

Historical geographies of coastal tourism: Mossel Bay, South Africa c.1850-1988

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Abstract. During the past decade there has occurred a burst of international research and debate on coastal tourism as part of the ‘blue economy’ including a growth of geography-specific scholarship. Arguably, however, within the extant geographical literature there is an overwhelming ‘present-mindedness’ and limited historical perspectives. This paper addresses this neglected knowledge gap by using an historical approach and archival sources to undertake a locality-based study of the historical transitions which have shaped and reshaped one coastal settlement in South Africa. The Mossel Bay area is of considerable historical significance because of its long history of indigenous settlement before the first European contacts triggered by the arrival in 1488 of Bartholomew Diaz and crew who were in search for a trading sea route for Portugal to India. The nature of the colonial growth of tourism in Mossel Bay and the distinctive tourism economy of the town under apartheid is interrogated. This culminated in the scripting of the controversial 1988 Dias festival hosted to celebrate the opening of ‘apartheid’s last museum’ which occurred before Mossel Bay would experience a radical social transition following South Africa’s democratic elections. Overall, the evolutionary pathways and transitions in the historical geography of this coastal locality are the focus of discussion.

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1. Introduction

Geographers stress that oceans and coasts are becoming central elements of the sustainability agenda as represented by United Nations SDG 14 “Life Below Water” which commits member states to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and maritime resources for development purposes (Heidkamp et al., 2023). The United Nations proclaimed the period 2021-2030 the Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development to support the establishment of a common framework for improved conditions for the sustainable development of the ocean. Dwyer (2017) argues that the increasing tempo of debates about the sustainable economic use of ocean resources are coalescing around the term ‘blue economy’. Certainly the proclamation of the ocean decade reflects growing concern for the ‘blue economy’ and the potential for ocean and coastal economies to drive economic growth, innovation and sustainability (Heidkamp et al., 2023: 3). Over the past 15 years the concept and practice concerning the blue economy have triggered a rich and diverse body of scholarly literature (Garland et al., 2019; Brears, 2021; Martinez-Vazquez et al. 2021a; Heidkamp et al., 2023; Islam & Bartell, 2023). This expanding corpus of debate extends to the context of sub-Saharan Africa where the African Union has hailed the blue economy as a priority focus for the making of an African renaissance (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019; Nagy & Nene, 2021; Sparks, 2021).

The activity of coastal and marine tourism is identified as the second largest sectoral contributor and ‘new frontier’ in the blue economy (Dwyer, 2018; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019; Winchenbach et al., 2022). During the past two years (at least) three bibliographic reviews have appeared which seek to provide an overview of the ‘state of the art’ of international research on coastal and marine tourism (Martinez-Vazquez et al., 2021b; Kabil et al., 2021; Duan et al., 2022). Kabil et al. (2021) highlight that despite the significance of coastal and marine tourism for the blue economy there exists only a relatively small volume of writings that pertain to coastal tourism. Although an upturn is recorded in scientific publications from 2007 onwards, a similar conclusion is given in the analysis of global research on maritime and marine tourism that was produced by Martinez-Vazquez et al., 2021b). The study by Duan et al (2022) spans the longer period 1990-2020 and isolated an upward trajectory of scientific outputs on coastal and marine tourism throughout this period. Using VOSviewer an analysis of the high frequency co-occurrence network

revealed four major research topics as dominating the discourse, namely sustainable development, local destination impacts, management and conservation, and, the ramifications of climate change (Duan et al., 2022). Across all three review articles it is observed that a recurrent theme in the reviewed literature is the overwhelming ‘present-mindedness’ and limited historical perspectives about both the blue economy and coastal and marine tourism.

It is against this backdrop that the paper addresses this neglected knowledge gap by using an historical approach and archival sources to undertake a locality-based study of the transitions which have shaped and reshaped one coastal settlement in South Africa. Two sections of material are presented. The next section situates the study as part of the critical literature around the blue economy. This is followed by the analysis of evolutionary pathways and transitions in the historical geography of the coastal locality of Mossel Bay which take centre-stage in this paper. Arguably, the Mossel Bay area is of considerable historical significance because of its long history of indigenous settlement before 1488 and the first European contacts following the arrival of Bartolomeu Dias and crew who were in search for a trading sea route for Portugal to India.

2. The blue economy, coastal tourism and geography

According to Brears (2021) the first appearance of the concept of the blue economy can be traced back to 2009 and took place at hearings in the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation about business opportunities around ocean development and potential opportunities for developing new blue jobs in renewable energy. It is generally agreed, however, that the concept of the blue economy attracted scholarly interest and momentum following the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and was linked to the expanding economic interest in the oceans.

Traditionally the ocean and its resources were viewed solely as a mechanism for economic growth, a business-as usual approach which facilitated the exploitation of maritime resources without any, or only minimal, consideration for the future health of these resources and of local communities impacted by their exploitation (Brears, 2021). The blue economy concept seeks to align the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with economic growth objectives and incorporate critical concerns for ma-

rine protection and local community development and especially for those localities dependent on the ocean (Germond-Duret et al., 2023: 2). Indeed, the potential is acknowledged for the blue economy to become a core cog in the transition to a low-carbon future and correspondingly enhance the potential of coastal resilience building (Heidkamp et al., 2023). As Brears (2021) contends the blue economy concept therefore moves beyond the business-as-usual approach with economic development and ocean health complementary to one another. Research concerning the oceans had been the usual domain of natural scientists, oceanographers and marine conservation scholars but from this time an upturn is recorded in works by social scientists that transcend issues of biodiversity. Arguably, whilst economic activities such as fishing, transportation and trade were clearly not new phenomenon what was new related to “the recognition of the further economic potential that oceans represent and of the wide-range of sectors that can benefit from expansion into as yet untapped ocean spaces” (Germond-Duret, al., 2023: 3). As articulated by Bennett et al. (2021: 1) the oceans became seen as “a lucrative new frontier for economic development”

It is pointed out by several observers that currently there is no generally accepted definition of the ‘blue economy’ despite the term becoming adopted and more widely debated over the past 15 years (Garland et al., 2019). In a manner akin to discussions about ‘sustainability’ the concept of the blue economy permits a wide range of interpretations. Indeed, Germond-Duret et al. (2023: 4) pinpoint the ‘ambiguity’ of the blue economy concept. None the less, its broad umbrella characteristic has been a contributory factor in the concept’s success “allowing actors and stakeholders with very different agendas to see their own priorities reflected in the ambiguity of blue economy discourse” (Germond-Duret et al., 2023: 4). In particular, it is pointed out there exists confusion over its social and environmental sustainability with the juxtaposition of development imperatives with ecological preservation and the management of coastal and marine environments.

Traditionally, ‘the sea’ and ocean space has been neglected by social scientists as a whole, including by tourism scholars. This said, Martinez-Vazquez et al. (2021b: 2) point out “the sea has always been present in the economic activities of all civilizations as a food resource, a means of transportation and commercial trade”. Extant research on the oceans by social scientists has been dominated overwhelmingly by issues of economics, geopolitics, transport and maritime planning. Usually, the sea has been framed

conceptually from a physical or material perspective as an ‘empty space outside of human experience or placeless void. As Germond-Duret (2022: 314) contends this view has conveniently “facilitated the economic use of the ocean and the concept of the blue economy”. Arguably, in global sustainable development agendas the dominance of economic voices has contributed to a narrative of the sea as ‘placeless’ which allows the ocean to be seen as a site for exploitable resources. In recent years, however, alongside a scholarly turn to the ocean there has occurred the discovery and acknowledgment of the sea as a place of human, social and political interactions. In particular, issues of ‘the importance of place’, ‘sense of place and ‘meaning of place’ have been raised in scholarship authored by humanistic geographers building upon seminal theoretical works by Edward Relph (1976, 1981, 1997) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 1976, 1979).

Among others Garland et al. (2019) point out that geographers have called for a more critical engagement with the blue economy and argue much existing research has failed to integrate core geographical concepts such as space and place. It is contended that scholars need to transcend what is called ‘sea blindness’ which has blocked views of the “sea as a place that matters to societies and people’s identities” (Germond-Duret et al., 2023: 2). Examining media coverage of the blue economy in the British press Germond-Duret and Germond (2023) find that it is framed largely in terms of economic opportunities and weak sustainability which reflects this condition of sea blindness. For Germond-Duret (2022: 316) the representation of the sea/ocean as ‘placeless’ aligns with one stream of writings in the blue economy encouraging the sustainable exploitation and global stewardship of marine resources. Accordingly, geographical scholars stress the importance of further critical engagement with the blue economy and in particular for incorporating key concepts such as place, space and locality (Garland et al., 2019).

One strand of tourism scholarship on coastal tourism that more fully engages with concepts of space and place is that surrounding historically-informed research on the evolution of resorts. For more than two centuries coastal, seaside or beach resorts as a distinctive kind of tourist destination (albeit with a wide array of variations) have been meeting points for international as well as domestic travellers in search of health, pleasure, fashion and display (Walton, 2016). Arguably, resort development and their evolution represents a long standing theme which continues to be significant in tourism scholarship especially for geographers (Agarwal

and Shaw, 2007; Butler, 2015; Cantillon, 2019; Rogerson, 2019; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020a, 2020b; Rogerson & Visser, 2020; Rogerson, 2023). However, the seminal research works are those by the tourist historian John Walton (1978, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 2000) and colleagues on the growth of English seaside holidays and the geographical spread of the modern commercial coastal resort phenomenon to Europe (Walton, 2002; Worthington, 2003; Beckerson & Walton, 2005; Saarinen & Kask, 2008; Walton, 2009; Borsay & Walton, 2011; Walton, 2011, 2016). Importantly, in the historical geographical scholarship about resorts an essential connection is made between the land and the sea, issues of sense of place, attachment as well as the interaction of both visitors and residents with the sea. Arguably, in our case study of the historical geography of the South African coastal settlement of Mossel Bay the sea is a constant thread in unravelling the historical evolution of this locality during the period under scrutiny.

3. Mossel Bay

During the early 20th century as a result of the area's natural beauty the port town of Mossel Bay experienced a socio-economic transition with health and leisure tourism diversifying the local economy. The

nature of the colonial growth of tourism in Mossel Bay (Fig. 1) and the distinctive tourism economy of the town under apartheid is interrogated in two sub-sections of discussion.

3.1 Health, pleasure and the sea: Mossel Bay 1850 to 1940

The first chapter in the settlement of Mossel Bay relates to the pre-colonial period prior to white settlement when communities of indigenous Khoisan people were using the ocean for their livelihood (Mafumbu et al., 2022). Rich archaeological evidence discloses the use by nomadic San populations of a range of open access marine resources by communities who inhabited the area and lived in caves. The first contact between Europeans and the indigenous populations occurred in 1488 following the arrival of Bartolomeu Dias and crew at Santos beach. According to accounts in the diaries of Vasco da Gama the welcome not fulsome as the "local inhabitants threw rocks at Dias and his crew as they tried to obtain water" (Witz, 2010: 8). Trade between the Portuguese and the Khoisan began as the sailors used Mossel Bay as a halfway station to replenish food supplies on the voyage to India. Subsequent colonial land grabbing contributed to the marginali-

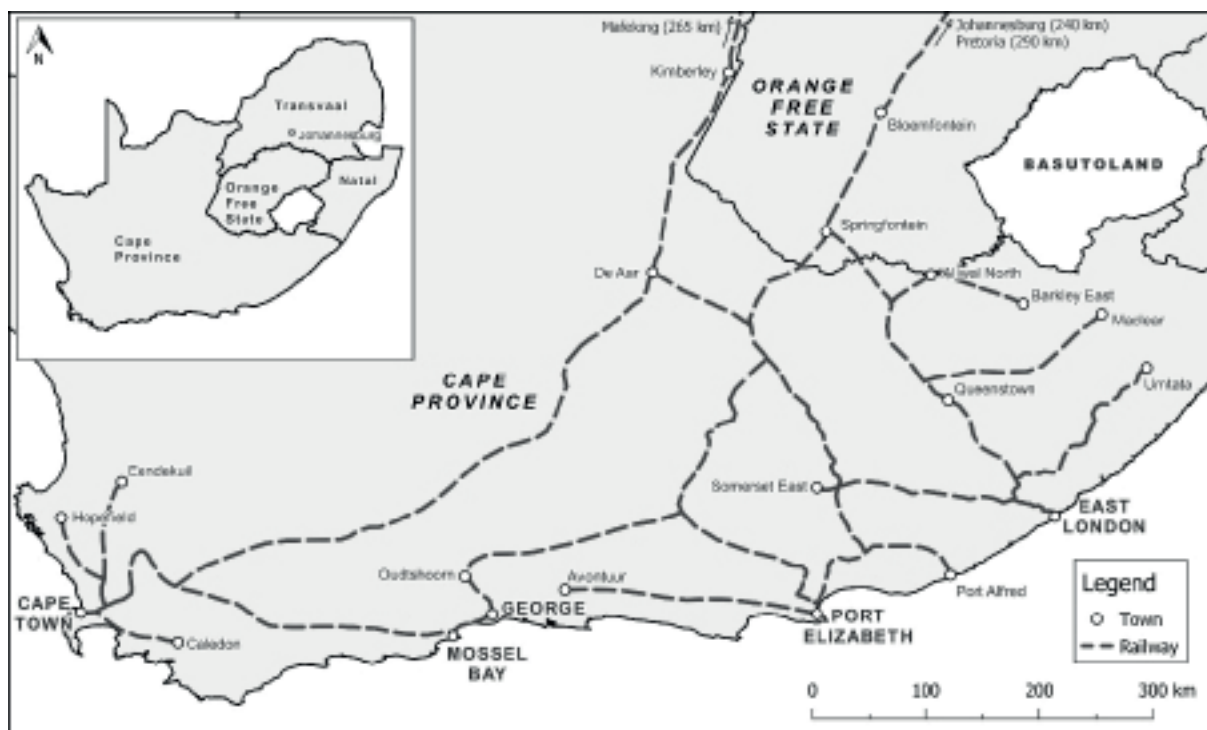


Fig. 1. The Historical Location of Mossel Bay in Cape Province 1910

Source: Own authors

zation of the Khoisan population and reduced their access to coastal resources (Boezak, 2017).

The settlement of Mossel Bay was founded in 1848 by British colonialists and briefly was called Aliwal South. The coastal town's 'modern' history dating from the mid-19th century with a local economy which was anchored initially on farming, fishing and activities around the port. Goetze (1995) records that until 1880 Mossel Bay was a relatively important regional seaport. Nevertheless, with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and the construction of rail links from the ports of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth to the interior the trade and economy of the 'lesser port' of Mossel Bay was detrimentally affected by the absence of rail linkages. Mossel Bay also was not favoured by the movement that began in the mid-19th century when the Cape Colony of South Africa earned a reputation of a health resort for Europe because of its clean air, climate and sunshine (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). In particular, the colony was attractive for people traveling in search of cures for a failing health and most especially for tuberculosis sufferers. In the influential survey of destinations informing doctors in Britain where they might send consumptive patients Mossel Bay was not a preferred destination. The settlement was described as "a somewhat dreary place, with very little to recommend it, except as the port of a beautiful back country, inaccessible, however, by rail" (Symes Thompson, 1889: 16).

By the early 20th century, however, and following the improvement of rail linkages to Cape Town (Fig. 1) and the delayed forging of new linkages to the interior it could be observed that "Mossel Bay is now well within sight of that new era of development and expansion which has been predicted for many years (Burton, 1907: 106). Leisure tourism opportunities now were opened up by enhanced rail linkages. The construction of the seaside as a leisurely space in South Africa followed changing European conceptualizations of the ocean and seeing the benefits of the sea bathing for health (Geustyn, 2021). During the first two decades of the 20th century the health giving properties of the climate of Mossel Bay were promoted along with the town's several assets for visitors and most especially its beaches. The survey produced in 1907 for the Cape Railways noted as follows "for the tourist, the place has many charms; there is always enough sandy beach and shallow water whereon to bathe and swim" (Burton, 1907: 106). Among the town's other assets were opportunities for collecting mussels and oysters, boating, visits to Seal Island and where "the hotel accommodation is good, and there are private boarding houses" (Burton, 1907: 107). In

1911 it was described that "Mossel Bay is making much headway in establishing its claims as a popular seaside resort. Its bracing climate leaves nothing to be desired, its proximity to mountains and the sea invite the old and young, here to climb and romp and renew their health and vigour; fishing is at hand, its ancient history appeals to the historian and antiquarian alike, in fact Mossel Bay satisfies the wants of the health-seeker, the fisherman, the artist, the yachtsman, and the overworked in need of quietude and sunny calm" (Cape Times, 1911: 133). Mossel Bay's tourism assets were of growing appeal. Burton (1907: 107) recorded that they "annually attract great numbers of country people who travel long distances by road and rail, and camp out till the whole shore looks like a great Boer camp" which was considered that on "a moonlight night the scene from a short distance reminds one of a Mediterranean watering place" (Burton, 1907: 107).

A decade later the earliest publicity material which was produced by the municipality applauded its charms as including the "naturalness of the place" offering "at once a refuge and a rest"; it styled Mossel Bay as "the Princess of Holiday Resorts" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1920: 6 and 7). Comparisons were made to the resorts of the Mediterranean: "on a cloudless day, when the heavens and the earth and the sea are a welter of sapphire and gold, the port undoubtedly bears a striking resemblance to Naples" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1916: 6 and 7). The health-giving properties of the local climate throughout the year were accorded great prominence: "it is quite a common experience for us to see people who arrive here looking haggard, run down, worn, and with nerves obviously on edge, altering daily before our eyes and leaving us, entirely different beings from what they were" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1916: 8). It was proclaimed the town enjoyed "a most desirable climate both in summer and in winter and, as a natural result, to be a splendid health and holiday resort, whatever period of the year may be chosen for visiting it" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1916: 8). The beaches of Mossel Bay were the central attraction for visitors (Fig. 2).

The sea's role in improving the health of visitors is a constant theme. Promotional literature enthused that the sea air was "so cool and soft with just enough crispness in it to set the blood dancing and the pulses tingling", it was a "tonic and restorative" and "as wine to the blood" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1920: 9). This narrative of Mossel Bay as a resort for health and pleasure was constantly messaged in the 1920s. The beach was centre-stage for pleasure seekers. Another handbook in



Fig. 2. Recreation at Mossel Bay Beach c.1920
Source: Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1920

1923 re-iterated the town was an “all-the year round health and holiday resort” with a climate that provided “wonderful recuperative properties” (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1923: 6). Of importance for visitors also was the wide range of accommodation service options that were on offer. Potential tourists were informed that “in the matter of accommodation, the resort has much to commend it, for there is an abundance of first-class – and in every way modern – accommodation at reasonable rates” (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1923: 5). This said, it was stressed also that the resort offered cheaper options in the form of rented bungalows erected by the municipality or at one of the campgrounds established by the municipality. Indeed, Mossel Bay was one of the first-mover municipalities in South Africa in supporting low-budget options for tourism in particular for camping.

By the 1930s promotional literature produced by South African Railways and Harbours (1934: 102) proclaimed that “Mossel Bay has acquired widespread popularity as a holiday resort, sea bathing and a remarkably dry climate ranking among its greatest attractions while westward along the coast is a wild profusion of rock scenery”. Emphasis was upon the town as a small picturesque port with “an appealing atmosphere” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937: 94). Mossel Bay was portrayed as “definitely old-world in atmosphere” but “highly modern, yet it retains a spirit of mellowed age” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937: 94). The guidebook spotlighted the town as offering

great opportunities for sea and rock anglers as well as “the home of the country’s finest oysters” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937: 94). In terms of its accommodation services, it was remarked that during “certain seasons of the year accommodation at the numerous hotels and boarding houses is fully taxed, and, in addition, there are many hundreds who prefer to live for a spell under canvas at one or other of the camping sites laid out by the Municipality” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937: 94).

Another chapter in the low-budget tourist development in Mossel Bay occurred with the establishment of Hartenbos as an Afrikaner beach resort, the details of which are chronicled by Grundlingh (2013). The resort’s genesis was tied to the entry and growth in numbers of (white) Afrikaans-speakers employed in relatively low and menial jobs on the South African Railways. In 1930 the Afrikaanse Taal-en-Kultuurvereniging (ATKV) was founded as an organisation dedicated to support Afrikaans language rights as well as to the cultural welfare of its members, who were mainly poor working class railwaymen. One of its concerns was the leisure time of this working class which was exposed to the perceived negative impingement of cosmopolitan urban culture in cities such as Johannesburg. This concern prompted a focus on how railwaymen spent their holidays and the launch of a search for a suitable holiday resort as it was claimed “Afrikaner railwaymen were not welcome in predominantly English-oriented resorts along the Natal coast”

(Grundlingh, 2013: 42). In 1936 the decision was taken by the ATKV council to purchase the Hartenbos estate, eight kilometres from Mossel Bay, and to establish there a dedicated beach resort for the rising numbers of Afrikaans-speakers employed on the South African railways. What emerged was a modest comfortable beach resort town which from the early 1940s became a highly popular and attractive destination for railwaymen and their families. The resort's accessibility assured its success as it was situated on one of the main railway lines and railway employees were entitled to special travel fares which reduced costs.

3.2 Apartheid Mossel Bay and the Commemoration of Bartolomeu Dias

Arguably, at the time of the Second World War the Mossel Bay economy was in a healthy state. The local government could proclaim confidently: "In the full five-hundred-mile stretch of rugged coastline that constitutes Africa's southernmost flank, from the Cape Peninsula to Port Elizabeth the Port of Mossel Bay is one of the very few that justifies bold lettering on the map" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1943: 1). The town's economic base was diversified with a cluster of industrial activities including milling, footwear factories, fishing and ship repair around the port. It was highlighted that Mossel Bay was the fifth most important port for the country and that the "activity consequent upon the port's function as the clearing point for the traffic of a large and important hinterland, has been sufficient to bring to the picturesque shores of the bay just sufficient of bustle and activity and sufficient commerce to convert what might have been a sleepy seaside village into a wide-awake progressive and charming seaside resort" (Mossel Bay Publicity Association, 1943: 1). For tourism the focus was on the local opportunities around surfing, bathing and lazing on the town's beaches as well as the advantage of Mossel Bay's geographical location and access for the Garden Route, which by the 1940s now was a popular focus for the growing activity of drive tourism in South Africa. Further impetus for local tourism arose from the initiatives launched in 1947 by South African Railways to include visits to the Garden Route as part of its 'Round in Fifteen' (days) tour itineraries which were organised mainly to attract overseas visitors.

During the apartheid period (from 1948) the numbers of domestic leisure visitors to Mossel Bay – and especially to Hartenbos – was boosted by a period of economic prosperity especially the 1960s,

a decade when South Africa enjoyed a massive economic boom and recorded some of the highest economic growth rates in the world. This followed the consolidation of the power of the National Party and political stabilisation in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre, the clampdown of trade unions, and the repression of black political organisations, most importantly the African National Congress (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022). For tourism it was a period marked by considerable expansion after the cessation of the state of emergency declared after Sharpeville as well as the government's launch of a new and greater focus on promoting both international and domestic tourism in South Africa (van Wyk 2013). Under apartheid it should be understood, however, that there occurred the demarcation of racialized spaces of tourism in South Africa with the enactment of policies that created racially separated accommodation and beach spaces (J.M. Rogerson, 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020c; C.M. Rogerson, 2020). As a whole, these apartheid regulations reinforced the status of Mossel Bay as a resort which would be the domain of almost exclusively white domestic holidaymakers for the next four decades. In the first national guide of graded hotels which was published for 1972 the modest character of all Mossel Bay area registered accommodation is underlined by the fact that no hotel establishment achieved more than a one-star quality grading (Hotel Board, 1972). This finding is a signal of the mainly budget range cost of accommodation service establishments in Mossel Bay which targeted the domestic leisure tourism market.

A notable feature of leisure tourism in Mossel Bay during the apartheid period was the town's considerable popularity for caravanning (as well as camping), a 'mundane' form of leisure travel that expanded greatly in South Africa from the 1950s and boomed in the decade of the 1960s into early 1970s. As is shown by Rogerson and Rogerson (2021b) caravanning was geographically concentrated on the coastal resorts of Cape Province with Mossel Bay one of its most popular locations. The town's attractiveness for caravanners was boosted by the leveraging of local assets when the municipality established a well-run municipal caravan park which provided opportunities for caravanners to enjoy a low-budget beach holiday. Further low-priced leisure holidays were available at Hartenbos. According to Grundlingh (2013: 46) in the apartheid period the Hartenbos beach resort consolidated its ethnic character and "self-consciously projected itself as first and foremost an Afrikaner resort". Leisure was purposefully channelled in ways that enhanced ethnic solidarity with concerts, folk dancing

and braais seen as mini-cultural rallying points. The beach and resort activities became a base to instil Afrikaner traditions and values. With its beautiful natural environment and low-costs of accommodation Hartenbos became a 'Mecca' for Afrikaners and most especially for those working on the railways. In the Afrikanerisation of Hartenbos Grundlingh (2013) stresses the existence of metaphoric linkages between Afrikaners and the sea which was framed as a powerful and purifying force for visitors. The sea enacted for van Eeden (2014) a social imaginary that held sway beyond the confines of a beach holiday. Nevertheless, Thompson (2015: 47) records that the strict Calvinist values of the Hartenbos community generated opposition towards outsiders and to certain sea activities, most notably surfing which was associated with 'hippies', 'permissive males' and generally viewed as "a sexual threat to the chastity of town's young women".

With boycotts and growing international sanctions imposed on South Africa following the Soweto emergency of 1976 the domestic character of the tourism economy of Mossel Bay was further confirmed. The decades of the 1970s and 1980s were years when the importance of tourism in the local economy was eroded as a consequence of the discoveries in 1969, 1980 and 1983 of natural gas fields offshore and the subsequent development of the Mossgas gas-to-liquids refinery. One potential boost to local tourism was the planning of a festival to be held in 1988 as a celebration paying homage to the quincentenary of the rounding of the Cape by Bartolomeu Dias and his crew. The festival would lead to the construction of a museum complex which opened in 1989. For Witz (2010, 2022), a leading writer on public history and museums in South Africa, this major current tourist attraction in Mossel Bay was 'apartheid's last museum'. Its establishment as a base for heritage tourism and the 1988 festival was mired by considerable controversy.

As Witz (2006) argued the planning of this Mossel Bay festival happened in very different circumstances to when the National party came to power and had driven the organization of a similar kind of festival and events in 1952 to commemorate Jan van Riebeeck and European settlement at the Cape. This occasion had provided an opportunity to construct an event to confirm a racialised South African citizenry and present a history of European settlement to support "a history and identity of whites as whites" (Witz, 2006: 162). The political situation in 1988 was markedly different. With the National Party in 1988 proclaiming that it was at this time 'reforming' apartheid the festival could not portray the primacy of South Africa as a white

settler nation; instead "the emphasis in 1988 was on apartheid South Africa being constituted by a 'rich diversity of cultures'" (Witz, 2008: 423). Within this framework the Dias voyage was not presented as one of national discovery. Rather as Witz (2006: 163-164) chronicles "the land was depicted as already inhabited ('bewoon') prior to his arrival and the festival organisers asserted that the Dias' significance reached far beyond national significance and what was being commemorated was the 'wonderful discovery' of the sea route to India, a breakthrough ranked 'as equal to modern space travel'".

At the core of the festival was the construction of a caravel vessel which sailed from Lisbon in November 1987 to arrive at Mossel Bay precisely on time for the pageantry of 3 February 1988 (Witz, 2011). The caravel was proclaimed a replica - a supposedly faithful reconstruction - of the vessel used by Dias four centuries earlier albeit the engine that secretly kept it going on its journey from Portugal was hidden below the water line (Witz, 2022). A major challenge for festival organisers arose in the presentation of 'multiculturalism' at a time when the legitimacy of South Africa's tricameral parliament had been shattered and successive states of emergency imposed by the apartheid state to maintain its control. In line with precepts of 'reformism' carefully selected individuals racially-designated as Coloured, Indian and African were placed on various festival committees. This said, as Witz (2010) points out, whilst claims made for the 'multi-cultural' character of the organisation of the festival the committees were convened by the whites-only Department of Education.

An even bigger challenge for festival organisers was that in terms of South Africa's designation of racialized spaces the beach that was the site for commemoration was for the exclusive use by whites (Rogerson, 2017). This case of the racialization of tourism space was a catalyst for massive boycotts around the planned celebrations for a hoped-for spectacle of colour thus completely undermining "the attempts at providing a multicultural imagery of Dias" (Witz, 2010: 8). For the historical re-enactment of the arrival of Dias therefore the festival organisers had to resort to the masquerade of using white actors to represent the indigenous inhabitants on the beach. In an extraordinary scene these white actors donned black masks in order to perform late apartheid's last festival. As Witz (2010: 8) points out the caravel therefore was shown to be "the bearer, not of Bartolomeu Dias, but of the contradictions of the apartheid state attempting to assign itself a multicultural past". Overall, festival organisers had experienced immense challenges in locating

event participants as well as to contain tensions and manage the contradictions for a festival that “asserted its multiculturalism within the bounds of (but attempting to be apart from) the apartheid state” (Witz, 2006: 164). In the scripting of the 1988 festival, therefore, “denial, suppression and substitution were the basis of the commemorative activities on the beach at Mossel Bay” (Witz, 2006: 164).

4. Conclusion

This paper represents a modest contribution to the expanding scholarship on the blue-economy and in particular to address the presentism of much existing writings. Building upon recent geographical works by Garland et al. (2019), Germond-Duret (2022) and Heidkamp et al (2023) it highlights the need for evolving a more critical engagement with the blue economy and the incorporation of key geographical concepts of place and space. For coastal communities as well as visitors the sea is not ‘placeless’ rather it forms the foundation for essential connections and interactions that create a sense of place and of place attachment. It has been shown that South Africa’s coastlines and beaches have been inscribed with histories of unequal interactions, legislated segregation and control that have controlled mobilities (Geustyn, 2021; Mafumbu et al., 2022).

As is demonstrated in the case study of Mossel Bay the sea has been a constant thread in shaping 400 years of the development pathway and ‘place’ of this locality. Throughout the earliest period of the town’s development – and including as a resort – it was evidenced that the sea assumed a foundational role variously for local economic development, the making of place and identity as well as impacting the everyday lives of both local residents and visitors. This critical importance of the sea for shaping the town’s development pathway continued into the apartheid years. Overall, this research underscores that the pursuit of historical geographical studies about the evolutionary development of resorts provides a valuable window for enrichment of blue economy debates.

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