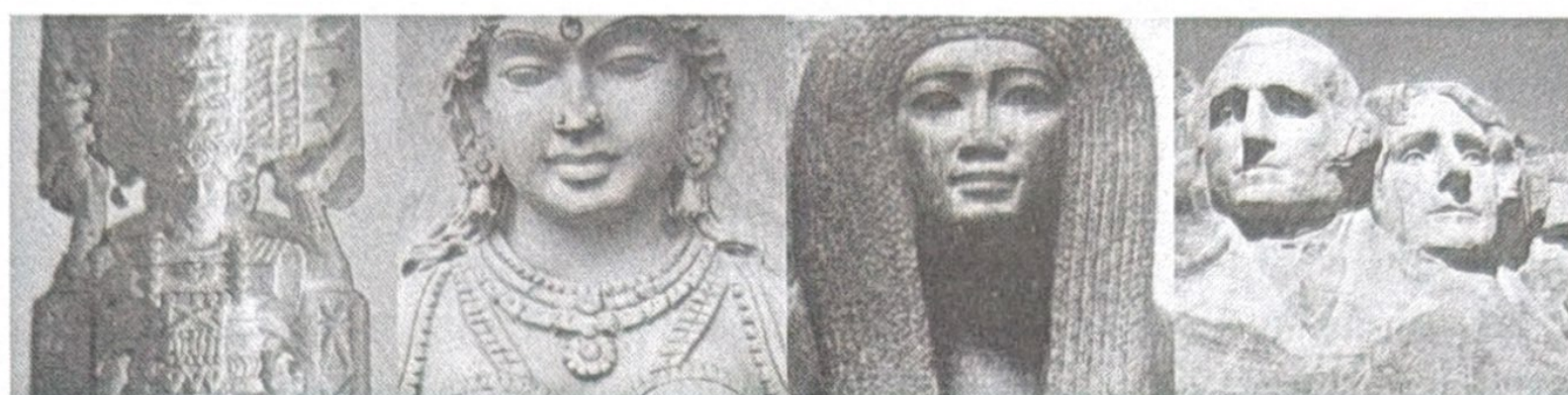


Las Vegas in Africa

Hall, M., & Bombardella, P. (2005). Las Vegas in Africa. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 5(1), 5–24.

Recent years have seen substantial capital investments in “destination resorts”, many of which utilize heritage themes to attract consumers. This movement was led by the renaissance of Las Vegas and by major urban destination projects, and coincided with South Africa’s reintegration into the global economy from the early 1990s onwards. As a result of new legislation in 1996, South Africa has in recent years seen the opening of a number of major destination resorts, in partnership with international interests that include Las Vegas-based multinationals, that reinterpret heritage to provide themed entertainment for a post-apartheid middle class of consumers. This paper looks in detail at four South African destination resorts, and shows how established themes in the representation of Africa and its history have been re-appropriated by the heritage industry in the material culture of casinos and associated retail and entertainment facilities.



Copyright © 2005 SAGE Publications (www.sagepublications.com)
ISSN 1469-6053 Vol 5(1): 5-24 DOI: 10.1177/1469605305050141

Las Vegas in Africa

MARTIN HALL

Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Cape Town, South Africa

PIA BOMBARDELLA

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen substantial capital investments in 'destination resorts', many of which utilize heritage themes to attract consumers. This movement was led by the renaissance of Las Vegas and by major urban destination projects, and coincided with South Africa's reintegration into the global economy from the early 1990s onwards. As a result of new legislation in 1996, South Africa has seen the opening of a number of major destination resorts, in partnership with international interests that include Las Vegas-based multinationals, which reinterpret heritage to provide themed entertainment for the post-apartheid middle-class consumer. This article looks in detail at four South African destination resorts, and shows how established themes in the representation of Africa and its history have been re-appropriated by the heritage industry in the material culture of casinos and associated retail and entertainment facilities.

KEYWORDS

consumption • heritage • Las Vegas • South Africa • tourism



■ INTRODUCTION

One way of understanding 'heritage' is as the mobilization of culture in the service of the present. Heritage works with the diverse remnants of the past: artifacts, buildings, cityscapes, landscapes, documents, literature, oral traditions, memories. These are things that have been passed down the generations, and the awareness of them makes tangible associations in the present, whether by ethnicity, class, geographical region, language, gender, race or other category. And, in working within the present, heritage makes claims on the future, for example by making a claim for land, furthering a nationalist agenda or promoting future language rights. As such, heritage gives form to the public sphere. As a mobilization of culture, heritage is a manifestation of power. While it makes use of disciplines such as history, archaeology, art history, and architecture – all themselves forms of production – heritage is not synonymous with them.

This article looks at some of the large entertainment complexes that have recently been opened in southern Africa, and which emulate the resort hotels that epitomize the Las Vegas renaissance – places such as the Mirage, Bellagio, and Venetian. Such projects, for which investments of over US\$1bn are routine, involve multinational corporations that offer a variety of conceptualization, design, and project management services. Contemporary destination resorts seek to individualize participation, ever seeking the unique angle that avoids the commodification of leisure. Pine and Gilmore (1999), in advocating the possibilities for business and a new breed of managers, have called this the 'experiential economy' – a combination of entertainment, simulation, security, and the major selling point of the appearance of a unique experience. Such heritage destinations are increasingly directed at customers who are fully aware that they are playing a game – that the environment is simulated, or that they are not 'really' in an 'authentic' environment. The success of the attraction is measured by the sophistication of the game, rather than solely by the qualities of the illusion (Hannigan, 1998). In this respect, contemporary heritage destinations seem more the kin of video games than allies of historic sites and educational museums.

The bridgehead of the experiential economy in South Africa coincided with the end of the country's international isolation in the early 1990s, and with a substantial increase in the scope and capacity of the international entertainment and heritage industry, marked by huge projects such as the urban regeneration of cities such as New York (Hannigan, 1998; Sagalyn, 2001) and the renaissance of the Las Vegas Strip (Gottdiener et al., 1999). The South African foundation for this new approach to leisure was Sun International's Lost City, which opened in 1992 and was designed by Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo (WATG, 2002). The Lost City project

established a local infrastructure that has been deployed in subsequent projects, and which provided a platform for the substantial increase in resort development that followed the reorganization of gambling in South Africa's National Gambling Act of 1996. This legislation allowed for up to 40 casino licenses, distributed through the provinces, close to major urban areas, and prompted a number of large-scale international partnerships with substantial capital investments.

■ REFLECTING STEREOTYPES

The Lost City project was South Africa's inauguration to the world of Disney-style themed entertainment and Las Vegas's indomitable style of grandiloquence and razzmatazz (Hall, 1995). The Palace of the Lost City was conceived in the tradition of Caesars Palace and the Mirage, and anticipated both the Bellagio and the Venetian in the larger-than-life architecture and the reinvention of the nineteenth century pattern book in bringing together an eclectic range of design motifs. The theme park, designed as an archaeological site, again mirrors Las Vegas in bringing large expanses of water into a semi-arid environment. The result is a preternatural juxtaposition of the stark, archaic thornveld and an oasis alive with fire and light. As with Las Vegas, the Lost City has a uniqueness in its architecture, setting, and location that underpins its continuing success.

The Lost City also represents a shrewd business strategy on the part of its owners and developers, Sun International. Prior to 1990 and the collapse of the apartheid edifice, Sun International had a virtual monopoly in the southern African homeland casino business, the peculiar arrangement in which Calvinistic South Africa banned all gambling (with the exception of betting on horses), while meeting the desires of its citizens at entertainment centers in the 'independent' homelands of Bophuthatswana, Venda, Transkei, and Ciskei, as well as in neighboring Lesotho and Swaziland. Mandela's release from prison in 1990 brought African rhythms, the rainbow nation, brightly colored shirts, Sunday trading, international sport, and world tourism. Sun International needed to reinvent its image.

The key element in this reinvention was heritage – the construction of a credible past that would serve the needs of an imminent, and different, South Africa. Commenting in 1992, Gerald Allison, Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo's lead designer for the Lost City project, observed that the theme was:

... based purely on fantasy, but colored by the heritage of Africa ... a totally new architecture developed by a people completely isolated from any outside human influences ... As we developed this 'new architecture', we tried very hard to recall in a mystical manner a conglomeration of historical influences instead of a specific north African heritage. (quoted in Hall, 1995)

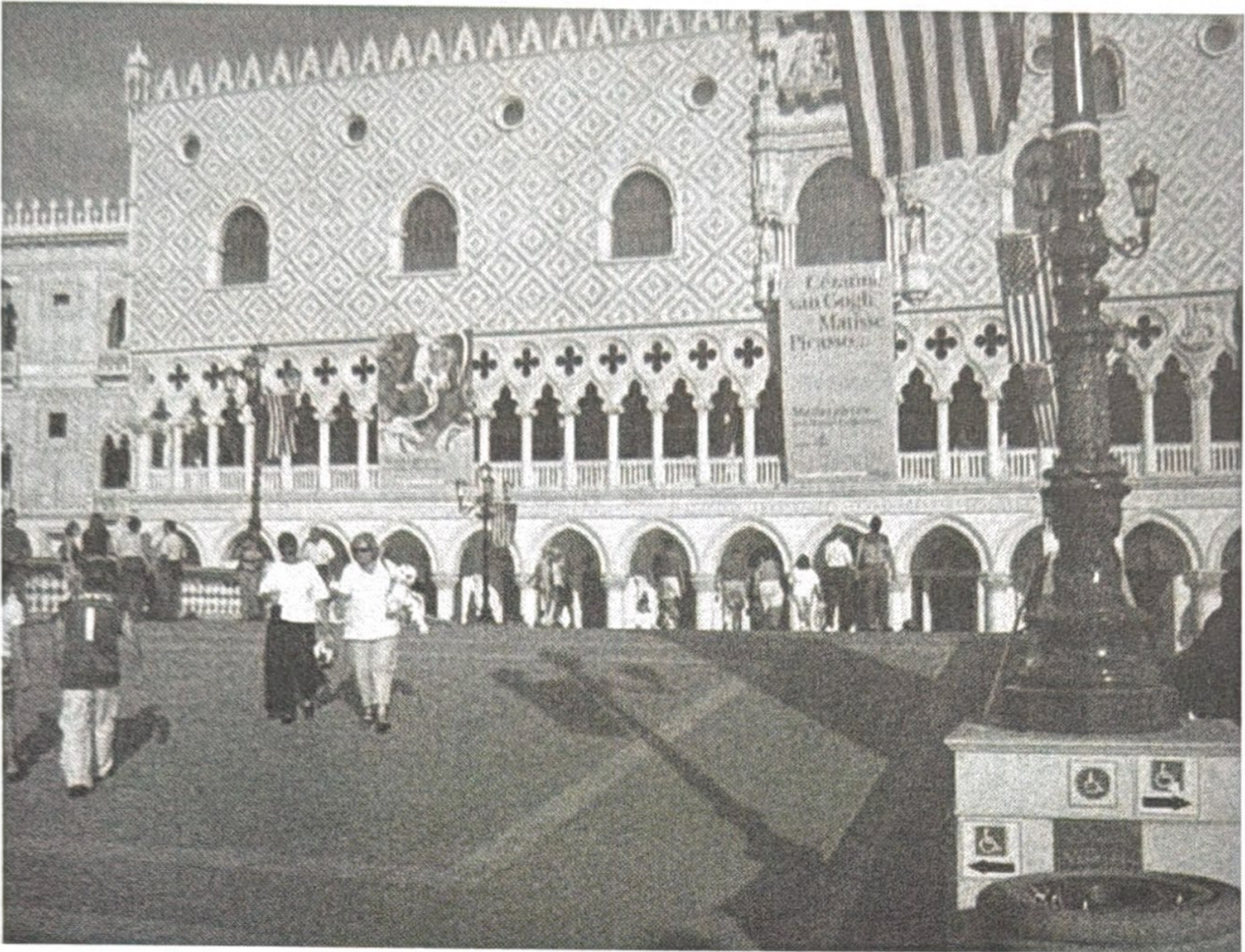


Figure 1 Las Vegas Venetian – reconstruction of Doge's Palace

Seven years later, in an interview with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. for the PBS's television series 'Wonders of the African World', Allison reaffirmed this approach. Asked by Gates whether he thought he was reinforcing or changing stereotypes of Africa, he replied that the Lost City's design was rather 'reflecting the stereotypes . . . it was a case of art trying to develop an architecture and an environment that we thought would portray Africa for the visitor' (quoted in Gates, 1999).

The important point here is that the Lost City was never intended to be an accurate historical reconstruction – it is not the work of designers who failed to read history properly. It was rather to be an improvement on history, a project to capture the essential experience of being in a continent with a depth of exotic traditions that requires the architect's interpretation for its full appreciation. This approach is well expressed in Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo's more recent project, the Las Vegas Venetian, with its full-scale reconstruction of St Mark's Square and parts of the Doge's Palace (Figure 1). Here, the brief was to improve the original, to produce a Venice that is old rather than shabby, aged but not weathered: 'as a result, this Venice feels clean, comfortable and welcoming, evoking that peculiarly potent yearning for a place and time that never existed'. In the comment of one visitor, 'I've been to Venice, and tacky as Las Vegas is, this is a lot nicer than the real one. It smells a lot better. It's so organic over there'

(Curtis, 2000). Similarly, the Lost City is intended as an improvement on Africa, an experience without the distracting unpleasantness of the organic. In this, the Lost City is immune to the criticism that its buildings never existed, its traditions were never told or that its artifacts are to be found in no museum. The Lost City is a true simulacrum – a copy for which there is no original.

This self-referentiality, however, does not mean that the Lost City's designers were free to invent their own Africa. Rather, it is useful to think of the project's constructed heritage as a metaphor for the continent. As with all metaphors, its valency depends on the persuasiveness of its implications of resemblance. As with other heritage destinations, the Lost City's clientele come with prior knowledge and experiences, with preconceptions and prejudices, and with itineraries that take them to other destinations on the continent. Consequently, the design of the resort stands or falls on its ability to offer a persuasive ambience – an assemblage of architectural motifs and décor that evokes a credible past and present.

As with similar heritage destination projects, the Lost City is underpinned by a back story that provides coherence and consistency to the varied aspects of the design, services and associated products. Here, the theme is an elaborate 'Legend of the Lost City' that maps out a history for the resort and is the basis for its organizing metaphor: 'This truly magnificent Palace, so legend tells, was built for a king by an ancient civilisation from the North of Africa, who made this idyllic valley their home until it was destroyed by an earthquake' (Sun International, 2002). Gerald Allison sees the Legend as pure fantasy, a work of new imagination. However, its structure replicates a meta-narrative that is found in the Bible, early ethnographies, travel accounts, rationales for colonial settlement, popular novels and movie scripts. Long ago, a lost tribe wanders south, an offshoot of the early civilized zone of North Africa and the Mediterranean. They find a secluded valley, fertile and rich in natural resources, where they build a civilization of their own. This, though, is destroyed by a dark disaster, and the ruins lie undetected for centuries until they are discovered by an enlightened explorer. This is the story of the Queen of Sheba and Great Zimbabwe, of Rider Haggard's 'King Solomon's Mines' and of Wilbur Smith's 'Sunbird' (Hall, 1995). The strength of the Lost City's organizing metaphor lies in its play to this widely-held preconception of what Africa has been, and is today. In his later interview for PBS, Allison recognizes these influences as an asset that strengthens the Lost City's back story, acknowledging Tarzan, Indiana Jones and the African Queen as inspirations.

Thus the Lost City's constitution of African heritage – as with other such themed projects – depends for its veracity on its appeal to widely-held ideas about Africa. Without this appeal, the metaphor loses its strength and the simulacrum becomes an unanchored referent, no better or worse than any other story and lacking in appeal to customers seeking authentic experiences. This, though, introduces a contradiction which is at the heart of the



Lost City project, and which runs through subsequent themed destination projects in South Africa.

The key element in the meta-narrative of Africa's past is that the continent is devoid of its own history. Gerald Allison makes his views on this clear. Africa, he told Gates, 'had very little history, and architectural history practically zero . . . there were some remains of foundations of old huts and so on, but nothing on the scale of this'. Because Africans are 'a very, very proud people and very beautiful people to work with', Allison did not want to 'insult' them with a resort architecture that was modeled on the 'foundations of old huts and so on', and rather wanted to give them the 'new architecture' that they deserve (Gates, 1999; Hall, 1995). In this brief soundbite, delivered with the fountains of the Palace of the Lost City in the background, Allison manages to compress all the centuries of colonial patronage.

Thus, in presenting Africa as metaphor, the Lost City inaugurates South Africa's destination heritage industry with a founding conundrum. Africa is an exotic destination, filled with rich and exciting traditions that can be given expression through new architecture and design. As with Las Vegas's renderings of New York, Paris and Venice, historical sites can be improved through hyper-reality. But to be successful, such simulacra must be anchored to preconceptions and the web of associated experiences. And the prevalent preconception about Africa, told over and over again in a wide range of media, is that it has no history or tradition of its own; there is no odiferous, organic equivalent of Venice's streets and canals that underpins the Palace of the Lost City's atrium as an improvement on reality.

This contradiction runs through subsequent heritage destination projects in South Africa as the expression of two themes. The first of these can be termed 'appropriation', and seeks to resolve the problem by turning back from the fantasy of the Lost City, rather constructing heritage from the historic fabric of Cape Town and Johannesburg. The second can be called 'escape', and takes the opposite route, constructing elaborate fantasies that construct a new heritage.

■ APPROPRIATION

A key issue for prospective heritage destinations is differentiation, allowing distinctive marketing and the claim of a unique experience. By 1996, the Lost City had become something of an icon, widely promoted and distinctively branded. In addition, the ethnographic theme had been extensively exploited, with a host of ethnic villages that offered tribal dancing, sorghum beer, beadwork and carving. An alternative to the Lost City approach was to look to Africa's colonial and subsequent history, with entertainment



Figure 2 Cape Town, GrandWest resort – reconstruction of seventeenth century castle

complexes based on the buildings and streetscapes of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century towns. Two large casino resorts have done this. Cape Town's GrandWest Casino appropriates an eclectic mix of images that include early Dutch settlement, grand colonial and 'Malay' traditions. Gauteng's Gold Reef Casino takes late nineteenth century Johannesburg as its theme, bringing the tradition of the Wild West to the highveld.

GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World was developed by Sunwest International, jointly owned by Grand Parade Investments, AfriLeisure and the veteran of the days of the homeland casinos and the Lost City, Sun International (Figure 2). In order to comply with the National Gambling Act, 51 percent of Sunwest International's equity is held by 'historically disadvantaged' shareholders, and the company's pitch for a casino license (which was granted in December, 1999) emphasized local and regional development and economic empowerment. Sunwest has three linked projects with a total investment value of 1.5bn Rands (US\$18.75m), the largest single capital investment in the Western Cape's tourism and leisure industry: the development of a new convention center close to the city, a canal linking the convention center with Cape Town's popular Waterfront, and the GrandWest complex on the old Goodwood



Showground, once the venue for agricultural shows, fairs and drag racing (Thomas, 2000a).

The casino and entertainment complex has four design themes, each of which emphasizes an aspect of local heritage. A reconstruction of the Fort of Good Hope refers to the initial settlement of the Cape by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. Baroque-style and neo-classical gables in the shopping area and elsewhere evoke the eighteenth century and the vineyards for which the Cape is widely known. Replicas of Victorian-era colonial buildings recall the period of British colonial settlement in the nineteenth century. And narrow streets, washing-lines and vernacular façades point to the 'Malay' quarters of Cape Town – the syncretic culture of European and Indonesian influences best known through District Six. In the tradition of heritage destinations in general, this is promoted as an improvement on reality:

This superior family entertainment complex has, as its main theme, the rich architectural heritage of the Western Cape . . . With all this beauty and style that surround this larger than life gaming and entertainment complex, no wonder, the rest of the destinations in South Africa's fairest Cape seem just a little smaller once you've been to GrandWest . . . GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World is a recreation of historic Cape Town . . . From the impressive old Post Office building and the Grand Hotel to the streets of District Six, GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World is both a step back in time, and a leap into the future with smart-card gaming . . .
(www.suninternational.co.za)

GrandWest's Fort of Good Hope comprises outer stone walls and ramparts, a moat and cast iron balustrades lining a paved walkway. A period tallship is anchored in the moat: an obvious impossibility, since the moat was never more than waist-deep. Rather than a recreation of the Fort itself, the moat, balustrades and paved area are more a reference to the mid-1980s restoration of the subsequent Castle (the construction of which began in 1666). GrandWest's Castle precinct, then, is a cluster of signs that, rather than signifying historical reality, point to another layer of constructions – the Fort and ship as symbols of the Dutch founding of the Cape settlement. Similarly, GrandWest's eighteenth century gables are an interpretation of the Western Cape's well-known architectural tradition, rather than an attempt to produce historically-accurate replicas. Although there are gables – both baroque in the style of the earlier eighteenth century and neo-classical in the tradition of the first years of British occupation – GrandWest's shopping area and food court also sport a range of other architectural motifs. Again, GrandWest's allusions are more to Cape Dutch interpretations than to historical sources – to the shopping malls, electricity sub-stations, fuel stations and holiday houses that have, over the years, appropriated a derived style of their own (Hall, 2000).

'The District' at GrandWest takes up the creole, 'Malay' style that is celebrated as Cape Town's distinctive heritage. Originally the culture of slaves emancipated in 1838 and tracing diverse origins to Indonesia and India, with extensive miscegenation with their one-time owners from Europe's low countries, this architecture has been gentrified in areas such as the Bo-Kaap, where the plastered and parapetted houses, cobbled streets and Cape Malay restaurants are a feature of the tourist circuit. District Six has been widely romanticized – the subject of watercolors of quaint urban life, racial stereotypes of charming drunkards and benign gangsters, carnival, historical novels, and a musical. GrandWest's 'The District' takes up these themes, with an architecture straight from a hotel room painting, the clichés of washing-lines, street signs and fading posters. Two murals reproduce the most common representations of 'Cape Coloureds' – flower sellers, and minstrels. Again, then, 'The District' refers to derived images of heritage, rather than claiming historical verisimilitude. As representation of the past, it stands in marked contrast to Cape Town's District Six Museum, widely known as a community project that preserves the memory of the devastation in the name of the apartheid Group Areas Act (Rassool and Prosalendis, 2001).

Therefore the only part of GrandWest that follows a conventional line in the presentation of heritage is the row of external façades – the nineteenth century buildings and the replica of the Victorian Grand Hotel, where the 'historic façade recreates an era long since forgotten in the modern metropolis of 21st Century Cape Town'. Rather than attempts at accurate reproductions, GrandWest's Fort, Cape Dutch precinct and Malay area are more replicas of replicas, resulting in an overdetermination of the obvious. As such – and like the Lost City – GrandWest makes a claim to a popular, derived historical vernacular, rather than to archival authority. In this, it seems to parallel the original Caesars Palace: 'a camp masterpiece, a knowing parodic send-up of the impossibility of theming a modern hotel on ancient, classical lines' (Anderton and Chase, 1997: 48). GrandWest claims to be 'a recreation of historic Cape Town', but those consuming its cultural products are not expected to take such a statement literally. They are, rather, invited to participate in a knowing game, a send-up of a region that takes its heritage too seriously, and that needs to learn to let its hair down and have fun.

Johannesburg's Gold Reef City has, for more than a decade, invited its visitors to relax into a popular, fun-loving version of the city's history (Kros, 1990, 1992). The reorganization of gambling offered the possibility of expansion, but required as a condition of a license that the casino development be matched by a contribution to the quality of community life. The bid-winning solution on the part of Gold Reef City's developers was dual facilities, on the same site but with separate entrances – the Gold Reef Casino and the Apartheid Museum (Walker, 1999). Taken together, these



Figure 3 Johannesburg, Gold Reef Casino – colonial-style exterior façade

two new additions present a paradox, the casino presenting early Johannesburg as a place of wild fun, and the Apartheid Museum showing the same city in the light of chilling brutality, segregation and cruelty, misery and death. Resolving this paradox contributes further to understanding the new role of heritage in the experiential economy.

The Casino's theme is Johannesburg, some 20 years after its founding – a time when the first substantial buildings had been constructed, but when there was still the excitement and adventure of the gold rush (Figure 3). The entrance to the complex is through an ornate lobby based on the 1906 Carlton Hotel. Beyond is a large, circular area with the hub based on the Joubert Park kiosk, also dating to 1906. The surrounding space is given over to the gambling tables and slot machines, which form a busy public space reminiscent of a market square (after which it is named). The main heritage focus is around the perimeter, where there are three-dimensional replicas of 11 major historic buildings, each marked with a bronze plaque (based on those used by the South African heritage authority), an archival photograph of the original building, and a brief historical summary. Forced perspective (a technique developed by Disney for its theme parks) adds to the effect of standing in the street, while *trompe l'oeil* murals and ceilings provide in-perspective glimpses of the surrounding landscape. As with GrandWest's Cape Town, Gold Reef's Johannesburg is a collection of

images drawn from around the city and assembled around a fictional public space. Here, though, the effect is far more integrated, with a consistency of timeline and architectural theme underwritten by a back story, based on architectural research (Gold Reef City, 2001). The technique is reminiscent of Disney-style 360-degree virtual reality attractions, the three-dimensional scale replicas animated by lighting effects. As with other instances of new heritage destinations, there is an emphasis on playfulness.

The substantive criticism of Gold Reef City – and of GrandWest's Cape Town – is that theirs is a sanitized past – cities without exploitation, racism or violence – Johannesburg as a Wild West frontier illusion of fun, camaraderie and equal opportunity for the bold-hearted. And this, of course, is the message of the casino itself – whoever you are, be bold enough to risk everything for the chance of a fortune and all that will come with it. The paradox, though, is that Medex and the black empowerment consortium AkaniLeisure Investments, which have jointly invested more than 800m Rands (US\$100m) in the Gold Reef complex, cannot be unaware that the casino's Johannesburg is a fiction, and have no problem in undermining the veracity of their own construction. This is because the adjacent Apartheid Museum makes the opposite interpretation the unambiguous theme of all its displays.

Possibly the major issue in 20th century South Africa, has been racial discrimination and its incarnation as apartheid after 1948 . . . a key idea in the museum was to try and track, in one way or another, journeys of different kinds of South Africans, who came to meet in Johannesburg, thereafter to be separated by various legislative measures . . . that's what makes Johannesburg unique and that is what gives it its particular place in South African history, and that's what I felt was worth commemorating and what is interesting. (Phil Bonner, the Apartheid Museum's historian, quoted in Kapelianis, 2001)

Medex's Solly Krok, the moving force behind the casino development, took the idea of a narrative of the horror of apartheid from Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum and persuaded leading public figures, such as novelist Zakes Mda and actor John Kani, to join the organizing committee (Figure 4).

The museum's building was designed by a team of leading architects at a cost of 80m Rands (US\$10m) (Bauer, 2001). It comprises brick walls, stark concrete blocks, pillars and barred windows and entrance gates, recalling carceral structures and the brutality of modernism – a conscious distancing from the fair ground aesthetic of Gold Reef City and the ornate Las Vegas façades of the casino. The galleries are entered from above, after walking up a long concrete ramp on which are positioned life-size cutouts of members of 20 families, telling the history of their migration to the Witwatersrand. The subsequent displays are strongly thematic, and combine text, video, photographs, and the artifacts of oppression to tell the



Figure 4 Johannesburg, Gold Reef Casino – Apartheid Museum

story of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, resistance to segregation, forced removals, political executions, the Soweto uprising, resistance in the 1980s, and the eventual release of Mandela and the 1994 elections.

Reactions to the Apartheid Museum have been varied. For Charlotte Bauer, for example,

the building's success as a memorial to suffering and survival lies in the ability of its very structure to express and excite feelings . . . Like a cathedral or a field, the building provides a contemplative space, inviting us to be with our own thoughts . . . The Apartheid Museum is frankly transcendental, and an important addition to the country's growing body of memorial sites. It signals both the emergence of a new South African architecture, as well as a new South African way of thinking about our past in a vernacular that is sleek and modern, modest yet profound, wholly unsentimental. (Bauer, 2001)

For John Matshikiza, this is not enough:

the sounds and smells of apartheid's humiliation almost demand a site as varied and complex as a Disneyland – or a Gold Reef City, for that matter. The facts, figures and photographs assembled here are just the beginning of the journey. Truly reliving even some aspects of the apartheid experience would be far more instructive to future generations – of all races. (Matshikiza, 2002)

But these – and similar – commentaries evaluate the Apartheid Museum in itself, rather than in the context of the Gold Reef complex as a whole – as a heritage destination that comfortably portrays opposite, and mutually

exclusive, views of Johannesburg's history. How can they resolve the paradox of two, diametrically opposed, interpretations of the city that are side-by-side, part of the same development?

The answer, it is suggested here, lies in the very nature of the experiential economy. Earlier systems of museum display – what Tony Bennett has termed the 'Exhibitionary Complex' – sought to advance a dominant discourse, a collective, evolutionary view of society which served the bourgeois public sphere by seeking to reform the manners of the proletariat, or to reaffirm the middle classes in their shared identity, an institution that induced in the visitor 'new forms of programming the self, aimed at producing new types of conduct and self-shaping' (Bennett, 1995: 46). In contrast, the experiential economy emphasizes the individuality of experience and the game-like qualities of participation, inviting the visitor to become a partner in admiring the quality of the simulation before moving on to another fulfilling experience (Hannigan, 1998; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Thus in itself, the Apartheid Museum is a narrative that explores South Africa's brutal past in the interests of a better future. In the larger frame of the Gold Reef City complex as a whole – and Gauteng and South Africa's varied heritage destinations – the Apartheid Museum is one of a range of attractions, given value by its uniqueness and the depth of its sincerity. For those investing large money in the new entertainment business, reliving apartheid is another ultimate experience, an attraction, not quite a snuff movie, but in the same league. In this larger frame, the experiential economy is the appropriation of any version of the past that will make money for corporate investors.

■ ESCAPE

Both GrandWest and Gold Reef Casino, then, offer an ersatz heritage of the city, taking South Africa's early urban environments as their theme. In this, they relate to international heritage stereotypes, whether a romanticized New Orleans, quaintly historic Massachusetts towns such as Concord or Lexington, or Shakespearean Stratford-upon-Avon. None of these places – whether casino or period market town – restore the historical contexts to which they refer. They rather provide for what Urry (2002) calls the 'spectorial gaze', for the expanding and ever-diversifying tourist industry, both local and international, for which heritage is a primary commodity. Such heritage is performance with a message, an enactment of the past that serves to frame the future. Rather than being measured by their verification against the archival record, heritage productions gain respectability if they convey the essence of a place or of an era – if they persuade their participants to reflect a bit, or to appreciate the qualities of an environment. Heritage, in other words, is serious play.



This frame of reference legitimates the creation of new heritage – inventions that meet the purpose of conveying the essence of a time and place, but without the constraints of historical veracity. This possibility is important to South Africa's burgeoning heritage industry, for two reasons. First, and unlike other countries, South Africa does not have a large stock of cultural materials that can be recycled as heritage destinations. John Urry (2002) has observed that the massive expansion of commercialized heritage in Britain over recent decades is a consequence of rapid de-industrialization. The closure of factories and canals, marginalization of smaller towns and shift to an economy dominated by the service sector has left a large stock of buildings and landscapes that can be taken over and improved as heritage sites. South Africa, in contrast, has a far more limited cultural inventory of this kind. Second, heritage destinations must play to the expectations of their consumers. Perceptions of Africa are shaped by the meta-narrative of the empty continent, by the devaluing of African history prior to colonial settlement. The invention of heritage offers a solution to this problem, as an approach to creating new heritage destinations without copying the Lost City, or risking over-trading by opening another District Six memorabilia show or Victorian architectural extravaganza.

The most elaborate of South Africa's heritage inventions is Gauteng's Montecasino, a full-scale Tuscan town on the highveld (Figure 5). At 1.4bn Rands (US\$17.5m), the development cost matched Sunwest's investment in the Western Cape, and was put up by Tsogo Sun, half-owned by the ubiquitous Southern Sun, with a partnership with Las Vegas's MGM Grand to run the casino. Montecasino has capacity for 10,000 visitors in a secure complex with entrance control and comprehensive CCTV surveillance (Thomas, 2000b).

Montecasino has four primary anchors: the casino, the cinema complex, restaurants, and the hotel. These – and the exterior of the complex along with the simulated streets and shops that link the entertainment area – conform to the northern Italian theme and its Renaissance associations. In the laid-back, anti-intellectual style of the entertainment industry, the inspiration is attributed to a leading personality in the consortium, in this case Ken Rosevear, like Sol Kerzner a one-time CEO of Sun International. According to project architect Bentel Abramson, Rosevear had

just spent a holiday in Tuscany and simply loved it. He also knew there was no other casino in the world in a Tuscan theme, and thought its 'earthy feel' would appeal to South Africans. So Tuscan it was . . . it was not a big intellectual decision, it just happened because Rosevear thought it would work. (Bremner, 2002)

There is, however, a lot more to the creation of a new heritage tradition than the recollection of a nice holiday. As with the archaeological footprint of the Lost City, the Tuscan concept allows the evocation of deep history by means of a patina of relaxed and charming decay. The north Italian



Figure 5 Johannesburg, Montecasino – Tuscan theme for imagined heritage

association permits an eclectic pattern book comprising a wide range of classical architectural and decorative themes, while the lack of geographical specificity removes any obligation to replicate a particular townscape or buildings. The terracotta colors and the association of Mediterranean design with the sun ensures a strong connection between this new architecture and the primary colors of Africa.

Behind this is a specific link to the invention of the Lost City. The concept for Montecasino was given form by Creative Kingdom, headed by Eduardo Robles, also the Chief Architect for the Palace of the Lost City. This earlier development by Sun International, it will be recalled, was supported by a back story which had a tribe wander south from the North African coast, bringing their architectural designs with them. The Palace combines an Italianate exterior – columns, copulas and arches – with an interior décor of giant carved pillars, ivory tusks and zebra skin chairs. Montecasino returns to the Lost City's roots, and is the heritage of the lost tribe itself, traced back through the legend of southward migration to the culture's origins in the Mediterranean heartland. Where Sol Kerzner was the swashbuckling archaeologist, restoring the glories of the Lost City in a grand gesture, Ken Rosevear is the tribe's cultural historian, giving its modern-day descendants a heritage of their own.

Although Montecasino's theme is fanciful, it is not frivolous. There is careful attention to detail. Simon Black of Blacksmith Interiors:



We emulated accurately how the sun bleaches buildings over the 600 years, where dirt collects, smoke, soot on chimneys, bird droppings on trusses, how awnings weather. For six months, the team mottled, added grime, knocked off edges that would be damaged, cracked things and stained them. The poor builders and cleaners were so confused they kept trying to repair and tidy up. (quoted in Watkins, 2001)

Montecasino comprises seven different types of Tuscan neighborhoods, ranging from 'elite uptown' to a less affluent fishing village. There are cobbled streets, fountains, piazzas, a town square and 35 steel trees each with 100,000 artificial leaves.

Predictably, the high-brow press has been condescending:

Ritz, glitz and plenty of bad taste are the lures used to separate gamblers and shoppers from their hard-earned cash at Montecasino . . . Washing hangs from lines between the buildings, paralysed cocks leer from the roofs, ducks are poised in the middle of a stream, the old bicycle, motorcycle and battered Fiat are all there. But you know they will never again be used. The village appears lifelike, but the proper inhabitants are not there. They have fled before the invading army of tourists. . . . (Le Page, 2001)

But the vast majority of these 'tourists' are the people of Johannesburg, and Montecasino is popular. It is a barren cultural criticism that can only proceed by dismissing a wide spectrum of the population as possessing bad taste. Montecasino's new heritage appeals to more than a superficial vulgarity.

■ NEW PUBLIC PLACES

Montecasino – along with the Lost City, GrandWest and Gold Reef City – are the South African vanguard of a worldwide trend in a new form of heritage destination. As with similar developments elsewhere, each has a number of definitive characteristics: the investment of multinational capital, the engagement of specialized companies, working across several continents, that integrate a range of design, development and management services; the combination of the primary attractors of shopping, movies, restaurants and gambling in one complex; advanced surveillance and policing that excludes those without money to spend and ensures a high degree of internal security; a strong organizing theme that links together all aspects of the complex as a single concept; and an urgency to attain uniqueness through scale, the quality of the simulation, location and message. Such heritage destinations are, in turn, part of a wider genre that includes wildlife parks, shopping malls and urban regeneration projects that seek to create heritage enclaves that reclaim the city as a tourist destination for suburbanites. Together, these are the bourgeois public spaces of the new millennium. And as such they cannot simply be dismissed as 'bad taste'.

As heritage destinations, each of the four complexes described here takes an aspect of the popular awareness of South Africa's past and molds it as a space of the future. Gold Reef City harps on nostalgia for an imagined Johannesburg of the gold rush to create a public space that projects security, equality of fortune and the possibility of still striking it rich. GrandWest plays to the Western Cape's sense of itself as different from the rest of Africa, and creates a new creole mix of Dutch baroque, British classicism and vernacular to claim a future of fun, hospitality and relaxation. The Lost City follows in the footsteps of Wilbur Smith, Rider Haggard and many before them in portraying Africa as an empty, and therefore mysterious, continent in which the jewels of a lost civilization await discovery. Africa's proud and beautiful people are given an architecture of which they can at last be proud, thanks to the beneficence of Wimberley, Allison, Tong and Goo. And Montecasino draws on the same heritage stock as the Palace of the Lost City – the rich architectural heritage of the Mediterranean, Africa's civilized neighbor – to give the highveld a new architecture for the future. South Africa's new Tuscan roots seem to be widely popular. In a way that uncannily recalls the fusion of north European baroque and Indonesian styles in the creation of the new heritage of Cape Dutch architecture in the first half of the eighteenth century, South African Tuscan is spreading like wildfire, with a string of new corporate headquarters along Rivonia Road, linking Montecasino with the Italianate Sandton Square and its Michelangelo Hotel, and beyond.

Despite the feigned casualness of their alpha designers and dismissive reviews, such heritage destinations are complex and sophisticated developments that seek to meet exacting standards. These standards, however, are not those of historical veracity or traditional architectural integrity. As buildings, they are large, air-conditioned sheds with façades on the outside and props within. Their measure is their ability to entertain – to organize performances and create simulations that engage their visitors in the dialogue of the pin-ball game, virtual reality simulator or successful show. As entertainment centers, they play to individual experience rather than to a mass audience. Their operators have little interest in matters of public history or heritage as education. The primary purpose of the historical façades and simulated street scenes is to surprise and delight as they draw visitors into the heart of their world, and the ultimate individual experience of the jackpot, or a lucky spin of the roulette wheel.

As John Urry has shown, the 'gaze' is a primary commodity in this entertainment business – vistas, experiences, photo opportunities and memories that can be collected, and which attain value through their qualities as experiences, including their rarity. Again, this is a long way from the traditional museum approach, in which historical materials address the presumption of a hunger for knowledge and understanding, and from the ideology of public history, in which heritage organizations are custodians of a historical consciousness that will be the legacy of future generations.



This individualization of the 'heritage experience', and its status as a collectable gaze, effectively removes any onus on the operator for either veracity or balance in presentation. Sunwest's promotional material positions the company as part of the wider tourist and entertainment industry of the Western Cape, complementing other attractions by expanding the range of consumer choice that is available. If, then, visitors feel that 'The District' is only a partial representation of District Six and its history, let them add the District Six museum to their itinerary. But if they feel that the artificially rusted street signs, simulated cobbling and collage of period posters convey an adequate impression, then they can take in a wine tour or a trip up the mountain in the cable car to complete the visit.

Heritage as consumer choice achieves its most advanced form in Gold Reef City, where alternative Johannesburgs are available, side-by-side. The appropriate analogy here is not with two historical texts, one right and the other wrong, leading to incredulity that Gold Reef's designers could not see the contradiction. It is rather equivalent to the dilemma of the guest at Disney World, torn between the Kilimanjaro Safari attraction, and a serious message about conservation, or the good clean fun of Mickey's Jammin' Jungle Parade along Main Street. In developing such entertainment complexes, the new breed of specialist designers has learned well from post-modernism. Heritage destinations are post-modernism's avatar, the consequence of combination of corporate capital with the valorization of pastiche and playfulness.

There is, however, another consequence of the privileging of the dialogical relationship between producer and audience in themed entertainment. Unlike the ideologies of high modernism, the grand organizational schemes captured in James Scott's (1998) phrase 'seeing like a state', the new experiential economy privileges consumer choice. Those in search of entertainment can choose Caesars Gauteng over Montecasino, Canal Wharf in preference to Grand West, or they can stay home, watch television or surf the web. Earlier representations of heritage, building on nineteenth century concepts, sought to reform the manners of the working class and reaffirm the cohesion of the bourgeoisie through what Bennett (1995) has termed the 'exhibitionary complex' – a Foucauldian system of controlling discourse. But this no longer works in the experience economy, because individuality of experience is emphasized and the visitor is a knowing participant in the illusion. Such consumer choice serves to shape heritage destinations to the wishes of their customers. While hardly a form of resistance, such 'modes of consumption' do exercise considerable power in the marketplace of ideas.

This makes South Africa's new heritage destinations particularly interesting, because they have been developed at a time of social change, following the collapse of apartheid's social geography of segregated spaces determined by the Group Areas Act. The new casinos that have opened following the National Gambling Act of 1996 are positioned to take

advantage of the spatial arrangements of the changing urban environment. Gold Reef City hedges its bets. Montecasino is appended to Johannesburg's arterial system of freeways, maximizing access. GrandWest is in Cape Town's sprawling northern suburbs, well away from the old money beneath Table Mountain. It is too early to tell how these heritage destinations will shake down as competition and over-trading take their toll. But an evening at Montecasino or GrandWest will show that the use of these places is diverse. The movie theatres, food courts and up-market restaurants attract visitors across a wide social spectrum: youth, families, couples on a night out, those attracted to promotions and, of course, gamblers who range from a turn on the slots to addicts. There is an undoubted social cost, with an increase in compulsive gambling by those least able to afford it. There are also social benefits, particularly in the security provided by access control, surveillance and high levels of visible policing. Along with shopping malls, entertainment complexes such as these are South Africa's new public places. They are closely linked to the formation of identity, to the definition of a new middle class, and to the mechanisms of exclusion of the majority of the population, who can no more afford to be consumers in the new economy than they could in the old.

Acknowledgements

The work described in this article was carried out under the auspices of the Research Unit of the Archaeology of Cape Town. The interpretations of the South African destination resorts described in this article are based on fieldwork carried out in late 2001 and early 2002. We are grateful to managers and staff for facilitating access, and for providing background information and literature.

References

- Anderton, F. and J. Chase (1997) *Las Vegas: A Guide to Recent Architecture*. London: Ellipsis.
- Bauer, C. (2001) 'Speaking for Itself, and for All of Us', *Sunday Times Johannesburg*, 2 December.
- Bennett, T. (1995) *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Bremner, L. (2002) 'Theme Park City', *Sunday Times Johannesburg*, 17 March.
- Curtis, W. (2000) 'Las Vegas' Fantasy Hotels have Blueprint in Reality', *Dallas Morning News*, 23 June (consulted 20 January 2002): <http://www.dallasnews.com>
- Gates Jr, H.L. (1999) *Wonders of the African World: Lost Cities of the South*. Alexandria: Public Broadcasting Service.
- Gold Reef City (2001) *Gold Reef City Casino: The Story*. Johannesburg.
- Gottdiener, M., C. Collins and D. Dickens (1999) *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Hall, M. (1995) 'The Legend of the Lost City; or, The Man with Golden Balls', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21(2): 179–99.
- Hall, M. (2000) *An Archaeology of the Modern World*. London: Routledge.



- Hannigan, J. (1998) *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. London: Routledge.
- Kapelianis, A. (2001) 'Apartheid Museum Opens in Johannesburg'. *South African Broadcasting Corporation*, 30 November (consulted 20 January 2002): <http://www.sabcnews.com>
- Kros, C. (1990) Visiting History on the Week-end: From Colonial Williamsburg to Gold Reef City: An Exercise in Scrutinizing Public History. *Myths, Monuments, Museums: New Premises?* Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop.
- Kros, C. (1992) *Experiencing a Century in a Day? Making More of Gold Reef City. Myths, Monuments, Museums: New Premises?* Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop.
- Le Page, D. (2001) 'Gauteng's Newest Citadel of Sin', *Mail and Guardian Johannesburg*, 5 January.
- Matshikiza, J. (2002) 'Banking on Culture', *Mail and Guardian Johannesburg*, 11 January.
- Pine, J.B. and J.H. Gilmore (1999) *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Rassool, C. and S. Prosalendis, eds (2001) *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum*. Cape Town: District Six Museum Foundation.
- Sagalyn, L. (2001) *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Scott, J.C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sun International (2002) *Palace of the Lost City* (consulted 27 May 2002): <http://www.suninternational.com>
- Thomas, J. (2000a) 'Cape Town has got it, and Flaunts it', *Business Day Johannesburg*, 29 August.
- Thomas, J. (2000b) 'Shoppertainment Comes to Fourways', *Business Day Johannesburg*, 31 May.
- Urry, J. (2002) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.
- Walker, J. (1999) 'Krok's Gold Reef Casino Loots the Surface Dust', *Sunday Times Johannesburg*, 1 August.
- WATG (2002) *Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo* (consulted 27 May 2002): <http://www.watg.com>
- Watkins, G. (2001) *Life is Beautiful at Montecasino* (consulted 30 August 2001): <http://www.freelancers.co.za/feat.html>

MARTIN HALL is Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of Cape Town and was formerly Professor of Historical Archaeology.
[email: mhall@bremner.uct.ac.za]

PIA BOMBARDELLA is a researcher in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town.