

**Revisiting the ‘Old’ South Africa:  
Excursions into South Africa’s Tourist History  
under Apartheid, 1948–1990\***

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**Introduction**

Despite the growing world-wide visibility of tourism as a significant and multi-faceted industry and the concomitant rise of academic tourism studies, histories of tourism specifically have been relatively slow to emerge. Foremost British exponent of the history of tourism, John Walton, advances two reasons for this: first, the tardiness of the tourist industry to realise the value of historical studies, and second, what he considers to be the innate conservatism of history as a discipline to move beyond established thematic boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding obstacles, there has been an incremental growth of a body of work abroad, reflecting a fuller and more nuanced historical understanding of the various and complex dimensions of tourism as a site of contestation in which cultural imagery, politics, economics and international relations can all enter into the fray. Equally pertinent is the way in which the study of tourism can shed new light on traditional topics – as Kristin Semmens has recently demonstrated in a book exploring the role and impact of tourism in Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup> Scholarly debates over the nature and ramifications of tourism often mirror wider historiographical concerns such as the shaping of cultural and ethnic identity, changing forms of representation and the rise of consumer culture. Indeed, there is sufficient reason

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1. J.K. Walton, ed., *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict* (Clevedon, 2005), 1; see also J.K. Walton, ‘Taking the History of Tourism Seriously’, *European History Quarterly*, 27, 4 (2003), 563–71.
2. K. Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (Houndmills, 2005); see also S. Baranowski, ‘Radical Nationalism in an International Context: Strength through Joy and the Paradoxes of Nazi Tourism’, in Walton, *Histories of Tourism*, 125–43.

to believe that historians should not leave tourism for their summer holidays only, but also reflect upon it during the academic year.<sup>3</sup>

With the official demise of apartheid after 1994, the fall in the value of the rand in relation to the dollar, pound and euro, and with South Africa increasingly exposed to a globalising world, tourism has shown marked growth in the last decade.<sup>4</sup> Yet relatively little is known of developments which preceded the current phase – so much so that scholars of other disciplines can airily dismiss tourism before 1990 as of no consequence.<sup>5</sup> In a sense, such ignorance is understandable, as the history of tourism in South Africa has remained a largely uncharted field. For the pre-Second World War period, there exists only an article on American tourism to South Africa and a largely technical contemporary survey of the tourist industry published in 1936.<sup>6</sup> The yield for the apartheid era is even more meagre. The few historians who have ventured into tourist studies have preferred an episodic approach – or what they called ‘moments’ in tourist encounters – to a more diachronic analysis. Their work consists of wide-ranging descriptions in a critical tone of selected tourist attractions and expositions of how the South African past has been constructed in post-apartheid society for the purpose of tourism.<sup>7</sup> The paucity of the number of explicit historical contributions stands in contradistinction to the burgeoning work on the geographic patterns, economics and development of tourism in South Africa since 1990.<sup>8</sup>

Broadly defined, this article is an attempt to explore the nexus between politics, representations of society and tourism. Conceptually, tourism is viewed as a site of contestation, focusing on the interplay between apartheid and tourism at different historical junctures. In the process, it picks up on discontinuities but also on continuities in tourist practices which extend well beyond the official

3. D. Engerman, ‘Research Agenda for “The History of Tourism”: Towards an International Social History’, *American Studies International*, 32, 2 (Oct. 1994), 9.
4. C.M. Rogerson and G. Visser, eds, *Tourism and Development Issues in Contemporary South Africa* (Pretoria, 2004), 6; R. Palmer and J. Viljoen, ‘South Africa and the New Tourism’, in R. Palmer, H. Timmermans and D. Fay, eds, *From Conflict to Negotiation: Nature-Based Developments on South Africa’s Wild Coast* (Pretoria, 2000), 228.
5. Palmer and Viljoen, ‘South Africa and the New Tourism’, 226, note 8.
6. J.B. Wolf, ‘A Grand Tour: South Africa and American Tourists between the Wars’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 25 (1991), 99–116; A.J. Norval, *The Tourist Industry: A National and International Survey* (London, 1936).
7. C. Rassool and L. Witz, ‘“South Africa: A World in One Country”: Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern’, in *Cahiers d’Etudes africaines*, 143, 36–3 (1996), 337–71; L. Witz, C. Rassool and G. Minkley, ‘Repackaging the Past for South African Tourism’, *Daedalus*, 3 (2000), 277–95.
8. See, for example, C. Rogerson and G. Visser, eds, *Tourism and Development* (Pretoria, 2005); S. Cornelissen, *The Global Tourism System: Governance, Development and Lessons from South Africa* (Ashgate, Hants, 2005); T. Binns and E. Nel, ‘Tourism as a Local Development Strategy in South Africa’, *The Geographical Journal*, 168, 3 (Sep. 2002), 235–47; G. Allen and F. Brennan, *Tourism in the New South Africa: Social Responsibility and the Tourist Experience* (London, 2004); A. Bennett and R. George, *South African Travel and Tourism Cases* (Pretoria, 2004); Palmer, Timmermans and Fay, *From Conflict to Negotiation*.

abolition of apartheid. Given the huge lacunae in the historiography of tourism, this article makes no pretence to be exhaustive in its treatment of the theme. Furthermore, tourist studies in general have generated a multiplicity of issues; this analysis only concentrates on what appear to be the most salient historical questions.

### **Trends in Tourism, 1948–1976**

The exigencies of the Second World War had many unintended social consequences, among them large-scale migration of men and women, both civilian and military. Insofar as South Africa was considered, it played host to thousands of accidental tourists, because British airmen arrived in the country for training.<sup>9</sup>

In general, the considerable movement of people during hostilities also had the effect of alerting the South African authorities to the growing importance of upgrading tourist policy in peacetime. To this end, the South African Tourist Corporation (Satour) was formed in 1947 as a separate entity from the publicity arm of the South African Railways and Harbours, which formerly dealt with tourist matters.<sup>10</sup>

The change in government in 1948 after the National Party's (NP's) electoral victory altered the prevailing approach to tourism. During the first years of NP rule, tourism had a relatively low priority. Until the late 1950s, the tourism market remained predominantly a regional business, with the whites of neighbouring countries such as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Mozambique providing the bulk of the tourists. Only 17 per cent were long-distance visitors from overseas, half of whom came from Britain.<sup>11</sup> One important reason for this was that South Africa was a long-haul destination, which for the majority of potential overseas tourists meant a two-week sea journey. Another consideration was that the state had far more pressing priorities. The consolidation of Afrikaner power and the early shaping of apartheid policies took precedence over tourism, and there were few active attempts to court overseas visitors.<sup>12</sup>

This situation changed in the 1960s. After a temporary lull which followed the Sharpeville killings in 1960, the South African economy boomed. With the banning of black political organisations such as the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress and the muzzling of trade unions, political quietude seemed to return to the country. Political stability and a docile workforce made for excellent investment opportunities. During the 1960s South Africa experienced one

9. F.G. Brownell, 'British Immigration to South Africa, 1946–1970', *Archives Yearbook for South African History*, 48, I (1985), 18–19; see also J.B. Litoff, 'Enforced Tourists: American Women, Travel and the Far-Flung Fronts of World War II', *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 3, 3 (2005), 178–93.
10. F.F. Ferrario, 'An Evaluation of the Tourist Resources of South Africa' (PhD thesis, University College of Los Angeles, 1978), 58.
11. *Ibid.*, 55.
12. *Ibid.*, 58; Anon, 'Die Uitbouing van Toerisme' (Memorandum van die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, Pretoria, 1969), 9–10.

of the highest growth rates in the world.<sup>13</sup> These developments augured well for an increase in tourism, as the government, which now appeared to be firmly in charge, was more confident of broadening its range of overseas connections, including tourism. In addition, as a result of economic prosperity, it was possible over the decade to expand the road network and generally improve the country's infrastructure, which in turn increased South Africa's tourist potential.<sup>14</sup>

A crucial development in the wider tourism world was the technological advances which heralded the advent of commercial jet aircraft travel in the late 1950s and its rapid growth during the 1960s. Travelling time was cut considerably, and ocean liners as common forms of international passenger transport had to face the possibility of obsolescence. The age of air travel for the masses was given further impetus when the first wide-bodied jets (Boeing 747s), capable of carrying over 400 passengers, were introduced. This led to a drop of unit costs and in turn boosted expansion of packaged holidays. It became clear that the future of mass-market leisure travel was to be a north-south movement from the often inclement climates of North America and northern Europe to sunnier southern parts.<sup>15</sup> As a warm sunshine country, South Africa, though comparatively still a long-haul destination, stood to benefit from the revolution in the tourism industry during the 1960s.

These changes resonated in South Africa, where the government actively showed greater awareness of tourism with the establishment in 1963 of a department dedicated at least in part to tourism.<sup>16</sup> Although the Department of Tourism did not stand alone (initially it was jointly tagged with 'Indian Affairs'), this development was nevertheless an appreciable advance on the low-level interest before the 1960s. The department's main task was to formulate policy and to promote tourism initiatives. In addition, the Hotel Board, a statutory body, was called into being, with a view to grading hotels within a band of five quality levels.

Overseas visitors increased from 18 000 in 1961 to 60 000 in 1967.<sup>17</sup> Despite this growth, the potential of the overseas tourist market was not fully exploited, as the government insisted on high-income tourists, labelled an 'aristocratic cachet', as opposed to high-volume mass tourism intakes. Tourism advertising agencies worked in part from carefully compiled direct mailing lists, comprising the top echelons in terms of socio-economic standing abroad.<sup>18</sup> The rationale behind this was to ensure that the South African beaches and other tourist resorts were not inundated – as had happened in Spain and the Caribbean – by hordes of noisy tourists with limited spending power. Moreover, in the government's view such

13. R.W. Johnstone, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?* (Johannesburg, 1977), 29–31.

14. C. Verburgh, 'Transport and Communications', in Anon, *South Africa – The Free World's Treasure House* (Johannesburg, 1977), 179–80.

15. J.C. Holloway, *The Business of Tourism* (Harlow, 1998), 32–3.

16. Ferrario, 'Evaluation of Tourist Resources', 59.

17. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 28 May 1968, p. 6335 (J.D. Smith, Turffontein).

18. *Annual Report of the South African Tourist Corporation* (Pretoria, 1970), 14.

tourists were associated with dubious morals which were regarded as at odds with the puritanical outlook of Calvinistic Afrikanerdom.<sup>19</sup> But there was also an additional reason. Theo Behrens, Secretary of Tourism from 1973 to 1981, recalls that the government was of the opinion that wealthy tourists were more likely to be politically conservative and influential in the 'right' circles and would comment favourably on their visit to South Africa upon their return to their home countries.<sup>20</sup> Related to this line of reasoning was a certain degree of apprehension that mass tourism, which was more difficult to control, might have sparked social 'incidents' as tourists unwittingly breached the many 'petty' apartheid regulations pertaining to separate facilities.<sup>21</sup>

The government's approach of elitist targeting of tourists, however, ran counter to the interests of many hotels, which aimed for full occupancy rates and preferred high turnovers, regardless of the type of tourists they attracted. In the business world, the government's approach was regarded as shortsighted, and pressure started to mount for a more encompassing tourist strategy. In 1973, a shift did occur with the appointment of Owen Horwood as Minister of Tourism. He declared shortly after taking up the post: 'Our policy is not to be selective. It is time that we dealt with our problems as any marketing orientated organisation should – in an aggressive business like manner.'<sup>22</sup> This departure was probably underpinned by an increasing awareness of the potential of the tourist industry for earning foreign revenue. In the early 1970s, it was the fifth-largest earner, and the need for a professional approach based on business principles instead of a strategy based partly on 'traditional values' became more readily apparent.<sup>23</sup>

In post-1994 government literature on tourism, the apartheid past stands fully condemned as being a major deterrent to visitors and that 'tourist development in South Africa has largely been a missed opportunity'.<sup>24</sup> While such sentiments can be appreciated in that black people played a very limited role in tourism, it would be wrong to assume that apartheid meant that tourism was historically a stagnant enterprise. At least until the mid 1970s, the disrepute of South Africa's discriminatory policies was not so pervasive that it served as a significant barrier to tourists, many of whom seemed to have had few qualms in visiting the country. It was possible, even in international academic writing on tourism, to concentrate blithely on wildlife, sunshine, beaches and mountains in South Africa without even

19. Ferrario, 'Evaluation of Tourist Resources', 61, 63; D.M. Beiles, 'The South African Tourist Industry: Its Problems and Potential' (MBA research paper, University of Cape Town, 1972), 97; *Annual Report of the South African Tourist Corporation* (Pretoria, 1971), 14; 'Massatoerisme in Zuid-Afrika?', *Nieuws Zuid-Afrika*, 12, 7 (10–11 Dec. 1972); 'Ons Kort 'n Meesterplan vir Toerisme ... Anders Vermink Ons Suid-Afrika', *Die Huisgenoot*, 20 Mar. 1970.
20. Interview with T. Behrens, Kleinmond, 31 Aug. 2006.
21. 'Massatoerisme in Zuid-Afrika?', 12.
22. 'Visiting Hours', *Financial Mail*, 26 Oct. 1973.
23. Interview with T. Behrens, Kleinmond, 31 Aug. 2006.
24. 'White Paper on the Development of Tourism in South Africa' (1996), 4.

mentioning apartheid.<sup>25</sup> The number of tourists from overseas not only grew steadily, despite the initial selective policy, but in comparative terms for the period 1965 to 1970 South Africa's tourist arrivals actually outstripped the rate of world-wide arrivals. Whereas the world showed a 7.2 per cent growth rate, South Africa had an increase of 11.4 per cent in arrivals.<sup>26</sup>

There is a dearth of primary evidence on the way in which foreign visitors experienced apartheid, and this makes any claims somewhat speculative. There is however, some indication that, although some overseas tourists may have had private reservations about apartheid, in general few seemed to have had a fuller understanding of what the system entailed.<sup>27</sup> It may indeed be likely, as reported in the business press, that 'most foreign visitors generally return home as excellent ambassadors for South Africa'.<sup>28</sup>

What most probably also came into play here is what John Urry in a celebrated phrase has called the 'tourist gaze'. Holiday packages are highly structured and tourists tend to live in an 'environmental bubble', designed to shield them from potential 'negative' experiences. To be a tourist can mean to opt out of ordinary social reality.<sup>29</sup> The power to define the world of the tourist often resides in those agencies which direct the tourist 'gaze', and for a variety of reasons they may shut out possible controversial imagery. This in turn may have affected the limited understanding which tourists had of South Africa's race policies during this period.

A pertinent issue in dealing with apartheid and tourism for the relevant period is whether or not the South African government deliberately set out to use tourism as an additional platform for the promotion of its race policies. Some academic analysts have no reservations on this matter: they have argued that during the apartheid era even the very act of 'admittance of international tourists involved actions (e.g., the stamping of passport, the negotiation of landing rights) that affirm and gave substance to the sovereign prerogatives of the state'.<sup>30</sup> The statement, however, is problematical. The question of South Africa's constitutional sovereignty as such was never in doubt, and the government hardly needed the act of tourism, symbolically or on any other level, to confer sovereign legitimacy. Of course, what was much more pertinent and at the core of anti-apartheid campaigns was the issue of political representation within the sovereign state, as the majority of the population was excluded from meaningful participation.

25. See, for example, H. Robinson, *A Geography of Tourism* (London, 1976), 422–7.

26. Beiles, 'South African Tourist Industry', 12.

27. Compare W. Gierch, 'Ferntourismus im Südlichen Afrika: Entwicklung und räumliche differenzierung' (DPhil thesis, Goethe University, Frankfurt, 1986), 201.

28. 'Hotels for Africa', *Financial Mail*, 6 Mar. 1970.

29. Compare J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London, 1990), 1–11; M. Crick, 'Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings and Servility', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 18 (1989), 327.

30. D.B. Weaver, 'Tourism and Political Geography in Southern Africa', in P.U.C. Dieke, ed., *The Political Economy of Tourist Development* (New York, 2000), 56.

Although, as indicated earlier, the government initially preferred selective tourism, this does not imply that as a matter of overall policy it was regarded as essential to refract apartheid through a tourism prism. On the contrary, even when prompted, the Minister of Tourism, Frank Waring, did not think it was incumbent upon his department to do so. In 1971, he explained in parliament his position on the suggestion of having to create a 'positive' image of South Africa:

It is not the function of the Department of Tourism. I agree --- that tourists who visit this country have a different impression of the country when they return to their home countries. But basically it is merely a subsidiary matter as far as tourism is concerned and I do not regard it as an important function of my department. I want to put it clearly --- as I do not want the opinion to prevail that tourism must be used mainly to create a good impression of South Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, there was also a certain caution in actively trying to win over tourists to South Africa's race policies. A high-ranking tourist official in government circles warned in 1971 against an over-enthusiastic approach:

There is much interest overseas in our policy of separate development. We should not try to inundate overseas tourists with long explanations trying to justify our policy. Let them first look around for a while on their own, and we can then try to explain to them our history and policy in an interesting manner.<sup>32</sup>

While the pronouncements of government officials should of course be viewed with scepticism, there does not seem to be any reason to reject these out of hand. As a matter of fact, the absence of a 'hard-sell' approach seemed to have been pervasive. In the popular press, it was reported that many ordinary Afrikaners refrained from 'naively' trying to impress tourists with the politics of South Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Proselytism therefore does not appear to have been a deliberate priority for tourism at this stage; at most, a 'positive' view of South Africa was seen as a by-product of that which tourists would absorb on their visits. Underlying this position in the 1960s was a high degree of local confidence on the part of whites that despite possible obstacles, apartheid could well be the answer to what was regarded as the country's most intractable issue.<sup>34</sup> In the process, apartheid was assigned a spurious naturalness as the 'logical' answer. It was an outlook, combined with exceptional prosperity at the time, which seeped into the country's tourism discourse. Upon making his first public appearance as South Africa's new prime minister after the assassination of H.F. Verwoerd in 1966, B.J. Vorster addressed

31. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 11 May 1971, p. 6553 (translation).

32. Cape Archives (hereafter CA), Provincial Archives Files (hereafter PAF), A/180/ANO 12/21 'The Promotion of Tourism' (1971).

33. 'Die Nuwe Afrikaner', *Die Huisgenoot*, 4 June 1965.

34. H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town, 2003), 534.

delegates of the hotel industry in Cape Town. To great applause, he struck an optimistic note, claiming that ‘if South Africa were a business and that business was for sale, you and I would buy it at twice the value of its present sworn appraisal’. The country, it was claimed, had huge potential despite the shock of Verwoerd’s death. ‘South Africa’, according to Vorster, ‘had much to offer the tourist from abroad and when these storms have passed – and they will pass – at least we will have achieved the position where everybody in the world knows where South Africa is.’<sup>35</sup>

The publicity material of Satour during the 1960s consisted partly of brochures and posters depicting the ubiquitous imagery of sun, sea and wildlife. These portrayals were supplemented by material focusing on sport: brochures depicted the world-renowned golfer, Gary Player, teeing off for an American audience and a scene from a rugby match aimed at an Australasian market.<sup>36</sup> Looking at these brochures from the vantage point of 2006, it is the silences that speak the loudest; black people did not make a guest appearance, nor did they even appear as a kind of animated geographical background. Clearly, to the prospective tourist, South Africa had to appear as an invitingly outdoor, exclusively white country with a consuming interest in sporting matters.

The marketers of South African tourism put their greatest store by films as an ‘invaluable publicity medium’, constituting the ‘most effective means of stimulating a desire to visit South Africa’.<sup>37</sup> The viewing figures certainly bear out this enthusiasm: in 1970 a total of 53 828 film screenings to audiences totalling an impressive 4 228 534 people were held abroad.<sup>38</sup> It is not possible, however, to tell how many of these viewers actually decided on the basis of such screenings to visit the country.

As indicated earlier, tourism at this stage was not singled out as a useful instrument to promote apartheid, but given the entrenched and distorted nature of apartheid thinking it is not surprising that tourist films, like brochures, traded in certain racial stereotypes and mythology. One of Satour’s first productions in 1959 was entitled ‘South Africa: A Preview for the Visitor’. The ‘native races’ were depicted in their rural ‘habitat’ as ‘unspoilt’ by city life. Particularly misleading historically was the perpetuation of the myth of the ‘empty land’, with blacks being described as trekking from the centre of Africa and being as much immigrants to the interior of the country as the white colonists.<sup>39</sup> Other films focused on wild life. In 1970 a technically superb film, ‘The Peace Game’, was produced. The film ends with the promise of ‘privileged moments’ for those who visited the parks, but

35. ‘PM Sees a Big Future in Tourism’, *Cape Argus*, 20 Sep. 1966.

36. *Annual Report of the South African Tourist Corporation* (Pretoria, 1964–1965), 18–19.

37. *Annual Report of the South African Tourist Corporation* (Pretoria, 1970), 16.

38. *Ibid.*

39. I am indebted to Trevor Moses from the National Film Archive for information on this film.

understandably was silent on the fact that in South Africa one needed at the time 'a special kind of privilege to get to the game parks'.<sup>40</sup>

Deeply embedded and enduring in the ethos of marketing South Africa as a tourist destination was the juxtaposition of the 'primitive' and the 'modern'. This implied a judicious blend of the familiar with the unfamiliar. Wealthy tourists had to enjoy all the luxuries and comforts they were accustomed to, yet they had to be exposed to 'wild Africa' under controlled conditions. In 1963 the Secretary for Tourism identified this as the 'romantic theme' which should inform their promotional effort: 'Here is an exhilarating land lying under a warm beneficial sun. Cities, alive with prosperity and confidence, form a contrast to picturesque Bantu Villages where ancient tribal rites and traditions are still to be seen.'<sup>41</sup> In parliament the same theme was raised with a slight shift in emphasis, in that there was some concern that the African side of South Africa was being over-emphasised at the expense of what was regarded as the essential alignment with counterparts in the West.<sup>42</sup>

This emblematic projection of touristic South Africa was not restricted to the period of NP rule, and though it might have accorded well with apartheid thinking, its roots went further back to the segregationist era. It formed a distinct part of the official tourist discourse at least from 1936 onwards, as tourist brochures from the publicity department of the Railways waxed lyrically about the contrasts in South Africa:

For all the furbelows of modernity, there is in Southern Africa an ever present nearness to life in the raw. At one hour of the day the sightseer may be seated in the lounge of a fashionable club or hotel, with around him all the emblems of refined living, and the next he may be intrigued to find himself at a native kraal, face to face with the primitiveness of Bantu life.<sup>43</sup>

This notion, remarkably, outlived segregation and apartheid to re-emerge robustly in the post-apartheid era at a time when such loaded comparisons were generally deemed to be have been consigned to the unbearable past. None other than Cheryl Carolus, Chief Executive Officer of South African Tourism and staunch anti-apartheid activist in the 1980s, roundly proclaimed in 2003 that South Africa has 'magnificent attributes – world class, value for money, quality African tourism experiences coupled with sophisticated infrastructure and services'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the government tourism agency, while attempting to 'rebrand' South

40. *Monthly Film Review*, June 1971, p. 129. Trevor Moses provided the reference.

41. CA, PAF, A/401/ANO 12/1, First annual congress of the Northern Cape Tourist Board, 1963.

42. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 19 Apr. 1962, p. 4423 (H. Russel, Wynberg).

43. C. Carlyle-Gall, *Six Thousand Miles of Sunshine Travel over the South African Railways* (Johannesburg, 1936), 1.

44. <http://www.southfrica.info/plan-trip/holiday/tourism-080503.htm>; 'South Africa Rides Tourism Wave', accessed 8 Nov. 2005.

Africa, still uses terminology such as 'Luxury in Africa' to promote the country.<sup>45</sup> While making allowance for slightly different emphases, the basic juxtaposition remained much the same. It reflects revealingly on South African tourism imagery; despite successive governments with considerable political differences, this particular notion assumed an almost timeless quality with a similar overarching message. Although the African side may currently be more consistently emphasised than under apartheid, there remains an overriding need to accentuate South Africa's infrastructural superiority in comparison to the rest of Africa.<sup>46</sup> Underlying this is probably the material reality that it is difficult to move away from imagery which has a proven record of being a major drawcard for wealthy overseas visitors.

Apart from overseas visitors, South Africa also had a substantial number of tourists from neighbouring settler countries such as Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Mozambique. White Rhodesians came in large numbers, but this market was regarded as saturated and tourist officials explored the possibility of increasing the number of more than 31 000 Portuguese from Mozambique who visited South Africa in 1965.<sup>47</sup> Because these Portuguese inhabitants were used to Africa, their requirements differed from those of overseas visitors. Tourist officials were quite blunt in what the Portuguese visitors expected: 'The women came for shopping, and the men for sin – in this context 'sin' should be taken to mean cinemas, theatres, night-clubs and horse-racing'. The men, it was added, apparently also had another 'weakness': 'As a class, all Portuguese men suffer, or think they suffer, from liver trouble. This account for the popularity of mineral springs.' As the Portuguese tourists came as families, it was further deemed necessary to take their children into account. With some glancing comments on perceived Portuguese child-rearing practices, it was advised:

Facilities for children are an important consideration as the Portuguese are notorious for spoiling their children. This has, indeed, caused them to be unpopular amongst some South African hoteliers whose other guests have been inclined to complain about the Portuguese children running wild.<sup>48</sup>

Until the mid 1970s, the South African tourist industry could in its own terms look back upon a period of steady increases in tourists from neighbouring countries, but more important significant growth in the overseas travel market. Sator had offices abroad in London, Paris, Rome, Frankfurt and Amsterdam, and was well connected with the major tour operators abroad. On the face of it, the corporation had every reason to be optimistic, and the hope was expressed that the

45. Cornelissen, *Global Tourism System*, 112.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 5 Aug. 1966, p. 279.

48. CA, Buitelandse Konsul-Generaal Lourenco Marques (hereafter BLM), 21/35/17/1, Report of the South African Tourist Corporation, 1956.

Republic would develop as a top priority in south-bound tour planning.<sup>49</sup> Up to 1976, tourism as a site of contestation was, as indicated, restricted to skirmishes about the preferred type of tourist. Apartheid had yet to develop as a major national and international flashpoint; in the following decade the stakes were to be considerably higher.

### **Tourism from Overseas under Pressure, 1976–1990**

The complacency which created the illusion that tourism and apartheid could comfortably inhabit the same space was increasingly challenged during the period from 1976 to 1990. The first major conflagration which brought this home was the Soweto revolt of 1976. On 16 June 1976 school pupils, fueled by a number of grievances and resentments, among them the use of Afrikaans in the teaching of certain subjects, came out in protest in Soweto. Violent clashes between pupils and police sparked further revolts and the simmering dissatisfaction spilled over into other parts of the country. Television coverage of the events and newspaper reportage ensured unprecedented international abhorrence for what was taking place in South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

It was the worst kind of publicity for tourism, as it immediately raised the spectre of general mayhem and danger. The question of safety relates directly to tourism, and the issue is compounded by the fact that prospective overseas visitors are often not in a position to arrive at a sober assessment of the degree of risk involved. 'Americans assume political stability', an American analyst commented in 1992:

Acts of terrorism, civil strife, or political conflict strike irrational fear ... Statistics showing that one is more likely to die from lightning or in the bathtub than from political violence do not dispel the concern that deflects travel decisions away from controversial destinations and towards more serenity.<sup>51</sup>

Not surprisingly then, the revolt in 1976 had a considerable impact on the number of overseas visitors. After an all-time high of 402 988 in 1975, numbers plummeted to 293 999 in 1977 – a drop of 27 per cent.<sup>52</sup>

This prompted swift and intensive action on the part of the Department of Tourism. In parliament, the Minister of Tourism, Marais Steyn, elaborated on these responses and what he perceived to be the effects:

49. *Annual Report of the South African Tourist Corporation* (Pretoria, 1971), 10.

50. The literature on Soweto is huge. For a sound introduction, see P. Bonner and L. Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town, 1998).

51. L.K. Richter, 'Political Instability and Tourism in the Third World', in D. Harrison, ed., *Tourism and the Less Developed Countries* (London, 1992), 38.

52. *Annual Report of South African Tourism Board* (Pretoria, 1991), 19: see Diagram A, Twenty Year Growth.

At the time of the troubles in Soweto we acted immediately to undertake what I would call a 'reassurance campaign' in the countries from where our tourists emanated. We organised special seminars, we brought special visits to our business acquaintances in the 13 areas where we have overseas offices and we invited travel agents on an unprecedented scale to South Africa. We brought travel writers and correspondents and editors of travel journals from all over the world to South Africa. The result was that a message of reassurance spread all over the world. It made an end to the decline which was fairly serious, but which would have been more serious if we had not taken these actions.<sup>53</sup>

Steyn was correct that tourism increased again; figures for overseas visitors in 1978 showed a 12,7 per cent growth from the previous year, to 336 911 visitors.<sup>54</sup> The tourist scene, however, was not destined to return to the placid politics of the 1960s and the rapid growth curve of that decade. Soweto was not a temporary aberration, but the harbinger of the new dynamics of apartheid resistance which would find full expression in the turbulent 1980s, with large-scale popular resistance and the imposition of various states of emergency by an increasingly embattled government under local as well as growing international pressure. While these developments, along with an intermittently recessionary economic climate, undoubtedly had an inhibiting effect, the tourist industry was resilient enough to manage, with the exception of 1986, a fairly stable overall pattern of overseas arrivals during the decade.<sup>55</sup> The year 1986 was particularly volatile, as the only way the government could assert control over the continuing unrest was to announce a nation wide state of emergency. The effect of the turmoil was reflected in the figures for 1986 dropping to 1973 levels. However, the numbers picked up again subsequently, as oppositional groups spend time regrouping and a spurious calm returned. An emboldened president P.W. Botha could confidently proclaim in 1987:

Those people who have been ranting against us for the last eighteen months to two years, who throughout the world have been heaping abuse on South Africa, have in a way done us a favour. Now the world is growing curious to come and see this country. Tourism is increasing and each tourist who has come and has seen South Africa, goes back and says, 'I never knew that there was a country with so many superb features'.<sup>56</sup>

Botha's optimism over the effect of tourism was unwarranted, and he oversimplified a more complex issue. At the other end of the spectrum is the assumption that because projected target figures for the 1980s were difficult to attain, the unrest provoked by apartheid irredeemably tainted all tourist endeavours

53. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 1 May 1978, p. 5826 (Marais Steyn, translation).

54. *Annual Report of South African Tourism Board* (Pretoria, 1991), 19: see Diagram A, Twenty Year Growth.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Quoted in J.J.J. Scholtz, compiler, *Fighter and Reformer: Extracts from the Speeches of P.W. Botha*, (Pretoria, 1988), 115.

and that the industry virtually came to a grinding halt.<sup>57</sup> One needs to put South African tourism in a wider perspective in order to arrive at an assessment of the impact of the turmoil of the 1980s. One way of doing this is to look at tourist performances in other unstable countries at the time. Political unrest was not unique to South Africa. Writing on political instability and tourism in the third world, Linda K. Richter has drawn attention to the fact that in the period from 1956 to 1985 there were 60 successful coups and 71 attempted coups in Africa. Furthermore, there were 120 additional reported plots in which the military was involved. Even well-meaning efforts to calm the political situation could complicate the functioning of tourism; airport closures, curfews and the absence of night-time entertainment added to the woes of potential intrepid tourists. Such a political climate not only negatively affected tourist numbers, but also led to a lack of investment in tourist infrastructure. Richter succinctly sums up the overall situation: 'Like the rather forlorn Bangladesh poster urging "Come to Bangladesh before the tourists come", there is still time in most of Africa.'<sup>58</sup> In South Africa, though the situation was serious in the 1980s, it was not nearly as bleak as the scenario sketched by Richter. The country remained one of Africa's top tourist destinations for overseas visitors.<sup>59</sup>

The events in Soweto and the continuing political stresses had a marked effect on the tourist strategies of tourism officials. It had now become incumbent upon them to convey what was regarded as the 'correct' information to prospective tourists.<sup>60</sup> There was a particular concern about the 'leftwing bias of the media overseas and its penchant for the sensational [which] combined to create a picture of the southern African continent as a new version of Vietnam'.<sup>61</sup> In the face of mounting overseas criticism of events in South Africa, tourist officials intensified their efforts in the 1980s to try to create what they considered to be a more positive image of the country. Foreign tourists, more than before, became valuable ideological commodities. In 1985 Satour made it clear: 'The value of well disposed tourism from overseas as the creator of understanding and goodwill to counter negative publicity against South Africa, can not be calculated in monetary terms.'<sup>62</sup>

With these developments, segments of the South African tourism industry became fully embroiled in the propaganda and counter-propaganda apartheid war

57. See, for example, L. Dondolo, 'The Construction of Public History and Tourist Destinations in Cape Town's Townships: A Study of Routes, Sites and Heritage' (MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2002), 11–12. This takes an excessively dim view and implies that the efforts of tourist officials to maintain a steady tourist flow were to no real avail. For a similar assumption, see also P. McKenzie, 'A Sociological Study of Tourism in South Africa: A Case Study of Gold Reef City' (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994), 28.

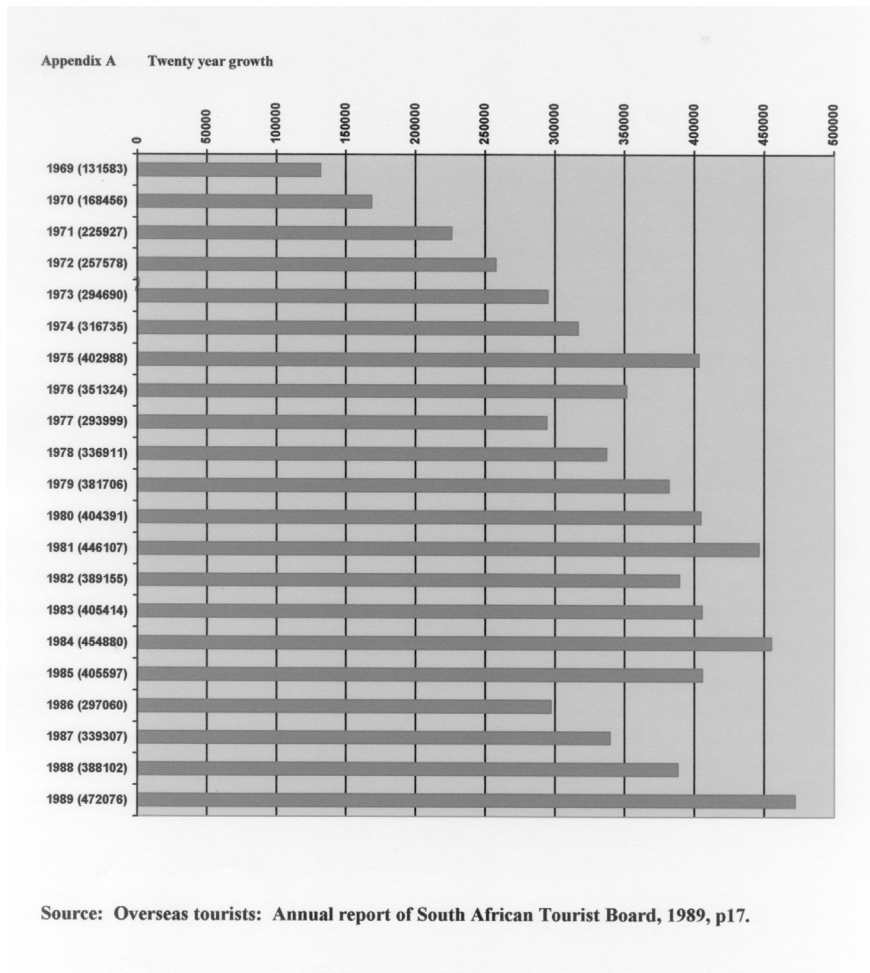
58. Richter, 'Political Instability and Tourism', 40–1.

59. D. Harrison, 'International Tourism and the Less Developed Countries: The Background', in Harrison, *Tourism and the Less Developed Countries*, 7.

60. *Volksraadsdebatte*, 9 Feb. 1978, p. 750 (P.J. Badenhorst, Oudtshoorn) (translation).

61. *Saturday Evening Post*, May/June 1979, p. 2.

62. *Annual Report of the South African Tourism Board* (Pretoria, 1985), 4.



which, under the slogan of ‘total onslaught and total strategy’, was such a marked feature of the 1980s. This was a decisive shift away from the 1960s, when tourist officials, as we have noticed earlier, were more reluctant to be seen as active promoters of ideological projects. To be sure, even in the 1980s there were some high-ranking officials who had their reservations about the efficacy of blatantly blending politics and tourism to the likely detriment of both.<sup>63</sup> What emerges

63. Interview with T. Behrens, Kleinmond, 31 Aug. 2006.

clearly from this is the linkage between tourism endeavours, wider politics and the way the correlation changed over time. During the 1980s, tourism had become a marked site of contestation; the heated political climate had prevented exponential growth, but the industry did manage to secure an even and relatively steady flow of overseas tourists.

### Aspects of Domestic Tourism, 1975–1990

A distinct characteristic of domestic tourism after the mid 1970s, apart from the abiding popularity of the Kruger National Park, was the promotion of tourism in the so-called homelands. With the 'independence' of the Transkei in 1976, tourism, which till then had received scant attention, was foregrounded as part and parcel of the project to promote the 'new' country.<sup>64</sup> One of the more fanciful schemes was to produce large stamps, covering almost half an envelope, proclaiming the 'independence' of the Transkei and its tourist potential.<sup>65</sup>

More important, however, was the development of casino hotel resorts in some of the homeland areas, most notably Sun City in Bophutatswana and the Wild Coast Inn in the Transkei. These resorts were conveniently situated relatively close to urban centres in 'white' South Africa. They took their cue from similar resorts in independent Swaziland and Lesotho and were designed to attract much the same clientele. Underpinning the attractions at these luxurious resorts was the allure of forbidden fruit – gambling, pornographic films and, more informally, prostitution across the colour line. All these 'sins' were illegal in greater South Africa, but upholding the fiction of independent homelands the government conveniently shelved its puritanical views and argued with scarcely concealed sophistry that it was within the jurisdiction of the homeland authorities to formulate their own positions on these matters.

The marketing of these resorts within larger South Africa was hardly subtle; promotional material enticed prospective visitors to

come alive to the throb of excitement. Dine and dance at Gigi's while watching international cabaret. Settle down in our plush and luxury cinema to see a naughty and different film. Be where the action is – in our casino. You can play --- amidst the excitement and tension where hopes and fortunes are won and lost every night, surrounded by the clattering ring of coinspilling slot machines.<sup>66</sup>

These resorts were popular and the majority of visitors who stayed overnight were from greater South Africa. In this way, domestic tourism became inextricably

64. M.J. Woock, 'Tourism in the Transkei: A Review of the Industry and Its Problems' (MBA research paper, University of Cape Town, 1981).

65. Interview with T. Behrens, Kleinmond, 31 Aug. 2006.

66. Quoted in J. Crush and P. Wellings, 'The Southern African Pleasure Periphery, 1966–83', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21, 4 (1983), 685.

bound up in the politics of grand apartheid. It helped, for example, to attract private investment to the homelands which otherwise might not have been forthcoming, as they lacked international standing. Furthermore, although the development of these resorts might have provided employment for a small number of local residents, it came at high social costs as prostitution flourished and many returning migrant labourers gambled away their savings at slot machines at the expense of basic needs like food and clothes.<sup>67</sup>

Seen in historical perspective, these developments were important tourist markers. Despite their political illegitimacy and questionable social and moral costs, the basic fare they had on offer at these resorts was almost seamlessly absorbed in post-apartheid era and became readily available for tourists in the 'new' South Africa. After 1994, the number of casinos in South Africa has increased from 17 to 33 and pornography has become freely available.<sup>68</sup> Whereas under apartheid casinos were situated in rural impoverished homelands, current casinos are usually located close to poorer urban areas. The particular form of casino tourism that had its origins under apartheid thus lives on in a somewhat different yet recognisable guise.

Casino resort tourism aside, there was no shortage of domestic tourism destinations in South Africa in the 1980s. Compared to developing countries, South Africa had a thriving local tourism economy, based mainly on the white market.<sup>69</sup> Black tourism, other than visiting families and friends, was severely curtailed through discriminatory legislation. The Group Areas Act and the Separate Amenities Act, for instance, systematically denied black people access to certain hotels, beaches, cinemas, buses and hiking trails. At the same time, the government assisted in the promotion of mass domestic tourism through the development of inland resorts such as the 'Aventura' spa destinations, which could make tourism more affordable for the white lower-middle classes.<sup>70</sup>

This does not, however, imply that no attention was given to domestic black tourism. Within the apartheid paradigm of equivalent facilities for different race groups, extensive plans for 'appropriate' tourist places for blacks, many of them in the emergent homelands, were discussed in the Department of Bantu Affairs.<sup>71</sup> It would appear, though, that with the establishment of casino resorts, such plans fell away. In practice, tourist facilities specifically for black people remained woefully inadequate. In essence there were three resorts: Manyeleti, a nature game park in what was the Eastern Transvaal (currently Mpumalanga) along the border

67. J. Lea, *Tourism and Development in the Third World* (London, 1988), 18; G. Schutte, 'Tourists and Tribes in the 'New' South Africa', *Ethnohistory*, 50, 2 (Summer 2003), 475–6.

68. C.M. Rogerson and G. Visser, 'Tourism in Urban Africa: The South African Experience', *Urban Forum*, 16, 2–3 (Apr. - Sep. 2005), 70.

69. C.M. Rogerson, "'Sho't Left': Changing Domestic Tourism in South Africa', *Urban Forum*, 16, 2–3 (Apr. - Sep. 2005), 93–4.

70. McKenzie, 'Sociological Study of Tourism', 25.

71. CA, Bantoesake en Ontwikkeling (hereafter BAO), 21/63/R144/11/1, Memorandum oor Moontlike Swart Toeriste Plekke, 2 May 1975.

of the Kruger National Park; Umgababa, a seaside resort south of Durban; and Boitaboboso, a resort with chalet accommodation near Zeerust on the Botswana border.<sup>72</sup>

However, the need to legitimise 'Bantu culture' and to market the homelands to overseas and domestic visitors opened opportunities for floating fanciful touristic ideas. One such notion was that of a giant African theme park. This idea emanated from Credo Mutwa, a maverick, self-styled indigenous knowledge expert who introduced himself to the Minister of Tourism in 1973 as an 'unworthy possessor of several talents; a witchdoctor, a painter of pictures, a sculptor – and as a builder of sorts' who had also written two books and 'hoped to write about thirty more'. After dutifully confessing his belief in separate development, Mutwa expanded on his elaborate plans for a huge building 'anywhere in the country', to consist of a 'modern hall for plays', where tourists could enjoy live African culture, and an 'ultra modern museum hall, a great shrine of 1000 gods, a great place of dancing and African wrestling, and sacred cornfields'. He called the projected complex a 'Place of Light where I could revive ancient Bantu sports, plays and arts on a scale never tried before'.<sup>73</sup> Such a scheme, however, was considered far too ambitious, even by the standards of apartheid social engineers, to entertain seriously.

Intriguingly though, Mutwa's conception of an African theme park, with its emphasis on various dramatic components of manufactured African traditional custom, loosely resembled that of Sun City's mythical 'Lost City' complex with its extravagantly packaged 'ancient African culture', designed by international resort architects in California. 'Lost City' emerged some twenty years after Mutwa's musings. Martin Hall, in a revealing analysis of the 'Lost City' idea, has shown that it was based on a 'deep and wide foundation of popular mythology'.<sup>74</sup> Hall does not mention Mutwa, but given the similarities, it is not inconceivable that Mutwa's earlier representations of 'Bantu culture' drew upon the same source which later, unwittingly, dovetailed with that exported to California and reworked to parade as African antiquity, ultimately serving the needs late twentieth-century capitalism.

Whatever its origins, in the post-apartheid South Africa the 'Lost City' has lost none of its allure. In the government's glossy tourism publications, the mythical misrepresentations of Africa are vigorously promoted:

72. F. Ferrario, 'Emerging Leisure Market among the South African Black Population', *Tourism Management*, vol. 2 (Mar. 1988), 36.

73. CA, BAO, 21/63/R144/11/1, C. Mutwa - Minister of Tourism, 21 June 1973. For some of Mutwa's other ideas, see C. Mutwa, *Zulu Shaman: Dreams, Prophecies and Mysteries* (Rochester, 2003).

74. M. Hall, 'The Legend of the Lost City: Or, the Man with Golden Balls', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 2 (June 1995), 196.

In the remote northern region of South Africa one may find the Lost City, the largest theme park resort in the world. It's a dream-like world where anything is possible, where you can catch an extravaganza, or an island wave, play golf on a fabled course, rub shoulders with the rich and famous ... Or go back millions of years in a big five game reserve within an ancient volcano.

The promotion then clicks into even higher gear by linking the initiatives of wealthy entrepreneurs to those of South Africa's new political elite and their activist background: 'All it took was the vision and the can-do attitude of a select few. Not unlike those who have been tasked with showing the world why nothing is impossible.'<sup>75</sup>

The question of black cultural representation in the context of tourism and apartheid revealed some distinct ambiguities. There was an awareness on the part of certain government officials that public displays such as tribal dancing arranged specifically for tourists were problematical, and not only because they were often held in 'white' areas which were easily accessible to tourists. The chief government ethnologist, C. Bothma, explained in 1973:

The time that any aspect of Bantu life can be presented as a tourist attraction is in my opinion something of the past. The Bantu themselves object to being put on display like cattle for inquisitive tourists ... Inquisitiveness of tourists increasingly annoys tribal leaders and leaders of the nation ('volksleiers')'.<sup>76</sup>

While this view reflected a certain sensitivity to the potentially offensive nature of such displays, it was not a stable position. In keeping with the contradictions of apartheid, Bothma actually encouraged such performances for tourists when they took place in the homelands, provided that each ethnic group (for example, Xhosa and Zulu) performed their own traditional dances which should be '*volksgerig*' (aimed at the particular group). The basis for this argument was that these would strengthen ethnic bonds and that it was within the jurisdiction of homeland leaders to decide on the advisability of such forms of tourism or not.

The broader issues implicit in this, such as 'othering', authenticity and the commodification of culture for touristic purposes, were to become more controversial doing the post-apartheid period, which saw a proliferation of so-called cultural villages, among others so-called San villages, with several scholars in tow to comment and express their criticisms.<sup>77</sup> Yet, as is clear from the

75. *South African Tourism Annual* (Pretoria, 2004/05), 16.

76. CA, BAO, 21/63/R144/11/1, Memorandum of C. Bothma, 25 Nov. 1973 (translation). On the intellectual orientation of Afrikaner ethnologists, see W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920-1990* (Johannesburg, 1999), 109-39.

77. Rassool and Witz, 'A World in One Country', 343-8, 354-61; Witz, Rassool and Minkley, 'Repackaging the Past', 279-83; S. Goudie, F. Kahn and D. Kilian, 'Tourism beyond Apartheid: Black Empowerment and Identity in the 'New' South Africa', in P.A. Wells, *Keys to the Marketplace: Problems and Issues in Cultural and Heritage Tourism* (Enfield Lock, 1996), 74-9; K. Enevoldsen, 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil: An "Outsider's" Encounter with Cultural

reservations of Bothma, this particular concern has a longer genealogy than is often assumed, albeit it one with a peculiar apartheid twist. Equally pertinent is the fact that in terms of representation, the continuing importance of this kind of display seems to have outlived apartheid, only to re-emerge in much the same way in a new dispensation. One scholar has noted: 'The irony in many instances is that the cultural distinctiveness of indigenous groups, as the apartheid regime divide and rule policies defined it, is being reproduced in an era that is supposed to have superseded it.'<sup>78</sup> But perhaps it is not that strange, as tourism has its own dynamic in shaping the cultural marketplace. 'A crucial feature of tourism', writes John Urry, is that

potential objects of the tourist gaze must be *different* in some way or the other. They must be out of the ordinary. People must experience particularly distinct pleasures which involve different senses or are on a different scale from those typically encountered in everyday life.<sup>79</sup>

As long as tourists express a demand for cultural villages and tribal dancing and find them sufficiently different from what they have seen before, one can safely assume that these practices will, despite reservations, continue to exist in a South African tourism context.

### Conclusion

This article has viewed tourism as a site of contestation and has tried to highlight the interaction between tourism and wider societal forces in South Africa. Such encounters had their own twists and turns. The 1960s saw the growth of tourism in the wake of an economic boom, relative political quietude and the advent of jet travel. While the obvious exclusionary elements of the system skewed tourist endeavours, a relatively sophisticated tourist infrastructure was nevertheless established. Nor in a decade of optimism and belief in South Africa's race policies was it deemed necessary deliberately to use tourism to promote apartheid policies. The effects of intermittent political unrest since 1976 which reached a climax in the 1980s and South Africa's increasing international isolation placed the tourist industry under greater pressure and there were far fewer reservations in overtly mixing politics and tourism. The industry managed, however, to weather the storm insofar as the overall number of annual foreign arrivals, with the exception of 1986, remained fairly constant. In terms of tourist representations and practices,

Tourism in South Africa', *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, 3, 4 (2003), 486–502; K. Tomaselli and C. Wang, 'Selling Myths, Not Culture', *Tourism Forum*, 1, 1 (2002), 23–33; Schutte, 'Tourists and Tribes', 478–85. For a perceptive and succinct discussion of these matters outside the South African context, see R. Shepherd, 'Commodification, Culture and Tourism', *Tourist Studies*, 2, 2 (2002), 183–202.

78. Schutte, 'Tourists and Tribes', 486.

79. Urry, 'Tourist Gaze', 11–12, emphasis added.

certain enduring trends which owed much of their longevity to the requirements and the preferences of the tourism industry made the transition from the 'old' South Africa to the 'new' almost effortlessly.

Writing on the transformation process of tourist destinations in general, the Finnish scholar, Jarkko Saarinen, has emphasised that the

identity of a tourist destination is a historically specific construction composed of the discourses and realms of social relations, meanings and nature in a specific space ... [The] transformation process of a destination also contains features from the present, traces from the past, and signs of future changes.<sup>80</sup>

All of this has a certain relevance for South Africa. What this article has attempted is to give substance to the 'traces of the past', as ambiguous and contradictory as they were in the construction of South Africa as a tourist destination.

80. J. Saarinen, "'Destinations in Change': The Transformation Process of Tourist Destinations", *Tourist Studies*, 4, 2 (2004), 174.