

Feature Articles

Nkandla or Bust: Neo-Traditions, Politics, and the Fire-Pool

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Manipulating the built environment for political ends is not new in postmodern South Africa. Jacob Zuma's much-vaunted Nkandla homestead, with its "fire-pool," may thus be seen as a pastiche representation of a "tradition" that has slowly condensed over the last two centuries. To this end, this article examines the change in "traditional" architectures in KwaZulu-Natal as a result of rising sedentariness, ongoing expressions of political power, and fluctuations in ethnicity and identity. In particular, it examines the historiographic record of prominent clan groups within the larger Southern Nguni people to understand whether the scale of "Zulu" homesteads increased during succession battles, and to establish whether these settlement structures represent a domestic-scale symptom of a greater political power struggle.

On Valentine's Day 2018, Jacob Gedliyelekisa Zuma stepped down as president of the Republic of South Africa. A staunch Zulu nationalist and senior member of the Nxamala clan (demonstrated by the frequent public use of his *izithakazalo*, or clan name, of Msholozzi), Zuma remains a controversial figure, and he was so even before he assumed the title of president of the African National Congress in December 2007. However, among the many transgressions during his terms of office, perhaps one of the most tangible was the extensive personal homestead that he constructed using money from state coffers.

The homestead, situated close to the rural hamlet of Nkandla, in KwaZulu-Natal, presents one of the most persuasive arguments for how the perpetuation of "tradition" politicizes and endemicizes architecture. Built at a cost of US\$20 million, this rural idyll serves as the personal home of the former president, his five wives, and his entourage. Yet, far from subscribing to the prescriptions of the established, wealthy Zulu homestead, it resembles rather a caricature of an upmarket safari lodge, with steeply sloping thatched roofs and detached *rondawels* with en-suite attachments. A closely guarded security perimeter and other accoutrements of the affluent South African household — particularly a

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FIGURE 1. Zuma's homestead at Nkandla. Source: J. Forbes, <https://www.panoramio.com/photo/84617082>.

swimming pool, argued off as a “fire-pool” — are considered vital as “security assets.” A number of whimsical follies, built to theme, are also scattered across the site, situated true to form on the side of a hill (FIG. 1).

In addition to the extensive security arrangements, in order to accommodate Zuma and his retinue of wives and children, the homestead boasts a helipad, forty residential staff units, a visitor center, guard houses, and a clinic — in addition to offices for the local police. In its extent, and certainly its irony, The Nkandla homestead is perhaps the most blatant visual demonstration of political power associated with Zulu traditionalism in contemporary South Africa. Yet, while it may not be true to “traditional” form, structure and typology, this does not mean its message is not clear. All its elements are deliberately sited to evoke nostalgia and nationalism, and to convey a message of new power to residents of the province. This, in turn, is linked to a current ruling democratic dispensation, and competes with the powers of long-established traditional authorities.

The reaction of citizens to this overt misuse of public funds resulted in a comprehensive report authored in March 2014 by the public protector, Adv. Thuli Madonsela (whose office was set up to support and defend democracy in South Africa). The report, “Secure in Comfort,” detailed a litany of charges of demonstrative expansionism and lack of candor with regard to the Nkandla project. Not the least of these was that its “fire-pool” was in reality a suburban-style swimming

pool with all the trappings. The fire-pool subsequently became a figurative “whipping boy” for ongoing protest against Zuma’s patent abuse of taxpayer money. In Madonsela’s report, this focus was consistently reiterated, given Zuma’s poor justification for building a reservoir for “fire protection” in an area where most local residents have no potable water supply. According to the report:

What initially was supposed to be a fire-pool (water reservoir) was converted into a swimming pool . . . it was decided that as it was a requirement to have a fire-pool, to make it aesthetically pleasant as well by building it in the form of a swimming pool.¹

The Nkandla homestead and its associated developments have also featured in academic discourse. Meghan Healy-Clancy and Jason Hickel addressed this issue in the introduction to their edited volume *Ekhaya: The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal*. Specifically, Healy-Clancy and Hickel described the import of Zuma’s fifth marriage in 2010, suggesting that through this event, “Zuma celebrated the extension of his *umuzi*, and thereby the expansion of his political power.” Citing the work of the University of KwaZulu-Natal history professor Benedict Carton, they further noted that for many South Africans, and particularly rural residents of the province of KwaZulu-Natal,

Zuma's nuptials — and the development of his homestead — inspired respect. . . . In an age of pervasive crises of governance and gendered social reproduction, Zuma's marriage signified a sense of optimism for the future by gesturing to a past in which power and authority had been domesticated — naturalized through domestic space — on the terms of patriarchal homestead heads.²

As implied here, the construction of large homesteads in order to demonstrate power is not a new phenomenon; indeed, it is perhaps as old as settled humanity itself. However, what is significant in this case is that the public positioning of Jacob Zuma can be read as both overt and covert. Thus, his public face addresses the nation of South Africa in all its multicultural complexity, while his less overt persona expresses the vestiges of a clan struggle in a rapidly fragmenting Zulu nation.³

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

As context, it is important to note that the Zulu are currently one of the largest ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. They consider the contemporary province of KwaZulu-Natal, on the South African east coast, to be their homeland. “KwaZulu-Natal,” however, is in actuality a conflation of the colonial-era Natal Colony to the south of the Mzinyathi and Tugela rivers and the area to the northeast, known as Zululand (KwaZulu). Until the end of the nineteenth century the latter was “considered” Zulu territory, until its incorporation into the Colony of Natal in 1897.

As will be discussed below, the Zulu, as an aboriginal clan group, however, were not the only inhabitants of this region. Yet, over time they became ever more firmly entrenched in the northern territory of Zululand, while the Hlubi and Mkhize peoples moved south, crossing the Tugela River border into colonial territory. In fact, these latter groups moved precisely to seek refuge from the assertive nationalization phenomenon, or *Mfecane*, which increased human migration in the region between the late eighteenth century and at least the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴ The expansion of Zulu royal homesteads at the center of this disruption occurred across space, and spoke to new conditions of sedentariness and established power. Meanwhile, the scattering of the royal homesteads of the Hlubi and Mkhize reflected disassembly and regrouping. Similarly, the displacement of the Nxamalala (the clan to which Zuma belongs) and their reestablishment in the center of the Natal Colony at Nkandla, spoke to related experiences of fragmentation and reassembly.

Given that the core discussion in this article revolves around homesteads and settlement patterns, it is politic to introduce the varied identities of these groups at the outset in order to contextualize the impact of their expansion, move-

ment and fragmentation. The first section of the article will thus briefly introduce the groups of pastoral people who moved into the eastern coastal littoral from the north sometime in the eighteenth century. It will then discuss the nineteenth-century clan group of the Zulu, the polity at the center of the *Mfecane* debate, at the time of its nationalization under the kings Shaka (1787–1828), Dingane (1795–1840), Mpande (1798–1872), and Cetshwayo (1826–1884). This discussion will stress how the enduring effect of this nationalization until now has been that what were once independent clans, lineages with their own kings, are today generally all classed as “Zulu,” and so considered subjects of the current king of the Zulu nation, Goodwill Zwelethini. This view, however, typically dismisses descriptions of Hlubi homesteads under Bhungane (d. 1800), Mthimkhulu (d. 1818), and Langalibalele (1814–1889) through times of defense and reestablishment; and it likewise ignores the dispossession and reestablishment of Mkhize homesteads under Siyengele.⁵ The peripatetic homesteads of these clan leaders and thus the fluid socio-political landscape of the time (as described in the oral record) were, however, important localized reactions to the *Mfecane*. A graphic representation of these movements within the region can be found in the accompanying map (FIG. 2).

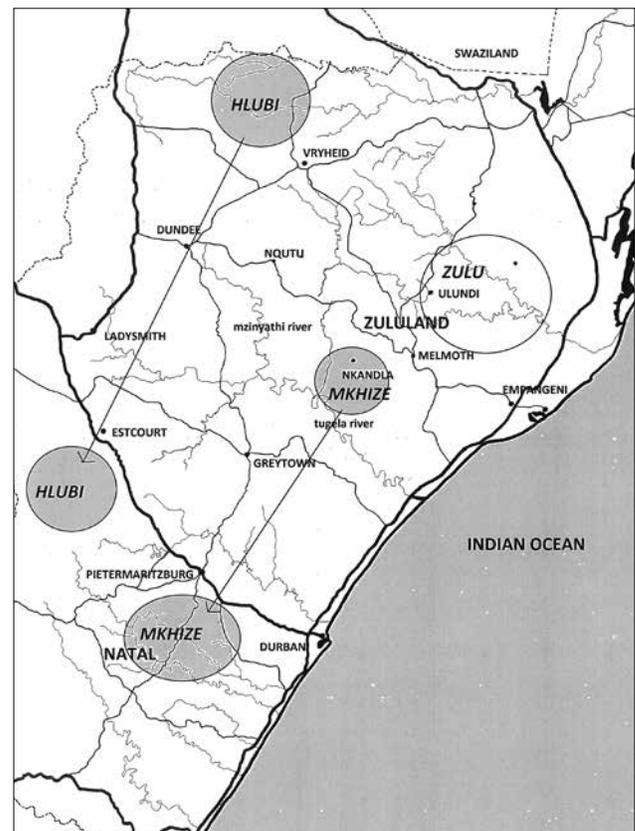


FIGURE 2. Map of KwaZulu-Natal, showing Natal (south), Zululand (north), and the areas of residence and movements of the Zulu, Hlubi and Mkhize. Drawing by author.

The second section of the article will then examine the “traditionalizing” of tradition. In particular, it will describe the formal inscription of “custom” in the Natal Code of Native Law (1891), which sought to regulate the Zulu tradition, presenting it as a fixed construct rather than an enduring, fluid and indelible practice.⁶ But the article will further note that these “traditions” have changed significantly since the late nineteenth century, and that legal mothballing has done little but evoke a nostalgia ungrounded in reality.

The article will conclude by discussing the impact of a created, described tradition — the increase of a new form of nationalization and its resistance — before analyzing the position of Zuma’s Nkandla homestead as a liminal traditional environment in which the trappings of both Western and traditional wealth are evident.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE IDYLL

Idyll invokes nostalgia, and nostalgia forms a central part of the argument for Nkandla. The Nkandla compound thus employs the trappings of “tradition” in order to reinforce the regional status of the homestead, and to entrench Zulu nationalism.

The domination of the Zulu lineage in the Natal Colony was originally supported by the colonial government (broadly between 1843 and 1910). This historical advocacy has continued until today, with “Zulu” nominally dominating the entire regional ethnographic landscape. Thus, while Jacob Zuma is a senior member of the Nxamalala clan, this group remains located under the portmanteau of “Zulu.”⁷ Lineages like his, which comprised clans associated with the Zulu, are more celebrated in traditional lore, in addition to being more prominent in colonial-era texts. They are thus more dominant in the popular mind. However, the Zulu are also central to the history of the Hlubi and the Mkhize, because the relationship these latter polities had with the Zulu after 1820 shaped and formed their displacement, and subsequent resettlement. Indirectly, this relationship also affected the scale of their homesteads as a settled, prosperous people.

It is vital to mention here that pre-mid-nineteenth-century histories are oral, and as such present a worldview positioning people, actions and places within different scales of importance, dependent on information that needed to be reinforced.⁸ Indigenous histories typically rely strongly on oral traditions in order to reinforce identity, loyalty, social order, and events. In this regard, the oral historian Selby Hadebe has described different layers of orality in the South African context — specifically, legends, proverbs, songs, clan praises, and personal praises. As reinforcement, he noted how, in 1931, the ethnographer P.A.W. Cook observed that “. . . their form is permanent and they abound with allusions to the important events in the lives of the chiefs so that they form invaluable historical evidence.”⁹

Given this brief introduction, it is next important to contextualize the idea of the “homestead.” This requires foregrounding earlier dwelling types that are understood to have been utilized by polities that belonged to and currently form part of the Zulu, before concentrating on the “archetypal” Zulu homestead, and the reinforcement of authority through scale and purpose in their military homesteads, or *amakhandanda*. Much of the information is derived from collated histories and ethnographies, which lean heavily on “first-hand” accounts of early settlers and traders who encountered the Zulu, particularly those who visited the homesteads of the kings from the time of Shaka until the burning of the Ulundi homestead on July 4, 1879.

Zulu reference to urban scale is largely related to association and purpose, rather than population or physical extent. The fundamental unit of spatial organization is the *umuzi*, the family homestead, consisting of a number of individual dwelling units around a central cattle byre, as seen in the accompanying image (FIG. 3). Importantly, the homestead scale can be expanded. Thus, the lexicographers Doke et al. defined *umuzi* as a “kraal, village, collection of huts under one headman,” and recorded that the word could even refer to a settler town or city.¹⁰ Significantly, a “palace” is defined as *indlu enkulu yobukhosi*, indicating a condition of extent in relation to the rather modest word *indlu*, as “dwelling place or habitation” — but focusing on the structure’s relation to a king.¹¹ By contrast, the word *ikhanda* has a more specific connotation, as the “head military kraal.”¹² Thus homestead is the general means by which forms of settlement are described in their various extents, with the *ikhanda* being a homestead with a specific political purpose.

Oral histories record the Southern Nguni, of which the Zulu form one of many clan groups, as migrating into the coastal littoral in the late eighteenth century. Archaeological



FIGURE 3. Archetypal Zulu homestead. Source: E.J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1962 [1936]), p.39.



FIGURE 4. House movement in action. Source: H. Kuper, *The Swazi: A South African Kingdom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

excavations of circular structures record the previous occupation of the area by iron-making peoples.¹³ Martin Hall has noted that the Babanango Plateau was occupied by herders in the eighteenth century, who built what he called “Type B” structures, consisting of a series of circular stone circles linked together with a walled enclosure.¹⁴ Significantly, citing earlier investigations by himself and Tim Maggs, Hall described how these homesteads showed no evidence of human occupation, suggesting rather that they were occupied by livestock.¹⁵ While archaeology can describe spatial orderings of power and the use of space, it is unable to reflect on the manner in which that space was described, ruled or dominated. Nevertheless, Hall cited the archaeologist Tom Huffman in noting that “. . . archaeological site plans can be ‘read’ for indications of social relations’ allowing for some interpretive material.”¹⁶

As a people on the move, the worldview of Southern Nguni clans was constructed and reconstructed through mobile objects and group mobility — people and cattle (FIG. 4). Jeff Guy has also presented “historical” Zulu culture according to a Marxist framework of production.¹⁷ This was articulated in the way the Zulu viewed their land and their access to it: people and cattle meant wealth, and polygamy reinforced the means of production by allowing both women and children to tend crops and look after livestock.

Being peripatetic, the Southern Nguni also did not create “public” city spaces in the Western sense. Rather, homesteads of varying scales housed specific families of people, under the leadership of the *umnumzane*, or homestead head.

The *umnumzane* was granted land on which to construct his homestead by the lineage *inkosi* (loosely translated as “king”). This dispensation allowed him to build his *umuzi*, farm some land, and graze stock, usually cattle and goats. The political ties ensuring stability were in turn reinforced through intermarriage between clan groups (although some groups such as the Swazi and the Hlubi, practiced clan endogamy).

Within this system, the scale of the individual homestead was determined by the wealth or importance of the homestead head. The practice of polygamy further determined the number of individual dwelling units and their associated kitchens, based on the number of wives taken by the *umnumzane*. The number of wives also determined the number of children; and thus the number of individual dwelling units increased in order to accommodate the wives and the children, the latter organized by sex and age.

At a greater scale, the head of the clan lineage — theoretically, the first-born son from the first-married wife — would have more wives and cattle, given the tributes paid to him by adherents, who relied on his patronage.

Historically, the clan lineage would reside and operate from a specifically defined area, whose borders would inflate and conflate depending on power relations with neighboring clans. The scale of each homestead in a stable and well-networked society was thus demonstrably sized to reflect the number of women the homestead head had married, the number of children they had borne, and the number of cattle the head had acquired through trade, tribute, raiding, and natural breeding.

The spatial planning of the homestead was also important, because it was a visual representation of this cultural narrative. Over the last century and a half, many authors, such as Aileen Krige, A.J. Bryant, and Adam Kuper, have described the layout of the “archetypal” Zulu homestead.¹⁸ Generally speaking, such a “traditional” homestead was circular, and had a cattle byre located at its center. This was surrounded by a ring of individual dwelling units, which took the form of domical grass beehives, or alternatively, cone-on-cylinder *rondavels*. This homestead was strongly gendered and hierarchical, and it has been described as following the “Central Cattle Pattern.” Thus, cattle were physically central (given that the byre was at its center); but they were also cognitively central, since they were the means by which wealth was displayed and ritual was brokered.¹⁹ While Guy has strongly contested the implications of this nomenclature, citing lack of evidence and historical argument, the centrality of cattle in Zulu society, both cognitively and spatially, cannot be discounted.²⁰

Kuper has further commented that, “In the early nineteenth century, . . . [the Zulu] kingdom sought to leverage the spatial logic of the Central Cattle Pattern to organize and rigidify political hierarchies and establish regional patterns of tribute.”²¹ Thus, around the time of Shaka, intense nationalization required the development of extensive military homesteads (*amakhanda*) to control people at the edges of the newly constructed nation. The scale of these homesteads, which were associated with royalty and specifically intended to house armies, simultaneously reflected the seat of power. Thus, according to Hall, the fact that “. . . the early Zulu kingdom was a product of warrior leaders is underlined by patterns of settlement.” Hall, citing Herman, referred specifically to journeys undertaken by the young trader Nathaniel Isaacs in the early 1820s: “. . . the villages that Nathaniel Isaacs encountered as he travelled across the kingdom to appear before Shaka were much the same in composition and size, and it was only the king’s capital that was of a different order.”²²

Given their prominence in the regional history of the last two centuries, much has been written about the Zulu and the nationalization campaign carried out by its founder, Shaka, the son of Senzangakhona.²³ Prior to Shaka’s rise to control over the clan around 1816, the Zulu were a small group of people dwarfed by local polities associated through lineage, such as the Khumalo and the Buthelezi. While little is known about homesteads connected to specific people and processes up to that point, it is clear that during his reign, Shaka established himself in three specific homesteads: KwaBulawayo I, KwaBulawayo II, and KwaBulawayo III. While nominally similar, these homesteads moved over time to be closer to the Emakhosini Valley, an area in central Zululand in which the progenitors of the clan were buried. However, as king, Shaka simultaneously exercised control over a large number of other, outlying military homesteads.

Shaka’s half-brother Dingane, who assumed power after Shaka’s assassination in 1828, next lived at an extensive

homestead known as Umgungundlovu, between 1828 and 1840. This was situated in the Emakhosini Valley, and thus in the Zulu “heartland.” Another half-brother, Mpande, then assumed power in 1840, ruling from Nodwengu, a homestead situated in the center of the present-day town of Ulundi. Traveler Wilhelm Bleek described Nodwengu in 1856:

*It consists . . . of a circle of huts which surrounds the circular animal kraal. Only here the diameter for the latter is more than a thousand paces, and there is not a single row of huts, as is usually the case, but several. There are three rows near the entrances. . . . The number of huts may easily amount to 2000.*²⁴

Finally, Mpande’s son Cetswayo ruled from Ondini. Close to Nodwengu, this homestead was torched by British troops at the Battle of Ulundi in July 1879.

Oral evidence from this period is corroborated by the diaries, drawings and sketches compiled by white settlers with whom Shaka, Dingane and Mpande negotiated trade. Thus, homesteads, their layout, and their purpose were inscribed and encoded as Western forms of documented understanding.

Evidence to date indicates that Shaka’s renowned KwaBulawayo homesteads did not serve traditional practices of production and homestead life. While Shaka never took a wife, limiting the potential for wealth through women and children, Krige has noted (again citing the young trader Nathaniel Isaacs) that KwaBulawayo did have about one hundred individual dwelling units in the *isigodlo* for “harem” women offered in tribute to Shaka. But the primarily military role of such kingly homesteads has been shown by archaeological research. Indeed, Hall has referred to excavations undertaken at Dingane’s homestead of Umgungundlovu, arguing that they show this *ikhanda* (central military settlement) was provisioned by surrounding homesteads, with little proof that it supported pastoral or agricultural endeavors of its own.²⁵ The accompanying image shows an annotated, nineteenth-century depiction of Dingane’s homestead (FIG. 5).

Military homesteads were thus intended to reinforce power, as well as to act as vectors of power and domination. Their size might also increase to match their political importance. Thus, Krige, author of the seminal mid-twentieth-century ethnography *The Social System of the Zulus*, described how “The king always lives in a military kraal. . . . [These] were usually large, the diameter of the outer fence being from 1200 yards to a mile, and the space between the inner and outer fence being occupied by about a thousand huts.”²⁶ This allowed the central cattle byre to act as a politicized space, facilitating the gathering of armed men, rather than the holding of cattle, as would have been the case with a domestic homestead.

At Ondini, Cetswayo’s homestead was a political and administrative center that allowed meetings of state and other events vital to the operation of the nation. And, as Guy further mentioned,

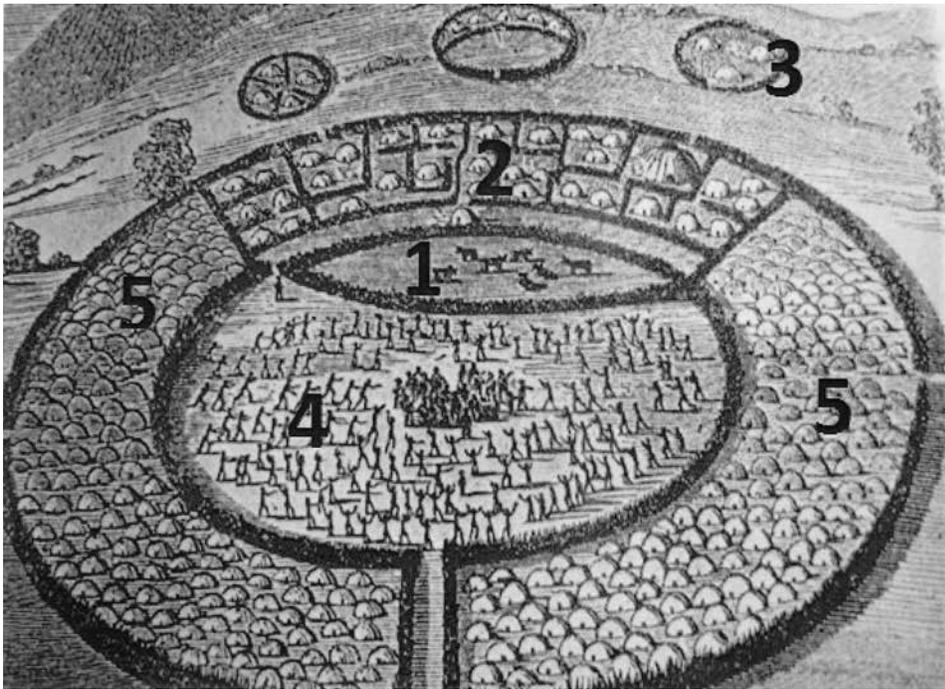


FIGURE 5. Dingane's Umgungundlovu homestead, ca. 1838. 1. isigodlo; 2. isibaya (cattle byre); 3. soldiers; 4. king's cattle; 5. affiliated homesteads providing provisions. Source: KwaZulu-Natal Archives Repository Photograph C2004.

... the homesteads of the king, the amakhanda, were concentrated around his personal homestead . . . on the Mahlabathini plain. The size and physical structure of the amakhanda reflected the enormous amount of social power concentrated in the royal lineage.²⁷

He continued by describing around a dozen *amakhanda* in the Mahlabathini area, in addition to a similar number in outlying areas under Cetshwayo's control, which served as locations to recruit new soldiers and reinforce military control. Guy also supported Hall's earlier work, describing the *amakhanda* as being serviced by important local clans. "In the case of some of the oldest *amakhanda* the importance of the *amakhanda* had eclipsed the importance of the clan in so far as the relations of its members to the state were concerned."²⁸ Many of these also carried the names of the homesteads of Cetshwayo's ancestors, although their siting and the people who occupied them had changed over the years. Thus the notional "mobility" of homesteads in a more sedentary realm was perhaps a vestige of an itinerant society in which name indicated ancestry and lineage and thus clan affiliation.

Jeff Guy's approach to understanding the local economy through the production of people and cattle is reinforced by the practice it embraced of exchanging women. Thus Krige has pointed to the role of the *isigodlo*, a specifically demarcated and fenced area located at the top end of the *ikhanda*, opposite the main entrance. This was exclusively used by the king and his seraglio (women's apartments); as such, it housed the king's wives, in addition to the *umdlunkulu* (maidens presented to him in tribute). As political pawns, the *umdlunkulu*

served to strengthen social and political ties between the king and his prominent adherents.²⁹ They were serving women, looking after the royal wives who were not expected to work. Extending from here, as in some of the larger *amakhanda* such as that at Ulundi, soldiers were housed in individual dwelling units situated three deep, in a series of bands which followed the arms of the circle moving down the hill.³⁰

Following Adrian Koopman, Steve Kotze has noted that the names of homesteads also served two purposes — the first practical and the second as a means of reinforcing political identity. This second purpose was especially important in times of conflict, because when constructing a discourse of power, the perpetuation of a name embeds not only the present but also memories of the past. Kotze thus observed how "The names of homesteads served to remind subsequent generations of the social upheaval that gave rise to the Zulu kingdom."³¹

Overall, therefore, the scales of the homestead fluctuated with requirement and need — to contain people and cattle, and embody wealth and power. The idea of the central cattle byre and encircling rows of individual dwellings, however, was virtually indelible; it just varied with respect to scale.

THE HLUBI AND THE MKHIZE

To fully appreciate nature of settlement in the region it is also important to examine the Hlubi and the Mkhize, discuss their relationship with the Zulu, and understand their migrations and population dynamics as a result of external political pressures.

Rather than being the promoters of nationalization, as were the Zulu under Shaka, the Hlubi were a large, established tribe situated in the interior. As with many other clan groups in the region, Hlubi oral history suggests that they originated near the Lubombo mountains to the east. However, oral history records a “separation event” that split the tribe, resulting in a group moving to live along the Mzinyathi River. Certainly by the mid-eighteenth century, the Hlubi were resident at the upper reaches of the Mzinyathi, in the northwest of the current-day province of KwaZulu-Natal

(REFER TO FIG. 2).

The group was then subject to a second fragmentation — an event known as *izwekufa*, or the “scattering” of the nation, which led to their resettlement on ancestral lands under the strong leadership of Bhungane in the late eighteenth century. As such, the Hlubi emerged as a distinct group of people with their own histories, traditions and rituals, distinct from the regional and subsequently nationalized practices of the Zulu. Specific practices which identified them included clan endogamy, the burial of their royalty in caves, specific dress codes, and certain taboos (FIG. 6).



FIGURE 6. Hlubi boy. Source: A.T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London: Longmans Green, 1929), p.147.

The Hlubi, under Bhungane and his son Mthimkhulu, had a good relationship with Shaka; indeed, the Hlubi regiment or *izinyendane*, were highly regarded as protectors of the Zulu kings, and as such occupied an *ikhanda* (military homestead) close to Nongoma. Yet, as Selby Hadebe noted:

*The amaHlubi regard all the rulers who descend from the royal house . . . as kings. Bhungane, Mthimkhulu and Langalibalele were kings because they were never subjects of the Zulu kings. They however formed what is referred to as a “tributary” especially during the reign of Mthimkhulu and Langalibalele.*³²

At its greatest, Bhungane’s power extended over 5,000 sq.km., with some 10,000–15,000 adherents.³³ His homestead was at kwaMagoloza (eNgolozini), south of present-day Newcastle. By his chief wife he had Mthimkhulu, his successor.³⁴

Succession battles were an active part of the pre- (and post)-colonial landscape. And after Bhungane’s death, rivalry between his sons and their factions led to further fragmentation. One of his sons, Mthimkhulu subsequently assumed power over the main clan, moving from Bhungane’s kwaMagoloza to his own homestead at Odidini, across the Mzinyathi River near present-day Utrecht. Mthimkhulu’s reign was characterized by stability, and one of his many wives bore his chief son Langalibalele.

By 1819, the loose confederation of Hlubi was subject to the systematic expansionism taking place across southern Africa. Mthimkhulu was killed, leaving his sons Langalibalele and Dlomo to claim the kingship.³⁵ The succession battle led to Dlomo being killed and Langalibalele being appointed to head the Hlubi ruling house. After some time he built a homestead called ePhangweni (named after his brother Dlomo’s spirit). This was located in the territory of the Mculwana, amongst whom he had taken refuge.³⁶ Thereafter, Langalibalele rapidly took wives, who produced children. And by visually and nominally expanding his power, he was able to consolidate and rebuild the Hlubi people.

Thus newly established, the Hlubi, however, soon faced threats from the new Zulu king, Mpande, which led to Langalibalele appealing to the colonial government in Natal for refuge (REFER TO FIG. 2).³⁷ Moving across the Mzinyathi River, Langalibalele “relocated” ePhangweni, and set up around Ntabamhlope (White Mountain) with a large number of followers. This was significant because by retaining the homestead name he retained its embodiment of the ancestral lineage and the practice of its progenitors. Andrew Manson has expanded on this by noting that around Ntabamhlope Langalibalele initially established two main homesteads — Bhekuzulu and Emphangweni — and later others such as Nobamba, Mpihlweni and amaHendini. And while ePhangweni was constructed for his brother Dlomo’s spirit, kwaNobamba and kwaMahambehlala (emaHendeni) were constructed for the spirits of his father Mthimkhulu and his younger brother Mpangazitha, respectively.

With a measure of protection and security, as time passed, the Hlubi became increasingly adept at producing a surplus for sale to white settlers. Strong leadership, reinforced by the establishment and consolidation of power through the reestablishment of the homesteads of his ancestors Mthimkhulu and Mpangazitha, further entrenched Langalibalele's network of control over some 8,000 adherents. Thus the value and power of the physical homesteads and their association with noted members of the clan had agency across both time and space. Indeed, they formed a critical component of the rebuilding of Hlubi power in the Natal Colony.

The story of the Mkhize is slightly different. Oral histories collected in 1913 record that as a group they originated in Swaziland and lived for many years in the Nkandla area until they fell victim to Dingane's rise to power. Under Siyingele, however, they moved south to claim refuge in the Natal Colony (REFER TO FIG. 2). One clan member, Mbokodo, then about sixty years old, noted that, "When Siyingele first arrived, he built at the eMgwahumbe River. . . . Later on he went and lived at eGilanyoni (large hill), overlooking the Mkomazi and on the north side."³⁸

The location and character of these sites were described by Wilhelm Bleek when he traveled through this district in 1856.³⁹ Bleek recorded Siyengele's homestead eMahleni as consisting of nineteen individual dwellings around a central cattle byre. This had been moved from an earlier position which contained the same number of dwellings. It is significant that in these remembrances the settlement's scale is minimal. And the presence of a mere nineteen dwellings indicated a much lower level of prosperity than in the Hlubi and Zulu cases. Rather, it seemed to indicate little more than an effort at geographical positioning.

By combining the oral histories, Bleek's notes, and evidence from grant and survey documents, however, a compelling story of movement, settlement and reestablishment can be written. Survey reports attached to grant documents from the mid-nineteenth century record a slow immigration of people, who were most likely of the Mkhize clan. Documentation for Leeupoort farm close to Camperdown thus shows a grant to a white settler in 1841; but by 1843 the farm surveyor recorded that African people had moved onto the property. Thus, Pieter Zietsmann recorded how ". . . three kraals of natives one hut been [sic] on the ground in four years and the two now being erected and I surveyed the farm that contain [sic] about 30 men, women and children."⁴⁰

At the time the terminology "kraal" was generally used to refer to a cluster of buildings constructed around a central cattle byre in "typical" form. Thus, a description of "one hut" did not speak to the classical idea of a settled, prosperous homestead. Tension between newly arrived Dutch settlers and the immigrant Mkhize was also evident in these early documents. At another farm in the region, which was granted in 1842, the owner ". . . fled for safety from the Farm . . . having had all his cattle stolen."⁴¹ On the farm Umlaas Poort,

*Buildings were erected and the Lands sown and cultivated during the year 1841 & 1842. At the outbreak of hostilities Caffers — having plundered all the neighboring farms, the claimant abandoned the farm and returned to the Little Tugela where he resides.*⁴²

At the time of the farm survey shortly prior to 1852, it was noted that, "There are two kraals of natives of which one has been erected about three years ago. They contain together about 20 men, women and children."⁴³ Once again, however, the description was of a dwelling situation far less dense than that of an established homestead, which ordinarily would have been occupied by an identifiable male head and a number of women in a polygamous setting.

THE "TRADITIONALIZING" OF TRADITION

This article has so far identified the Zulu homestead as having a clear format and a scale that reflected the extent of its power and control. But it has also described the dislocation of the Hlubi and the efforts of Bhungane and Mthimkhulu to settle new land, and their eventual consolidation on territory in Natal Colony under Langalibalele. In the process, homestead mobility and ancestral affiliation formed new networks of created power. The article has also referred to the migration of a landless group of Mkhize people, who arrived in the Camperdown area at the same time as white settlers. This transient group set up homesteads that evoked efforts at survival rather than established tropes of prosperity and power. The article has thus attempted to show how power and authority were contained in the scale of the homestead, the extent of settlement, and the retention of lineage references as vectors of chiefly power.

The article will now reflect on the manner in which another version of tradition was manufactured through the writing of white settlers — and more fundamentally, how it was inscribed in the Natal Code of Native Law, perhaps obliterating it through its generification.

Tradition itself is a slippery concept. Simon Bronner has suggested that it can exist as a cultural context as well as a performed text. As both subject and object, tradition in the built environment thus "shapes buildings, and buildings shape traditions." Further, "it is a reference to the learning that generates cultural expressions and the authority that precedent holds."⁴⁴ Given the descriptions of the assertive homesteads of the nationalizing Zulu, the defensive and reconstructive efforts of the Hlubi, and the disestablishment and reestablishment of the Mkhize, it is therefore important to consider the cultural position of "tradition" in the vernacular architectures and practices of all the peoples who comprised the Southern Nguni in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

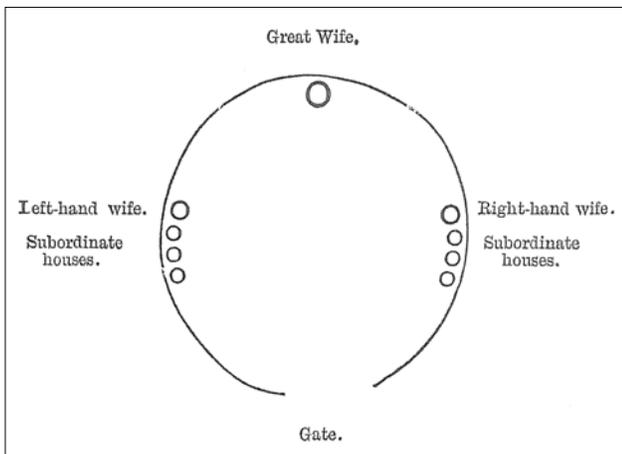
Despite this complexity, and while precolonial practices are largely unknown — even more so as a result of the *Mfec-*

ane between 1800 and 1880 (which facilitated the construction of the Zulu nation as it subsumed polities in its proximity) — the “effective” tradition, which allowed for a transcription of culture, was laid down as “law,” and indeed inscribed, in the late nineteenth century by white colonists. This took place as part of the writing of the Natal Code of Native Law, which originated in a document that was certainly in circulation between 1876 and 1878, and which aimed to create a general set of rules by which the Zulu people in the Natal Colony could be governed. Healy-Clancy and Hickel have used the word “ossified” to describe the extent to which this document obliterated the fluid, preexisting, fragmented sets of rules and practices to create a single code by which “Native Law” could be adjudicated.⁴⁵

In its effort to underpin the descriptive narratives related above with a constructed legal framework, the Natal Code of Native Law, as inscribed and enacted in 1891, subsequently had an indelible effect on the practice of “Zulu” culture.⁴⁶ To begin, it prescribed a generic household layout (FIG. 7). But it also advocated for the means by which inter- and intra-household decisions were taken; positioned the role of the homestead head and his wives; and determined the (theoretical) means by which succession through the primary male line would occur.

Significantly, in its many subsequent variations the Natal Code also prescribed the means by which tribal courts could adjudicate civil matters, reinforcing and reinscribing, tradition. Yet, as Healy-Clancy and Hickel have argued,

*In the process, the Code’s drafters took the liberty of enshrining their own stereotypes about Zulu society, to the extent that the end product was less an honest depiction of Zulu customary law than a reflection of colonists’ vision for what African society should look like.*⁴⁷



Thus the politics of creating an interpreted colonial vision of “tradition” in itself created a tradition, which has subsequently been traditionalized, forming what is today a “potted” and romanticized ideal of a nostalgic past. This “traditionalizing” of tradition has also gone hand in hand with official support for creating a Zulu identity and entrenching the idea of a “Zulu tradition.” Not only did this legal system uphold the traditional assessment of civil issues through effective resource management, but it indelibly colored what are now considered contemporary notions of nostalgia, incorrectly heralded as “authentic” tradition.

Healy-Clancy and Hickel have commented on this sliding scale of the homestead and tradition. As they observed, “Certainly the pre-colonial *umuzi* cannot be said to be the same as the rural homestead under colonial rule, which in turn looked quite different from more contemporary iterations that bear the same name today.”⁴⁸ While Adam Kuper has suggested that the “formal” homestead layout developed as a result of Zulu nationalization, as a reflection of entrenched power and authority, the change in scale, order and perception can perhaps be attributed as much to creeping sedentariness, and to prescriptions laid down by the colonial government, restrictions on land, and the collapsed power of chiefs in the last two centuries.

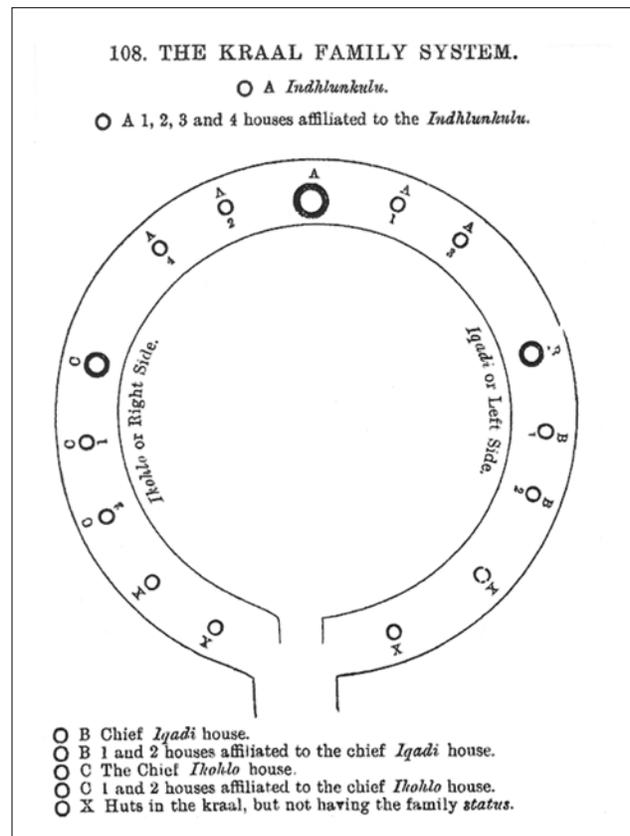


FIGURE 7. Diagrams from the Code of Native Law as at present (1876–78) administered. Source: KwaZulu-Natal Archives Repository NCP 5/8/13) and Law 19 of 1891 (The Natal Government Gazette, August 11, 1891).

NEW IMAGES OF POWER

In understanding the Nkandla homestead, it is critical to consider a synthesis of the preceding discussions. In the historical record, power may be understood through the scale of a homestead, just as wealth was reflected through the accumulation of wives and cattle, which allowed for production.⁴⁹ In the case of the Zulu, rapid nationalization in the nineteenth century allowed for the construction of political homesteads, spread out across the conquered landscape, reinforcing power at the edges. These were military *amakhanda*, which housed men, and had little to do with production. Rather, their means of subsistence was external: tribute cattle were diverted to households of adherents for tending, and the cattle byre, central to the conceptual and spatial ordering of the Central Cattle Pattern assumed a symbolic role. As a man's place in a domestic homestead, the value of the cattle byre in the *amakhanda* was up-scaled as a space in which soldiers gathered, transferring the notions of wealth and power through cattle, to wealth and power through people — and, obliquely, through the might of the military.

It is also important to consider homestead construction as a reaction to disruption, and as a critical part of reestablishment in a more settled, and secure society. It has thus been well documented that the effects of the population movements between 1800 and 1880, commonly referred to as the *Mfecane*, resulted in clan groups fleeing from the nationalization efforts of Shaka, in particular — but also of Dingane, his half-brother, who assumed control after the assassination of Shaka in 1828. People who had previously been tributaries to Shaka presented a threat to Dingane's rule, and thus a wave of disruption occurred. This included the Mkhize people, who fled south across the Tugela River and took refuge in the Colony of Natal. Descriptions of what were most likely these settlers were recorded in this area as the arrival of an itinerant and slowly growing population. In 1848 a similar push by the then Zulu king, Mpande, led to Langalibalele and most of his people moving across the Mzinyathi River and taking refuge in Natal Colony.⁵⁰

Of interest here is also the dislocation of the people of Nxamalala, the clan in which Zuma is today a senior member. They had settled under the peripatetic leader Lugaju in the Pietermaritzburg area in the 1850s, expanding once Zwartkops and Impendle were established as new locations. In this regard, Jeff Guy and others have stressed the irony inherent in the lands now held by Zuma at Nkandla, since the clan progenitor who lived in this area was originally given them as a result of support for colonial forces during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.⁵¹

While these discussions are strongly situated in the history of the nineteenth century, what they do reflect is a cementing of tradition, in addition to the tradition delimiting the manner in which power and authority was reflected, around access to both people and cattle. Guy thus concluded

that it is merely an “idea” of home that has prevailed: “For the continuities between the pre-conquest *umuzi* and the colonial kraal . . . remain real and deeply felt a century later. But at the same time, these continuities are, analytically, ephemeral and shallow.”⁵² This is reinforced by the conditions of today's globalized world, in which rural-urban migration, modernization, and generational shifts have rapidly transformed “traditional” societies. Further, challenges such as intermittent drought make cattle-keeping problematic, and shrinking, dislocated households mean that traditional tropes concerning the presentation of wealth have changed. Speaking about rural-urban relations between hostel dwellers in KwaZulu-Natal and their rural homesteads, Xulu-Gama has noted:

*The idea of livestock as a measure of one's prestige and status is declining. Historically, how much livestock one possessed was used as an indication of one's wealth and status. There is even a saying in isiZulu to this effect: “Ubuhle bensizwa izinkomo zayo,” which can be translated as, “. . . the beauty of a man is measured by his livestock.” However, people have found different ways of measuring prestige and status these days — for example, the material used to build one's house and the size of the house. . . .*⁵³

While the means by which wealth and status (in the past a matter of wives and cattle) may be transforming in contemporary society to allow for more permanent, sedentary trappings, architecture amongst the Southern Nguni may also be evolving to include new forms and reference points that indicate a repositioning of traditions through fixed space and permanence. Thus a significant number of contemporary dwellings mimic the Italianate villa and limit the “traditional” past to a small memorial remnant of the homestead.⁵⁴ Yet the overt visual interpretation of “tradition” still serves to fix a socio-architectural “memory” in order to reinforce political authority and identity.

Like many traditional Zulu men, Jacob Zuma is a polygamist. In traditional Zulu society each wife has her own dwelling and kitchen. The Nkandla homestead thus appears on the landscape as a liminal traditional environment displaying physical and notional trappings of traditional and Western wealth. In the ironic form of a safari lodge, it casts its Western gaze across poverty and the oppressed: the ultimate demonstration of power and dislocation.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. Office of the Public Protector, "Secure in Comfort," released March 19, 2014, p.219.
2. M. Healy-Clancy and J. Hickel, "Introduction: On the Politics of Home," in Healey-Clancy and Hickel, eds., *Ekhaya: The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: The University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), pp.1–2. The citation is to B. Carton, "Why is the '100% Zulu Boy' So Popular?" *Concerned African Scholars Bulletin*, No.84 (November 2009), available at <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/Bulletin84-scarton.pdf>.
3. The domination of Natal clans by the Zulu was reinforced and perpetuated by British colonial rule in the mid-nineteenth century. This promoted the Zulus under Cetshwayo, and subsequently under Dinizulu, Solomon, Cyprian, Bhekezulu, and now King Goodwill. The promotion of a single clan has met with significant resistance, as evidenced by appeals to the Nhlapo Commission for recognition as royalty by (among others) the abaThembu in the Eastern Cape Province and the amaHlubi and amaDlamini in KwaZulu-Natal.
4. All of the above clan groups "form" part of the greater "Zulu," having been politically and nominally subsumed in the nineteenth century.
5. The *Mfecane* is usually presented as having consisted of disruptions caused by the nationalization of the Zulu people under Shaka from 1818 onward. However, this is a simplistic description, and has been much debated by scholars. See G. Dominy, *The Debate on Zulu Origins: A Selection of Papers on the Zulu Kingdom and Early Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Department of Historical Studies, 1990); and C. Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001).
6. This document was vital in the history of tribal authority in the Natal Colony, subsequently the Union and then the Republic, to the extent that its amendments formed part of legislation underpinning the formation of KwaZulu in the 1970s. Originally contrived much earlier, it was enacted as Natal Law No.19 of 1891, and repealed by various acts in 1891, 1894, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1901, 1902, 1903 and 1910, and updated by Natal Proclamation No.168 in 1932.
7. Lugaju is considered a progenitor of the Nxamalala people. He finally settled close to Pietermaritzburg around the late 1840s. While little exists in the historiography to indicate that one of the Nxamalala progenitors moved across into Zululand, Jeff Guy has convincingly argued that the clan was awarded land for their participation on behalf of the colonial government in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.
8. S.B. Hadebe, "The History of the amaHlubi Tribe in the Izibongo of Its Kings," MA Thesis (Oral–Literacy Studies), University of Natal, 1992.
9. P.A.W. Cook, "The History and Izibongo of the Swazi Chiefs," *Bantu Studies*, Vol.5 (1931), pp.184, as cited in S.B. Hadebe, "The History of the amaHlubi Tribe," p.3. Steve Kotze has also related how "A vital element in this oral poetry was the countryside which formed the backdrop to all social activity. On occasion, the land itself came to the fore, assuming critical positions in matters of state and stories of conquest." S. Kotze, *Naming Farmland: Cultural Legacies of Named Landscapes in South Africa*, available at <http://www.kznhass-history.net/files/seminars/Kotze2010.pdf>, p.2.
10. C.M. Doke, D.M. Malcolm, J.M. Sikakana, and B.W. Vilakazi, *English-Zulu Zulu-English Dictionary* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1990), p.891.
11. *Ibid.*, p.540.
12. *Ibid.*, p.378.
13. G. Whitelaw and S. Hall, "Archaeological Contexts and the creation of social categories before the Zulu Kingdom," in C. Hamilton and N. Liebhammer, eds., *Tribing and Untribing the Archive* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2017), pp.146–81.
14. M. Hall, *The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings and Traders in Southern Africa 200–1860* (London: James Currey, 1987).
15. M. Hall and T. Maggs, "Nqabeni, a Later Iron Age Site in Zululand," in *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, No.3, 1979, pp.159–76.
16. Hall, *The Changing Past*, p.72.
17. J. Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), p.29.
18. E.J. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1962 [1936]); A.T. Bryant, *The Zulu People as They Were before the White Man Came* (Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness Ltd., 1949); A. Kuper, "Symbolic Dimensions of the Southern Bantu Homestead," *In Africa*, Vol.50 No.1 (1980), pp.8–23.; and J. Soga, *The South Eastern Bantu (abe-Nguni, amaMbo, amaLala)* (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint 1969 [1930]).
19. T. Evers, "The Recognition of Groups in the Iron Age of Southern Africa," Ph.D. thesis (Archaeology), University of Witwatersrand, 1988.
20. Guy's views are well summarized in Healy-Clancy and Hickel, "Introduction: On the Politics of Home," p.6.
21. A. Kuper, "The 'House' and Zulu Political Structure in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, Vol.34 No.3 (November 1993), pp.469–87; and as cited in Healy-Clancy and Hickel, "Introduction: On the Politics of Home," p.4.
22. Hall, *The Changing Past*, p.136–37. The citation is to Herman (1936).
23. Seminal early works by A.T. Bryant such as *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* (London: Longmans Green, 1929) and *The Zulu People as They Were before the White Man Came* have prefaced more recent, critical works, many of which are listed in these notes.
24. *The Natal Diaries of Dr. W.H.I. Bleek, 1855–1856*, O. Spohr, trans. (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1965), p.68.
25. Hall, *The Changing Past*, pp.136–37.
26. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, p.233.
27. J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994), p.36.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, p.236.
31. S. Kotze, *Naming Farmland: Cultural Legacies of Named Landscape in South Africa*, available at <http://www.kznhass-history.net/files/seminars/Kotze2010.pdf>, 2010. The citation is to A. Koopman, *Zulu Names* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2002), p.192.
32. S.B. Hadebe, "The History of the amaHlubi Tribe," p.11.
33. J. Wright and A. Manson, *The Hlubi Chiefdom in Zululand-Natal, a History* (Ladysmith: Ladysmith Historical Society, 1983), p.4.
34. *Ibid.*, p.6.
35. *Ibid.*, p.27.
36. *Ibid.*
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38. As related in C. de B. Webb and J. Wright, *The James Stuart Archives* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1982), pp.72–78.
39. As translated by O. Spohr in *The Natal Diaries of Dr. W.H.I. Bleek, 1855–1856*.
40. Dutch Grant/Cloete Commission for Leeupoort (KwaZulu-Natal Archives Repository).
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Farm Survey (Reports on the Lands Measured) Umlaas Poort, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Deeds Office, Pietermaritzburg.

44. S. Bronner, "Building Tradition," in L. Asquith and M. Vellinga, eds., *Vernacular Architecture in the Twenty-First Century: Theory, Education and Practice* (Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2006), pp.24–25.
45. Healy-Clancy and Hickel, "Introduction: On the Politics of Home," p.10.
46. Code of Natal Native Law Civil and Criminal framed under the provisions of Section 4 of Law 44 of 1887, Pietermaritzburg, Government Printers 1890 (NCP 8/5/36)
47. Healy-Clancy and Hickel, "Introduction: On the Politics of Home," p.10.
48. Ibid., p.3.
49. Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal*, p.29.
50. Langalibalele was removed from power and stripped of his chieftom and his people fragmented as the result of a well-publicized uprising in 1873. At the time the Hlubi posed a potential threat to white settlers in the region. Their agrarian success is said to have been the trigger for the Natal Resident Magistrate John McFarlane to orchestrate the infamous Langalibalele Rebellion.
51. J. Guy, *Women in Labour: The Birth of Colonial Natal* (University of KwaZulu-Natal, History and African Studies Seminar file:///F:/Guy2009.pdf, 2009), p.5; and C. de B. Webb and J. Wright, *The James Stuart Archive V* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2001), p.359. The son of the progenitor Msholozzi, Mnyakanya, reflects as the chief of a small group of people in this region in the *Natal Native Affairs Blue Book* for 1906.
52. J. Guy, "Colonial Transformations and the Home," in Healy-Clancy and Hickel, eds., *Ekhaya*, p.45.
53. N. Xulu-Gama, *Hostels in South Africa: Spaces of Perplexity* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2017), pp.139–140.
54. D Whelan, *Immigrants, Protest and Aspiration: The Curious Case of the Current Polemic in South African Vernacular Architecture* (in press, 2019).