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# From universal to local: perspectives on cultural landscape heritage in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of cultural landscapes relates to the multifaceted links between people, place and identity. From a professional perspective, the concept refers to a category of designated conservation areas with specific biocultural heritage values. From a local perspective, it may refer to a landscape that is associated with the provision of a culturally-specific sense of identity and belonging. We explore these two perspectives through a comparative analysis of three cultural landscapes in South Africa, the 'expert' designated Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape, and the local associative landscape of *emaXhoseni*, which is not formally recognised. We propose that a biocultural diversity perspective of heritage not only recognises the inextricable relationship between nature and culture, but it also gives prominence to the beliefs, values and practices of local people, and to strengthening their agency to safeguard their heritage in ways and forms that are relevant to them.

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## Introduction

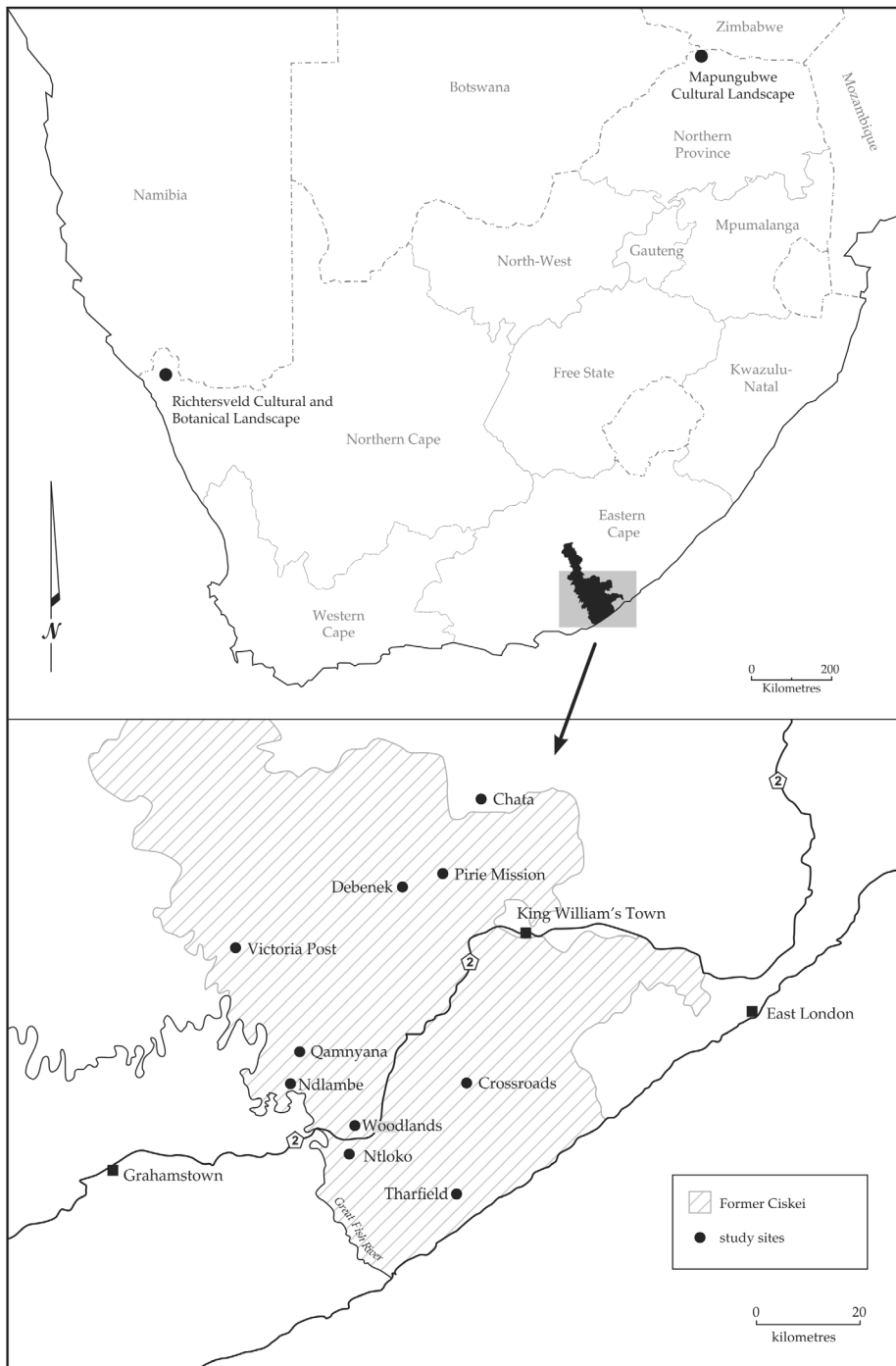
Heritage, in its broadest sense, is that which present generations wish to safeguard for future generations. While the nature of 'heritage' differs considerably among peoples, between places and over time, it invariably stems from both nature and culture and our attachments to it are universal (Lowenthal 2005). This apparently simple and universal concept belies the myriad tensions that can arise when defining what constitutes heritage, whose values, objectives and expertise matter, and who the intended beneficiaries of such heritage are (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000; Meskell 2012; Rassool 2013). A growing field of heritage studies has critically examined the ways in which 'heritages' have been defined, resourced and showcased and has revealed economic, social and political patterns of priority and exclusion (Meskell and Scheermeyer 2008; Smith and Waterton 2011). These patterns of priority and exclusion have been expanded upon through post-colonial critiques (Spivak 1988; hooks 1990; Goss 1996), and several recent discussions have highlighted how theories and conceptualisation of heritage from the global North have privileged certain histories and geographies as the 'universal' lens through which heritage in other regions of the world is viewed (Winter 2013, 2014). This has prompted calls to adopt 'pluralisation and a theoretical approach to heritage that better addresses the sociocultural pasts and futures for different regions of the world and recognises the need to de-centre Europe and the West in the way heritage is thought about and read as a series of interconnections between the human and non-human, past and present' (Winter 2014, 560). The traditional material,

science-centred approaches to heritage conservation are also ill-equipped to deal with the many pressing issues heritage is enmeshed in during this era of unprecedented global environmental, economic and political change (Winter 2013).

In this article we contribute a South African perspective on the plural manifestations of heritage. Due to its history, South Africa has a rich, diverse and contested natural and cultural heritage. It offers an interesting example of the search for developing a multicultural society that balances universal principles with the culturally specific perspectives of historically disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, in the international literature on the different frames of heritage conservation South Africa (and Africa more generally) is relatively under-represented compared to Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the Americas.

In our analysis of the pluriform manifestations of heritage in South Africa we focus on two interwoven areas of tension that play out in heritage conservation and management, which are of special significance in South Africa in determining what heritage is considered worth safeguarding, in what form, and for whose benefit. The first is related to the more general discussion on the need to differentiate between professional assessments of the universal value of heritage, versus the local values attached to heritage by Indigenous, rural and urban people (Hay-Edie et al. 2011). The second relates to the question of how to link the conservation of natural vs. cultural heritage, which remain largely separate endeavours that are the mandate of different, and often conflicting, organisations (Meskell 2012) – whereas for local people the natural and cultural dimensions of heritage are often inseparable (Maffi 2001; Pretty et al. 2009). We propose that a biocultural perspective to analysing heritage has the potential to address both these tensions. This approach does not only recognise the inextricable and reciprocal relationship between nature and culture, but also gives prominence to the beliefs, values and practices of local people. It thus highlights the scope for taking the recognition and management of the interrelated natural and cultural heritage beyond that of formally designated areas, where the assessment of ‘experts’ and the expectations of tourists are usually given primacy, to areas where the safeguarding of locally valued heritage is bound up with issues of identity, sense of place, spiritual wellbeing, connection to land, social justice, and self-determination (Apgar, Ataria, and Allen 2011; Cocks, Dold, and Vetter 2012; Ianni, Rivera, and Geneletti 2014). Work amongst Indigenous communities has drawn attention to the importance of experiential and emotional aspects of heritage (see Buggey 1999; McKercher and du Cros 2002; Prosper 2007; Andrew and Buggey 2008; Wallace 2014). These understandings and conceptual developments have created possibilities to move beyond the realms of the ‘elite’ and the ‘universal’ to include locally experienced heritage areas that represent the physical experiences of routine life of ‘minor figures’ and make room for ‘small stories’ to emerge. Such an approach allows for an increased appreciation of the embedded links between people, place and identity (Harvey 2015). It also recognises the agency of local people in managing their own heritage and maintaining the endogenous processes that are important for a continued nurturing of biocultural diversity (Apgar, Ataria, and Allen 2011).

During the last decades, the concept of cultural landscapes has been used to analyse the multiple manifestations of heritage as the representation of co-evolution between nature and culture. Such landscapes have been conceptualised as consisting of areas holding joint natural and cultural heritage values (Rössler 2006; Taylor 2009). Within the context of cultural landscapes studies, several analyses have highlighted the pluriform interpretations of the precise nature of such cultural landscapes (Taylor 2009; Hay-Edie et al. 2011). This paper presents a comparative analysis of three different ‘cultural landscape’ sites in South Africa that illustrate different interpretations of biocultural heritage in South Africa. The cultural landscape sites selected are Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape, both listed as World Heritage Sites, and *emaXhoseni*, a landscape locally valued by Xhosa communities living in the former homeland area of Ciskei, which has no formal recognition (locations shown in Figure 1). The analysis of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape is based on a review of documents and literature reporting on the establishment of these landscapes and evaluating their impacts. The analysis of the community-level associative landscape is based on two decades of anthropological



**Figure 1.** Map showing the locations of Mapungubwe Cultural landscape, Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape, and the community-associative landscape of emaXhoseni. The inset shows locations in emaXhoseni where the anthropological research that forms the basis of the case study was conducted.

fieldwork in this area,<sup>1</sup> which aimed at unearthing rural and urban residents' values and associations with their surrounding and ancestral landscapes. An explicit objective of our research and its dissemination has been to inform conservation, urban planning and rural development in South Africa of

these local perspectives in order to foster more appropriate approaches that give greater prominence to local biocultural values.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by reviewing the emergence and development of the concepts of cultural landscapes and biocultural diversity. This is followed by a historical overview of how natural and cultural heritage conservation in South Africa has been institutionalised, to provide the contextual background for comparative analysis of the three cultural landscapes. Next, the nature of the three cultural landscapes is described, giving attention to both the nature of the biocultural relations, the process of designation, and the outcomes this has had in relation to the types of heritages which received attention. We conclude by making an argument for giving the notions of biocultural diversity and heritage more prominence within the framework of cultural landscape discourses, to overcome the limitations of the currently prevalent universalist and preservation approaches with their deep roots in Eurocentric notions of heritage. The use of these concepts provide the means for new points of entry as they are aligned to local forms of 'heritages' that link to personal and collective identity, belonging and self-respect.

### **Contrasting interpretations of cultural landscapes as representations of biocultural heritage**

The concepts of cultural landscapes and biocultural diversity have both emerged to give recognition to the interaction and co-evolution of biological and cultural diversity. Each has a specific history (Hill et al. 2011).

The concept of cultural landscapes was formally recognised within the framework of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972. Within this framework, heritage sites were characterised as either representing cultural heritage in the form of great monuments and human-created sites, or natural heritage in the form of wilderness areas untouched by people. By the 1990s, the multifaceted interactions between cultural heritage and the natural environment were recognised and a new category of heritage was identified in the form of cultural landscapes (Rössler 2006; Aplin 2007; Taylor 2009). At first, the concept mainly focused on human-created and designed landscapes such as parks and gardens. These intentionally designed landscapes often straddle the divide between nature and culture by containing both valued constellation of biodiversity as well as historical heritage objects in the form of archaeological sites or historic buildings. Such an interpretation was further adapted when it was realised that cultural landscapes should not only recognise material cultural artefacts within a landscape, but also spiritual and religious values that are attached to landscapes, particularly in areas inhabited by Indigenous communities (Mitchell and Buggey 2000; Prosper 2004; Taylor and Lennon 2011). Consequently, the concept of cultural landscape was later expanded to reflect the fundamental links between local communities, their cultural heritage and the natural environment and the multifaceted interactions between the tangible and intangible cultural manifestations within the natural environment (Rössler 2006; Taylor 2009). These manifestations include both the outcome of human cultural practices on the natural environment as well as the cultural values that inform those practices (Ramakrishnan 1996).

Within international cultural landscape programmes, three types of cultural landscapes are now officially recognised (UNESCO 2008):

- Clearly defined landscapes designed and intentionally created by man such as gardens and park-land landscapes. These often include architectural heritage objects such as castles, mansions or historical industrial buildings or cultural objects such as park ornaments and statues.
- Organically evolved landscapes that were initiated by social, economic or religious imperatives but developed their present form by association with and in response to the natural environment. These cultural landscapes may take the form of either relict or fossil landscapes in which an evolutionary process has come to an end, or continuing landscapes in which evolutionary

process is still in progress and where there is an active social role of the traditional way of life in contemporary society.

- Associative cultural landscapes that reflect powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations with natural elements rather than material cultural evidence (which may be minor or even absent).

The concept of biocultural diversity emerged from case material collected from minority Indigenous communities (Persic and Martin 2008; Pretty et al. 2009) and was coined to give recognition to the inextricable link between biodiversity and cultural diversity amongst traditional and indigenous people (Posey 1999). Biocultural diversity became framed as a concept to identify options for conservation with Indigenous people and conservationists forming 'natural alliances' (Redford and Painter 2006). Many studies have documented how places that are regarded as sacred by local Indigenous people are protected as sanctified or ceremonial locations, and how sacred species are protected through beliefs in totem or taboo species (e.g. Posey 1999; Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008; Verschuuren et al. 2010). Sacred places became represented as 'the oldest form of conservation known to mankind' (Wild and McLeod 2008) and as being 'of vital importance for safeguarding cultural and biological diversity' (UNESCO 2005; 1). Within this frame, biocultural diversity is seen to be threatened by environmental degradation and exploitation resulting from unbalanced tenure and governance relations, and economic development-related processes of acculturation and socio-economic change (see Woodley 2010, 131–132). As concluded by Woodley (2010, 133) 'changing livelihoods, worldviews and value systems alters peoples' sense of place and cultural identity and leads to a breakdown in the intergenerational transmission of local knowledge, practices and languages that are so closely tied to the surrounding environment'.

Recently, the concept of biocultural diversity has further evolved as a result of the recognition that culture is dynamic and that biocultural values are not only maintained by Indigenous people living in 'pristine' natural environments, but also by communities that have been impacted upon by broader social and economic processes (Cocks and Wiersum 2014), including in urban areas (Cocks et al. 2016). The concept of biocultural diversity has also been found to have relevance to communities in the Global North (Elands et al. 2015), where it is increasingly recognised as being reflected in the biocultural heritage values of cultural landscapes (Agnoletti and Rotherham 2015). Biocultural values are often resilient and may be maintained and adjusted to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions (Ianni, Rivera, and Geneletti 2014). Buizer, Elands, and Vierikko (2016) propose that biocultural diversity should not be considered as a definitive concept providing prescriptions of what to see, but as a reflexive and sensitising concept that can be used to assess the different values and knowledge of people living with biodiversity.

From such a reflexive point of view, two main analytical approaches to assessing biocultural diversity and cultural landscapes may be identified. Both concepts refer to the set of values and practices through which local people associate with their natural environment at landscape level, but they have been applied in different ways. On the one hand, the concept of cultural landscapes in a normative sense is applied as referring to formally designated conservation areas; on the other, it can be applied in a more analytical sense as referring to the set of values and practices through which local people associate with their natural environment at landscape level. This latter approach mirrors the interpretation of the concept of biocultural diversity that provides a conceptual frame to give greater acknowledgment to involvement of local communities in processes of heritage creation and conservation (Davidson-Hunt et al. 2012).

Within the framework of the UNESCO World Heritage Programme, discussions have examined whether in the designation of cultural heritage sites more attention need to be given to the cultural values of indigenous inhabitants (e.g. Mitchell and Bugey 2000; Prosper 2004; Taylor 2009; Taylor and Lennon 2011; Waterton and Watson 2013), and whether more attention should be given to local designations of cultural landscapes (Hay-Edie et al. 2011). The selection and designation of cultural landscapes is primarily based on their heritage conservation values in the eyes of professional experts on natural and cultural heritage. These expert values and visions do not necessarily reflect those of the



people who actually created and/or live in these landscapes (Mitchell and Buggey 2000; Hay-Edie et al. 2011). Several studies have highlighted the tensions that exist between the professional and local interpretations of the nature and value of such landscapes, particularly amongst Indigenous minority groups (e.g. Prosper 2004; Taylor 2009; Waterton and Watson 2013). Despite the apparent alignment of the UNESCO cultural landscapes discourse with that of biocultural diversity, however, the listing process is typically top-down, with local engagement often only occurring after listing, a process that tends to be opaque and alienating to local people (Hill et al. 2011).

## Natural and cultural heritage conservation in South Africa

Nature conservation has a long history in South Africa going back to the late 1800s when the colonial government established the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, which was combined with the Singwitsi Game Reserve to form the Kruger National Park (Carruthers 1993). The establishment of this and other national parks was heavily influenced by the then prevailing conservation policies and approaches adopted in North America that emphasised the need for conservation areas to represent 'unspoilt wilderness' (Beinart 2000; Fabricius and Koch 2004). From the late 1970s, the main objective of national parks and state-owned nature reserves became the conservation of endangered animals and maintaining the integrity of ecological systems. This further stimulated the need to conserve landscapes that were devoid of people, and to return disturbed landscapes to their 'original undisturbed form' (Fabricius and Koch 2004). In order to comply with this conception, local people were forcibly removed from such areas (Beinart 2000; Brockington 2002; Brockington and Igoe 2006).

In a similar vein, the colonial and apartheid heritage legislation also marginalised and downplayed the cultural heritage of non-white South Africans by focusing on archaeological sites, artefacts, monuments and memorials representative of white settlers (Meskell and Scheermeyer 2008). Although African languages, cultures and institutions were documented by linguists, ethnographers and administrators since colonial times, in this process, 'the routines of human life were lifted out of the dynamic real world, placed outside the reach of change and innovation, and rendered anachronistic at the moment of publication' (Peterson 2015, 1–2). Primordialist and essentialist notions of African traditional culture (Peterson 2015) were used by colonial and apartheid regimes to further their own interests, and underpinned the creation of ethnically defined 'homelands'.

Since the advent of the South African democracy in 1994, new approaches to defining, documenting and preserving heritage have emerged, and heritage has become central to efforts to redress past injustice and build human rights (Herwitz 2015). Following international trends, nature conservation policies in South Africa have become increasingly culturally-oriented. This is reflected in the National Biodiversity Assessment programme, which explicitly acknowledges the role of ecosystems and biodiversity to human wellbeing and the importance of cultural and spiritual services of ecosystems services (Driver et al. 2012). The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) of 1999 mandates the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) with safeguarding 'tangible and intangible heritage resources for the purposes of commemoration, restitution, development and ultimately healing' (Meskell and Scheermeyer 2008, 155).

Despite these acknowledgments and advancements, nature conservation and the safeguarding of cultural heritage still fall under separate government agencies, and at sites where natural and cultural heritage co-occur, tensions remain between these often conflicting objectives of conserving nature as an ecological object and culture as a multifaceted representation of human values. In post-apartheid South Africa, this is reinforced by the view of biodiversity as a culturally neutral, universal public good, whereas cultural heritage is seen as identity-specific, local and divisionary (Meskell 2012). Nature conservation in South Africa usually dominates over cultural heritage, and the needs of tourists are privileged over the needs and values of local communities (Meskell 2012), echoing the situation elsewhere in the world (Apgar, Ataria, and Allen 2011, Baird 2013). This lack of balanced attention to the co-evolution between biological and cultural diversity results in various tensions that are illustrated in the following case studies of three types of cultural landscapes.

## 'Cultural landscapes': three South African case studies

To illustrate how the discourses within heritage and landscape have impacted upon how 'heritages' have been defined, showcased and resourced, we compare and contrast two examples of World Heritage Sites, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape, with the characteristics of the community-level associative landscape of *emaXhoseni*. For each we describe its setting, history and current status and interrogate (a) which types of heritage are present, how they interrelate, and which heritage components are privileged, and (b) who makes decisions on the value of the heritage, and who the envisaged beneficiaries of conserving and managing it are.

### *The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape*

The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape is located in the northern part of South Africa at the border with Zimbabwe and Botswana. The landscape reflects the rise and fall of the first Indigenous kingdom in southern Africa between 900 and 1300 AD (UNESCO [n.d.](#); Huffman [2005](#); Carruthers [2006](#)). The site represents the most important historic inland settlement in southern Africa and incorporates the site where the sacred leadership of the kingdom was located. The location of the kingdom was well suited to take advantages of trade routes from the interior to the Indian Ocean and to Arabia, India and China, and an intensive agricultural production system emerged. Mapungubwe developed into a powerful trading state, which represented a significant stage in the history of the African sub-continent. The cultural heritage of the area is still visible in the remnants of three human settlements. The sophistication of the Mapungubwe culture is reflected in several iconic artefacts, including a golden sculpture of a rhinoceros. The area also contains more than 400 documented archaeological sites from the Stone Age and the Iron Age periods.

The identification of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape as a heritage area of national and international importance is reflected in its present-day organisational setting. The heritage area is incorporated in the well-resourced South African National Parks (SANParks) system, which manages many of South Africa's most iconic and economically important tourist destinations, including Table Mountain and Kruger National Park. The Mapungubwe National Park is part of a proposed trans-frontier wilderness area (incorporating the Tuli Safari Area in Zimbabwe and the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in Botswana) that covers the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers. Although the World Heritage Site status of Mapungubwe National Park is based on cultural criteria, the primary focus of SANParks is wildlife and biodiversity conservation. While the present-day policy of SANParks also places a value on the cultural, historical and archaeological dimensions of the parks they manage, the actual management emphasis of Mapungubwe and other National Parks is on the park's wildlife. Some consider this to run counter to the aims of preserving and exploring the site's archaeological heritage, and illustrative of the greater status accorded to nature conservation compared to cultural heritage in South Africa (Meskell [2002, 2012](#)).

A key imperative of SANParks is to stimulate tourism development within and surrounding its National Parks. In the case of Mapungubwe National Park this has led to the establishment of museums, interpretive tourist centres and tourist attractions (including a stairway up one of the main cliffs to observe the royal quarters and a canopy-level boardwalk in the riverine trees) inside the Park, as well as tourist accommodation and infrastructure in the surrounding area (Carruthers [2006](#)). Local participation has largely taken the form of employing community members in these tourism initiatives. However, the impact of these initiatives has been severely hampered by the fact that local communities live some distance from the park, which is a result of past colonial and apartheid settlement policies (Chirikure et al. [2010](#)).

The case of Mapungubwe illustrates South Africa's current ambivalence around nature conservation and cultural heritage. The designation of the site was based on the criteria of international bodies and the heritage concerned is valued as being of 'outstanding universal importance', implying a somewhat abstract and apolitical global audience. Nature conservation in practice dominates over



the management of cultural heritage, reflecting both the priorities and expertise of the conservation body (SANParks) tasked to manage the site, and the prevailing demands in the tourism market. The cultural heritage recognised in the proclamation of the site is an ancient and extinct one, though considered by many a source of national and African pride. Local people live far from the protected area, however, and have no direct interaction with its landscape or cultural values. Their role (and interest) is primarily viewed as being beneficiaries of local economic development via tourism.

### ***The Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape***

The Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape covers 160,000 ha of mountainous desert in the far north-west of South Africa. The area, though settled for at least 1300 years by herders of KhoeKhoen descent (Webley 2007), is typically described as a 'remote wilderness' (Williamson 2000; ICOMOS 2007). The Richtersveld Community Conservancy was established in 2002, evolving out of the Richtersveld Community Heritage Area that was set up in 2000 to protect both the environment and culture of the area (ICOMOS 2007). The site was nominated for the World Heritage List in 2006 as a mixed natural and cultural heritage site, based on its unique endemic flora (Desmet and Cowling 1999; Fleminger 2008) and as representing one of the last remaining places where traditional transhumant pastoralism is practiced. Although named a 'cultural and botanical landscape' and nominated on both natural and cultural grounds, the site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a cultural site in 2007, based only on the cultural criteria of the World Heritage Convention. This followed concern that maintaining the cultural integrity and authenticity of the site required the continued practice of nomadic pastoralism, which had the potential to conflict with the requirements of safeguarding the botanical heritage (Hendricks et al. 2007; ICOMOS 2007).

In its site evaluation, ICOMOS (2007) recommended including the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape site on the IUCN list of World Heritage Sites. The recommendation was based on site's 'outstanding universal value', included the following:

- 'The extensive communal grazed lands are a testimony to land management processes which have ensured the protection of the succulent Karoo vegetation and thus demonstrates a harmonious interaction between people and nature.
- The seasonal migrations of graziers between stockposts with traditional demountable mat-roofed houses, *|haru oms*, reflect a practice that was once much more widespread over Southern Africa, and which has persisted for at least two millennia; the Nama are now its last practitioners' (ICOMOS 2007, 7)

Unlike Mapungubwe, the Richtersveld World Heritage site is listed as a living, evolving cultural landscape, where the cultural values of the community and their continued existence are considered to be intrinsically connected to the environment. The site is owned and managed by the Richtersveld community via their elected Communal Property Association. The continuation of traditional grazing practices is viewed by ICOMOS as central to the maintenance of the site's outstanding qualities (2007). Key to the listing of the Richtersveld cultural landscape were the practice of traditional pastoralism and the continued construction of rush-mat houses. In addition to the living pastoralist culture, the area also has sites where archaeological remains of San hunter-gatherers are found, including stone tools, ostrich eggshell beads, and petroglyphs (Webley 2007).

Most of the people living in the Richtersveld today are Nama, who are direct descendants of the KhoeKhoen herders, but there is also a community of Bosluis Basters, descended from a group who moved into the Richtersveld in the late 1940s. The area became a 'Coloured Reserve' under British colonial rule in 1934 but the land is now owned by the community, including large tracts of agricultural and mining land that was subject to a successful restitution claim settled in 2007. Although pastoralism is practiced by almost three-quarters of households and is an important contribution to

household subsistence and as an insurance against unemployment, the main source of income in the area is wage-labour in nearby diamond mines (Hendricks et al. 2004; Berzborn 2007).

The Richtersveld National Park (RNP), a contractual park co-managed by SANParks and the Richtersveld community, borders the heritage site to the north. Both the RNP and the World Heritage Site are sought out by South African and international tourists and 4 × 4 enthusiasts who appreciate the area's scenic beauty, unique plant life and culture. Due to the area's remoteness, hot and dry climate, ruggedness and inaccessibility, numbers of visitors are relatively low, and infrastructure is mainly in the form of campsites and very rustic traditional huts. In their evaluation document of the site, ICOMOS (2007) cautions that tourism infrastructure and activities, as well as other activities such as improving access for the community and emergency services to the listed property needed to be carefully planned to limit their ecological impact and 'in order not to destroy the values the State Party aims to preserve' (4). This potentially limits the economic potential of ecotourism and other economic development in the site, as has been reported in the context of the RNP (Boonzaier 1996).

The Richtersveld World Heritage Site is illustrative of a site where living cultural and natural heritage is under the custody and management of the local community, who themselves value this heritage and wish to safeguard it. At the same time, the judgement of this heritage having outstanding universal value has been made by an international organisation, which monitors how these qualities are maintained, and which makes support and protection contingent on the site meeting their requirements. Local people have been the subject of contrasting images of their existence in relation to conservation. On the one hand, they are portrayed (in RNP brochures and, more recently, in the UNESCO site description) as noble traditional farmers in harmony with nature. On the other hand, their destructive farming practices have been blamed repeatedly for degradation of the environment and cited as a reason why parts of the Richtersveld need formal protection (Boonzaier 1996). This ambivalence regarding existing activities and future economic development in the area creates considerable potential for conflict.

### **emaXhoseni landscapes**

The area that we characterise in this paper as *emaXhoseni* is located in the former homeland (or Bantustan) of Ciskei in the Eastern Cape. The area locally referred to as *emaXhoseni* has no formal recognition as either a cultural or natural heritage site. In fact, the area is generally viewed by professionals as a degraded, dysfunctional agricultural landscape in need of economic and agricultural development (Bank and Minkley 2005). While the area is of considerable conservation interest due to its unique subtropical thicket vegetation (Steenkamp, Van Wyk, and Victor 2004; Cowling, Procheş, and Vlok 2005), it is considered too degraded to be recognised as worthy of biodiversity conservation (Lloyd, van den Berg, and Palmer 2002). Nature conservation in the area remains framed as a professional activity in set-aside reserves with relatively untouched vegetation (Kepe 2014).

Although the landscape is often portrayed as a much contested landscape characterised by large-scale discontinuities in land-use, labour migration and decreased dependence on the material benefits derived from agriculture (Shackleton, Shackleton, and Cousins 2001; Hebinck and Lent 2007; Bank 2010), it is still culturally valued by the local Xhosa-speaking people. Historically the areas of the Eastern Cape occupied by these people were referred to as *emaXhoseni*, meaning 'place where the Xhosa people live' (Peires 1981; Dold and Cocks 2012). The majority lived in clustered homesteads or *imizi*, based on close, agnatic (patrilineal) kinship ties who predominantly engaged in agro-pastoral land-use practices (Hirst 1990) and relied on the wild natural resources that surrounded them (Fabricius and Koch 2004). Land was communally used and managed. Arable plots were allocated to individual households by chiefs or headmen, which did not confer individual ownership to these lands. Due to the dispersed settlement pattern, power amongst the Xhosa people was mostly decentralised (Sansom 1974; Bernard 2010).

During colonial and Apartheid times this landscape was drastically changed and redesigned. Colonial expansion, the discovery of minerals and subsequent industrialisation, and the segregationist and apartheid policies of the twentieth century progressively succeeded in wresting away control

of land from Black South Africans. In 1894, the Glen Grey Act limited the size and number of plot holdings per owner and imposed taxes that could only be paid in cash, turning the rural areas into labour reserves for the mines (Kepe, Hall, and Cousins 2008). The Native Land Act of 1913 restricted Black Africans in South Africa to ethnically defined 'homelands'. The homelands of Transkei and Ciskei were created for the Xhosa-speaking people (Peires 1992). The Apartheid government considered traditional land-use systems in the homelands as inefficient and as having caused the degradation of the local environment. So-called 'Betterment' schemes were introduced and implemented from the late 1930s until the 1960s to restructure settlement patterns, reverse degradation and increase productivity through 'sound' agricultural practices (Letsoalo and Rogerson 1982; De Wet 1989; Hebinck and Lent 2007). More than 3.5 million Xhosa people were forcefully moved into planned villages from their original scattered homesteads and livestock numbers were severely reduced in many areas (De Wet 1995; De Wet and Whisson 1997). Due to the employment of many Xhosa men in the mining industry and other forms of wage employment, rural settlements became increasingly subjected to circular rural-urban migration (Mayer 1971; Bank 1999). After the demise of Apartheid in 1994, all former homelands were re-incorporated into South Africa, but the social and economic reality of these areas remains marked by high population densities, high levels of poverty, poor levels of infrastructural development and inferior education opportunities (De Wet and Whisson 1997; Bank 2002; Hebinck and Lent 2007).

Despite the intentional land use policies that have undermined the local values and practices and dramatically altered the *emaXhoseni* landscape, our ethnographic studies revealed an enduring, culturally mediated, connection to rural cultural landscapes that retains its relevance. Notwithstanding the large-scale discontinuities in land-use, labour migration and decreased dependence on the material benefits from natural resources, many Xhosa people still maintain strong and multifaceted cultural associations with their surrounding landscape.

The multiple levels of associations, meanings and attachments are directed at different components of the village and surrounding natural landscape. The three main culturally significant landscape components are homesteads as locations of ancestral seats and as sites for ceremonial rites, grazing lands for maintaining culturally venerated cattle, and the forests as essential places for maintaining cultural identity. Water bodies, especially deep pools, are also considered important as locations in which water spirits reside (Bernard and Kumalo 2004).

Homesteads (*imizi*; sing. *umzi*) form a central component of the Xhosa cultural landscape. Before 'Betterment', homesteads were scattered across the landscape rather than concentrated in a village formation. Since 'Betterment' planning the construction of homesteads has been restricted to residential plots in systematically laid-out villages. Despite this externally designed and enforced settlement layout, the key elements of a homestead still remain prominent to this day, which include the living quarters, *ubuhlanti* (cattle kraal), *igadi* (garden), *amagoqo* (woodpiles; sing. *igoqo*) and *indlu enkulu* ('great house', a round hut built specifically for carrying out ritual practices such as brewing of traditional beer). The homestead represents a significant component within Xhosa cosmology (Hammond-Tooke 1974; Prins and Lewis 1992) as it houses the seat of both female and male ancestors of the patrilineal ancestors who are held in memory (McAllister 2001). This is reflected in the two major cultural artefacts within the homestead, the *ubuhlanti* and *amagoqo*, both of which have important symbolic and ritual functions as seats of ancestral spirits (McAllister 2001; Cocks et al. 2008; Dold and Cocks 2012).

Cattle are deeply embedded in a web of socio-cultural and economic relations for many Xhosa people, as they provide the means to engage in and maintain social networks and circuits of exchange and act as a sacrificial medium by which the living come into contact with the ancestral spirits. Cattle are also a visible sign of a household's social status and wealth and special breeds are celebrated for their beauty. Although indigenous breeds were denigrated as 'scrub cattle' and replaced by dairy and beef breeds of European origin during 'Betterment' interventions, there is a widespread revival of, and pride in, Nguni cattle, not only in the former 'homelands' but also among commercial farmers. This social, cultural and spiritual attachment to cattle meant that grazing lands were historically a prominent feature of the rural village's landscape (Soga 1931; Ainslie 2002, 2005; Poland, Hammond-Tooke, and

Voigt 2003). The communal grazing lands were vested in the supreme chief on behalf of his people and cattle were allowed to graze wherever their owners wished (Soga 1931). This situation drastically changed as a result of the 'Betterment' schemes, when grazing lands became re-organised into fenced-off grazing blocks under the administration of the Native Trust (Hoffman and Ashwell 2001). The traditional herding systems have subsequently fallen away in many areas and at present cattle graze in a mostly unregulated manner in open fields and within indigenous forested patches. The socio-cultural values and meaning attached to cattle still remains, as demonstrated by the large number of families investing in owning cattle in the study area (Ainslie 2005).

Local forests are botanically classified as Albany Thicket (Steenkamp, Van Wyk, and Victor 2004) and are locally referred to as *ihlathi lesiXhosa* (Xhosa forest). *Ihlathi lesiXhosa* is not only appreciated for the diverse array of resources it provides for daily use, but also for the spaces and places it offers for cultural events and practices, as well as for personal reflection and solace. It is commonly believed that without access to the *ihlathi* one would become spiritually and culturally impoverished (Cocks, Dold, and Vetter 2012). Indigenous thicket and forested areas are considered to house ancestral spirits, with whom one needs to remain in regular contact as they are venerated as benevolent guides, mentors and protectors. *Ihlathi* is also the location where certain rites of passage, such as the initiation from boyhood into manhood, are performed. Men often return to these locations to reminisce (Cocks, Dold, and Vetter 2012; Dold and Cocks 2012).

Within *emaXhoseni*, the local people attach associative values and meanings to the entire landscape, with its multiple natural, transformed, constructed and intangible elements and components. The landscape is given meaning by people who live there, and in turn residents feel that the landscape gives them meaning and sense of identity and belonging. The values and meanings become inscribed through the activities and experiences that are carried out within the landscape. The landscape also reflects its turbulent history and bears the scars of many decades of oppression, social engineering, ill-advised agricultural interventions and political and economic marginalisation. Despite this, the former homeland areas represent areas where the majority of local communities are still located, and where many urban residents still have strong roots and family ties (Masterson 2016; Njwambe 2017). The rural areas are considered to be areas where local 'heritages' are lived and embodied, and for many urban residents their childhood in the rural areas represents an age of freedom, innocence and tradition that they remember with fondness and nostalgia (Cocks et al. 2016). Many rural and urban people wish to pass on their local heritages to future generations, at the same time as aspiring to education and social and economic advancement. Several recent South African studies have documented the resilience of traditional biocultural values even among people living in urban areas, including migrant workers. These urban (part-time or full-time) residents were found to maintain fond memories of the activities they carried out in their traditional cultural landscape and consider these experiences as an essential component of their identity as Xhosa men and women and as the Xhosa *isithethe* (way of doing things) (Cocks et al. 2016; Masterson 2016; Njwambe 2017).

From an outside, professional perspective, *emaXhoseni* lacks the 'outstanding' qualities sought-after by conservationists of natural or cultural heritage. Its village life does not conform to picturesque ideals of traditional tribal life that might interest tourists, nor does the landscape conform to UNESCO ideals of cultural landscapes as sites where humans and nature exist 'in harmony' (Lowenthal 2005). With the exception of specific nature conservation areas and monument or memorial sites, the area enjoys no formal recognition or plans to preserve its natural and cultural heritage. The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) mandates SAHRA to safeguard tangible and intangible heritage resources and the legislative framework stipulates the protection of heritage embodied in cultural landscapes and valued by local people (Meskell and Scheermeyer 2008). In practice, however, such criteria are seldom acknowledged or applied in the former homeland areas of South Africa, where the outside, 'professional' perspectives rather than local values continue to guide heritage policy and practice. This leaves the biocultural heritage of these areas vulnerable to injudicious land use planning and development, including large-scale afforestation, settlement construction and mining, which do not take into account local landscape values and ways to minimise or mitigate how they are impacted. Ironically,

the impacts of such schemes during Apartheid-era 'Betterment Planning' are now well-recognised, but the present-day democratic government follows similar top-down approaches.

## Discussion

Our comparative analysis of three different cultural landscapes is in agreement with earlier critical heritage studies that recorded the extent to which theories and conceptualisation of heritage from the Global North have influenced and defined types of heritage that have been resourced and showcased (Apgar, Ataria, and Allen 2011; Wallace 2014). We found that, notwithstanding the heralding of South Africa as a 'rainbow nation' that left its history of colonialism and Apartheid behind it, local histories and heritage for the benefit of local people remain a low priority. Formally recognised cultural landscapes are designated by professional conservation organisations, who base their decisions on the 'outstanding universal value' of a site on specialist assessments. The values and needs of international and local tourists are given more attention in the design and management of these sites, as illustrated in the cases of the Mapungubwe and Richtersveld World Heritage Sites.

Within the context of South Africa, a more appropriate approach to recognise local associations and values can be taken from studies in Australia and Canada on Aboriginal interpretation of cultural landscapes, which demonstrate that such landscapes are 'activated' through practices of everyday life that are rooted in knowledge of the land and use of natural resources (Buggey 2004; Prosper 2007). In response to such understanding, in several post-colonial countries attempts have been made to incorporate Indigenous perspectives of heritage into community-based management approaches (e.g. Mitchell and Buggey 2000; Greer 2010; Hill et al. 2011; Wallace 2014). While research on the heritage values and cultural landscapes has tended to focus on more remote and iconic locations, our studies illustrate that it needs to be recognised that heritage values also exist in more modernised areas, including urban areas (Wallace 2014; Cocks et al. 2016). This is particularly pertinent in the African context, where the separation between 'pristine' nature conservation areas and rural and urban areas inhabited by people is stark, with the latter being seen as threats to biodiversity rather than sites of biocultural heritage.

The 'invisibility' of community-designated heritages in South Africa illustrates the lack of progress that has been made in integrating concepts such as place, sense of place, place-making and place identity into heritage management, and in engaging local communities in culturally-sensitive approaches to improving land use and management (Puren, Drewes, and Roos 2006; Kepe 2009; Cocks, Dold, and Vetter 2012; Thondhlana and Shackleton, 2015). Archaeological and antiquities departments have attempted to stimulate community involvement in cultural heritage conservation, but these programmes have focused primarily on archaeological monuments rather than on living cultural landscapes and have had only a limited impact (Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Chirikure 2013). Our analysis indicates that in South Africa there is scope for further development of a community-based approach towards cultural landscape conservation and management. This requires a shift from the notion of cultural landscapes as professionally designated conservation areas (which often encourage visits by tourists while limiting access by local people) to a more inclusive notion which also recognises associative cultural landscapes of local communities (Hay-Edie et al. 2011). Such a shift will ensure that the cultural values and practices of local communities in respect to living with nature and biodiversity are not overshadowed by values regarding the universal significance of cultural landscapes. It will require accepting and dealing with different perspectives on the material and immaterial values of cultural landscapes and their underlying differences in worldviews (Mitchell and Buggey 2000; Marthez-Stiefel, Boillat, and Rist 2007).

The inclusion of a biocultural diversity perspective forms a good basis for developing such an approach to heritage management. This can assist in understanding the nature of cultural landscapes as being the product of the interaction between nature and society, where socio-cultural and political processes have shaped the landscape and where the landscape itself has shaped these processes (Prosper 2004). In the process, landscapes take on meanings influenced by the lived experiences within them,



and where the cognitive construction of the landscape is linked to the construction of individual and group identities (Osborne 2001; Prosper 2004).

While we emphasise the importance of recognising and safeguarding local cultural landscapes as reflecting the biocultural heritage of and for local people, this should not preclude attempts to generate outside interest in, and a better understanding and appreciation of, the biocultural landscapes in the former 'homelands'. Ecotourism is a potential source of revenue and development, and having visitors appreciate local landscapes and culture can foster pride in local biocultural heritage. An interesting case study from a village of the former Ciskei showed how economic opportunities of creating crafts and performing cultural dances for tourists post-1994 led to an unexpected revival of local culture within the village – in ways that reflected innovation and emancipation (notably of women) rather than nostalgia and conservatism (Bank 2002).

## Conclusions

Cultural landscapes represent a manifestation of an integrated knowledge-practice-value system (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000) where the meanings and attachments embodied through landscapes are bound up with communal rights and customs and acknowledged as worthy of safeguarding for future generations (Harvey 2015). While safeguarding heritage of 'universal value' tends to be a pre-occupation of well-educated and affluent elites (Lowenthal 2005), the conceptual frame of biocultural diversity provides a platform for giving prominence to the issues of ethics and social justice within the domain of cultural landscape conservation (Davidson-Hunt et al. 2012; see Maffi 2001). Such an approach is highly relevant in South Africa, where decades of colonial and Apartheid rule have denigrated manifestations of African culture (including languages, beliefs and customs, livestock breeds and agricultural practices) as 'primitive' and inferior. While this has changed since the advent of democracy, millions of rural people continue to be portrayed as having degraded their natural resource base through ignorance, self-interest and neglect (Beinart 2000; Vetter 2013), and rural areas remain stigmatised as culturally, socially and economically 'backward'. Rectifying past injustices needs to include a concerted effort to achieve much-needed social and economic development in these areas, but at the same time to recognise and prize the diversity and richness embodied in local cultural landscapes. Local people should be supported in recognising and safeguarding their biocultural heritage – for themselves, for their descendants, and for a South African society that has a long way to go in understanding and appreciating the historical and cultural legacies of all its people.

## Note

1. Initial studies focused on the use and cultural significance of wild harvested material in rural and peri-urban communities in the former Ciskei and adjacent urban centres (Cocks 2006a). This was followed by case studies to determine the values attributed to different vegetation and the types of interactions and activities carried out within them (Cocks, Dold, and Vetter 2012; McAllister 2012; Mogano 2013; Cocks and Wiersum 2014; Njwambe 2017). Additional in-depth case studies were carried out among adults and children living in rural, peri-urban and urban areas to determine the significance they attach to various natural components in the surrounding landscapes (Alexander, Cocks, and Shackleton 2015; Cocks et al. 2016).

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