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Negotiations of heritage in and around locally protected forests in Inhambane province, southern Mozambique

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, I explore negotiations of heritage in heritage forests from three case studies in southern Mozambique using oral history, field walking, video documentation and conversations. I argue that at local level there are processes of negotiation, authorisation, and legitimacy of heritage in forests. Such local forms of heritage negotiation and heritage discourse are authoritative and need to be recognised in both the planning of heritage conservation, and also in nature conservation. This recognition can strengthen local custodians to safeguard forest patches as locally protected areas, and opening room for heritage practitioners to be engaged by local people in the process of cultural heritage management.

Introduction
The recognition of culturally protected landscapes and intangible heritage have given way to more inclusive heritage management, and a stronger focus on local processes of heritage making (Cocks, Vetter, and Wiersum 2018; Crooke 2010; Hill et al. 2011; Waterton and Smith 2010). However, there are still many challenges in formally recognising locally protected areas and associated heritage places (Brumann and Gfeller 2022; Ginzarly, Farah, and Teller 2019; Karlström 2013; Quang 2022). For instance, there are a large number of forests safeguarded by local and Indigenous communities which are not recognised as heritage (Taylor and Lennon 2011).

The biological and ecological function of locally protected forests, as hotspots for biodiversity conservation, have been discussed by several authors (e.g. Bhagwat and Rutte 2006; Ruelle, Kassam, and Asfaw 2018; Wilson and Primack 2019). However, there is still a lack of studies which explore the heritage practices linked to these forests, the type of heritage discourse and the negotiation of heritage in and around such areas.

Mozambique has a large number of such forests, though they are not formally protected through heritage or nature protection laws (see Cruz 2014; Gota 2023; Izidine et al. 2008; Virtanen 2002). Already a century ago, in Mozambique, the ethnographer Junod (1913) described locally protected forests. Typically, these forests are places where local chiefs had been buried and which now are used for ceremonies. Few of them have been documented or formally counted as heritage sites. Gota (2023) documented in the Inhambane Province more than fifty locally protected heritage sites of which twenty-four were forests.

Though these heritage forests have been preserved for decades (Gota 2023), illegal and licences logging is now a threat to their existence (see German and Wertz-Kanounnikoff 2012; German et al. 2011). For these heritage forests to be properly protected as both local cultural heritage sites and...
hotspots for biodiversity conservation, there is an urgent need to understand how customary protection is motivated and justified locally, including the heritage practices linked to the forests and the local discourse.

Here, I will delve into the local discourse on heritage as tied to the forest patches and heritage practices within them. The local heritage discourse in and around the forests is typically linked to a particular family lineage, that of the chief or former chiefs (loosely referred to as ‘ancestors’). The traditional chiefs monitor customary resources and land rights through heritage practices, in this case, mediated through the forests. The memories, norms of protection and heritage practices are upheld by the traditional chiefs. This paper argues that there is a strong degree of local authorisation of chiefs which contributes to uphold the rules against the use of forest resources or the cutting of trees. In addition, I suggest that heritage practices carried out inside the forests are aimed at maintaining a sense of common identity and history which reinforces village and community identity.

**Background**

Heritage is seen as a process and negotiation where different narratives of the past are contextualised in the present and through heritage practices and storytelling (Bendix 2009; Smith 2006, 2015; Wu and Hou 2015). Though there is a tendency to objectify the narratives about heritage to claim legitimacy over a particular past, the very character of heritage opens ground for continuous negotiations of which narratives should be legitimised and its material dimensions (Smith 2012, 2015; Yim 2022). Conventionally, the memories and narratives of community members and local heritage practices tend to become excluded in favour of a nationalist or western discourse (Gentry and Smith 2019; Harrison 2013, 2018; Smith 2006; Waterton and Smith 2010).

This corpus of dominant narratives, practices and processes of heritage making, and ways of representing a particular past and values that focus and favour a nationalist or western perceptions, ideas and approaches to cultural heritage management is termed Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006). Due to low funding and lack of staff, heritage management in rural areas is weak in Mozambique and heritage places are mostly taken care of by community members (Ekblom, Notelid, and Witter 2017; Jopela and Fredriksen 2015). In places where formal heritage management systems are present, narratives and interpretations tend to be embedded in a nationalist discourse (Jopela 2017). However, it needs to be recognised that such processes of exclusion and authorisation occur also at a local level (Chhatre, Lakanpal, and Prasanna 2017; Cocks, Vetter, and Wiersum 2018; Lwoga 2018). As elsewhere, heritage is used to make and remake collective identity (Hill et al. 2011; Moylan, Brown, and Kelly 2009). Thus, Smith’s (2006) notion of Authorised Heritage Discourse is my point of depart to conceptualise Local Authorised Heritage Discourse as a set of heritage narratives and practices that being embedded in the negotiation processes of a particular past and ancestry lineage history connected or related to a specific chief become dominant, legitimised and enacted at local level to represent ‘community identity’ and ‘sense of community cohesion’.

In Mozambique, this intricate process of inclusion and exclusion lies at the core of ‘community cohesion’. These negotiations are intimately connected and tied to the physical landscape, in this case, the forests which are linked to the founding families of a village. Customary laws and ceremonies are connected to the ancestry lineage history and material evidence (e.g. the forests themselves and burial grounds or old settlement traces) covering several generations, are part of heritage making, which are staged and reconfirmed by the traditional leader (also referred as chief) through heritage practices such as ceremonies.

Inhambane Province has experienced considerable migrations and movements since the seventeenth century, which has led to intense re-negotiations of ethnicity and identity, among these were movements of Tsonga speaking peoples from the south in the seventeen hundreds, and the expansion of the Nguni speaking armies with other followers in the nineteenth century (G. Liesegang 1970; G. J. Liesegang 2014; Newitt 1995; Theal 1910). After the independence from
Portugal in 1975, the Mozambican government took a campaign of creating ‘new man’ and ‘Mozambican identity’ that was aiming to dissolve all local features and practices related to local identity, including ceremonies to the ancestors, the invoking of rain and allied local heritage practices (cf. Bussotti and Nhauleleque 2022; Cabaço 2007; Macagno 2009). In the past, a village used to be dispersed in smaller homesteads but aggregated under a paramount chief. However, villagisation programmes and the Civil War (1976–1992) caused villages to become more centralised (Alexander 1997; Coelho 1998; Lorgen 2000). Formally, homesteads are organised in village communities (which is how community is defined here).

In southern Mozambique most of the chieftaincies are patrilineal and among the many duties of the traditional leaders is to make ceremonies for the benefit of the community (Feliciano 1989). The ancestral link between the village founder and the traditional leader is fundamental here, and the traditional leaders are in this sense the experts and guardians of local heritage. The traditional leaders maintain authority over customary law, land and use of resources. Villages also have village leaders (also referred as community leader) elected through ballots; the ballot system was made mandatory by a 2000 governmental policy (Decree n.15 of 20 June 2000) as a result of Mozambique’s decentralisation process of the nation-state administration (Buur and Kyed 2005; Igreja 2013). In some cases, the traditional leader is also the elected village leader.

**Method**

This study focuses on the forests of Chitanga, Luido, and Mapoka all located in Inhambane province, southern Mozambique (Figure 1). Before making visits to the communities the project
was presented at the national, provincial and district governmental institutions dealing with cultural heritage and acquired appropriate licences. These forests were visited nine times between 2021 and 2023, and focused in informants who are identified locally as the experts of heritage (Annex). In the first visit the overall project was presented to communities, and permission to carry out the project was granted.

Theoretically, the study builds on the idea that narratives and heritage practices are used to build a sense of communal identity (Yuval-Davis 2010). Here, identity and heritage are connected, and represent the human need for recognition and to have a sense of belonging anchored to values individually or and collectively placed into materials and narratives making cultural heritage (Bauman 1992; Smith and Waterton 2009). In this context, values are core element to the process of selecting the materials, pasts and narratives ought to represent individual and collective identities (Graham and Howard 2008) and community members actively reshape identities through heritage practices (Deschamps 1982; Turner 1982). Methodologically, oral history approaches were applied in this study, and as other narrative forms of history telling, oral history is always a social negotiation (Abrams 2016; Tonkin 1992). Therefore, collecting oral histories required a great deal of sensitivity and trust building (Boschma, Yonge, and Mychaljuk 2003; Mukungu 2017).

Data collection consisted of interviews (stricto sensu conversations) around themed questions. Conversations included questions about mobility and settlement patterns, customary laws, names of buried chiefs and family lineages, names of the chiefs’ wife, use of forest’s resources, practices in heritage forests (when, whom, how, what is being said in the performance moment), funeral procedures of chiefs, and the selection process of the current chiefs. I recorded the conversations through a voice recorder and took notes implying schematic representations. I did the same procedure with video content from walks in the forests. These procedures allowed approaching the forests phenomenologically (Pink 2007; Springgay and Truman 2017; Tilley 1994, 2006).

In each community and revisit, a week was spent asking these questions in different moments while mapping heritage forests, drawing local participatory maps, collecting lake sediments, and allied data to understand the conservation context of these forests. Leaders and chiefs were more open to explain deep narratives on their role and the importance of these forests in each visit I made to the communities. I considered this as new layers of understanding the complexities of managing these forests and the authoritative discourse surrounding their existence. Speaking the local language (Citshwa), to read back oral testimonies and to share collected material such as historical maps, copies of photos and videos facilitated the process of data collection. All the chiefs and elders gave recorded consent and wanted to be quoted with their full names.

Data from the recorder were later listened, translated from Citshwa to English and stored in cloud and hard disk. Data analysis consisted in filtering, categorising and summarising conversations into themes related to thematic questions. Considering the paper length, I only focus on presenting results connected to the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse and the existence of heritage forests. By confirming or challenging accepted norms about the forests or narratives around them, community members may also challenge the authority of the traditional leaders. However, since I have restricted the interviews to the traditional leaders and elders, I have not really captured this side of the negotiation of heritage.

Results

Chitanga

The Chitanga area has four heritage forests with a size ranging from 1 ha to 4.632 ha and several ceremonial places all burial grounds (Figure 1, map e), and the main forest with the same name is discussed here. The forest is 6 ha in size and located 7 km southwest of the Chitanga village. The village was centralised during the civil war. Prior to this centralisation, homesteads were in and around the forests, individuals with customary rights maintain fields and pasture land in proximity
to the forests. The cutting of trees is forbidden in customary law. Hunting and use of resources, as picking of firewood, is also forbidden in this area because the forest is the dwelling and burial of the village founder, Chitanga. However, the current chief struggles to monitor the compliance to these prohibitions and while walking through the forest instances of single-tree selection cutting could be noticed. Chitanga hosts a relict riverine system with seasonal lakes, the largest being Chibue Lake (0.5 ha). This and other smaller lakes flood during rainy season to form a larger wetland of c. 8 ha. This lake is also locally protected and fields are not allowed in its vicinities.

The existence of the heritage forests are related to past settlement patterns and presence of water sources. The past chiefs, based on the oral history, can be traced back to six generations, had their homesteads and fields here. After the death of the village’s founder, the area became forest, and it is since used as heritage place. As the chief died and was buried in the homestead, the place became protected through customary rules. The current chief of Chitanga is Arnaldo Massinguile (73 years old), and is assisted by his cousin Alexandre Massinguile (69 years old). The elected community leader is also of the Massinguile family, Amiado Massinguile (57 years old), is the nephew of both Arnaldo and Alexandre.

The Chitanga family stems from the Massinguile family who is said to stem from the Nguni speakers who expanded in the region in the early nineteenth century. Chitanga was a son of chief Massinguile sent to govern this area. The village and the main forest are named after Chitanga. Other heritage forests are named after Chitanga’s children. The knowledge and narratives about the Chitanga forest are curated by the elders of the Chitanga family. Chitanga and other chiefs stem from the same ancestor NgangandzelaRibyeni. However, as related by Arnaldo Massinguile and Alexandre Massinguile, the Chitanga elders recognise that they were not the first to govern this landscape. Prior to the Massinguile’s, the area was ruled by a Tsonga speaking chiefly family. ‘Tsonga’ in this case designates an earlier chiefdom, the name of which is forgotten in local tradition.

Overall, the Massinge lineage has a shared authority within the family. The community leader Amiado Massinguile, democratically elected, acts in a political role on behalf of government-district authorities. The traditional leader or chief, Arnaldo Massinguile, has the authority and responsibility to carry out all functions connected to customary law and community services such as invoking rain through ceremonies, and in allocation of land for farming and pasture, including settling in conflicts over customary rights. The traditional leader also issues fines for transgression of taboos in relation to the forests. The material evidence in the landscape, ranging from ceremonial places, burial and the heritage forests connected with their names, all contribute to reconfirm and legitimate the authority of the chief.

Heritage practices such as ceremonies for invoking rain are carried out in the burial of Chitanga or one of the Chitanga descendants. As related by Alexandre Massinguile, 1984 was the last time a ceremony of invoking rain was held in the Chitanga forest. This ceremony is only carried out when there are droughts. A typical burial ground in the forests consists in a small house or simply poles demarking a house foundation. The house symbolises the dwelling of the ancestor, and in the middle, there is often a small ceramic pot, a bottle and a collection of ‘old’ things either collected near the homestead or the larger area. The house is only renovated when a ceremony is about to be held in the forest. The fact that ceremonies invoking rain are carried out in the forests, and the community acknowledge this practice as vital to their lives, leads to a strong authorisation of the Chitanga leader even though the community consists of a diverse number of family lineages and beliefs.

**Luido**

Luido community is in a forested environment, has a centralised main village, and scattered homesteads, settlements and fields. The area is named after the first chief (Cinehani) nicknamed as Luido. Luido conquered the Tsonga speaking peoples at an unknown time and settled among them. The community has two heritage forests, Mafai and Nyamuwuka (Figure 1, map d).
The Mafai forest is ca. 1.340 ha and hosts most of the ceremonial places, burial grounds and old homesteads. This forest has three lakes connected through a relict river system. The lake Nhamutate (ca. 2.90 ha) is used by local community to fetch water for daily usage. Lake Nhlicanga (ca. 1.70 ha) and Dove (ca. 0.82 ha) are both used to fetch water and to wash clothes. Nymuwuka forest is ca.10.277 ha. Based on oral history and as related by Feliciano Massingue and Pedro Massingue, the protected forests and lakes have names connected to the pre-existing Tsonga speaking chiefs, represented today by the Nhamussue family. Thus, like Chitanga the heritage forests in Luido also have an earlier history of Tsonga dominance but the negotiation of heritage and practices are very different from the Chitanga.

Apart from ceremonies invoking rain other heritage practices within the forests include the annual harvest ceremony. It is prohibited for anyone to harvest before making ceremonies notifying the ancestors that the crops are mature and asking for permission to start the harvesting season. This is a community practice, and in order to successfully perform the ceremony, every member of the community contributes with agricultural products from the field. These products are then used to prepare food (it is taboo to add salt to this food) to be offered to the ancestors. There is also a taboo connected with the prohibitions of sexual activities in the Mafai forest, and if transgressions occur a specific ceremony must be performed. As the community lives close to the forest it is also a taboo to pound cereals or to roast pumpkin seeds at night as this is seen to attract wildlife to the community and fields. Similarly, it is prohibited to use anything made from metal to fetch water in the Nhamutate Lake.

Differently from Chitanga, there are agricultural fields in the vicinities of the forest. This is a swidden agriculture practice where coppicing of trees and organic material are gathered in piles and then burnt before planting. Typically, the field is left fallow for 5–10 years whereby trees recover as shrubs. In Luido, the outtake of forest resources is allowed and resources are mostly non-timber products and collection of firewood is allowed in the Mafai forest. As in Chitanga, the cutting of trees and hunting is prohibited. However, while walking in the Mafai forest evidence of single-tree selection cutting and small mammal traps in the forest could be seen. Again, it is challenging for the leader to monitor the cutting of the trees and to hold people accountable. As cutting of trees is done in secret, individuals are only made accountable in events of an accident. It is only in such instances that individuals who transgress taboos can be held accountable. Typically, they are then fined, and a ceremony must be performed to ask forgiveness to the ancestors for transgressing the rules.

In the Luido village, the authority over forests and local governance is divided between the Massingue family and the Nhamussue family. Feliciano Massingue is double authorised in the sense that he is the traditional chief and elected as community leader, as such he has authority both in matters related to negotiations with external authorities and over land allocation and customary rights. Feliciano Massingue (51 years old) took over the office as chief from his sibling Alfredo Massingue who passed away in 2015. Feliciano called an elder’s council of 40 members, from many different families, which has an advisory role. The heritage sites outside the forests are under Feliciano’s authority. However, since the protected forests are associated with the former Tsonga rulers it is only Tsonga descendants who may perform ceremonies within the forests. In this case, even though Tomás Nhamussue lives 35 km away from Luido, he must carry out the annual harvest ceremonies and ceremonies to invoke rain. The last invoking rain ceremony in the Mafai forest was in 1994.

Both Mafai and Nyamuwuka forests host ceremonial places respectively dedicated to two siblings of Tsonga descendants both called Nwalifabiso, literally meaning daughters of Lifabiso. One of Lifabiso’s daughters was married to the child of a Massingue chief, and the other daughter was married to the cousin of the same Massigque chief that married the prior daughter. It was a common practice as related by Pedro Massingue and Tomás Nhamussue that the children from Tsonga family lineage were married to members of the Massingue family lineage. This oral history legitimises the shared authority between the Nhamussue family and the Luido-Massingue. The dual authority of the heritage in the Luido area may also be due to the fact that Luido is buried in Mapinhane (ca. 150 km) outside of the Luido chiefdom and the Massingue family is still trying to locate the burial. Tomás
Nhamussue relates how there was always someone from his lineage who worked alongside the chief from the Massingue family. Though it is Nhamussue who carries out the ceremony, all the preparations are organised by the Massingue chief. The members of the community support this task by providing the chief with the supplies and by attending to the ceremony inside the forest.

As shown, there is a distributed authority of the heritage in the forests. Chief Feliciano expresses the importance of the forests in the sense that indirectly, even though they are not testimonies to Massingue lineage, they do confirm the cohesion and longevity of the Luido community. The distributed authority is reflected also in the local governance of Luido village. Because of this collaboration between family elders, the norms of protection of forest resources in Luido village are upheld to a high degree. Possibly the fact that there is allowance of resource creates a sense of community ownership, but this suggestion can only be explored by interviews with other individuals than those focused on here.

**Mapoka**

Differently from the Chitanga and Luido communities, the Mapoka area does not have a centralised main village but homesteads are spread out in the landscape. The Mapoka area has one protected forest, named Nwamukuku (Figure 1, map f). Mapoka is the name of a ruling chief, and the forest is named after Mapoka’s child, Mundhagwani, whose nickname was Nwamukuku. The forest is currently under the responsibility of Chief João Manhisse. The Manhisse lineage traces its ancestry to Mapoka.

Nwamukuku forest is large, 555.80 ha. The ceremonial place is surrounded by two small lakes; Lake Nyawukheri is situated ca. 0.35 km from the ceremonial place and is used by community members for water. As related by António Manhisse, community leader and assistant of Chief João Manhisse, the name Nyawukheri translates to ‘place for circumcision’, which refers to its historical function as a place of initiation rites. The second lake Makhile, the meaning of the name is unknown, is also protected but used for watering livestock. The core area of the forest where ceremonies are being performed is ca. 5.40 ha in size. Here, a small, thatched house can be found which symbolises the dwelling of the past chief (or chiefs). This house is used as the main place for ceremonies and old textiles and several glass bottles of distinct colours can be found here, all dating to the twentieth century. The house and its surroundings are cleared from vegetation every time a visit is made. The house which is built with thatch and thin wooden poles tends to collapse and is renovated whenever a new ceremony is held in the forest.

As in Chitanga and Luido, in Mapoka the protection of the forest is also ensured through a set of customary norms, taboos and ceremonies. It is prohibited to collect firewood, to cut trees or to cultivate in the Nwamukuku forest. Even though the community use fires to clear the land for agriculture, fires cannot be used inside the forests or be allowed to soar inside the forests. These rules are maintained through fines issued by the chief.

The heritage of the Nwamukuku forest is linked with the movements of Chief Mapoka who is regard as the founder of the chiefdom. However, the actual location of burial grounds of Mapoka and Mundhagwani is unknown, and there is no forest dedicated to the founder of the chiefdom. The history of migrations and linked negotiations is no longer remembered in Mapoka. It is unclear if Mapoka was an early chief related to Tsonga (as in the case of the Nhamussue family in Luido), or if Mapoka was an Nguni invader (as in the case of the Massingue family in Chitanga and Luido). In any case, the ruling Manhisse family lineage recognises that they were not Indigenous to the area of contemporary Mapoka. Chief João Manhisse relates how ancestors migrated from southern Mozambique (Maputo province) to Inhambane province in the distant past (either already in the seventeen hundreds, but more likely with the Nguni movements in the eighteen hundreds). Due to the fragmentation of the family with the civil war, Chief João Manhisse is the only person and elder that knows the locations and names of burial grounds in the forest.
However, Chief João Manhisse now is old and has a visual impairment and, therefore several of the ancestral places will remain unknown. In addition, the last ceremony for invoking rain was only performed in 2004. Currently, it is only the burial of Chief Massalela, the parent of the current Chief João Manhisse, which is visited. Burial locations of older chiefs might be placed in the forest but are now forgotten. Far from the Nwamukuku forest (ca. 6.8 km), there is an older ceremonial place named Mabasso. This place has several nineteenth-century ceramic pots and is protected even though Mabasso is not connected to the Manhisse ruling family. Interestingly, Mabasso is also not claimed by any family lineages, making it an orphaned heritage site.

The forest is protected through customary rules and there is no discernable difference in tree maturity or species composition between the known heritage centre and other locations within the forest. Here, taboos are also respected which is why the forest is maintained. This suggests that even though part of the traditions around the forest is forgotten, the forest is still respected among residents today.

**Discussion**

Grey and Kuokkanen (2020) use examples of heritage protection in Sápmi in Sweden, unprotected sacred area of Suttesája in Finland and the Quechua communities in Peru, to argue for the self-governance of Indigenous peoples to their cultural heritage as the alternative to co-management. In South Africa, Cocks, Vetter and Wiersum (2018) propose the biocultural perspective as a way to give importance to local people’s views in the management of cultural landscapes. Using Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape, and emaXhoseni as case studies, they argue for the recognition of local associations in the interpretation of cultural landscapes. Similarly, Prangnell, Ross and Coghill (2010) present results of a collaborative project between Aboriginal community in the North Stradbroke Island and archaeologists to emphasise the need of addressing power imbalance by valuing and giving opportunity for community to have control over the interpretation and management of cultural heritage.

These and other studies demonstrate the authoritative position of national and international discourses on heritage. However, this power imbalance can also occur at and within the local levels. While we may recognise the international and national Authorised Heritage Discourse, the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse may also exist that operates at community level. Often, communities’ heritage (local and Indigenous) will be presented as homogenous and little is said about the type of heritage discourses and existing narratives surrounding local and Indigenous heritage that may exist. This amounts to the misrecognition, and simplifies the existing complexities within communities, and limits open discussion about community heritage issues of representation and identity (Crooke 2010; Waterton and Smith 2010).

For the case of heritage forests, single ancestral lineage and narratives connected to the current chiefs are authorised, legitimatised and used to represent community identity at the expense of other accounts from other families. Within the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse, narratives, memories and places of families and ancestry lineages that are different from the village founder and ancestors are excluded or ignored in the processes and practices representing the ‘community’. This form of representation misrecognises that other lineages have heritage not connected to the ruling families though are part of the ‘community’ (cf. Kearney 2020). In this process, the forests act as a node for the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse (see similar discussion in Katapidi 2021; Smith 2012, 2015; Yim 2022; Zhang and Wu 2016). However, as shown here the narratives and practices in some cases also have amalgamated other traditions and family histories. This is the case of Luído, where the power of village leader and chief are endowed to the same individual, but there is a counterbalance in the sense that the Massingue family is not authorised to perform ceremonies without the Nhamussue family.

Despite challenges to local authority from the state authorities after independence, heritage practices related to the forests are active and strongly authorised by community members as no chief would be able to enforce the rules of taboos unless this was the case. The illicit cutting of trees
observed in the three case studies shows the challenges of having heritage practices and narratives tied to a single or few family lineages. Since, some groups such as young people may not feel the same claims or feel excluded, the cutting of trees in the forests may be a challenge to the role and authority of the chiefs in enforcing cultural codes linked to the management of heritage forests.

The value of local heritage is lacking in current national heritage policies and transfer of intergenerational practices can negatively be endangered by these polices (Keitumetse 2016; Mydland and Grahn 2012). Efforts to protect forests from national and or district authorities might risk co-opting these forests and related practices into a nationalist discourse (cf. Germundsson 2005) or in exclusionary conservation practice (cf. Matusse 2021; Walker 2015). Such a process would be a definite threat towards local ownership and protection. In this case, the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse can be an effective counter against nation-based narratives (see discussion in van Deursen and Raaphorst 2014).

This discussion is important for understanding the agency of non-formal protection of heritage and local conservation approaches. Despite being burial grounds and ceremonial places most of the visited forests are under great pressures from logging companies. The cultural codes that were once strong to regulate community behaviour towards the forests are weakening with these pressures. If these forests are not formally recognised as heritage, both village leaders and traditional leaders will struggle to defend these forests against concessions.

**Conclusions**

Local and Indigenous communities are often assumed to have a single identity, homogenous heritage practices that are currently often perceived as 'excluded' by national heritage discourses and marginalised by processes of building a 'national identity'. Much has been written on how local and Indigenous communities have overcome the dichotomy of nature and culture, but there is less discussion on how these communities are building 'community cohesion and identity' or the type of heritage discourses taking place at a local level. From these assumptions, layers of community heritage and negotiation processes that might happen at local level some of which have authoritative dimension are being missed.

The three examples presented here provide insights into how the heritage discourses in and through locally protected forests are enacted through oral history and local heritage practices. The forests as physical entities are entangled with history through the different ties between dominant family lineages and ancestors. Local institutions dealing with the existence of heritage sites use the past related to the forests to claim recognition, legitimacy and authorisation (cf. Pocock and Lilley 2017).

The paper highlights that there is an authorised heritage discourse taking place at local levels that is connected to heritage forests, and showed instances where heritage narratives of a single family, to some degree, become the most prominent, and the narratives of other families’ lineages are muted and their material dimension are automatically invisible. For instance, the locations of burials of chiefs’ wives are unknown, and being part of other lineages their narratives are lost in the oral history. It was only in Luido where two daughters have dedicated ceremonial places.

Due to the paper length, I do not pinpoint exhaustively similarities and differences between the Authorised Heritage Discourse and the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse. However, the Local Authorised Heritage Discourse shares, to some extent, the dimensions of the Authorised Heritage Discourse. From a quick glance, the similarity lies in the context that both discourses have their own heritage experts, have curators of knowledge and narratives on how heritage should be used, use and legitimise a specific past, memories and values, aim at framing a common identity, exclude and or ignore other narratives in the processes of heritage making, have material dimension in the landscape and specific heritage practices. Simplifying, the difference lies in the instances that the Authorised Heritage Discourse is pro-tourism and privileges tangible cultural heritage, while the other focus in both intangible and tangible elements of the cultural heritage with less focus on the heritage’s economic value.
The Local Authorised Heritage Discourse is captured in the narratives, memories, places and practices typically connected to a particular family lineage or ancestors. Within this discourse, the village and community history is explained from the ancestors (the village founder ancestors) in a process that authorises and legitimises the role played by the current chief. This is done by giving focus mostly to the material evidence (past settlements, burial places, and forests) and narratives of the ancestors of the ruling family.

The Local Authorised Heritage Discourse should not be perceived as recent discursive process empowering ruling families to engage with their heritage, a process of recovering past memories aiming to preservation or against nation-based narratives on heritage. Rather, in the case of Mozambique, it is a continuous process of negotiation among community leaders, traditional leaders, different lineages, and ancestors that have been in place long before the emergence of the national and international Authorised Heritage Discourse. However, in the negotiation processes it overrides other practices and discourses of heritage within the community. This exclusion and misrecognition of other discourses of heritage is materialised by 1) solely using chiefs’ burials and homesteads of the village founder as places where ceremonies ought to be conducted, 2) only accounting the village history, narratives and place names connected to a particular ancestor l which is for most of the time linked to the current chief, 3) community members from different lineages participating in the heritage performance and management of local heritage places linked to the current chief without accounting for their own heritage making processes.

The heritage practices discussed here are characterised by cyclical and periodical heritage performance aiming to appease the ancestors and solve local social issues. There is an embedded process of negotiating identity and ancestry. Local heritage sites such as forests though guarded by a few family members of a select lineage are used as the medium for multiple family lineages to negotiate their identity and heritage to a broader village community.

Ultimately, the paper argues for the recognition of local heritage practices and their discursive dimensions, which have positive side effects to the existence of heritage forests protected by communities. The Local Authorised Heritage Discourse needs to be recognised and taken in account by heritage professionals in planning and discussing cultural heritage management related to heritage forests.

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**Notes on contributor**

**Pascoal Gota** is a PhD student at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University. His research interests comprise a mix of disciplines, approaches, and fields such as environmental archaeology, historical ecology, heritage, GIS, oral history, and remote sensing. His PhD research aims to understand the conservation status of biocultural heritage in Inhambane province, Mozambique. He focuses on modelling forests and reconstructing of the landscape and vegetation of Inhambane and engaging communities to stewardship their heritage.
References


Annex. Informants of local heritage practices and village history

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
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