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## How HERI (Human Evolution Research Institute) is disrupting, transforming and decolonising long held patriarchal narratives of human evolution in South Africa.

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South Africa has an extraordinary record of human evolution spanning from our early hominin ancestors in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage site, through to more recent evidence for the emergence of modern humans. Human evolution research in South Africa has received international attention for nearly a hundred years and has been vast and broad in terms of research foci, as well as researcher participation. However, the leading researchers in South Africa have been almost entirely men, with women and people of colour under-represented, and black women largely absent. Since its inception in 2016, the Human Evolution Research Institute (HERI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) has developed a tangible plan to change this: to disrupting, transform and decolonise the long held patriarchal narrative of human evolution in South Africa. Our intervention has a three-tiered design, focusing on the institutional (UCT), the current undergraduate and postgraduate student body, and the public. Using HERI, we are creating more inclusive and diverse spaces for the production and dissemination of high-quality research into human origins, through both physical changes and interactive programmes (e.g. seminars, workshops). We bring young, black women into this space, facilitate cohort-building, and give them knowledge, skills and courage to be the future of scholarship into human evolution in South Africa. We have programmes in place to support and graduate a new cohort of young, black woman PhD students, as well as postdoctoral support that will provide a stepping-stone for these young women to continue in their scientific careers. Field camps are used to demystify the fieldwork experience and encourage interaction between undergraduate and postgraduate women – as well as academics – and help younger women receive the skills they need, as well as the experiences necessary to spark their interest and imagine themselves entering the discipline. Finally, in order to reach beyond the bounds of higher education institutes and out into the public domain, we are developing a new, permanent museum exhibition on human evolution at the Iziko Museum of South Africa, in Cape Town. The exhibition reframes the human origins narrative to centre on the diversity of all people in South Africa, exploring how evolution produced that diversity through a lens of inclusivity and aiming to demystify the topic in an environment that is not alienating but

welcoming.