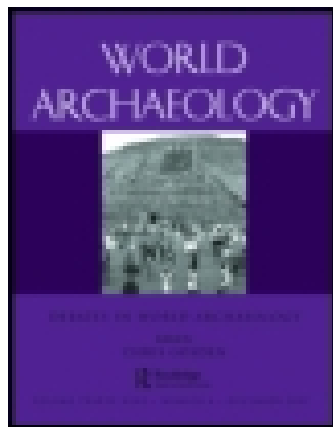


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Public archaeology, knowledge meetings and heritage ethics in southern Africa: an approach from Mozambique

Albino Jopela and Per Ditlef Fredriksen

Abstract

What do researchers and heritage practitioners do when their concepts of place do not coincide with those held by local communities? Discussing a case study from Mozambique against its wider southern African backdrop, this article argues that professionals cannot overlook the fact that many rural communities in this part of Africa do their version of 'archaeology' by reconstructing the past via their ancestors. The primary focus is to establish a ground for epistemic levelling between 'scientific' and 'other' knowledges and an ensuing heritage ethics from which to articulate a set of key tenets for future engagements with local communities and public archaeology. In order to develop an approach that is inclusive and within the scope of 'a truly engaged archaeology', we explore the potential of encounters between different epistemologies, between those of professional practitioners and those of the public they engage with.

Keywords

Public archaeology; epistemologies; heritage ethics; local communities; southern Africa; Mozambique.

Prelude: a documentary scene

A few years ago, in a Shona-speaking part of rural Mozambique, filmmakers Liivo Niglas and Frode Storaas (2007) documented the following ceremony:

Just before the rainy season, around September, all households under the local sub-chiefs (Sabhuku and Samutandha) start the ceremony preparations, which are led by a female spirit medium. Maize meal beer, brewed for three weeks, and stiff maize meal porridge (sadza) are provided.

At dawn the elders gather at a boulder at the foot of the sacred hill. The spirit medium asks the known ancestral spirits (mhondoro) to remember the community by giving them good rains and ensuring the fertility of their fields. She asks the mhondoro spirits to pass on this message to other unnamed spirits beyond. Beer is then passed amongst the elders. Later, a small, round beer pot is carried up the hill to a painted overhang. Ritual priestesses sing rain songs ('the mhondoro, the great spirits, they drink from the Save River, from the Zambezi River and from the Púgwe River') and lead a procession of selected men and women to the site, where the beer is placed in front of the painted panel. The spirit medium kneels and addresses the ancestral spirits:

'Excuse me "Daday", the owner of this land...we are asking for peace and also for rains. We are struggling; we have not much drinking water...we ask you, below ground and in heaven. You, "Daday", the owner of the land. Only one person made the mistake. Can you kill all because of one? Forgive this person; unite him with those who please you. Give us water'. (Making Rain 2007)

Introduction

Scenes of ritual engagement similar to the one described here are played out in countless places across southern Africa and beyond, including at many archaeological sites. The ritual significance of archaeological sites and other heritage icons across southern Africa suggests that communities in these landscapes draw on past material cultures to negotiate and reconstruct present identities and ritualized world-views (see Ranger 1973; Smith 2005; Pwiti et al. 2007). Although it is widely agreed that 'the public' have the right to access and use cultural material remains, sometimes the engagement of segments of the public with 'the past', for instance in a ritual context as described above, is held in tension with the idea of a frozen past that needs protection (i.e. archaeological heritage) (see Manyanga 1999; Katsamudanga 2003). Professional archaeologists are self-defined 'custodians of an important section of Africa's past' (Smith 2014, 136), whose primary professional duty and ethical responsibility is to 'steward the care for and protection of the past' (see Hamilakis 2007, 26) for the benefit of the present and future generations. Accordingly, public education and outreach are critical to convey the message that stewardship of archaeological heritage is important. This garners support for what we do as archaeologists (Merriman 2004, 5–6) and aims to make the general 'public', and particularly 'local communities', appreciative of the value of archaeology and heritage. Yet power asymmetries in terms of the archaeological production and management of the African past still expose the colonial legacies in many aspects of archaeology (see Shepherd 2002, 2003; Abungu 2006; Schmidt 2009). This is despite the significant changes that have occurred over the last thirty years to counteract the colonial underpinnings of the discipline (Reid 2014). A key issue is that "the past" which archaeologists frequently talk of in terms of belonging to the people (e.g. "public" and "local communities") of the present and the future, has been, and continues to be, colonised by archaeologists through what Laurajane Smith (2006) calls the Authorized Heritage Discourse¹ (Giblin 2012, 126).

Although the definition of heritage has morphed over time, from an initial focus on its material manifestation to a more holistic definition that includes its intangible elements (see Gillman 2010; Smith 2011),² it is problematic that in the current dominant theoretical

framework and practice of heritage management there is a discontinuity between the places considered to belong to the past and the values and aspirations of people in the present (Pwiti and Mvenge 1996; Fontein 2006; Poullos 2010). Consequently, practitioners in southern Africa have been accused of protecting only those aspects of sites that heritage managers consider important and, in most cases, excluding other aspects of heritage; presenting heritage resources in a lingo that is familiar only to those within the profession; dwelling on issues that may not be of interest to the wider public; and involving local communities in very limited ways, if at all (Jopela, Nhamo and Katsamudanga 2012, 176). A key reason for this scenario is that post-independent state-based heritage organizations inherited rigid colonial policies that did not recognize the importance of traditional custodianship systems for protection and management of heritage places (Katsamudanga 2003; Ngoro and Pwiti 2005). Thus, as archaeologists, we may wonder what to do when our conceptions of place and of the 'archaeological record' do not coincide with those of local communities.

One of the difficulties rests on the widespread assumption that local communities' knowledges stand in contrast to scientific archaeology. Moreover, as we will explore in more detail below, by implying static rather than dynamic and changing categories the contrast may relate to an asymmetric ranking of knowledges, in which generalizing science, is preferred over contextually specific insights (Lane 2006, 2011; see Fredriksen 2011, with references). One outcome of this asymmetry is what Lynn Meskell calls 'an extractive model', where professionals in the field have come to use local informants as 'research subjects and as archival resources that are there to be mined' (Meskell 2005a, 89). The asymmetry is most likely a key reason why Paul Lane in his 2011 review of the possibilities for postcolonial archaeology in sub-Saharan Africa finds little evidence to suggest that archaeological reasoning has been shaped at all by indigenous epistemologies. He suggests, among other things, that archaeologists abandon the idea that only professionals do archaeology, thereby recognizing that indigenous archaeologies have been practised throughout the world by people drawing on material traces of previous inhabitants in their construction of narratives about their own past, adding significance to their sense of place and identity (Lane 2011, 17–18). As recently noted by John Giblin, Rachel King and Benjamin Smith, such postcolonial engagements require archaeologists to 'accept a high degree of ethical responsibility regarding the production of the past in the present with future consequences. A truly engaged archaeology thus becomes a present-centred and future-oriented practice' (Giblin, King, and Smith 2014, 132).

It is within this nexus of concerns that this article discusses issues of public archaeology in southern Africa, particularly the challenge to archaeologists to engage with local communities' knowledges about the past, and the implications of that engagement in relation to the conservation of archaeological heritage. In the following we outline an inclusive framework by discussing a case study from Mozambique against its wider southern African backdrop. We believe professionals cannot overlook the fact that many rural communities in southern Africa do their version of archaeology by reconstructing the past via their ancestors, named or unnamed. Consequently, our primary focus is to establish a firm theoretical ground from which to articulate a set of key tenets for our future engagements with local communities and public archaeology in southern Africa. Acknowledging that there is still some distance to cover to reach some form of epistemic symmetry and mutuality between scholarly and local/indigenous knowledge,³ our principal aim is to provide an initial step from which to progress further towards 'a truly engaged archaeology', as formulated by Giblin, King, and Smith (2014). This

article explores the potential of encounters between different epistemologies, between professional archaeologists and segments of the public, in order to develop an approach for managing heritage that is inclusive.

A vernacular cosmopolitanism: epistemic levelling and heritage ethics

If we briefly return to the opening scene, it is easy to see ‘the public’ as the living members involved in the rain-making ritual. However, by constantly re-visiting the question ‘Who are the public?’ we critically address the modern notions of ‘who’ and ‘what’. While the living are the ‘whos’, we normally impose the ‘whats’ on places, things, animals and the spirit world. For many rural communities on the sub-continent this involves at least one mis-categorization: of the members of the local community that are seen as fundamental to any decision-making of importance, namely the dead. By questioning conventional understanding of the notion of politics we relate to recent analyses of how meetings between differing knowledges of the material world involve changes to people’s engagement with their physical surroundings (Fredriksen 2011, 2012, *forthcoming*). This challenges the way we think of and engage with material and immaterial heritage. Our approach thus involves primarily the two closely intertwined issues of *epistemic symmetry* and *inclusive ethics of recognition*. In so doing, we also relate to more recent critical approaches to heritage definitions, pointing out the modern regime’s tendency ‘to tidily organize our messy being into sealed and binary ontological compartments’ (Pétúrsdóttir 2013, 47). A version of such purified heritage categorization is the material/immaterial split. One particular outcome of this split for our case discussion is the categorization of ancestral beings, potentially along with certain related and relevant objects and locales, as being ontologically compartmentalized outside the realm of the real, and thus not partakers in the political dynamics around archaeological/heritage sites.

In our opinion, an inclusive epistemic framework is required, within which contrasting views and conflicts can be discussed without necessitating assumptions based on some standardized or universal values. This may be achieved through the adoption of a rooted or vernacular cosmopolitan philosophy (e.g. Bhabha 1996; Appiah 2006; Meskell 2009). Kwame Appiah’s cosmopolitanism combines two inter-related strands. One is the idea that we have obligations to those who are beyond the people who are close to us, like our kin or compatriots, and the second is taking interest in the lives, practices and beliefs of others (Appiah 2006, xv). Accordingly, a conversation between archaeologists and ‘the public’ about the values of ‘the past’ should go beyond a literal talk or consultation to become an engagement with experiences and ideas of that public (cf. Appiah 2006, 85). Rooted cosmopolitanism appears suitable in this context since it ‘emanates from, and pays heed to, local settings and practices’ and a heritage management philosophy that ‘will not always be preservationist in ethos, nor would it attempt to congeal people within some preserved ancient authenticity’ (Meskell 2009, 4).

However, as Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal (2009) cautions, certain versions of cosmopolitanism may be seen to have an elite-centred and self-satisfied streak. It may therefore be necessary to *occupy the space of the unsatisfied*, what Homi Bhabha (1996) terms vernacular cosmopolitanism. This is not simply to be in a dialogic relation with the localized (and their knowledge), it is to locate oneself at the border between categories, always and continually in-between. This is a perspective from below instead of a top-down or trickle-down approach, a view from which

worlds are in a constant state of becoming, and where hybrids are constantly formed. To us, Bhabha's border thinking, conceived in terms of interfaces or hybrid spaces where incoherencies and contradictions can be tolerated or held in tension, enables the view that scientific and local knowledges alike are truly hybrids; situated, localised or place-based knowledges. This is the recognition that traditional knowledges are no less subjected to hybridizing historical and contemporary conditions (Bhabha 1994; Shields 2006). As Bhabha writes, the idea of constant hybridity is 'a vision and a construction' that allows for difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (Bhabha 1994, 7).

Before relating such an epistemic levelling approach, and ensuing heritage ethics, to an example from Mozambique, key dynamics at work may be underscored by briefly relating it to examples from neighbouring countries. Notably, the Tanzanian case recently discussed by Stacey Langwick (2011) as an ontological politics of healing makes clear that a crucial aspect of the dynamics between knowledges is lost if the term politics is too narrowly defined, as in the conventional understanding of the give-and-take of an exclusively human club. This point is made on epistemic grounds by Bruno Latour (2004) in his critical rephrasing of cosmopolitanism into cosmo-politics. The presence of *cosmos* in cosmo-politics resists the tendency for politics to be a strictly human affair. Cosmos must embrace nonhumans (things, ancestral beings) as well as humans. And the presence of *politics* limits the number of relevant entities to take into account in any dynamics. Discussing a case from Pongola in northern South Africa, Per Ditlef Fredriksen (forthcoming) argues for the use of *necropolitics*. The term refers to forms of dynamics that include both humans and nonhumans, and focus attention on political agency as an aspect belonging to both sides of the divide between living and dead. Consultation with deceased community members is an inextricable part of everyday life in most parts of rural southern Africa. Importantly, ancestors are not abstract beings but real, present agents. Interestingly, this evokes the symmetrical treatise of nature, agency and causation by Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti (2004). Menkiti employs what he terms an expanded notion of material causation. The implication is that humans and nonhumans alike share the ability for action, belonging to the same undivided plane of material causation (see also Fredriksen 2011). Viewing necropolitics as a version of Menkiti's symmetrical expanded notion may inform our approach to engagements between differing knowledges in our Manica case.

Consequently, a core argument we make is that ancestral beings do *not* belong in an archival category of closed or static knowledges. Rather, they are active and omnipresent partakers in constantly hybrid heritage-in-the-making. In our opinion, this epistemic levelling or symmetry enables a heritage ethics where ancestral beings are re-categorized from being a 'knowledge archive' about the past which is there for potential intellectual mining to being real partakers in constantly ongoing necropolitics.

Public archaeology in southern Africa: an approach from Mozambique

The involvement of non-academics in the practice of uncovering, interpreting, presenting and preserving the past has been variously titled as 'applied', 'community' or 'public' archaeology (e.g. Marshall 2002; Byrne 2012). From its earlier concern with specific modes of practice, including that of cultural resource management and public outreach in the USA in the 1970s (McGimsey 1972), public archaeology has evolved to include multiple forms. Today it is widely

understood as a 'subject that examines the relationship between archaeology and the public, and then seeks to improve it through modes of practice' (Matsuda and Okamura 2011, 4). Such modes of practice include: cultural resource management or cultural heritage management (Smith 2004); outreach and education, involving presentation and interpretation of archaeological heritage (Morais 1984; Esterhuysen 2000); community archaeology (Marshall 2002, 2006; Damm 2005; Lane 2006); or archaeology that helps communities to solve societal problems (Little 2009).

Despite the growth of a range of strategies designed to facilitate and to ensure a meaningful involvement of different segments of 'the public' in the investigation, interpretation and preservation of 'the past' (Moshenska and Dhanjal 2001), public archaeology still faces a number of theoretical and methodological challenges. A conceptual problem is that meanings of the terms 'public' and archaeology vary in different parts of the world (see Matsuda and Okamura 2011) giving rise to difficulties in identifying who 'the public' in public archaeology actually are (Funari 2010; Pyburn 2011) or what is meant by 'public' in relation to archaeological practice and heritage (Skeates, Carman and McDavid 2012, 4; see also; Matsuda 2004; Merriman 2004). Here we use local communities to refer to interested local groups which are subsets of a larger, but similarly, interested public (Pyburn 2011, 30).⁴

Adding to this complexity is the fact that archaeologists and heritage managers are often unwilling to share power and instead continue to see different segments of 'the public' only as passive agents (Chirikure and Pwiti 2008, 474), or entities that simply need to be informed and enlightened about what archaeology really is (Holtorf 2006, 132) and about the values of 'the past'. In this light, public archaeology is often seen as comprising a series of goals and activities (e.g. consultation, public outreach, training) additional to the task of undertaking a conventional archaeological project and not as a different approach to the production of knowledge and heritage conservation through meaningful public engagement (Green, Green, and Neves 2003, 369). Often, involving the public is seen as the politically correct thing to do rather than an epistemological move to accept the public as full partner in exploring the past and making it relevant to the present (Nicholas 2000). As a result, when the scientific mode of inquiry intercepts indigenous and local knowledge systems the latter may be ignored or not fully recognized due to the prevailing heritage ideology or the dominant archaeological paradigm.

Though the term 'public archaeology' has been explicitly used in the literature concerning African archaeology only since the 1990s (e.g. Hall 1996; Segobye 2005a; Kusimba and Klehm 2013), elements of public archaeology have been a part of archaeological practice in southern Africa since the late 1970s. An early example from our primary study area is the project at the Zimbabwe-type site of Manyikeni in southern Mozambique (Morais and Sinclair 1980). More than 400 local community members participated in fieldwork, daily lectures and site tours. To ensure that knowledge obtained from the archaeology was recycled back into the community, thereby making archaeological heritage more accessible, an interpretative centre with seven on-site education points was established in 1979 and a local guide trained (Morais 1984, 121; Sinclair 1987, 99).

As in many cases worldwide, much of the debate concerning public archaeology in southern Africa has centred on issues relating to power imbalances between archaeologists/heritage practitioners and local communities, and the consequences of these (Robertshaw 1990; Smith 2004; Nicholas and Hollowell 2007; Chirikure and Pwiti 2008). Key concerns include: public or community involvement in archaeology, including engagement with archaeological sites (e.g.

Pwiti and Mvenge 1996; Pwiti et al. 2007; Chirikure et al. 2010; Pikirayi 2011); legacies of colonialism in conservation and heritage management (e.g. Pwiti and Ndoro 1999; Ndoro and Pwiti 2001); challenges related to the decolonizing of archaeological practice (Schmidt 2009; Lane 2011); heritage sociopolitics and ethics (e.g. Hall 1994, 2005; Shepherd 2007; Meskell 2005b; Meskell and Masuku Van Damme 2007; Chirikure 2014); archaeology education (e.g. Kiyaga-Mulindwa and Segobye 1994; Pwiti 1994; Esterhuysen 2000); archaeology and museum display (e.g. Mazel and Ritchie 1994; Lane 1996; Ouzman 2006); and the more general role of archaeology in society (e.g. Segobye 2005b; Pikirayi 2009; Mazel 2014).

Archaeologists for a long time ignored the fact that in southern Africa, as in many parts of the world, specific places or entire landscapes have spiritual significance and people have acted as custodians of the spiritual, biological and other values of such places, ensuring their appropriate use and survival (Carmichael et al. 1994; Pwiti 1996; Wild and McLeod 2008). All these protective indigenous and local systems are designated traditional custodianship systems and are defined as 'all mechanisms and actions guided by customs and belief systems, carried out by local communities, aiming for the continuous use of the place including the preservation of its symbolic and cosmological significance' (Jopela 2011, 107). Consequently, we find the term 'traditional custodianship' better suited than 'traditional management', as living communities' engagement with such places is not always conservationist in ethos. In fact, traditional custodianship systems may not always conform to modern Western notions of conservation and management of heritage places.

This form of engagement by local communities with archaeological sites is seen, for example, at the Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe (Ranger 1999; Nyathi and Ndiwini 2005), Tsodilo Hills, Botswana (Thebe 2006) and Kondoa-Irangi, Tanzania (Loubser 2006; Bwasiri 2011). Despite this reality, archaeologists have favoured the use of modern or state-based management systems informed by Western ideologies to oversee such sites. These are systems that were introduced throughout Africa as part of the colonial experience (Pwiti and Ndoro 1999), and until very recently they did not recognize the importance of traditional ways of protecting heritage places. State-based systems are generally founded on heritage legislation, enforced through the formal legal process and administrative frameworks established by governments, and they are generally premised on a philosophical orientation informed solely by Western science, with regard to the management of immovable heritage (Mumma 2003, 2005). As Laurajane Smith (2004, 9) points out, the management of cultural heritage is currently broadly conceived as the processes, informed by public policy and heritage legislation, that manage and protect indigenous and local communities' cultural and natural heritage and, in so doing, construct and define relations among heritage professionals, indigenous interests and governments.

Two Mozambican responses to the mutuality challenge

Due to increasing conflicts with local communities over the perception of heritage, since the 1990s archaeologists have shifted the heritage management paradigm from the 'monumentalist approach' to a holistic conservation approach that recognizes the need to build a more locally attuned heritage management framework (see Pwiti 1996; Deacon 1997; Ndoro 2001). Despite this, the role of indigenous and local knowledge holders in archaeological knowledge production and practices of heritage conservation remains limited (see Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Lane

2011). For instance, Paul Sinclair has acknowledged, in retrospect, that his collaborative approach at the Mozambican sites of Manyikeni and Chibuene in 1976–86 had limited impact in terms of cognitive insight to his own research, and that this was mostly due to the limitations of his epistemological frames of reference to engage with a different knowledge system. Thus, for Sinclair:

A challenge now facing us is how to incorporate these cultural differences into well grounded research, and heritage management programmes at both the local, national, regional and global scales with room for different actors to express their historical and cultural values while governed by mutually accepted principles to maintain communication.

(Sinclair 2004, 178)

Some projects in Mozambique have tried to embrace this challenge. For instance, Anneli Ekblom analysed the dynamics of environmental change at the coastal site of Chibuene from AD 400 to the present and offered a different viewpoint on environmental degradation, ‘not only as the disappearing of forests, or failure of crops due to droughts, but also as the erosion of local power, war and social unrest’ (Ekblom 2004, i). Tore Sættersdal focused on rock art and archaeological sites as well as the ethnography of the present people of Manica, to understand continuity and change in the social practice of rain-making (Sættersdal 2004). This research provided the foundation for a three-year public archaeology project which aimed at building competence within archaeological research and cultural heritage management in Mozambique (see Macamo and Sættersdal 2004).⁵ The difficulties of balancing respect for the present use of an archaeological site with doing research is commonly acknowledged (see Macamo and Sættersdal 2004; Sættersdal 2010) and within this nexus of concerns Albino Jopela started a research project to investigate whether intimate understanding of the existing traditional custodianship system of heritage places could provide direction towards a more effective and sustainable method of managing rock-art sites imbued with sacred values in central Mozambique and other areas in southern Africa (Jopela 2006, 2010a, 2010b).

Traditional custodianship of the Vumba Cultural Landscape

Key aspects of our outlook may be exemplified by the case of the Vumba Cultural Landscape (VCL) in the Manica province in Mozambique (Fig. 1). The sacred hill of Chinhamapere containing well-preserved hunter-gatherer painted sites (Figs 2 and 3) is a prominent landscape feature. The current Shona-speaking inhabitants are relative late-comers to the area and have no ancestral relationship or shared culture with previous Later Stone Age (LSA) hunter-gatherer groups (Sættersdal 2004, 2010; Nhamo, Sættersdal, and Walderhaug 2007). However, the present communities are well aware of the rock art and use the sites for ceremonies.

Traditional custodianship systems may be understood as cumulative bodies of knowledge, practice and belief about the relationship of living beings with one another and with their environment that are generated, preserved and transmitted in a traditional and intergenerational context (Jopela 2011; see also Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000).⁶ In these systems, customary rules enforced by traditional custodians govern the use of resources (Mumma 2003). The systems are firmly anchored in the intangible heritage (values, norms and world views) of

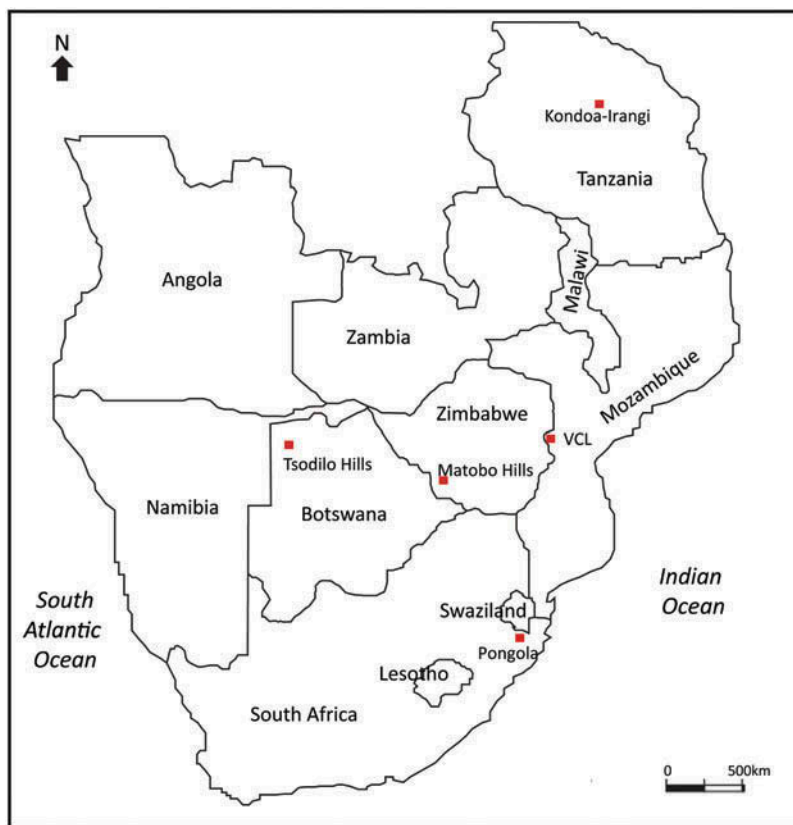


Figure 1 Map showing the VCL in relation to other sites in Southern Africa mentioned in the text.



Figure 2 Chinhamapere Hill (image courtesy: Tore Sætersdal).



Figure 3 Chinhamapere I rock-art panel showing humans, animals and anthropomorphic figures.

communities and largely informed by local cosmologies (Munjeri 2002). On this basis, the discussion of traditional custodianship systems at the VCL focuses on three key aspects: the necropolitics of Shona-speaking communities, the use of rock art sites and the role of the traditional authority in the management of heritage resources.

The social and political frameworks of Shona-speaking communities in Manica provide appropriate environmental ethics (e.g. humans are part of constantly ongoing interaction and politics in the landscape) and cultural values (e.g. respect for humans, environment and, above all, for the ancestral spirits) that enhance and promote the conservation of those resources that they value (Jopela 2010b). In a cultural sense, land belongs to the spirit guardian of the chiefdom (*mhondoro*), while living chiefs (e.g. paramount chief [*Mambo*] or village headmen [*Sabhuku*]) are its living custodians. While it is the chief's duty to enforce the laws, the *mhondoro* may exert general punishment, by causing drought or some other catastrophe (Murimbika 2006; Sætersdal 2010). Thus, ceremonies are held at sacred places (e.g. trees, boulders and rock shelters, hilltops or graves of former chiefs or spirit mediums) to honour ancestral spirits for good controlled rain, to bless the seeds and to give thanks for the harvest (see Bucher 1980; Sætersdal 2004). Rain control is a social act: aside from procuring rain, the ceremonies ensure that people adhere to society's rules (Schoeman 2007, 77). According to Pwiti et al. (2007), the religious significance of some archaeological sites suggests that communities in these landscapes continually draw on past material cultures to negotiate and reconstruct present identities and world-views. In other words, through everyday necropolitics, this is the local, contextualized version of 'archaeology'.

These necropolitics oblige communities to abide by customs of access to sacred places. For instance, Chinhamapere hill is a place of kings or a place of the spirits. Access to the hill is controlled by tales of large, black, spirit snakes that dwell under the huge boulders and rocks on top of the hill. These snakes are believed to attack anyone who ascends the mountain without prior ancestral authorization, as mediated through traditional custodians. Authorization may be

obtained through a ceremony by the spirit medium/traditional site custodian (Sætersdal 2010, 256). Similarly, in a subsistence-based economy characterized by small family-farmed fields (*machambas*), rain control rituals (*kudhira nvhura*) are part of the necropolitics. Within this framework Chinhamapere is used in a phase of the rain control ritual, as depicted in the opening documentary scene (Fig. 4). Practices related to the agricultural cycle constitute a mechanism that reinforces and transmits ethical values related to the conservation of resources, such as respect for sacred places, aside from maintaining the social order (Macamo and Sætersdal 2004; Jopela 2010b). This wider framework of beliefs that define the codes, roles, obligations and behavioural patterns of communities towards the landscape and its resources sustain the use and management of resources within the VCL.

Leaders, both alive and dead, play a key role in ensuring that use of resources is governed by both state and customary rules. Traditional chiefs⁷ have for a long time been drawn into re-defining and re-constituting their authority in relation to wider polities (e.g. pre-colonial [1600s–1890s] re-organization of the Shona-Karanga *mambos* in present-day Manica). For this reason,

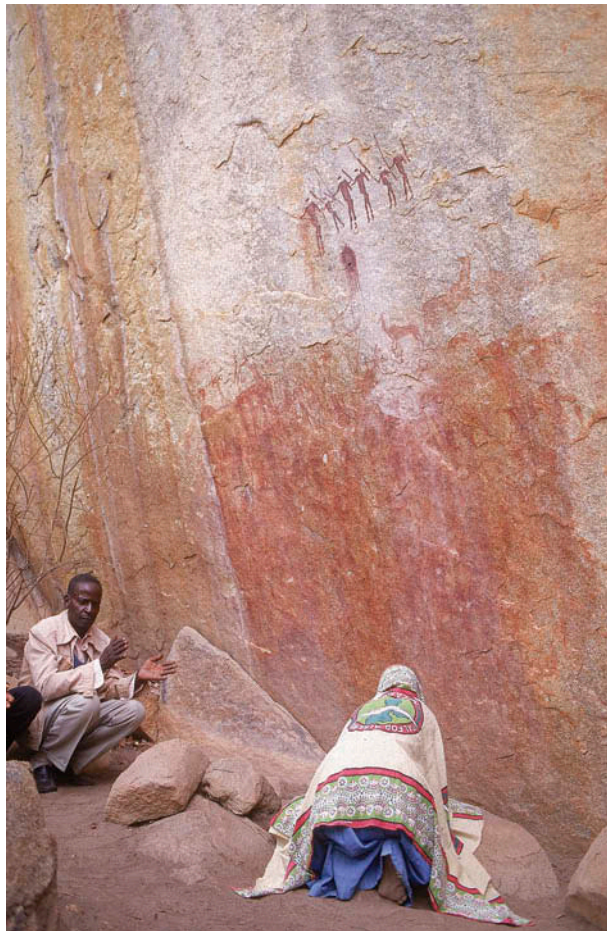


Figure 4 Traditional custodian approaching the ancestors at Chinhamapere I rock-art site (image courtesy: SARADA).

colonialism (1891–1975) only partially invented and encapsulated traditional chiefs. The post-colonial state (1975–92) ban of *mambos* was less than total, and the post-war (1992–2000) reinstatement of *mambos* less traditional than was claimed (Buur and Kyed 2007). This historical process has led to a form of neo-traditionalism in which the *mambo* and other traditional leaders are no longer simply traditional authorities, but also modern ones (Kyed 2007, 14). Thus present-day traditional authority is defined as a ‘hybrid authority’ straddling two radically different worlds: (1) bureaucratic positions, national political and economic networks and European dress from ‘the modern world’; and (2) dispute settlement, allocation of land, elimination of witches and performance of rituals to sustain the local cosmological order from the ‘traditional world’ (Kyed 2007, 12–13).

The influence of traditional chiefs and institutions may vary, but traditional chiefs are commonly equated with authority, legitimized by traditional customs, and their strong influence is widely recognized (Artur and Weimer 1998; Buur and Kyed 2006). For instance, although land in rural Mozambique has been under state ownership since independence in 1975, it is governed by a traditional system based on lineage and headed by traditional chiefs. In essence, the traditional leaders exercise *de facto* ownership over the land (Serra 2001, 5). The traditional authority (formally designated community authorities [*Autoridade Comunitárias*] since the year 2000) in Manica comprised: (1) individuals holding traditional political power such as the supreme chief (*Mambo*), the head of a group of villages (*Sabhuko*) and the head of a village (*Samuthanda*); (2) individuals who hold spiritual power such as spiritual mediums (*svikiro*), traditional healers or those in charge of officiating traditional ceremonies and worship; (3) individuals who work with mechanisms of social control (and enjoy social prestige) and, to some extent, control the transmission of cultural values such as elders and members of the commentary court (Jopela 2006, 45).

The local traditional authority in Manica controls and effectively manages Chinhamapere and related sacred places for the communities. The political-traditional structures are responsible for monitoring activities and behaviour at sacred sites and for making sure that locals abide by the rules. Currently the local traditional custodian (the daughter of the late Ms Mbuya Gondo, a renowned spirit medium and traditional healer) is responsible for conducting traditional ceremonies around Chinhamapere hill. Individuals and groups are not allowed to visit the area without the official custodian or her appointee. This ensures strict adherence to local norms. The spirit medium has also contributed to the maintenance of the sacred forest by sensitizing the community to the deforestation of the hill.

Traditional custodianships and public archaeology: towards an inclusive framework

A traditional custodianship system revolves around places of cultural significance in which ancestral spirits dwell and not necessarily around archaeological sites. In fact, rock-art sites in Manica are not considered sacred *per se* (they do not embody ancestral spirits) but serve as spiritual abodes. Often, protective norms do not focus on the rock art but rather on the broader landscape in which ancestral spirits dwell (e.g. sacred forest or hill) (Jopela 2011). Therefore, the protection ethic towards sacred places at the VCL has only an indirect conservation benefit for rock-art sites (see Jopela 2010b). The question is: if traditional custodianship systems do not

aim at conserving rock art *per se*, can archaeologists and heritage practitioners use this ‘indirect conservation effect’ to manage rock-art sites today?

Before attempting to integrate traditional custodianship systems within more formal approaches to conservation, practitioners must be aware of the fact that some of the traditional uses of rock-art sites, such as the throwing of animal fat and millet beer over the rock-art panel at Mungumi wa Kolo rock art in the Kondoa-Irangi area, central Tanzania (see Chalcraft 2008; Bwasiri 2011), may not be in accordance with dominant Western conservation philosophy. In fact, since traditional custodian systems do not focus on the rock art itself, the practices at places like Chinhamapere may evolve from a situation of non-contact to touching the rock imagery during traditional use of the place. For most archaeologists, touching rock art or the spattering of millet beer during rituals threatens the physical integrity of the site. Paradoxically, it is this apparent destructive ritual that provides the context in which the intangible values associated with the sites exist and are maintained. This example clearly illustrates that, since the motivations under which traditional custodianship systems operate may sometimes differ radically from those of contemporary conservation, compatibility between the two management systems might be difficult to attain.

Conversely it is also true that from the communities’ point of view, the objective of traditional custodianship systems is to ensure continuous use of resources, while safeguarding the sites and its associated values. This view is consonant with the current accepted values-based management approach (see Lennon 2002; Sullivan 2003), wherein ‘conservation of heritage sites comprises all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance’ (Burra Charter 1999, 2). Seen from this perspective, traditional custodianship may offer sustainability in terms of conservation and protection of the values that make rock art sites significant to present-day communities (Jopela 2011). Thus for some scholars the challenge facing archaeologists and heritage practitioners is to build a ‘hybrid’ heritage management framework that can make use of the benefits of traditional custodianship systems without forgoing the benefits of the state-base management framework. In this vein, Pascall Taruvinga has suggested that the best approach is through the adoption of a participatory management system, defined as a ‘situation in which two or more social actors concerned about a heritage site negotiate, define and guarantee among themselves a fair sharing of its management functions, entitlements and responsibilities’ (Taruvinga 2007, 41). According to Smith (2006, 329), this framework can be implemented through a partnership between community members and heritage professionals. The community brings knowledge of the significance and meaning of the site and a wealth of experience as to how the site was protected in the past. The heritage professionals bring broad experience of practices that have worked effectively elsewhere and complex scientific skills that may also help conserving aspects or parts of the site’s heritage that may not be recognized by the local community.

Although the idea of having a participatory management system is in theory undisputed, the implementation and operationalization of such integrated systems is often constrained by what is considered to be meaningless community involvement in heritage management (Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Chirikure et al. 2010; Waterton and Smith 2010). A major criticism is that stakeholder involvement on its own does not overcome the power imbalances among interested parties. In this regard, Smith (2004) has demonstrated that, despite the incorporation of local communities’ knowledge and experiences through consultation, the actual heritage practices remain subject to a formal heritage approach in terms of interpretation and regulation. Within

African archaeology the call for a hybrid approach in archaeological knowledge production through an epistemological and methodological incorporation of ‘African knowledge systems’ into ‘Western archaeological science’ was made in the 1990s, in order to make archaeology more relevant to contemporary African societies (e.g. Andah 1995; Schmidt 1995). However, to this date, there is little evidence that indigenous conceptions have been incorporated into archaeological interpretations or that archaeological reasoning has been shaped by them (Lane 2011).

Thus, the idea that somehow a state-based institution can co-opt traditional custodianship systems without freezing or disrupting the dynamism of cultural process concerned with the negotiation and arbitration of cultural change (Smith 2011, 10) may seem over-optimistic or naive at best. We believe that traditional custodianship systems are unlikely to be integrated into state-based systems without making epistemologically informed changes to the social relationships and conservation mechanisms of traditional systems (see Sheridan 2008). Thus, it is crucial to question not only how to incorporate traditional custodianship systems into state-based management systems but also how to re-orientate heritage management in Africa, practically *and* theoretically, through engaging with the social institutions that underpin indigenous and local knowledge systems.

Returning to the question of what to do when our conception of an archaeological place does not coincide with the concept held by the local community, we emphasize that our perspective of constant hybridity aims at epistemic levelling. On this basis, it is argued that the way forward is *not* to advocate the integration of ‘indigenous and local systems’ into hegemonic frameworks and to call this hybrid heritage management systems. Such superficial ‘hybrid’ systems may help to mask cultural and social difference as well as inequality and power asymmetry (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998). Given their different contexts, roles and historical relationships in colonial and post-independence periods, today the two system types are accorded different status and play different roles in heritage management. In many places traditional systems remain informal in terms of the legal heritage framework and operational at only a low level within a state-based management system (see Jopela 2011). Instead, the notion of hybrids should be constantly working on a deeper, epistemic level. We argue that thinking of hybridity as an *outlook*, and not necessarily as an *outcome*, enables a bottom-up approach which takes micro-scale political dynamics into serious consideration while also offering a context-sensitive way to include knowledges about intimate human/nonhuman relations into these dynamics of heritage-in-the-making.

Hence, meaningful engagements by archaeologists should transcend purely technical aspects and focus on attitudinal ethics and calls for political willingness in considering often-competing local conceptions of the past. Ethics are conceived as core values (Meskell 2007) and not simply as the rules or guidelines to be followed (Lane 2014). Always embedded, contextualized and continually reconstructed through practice (Meskell and Pels 2005) and dialogue (see Hodder 2011) between archaeologist and other custodians of the African past, ‘the public’. Thus, our suggestion of an epistemic levelling and ensuing heritage ethics may be seen as a form of a broader ‘political ethics’ which ‘not only acknowledges the power dynamics, asymmetries and inequalities both within archaeology and in the broader world, but also takes a political stance in today’s battlegrounds and conflicts’ (Hamilakis 2007, 31). Therefore, as pointed out by philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, if academics are to engage with different segments of the ‘public’ they must expect to have moral disagreements since these normally occur within

societies (cf. Appiah 2006, 46). However, conversations do not have to lead to agreements, as it is possible to agree about what to do even when not agreeing on the rationale behind it. Such a world-view not only enriches by acknowledging difference, but also offers legitimacy to that difference (Appiah 2007).

Challenges to future research

A concluding question emerges from our proposal: are we, the archaeologists/custodians of the African past, prepared to fill the gap between the present ‘policy statements’ and ‘ethics guidelines’ (e.g. that call for the involvement of the ‘public’) and their actual implementation and to give away part of our control over ‘the past’ to the ‘public’ we serve?

This inquiry draws attention to a set of challenges that need to be addressed in future heritage research in Mozambique. We wish to make some concluding remarks on two specific challenges, both relating to ways of understanding *power*, *access to place* and *agency*. One is how we may further refine the definition of ‘the public’ in our particular context of analysis. For example, ‘the public’ can mean so much more than ‘the local communities’, and future research needs to address the fact that the public may well include city dwellers who want to access rural sites, such as in the VCL, without having to appeal to local power hierarchies. And, equally important, ‘the local communities’ can (and frequently do) include newcomers who cannot claim access through ancestry. A second challenge that relates local power asymmetry to the question of agency of ancestors is the role played by the living mediator or interpreter of this agency. We need to identify new and alternative ways to negotiate the fact that the dominant traditional custodians are representatives of particular lineages whose power and ownership of place will be entrenched through the traditional custodianship system, potentially at the cost of access for other members of the public.

While underscoring the importance of getting to grips with these and similar issues, we contend that the epistemic and ethical outlook presented here may potentially aid in providing a first step for archaeologists and heritage practitioners to fully recognize the different values, interests and concerns of various stakeholders, thereby allowing the whole society to assume important roles and responsibilities in the interpretation and preservation of ‘the past’. This may also help to minimize the boundary that separates the idea of Western-oriented state-based heritage management from the community’s values, needs and aspirations and also to remove the assumption that the analysis and interpretation of heritage can only be done by ‘heritage experts’ (Smith 2006, 12), who usually have the last word about the nature and meaning of heritage.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Notes

- 1 Gibling continues: ‘Essentially, archaeologists, as members of a self-constructed and self-regulating institutional body of experts, appropriate the pasts of “others” and in the name of science, conservation, and education restrict access to those pasts to comparable authorized experts. Thus the post-colonial critique has identified a structural and epistemological decolonial challenge that concerns all forms of knowledge production, including archaeology’ (Gibling 2012, 126).
- 2 This latter intangible heritage discourse has in recent years been increasingly criticized for reducing tangible, material things to epiphenomena of intangible social processes (e.g. Pétursdóttir 2013).
- 3 A conventional definition of the term ‘indigenous and local knowledge’ is as ‘specific systems of knowledge and practice, developed and accumulated over generations within a particular cultural group and region, and [which] as such are unique to that group and region’ (Mwaura 2008, 22).
- 4 To us, communities are complex and heterogeneous, with fluid boundaries and membership, often consisting of groups within groups, with competing and overlapping factions, and with members who have diverse perspectives, needs and expectations. Furthermore, archaeological projects often involve multiple ‘stakeholder’ communities (Atalay 2010, 421). Similarly, the term ‘public’ can be broken down into multiple audiences with differing interests and expectations (Pyburn 2011, 36).
- 5 This NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) funded project established a platform for research in central Mozambique’s Manica and Tete provinces, and included a

management plan for the Chinhamapere rock art site which incorporated contemporary, local community usages. To answer local concerns about the documentation of traditions, the project also produced two documentary films in the local Shona dialect, *Chi-Manyika*. One, entitled *Making Rain* (2007), explained the current use of the rock-art sites. The other, entitled *If Vagina Had Teeth: the Shona Rainmaking Ceremony in Western Mozambique* (2009), documented people's current relationship with the sacred landscapes. The project included the creation of a local museum (see Bang and Sætersdal 2012), which functions as community cultural centre, library and exhibition gallery.

- 6 The term is thus similar in several respects to 'traditional ecological knowledge' (see Berkes 1999).
- 7 We use the term traditional chiefs to refer to a form of leadership in which authority derives from tradition or custom.

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