
Pollution Concepts and Marriage for the Southern African Iron Age

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This article draws on the ethnography of South African Bantu speakers to model an archaeologically useful relationship between pollution beliefs and marriage. Typically, pollution beliefs intensify with more complex marital alliances, first with the increasing significance of relations between wives and their cattle-linked siblings, and then with a shift towards a preference for cousin marriage. The article applies the model to the Early Iron Age (AD 650–1050) record and concludes that Early Iron Age agriculturists practised non-kin marriage, but that a high bridewealth, and possibly hypogamous marriage, generated considerable structural tension in Early Iron Age society.

In an article published in 1981, Hammond-Tooke (1981a) compares Sotho and Nguni worldviews, drawing especially on studies of the Kgaga and Zulu. He focuses particularly on pollution beliefs, interpreting these in terms of the articulation of each with its 'social substructure'. Like other Sotho-Tswana, the Kgaga conceive of pollution in terms of heat, while Zulus view it as bodily contamination. Hammond-Tooke poses a gentle challenge to archaeologists to investigate the origins and development of these different systems, or at least to interpret archaeological residues in terms of pollution beliefs. His work inspired several archaeologists to apply pollution-related interpretations to the archaeological record.

Hall (1998), for instance, argues that changes in Sotho-Tswana household layout and ceramic style constitute evidence for the development of increasingly hierarchical relations between men and women. Boeyens *et al.* (2009) interpret child burials in pots as treatment of the polluting effect of untimely death (see also Hattingh & Hall 2009). Huffman (2009) uses burnt daga structures as a proxy for severe drought, arguing that structures were burnt deliberately in order to treat drought-causing pollution. In a remarkable validation of the interpretative approach, he matches the burnt structures, isotopic results from faunal remains and lake deposits in South America to identify a 2000-year sequence of intense El Niño episodes that caused droughts throughout southern Africa (Huffman 2010a).

This article attempts to examine links between pollution beliefs and marriage in a way that is archaeologically useful. It draws heavily on Hammond-Tooke's thesis, though it offers new material and some different perspectives. I mostly use the present tense, either because people to whom I spoke still hold these ideas or because the ethnographic sources are generally of the twentieth century. I start with an Nguni (mainly Zulu) perspective (Fig. 1).

Pollution and society

Douglas defines pollution as a set of dangerous powers that 'punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate' (2002 [1966], 140). People inevitably encounter such conjunctions and ruptures, partly because their models of the world do not perfectly match their experience in it, but more importantly because people experience change throughout their lives, from birth through childhood, puberty, marriage, parenthood, old age and death. Each transition, each mismatch is ripe with creative potential, but also, by implication, contains uncertainty and even danger (cf. Douglas 2002 [1966], 117). Pollution represents this uncertainty. Living, then, generates pollution, sometimes intentionally, but more usually unintentionally. Either way a 'polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition



Figure 1. East and central southern Africa, indicating various groups and places mentioned in the text: N = Ndongondwane; MC = Msuluzi Confluence; M = Magogo and Mhlopeni; K = KwaGandaganda; Mtd = Marothodi; KZN = KwaZulu-Natal; EC = Eastern Cape.

or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.’ (Douglas 2002 [1966], 140)

For the Zulu, pollution manifests itself primarily as darkness (*umnyama*) (Krige 1962 [1936], 82; Ngubane 1977, chap. 5). The Mpondo and other southern Nguni refer to *umlaza* (Hunter 1961 [1936], 46–7; Hammond-Tooke 1962, 69–70). Whatever its form, pollution renders people vulnerable to bad luck and sickness, notably in terms of reproductive and productive success. Further, polluted people are dangerous for other people as well as things. Crops might shrivel, brews fail, pots crack and milk can dry in the udder (Hunter 1961 [1936], 46–7; Ngubane 1977, 78–9).

Polluted people protect themselves and others from the condition in several ways. Affected people *zila* (adopt abstinence and avoidance behaviour) and cleanse themselves. New mothers and mourners should cover themselves with blankets and then, in the case of mothers, apply red ochre to themselves as protection from negative influences in the environment (for which, see Ngubane 1977, 24–9). Fearful of passing such influences on to their babies, mothers returning from an outing express a few drops of milk onto the floor before breastfeeding. Similarly, men who encounter strangers at work might regularly induce a cleansing vomiting. Young men who feel themselves unattractive can take a course of steaming and vomiting with red medicine followed by a course of vomiting with white medicine (Berglund 1989 [1976], 328–9; Ngubane 1977, chaps. 5 & 6; Ntombifuthi Mkhize pers. comm.). A menstruating woman who must cross a groundnut field (which she would normally avoid doing) spits onto an earth clod and throws it into the field (Ngubane 1977, 79). Here she apparently treats the field as one would a grave (see Berglund 1989 [1976], 334–5); they are the same in the sense that both are conceptually similar to the womb (Armstrong *et al.* 2008, 537–8). Spitting can be cleansing but in this context is also a declaration of innocence, an indication that the woman means no harm. A menstruating Bhaca woman adopts the same strategy when crossing a river, which might otherwise ‘become aggravated’ (Hammond-Tooke 1962, 70). Importantly, because people believe they can be unknowingly polluted, they always take steps to ensure they are ritually pure before embarking on activities related in any way to the creative process (Krige 1962 [1936], 82; Berglund 1989 [1976], 225–8, 329). To understand where pollution dangers lie, we must follow Hammond-Tooke and look at the ‘social substructure’.

Pollution in the ‘social substructure’

The key social unit is the agnatic cluster, which together with wives typically occupies a homestead or set of closely associated homesteads. The cluster includes the homestead-head’s ancestors, incorporating both the undifferentiated legion of clan ancestors as well as recognizable members who died recently. The first category comprises all the dead who shared the homestead-head’s clan name. The second, typically grandparents, distinguishes the ancestors of different agnatic clusters within a clan (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 151).

Each homestead is created through marriage. Unlike some Eastern Bantu groups who permit cousin marriage, Zulus are more strictly exogamous. Typically, a man cannot marry a woman from any of the clans of his four grandparents (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 107, 118). In a cosmological sense, therefore, his wife is a stranger to his agnatic cluster. She is simultaneously alien and a critical component of her husband’s homestead — a homestead cannot exist without marriage, nor can a man’s agnatic cluster grow beyond him. Because wives join unrelated clusters, they provide a template for thinking about pollution.

Wives join different realms in another important way. When giving birth they connect or form channels between the living world and that of their husbands’ ancestors (Ngubane 1977, chap. 5). No contact between ancestors and clan strangers is more intimate. Consequently, pollution is most strongly associated with birth, when a wife’s fertile potential is fully realized, and with death, which mirrors birth. Indeed, burial ritual reverses the birth ritual (Ngubane 1977, chap. 5; Hammond-Tooke 1981a).

Subtleties in this set of beliefs are revealing. Death pollution is treated initially with ‘black’ medicines and with rituals involving black sheep, both of which represent the darkness of death (Ngubane 1977, 81, 86, 109–10, 120). The Zulu use of the word *umnyama* (darkness) as a general term for pollution represents an overwhelming concern for dangers that might adversely affect the future continuity — or cause the death — of the agnatic cluster. Zulus nevertheless often speak of the opposite power, fertility, as heat (*ukushisa*), work (of the ancestors) and desire (*ukufisa*) (Berglund 1989 [1976], 253), thereby differentiating it from death pollution. Bhaca make the same distinction (Hammond-Tooke 1962, 69). Darkness and heat are, however, linked symbolically (Ngubane 1977, 120–21). To be in a state of impurity or ill health is to be hot, and the black medicines used to purge bodily contamination, whether from pollution or witchcraft, are always heated. A course of white medicines always

follows treatment with black medicines, often via a transitional step of red medicines. White medicines cool and restore a person's balance. Unlike black and red medicines, they are never cooked.

Of reproductive pollution, that associated with birth is the most intense. Milder but still threatening forms exist in other expressions of fertility — pubescence, menstruation and sexual intercourse — and, by extension, in other transitional or ambiguous circumstances. On the other hand, pregnant and nursing women are considered *balula* (flimsy) and in need of special care and protection from negative influences. A man preparing for war can have sex safely with a pregnant wife, but not a menstruating one (Ntombifuthi Mkhize pers. comm.). The difference seems to reflect a distinction between the life-giving power of a wife's ancestors, expressed in menstruation, and that power engaged by her husband's ancestors, for fertility's power must be controlled — 'let loose it can kill a man' (Berglund 1989 [1976], 254). Note that people say a man's ancestors fashion his child from his wife's menstrual blood, which her paternal ancestors supply. The blood also nourishes the foetus in her womb; for this reason the menstrual flow ceases during pregnancy (Hammond-Tooke 1962, 71; Berglund 1989 [1976], 117, 253).

Pollution, however, represents more than male anxiety about uncontrolled fertility. Pollution beliefs provide a means to control that power, and the people who hold it, in ways that emphasize its apparent threat to success. By punishing inappropriate ruptures and contacts, pollution acts as 'a power by which the structure [of ideas] is expected to protect itself' (Douglas 2002 [1966], 140). It discourages challenges to social order by making inviolable the categories from which society is built: male *vs* female, young *vs* old, clan *vs* stranger.

To elaborate on this point: Hammond-Tooke (1981a) relates the differences between Nguni and Sotho pollution to the social boundaries maintained by the two groups. He argues that Sotho speakers, living in large villages with both kin and non-kin in close proximity, have to deal with strangers in a way that Nguni speakers in widely scattered homesteads do not. Boundary maintenance is further challenged by the Sotho acceptance of cousin marriages, which force a series of shifts in social relationships through life (see later). Given the greater potential for ambiguity and improper contacts, pollution dangers are more elaborate among the Sotho than the Nguni.

Hammond-Tooke draws partly on Sansom's (1974) environmentally grounded explanation of settlement differences between Nguni and Sotho-Tswana to suggest that concentrated settlement was an appro-

priate response to the relatively arid environment of west-central southern Africa. Archaeological research provides a cautionary note, however, showing that concentrated Sotho-Tswana settlement in these parts was a response to military stress from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, not a long-standing pattern (Huffman 1986a). Significantly, Tswana leaders have more recently imposed various sanctions to curb their subjects' desire to leave the large towns, as Hammond-Tooke acknowledges. In earlier times, settlements typically comprised fairly small homestead units arranged singly or in small clusters probably inhabited by closely related people (Huffman 2001, 27; Boeyens 2003, 65–6). We see a similar pattern of settlement density among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Zizi (Nguni) sites in the well-watered upper Thukela basin (see Maggs *et al.* 1986, 468–9, 478, figs. 11–14), and for sixteenth-century Type N sites of Nguni origin on the Vredefort Dome (Huffman 1986a, 287). This common pattern in differing environments not only undermines Sansom's expectation, but also suggests that settlement density was not a primary basis for the different pollution constructs, unless Sotho-Tswana beliefs are a recent phenomenon.

Marriage is a different matter. It was through marriage that people entered into a community of socially responsible adults and established homesteads, and primarily through marriage — the exchange of cattle for rights over women — that men gained control of other people. The more people living and working under a man's headship, the greater his status. He benefited from their work and from their fertility, which generated more people. His daughters, when marriageable, were exchanged for cattle that made more marriages possible, either for their father or their brothers. Thus the homestead-head added to the community under his control. This constant accumulation, creation and distribution of productive and reproductive potential — in the form of people or cattle — fundamentally shaped Iron Age economic structure and gave it life, for it established relationships between people with potentially competing interests, that is, between men, between men and women, young and old, ancestors and the living, chiefs and subjects, and between chiefdoms, all set in a varied and frequently capricious landscape (Guy 1987). Indeed, competition for people and cattle was a source of shifts in power throughout the Iron Age, sometimes in ways that usurped hereditary leadership. According to Kuper (1982, 51), rebellion 'was frequent, as were preemptive strikes by the rulers': Shaka famously killed his father's heir to take control of the Zulu chiefdom, and later died at his brothers' hands. And once in power, both Dingane and Mpande killed brothers.

Within the homestead, wives provide another potential schism. With the birth of her first child, a woman establishes a household within her husband's homestead and, at the same time, creates the potential for conflict between herself, her husband's other wives and her in-laws. She has a significant degree of autonomy, with her own fields and cattle, and her principal concern is the success and eventual independence of her own household (specifically of her sons *vis-à-vis* their father, brothers and cousins). These competing interests create lines of weakness between each household, and between households and homestead, between *izindlu* and *umuzi*. A disgruntled section of the homestead might hive off to independence, or witchcraft accusations might flare up between households, with potentially serious consequences for the accused. Either way, the homestead-head's control over his family is loosened or lost (Ngubane 1977, 91–2; Hammond-Tooke 1981a; 1993, 178; Mack *et al.* 1991, 124). Clan exogamy exacerbates the sense of threat by making new wives strangers worthy of deep suspicion, so much so that a bride's family warns her, 'You will be called lazy, a prostitute, a witch and all sorts of bad names' (after Krige 1962 [1936], 136).

Various control measures exist. The most direct is *inhlonipho*¹ (respect), an institution of formalized and respectful speech and behaviour by which people avoid improper reference to or contact with others. The practice applies to all people, but women especially suffer its burden because they live in their husband's homestead after marriage (Hammond-Tooke 1962, 122–3). *Inhlonipho* eases with time as a wife becomes more closely identified with her husband's people until, after menopause, when her father's ancestors leave her, the requirement falls away entirely (Berglund 1989 [1976], 121; Ngubane 1977, 54). *Inhlonipho* is largely an Nguni phenomenon, most likely conceived to deal with the perceived dangers of strict clan exogamy.

Inhlonipho is backed by pollution dangers. Unlike misfortune sent by witches and offended ancestors, pollution dangers are impersonal (Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 16–17). They (seem to) inhere in the natural order of things and so, significantly, are less easy to challenge.² Pollution dangers are (seemingly) unavoidable in the course of normal living and affect women most frequently and most severely. Failure to take appropriate protective measures is believed to bring on a neurosis that turns people into social misfits (Ngubane 1977, 82). It is as if the universe itself is demanding compliance with and acceptance of married men's control of women and children.

There is another way in which pollution dangers are naturalized. They function in a way that seems

to provide a symbolic map of marriage. Pollution weakens bodily defences, leaving people vulnerable to negative influences in the environment. Contamination is evidently believed to enter the body because treatment typically involves expulsion through purging — spitting, sweating, vomiting, enemas, expressing milk (Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 14–15). Similarly, marriage draws alien, unpredictable and potentially destructive individuals into the heart of the agnatic cluster (Ngubane 1977, 91–3). Pollution beliefs explicitly warn of the danger these people pose, as well as directing a cautionary note at scheming wives; at its most serious, purging can have dire consequences for witches. And, just as pollution is unavoidable in life, so is marriage, if life is to continue.

I am tempted to explore a similar significance for southern Nguni *umlaza*. In Zulu, *umlaza* is 'whey', a by-product of curdling milk or a sign of ageing curdled milk, and is generally discarded as something sour (although some people eat it) (Ntombifuthi Mkhize and Derrick Mhlongo pers. comm. 2012). Curdled milk (*amasi*) was an Nguni dietary staple in pre- and early colonial times (Soga 1931, 398; Bryant 1967 [1949], 270), and for the Zulu its consumption was (and still is) linked to descent.³ *Amasi* are likened to the ancestors and to semen — people say that eating *amasi* promotes the production of semen in the homestead-head (Raum 1973, 357). In principle, a man can eat *amasi* at any homestead of the clans of any of his four grandparents, but clan exogamy excludes him from marriage alliances with these people. The same symbolic associations probably existed among the southern Nguni, who similarly restricted the eating of *amasi* (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 56–7; Sinegugu Zukulu pers. comm. 2012; cf. Soga 1931, 234 (but see p. 356); Alberti 1968 [1815], 64).

For food that has soured, southern Nguni use the noun *isilaza*. Whey, by contrast, is *intloya* (Fischer *et al.* 1985; Sinegugu Zukulu pers. comm. 2012). Unlike *amasi*, people might offer *intloya* to strangers for refreshment (John Steele pers. comm. 2012). In Zulu, the noun *uloya* is 'life essence', while the verb form *-loya* means 'bewitch' (Dent & Nyembezi 1988 [1969]; Doke *et al.* 1990).⁴ I am struck by a possible connection between life essence and menstrual blood, and between bewitchment and polluting impurity, founded on the notion that agnatic continuity depends upon a stranger. To explore this idea I turn to Bryant's (1905) secondary meaning for Zulu *uloya*: 'long extended, stratified cloud or stratus, generally prognosticating rain or thunder (cp. um-Kwazi)'. For *umkhwazi* he gives, 'red streak or streaks, red streakiness, as formed by the rays of a rising or setting sun, or as exhibited in the long horizontal layers of golden stratified clouds (not a simply red-

dened sky)' or 'redness or blood-shot appearance of an inflamed eye'. To this definition, Doke *et al.* (1990) add 'bad luck, misfortune'. A key point here is that *umkhwazi* refers to a streaked rather than a uniformly coloured sky; in other words, a sky comparable to anomalous striped or spotted animals. These definitions suggest a bridge between Zulu whey and southern Nguni pollution through the liminal nature of dusk and dawn (Ngubane 1977, 115–17) and the unpredictability of rain (Berglund 1989 [1976], 37–8). If these associations have any substance, they suggest a linguistic transformation that separates KwaZulu-Natal and southern Nguni dialects. For, just as *amasi* production yields both curds and whey, so marriage creates homesteads containing both agnates (= curds) and affines (= whey). In the context of pollution dangers, whey would provide a powerful metaphor for wives and of the inevitability of pollution: curdling milk generates whey, and creating children demands wives. (Archaeologically, it is worth noting that a ceramic-style distinction appears to separate northern and southern Nguni regions from the period AD 1300–1700: Huffman 2004, 88.)

The Sotho-Tswana conception of pollution is essentially similar to the Nguni form, but with some interesting differences in emphasis. For them I mainly summarize Hammond-Tooke's position (1981a; 1993, chap. 9).

The Sotho-Tswana variant

Like the Nguni, native Sotho-Tswana speak of death pollution in terms of darkness, with the linked idea of a 'shadow' (Schapera 1979, 5; Krige & Krige 1980 [1943], 218–19; Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 15–16). In death-related or death-threatening circumstances, people are treated with smoking or charred material, as if the material's blackness will desensitize them to the darkness of death.⁵ But unlike the Zulu case, darkness forms a comparatively small component of Sotho-Tswana pollution. Instead, people elaborate the pollution of reproduction, speaking of 'hot blood' or states of 'hotness' and extending this concept to other transitional or ambiguous circumstances (e.g. Schapera 1979; Krige & Krige 1980 [1943], 220–21; Hammond-Tooke 1981a).

Sotho-Tswana pollution is again rooted in the 'social substructure'. The key social unit was the 'family group', which consisted of 'several different households' containing families

whose men were all descended agnatically from a common grandfather or great-grandfather, by whose name the group was known. The family group ... could also include other relatives, such as affines or maternal kin, or even families of unrelated dependents. It was thus not a pure descent group. The family

group was a closely knit unit, whose members cooperated in such tasks as building and thatching, agricultural labour, assisting each other with gifts and loans. It dealt with such matters as 'betrothal and marriage, the organization of feasts, the settlement of estates, and the future of widows, all of which [were] held to concern not one household alone but the group as a whole'. As in the case of the agnatic cluster, it also met, under the elder, to arbitrate over internal disputes. (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 110–11, quoting Schapera)

Sotho kinship terms emphasize the difference between the family group and the Nguni agnatic cluster. All kin, including affines, are called by one name, though the category is divided into paternal kin and close agnates of one's mother. Importantly, paternal kin living outside the family group are lumped with maternal kin (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 111).

This difference from Nguni derives from the Sotho-Tswana acceptance of cousin marriage. The social consequences are significant. Cross-cousin marriages set up politically advantageous, hierarchical alliances between two lines of descent that are repeated across generations (Hammond-Tooke 1993, 119). Cross-cousin marriage in particular helps to explain why the basic social unit extends beyond the agnatic cluster. Also, such inter-generational alliances made the incorporation of maternal relatives into the ancestral body possible, and even necessary (Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 11). Parallel-cousin marriage, on the other hand, unites close agnates who might compete with one another in the Nguni model, and so encourages settlement aggregation rather than hiving off or secession. It was especially favoured by elite families because it retained and concentrated control of people and cattle within the agnatic group (Kuper 1982, 56; Hammond-Tooke 1993, 119); people say, 'child of my father's elder brother/younger brother, marry me so that the cattle may remain in our kraal' (Mönnig 1967, 199).

The preference for cousin marriage provides the template for thinking about wives and, therefore, pollution. Because cousin-wives are daughters of families already allied and sympathetic to a man's fortune, his desire for agnatic continuity is not faced with a potentially dangerous stranger. Rather, the history of repetitive marriages provides a sense of security about the future. For this reason, death pollution is little emphasized. This security comes at a heavy cost, however, for repetitive alliances can challenge the authority of homestead-heads. A relative of a Pedi bride warns the groom, 'If she steals, do not kill her; if she bewitches, do not kill her; if she prostitutes, do not kill her; the head is ours, the feet are yours' (Mönnig 1967, 334). (Compare for contrast

the warning the Zulu bride receives.) There is thus an ambiguity about a man's control of his family. Further, cousin marriages mean that women and their close relatives can shift kinship categories, or be defined in multiple ways: from 'sister' or cousin to wife and from 'father' or uncle to father-in-law. Sotho-Tswana pollution concepts are entirely consistent with these social circumstances: ambiguity around reproduction is rife and so Sotho-Tswana pollution complexes are typically more baroque than Nguni ones.

We could predict, if we did not already know, something of their nature. Because wives are the daughters of allies, pollution beliefs typically do not demand the conceptually (and often physically) harsh expulsion of danger through purging — recall the warning to the groom. Rather, treatment takes the form of an *in situ* correction or restorative process, a cooling of reproductive 'heat', where 'to cool' might be alternatively expressed as 'to calm, to free from agitation, to soothe, to appease, or, more generally, to put right' (Krige & Krige 1980 [1943], 221). It typically involves the application of 'cool' substances, such as ash, dung, chyme or water-based medicines, and the immersion of 'hot' things in 'cool' environments.

It would be archaeologically useful if an emphasis on heat pollution could be associated exclusively with cousin marriage, and the Zulu pollution form with more strictly exogamous marriage. Unfortunately, things are not so straightforward. The Tsonga, for instance, provide an intermediate example. They have marriage rules almost as restrictive as Nguni rules (Kuper 1982, 119–20), and seemingly conceive of pollution as both heat (especially in the case of 'abnormal' births) and as something that can be washed away and discarded like dirt at crossroads, to be carried away on the feet of passers-by (Junod 1962 [1927], II, 317–19, 477–8). In this latter form, Tsonga pollution resembles the negative influences or contamination that Zulu speakers flush out with vomiting and steaming (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 22). Since washing can both cleanse and cool, pollution complexes evidently occupy a darkness/dirt–heat spectrum. We possibly see just such a spectrum expressed in the Kgaga words for soot (*mošidi*), charred *tšhidi* medicines, and dampness (*bošidi*) (Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 20).⁶ It is a spectrum that shifts uncertainly alongside a parallel spectrum of marriage practices. Do the two relate in an archaeologically useful way?

Pollution and marriage

A way forward is to consider the debts established by marriage alliances, which range in type from elite patrilineal first-cousin marriage through to non-kin marriage. All types allow for compensation of a

woman whose bridewealth is used to seal her brother's marriage (Kuper 1982, 158–9). In the preferred marriage among Sotho-Tswana and Venda a woman can claim her brother's daughter for her son — a mother's brother's daughter (MBD) marriage from his point of view. Nguni and Tsonga women, on the other hand, can claim a brother's daughter or a younger sister as a co-wife — a wife's brother's daughter (WBD) or wife's younger sister marriage from the husband's point of view. Intriguingly, the Xhosa have a different strategy.

A daughter was married with a substantial dowry. The dowry, of cattle, almost balanced a brideprice received for her. Her husband looked after the dowry cattle, but they remained legally hers, and could not be used except with her consent. Similarly the *lobolo* [bridewealth] received for her was not used by her father or brother to acquire a wife. The bridewealth cattle were held in trust for her. The cattle debts therefore balanced out. A woman had no claim on her father or brother arising from the use of her bridewealth. *And among the Cape Nguni, neither MBD nor the WBD was married.* Moreover, a woman was cut off from relations with her natal family, and her children had hardly any contact with their mother's brother. (Kuper 1987, 114; see also 1982, 33–6)

There is something elemental here: a household shorn of alliances to the outside world, which by their absence emphasize the relationship between children and father. At the same time, the arrangement stresses patriarchal control because it is fathers who connect homesteads to the wider world through affinal relationships. These are enduring and demanding for Xhosa men. There is no limit to the bridewealth claim, which lasts for the life of the marriage and beyond: a man can even claim cattle from his son-in-law's descendants after the son-in-law dies (Soga 1931, 266). It is a claim underpinned by his right to withdraw his daughter from her marriage, even when there is no evidence for her ill-treatment (Hoernlé 1933, 371–2).

Marriage, therefore, generates three key relationships: first, between homestead-heads, secondly between husband and wife, and thirdly, between a man's wife and her cattle-linked brother. We have already seen that structural tension exists between husband and wife, between homestead and household. The Xhosa arrangement highlights an opposition between the two external relationships. On the one hand, the relationship between a man and his father-in-law expresses patriarchal control over the homestead. On the other, the relationship between a woman and her cattle-linked brother emphasizes relations that are independent from patriarchal control.

Clearly this is an area where pollution can flourish. The homestead-head to homestead-head relationship dominates among the Xhosa, where,

interestingly, pollution beliefs seem less emphasized (Hammond-Tooke 1981a, 13; 1993, 179–80). In societies where the second external relationship is prominent, we can expect greater uncertainty, even tension, in relations between husband and wife, between homestead and household, due to the potential influence of forces beyond the husband's control. And we can then expect the expression of this uncertainty in more elaborate pollution beliefs, specifically those associated with reproduction. This result is consistent with the relationship Douglas defines between pollution and the control men exert over women (2002 [1966], 176).

Summing up, two things seem to influence the nature and significance of pollution beliefs. First, the degree to which marriage is restricted to unrelated people generates a basic form for pollution, indicated by the manner in which it is alleviated (e.g. cooled, washed, purged). Pollution as bodily contamination, for instance, indicates an anxiety about outsiders and suggests more restrictive marriage practices. This basic form can be altered by the second factor, the significance of cattle-linked relations between siblings. With their increasing significance, people seem to elaborate the simple fertility–desire–work–heat association into more complex heat-based pollution beliefs. The interplay between these two factors determines where on the pollution spectrum a particular set of beliefs sits.

Context is important. The archaeological record reveals circumstances and interactions that generated mergers and new identities throughout the Iron Age (e.g. Huffman 2007, 317–20, 431–3; Hall 2012). The Kgaga themselves have Koni (Sotho-ized Nguni) origins (Hammond-Tooke 1981b, 2), and the Kgaga term *go fiša*, 'to be hot', is a cognate of the Zulu *uku-shisa*, 'to burn' (Adrian Koopman pers. comm. 2012). Kgatla (a Tswana group) use of *bollo* for hot (Schapera 1979) indicates a different linguistic history. Elsewhere, interaction and movement across the Drakensberg between Nguni and Sotho gave some Southern Sotho a version of *inhlonipho* (Herbert 1990, 468–70). This version, *hlonepa*, is not as extreme as *inhlonipho*, nor does its neglect attract sanctions. Appropriately used, *hlonepa* simply indicates good manners. It is a gentler form of the practice, which Herbert ascribes to the influence of Sotho marriage preferences. In the same way, we can expect that a spectrum of pollution beliefs arose throughout the Iron Age, shaped by marriage practices generated in a range of social and environmental circumstances. This is probably as far as I can push the argument. I now turn to evidence for pollution and marriage in the Early Iron Age of KwaZulu-Natal.

Pollution residues in the Early Iron Age

The Early Iron Age begins in the fifth century with Mzonjani sites restricted mainly to the coastal belt, but by the mid-seventh century KALUNDU tradition agriculturists had settled further inland in the relatively closed savanna of the deep river valleys. It is the KALUNDU material I deal with here.

Sites occur on arable soils close to rivers, where people would have had access to year-round sweetveld grazing and plenty of fuel for domestic and industrial use. The sites are large, commonly 7–10 ha, though it is unlikely that site size always reflects settlement size. Some sites were occupied for long periods; consequently, the various temporal layers must be teased apart to discern settlement size(s) at any particular time. The sites are characterized by rich deposits with faunal material, structural and metallurgical remains, and abundant ceramics. Ceramics of all three phases, Msuluzi, Ndondondwane and Ntshekane, are richly decorated with bold incision, sometimes combined with graphite and ochre; almost every pot has some form of decoration, though it is less common on bowls (Fig. 9). This part of the Iron Age sequence lasts until the mid-eleventh century when it is succeeded by the Late Iron Age *Blackburn* facies and sites of a markedly different material-cultural signature (Table 1). Scholars now take *Blackburn* to mark the arrival of Nguni speakers in the region (see Whitelaw 2008 for a recent summary).

A key debate on the nature of Early Iron Age society involves faunal samples and the significance of cattle. Some scholars once argued that the low ratio of cattle to ovicaprine remains on most Early Iron Age sites indicated fundamental economic differences between first- and second-millennium agriculturists. Badenhorst (2009a,b; 2010) recently revived these arguments as possible evidence for matriliney, but his argument fails to shift a significant body of counter-data and reasoning accumulated since the mid-1980s. Huffman (2010b) provides a comprehensive response. There is no need to rehearse the debate here: cattle remains surely under-

Table 1. Iron Age ceramic phases in KwaZulu-Natal in years AD.

UREWE tradition – Kwale Branch	
Mzonjani	400–600
KALUNDU tradition	
Msuluzi	650–780
Ndondondwane	780–910
Ntshekane	910–1030
UREWE tradition – Blackburn Branch	
Blackburn	1030–1300
Moor Park	1300–1700
Nqabeni	1700–1850

represent the size of Early Iron Age herds. Further, since Iron Age people of both millennia maintained the Central Cattle Pattern, economic structure in both periods was fundamentally the same (e.g. Huffman 1982; 1990; 2001; Whitelaw 1994; 1994–95; 2012). The Central Cattle Pattern is a settlement form in which households are arranged in ranked order around a central cattle pen and court (Figs. 2–5). Female access to this central area is restricted and controlled. In the past and to a varying degree still today, this homestead layout was ‘a map of the family structure [and] ... a microcosm of the community and the spiritual world ... [It was a symbol] of a well-ordered world’ (Maggs 1995, 134; cf. Kuper 1980) (Fig. 6). This common social framework allows us to say something about Early Iron Age marriage preferences based on archaeological residues and the pollution model. There are a few thin strands of evidence.

Marriage preferences

Iron production provides an obvious starting point. Most sites contain metallurgical debris, but its ubiquity presents a challenge and a full understanding of the organization of iron production still eludes us. Ethnographic accounts nevertheless indicate that smelting was associated with procreation and birth (e.g. Collett 1993; Herbert 1993). For this reason, smelting was typically secluded from normal society in some way. Forging generally did not carry the same intensity and degree of transformational baggage, and ‘often the smithy plays a central role in the community, not only as a gathering place for men to exchange the news but as a refuge from violence, a place of purification, even a place of healing’ (Herbert 1993, 108). Since this distinction with its framing symbolism exists throughout the Bantu-speaking world, beyond the bounds of Eastern Bantu societies, it probably has great antiquity. We can therefore expect that southern African Early Iron Age societies maintained the same symbolic set.

Indeed, forging took place in an area where men gathered, close to cattle pens in the centre of settlements (Huffman 1990, 7; Whitelaw 1994, 26–8; Greenfield & Miller 2004, 1521, but see p. 1530). Smelting data are more equivocal. Furnace remains occur in a central area at Ndongondwane (Loubser 1993, 118–20), but might post-date the rest of the occupation (Fowler & Greenfield 2009, 381–2). A central midden at KwaGandaganda contains both forging and smelting debris (Whitelaw 1994, 33–4), though furnace fragments seem underrepresented. At Magogo, there is no settlement context for the complex of smelting features (Maggs & Ward 1984). This complex includes a trench-like furnace bowl measuring 2 m long, 55 cm

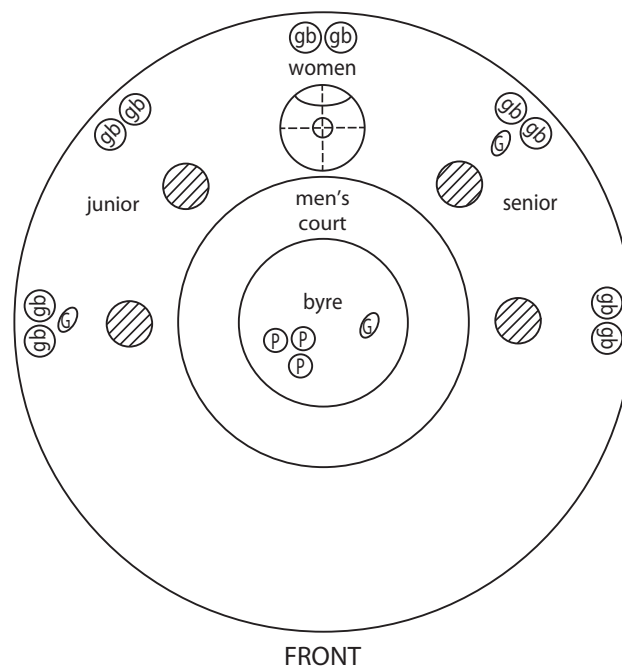


Figure 2. The Central Cattle Pattern settlement layout: P = pit; G = grave; gb = granary. (From Huffman 1996, 175.)

wide and 60 cm deep, a charcoal-production pit, and another pit containing, along with the furnace bowl, fragments of furnace superstructure and other debris. A slag heap lies on the occupation surface near the furnace bowl.

In symbolic terms the furnace at the end of the smelt was like a woman who had just given birth. Proper treatment of her ‘body’ would not only protect other members of the community, but also promote the success of further work on the iron bloom — her ‘child’. This reproductive symbolism suggests that the furnace superstructure at Magogo was demolished and buried in the bowl and nearby pit as part of a cleansing ritual. Slag was evidently largely excluded from this treatment, perhaps simply because there was so much of it and it inevitably accumulated in both smelting and forging areas. Demolition and burial of furnace remains partly explains why so few have been located (Maggs 1980, 121). But not all furnaces were buried (e.g. Maggs 1980, 121), so spatial context was perhaps a determining factor, with stricter disposal for furnaces close to or within the bounds of settlements. For the same reason, we find variable screening among the iron-smelting furnaces at the terminal Iron Age site of Marothodi (Hall *et al.* 2006, 9).

Pits like those at Magogo occur in both residential and central areas on Early Iron Age sites. Many were originally excavated for storage, as indicated by dung

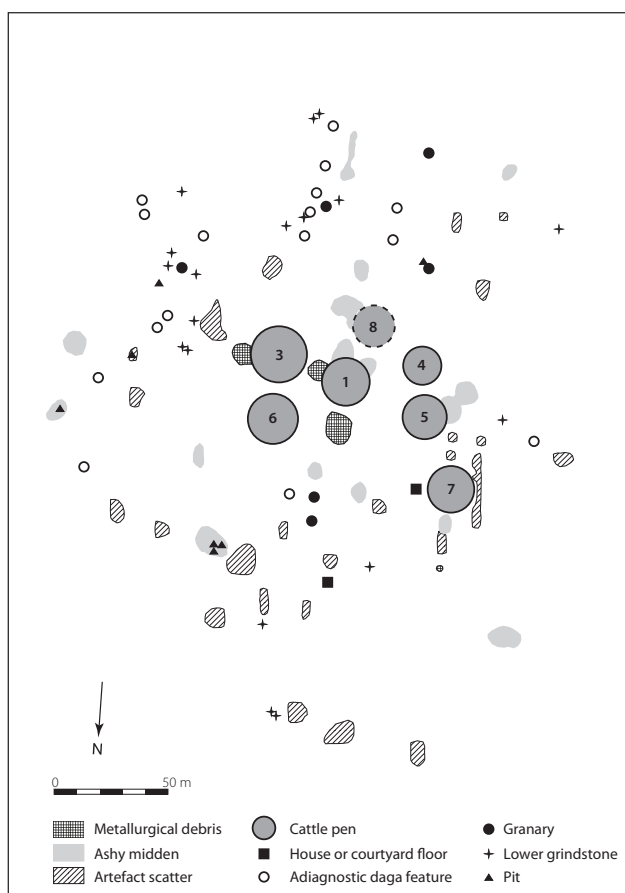


Figure 3. Combined Ndongondwane- and Ntshekane-phase features at KwaGandaganda (from Whitelaw 1994, 50). Cattle pen 7 probably dates to the late-Msuluzi/early-Ndongondwane period. Surface lower grindstones that cannot be allocated to phase are indicated on both Figures 3 and 4.

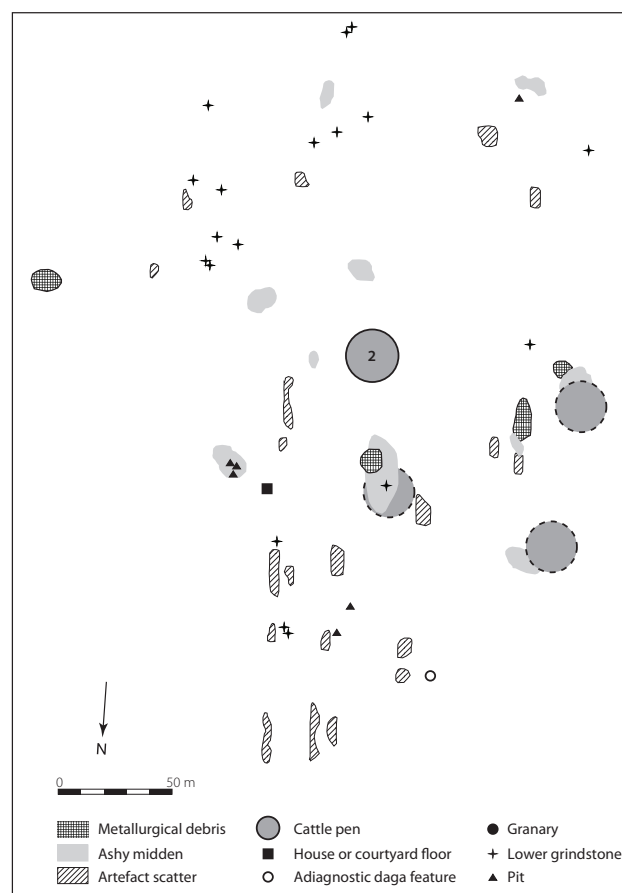


Figure 4. Msuluzi-phase features on KwaGandaganda (from Whitelaw 1994, 53). Surface lower grindstones that cannot be allocated to phase are indicated on both Figures 3 and 4.

and baked-earth linings. Many were subsequently used for a different purpose (Maggs & Michael 1976, 736). A (?dung-) filled storage pit at Mhlopeni, for example, was partially opened and reused as a grave (KwaZulu-Natal Museum records). More commonly pits contain a variety of cultural material that often accumulated in a characteristic way: 'parts of some pit fills were clearly single episodes when a mass of cultural debris was dumped, sometimes above fine ashy lenses which had apparently accumulated over a longer period' (Maggs & Ward 1984, 111). These pit-fills often include bottomless pots, a feature of Early Iron Age sites from Tanzania to the Eastern Cape. The removed bases are never found. Their deliberate removal, done sometimes with great care, was clearly part of a ritual, while the single dumping episodes suggest an ending or death (Maggs & Michael 1976, 736; Maggs & Ward 1984, 113).

I have argued elsewhere that these pits contain waste produced by pubescent girls, secluded for a period during which pit-fills accumulated gradually (Whitelaw 1993, 76; 1994–95, 44–6). The bottomless pots perhaps derive from a ritual that promoted the girl's future success as a mother — a symbolic defloration or 'opening'? — while the mass dumping of sherds and broken grindstones might mark the end of seclusion and the girl's reincorporation into society as a young adult. Such transformations, involving the end of one life-phase, a period of liminality and the emergence of a new person, generate considerable pollution and typically end with a cleansing ritual. In this case I suggest the cleansing included breaking the items used by the secluded girl and disposal of the remains in the pit. Like all such rituals, it was designed to remove a danger from society. This treatment of the remains (and those of smelting), I suggest, is more like purging than

cooling. Purging, as we have seen, is consistent with more restricted marriage preferences, that is, with more strictly exogamous marriage.

It is worth asking why this material was discarded inside the settlement, rather than outside like the contamination discarded at crossroads or vomited up following the use of black and red emetics (Ngubane 1977, 26, 115–17). Clearly it was a different kind of waste, I suggest because of its association with a daughter's first menstruation. We saw earlier that a woman's paternal ancestors are responsible for her menstrual cycle, which is a sign of her reproductive potential. Menstrual blood, especially of first menstruation, is perhaps conceptually similar to blood from the fatal wound of a sacrificed beast. This blood has special significance because it links the living to the ancestral world. For this reason, people distinguish this first blood from the rest of the animal's blood and guard the blood-coated spear against witchcraft (Ngubane 1977, 121). Material associated with first menstruation was certainly similarly susceptible to witchcraft, and its disposal must have required special care. Puberty was a public phenomenon. It sent a message to the wider community that a man's (the father's) ancestors looked favourably on him, but it could also provide enemies with the desire or opportunity to counter that success. I suggest that Early Iron Age people used pits within the homestead in response to these concerns.

We see something similar in a different archaeological context. Middens on Late Iron Age Ndebele sites were periodically capped with red earth. Scholars interpret these cappings in terms of Nguni ideas about witchcraft, arguing that they protected ash heaps from exploitation by witches (Huffman & Steel 1996, 54; Schoeman 1998a, 51; 1998b, 79; cf. Hall 2012, 314). A possible interpretative elaboration is that the cappings protected particular kinds of deposits, such as puberty, initiation or birth residues (see, for instance, Berglund 1989 [1976], 95). This reproductive symbolism also suggests an explanation for Early Iron Age features at Msuluzi Confluence, where Grid 1 probably represents a household courtyard containing three pits of varying shapes and depths (Maggs 1980). All three contained bottomless pots, one of which had been smashed before burial, but after its base was removed. Nearby on the surface lay a small heap of low-grade iron ore, possibly originally contained within a pot, and an even smaller slag heap. If the pit-fills with bottomless pots are explicable in terms of girls' puberty, then so are the small slag and ore heaps. Iron 'dross', for instance, might be used to alleviate painful menstruation (Krige 1962 [1936], 100).

Early Iron Age middens also contain evidence of marriage preferences. The deepest and most extensive

middens on KwaGandaganda were in the central area, closely associated with cattle pens (Figs. 3 & 4). One such Msuluzi-phase midden was perhaps 400 m² in extent, with a depth of nearly one metre (Whitelaw 1994, 32). I once thought these middens were solely a product of administrative and other men's work in central courts (e.g. ironworking, ivory carving). I now think that ash and debris from households in the settlement possibly also contributed. For one thing, some central middens seem to have accumulated rapidly, given the preservation of their contents. Also, central middens at KwaGandaganda contained ceramic female figurine fragments. I once thought these were either the residue of communal initiation schools, or that central middens and cattle pens were appropriate discard places for them (Whitelaw 1994, 51; 1994–95, 44). The latter possibility is more likely because archaeological and ethnographic data show that female figurines are and were private objects, made by mothers for their young daughters and 'activated' at puberty and marriage when the daughter and her husband separately learn laws relating to social responsibilities and authority. When in use, the figurines are and were household things (Summers 1957, 72; Wood 2002). Their fragments in archaeological contexts show that discarded material moved from households to the central middens.

More tentative evidence for a household contribution comes from the few bones of riverine fish — sharptooth catfish and scaly. In the past most adult southern African Bantu speakers avoided eating fish (Whitelaw 2009), so these remains are much more likely the product of children's activities, than the remains of food eaten by men in a public forum. Similarly, brown mussel shells in the large Msuluzi-phase central midden perhaps represent household rather than public food (e.g. Webb & Wright 1982, 56).

Household data are not as good, but we can suggest on the basis of archaeological evidence that a courtyard lay behind each hut (or behind the huts of each household), in which granaries stood and storage pits were sited (cf. Figs. 3–4, 7–8). Grindstones indicate that this was where women processed grain, and scatters of broken pottery and bone show that people left some waste either at the back of their courtyard or behind it outside the settlement. Ashy middens associated with the residential area are rare and thin. This variation in residential area deposits seems significant.

Zulu practice provides a possible explanation. While each household has its own rubbish heap, wives clear the ash from their hearths every day and dump it on the ash-heap outside the homestead gate (Raum 1973, 146, 153). The ash, it seems, represents the homestead-head's ancestors because it comes from 'the place of the shades' — the hearth (Berglund 1989 [1976], 206). In



Figure 5. A homestead in Zululand, photographed by G.T. Ferneyhough in 1886. The men are gathered in a 'court' area downslope of the cattle pen. Just visible behind the huts are structures that probably include granaries. (KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 1204.)

particular, hearth ash apparently represents the agnatic life-force that ancestors provide: the terms for ash and semen have the same root (*-lotha*) and one can stand for the other. People draw on this symbolism to heal rifts between kinsmen and when invoking the ancestors (see Raum 1973, 146; Berglund 1989 [1976], 204–6, 221, 324). The significance for marriage is that the communal disposal of ash symbolically binds households within the homestead together; it counters the structural weaknesses along which homesteads can fragment. Thus, the development of separate ash-heaps at the homestead entrance can signal conflict within a homestead and its imminent segmentation, or indicate independent sections in more complex homesteads (Raum 1973, 146; Mack *et al.* 1991, 124).

The Zulu disposal pattern could explain the refuse signature on non-Zulu Nguni sites in pre-colonial times (Maggs *et al.* 1986, 459). Middens on Zizi sites in the upper Thukela basin, for instance, are relatively rare (Maggs 1982, 84–5). Instead, refuse was

'irregularly dispersed towards the periphery of the homesteads' (Maggs 1988, 425). Separation of ash from other refuse could produce this archaeological signature. Sherds from the occasional broken pot might be scattered, while dogs might eat uncovered bones. On the other hand an ash deposit devoid of harder materials is perhaps more susceptible to erosion. This disposal pattern differs significantly from that of many Highveld Sotho sites (Maggs 1982, 85). It is therefore tempting to link a Zulu-like communal discard of ash specifically to a concern for homestead unity in the challenging face of non-kin marriage. Despite differences in detail, the Early Iron Age discard pattern may be an expression of this same concern.

I suggest that Early Iron Age people considered at least household ash not as rubbish, but as a household product that was most appropriately left on central middens. Small things such as shells and fish bones would easily be swept up with the ash to enter the central middens. There this material



Figure 6. Man smoking (probably Cannabis) from an *igudu*, a hubbly-bubbly-like smoking horn, and expelling saliva through a reed to depict a homestead plan. He is either demonstrating or playing a mildly competitive game enjoyed by men. Small boys would attend to the men's needs (see Krige 1962 [1936], 50; Bryant 1967 [1949], 221–2; Photographed in Natal. Purchased from Father Mayr in 1906. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 565B.)

combined with the product of other households to make a public, physical statement about the work in which the homestead-head, his ancestors and his wives were jointly engaged; it was a statement about unity and success. By contrast, ashy middens in residential areas may then indicate households either of unrelated followers or of relatively independent brothers or sons.

Now we can see the logic underpinning the burial of a third-trimester premature baby in a pot in the large Msuluzi-phase central midden on Kwa-Gandaganda (Whitelaw 1994, 34). In several societies people consider miscarriages a source of severe 'heat', capable of scorching the earth and driving away rain if improperly handled. For this reason, people bury the foetus in cool, shady places, such as river banks, or in or close to the mother's hut (e.g. Junod 1962 [1927], I, 191; Schapera 1979, 5, 9; Hammond-Tooke 1981b, 114–15). Boeyens *et al.* (2009, 233) found no reference to midden burials in numerous ethnographies. But

more than any other household 'product', a baby was a result of work undertaken to ensure agnatic continuity. Its failure in this case likely threatened the future reproductive potential of the household (see Boeyens *et al.* 2009; Hattingh & Hall 2009), a threat apparently lifted here with rituals that included burial in central-midden ash. This central, public location indicates that the burial must have conformed to normal practice. Here Zulu ethnography is instructive. In completing medicinal treatment, a person using white emetics vomits 'in the cattle byre or anywhere else within the premises' (Ngubane 1977, 111–12, 120). White medicines cool and restore good health. Central-midden ash — the cold residue of fire — evidently served the same purpose in the Early Iron Age, to counter ritual danger and return the community to health; it cooled, purified, cleansed and 'made right' in the face of death's darkness (see also Berglund 1989 [1976], 324; Hammond-Tooke 1981b, 135–7, 145; Boeyens *et al.* 2009, 233; Hattingh & Hall 2009, 304).



Figure 7. A homestead in the Umzimkhulu area, southern Natal, with raised granaries behind the huts. (Purchased from Father Mayr in 1906. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 552.)

The baby burial draws together ideas of healing and unity in the settlement centre that we saw earlier with forging and ash. In the case of ash, the symbolism may well elaborate a physical potential as a cleansing agent and pest repellent. Informants commenting on a Late Iron Age context near Johannesburg said that middens were placed at homestead entrances so that ash would coat the legs and bodies of cattle as they moved in and out, offering them protection from ticks (Huffman 1986b, 296). At KwaGandaganda ash also invokes a sense of heat pollution and so suggests, according to the pollution model, that relationships between cattle-linked siblings were potentially challenging for homestead-heads. I turn to this evidence now.

Marriage alliances

The first strand involves site-location preferences and an ethnographic pattern. As a rule, KALUNDU sites occur on deep arable soils, often the best available locally, suggesting that fields and gardens were established close to settlements. Baked sorghum-stalk casts on the site Ndongondwane support this location (Maggs & Ward 1984, 135–6; Fowler *et al.* 2000; Greenfield *et al.* 2005). This distinctive preference strongly suggests a food-production emphasis on

cultivation rather than pastoralism (in contrast to their relative economic significance). The year-round sweet but limited grazing in the valleys adds weight to this point, because it probably demanded the adoption of a transhumance grazing strategy (Maggs & Ward 1984, 135), especially as herd sizes increased with time. By contrast, Late Iron Age sites typically occur on hillslopes above the valleys, reflecting a greater pastoral emphasis in food production (Hall & Mack 1983, 187). The distinction is important because southern African ethnography reveals a relationship between bridewealth and cultivation. Bridewealth in societies that emphasize cultivation is typically high in relation to average livestock holdings, and conversely low in relation to average livestock holdings in societies that stress pastoral production (Kuper 1982, 157–8; 1987, 113). Applied to Early Iron Age data, this pattern suggests that bridewealth was high whatever the size of the herds (see Huffman (1990, 6) for an example of bridewealth increasing along with average herd size). The implication is that the marriages of most men would have depended on receipt of incoming bridewealth from their sisters' marriages.

Such arrangements can generate considerable structural uncertainty. In the Tsonga case, the poor pasture quality of the Mozambican plains shapes



Figure 8. A woman at her granary, probably around 1900. Behind her is a platform piled high with unthreshed sorghum. (Photographed by J.E. Middlebrook, probably in Natal. Photograph purchased in 1904. KwaZulu-Natal Museum accession number 312D.)

marriage practice. There are simply too few cattle for many independent marriages, and incoming bridewealth cattle are earmarked immediately for the marriage of a woman's eldest bachelor brother. These cattle-based alliances bind people together, but also provide tension. A divorce and claim for the return of bridewealth cattle in a homestead several exchanges distant can cause the breakup of marriages further up the line, and can even result in a man losing his wife to his erstwhile brother-in-law — the wife's brother's wife marriage. For some commentators bridewealth debts poisoned society, or were as ropes that denied human freedom (Kuper 1982, 108–12; and see, for example, Junod 1962 [1927], I, 161).

KALUNDU pottery provides further evidence (Fig. 9). A richly decorated material culture is often associated with socially complex situations, that is, situations involving representatives of a variety of social categories, or the merging of categories, or transitions between them. Pottery provides a particularly useful surface here because its widespread homology with people makes it a suitable vehicle for

messages relating to social relationships. Decoration used in this way expresses the principles and themes upon which society is built, reinforcing social relations by triggering symbolic associations deep within the viewer's psyche. In this sense, pottery decoration is closely associated with pollution beliefs, being most prominent in situations where pollution is rife: both act as 'a power by which the structure [of ideas] is expected to protect itself' (Douglas 2002 [1966], 140; also David *et al.* 1988; Hammond-Tooke 1989, 14–15; Hall 1998, 249–57; Armstrong *et al.* 2008).

There is a risk here of overemphasizing a male concern for social order, because women are the primary source of pollution. But such an emphasis creates an interpretative imbalance, because women made and decorated the pots. Their adherence to a restricted, 'traditional' stylistic code does not reflect their total acceptance of male control, but neither do I think it was, as some once suggested, part of a discourse through which women collectively asserted their power and interests *vis-à-vis* men (e.g. van Schalkwyk 1991, 127; Schoeman 1997, 197). These

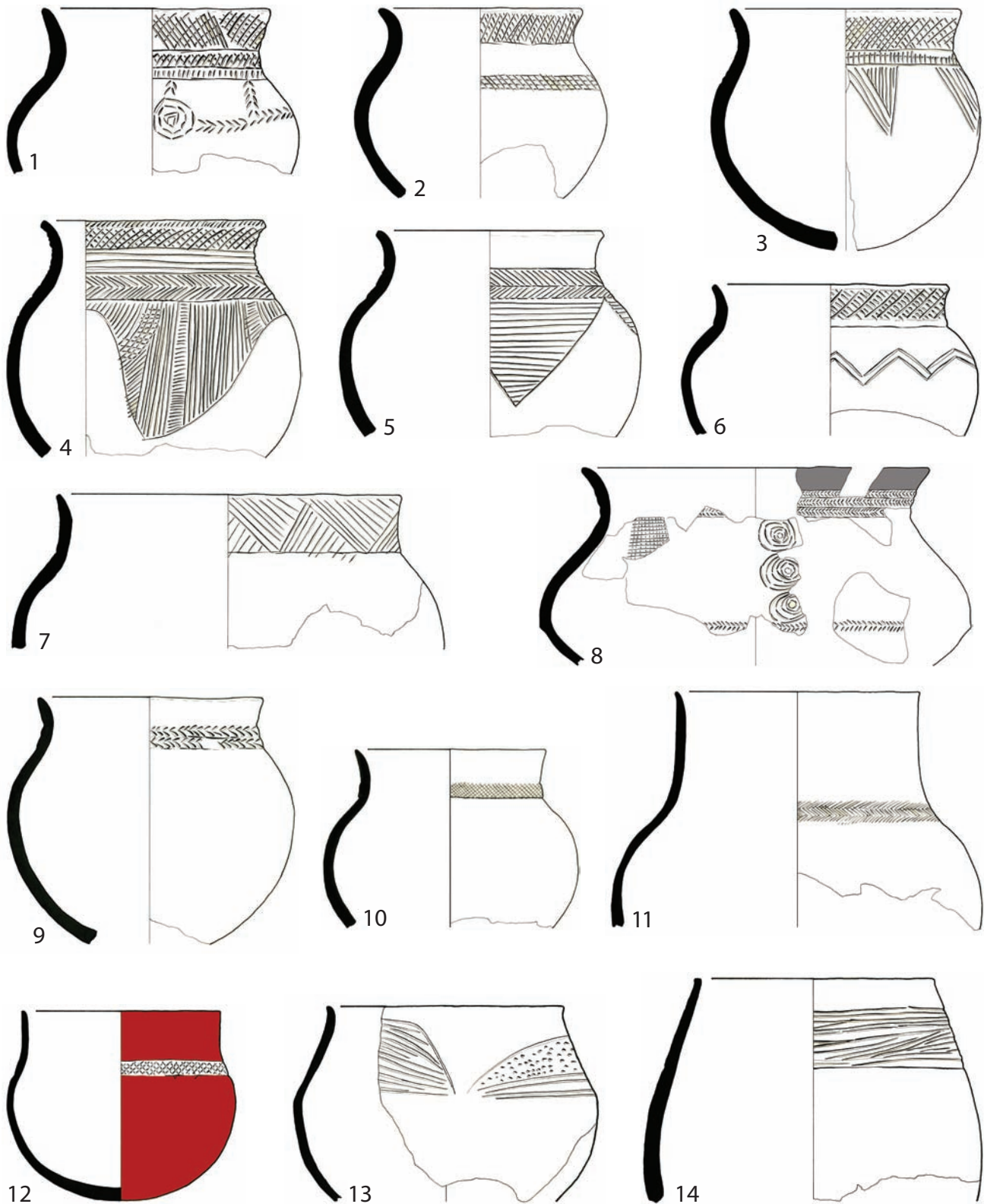


Figure 9. KALUNDU tradition ceramics: 1–8 Msuluzi phase; 9–12 Ndondondwane phase; 13–14 Ntshokane phase. Pot 8 with graphite burnish on the rim, plain burnish below the neck bands. Pot 12 with red-ochre burnish. Pots not to scale.

alternatives either ignore the dynamism in pottery production and use, or situate it incorrectly. We should not see ceramic traditions as if they are gradually mutating gene sets, passively inherited. Instead, potters actively invent and reinvent style as they work, selecting and modifying shapes and motifs from older vessels. Their choices (and those of non-potters selecting vessels) are motivated by personal desires and concerns (e.g. Handler & Linnekin 1984, 273–6), but also expressed within a context. Not only is style meaningful, but people belong to networks of relationships that frame their behaviour as communally responsible beings: Barley (1994, 115) records a Dawayo potter saying, ‘You do not want your children to be unlike other people’s children. They should be the same but better. So it is with pots.’ The same is true for rural KwaZulu-Natal where, for instance, Nesta Nala directed her beautiful but idiosyncratic vessel-sculptures solely to the global art market. For the local market she made more acceptably shaped and decorated beer vessels (Jolles 2005, 120–21).

Secondly, Karanga husbands and wives can use pots to communicate with one another, saying a woman’s pots are her weapons (Aschwanden 1982, 199–201). Apart from emphasizing that ceramic style contains an agreed-upon symbolism, the practice highlights the use of pots in a key area of negotiation — between the competing interests of homestead and household. It is in this interactive, tension-filled arena that ceramic style and its appeal for social order are generated, driven by demands from both sides. Nowhere is this point more poignantly illustrated than on a pot by Mandojeyane Makhunja, who lost her husband in the bloody feuds that disrupted Msinga (KwaZulu-Natal) for so many years. The pot carries an incised image of a machine-gun alongside ‘traditional’ hourglass motifs that appeal to gentler, socially responsible qualities in men (Armstrong *et al.* 2008, 531, 541–2).

A recent study of modern Zulu pottery suggests something like the Karanga practice probably existed in other societies in southern Africa. The study shows that pottery decoration is directed primarily at groups that include people who are potential or actual partners in marriage, such as at beer and meat feasts (Armstrong *et al.* 2008, 544). If the same pattern held true during the Early Iron Age — and the Central Cattle Pattern suggests it did — then we can argue that KALUNDU decoration reflected structural and personal tension in marital relationships.

KALUNDU pottery, however, is almost excessively decorated, especially the *Msuluzi* facies at the beginning of the sequence. While the demands associated with a high bridewealth were likely

significant, Early Iron Age site locations provide additional context. In some cases, deposits represent single long-lived settlements, in others, probably a palimpsest of smaller homesteads. Certainly in the former case, and probably in the latter, continued occupation of the same location suggests an Early Iron Age stress on homestead continuity, that is, on continuity of the agnatic cluster. This makes sense in terms of pollution, which discourages settlement on recognizable remains of unrelated people (see Ngunane 1977, 18–20, 24–9; compare Loubser (1994, 143) on Ndebele Group II and III site locations). Ceramic female figurines similarly stress agnatic continuity because they materialize the relationship between women and their fathers and explicitly delimit responsibilities and authority over women for husbands and fathers (Wood 2002). ‘Excessive’ Early Iron Age pottery decoration therefore likely reflected an uneasy co-existence of a desire for agnatic continuity with dependence for that continuity on the challenging consequences of a relatively high bridewealth.

Tension may have been further exacerbated by a hypogamous marriage practice. Ethnographies show that bridewealth exchanges always disadvantage inferior groups (Kuper 1982, 160), and the Central Cattle Pattern suggests the same would have been true for the Early Iron Age. We can expect then that Early Iron Age men commonly married up: a man’s brother- and father-in-law were his superiors.

Implications for the Central Cattle Pattern

An interest in pollution beliefs demands that we focus on the household and its relationship with other households and with the homestead-head, and thus on a key social dynamic in Iron Age life. Lane (1998, 187ff.) argues that application of the Central Cattle Pattern results in an interpretative neglect of the household, and suggests that we consider a gynecomorphic settlement model instead. The Central Cattle Pattern, however, is too consistent with the ethnographic and archaeological record for discard. Further, the pattern does not preclude an interest in the household, about which there is a rich ethnographic record. Lane nevertheless perhaps has a point in the sense that representations of the Central Cattle Pattern reflect and can affect our thinking about the homestead. We might therefore want to consider presenting the pattern in a way that incorporates the semi-independence of the household. For some time already textual descriptions have referred to private or household-controlled resources (e.g. Huffman 1986c, 89; 2001, 20; 2007, 25), so a new presentation is best done visually.

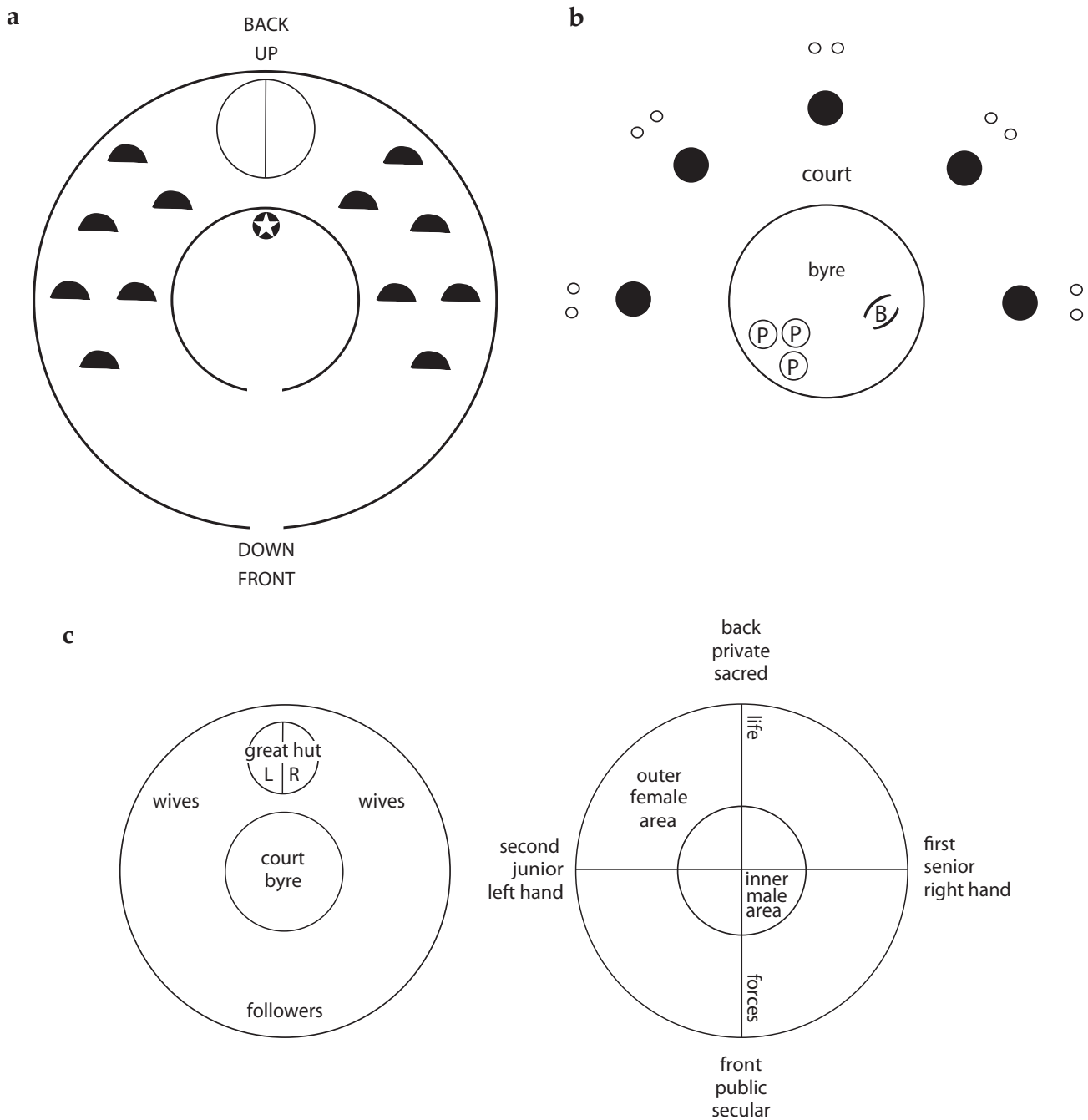


Figure 10. *The Central Cattle Pattern* (a. from Huffman 1982, 140; b. from Huffman 1984, 33; P = pit; B = burial; c. from Huffman 2001, 20; 2007, 25).

Figure 10 illustrates three diagrams. Figure 10a – the original Central Cattle Pattern diagram – incorporates a degree of household complexity with its double-banked sets of huts. It also heavily emphasizes the homestead-head through its depiction of the great hut, though in part the purpose is to show the gendered division of space within huts. Figure 10b offers more detail. The granaries attached

to each hut and grain pits in the cattle pen make it clear that homestead resources are both segregated and communal, reflecting a distinction later made in text. Huffman subsequently developed 10b by adding an elaborated version of the great hut in 10a (see Fig. 2). In the most recent version (Fig. 10c), the right-hand side shows key concepts that generate the physical layout, represented on the left. Visually, the left-hand

side is the culmination of a trend emphasizing the male, authoritarian aspects of the homestead, with the cattle pen and great hut. Wives and followers are reduced to text, and lost.

It is a significant loss, because images concentrate and make a variety of data simultaneously available, and so can powerfully influence our interpretation. In some ways Figure 10c echoes the definition of the homestead in the 1891 Natal Code of Native Law, which attempted to fix and preserve those aspects of the homestead useful to colonial capitalism. Guy (forthcoming) writes,

The Code gave the *umuzi* [homestead] legal dominance, in its male, authoritarian, patriarchal aspects—but without the legal guarantee of land which had always been integral to the concept of the homestead, without the cattle with which the homestead previously had to have been established, and without the legal guarantee of women's productive rights in land. ... At a time when the historical sources relate how material poverty and social distress were in the process of tearing the homestead apart, the [Code's] ... clear visual and verbal assertion of the structured cohesion of the homestead is in fact evidence of its fragmentation and dispersal: of external coercion replacing internal integrity.

Figure 10c in effect reflects a colonial and post-colonial ideology, with a Western and perhaps Christian emphasis on patriarchy. Figure 11 attempts to recapture some aspect of the homestead's precolonial internal integrity. Instead of a homogeneous unit, Figure 11 explicitly depicts a complex, heterogeneous entity, comprising semi-independent households with potentially differing interests. By illustrating the lines of weakness that mar homestead homogeneity, it incorporates a principal structural tension that contributed to the dynamism of Iron Age life.

Implications for research

In precolonial times, pollution beliefs were integral to economic structure, a key weapon in the arsenal that men deployed in their efforts to control wives, children and followers. As a supposedly natural force, pollution dangers 'sanctioned' social relations, making them seem inevitable and proper. Pollution beliefs were intimately associated with marriage, which was central to the maintenance of economic structure and, indeed, life, but came with the cost of uncertain success. Thus, the character of pollution beliefs varied on a spectrum along with the nature of marriage. Exogamous marriage preferences generated pollution dangers that admitted contaminants into the body, so representing the potential threat

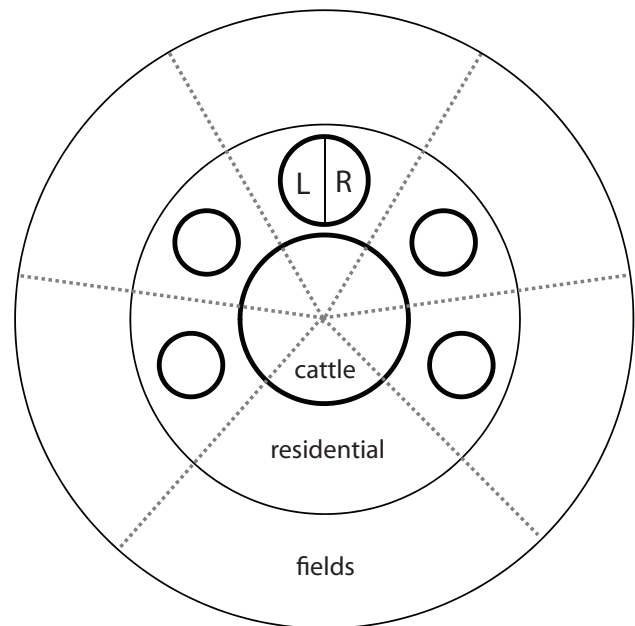


Figure 11. *The Central Cattle Pattern, showing lines of weakness separating households, each with its own agricultural resources (cattle and fields). The diagram can be elaborated as necessary.*

that stranger-wives posed to agnatic continuity. Pollution beliefs intensified with more complex marital alliances, first with the increasing significance of relations between wives and their cattle-linked siblings, and then with a shift towards a preference for cousin marriage. These developments logically enough involved reproductive pollution, and so typically took the form of heat.

Applying these ideas to the Early Iron Age, I argue that KALUNDU tradition agriculturists practised non-kin marriage, possibly along Zulu lines, but at least as restricted as Tsonga practice. Their archaeology also displays an emphasis on agnatic continuity, plus a concern for homestead unity. Bridewealth, however, was relatively high, meaning that relations between cattle-linked siblings presented a significant challenge to the ambitions of homestead-heads. Hypogamous status differences between homestead-heads and in-laws might have provoked additional anxiety.

These ideas are tentative, but worth airing, partly because of recent interest in the nature of Early Iron Age society (Badenhorst 2009a,b; 2010), but also because they flow naturally from earlier work on the period. Further, it may be that they provide a position from which to consider in more detail two topics of current interest: the origins of the Zimbabwe Culture and the Early Iron Age–Late Iron Age interface. Imagine, for instance, the response of

young unmarried men and women — dependent for marriage on incoming bridewealth from siblings — on encountering a new system in which bridewealth was relatively low, in which men married down, in which relations with in-laws were less imposing. If the earliest Nguni maintained such a system, these encounters would perhaps have quickly broken the authority of Early Iron Age homestead-heads, and resulted in a loss of practices bolstering their authority. It is worth exploring these issues in explaining the sharp transition between the Early and Late Iron Ages in KwaZulu-Natal.

We might also consider the relationship between cousin marriage and political complexity (e.g. Kuper 1982, 96–100, 159–60; 1987, 113–14; Hall 1998, 255; also see Hamilton 1997): did cousin marriage originate in the ethnically complex and stratified polities that developed in the last 500 years, or in similar developments that earlier generated the Zimbabwe Culture in the Limpopo Valley, or was cousin marriage already a feature of the earliest Sotho-Tswana communities? And what are the implications of cousin *vs* non-kin marriage for political and cultural developments during the course of the Iron Age?

Finally, this approach surely has wider archaeological application. Douglas's analysis shows that the relationship between pollution and marriage is (or was) widespread, even universal. Similarly, societies based on the accumulation of human productive and reproductive capacity probably existed across the world throughout history. Essentially, where technology was fairly simple people competed with one another for the capacity to expand socially into the future, with marriage as the primary means of acquisition (Guy 1987). Depending on how this capacity was controlled, we can expect that pollution beliefs varying in kind and intensity were generated (Douglas 2002 [1966]). Through the careful application of appropriate ethnographic principles to the archaeological record, we may reveal these beliefs and so establish a more intimate understanding of the relations that lay at the heart of ancient economies.

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Notes

1. The verb is *hlonipha*, so *ukuhlonipha* means 'to respect, to act respectfully'.
2. Colonial official James Stuart (1868–1942) writes, '[*Umnnyama*] means that some natural occurrence (in accordance with ordinary laws of nature) should take place which has the effect of bringing darkness over some person or persons, thereby affording their enemy an opportunity of stealing in upon them unawares ... The person or persons seized or overtaken by this "darkness" or "inability" or "powerlessness" are said to *have umnyama*' (Webb & Wright 1982, 323, italics recorded in Zulu). Stuart concludes from conversations about war doctoring that doctors could manipulate the elements to bring *umnyama* down on enemies. If correct, then *umnyama* was somewhat different in the late nineteenth century. Alternatively, and more likely from the argument in this article, circumstances of the times might have allowed some doctors to claim such power.
3. *Amasi* is the plural form and so grammatically more like the English word 'curds', but both Zulu and Xhosa distinguish between the cheesy curds and the more smoothly consistent curdled milk (*amasi*).
4. For *uloya*, Bryant's (1905) fuller definition is: 'central, essential, vitalizing part of a thing; hence, life, spirit, mind, heart, of a human-being, etc.; main inside substance, core, as of a mealie-grain'. Northern Sotho and Tsonga also use *-loya* for 'bewitch'.
5. Compare the use of a Lovedu medicine of crushed python vertebrae (Krige & Krige 1980 [1943], 216), and the 'smoking' of a week-old Tsonga baby (Junod 1962 [1927], I, 43–4).
6. Zulu lexicon does not seem to contain this relationship. While *mošidi* and *tšhidi* are cognates of Zulu *insizi* (soot, charred blackness) (Adrian Koopman pers. comm. 2012), dampness in Zulu is *umswakama*, *ubumanzi* or *umnepho* (Doke *et al.* 1990). Linguistically, Zulu sits close to the end of the pollution spectrum.

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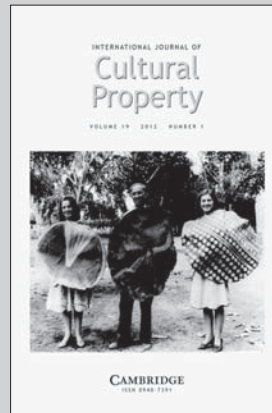
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