

# Enduring cultural landscapes of amaXhosa in former Ciskei

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# Introduction

- Within the conservation literature local communities have largely been portrayed as spoiling or degrading natural landscapes.
- Attention has been directed at documenting their negative impact on natural environments.



**Gathering techniques used often leads to death of the tree.**



**Informal gatherer-hawkers**

## Introduction 2

- This has resulted in many 20<sup>th</sup> century conservation policies being adopted that excluded local people from protected areas.
- An emphasis was placed on the need to educate local people in appropriate professional conservation practices.
- Within the South African context this even included the removal of people from protected areas as the aim was to create parks that showed no trace of human activity.
- Conservation also became perceived as elitist priority.





# Introduction 3





## Alternative approach

- In other parts of the world attention has been given to the inclusion of people in the landscape.
- Attention has been drawn to the protection of the interweave of biological and cultural diversity, people and places, and the continuing adaptation and co-evolution between landscapes and ways of life” (Laird *et al.* 2011).
- Resulting in coining of the concept cultural landscapes.



## Importance of cultural landscape

- Cultural landscape has been incorporated into conservation policies since the 1990s (e.g. Ramakrishnan 1996; Farina 2000).
- Cultural landscapes has become recognized internationally by world bodies such as the WWF, IUCN and UNESCO.
- “Sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes” is included in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Alcamo *et al.* 2003).

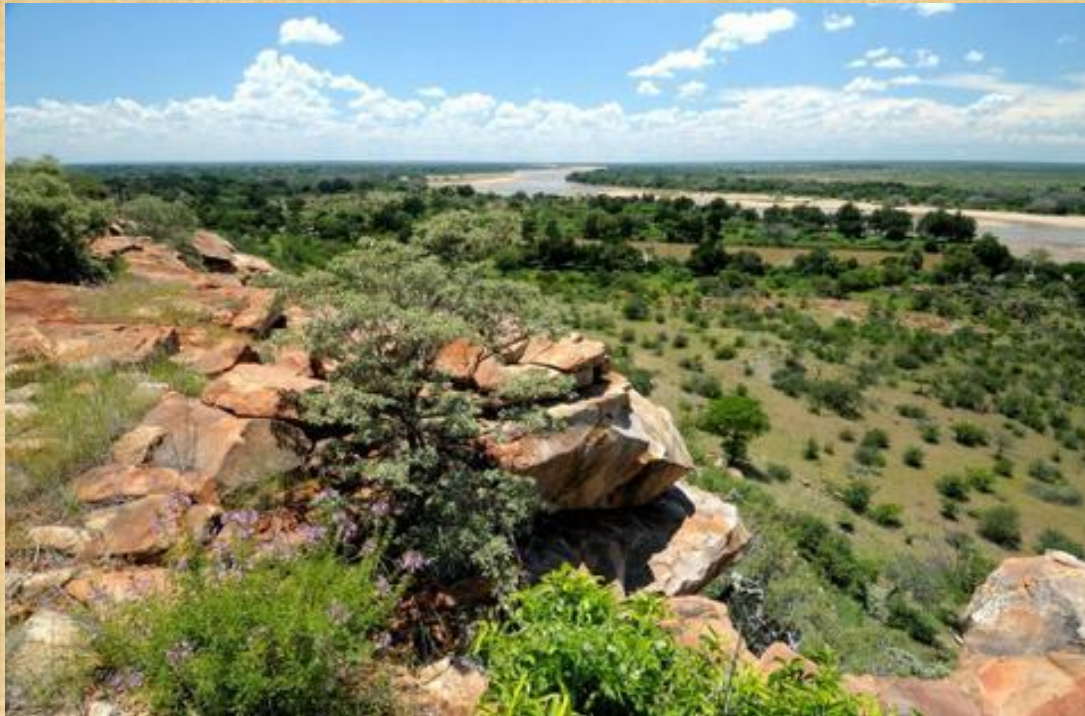
## ***The position of cultural landscapes as reflected in South African legislation***

- South Africa has adopted frameworks for community participation in conservation. Eg National Forests Act (1998), the White Paper on Sustainable Forest Use and Management (1997), the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (2004) and The Communal Lands Act (2004).
- Several calls have been made to interpret participation not only as local cooperation with professional conservation practices, but also as indicating the need “to give full recognition to cultural and spiritual values [of biodiversity] in order to promote a truly integral policy of nature conservation” (Pappayanis and Mallarach 2005: 242).



## Continued....

- Despite this formal acknowledgement of social and cultural dimensions of biodiversity conservation, only a few isolated examples exist where cultural landscapes have become formally included in conservation programmes.
- Places of implementation have been restricted to formal conservation areas, such as the Mapungubwe World Heritage site.



Centre of the kingdom, and exclusive domain of the royal family:  
Mapungubwe mountain, where the gold foil rhino found.

**THE WORLD  
HERITAGE SEAL IS  
A GUARANTEE OF  
PRESERVATION”.**

Simon Usborne -  
The Independent  
Newspaper UK  
29th April 2009



## Continued.....

- The concept of cultural landscape has hardly been given attention in relation to communal areas inhabited by local communities, particularly the former homelands.



A sacred grove of umhlontlo trees (*Euphorbia tetragona*) remains undisturbed as the village grows around it.

## Continued ...

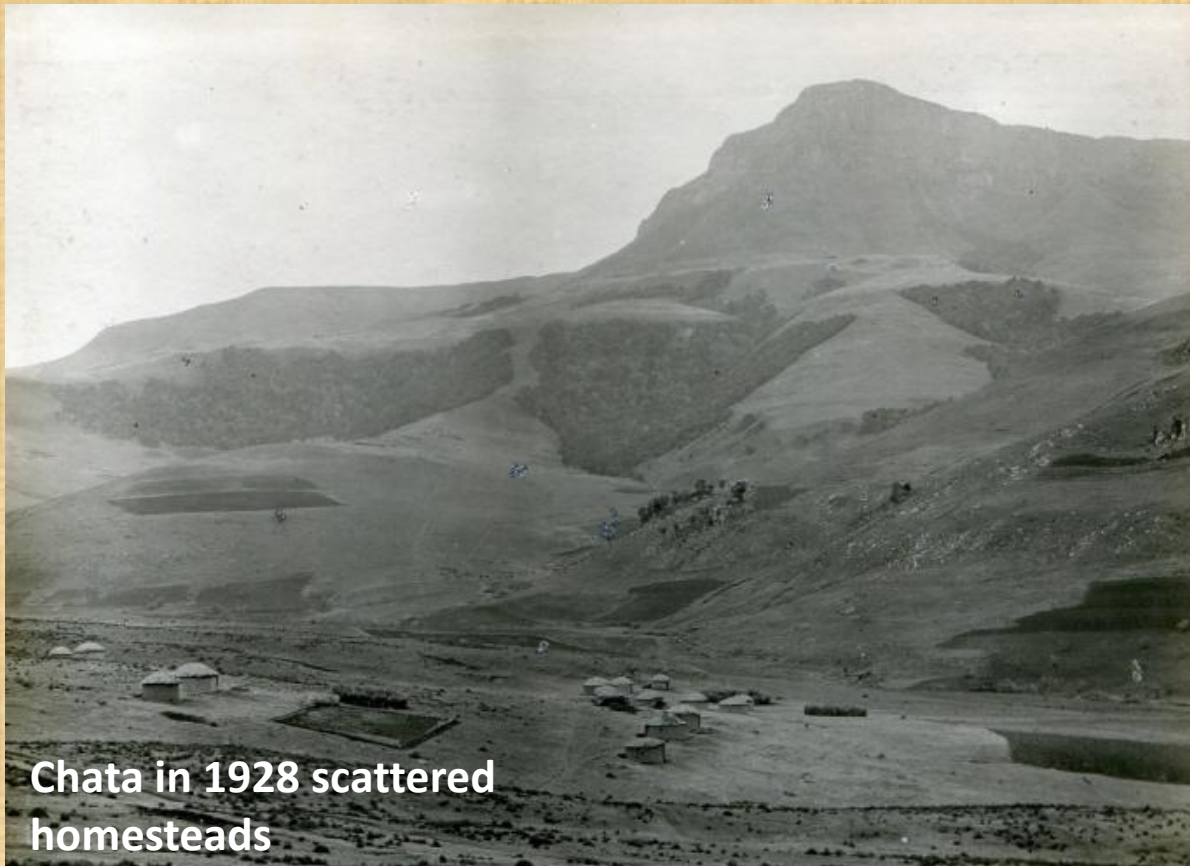
- Relevant legislation such as Spatial Planning and Land Use Management (SPLUM) Bill SPLUM is technologically focused and does not make reference to the need to recognize local communities' values and attachments to their surrounding landscape (Puren *et al.* 2006).
- Despite the existing legislative framework and acknowledgement from relevant authorities, the recognition of the contribution of cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity and ecosystem services has yet to be translated into widespread acknowledgement and practice (Cocks 2006b).
- Very little advancement has been made to involve local communities in culturally-sensitive approaches towards conservation outside of protected areas.



# AmaXhosa cultural landscapes in the Amathole region

## *History of landscape development*

- Past land use policies of the South African government resulted in major discontinuities in land-ownership and access to natural resources for the amaXhosa.



**Chata in 1928 scattered  
homesteads**

## Continued....

- The policies aimed at a professionally designed landscape that drastically changed the previously organically-developed landscape and totally re-conceptualized the local landscape



Chata post betterment



## ***Enduring amaXhosa cultural landscapes in the Amathole Region***

- Notwithstanding the ill effects of the apartheid's homeland policies research has indicated that the amaXhosa have still maintained associative cultural landscapes which reflect their cultural heritage.
- These relations are reflected in several specific features of the amaXhosa cultural landscape.
- This landscape consists essentially of a combination of:
  - a) grazing lands for the highly valued livestock reflecting their pastoral cultural orientation,
  - b) forest areas valued as offering space for maintaining spiritual identity, and
  - c) homesteads housing ceremonial sites for communicating with male and female ancestral spirits .

## ***Grazing lands as attribute for maintaining culturally venerated cattle***

- The significant social, cultural and spiritual attachment to cattle means that grazing lands were, and still are, a prominent feature of any rural village's landscape (Ainslie 2002).



Exceedingly close relationship that exists between the amaXhosa and their cattle: cattle are the medium of sacrifice by which the living come into contact with the dead and they are a visible sign of a man's social status and wealth (Soga 1931).

Even in present times cattle are still celebrated for their beauty, fecundity, social exchange value, and presence as mediators at the threshold between man and their ancestral shades (Poland *et al.* 2003).





Grazing lands common feature of rural villages



# ***Forests as essential places for maintaining well-being and cultural identity***



**Natural landscapes provide social identity (initiates during seclusion period)**



Landscapes provide religious affirmation through access to sacred sites.





natural landscapes provide religious meaning (note sacred pool)





## *Homestead as locations for ceremonial places*



Kraals as symbolic status



Religious affirmation through ceremonies

Within each homestead the kraal forms a major cultural artefact.

These *ubuhlanti* feature prominently in Xhosa idioms, and expressions.

Within the Amathole region about 80% of the *umzi* still own and maintain an *ubuhlanti*.



## ***Homestead (umzi) as locations for ceremonial places***



The *igoqo* refers to woodpiles situated outside of each *umzi*, these are still maintained within 40% of all homesteads in the Amathole region .

*Igoqo* is an social status symbol signifying a housewife's status.

Place to announce the gender of a newborn child as '*ngumntu wasegoqweni*' (child of the *igoqo*, meaning a girl), or '*ngumntu wasebuhlanti*' (child of the livestock enclosure, meaning a boy).

Some rituals are held at the *igoqo*, such as the sacrifice of a goat to appease the maternal ancestral spirits



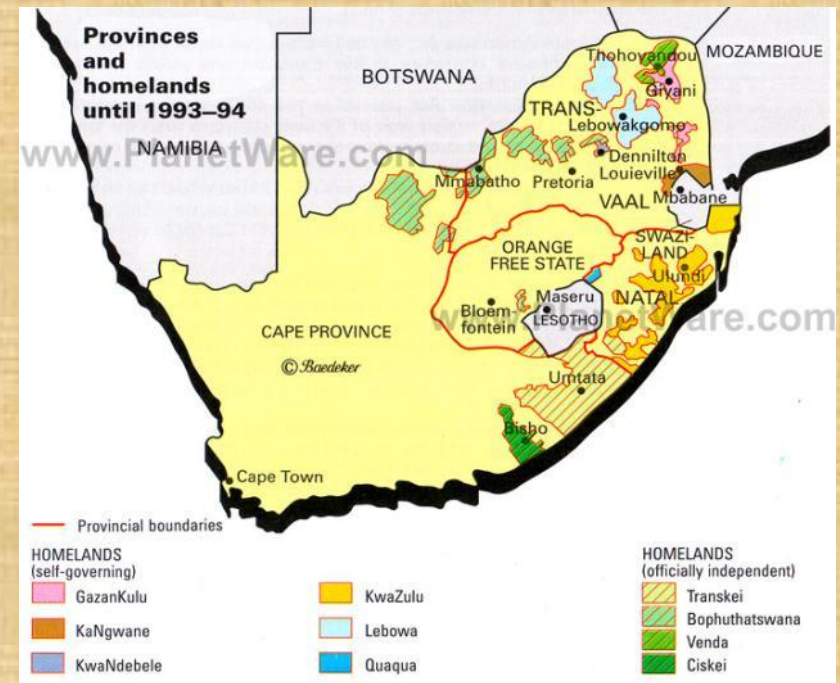
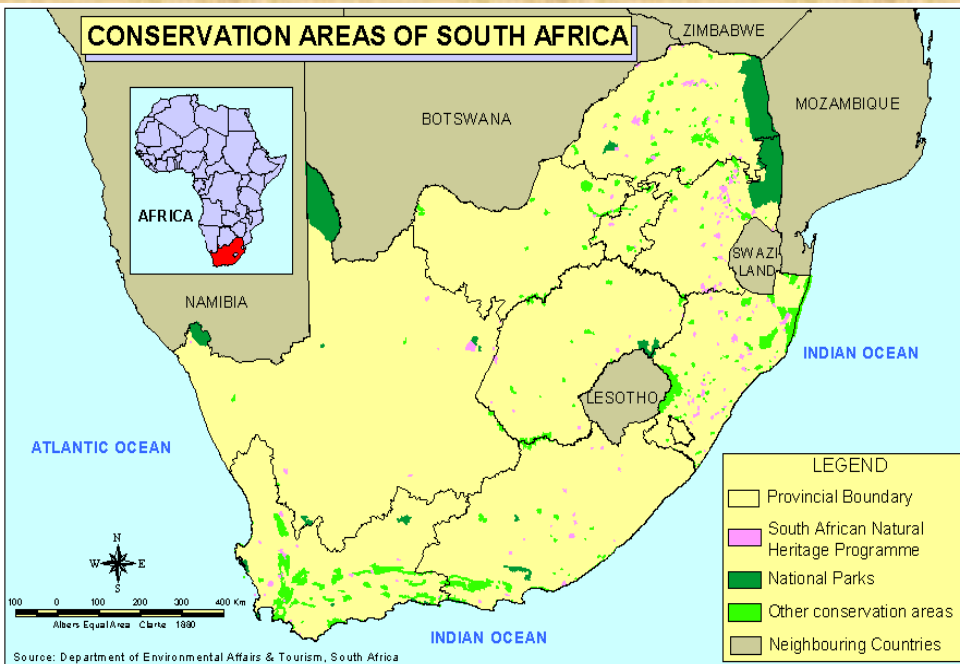


## Discussion

- Enduring amaXhosa cultural landscapes are multifaceted. They include beliefs and practices that are conservation oriented, but also elements (over grazing, over harvesting of plants used for spiritual purposes) that may result in degradation.
- This illustrates that the typification of cultural landscapes as vital areas for combining cultural heritage preservation and safeguarding cultural and biological diversity needs careful interpretation.
- Rather than simply considering the notion of cultural landscapes as a cognitive tool for furthering conservation, the concept can best be interpreted as demonstrating the need to recognize location-specific constellations of cultural expressions of nature and related practices.
- These expressions and practices should be used as elements in social-learning based approaches to develop culturally sensitive approaches towards biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation in community areas.

# Conclusion

- To ensure that the processes of co-evolution between nature and culture and the often long-enduring religious and spiritual value and practice systems in dealing with nature are reflected appropriately, a more inclusive approach of conservation by including cultural landscapes is required.
- Such an approach should focus on organically evolved, associative cultural landscapes rather than professionally designed reserves.





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Thank You