4 THE NATURE OF CULTURE IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

South Africa was subject to colonial occupation and more recently apartheid repression until the 1990s, leaving a legacy of decimated indigenous archaeological heritage. Archaeologists played crucial, albeit detrimental, roles in the fabrication of archaeological narratives and subsequent history making that remain inescapable today, and they have had the particular effect of diminishing the importance of an archaeological past for the majority of the nation’s populace. Focusing on Kruger National Park—the flagship of South Africa’s conservation, biodiversity, and wilderness heritage—I underscore the current tensions surrounding the privileging of nature over culture and the continuing sacrifice of historic recognition and restitution for the “greater good” of conservation. An archaeological ethnography based around heritage sites and projects across the park exemplifies the displacement of an archaeological past and exposes the implications for black descendant communities today. I argue that, irrespective of leadership or regime change, the mobilization of state power continues to devalue the archaeological past and its indigenous histories. What subsequently emerges as a dominant concern in the new South Africa is a distinctive articulation of nature in the cosmopolitan discourse of biodiversity.

Globally, biodiversity is positively viewed as an ecological workhorse, essential raw material for evolution, a sustainable economic resource, a font of aesthetic and ecological value, a global heritage, genetic capital, and the key to the survival of life itself (Hayden 2003: 52). Given this enormous potential and the future-geared, promise-based rhetorics of rescue, is it surprising that archaeological pasts seem weary and moribund ruins that are not living up to their earning potential? Perhaps as a result of this disinterest, and given the recent volatile struggles over land claims in Kruger and elsewhere, narratives of *terra nullius* or “empty lands” have resurfaced in dangerous and familiar ways (see also the chapter by González-Ruibal, this volume). The now
discredited discourse has become sutured to the celebratory discourses of conservation and biodiversity: both pertain to global desires for pristine wilderness, minimal human intensification, the erasure of anthropogenic landscapes, the primacy of non-human species, sustainability, and so on. Without recognition of the complex and continued human history in Kruger’s landscapes there is little chance of historical justice and restitution for indigenous South Africans.

Narratives of *terra nullius* hitch to the imaginings of powerful international bodies and regulations, including the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the United Nations (UN), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), that want to privilege and preserve flora and fauna over and above people (or even the evidence of people) in the name of a common humanity and the global commons. Biodiversity and conservation may today be global constructs, but they are imagined in South Africa in very specific, historically charged ways. They are distinct yet related discourses and both are enshrined in a “protected areas” strategy developed largely on a U.S. model of national parks and wilderness reserves that historically bifurcated humans and nature, nature and culture (W. Adams 2005; Adams and Mulligan 2003b: 10). While synonymous with nature in the form of dramatic wilderness and exotic game, South Africa is also renowned for its natural degradation, environmental troubles, pollution, and toxic landscapes (McDonald 2002). Human occupation and intensification are thus negatively inflected from the outset, whether in precolonial, colonial, or postcolonial contexts, and are similarly positioned with poaching, mining, deforestation, resource depletion, and so on.

The case of Kruger reveals the cosmopolitan frictions among transnational organizations, funding agencies, state projects, heritage bodies, and indigenous communities in and around the place of culture in a nature reserve. Both natural and cultural heritage are imagined in particular local and national ways, and each is influenced and effected by global organizations and mandates. Funding for the running and research of Kruger National Park and its outreach is supplied by North American government agencies, private foundations, international organizations, universities, research grants, NGOs, and state and private revenues (McKinsey Report 2002). Nongovernmental organizations ultimately do much of the work of the South African state. Many assert
that they float the nation, the danger being that they become de facto agencies for service delivery and devolved responsibility for government (Cheah 1998: 322). Notions of local, state, global, and indigenous are all pieced together from this complex mosaic of sources, resources, inspirations, and agendas. The research I present here is based on several years of work in Kruger National Park, and my research has been both archaeological and ethnographic (Meskell 2005a, 2006a, 2007a). Based at Skukuza, Kruger’s research station, I have had sustained interactions and interviews with park managers, research scientists and technicians, ecologists, service workers, rangers, heritage officers, and those forcibly removed from the park during previous regimes. What began as a project of tracking the progress of archaeology after ten years of democracy has necessarily come to embrace the fraught relationship between cultural and natural heritage, and to ask why it is that nature trumps culture. In fact, it would be impossible to conduct either archaeological or ethnographic fieldwork outside the confines of the parastatal pressures that prioritize the flora and fauna of Kruger National Park, as they are taken up in global imaginings of salvage, development, empowerment, and the good.

Parastatal Relations

In scores of interviews around the park borders, dislocated residents of the park see Kruger as the state, irrespective of its former management by the apartheid-era white National Party or its current management by the black ANC. Kruger is a parastatal organization; it operates as an arm of government, is answerable to the minister for Environment Affairs and Tourism, and yet is primarily financially self-sustaining. But more than its programmatic, Kruger operates likes a state and has always exercised a significant degree of juridical and disciplinary power. Its central administrative node and main tourist hub is Skukuza. The name Skukuza is telling. It means “to sweep clean” or “to strip bare” in Tsonga, and it was the name conferred upon the first warden of the park, Stevenson-Hamilton, in the early 1900s, by the local Shangaan people (Carruthers 1995, 2001). His measures to rid the park of its indigenous inhabitants became synonymous with the structure and identity of the park, particularly with systematic histories of erasure. Elders whom I interviewed from the northernmost park border at Pafuri south to
regions around Orpen and Lilydale, who once lived inside the confines of the park and were evicted between the 1920s and the 1960s, still refer bitterly to the organization of Kruger National Park as “Skukuza.” The name Skukuza, the action of stripping away all that existed before, has come to represent the politics of the park to this day. Skukuza, as both noun and verb, continues to have a strong resonance.

The complex relationship between people and nature that developed through colonial and apartheid regimes continues to haunt South Africa, specifically concerning what sorts of people serve nature versus those who are afforded its bounty. Historically, these have always been lines of tension, of circumscription and discrimination—and they continue to be a potent social and spatial determinant. The “fences and fines” approach, also known in its stricter guise as fortress conservation (Brockington 2004a), has always been in operation in South Africa, although prior to 1994 it was manned, quite literally, by the white elite and their soldiers. Kruger National Park was always considered a military buffer zone, a wilderness corridor that shielded the state from political resistance and insurgency during apartheid and now safeguards it from illegal immigration. As one might imagine, social transformation has still a vast way to go in the traditionally white, racially segregated preserve of national parks. Moreover, there has still been no recognition of the thousands of black workers whose labor created the park and whose forced sacrifice of land, livestock, and cultural lifeways made it possible for the fortunate to enjoy the spoils of biodiversity and conservation today.

Kruger comprises some two million hectares of fenced land and is bordered by Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Together the three countries have allowed the creation of a transfrontier or transboundary park (Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park), sponsored by the Peace Parks Foundation—a conglomerate of international development agencies, private donations, and corporate involvement. The whole notion of an international park that traverses three countries experiencing in their own particular ways dire poverty, the HIV-AIDS pandemic, unemployment, violence around immigration and displacement, and so on seems to test the limits of possibility. Some of my work has been conducted in Limpopo province where the three countries intersect. That intersection ominously known as Crooks Corner is testament to the histories of exploitation, both human and animal, that southern Africa has suffered through European colonialism, in the brutal regimes of
apartheid South Africa and the former Rhodesia, through war-torn Mozambique, and in the forced relocations and displacements of people more recently (Connor 2003). This point of triangulation, a no-man’s land of sorts, also witnessed some of the most aggressive poaching and illegal trading of animals, gunrunning, movements of military and insurgents, and untold numbers of refugees. For over a century this has been a stain on the map—a lawless area that has defied containment. It should not then be surprising that it was from this region, to the extreme north of Kruger National Park, that apartheid forces launched chemical weapons assaults into Mozambique against the resistance forces, the FRELIMO (Cock and Fig 2002), using perhaps the nation’s most positive emblem of heritage as a staging ground for crushing the resistance across national borders. Kruger’s origins and history have been deeply implicated in the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism and later apartheid, bolstered by extensive military force. Army and air force bases were dotted across the landscape, on its fragile borders with the rest of South Africa and, more importantly, with Mozambique. Some of these remain operative today while others have been reappropriated, such as the military barracks on land currently leased by the luxury five-star resort of Singita (Meskell 2006a) that now houses its black service workers.

The Nature of Biodiversity and Bad Citizens

As a result of ongoing fieldwork, I have become increasingly concerned with the current understandings of and ambition regarding the concept of biodiversity in South Africa. The global Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexities of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems” (Orlove and Brush 1996: 329–30). “Biodiversity” as a construction entered the stage of science and development in the late 1980s, while its textual origins can be traced to the CBD in 1992, the Global Diversity Strategy (fostered by the World Conservation Union, the United Nations Environment Program, and the World Resources Institute) in 1992, and the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 (Escobar 1998: 54). For South Africa, the end of apartheid and the shift to a democratic neoliberal state came at the very moment that the mandate
of biodiversity achieved global recognition, and this synchronicity is particularly salient. One senior scientist in Kruger explained it in an interview as “an intersection between a political opportunity or a window of policy change that we’ve seen right through just about all the legislation in South Africa, and these changes in ecological thinking.” While biodiversity has “concrete biophysical referents, it must be seen as a discursive invention of recent origin. This discourse fosters a complex network of actors, from international organizations and northern NGOs to scientists, prospectors, and local communities and social movements” (Escobar 1998: 54). And this ties neatly into developments in South Africa from the mid-1990s onward, when the new democratic nation first became enmeshed in this series of international networks.

In South Africa biodiversity is packaged as modern and forward-looking. It is entrepreneurial, economically indexical, and global, whereas cultural heritage is backward-looking, politically fraught, and signifies potential loss to the nation under the specter of land claims. Yet conversely, material heritage cannot always be sutured easily to living communities today given apartheid’s victory of historical erasure. Biodiversity is conceived as cosmopolitan and neutral, belonging to no single person, group, nation-state, or corporation (Litzinger 2006: 69) but instead to a common humanity, coercing us all to participate in its mandate. In reality its immediate beneficiaries are often few and occluded. I should point out that Kruger itself is not a biodiversity hotspot and the park was proclaimed for very different historic reasons, including aesthetic value and the prevalence of game for hunting. Embarrassingly, scientists and researchers agree that there is more actual biodiversity in the poverty stricken rural sprawl that constitutes Bushbuck Ridge on Kruger’s western boundary (see also Fairhead and Leach 1996, 2003).

In asking why diverse nature offers a more compelling suite of concerns, as opposed to cultural diversity and preservation, a number of differences are laid bare. Nature is neutral, supra-racial, existing and entreating protection beyond race: it can be embraced by the new, multicultural concept of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation (Meskell 2005b, 2006b). Nature is immediately legible with real-time collective consequences for the planet if we fail to meet our protective agendas. Thus, a truly cosmopolitan engagement is required, whereas the archaeological and historical past requires decipherment, translation, and
education and is packaged in South Africa as peculiarly local. Cultural heritage is identity-specific and factional, and while seemingly important for crafting a new national identity, archaeological remains are currently configured to particular communities in partial, exclusionary, and politically divisive ways. Multiple stakeholder sharing of the past is understandably difficult given the repressive histories of colonial and apartheid rule. Species diversity is universally recognized and consumed, irrespective of race, nation, religion, gender, ethnicity, and so on. It is also globally supported by an organizational and fiscal infrastructure that further operates an index of modernity, civilization, and alignments to the priorities of the first world. The language and scope of biodiversity is inherently modernist and cosmopolitan, neoliberal in ethos, and positively configured as scientific, sustainable, developmental, and experimental. Here neoliberalism refers to a set of policies and practices marked as privileged modes of governance for addressing social, economic, and environmental problems. Nature has increasingly been treated by development agencies, national governments in the North and the South, organizations regulating global trade, and some conservationists as a public good in the name of one worldism. From the 1980s onward, development and conservation discourses reframed economic development and “modernization” in terms of environmental “sustainability”—commonly defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations’ ability to meet theirs (Hayden 2003: 48–49). Private and state-sponsored environmental education programs, especially those targeting school children, throughout and beyond the borders of Kruger exemplify these hallowed concerns for creating good environmental subjects whose primary goal is conservation for the future. Conversely, no such programs exist for cultural or archaeological heritage.

Understandably, the ANC wants to trump the poor environmental record of the apartheid regime and the most expedient and globally recognized avenue is through high-profile nature conservation, which lies at the intersection of science, development, and neoliberal internationalism. Additionally, there are huge monetary incentives from overseas scientists and funding agencies. Archaeology and cultural heritage strategies cannot hope to match these resources or fiscal potentials. Given that the most famed archaeological site in the park, the Iron Age site of Thulamela, is not generating notable tourist traffic or
revenues (Meskell 2006a, 2007a) despite being generously funded by corporate sponsors and international development funds in the 1990s (WWF, NORAD, Gold Fields Foundation), it is unlikely that other sites will be considered for recognition and development by SANPARKS in the near future.

Cori Hayden (2003: 33) has eloquently argued that we are in the midst of a powerful set of turns pertaining to international development and conservation, biodiversity conservation, market-oriented sustainable development initiatives, and (endangered) cultural diversity. Several of these forces are at play in and around Kruger, although cultural diversity remains almost invisible within the park and is only lightly marked outside its borders by a flourishing market in tourist-oriented cultural villages. Since the 1990s the United Nations has a mandated register for biodiversity, and South Africa is a signatory to the international Convention of Biological Diversity, which outlines the need for its promotion in a range of sectors. Other international organizations, including the National Science Foundation and the Mellon Foundation, both of which are based in the United States, are operating in South Africa to fund research and inventory natural resources. Meanwhile, the same governance has since been applied to cultural heritage, as the South African Heritage and Resources Agency has now formed its own register. There are numerous overlaps between the two management systems. In the specific context of cultural heritage, Francisco Bandarin, the director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center in France, recently chose to stress that it was “the natural beauty of Africa and the remarkable biodiversity of its ecosystems [that] are of special importance to humankind, not only for the enjoyment of visitors but also for their scientific value and their critical importance for sustaining global biodiversity” (Russouw 2006: 15). Biodiversity trumps cultural heritage, particularly in the context of Africa, as opposed to the acclaimed cultural sites of Europe. As Bandarin makes clear, there is “an under-representation for Africa and the developing world” in the cultural realm. With biodiversity, alternatively, there are so many more potential economic sources for funding as well as strategic potentials for development. And it is precisely the cosmopolitan nature of nature’s potential that makes it ripe for such transnational attention and implicates us all in its ambitions.

Building on Foucault’s notion of governmentality, the notion of “environmentality” (Agrawal 2005) offers a provocative terrain for inves-
tigation into the recasting of SANPARKS under the ANC, particularly in terms of the kinds of subjects and subjectivity implied therein. Hayden (2003: 83) rightly asks what kind of participation and subjectivity is being recognized, impelled, forged, and articulated through the promise of biodiversity. Such promises tend to revolve around future-geared common goods that must be guaranteed by the continued participation, sacrifice, and self-monitoring by those very disadvantaged communities who have ultimately paid the price for conservation. While good environmental subjects are strongly desired, with an emphasis on the indigenous populations surrounding Kruger Park, their own knowledges and practices cannot be interpolated into park management strategies.

Many black South Africans, long excluded from the park on racial grounds (other than as service workers or guides), have understandably seen Kruger as an exclusive enclave catering to the cultural and recreational tastes of the white and the wealthy (Beinart and Coates 1995; Brockington 2004a). Numbers of black tourists visiting national parks have risen from 4 percent in 2002 to 19.7 percent in 2005 according to the director of SANPARKS. The reasons for these low numbers are both historic and economic (McKinsey Report 2002). The park system’s discourse of stakeholding and community involvement is aimed at creating the appropriate disciplined environmental citizens. And coincident with the “rhetoric of stakeholding comes a certain provisional language of representation and participation, expressed through the intertwined idioms of compensation, investment, and incentive-building” (Hayden 2003: 8). In South Africa, as elsewhere, rural people, researchers, and governments are “all encouraged to buy in to the globalizing project of biodiversity conservation and protected areas with the promise of dividends dangling in the future” (Hayden 2003: 8). Throughout many interviews, I have enquired whether people are proud of the park as a national treasure, an international icon, a beacon of biodiversity, and the pinnacle of conservation. Most reply that they still await an explanation for their eviction, for compensation, and for the right to freely enter the park, to see the animals, to visit the graves and sites of their ancestors, and to have their children and grandchildren given employment by the park. Many more are angry that dangerous animals that escape the park’s confines destroy their crops, attack their cattle, and threaten their personal safety and that nothing is done to protect or compensate them. If they retaliate and kill the animal, they face possible
prosecution. Yet Kruger takes no responsibility for such destruction (in 2006 Kruger was deemed legally responsible rather than the state). So common is the damage inflicted by the animals that researchers refer to their rogue escapees as DCA’s (Damage Causing Animals). Much of the “human cost” of wildlife has been elided from the preservationist discussion (Fortmann 2005: 202). In a similar vein, many of the poorest people interviewed do not understand what biodiversity entails and yet most representatives for South African National Parks believe that they do and are in essence supportive of this united venture (Meskell 2006a). Most of the people living in the area see little or no social or economic benefits from having one of the world’s great conservation enclaves at their doorstep, but rather applaud the more tangible benefits provided by private reserves such as those run by Conservation Corporation Africa. Moreover, people living on the edge of the park clearly understand that hunting in nearby private game farms by rich tourists is differently configured to traditional hunting practices. The taxonomies of “hunting” for sport or survival might seem porous to an outsider, but they have serious legal ramifications to those who once lived inside the park and are now very much on the outside. One man, jailed numerous times for poaching in Kruger put it well: It’s all about money, about who can afford to hunt and who cannot. He connected this immediately to the indices of race and power: being white means killing an animal has different significations and ramifications. How might such “disaffected” individuals, the bad subjects of conservation, and their descendents be brought into line, so to speak, with preservationist efforts? This question resides very much at the heart of Kruger’s didactic efforts and outreach programs.

Putting Archaeology in Its Place

Relations between the park and its forcibly relocated neighbors have improved since the democratic elections of 1994, however, and an entire unit known as People and Conservation was established with education, development, and employment as its mandate. Importantly, this is the unit that also manages cultural heritage, although SANPARKS has at present no qualified archaeologists on its staff in either its administrative offices or across its twenty-one national parks. We might well ask where Kruger’s rich archaeological heritage falls in this new
landscape of cosmopolitan biodiversity and development. Some of the answers are reflected in interviews with the park’s senior management. The tension between cultural and natural heritage is ever present among senior black ANC government employees who chose to privilege nature and the conservation effort over and above the economic and spiritual needs of their own people. In this regard I am not suggesting that cultural heritage necessarily be a primary concern, but rather that pressing social or cultural issues tend to be considered secondary. It was frequently said that Kruger is not a development agency.

The new black leadership continually highlights the international biodiversity mandate, trading it “off against social needs such as health care and other welfare services,” stressing that “to achieve the 10 per cent IUCN ideal, some 50,000km$^2$ of additional land (2.5 times the size of Scotland) must be acquired” (Magome and Murombedzi 2003: 109) for protected, conservation areas. It should be said that land reform during the ANC’s rule has been slow and heavily criticized for the reformers’ reluctance to disrupt nationally profitable white farms. In 2005 more than seventeen thousand land claims had yet to be processed: most successful claims entail financial compensation rather than land settlement. The potential losses to Kruger—dramatized in terms of local black communities turning wilderness into theme parks and casinos—featured heavily in the 2005 State of the Nation Report (Walker 2006: 68).

When interviewed, the director of Kruger National Park revealed that he had never visited the nationally celebrated site of Thulamela and, when pressed on the scale of Kruger’s cultural heritage, resorted to stock answers from the park’s public relations materials. With its impressive stone walls and dramatic discoveries of smelted gold (Grigorova et al. 1998; Küsel 1992; Steyn et al. 1998), the site has been used in speeches by cabinet ministers and presidents (Jordan 1996), and yet it has quickly fallen from public and park interest. There is a general feeling that safari tourism, featuring charismatic mammals (faced with threats and danger and extinction), offers a more reliable fiscal return. The success of UNESCO’s Ukhahlamba Drakensburg Park, with its rich rock art and heritage ecotourism, suggests that culture can be capitalized upon. If anything has been forefronted in Kruger it is the white history of exploration, discovery, trekking, trading, and hunting that have been visibly celebrated by historical markers. One need only think
of the proliferation of memorial sites dedicated to Jock of the Bushveld—Jock being the faithful dog in Sir Percy Fitzpatrick’s story of 1907—that occupy pride of place in Kruger and still dominate park maps. One can easily imagine apartheid park wardens and administrators privileging nature and wilderness at the expense of the historical cultural achievements of the black South Africans they victimized. Less easily envisaged is that the recent black ANC management has similarly chosen to downplay archaeological heritage and marginalize human history within the park, which is palpably felt by communities along the park’s edge. Willingness to address the past, or better still, to ethically recount its specificities, is a necessary condition for justice and reconciliation in the present. But as is indicated here, people of various political commitments and affiliations in South Africa today disagree profoundly over the details and consequences of historical injustices for thinking about future reparation. These disagreements impinge upon their respective notions of justice, and those of responsibility, freedom, and identity (Ivison 2002: 93–94). One third of Kruger’s land is now “threatened” by indigenous claimants in South African courts, and since Kruger is the jewel in the crown of African parks, and the most financially viable national park across the nation, black management is in a predicament, and future reparations are going to be influenced with volatile public negotiations about justice, identity politics, and common goods.

A complex example of the tensions between natural and cultural heritages and agendas can be traced through the negotiations around developing San rock art for the purposes of tourism and indigenous development. In recent years attempts have been made to publicly showcase the significant paintings within the park, attempts that I have observed as both an archaeologist and an anthropologist. Some two hundred rock art sites have been located and mapped, with hundreds more awaiting discovery within the two million hectares that constitute the park. There has always been great public interest in San rock art in South Africa, even during apartheid times, and there has been a recent resurgence of support with the collaborative interventions of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of the Witwatersrand (G. Blundell 1996, 2002, 2004; Smith et al. 2000). A management plan was devised by RARI in conjunction with the ongoing recording project and an intensive stakeholder survey was designed to maximize
collaboration, inclusion, development, and tourism. With support from the People and Conservation Unit, rock art specialists proposed several walking trails that would be led by qualified guides and rangers that would ensure protection of visitors and fragile rock art and promote greater understanding of the long and interwoven histories of occupation in Kruger. Instantly this proposal was met with strong disapproval by section rangers who, for the most part, did not want to be responsible for visitors’ safety (despite the long history of walking trails in Kruger) or have any number of people in the southern sector of the park since it was considered a prime “wilderness” zone. Traffic of any sort was considered unwelcome due to the close proximity of Kruger’s private game lodges—private fee-paying concessions that operate quasi-independently within Kruger but pay SANPARKS handsomely for long-term leases. Even when the team was recording rock art around Afsaal, members were admonished for having left a vehicle on a dirt road in plain sight of tourists who were paying hundreds if not thousands of dollars per night to experience a “wilderness area.” Visitors to these luxury lodges were afforded walking tours that included visiting rock art with the aid of an armed escort, but such experiences were not open to regular visitors to the park. Rangers with rifles were necessary for all such visits, including our own, as we were on foot in the park and thus at the mercy of all manner of wild animals. During mapping researchers frequently encountered elephants that had no difficulty traversing the steep rocky slopes and outcrops where much of the paintings were located. This was given as another reason why a rock art trail was dismissed by rangers: they were short staffed, had to patrol great swathes of territory alone, monitor their black field rangers, and be on call for fires, animals, tourists, accidents, and other incidents. It was simply not going to be possible. A solution came in the form of a rock art specialist and tour guide who was a trained ranger himself and had worked extensively both inside and outside Kruger at several exclusive private game lodges. He could handle the rifle and the narrative about San history and cosmology. This option too was rejected on the basis of funding.

Ambivalence toward the archaeological past is palpable in Kruger National Park. An elderly retired ranger who spearheaded the recording of the art some decades ago told me that he still refuses to publicly present his materials to his colleagues at Skukuza because he fears
reprisals for his focus on cultural heritage. He cautiously remarked that he still had a son working in Kruger and he worried that speaking out would negatively effect his future in the organization. In the next breath he lectured me that Kruger was not a cultural park, but a natural one, and should not be developed with its archaeological resources in mind. He certainly did not want to see archaeology form the basis for successful land claims or have people return to living in the park. This same man took me to numerous archaeological sites, spanning Paleolithic to recent historical times, lamenting the state of their preservation, their lack of recording or research, and their ultimate loss to memory. While he had no archaeological training as such, he was one of the only park employees I have met to date who expressed any interest in the archaeological past or its public presentation.

Just as the mapping and development project foundered, so did the attempts by young black researchers from RARI to glean information concerning relevant stakeholders and their concerns, ideas, and needs. Arrangements within Kruger were fraught, meetings with various SANParks representatives were cancelled, questionnaires were not distributed at gates and lodges, interviews were sometimes hostile, and there was little access to the communities who may have had most to gain. Some park workers felt threatened that the researchers were there to replace them and the overall impression was that of disregard for cultural resources and development across Kruger as a whole. At present the project is at an impasse and no concrete steps have been taken to consolidate the work done or the prospects for developing rock art in the future.

My lasting impression of archaeology’s place in Kruger National Park crystallized in the Skukuza archives. There, after much sorting and shredding since the bad old days of apartheid, two boxes labeled “Argeo-logie” were filed among hundreds containing meeting minutes, field rangers’ notebooks, reports on biophysical research, boundary issues, and prosecutions. And what constitutes archaeology in the park? — certificates granting mining rights, petitions for cinnabar prospecting and mica prospecting, and permits to dig for “buried treasure” no less. And there is some justice in this conceptualization; the negative inflection of mining, of depleting resources, of stripping, and of poaching is probably deserved given the particular history of our discipline in South Africa. It reminds me of another connection to biodiversity, namely bioprospecting, the global economic element of nature that similarly
conjures the specter of centuries-old images of the mining of gold, diamonds, and minerals (Hayden 2003: 51) from the colonies that became nations like South Africa.

Dreams of Terra Nullius

John Locke is largely blameworthy for the trope of res nullius, the idea of the globe as a common possession that effectively disregards historically existing property rights. In his teleology, private property follows from private appropriation, namely from the work of one’s hands, the labor of one’s body, and so on. European expansion deployed Locke’s treatise to justify colonial appropriation of lands. In the first instance indigenous lands were considered given to all “in common” and in the second they were worked by the industrious and thrifty (read European) for the benefit of all, so thus doubly possessed (Benhabib 2004: 31–31). Just as native fauna in South Africa have been proclaimed res nullius, or belonging to no one, the eco-enclave of Kruger has been branded as terra nullius, an empty land before the onset of white exploration and settlement. An attendant moral absolutism attaches to terra nullius, as it does to the constructs of nature and wilderness, with humanity being oppositionally and negatively juxtaposed. Nature, in this binary equation, is intrinsically valued whereas people and their material histories are intrusive, destructive, artificial, and devalued (Soper 2000: 19). Deep ecology and green politics have further bolstered these hierarchies, divisions, and narratives of blame. Despite the green movement’s nods to indigenous knowledge and participation, the remnants of colonial conservation ideologies remain. Neutral nature trumps the greed, waste, and devastation of people and societies, past and present.

Myths of emptiness have been vigorously dismantled in Australia and North America, yet have significant resilience in South Africa, whether due to lack of education or the association of archaeology with the apartheid state. Whatever the causes, Kruger’s indigenous history remains a deep wound in the landscape and one that is painfully ever present for the indigenous communities that live on Kruger’s borders. These groups have the most to lose, or win, in the recognition and restitution that might logically follow archaeological acknowledgment. Without an admission of the human past, recognition premised upon historical and genealogical grounds cannot move forward in the present.
In cosmopolitan terms we need to counter South Africa’s continued residual racism that imputes that certain people do not matter (Appiah 2006a: 153) and realize that particular histories do matter.

To underline the continued diminished position of the archaeological past I draw upon its recent rendering in Kruger National Park’s public documents. It is puzzling that in 2007 they still claim:

Bantu people entered about 800 years ago, gradually displacing the San. The available evidence suggests that humans occurred at low density and were mostly confined to the more permanent river-courses. It is reasonable to assume from the continuous presence at some sites (Pafuri, for example) that humans and wildlife existed in harmony, with no major impact of humans on wildlife or the reverse. The arid nature of the environment, together with an abundance of predators and diseases (e.g., malaria) would have played a role in preventing large-scale human population growth and settlement. Nevertheless, sophisticated cultures already existed by the 16th century.¹

The first myth is that Bantu-speakers (read black Africans) arrived at the recent date of eight hundred years ago, which is challenged by archaeological evidence that suggests at least two millennia (Mitchell 2002). The former still participates in the apartheid mythology of roughly joint arrival of black and white immigrants to South Africa, specifically when they reached the Western Cape. These deeply flawed constructions of history and culture have had a lasting legacy, felt to this day, but most palpably felt over the apartheid years since they were used to create racial hierarchies and structure unequal living experiences for both black and white South Africans.

Furthermore, the myth of low density is highly speculative as so little systematic fieldwork was done during the apartheid regime. Moreover, the archaeology within the park, for example the Iron Age sites of Thulamela, Makhahane, Shilowa, and Masorini, suggests significant industrial activity and occupation. These are material facts that are never engaged with, even by the researchers in Scientific Services or the foreign scientists who come to conduct research on the flora and fauna of the park. For the scientific community in Kruger, population density is determined teleologically: not by archaeological investigation but by current observations about impacts and modifications on the landscape. As Hayashida (2005: 45) points out,
because of the time lag in ecosystem response to disturbance and environmental change, current ecosystem structure, function, and composition cannot be fully understood or explained without a historical perspective. The lasting effects of past human actions (termed “land-use legacies”) include changes in species composition, successional dynamics, soils, water, topography, and nutrient cycling. Many seemingly natural areas have a cultural past that is part of their ecological history; their conservation today requires knowledge of that past and assessment of the value of continuing or replicating past cultural practices.

Given the forced relocations of people who lived in the park over the last century, the determined efforts to reinstate something imagined as a pristine wilderness, and the absence of any serious systematic archaeological survey, the lack of substantive human trace is undoubtedly in the eye of the beholder. Yet we know that there are over a thousand sites across Kruger’s vast expanse: early hominid, Paleolithic, San rock art, Iron Age, historic, and recent. Ironically, even under the rule of the National Party several publications recorded early and continued black history in the park, by way of documenting early European explorers passing through the original area. More than 170 historic place names have survived to reflect indigenous settlement, industrial or sacred sites (Kloppers and Bornman 2005), undoubtedly a mere fraction of the original.

Finally, the old apartheid fables of aridity and predator activity are spuriously given as reasons for the lack of supposed landscape intensification and modification. Historically, indigenous people are thus refused the role of “ecological agents” in their own right (Plumwood 2003). The South African national parks system must dismantle the devastating myths of empty lands and late arrivals that deprivilege indigenous South Africans and erase their historic achievements in the materiality of the past and present.

There is a growing movement that recognizes that even at colonial contact many landscapes were as fully anthropogenic as those found in Europe (Clark 2002). Recognition of this point would, however, be troubling for the mandate and ambition of SANPARKS, which needs to preserve the more barren notion of Kruger as predominantly pristine. While culture is all about fluidity and movement, nature is ideally meant to stand still: culture is a process, nature an object. And when
humans enter the fray, as below, they are typically cast as destructive agents of change. According to recent park documents, the positioning of humankind in the “natural” debate has attracted as much debate and usually settles out on a statement along the lines of “effects of pre-industrial people are considered natural” or the IUCN’s comment, “where people have less effect than any other species.” Each of these have potential flaws. For instance, many pre-industrial civilizations collapsed because of overexploitation of resources, and ecosystems with influential species (for example, elephant) leave more scope, in the IUCN’s definition, for human impact. Conceptually, many sustainable use systems place humans quite explicitly in the ecosystem. In modern times, society’s decision to proclaim parks at all is testimony to an agreement that people living elsewhere in more altered systems will strive to keep parks less altered for a different (usually far less altered) mode of usage (South African National Parks 2005).

Why is the peopled past so repeatedly undercut or erased from the landscape, even after the apartheid years? During 2005 I was asked by scientific researchers to participate briefly in a collaborative interdisciplinary project about disease landscapes in Kruger, this time assuming my role as an archaeologist. When I presented the established evidence for early and continued human occupation in the region this evidence was greeted as both unheard of and slightly unwelcome. Eagerly I pointed to Kruger’s own apartheid-era Parks Board publication from the 1970s that assembled historical accounts of the first Europeans in the area and their encounters with significant black populations (see Punt 1975). Archaeological and historical evidence was deemed peripheral or speculative at best in the face of biophysical science. Years of sedimented disinterest within the nation; the lack of any archaeologists employed in South African national parks or within Kruger; the prioritization of the biophysical sciences; researchers, rangers, and trackers with other tasks and no interest in cultural resources; the residual inertia of racism; and the lack of education are just some of the foundational reasons why the past remains problematic. There is a long way to go in terms of site management, tourism development, upgrading museums and displays, curation, creating inventories, and even securing the return of archaeological objects. Positive steps are gradually being taken, but the disparity between management of nature and culture remains troubling terrain. The work of heritage in South Africa is
always in process; it is future perfect. Heritage agencies like the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) or the National Heritage Council (NHC) are forward looking, forever making recommendations for the future, and workshopping future projects. They are ultimately caught in this double time, backward dependent while forward-looking (Farred 2004). This leads us into the double bind of historical injustice and its moral consequences in the present. Without a past, one cannot hope for recognition or restitution. While the passing of time changes facts on the ground, in the case of South Africa this is a very recent and remember-able history, effectively ending with the elections of 1994. Historical injustice goes hand in hand with reparations, of which Ivison (2006b) outlines three modes: restitution, compensation and recognition, or acknowledgment. These can take the practical forms of financial payment, apologies, affirmative action, constitutional provisions, and so on. Most importantly, recognition acknowledges the victims and the harm enacted against them and involves the act of restoring

1 The Mkhabela family at the grave of Chief Nyongane, Kruger National Park, 2005. Photograph courtesy of the author.
or compensating those who have suffered. Recognition can also take
the form of public apologies and forms of collective remembrance, as
has become commonplace in post-apartheid South Africa, which are
themselves political acts.

Around Kruger numerous communities have petitioned for various
kinds of reparation. For example, some like the Mkhabela family have
suggested a change in the name of the park gate, Numbi, to Nyongane,
the name of the mountain nearby, a symbolic change that would cost
little in financial terms. They have asked for acknowledgment of the
burials of their elders and of some 350 cattle situated within the new
borders of the park (figure 1). Recently People and Conservation at
Skukuza successfully organized an inscribed commemorative plaque,
for which the Mkhabela paid. Financial restitution has also been sug-
gested, though it has not been forthcoming from sanparks. Part of
this compensation would be for the death of a female relative killed
by buffalo in 1988, previously denied by the park since she was not a
sanparks employee. The Malatji have been more vigorous in launch-
ing a land claim that might entail a financial compensation. Elders told
me they would be looking for a share in the Phalaborwa gate takings,
but on a more pragmatic level they would like some decision-making
power in the development of their ancestral site, Masorini (Meskell
2005a). In 2005 after consultation, community members were employed
in reconstructing some of the huts and furnaces at the archaeological
site, although the final negotiations between the tribal authority and
sanparks were fraught. Alternatively, park authorities can always pro-
vide alternative scenarios to dismiss notions of sustainable use, much
less resource development. “The issue of conversion of natural capital is
intriguing, some countries or operations depleting their natural capital
without successfully creating manufactured capital or social capital (the
latter meaning human capacity and trust) in its place” (South African
National Parks 2005). Not all reparations are costly or financial. It is the
process that is often crucial in the spaces of reconciliation and potential
restitution. The challenge for postcolonial liberalism, as Duncan Ivison
argues, is to orient ourselves toward the local, while similarly providing
an account of the conditions and institutions that distinguish this effort
from merely deferring to existing relations of power (Ivison 2002: 22).
This seems key in an emergent nation like South Africa where regime
change may have replaced racial oppression, yet it has not erased local
issues of ethnic, indigenous, and political difference that remain cen-
tral vectors of inequality, nor has it erased pressing concerns for a new redistributive economy. Working at the interface of indigenous justice in the postcolonial, settler nations of Canada and Australia, Ivison’s (2002: 89) modest aims are for fostering “better conditionality” and remaining open to the future to come. While this entails acknowledging the impossibility of justice, our continued attempts to navigate a just course are the appropriate ethical tactics for keeping viable the possibility of new modalities of politics, identity, and justice.

*Skukuza: State without History*

Why would an archaeologist be interested in the narratives of conservation, biodiversity, sustainability, or development? Moreover does a heritage perspective have anything to offer scholars and practitioners in these other fields? Suffice to say that archaeologists need to recognize more fully our epistemic genealogies and the interwoven threads binding understandings of natural resources and nature conservation to cultural resources, landscapes, and values. Conservation and biodiversity mandates are cosmopolitan concerns in South Africa, while heritage remains a troubled and very local affair. Yet on a wider, world stage the discourses of nature and culture conservation share a legacy and are now mobilized through cosmopolitan networks, as argued in the introduction to this volume. Resource use and sustainability inform to a great degree cultural heritage concerns about site usage, occupation, and lived traditions, often undervaluing them when it comes to indigenous owners and stakeholders. We tend to see the past as both raw material and finite resource, a “fossil fuels” template of the world that wants to restrict utilization and save our stocks for future generations. Conservation is seen very much as a global good for a common humanity, whether natural or cultural. The language of sustainability, so prevalent in nature conservation, is fast becoming the rallying cry for heritage development as an economic growth industry worldwide.

As this chapter demonstrates, however, land use legacies and human histories are sometimes erased in the productions of place. In the conservation equation human interventions are destructive, dangerous, and undesirable. Just as some of my colleagues in Kruger National Park are concerned that any sort of natural resource utilization is the beginning of the end and refuse to allow sustainable harvesting of flora and fauna, heritage agencies the world over typically struggle with the realities
of human occupation, encroachment, ongoing traditional practices, visitation, and appropriation in and around significant sites. There are exceptions at the local level, though these struggles have often been hard won such as in Australia (Lilley 2000b; Lilley chapter in this volume; Lilley and Williams 2003), or are ongoing sites of contestation between local and international bodies, as seen in issues of preservation and management of sites across Southeast Asia for example (Byrne 1991, 1995, the chapter by Byrne, this volume). Just as animals, plants, and landscapes have been deemed part of the national estate for moral and scientific uplift from the Victorian era onward (see Ritvo 1987), archaeological and historic sites are often wrested from their immediate inheritors for the benefit of others, all in the name of the global good. The convergences of both natural and cultural protection and management undoubtedly culminated in the colonial occupations of Africa, Asia, Australia, and so on by British and other European empires.

Many authors have pointed to the continued colonial, national, and governmental overtones of conservation and management (e.g., Adams and McShane 1996; Adams and Mulligan 2003a; Brockington 2004a; Duffy 2002; Greenenough and Tsing 2003; Honey 1999; Keller and Turek 1998; Moore 1998, 2005; Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003; Neumann 1998; West 2006). More recently some impute that, discursively, biodiversity does not exist, rather it conveniently “anchors a discourse that articulates a new relation between nature and society in global contexts of science, cultures, and economies” (Escobar 1998: 55). Yet much of its networks of models, actors, theories, strategies, and objects remain hegemonic. Over the years I have come to view Kruger National Park as a state within a state. One park officer explained her idea for a passport system with entry stamps for Kruger and, despite the obvious marketing ploy, she had succinctly captured the nationalistic spirit of the place. Kruger is cumbersomely bureaucratic and juridical, with its own policing and border enforcement powers. It considers itself a business, but also a charitable organization and a national trust. It flirts with the notion of development, embarks on education programs for HIV-AIDS, and minimally entertains notions of sustainable resource use. Kruger is reliant on international funding agencies, philanthropy and donor aid, and assistance from NGOs: it operates on American and European support. Is it any wonder that various researchers from very different disciplines I have interviewed
have used the descriptor “schizophrenic” to describe Kruger’s workings? During my own fieldwork I have continually struggled to find coherence in the philosophies and management strategies for natural and cultural heritage within the park. Kruger is a lumbering beast that refuses to be brought into line with the nation’s other parks and the wider organization of SANParks. Its history of triumphal nationalist conservation coupled with long-term successful policies of human removal and erasure has made it near impervious to development and, ironically, adaptation.

From a hut on the N’watshisaka River I would daily observe monkeys causing havoc amid our rubbish and hear elephants tramp through the dry riverbed nearby (threatening biodiversity in their wake), and I fully understand the lure and grandeur of the park that is frequently touted as “the size of Israel”—“Skukuza.” A visiting ecologist asked me recently whether I considered Stevenson-Hamilton a genius for founding Kruger, “for leaving us this,” he exclaimed, looking around in wonder. That is one perspective I ventured; another would be offered by the countless residents along the park border who saw Skukuza as stripping them of their land, their livelihoods, and their history. His bemused look suggested he had not entertained these “other” histories of the park. As outlined above, archaeological and cultural assets continue to remain low profile and low priority. Capturing that dimension of biodiversity has been roundly overlooked, and natural heritage remains privileged and paramount in the hearts and minds of those who research, manage, and represent the park “for the benefit of all South Africans.”

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1 http://www.sanparks.org/conservation. This same text also appears in the newly commissioned brochures for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.