

Beasts to beer pots - migrant labour and ritual change in Willowvale district, Transkei

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Why do some rituals disappear while others continue to be performed? Why do some persist in a relatively unaltered state while others are radically modified? In an article published in 1978 Monica Wilson drew attention to the scarcity of information on this subject, and proceeded to consider possible reasons for the 'resilience' of certain rituals, such as those accompanying initiation and death, and the 'obliteration' of others, such as those concerning the birth of twins. My concern in this paper is with the persistence and radical modification of a Gcaleka [2] ritual called *umhlinzeko* or *umsindleko*, performed in celebration of the return of a migrant worker to his rural home. The earlier form of the ritual (*umhlinzeko*) is described and this is followed by an outline of the present-day form (*umsindleko*). The bulk of the paper is taken up with an attempt to explain why the one form gave way to another. In this respect the analysis concentrates on the relationship between the two forms and their socio-economic contexts, and tries to relate the changes in the form and meaning of the ritual to the changing economic and political circumstances affecting the Gcaleka and other Xhosa-speakers.

Among the Cape Nguni in general, from at least the 1930s onwards, the return of a migrant worker to his home and community has been marked by a ritual killing. Among the Pondo this was called *ukubulela* ("to give thanks"). "Persons having escaped from danger may kill in thanksgiving to their amathongo ... Nowadays it is an *isiko* [custom] to kill when a man returns safely from the mines" (Hunter 1936:251). Among the Bhaca a beast was slaughtered as *umbuliso* ("a special thanksgiving") when a young man returned from his first spell at work, "to thank the *amatshongo* for keeping him safe" (Hammond-Tooke 1962:240). Return from subsequent work spells was marked by the killing of a goat. In Keiskammahoek this ritual was known as *ukubulela abadala* ("to give thanks to the ancestors") (Wilson et al. 1952). Similar killings among these groups, called by similar names, were associated with escape from danger and with safe return from war or a journey.

Among Gcaleka too, the return of a migrant worker was marked by a killing, referred to simply as *umhlinzeko* (from *ukuhlinza*, "to slaughter"). People in Willowvale district say that this killing was held "because when you return home there should be the smell of meat, it should be clear to all that you have returned". In the past, this custom was regarded as an invocation to the shades and as a thanksgiving for safe return and success at work. There is considerable variation among informants regarding the procedure involved in this killing. Some say that it took place inside the cattle byre, that the "spear of the home" was used, that it was necessary for the goat or ox to cry out, and that the returned migrant ritually tasted a special portion of the meat. These features indicate a ritual in the full sense of the word, but it is clear from the statements of informants that it was a small, domestic affair. Agnates and other close kin who lived nearby would attend, as would neighbours, but it was not a public, community occasion. In this sense it was similar to lesser rituals which are still performed today such as *ukubingelela* (for a newborn child and its mother). Others say that it did not matter what kind of animal was

killed, that the animal was killed outside the cattle byre simply by having its throat cut and that there was no ritual tasting. It is possible that variations in the ritual were associated with different households or clans, but it is also possible that informants were referring to different time-periods. To the extent that *umhlinzeko* still occurs it is not of a religious character at all. A man simply kills a sheep, goat or pig for himself or for his son, usually next to the cattle byre, without any ceremony and without calling kinsmen to be present. The meat is consumed largely by the family concerned, though portions may be sent to neighbours and nearby kin. In accounting for the change from the killing to the beer drink I shall also try to account for why the killing, when it still occurs, has lost its religious character.

All the older men who I spoke to about *umhlinzeko* said that as boys and young men they had been slaughtered for by their fathers when they returned from work. Nowadays, very few such killings occur, and the custom has to a large extent been replaced with a beer drink called *umsindleko*. The two terms—*umsindleko* and *umhlinzeko*—are used interchangeably to refer to either a beer drink or a killing, a practice facilitated by what is possibly the original meaning of *umsindleko* — "food which a woman prepares and keeps for her absent or travelling husband" in anticipation of his return (Kropf 1915:391). Before tackling the question of why the killing was replaced by a beer drink it is necessary to provide an outline of the latter.

*Umsindleko* is one of a series of ritual and symbolic activities associated with migrant labour, which have been described elsewhere (McAllister 1979, 1980). It is a relatively large affair in contrast to its predecessor, and may be attended by up to 200 people, who come from neighbouring locations as well as the local community. It is held to mark the return of a migrant worker, not every time he comes home, but after every four or five (or more) spells at work. It involves, firstly, a public recognition of the migrant's efforts on behalf of his homestead. He is formally praised for his success at work and urged by the men of the community to continue in this vein. [3] Secondly, *umsindleko* is religious in character. It is seen by the participants as a thanksgiving to the ancestors of the returnee for having protected him at work, making his stay at work successful and ensuring his safe return. It is due to the shades that the migrant suffered no misfortune, and *umsindleko* is thought to ensure their continued blessings and protection, so that future trips to work will be successful.

In this respect *umsindleko* is similar to other beer drinks which, in addition to certain specific aims, are thought to secure good fortune for the homestead and its inhabitants and to stave off misfortune. Brewing beer for the community is regarded also as being a brewing for the shades. What is important to note here is that it is through the attendance of people at the beer drink, and especially through the words spoken by them in the formal speeches that are made (by kin and non-kin alike), that the attention of the shades is drawn to the homestead and their presence and blessings secured (McAllister 1981). In the *umhlinzeko* killing, it was through the invocation to the shades by the migrant's father or senior lineage member that communication with the shades occurred.

The third aspect of *umsindleko* to which I want to draw attention concerns the analysis of the speeches made and the relationship between speakers and migrant. What such analysis reveals is that the speakers address the migrant on behalf of the community, and that their speeches are an attempt to ensure that the migrant interprets his spell at work 'correctly'—i.e. in the terms laid down by the speakers. The speakers stress the

importance of working for the rural home and the importance of returning home (return in itself being seen as a moral good). They say that the money earned at work should be spent on things that 'build' the home and not wasted on prostitutes, fine clothes and radios. They emphasize rural values and the importance of being part of a community while decrying urban values and individualistic behaviour. In the case of young men particularly, the speakers refer to the social dependence of the migrant on his seniors, as if to counter the economic independence that migratory earnings give to the young. The speeches are made mainly by elders and senior men, who in effect provide an ideological framework within which to interpret the migratory experience, by publicly proclaiming the norms and values of the community regarding the expected behaviour of the labour migrant and by placing this within a broader perspective — that of the relationship between labour migration and rural social life. So the speeches represent the authority of the elders, the community and the ancestors, and constitute an attempt at social control. *Umsindleko* 'says' that the migrant's efforts at work have meaning and legitimacy only in so far as it benefits his rural home and community and that he depends on the community for success at work and for successful building of his rural homestead.

## II

Although the *umsindleko* beer drink is spoken of as an old, well established custom, it is of fairly recent origin. My attention was drawn to this after recording the following speech by a man of about 75 years at one of the *umsindleko* beer drinks that I attended.

Here is something, Dombothi [the returnee]! Modi [the previous speaker] has finished the words he was speaking. Dombothi, when I grew up it was said that when one comes back from service [work] a slaughtering is done. This was changed. It was said: "*Thyini!* This person has come home with a snake", and this custom was discarded. I myself was slaughtered for by Tela [the speaker's father]. He discarded that practice. And you were slaughtered for by Poni [Dombothi's father]. You have returned from service, from the business of serving Poni's homestead. And with me, I was building Tela's homestead. It has been like that since I was born. I am speaking to say we fell down [changed]. It was said, "*Hayi bo!* He has bought it!" We came to this Dombothi, to this that has been done by your wife in cooking for you, child of my grandmother, on your return from work. This thing, Dombothi, that is being done by your wife, I commend it, notwithstanding that it was not so at the beginning; it was a goat slaughtered by your father. He used to say, "My child, I am slaughtering for you because you are from service." That was changed [because] people said, "No! He has bought a snake." Child of my grandmother! Dombothi! I say engrave these words in your mind. It is fine Dombothi, when they say this wife of yours is cooking for you. I wish you good health always. Go back again to work for Poni's homestead. I say so, I, Mbambushe. I am going to speak the truth. She should cook [brew] for you again while you are back. We are happy because of your return. Even if you do not return with anything, you yourself in person are all right. I have stopped.

[Nants' into Dombothi. Uwagqibile uModi la mazwi ebewathetha. Dombothi ndivele kusithi xa uvel' enkonzweni kuxhelwe. Kwaphinda kwajikwa, kwathiwa, "Thyini! Lo mntu uze nenyoka", ukuze ilahlwe loo to. Ndixhelelwa nguTela mna. Wayilahla loo nto. Nawe uxhelelwa nguPoni. Uvel' enkonzweni, emcimbini wenkonzo yokwakh' umzi kaPoni. Nakum ngokwak' umzi kaTela. Ndivele kunjald ke mna. Nditheth' ukuthi sagungxuka. Kwathiwa, "Hayi Bo! Uthengile lo!" Seza kule nto, Dombothi, kule yenziwe ngulo mkakho yokuba makakuphekele, 'mtakamakhulu, xa uvel' enkonzweni. Loo nto Dombothi, yenziwe ngulo mkakho ndiyayincoma mna, kanti kwakungenjalo ekuqalekeni; yayiyibhokhwe oyixhelelwa nguyihlo. Athi, "Mtanam ndikuxhelela kuba uvel' enkonzweni." Yayekwa loo nto, bathi, "Hayi, utheng' inyoka." 'Mtakamakhulu! Dombothi! Ndingathi mna ezi ncwadi ungazibhala zihlale kuw' engqondweni. Kuhle Dombothi, xa athi lo mkakho akuphekele. Ungangophila yonk' imihla. Uphind' uphindele uye kuphangelel' umzi kaPoni. Nditsho, mna, Mbambushe. Ndiza kutheth' inyaniso futhi. Aphid' akuphekele futhi wakubuya. Sibahle thina ngokubuya oku kwakho. Noba akubuyanga nanto na, isiqu esi sakho silungile. Ndimile].

After recording this speech I asked a variety of informants to elaborate. One man put it this way:

This change [from a killing to a beer drink] came about because people used their money to buy wisdom [*ubulumko*]. This wisdom lives on blood, and fathers, in slaughtering for their sons, did not know if they were providing blood for wisdom or not, since they did not know if their sons had bought it or not.

Asked for clarification, this man said that "wisdom" was a snake.

A son goes out to work and he buys a snake there. If you slaughter here for your son you are slaughtering for a snake that is going to ruin your homestead... They say that this snake is a medicine. You put it in your pocket and keep it there while you move around. At night it becomes a beautiful girl and the owner must sleep with her. There are seven vaginas and you have to use them all that night. The next thing people hear is that your son is a witch and that he kills people. They will then go and burn down your homestead

It is obvious that this "snake" is *umamlambo*, a familiar associated with male witches. Although informants never used the word *umamlambo*, but always spoke of "a snake", "a thing", or "a medicine", they confirmed when directly asked that it was *umamlambo*, and its characteristics are unmistakably those of *umamlambo* as described by Soga (1931:193), Hunter (1936:286-87), Hammond-Tooke (1962:285, 1970:129) and Wilson et al. (1952:190). Gcaleka say that the snake issues instructions to and has control over the 'owner'. If the owner fails to comply with its demands for regular slaughtering, he will become insane. The snake can 'eat' him just as it is able to 'eat' (kill or injure) others. Having become an 'owner' of *umamlambo*, it is thought to be exceedingly difficult to get rid of it. Some men are believed to obtain it unwittingly, having bought what they

thought were purely "medicines" which would enable them to become wealthy, attract women, or whatever (cf. Wilson et al. 1952:189; Hammond-Tooke 1962:285-86). A man is said to purchase these medicines in the form of herbs or bark, and to discover later that he has acquired *umamlambo*. If one tries to throw the medicine away, it miraculously reappears. It remains with the owner "because it has become used to him". It is believed that one has to call in a herbalist to rid oneself of it. Even here, however, informants state that the herbalist has to take over ownership and cannot drive *umamlambo* away completely, though he is thought to possess the means to control it.

Since the father cannot know if the son has returned with a snake or not, he refrains from slaughtering for his son, because, as another informant put it, the *umhlinzeko* killing would be "marrying the snake to the son". However, informants maintain that it will be evident from the son's behaviour if he does indeed "take a snake" (*ukuthwala inyoka*). "We will see it from his behaviour. He will demand that there should be a killing. Then we will confront each other."

It is believed that labour migrants are able to purchase *umamlambo* at work from herbalists or *amalsilamisi* ("Muhammadans"). It may be bought in herbal (medicinal) form and this medicine has the power to take on various guises. Once a man 'owns' *umamlambo* he has to ensure that it is slaughtered for regularly, because it lives on blood. The usual motivation attributed to those who are thought to buy the snake is a desire for wealth, and this is achieved through killing those who stand in one's way. It is sons who buy the snake in order to kill their fathers and inherit the father's status, authority and livestock. Older men too, however, are said to be able to buy a snake, though this belief is usually associated with young, unmarried men. Whatever the case—a man demonstrates that he is not a witch, that he does not have a snake, by not slaughtering on return from work.

### III

So much for the widely held folk explanation of the change from *umhlinzeko* to *umsindleko*. What are we to make of it? Clearly, any sociological 'explanation' of the change from the killing to the beer drink must include reference to all or most of the features of both these rituals. This leads away from simple but plausible explanations such as a decrease in stock holdings coupled with increased maize yields during the period when large-scale labour migrancy was becoming institutionalized. Such an explanation indicates that the ritual change may have been economically induced, and that we might expect some 'spiritual' rationalization for the change, although a beer drink is regarded as just as effective a means of communicating with the shades as a killing. However, it does not tell us why the change was conceived of in terms of witch beliefs, why a small, fairly private ritual was replaced by a large, public one, or why the participants in the latter, address formal speeches which often have the characteristics of admonitions to the returned migrant, a feature, according to informants, that did not occur in conjunction with the killing.[4] These are crucial questions, and need to be answered in accounting for the ritual change.

I would suggest, as a starting-point, that the change was conceptualized in terms of witch beliefs because such beliefs constitute attempts to cope with ambivalence and strain in social life, and which enable people to place conflicts that they could not otherwise

express within a recognized idiom. In this sense witch beliefs both reflect social structure and are attempts to explain social reality and social change (Mayer 1954; Hammond-Tooke 1970,1974). In the case of *umhlinzekolumsindleko*, I am suggesting that the belief in *umamlambo* has been used to justify and make intellectual sense of the switch from a killing to a beer drink, and that the switch occurred as a result of certain ambiguities and strains in social life resulting from the changing conditions that Gcaleka found themselves in. I am suggesting that *umhlinzeko* became inappropriate as a vehicle for reincorporating returned migrants and for making statements about the relationship between migrant labour and rural society. *Umsindleko* took its place because, as a beer drink, it was more appropriate for these purposes.

What were these "changing conditions"? They involved, firstly, changes in homestead (*umzi*) size and composition, which were linked in turn to changes in "the social organization of production" and features associated with this, of which labour migration was but one.

Since 1900 or before, the size and composition of Cape Nguni homesteads have changed fairly radically. Formerly, homesteads were larger (10 to 40 huts each) and consisted of an extended family—man and wives, unmarried sons and daughters, married sons and their wives and children, and often other kin (Wilson 1969:111). Each homestead had enough stock and had access to enough land and labour to make it a relatively self-sufficient productive unit and to enable it to reproduce itself. The available resources were under the control of the paterfamilias, and his sons were dependent on him for their subsistence and for wives, since he controlled the cattle holdings. Sons remained at the father's homestead until he died or until they were already senior men. Hunter says that "old [Pondo] men lament the days when 'grey-headed men lived in the *umzi* of their father, obeying him in all things, as if they were children' " (1936:25). While obviously an idealization of the past there is little doubt that Pondo homesteads had declined in size by the 1930s (*ibid.*: 15; Beinart 1982:94 ff.), and this trend occurred amongst all Xhosa-speakers (see Hammond-Tooke 1962:35-36; Wilson *et al.* 1952:52-59; Wilson 1981). Due to a number of related factors, homesteads became smaller and closer together than they were in the past (Wilson 1971:63). Land shortage and increased population pressure as a result of the appropriation of Xhosa land contributed to this trend. Since a man with his own homestead would have had a greater claim to a field than one living in his father's home (as is still the case in Willowvale today), it was to the advantage of the family for sons to establish independent homesteads soon after marriage. It is possible that homesteads also became smaller because there was no longer any need to concentrate for defensive purposes—a function fulfilled by the traditionally large *umzi* (Hunter 1936:59). This was a result of the decline of chiefly power (chiefs organized raids and warfare) and of the incorporation of formerly independent chiefdoms into the colonial system, with its magistrates and police force. Hammond-Tooke (1962, 1975) suggests that the reduction in chiefly power and the introduction of the concept of individual property along with increased independence as a result of migratory labour opportunities, allowed for greater individualism. He also quotes Canon Mullins to indicate that the change in homestead size and distribution was already marked as early as 1883 (1975:82-83) but the process continued until at least the 1960s, as the figures for homestead composition from various parts of the Transkei over the period 1934-63 indicate (*ibid.*:111).

The institution of labour migration provided sons with an alternative source of cattle (through wages) and as they became less economically dependent on their fathers, allowed them to establish independent homesteads earlier in life (Hunter 1936; Wilson et al. 1952; Hammond- Tooke 1962, 1975). In this they were probably encouraged by their wives, who wanted to be freed from the control of their mothers-in-law, and who desired a greater claim to their husbands' cash earnings. In this respect it is of significance that the *umamlambo* belief has also affected the ritual of *ukwazisa umzi* ("to make known the homestead") performed after the establishment of a new homestead. In the past this was a small ritual at which a goat was slaughtered, attended by lineage members and close neighbours. Nowadays men say that in slaughtering for one's homestead it might be believed that one is slaughtering for a 'snake', obtained for the purpose of getting rich, and a beer drink appears to be slowly replacing the killing previously made for this purpose. Like migrant labour, the establishment of an independent homestead involves greater independence for the son and a slackening of parental control.

It is also possible, however, that the tendency for young people to move into their own homesteads earlier than before is exaggerated by a change in the age of marriage. Wilson et al. (1952:89) state that the age of marriage for males had increased from 24 years in the pre-1890s to 30 years in the period 1940-50. Obviously, the older the son is when he marries, the less time he will spend in his father's homestead as a married man.

Homesteads also became smaller due to a decline in polygyny, which was probably related to land shortage and increased population and also to a decline in cattle holdings. Coinciding with the above factors was a change in the organization of rural production. The smaller homestead became associated with only one field, in which it grew maize rather than sorghum (previously both these crops were raised). Beinart (1982) argues that this suited the smaller homestead. Maize plants, unlike sorghum, allow for the cultivation of subsidiary crops at the same time, and maize cultivation is less labour intensive. Cultivation "was oriented towards intensive inputs of labour at widely spaced intervals" (ibid.: 100). Except for weeding and harvesting, day-to-day labour in the fields was not required. The success of the system depended on the availability of ploughs and oxen, which in turn were purchased with migrant earnings.

The switch to maize resulted in a period of greater output (ibid.; Hunter 1936:357) but this was soon neutralized by rapidly increasing population and other factors. What is important as far as the present argument is concerned is that the success of the new system in all likelihood depended on these occasional "intensive inputs of labour", and on migrant labour, as this became progressively more important, though it aggravated the rural labour shortage. Individual homesteads pooled their resources in order to perform the required tasks and work parties and co-operative ploughing groups became very important. Both the general decline in *umzi* size and the reduction in cattle holdings meant that each individual *umzi* depended on the labour power and oxen of others.

The increasing importance of labour migration had two important implications. Firstly, the cash earned at work was important to the agriculture of the home area, because it allowed people to buy ploughs, fertilizer, and other inputs. Purchase of oxen provided the homestead with bargaining power in its co-operative relationships with other homesteads and also contributed to the welfare of the community as a whole. Secondly, as homestead heads became increasingly involved as migrants, dependence on neighbours grew. The head's absence meant that someone had to be delegated to act in his place (if he had no

grown sons), to make decisions on his behalf and look after the affairs of the homestead. This task usually fell to a neighbouring agnate, but any good neighbour would do.[5] The general dependence on occasional intensive co-operative inputs and the importance of labour migration in both contributing to rural agriculture and increasing dependence on neighbours may explain the emphasis among Gcaleka on good neighbourliness, the increasing importance of this principle in social organization, and the specific ritual change from *umhlinzeko* to *umsindleko*. It can be seen that the above process involved a paradox. The growth of individualism and increased economic independence, accompanied by increased labour migration and the change in rural production, led to a greater dependence on other homesteads and neighbours, on the community as a whole. Whether neighbours were/are in fact kin or not is immaterial, for the change that took place was both structural and ideological. The ideology associated with a closely knit economically independent extended family based in one homestead gave way to one of greater individualism, of smaller autonomous homesteads which were dependent on one another. Adjoining homesteads, now closer together than when homesteads were larger, provided the basis of socio-economic interaction. Those congregated within a particular geographical area became important as such, as neighbours, as independent homesteads which were involved with each other in the productive process, rather than as kinsmen. It was evident among the Pondo that "the more *imizi* [homesteads] subdivide the more kinship bonds tend to be replaced by ties binding neighbours" (Hunter 1936:60; cf. Meillassoux 1972, 1973). This is why Gcaleka say that ploughing, for example, has nothing to do with kinship, although in practice ploughing companies are composed largely of agnatic kin. I am not suggesting that neighbourliness arose as a new social principle, but that it became more important as the kinship system weakened with the decline in *umzi* size and other related factors.

It is suggested then that the ritual change from *umhlinzeko* to *umsindleko* coincided with, reflected and provided normative or ideological support for the process outlined above. From a ritual which correlated return from work with the unity and independence of the lineage segment or extended family, a similar but essentially different ritual emerged—one where the importance of the local group and of the community as a whole is recognized.

We must consider the decline of the *umhlinzeko* killing from another angle also — that of the father/son relationship, which was subjected to strain and underwent certain changes with the son's increased independence and access to wage-earnings.

Previously, a man obtained *lobolo* cattle from his father and/or senior kin such as father's brothers and mother's brother, and the relationship between elder and junior was closely tied to this. It was also possible to obtain *lobolo* through raids and *ukubusa* ("labour service for a chief or wealthy man") (Wilson 1981). The growth of a money economy first replaced raiding and *ukubusa* as a means of obtaining cattle, and later it replaced the other two (primary) sources of *lobolo*—father and senior kin (ibid.: 140-41). This process probably occurred much earlier among the Xhosa proper, whose cattle holdings never fully recovered from the cattle killing and among whom labour migration became institutionalized at an early stage, than it did elsewhere in the Eastern Cape and Transkei. In Pondoland in 1931-32 only 17 per cent of men in 115 marriages examined by Hunter had provided all their own marriage cattle, but this was at a time when "almost every homestead owned cattle and was largely self-supporting in food" (loc. cit.). Later, in



Pondoland as elsewhere, sons became relatively independent of their seniors as far as finding *lobolo* was concerned.

To be sure, the son's growing independence was tempered by the fact that cattle bought by him were regarded as belonging to the father (as is still largely the case in parts of Willowvale today), and he still depended on his father and lineage in the marriage process and in ritual. But his bargaining power was improved. From a position of total dependence on the father, the son became someone upon whom the father depended for the cash inputs needed to enable his homestead to survive. This weakened the father's authority and the political and economic power of seniors in general. Access to wealth that could be had without their agency was a threat which, it is suggested, was manifested in the belief that sons could become witches at work. Sons could buy a snake with their earnings as labour migrants. The belief that *umamlambo* sometimes takes the form of a beautiful girl with whom the son has sexual relations also makes sense, in view of the threat to the seniors' role as provider of bridewealth.[6]

It is suggested that the *umhlinzeko* killing was stopped partly as a result of the change in the father/son relationship, that its cessation was symbolic of an attempt by fathers to retain control over their sons, and to guard against the possibility of suspected witchcraft. But the father's homestead remained dependent on the son's earnings in order to retain its place in the organization of production. The *umhlinzeko* killing emphasized the bond between father and son and the son's status within the local agnatic group. Father slaughtered for son, emphasizing the son's dependence on the father and on agnates. By brewing *umsindleko* beer, on the other hand, the father avoids the possibility of 'feeding' the 'snake' but still acknowledges the son's role in contributing to the homestead and, through this, to the community.

Brewing beer for the community as a whole indicates that the father is still the head of the homestead, and that his homestead, through the efforts of the son, is being 'built up' and is a good one to co-operate with. The power of the son is thereby channelled and made relevant to a wider principle, that of neighbourhood, rather than that of the jural relationship between father and son. *Umhlinzeko* involved the direct father/son relationship, *umsindleko* the relationship between homestead head and other homesteads, through the son's efforts. The son as independent wage-earner was essentially ambiguous and disorderly—a threat to structure. By relating his role as migrant more strongly to the emerging principle of community or neighbourhood (in *umsindleko*) a clearer definition of the son's role in structure developed, and his potential disorderliness controlled (Douglas 1966). The ambiguous social position of juniors and their threat to seniors was reflected in the belief that they had access to a form of mystical power that rivalled the power of the shades available to elders. Resolution of the ambiguity, of the conflict between senior and junior, and of the threat of the uncontrolled power of witchcraft was achieved through substituting beer for the killing of a beast or goat. As Douglas argues, ritual harnesses disorder and turns it into a force for good, but this could not be achieved by the killing. The very blood being offered to the shades in the *umhlinzeko* killing was serving to feed the snake, which symbolized the potential disorderliness of the migrant. Blood itself thus became an ambiguous symbol, standing for both the *umamlambo* snake and the disorderly forces of witchcraft, and for the orderliness of society, represented by the shades and their earthly representatives, the elders. Substitution of beer for blood solved this problem. This is also the likely reason why, when killings for returned

migrants do occur today, which is seldom, they do not involve an invocation to the shades. They are not religious.

To put it more simply, the *umhlinzeko* killing, with its emphasis on the agnation, became inappropriate in the context of migrant labour and the cooperation of neighbours, and it stated a principle that was being challenged and contradicted by the very subject of the ritual. The switch to *umsindleko* accommodated both these contradictions. It re-aligned the father/son relationship in terms of the nature of the relationship between homesteads, and it related migrant labour to the changed organization of production.

The role of migrant labour in fostering conflict between elder and junior has been widely documented. Hunter quotes a Mpondo informant as saying "Formerly an *umzi* was under the thumb of the father, now it is under the thumb of the son . . ." (1936:60). Harries has shown how in late nineteenth century Mozambique, migrant labour offered juniors "new strategies for throwing off the dominance of the chiefs and *numzane* [powerful homestead heads]" (1982:150). Here, elders made vigorous attempts to retain their control over bridewealth and to maintain their position of dominance over juniors, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. Juniors lost respect for their seniors, refused to perform labour tasks for them, and opposed them politically (op. cit.:154—55).

Returning to the more general question of increased maize yields and a decrease in stock holdings, it should be mentioned that it is possible that beer drinks became more common during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and ritual killings, particularly those of lesser importance, less common. There are at least two references to this increase in the minutes of the Proceedings of the United Transkeian Territories General Council (in 1908 and 1914). In 1914, for example, Councillor Mamba (who was from the district of Idutywa, which adjoins Willowvale), in proposing a motion for stricter legal control over the holding of beer drinks, referred

to the barrels of beer which were being made in the locations. This was practically a new custom . . . but it was a growing one. Their mothers and ancestors made their beer in small clay pots . . . Nowadays it was beer everywhere . . . [This] was not according to the state of things in days gone by . . . [and there were] new kinds of beer drinks now...

This change can be traced back to around 1880, as indicated in the following extract from the evidence of Revd J. A. Chalmers to the 1883 Commission on Native Laws and Customs:

The drink of Kafir beer has changed within the last few years, and it is no longer what it used to be among the Kafirs. Only old men were allowed to drink it in olden time, and there were no such immense gatherings as there are in the present day. Up to within a few years milk was the one great beverage at all feasts. I do not see how you could put a stop now to the making of Kafir beer . . . (1883:136-37, emphasis mine).

Coupled with the increasing incidence of beer drinks may have been a degree of ritualization of these events and a transfer of the religious element of ritual killings to beer drinks. Gcaleka beer drinks today have a markedly religious content and the

religious element in the *umhlinzeko* killing for a returned migrant appears to have been transferred to the *umsindleko* beer drink which replaced it. Whether this sort of transference has occurred in other spheres of religious life is difficult to say. As mentioned above, the ritual of *ukwazisa umzi* ("to make known the homestead") may nowadays take the form of a beer drink without there being a goat slaughtered, and similar processes may have been at work in the development of the many other kinds of beer drinks that exist today.

## Notes

[1] I am grateful to Michael Whisson, Robin Palmer and Chris de Wet for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, which was read at the Annual Conference of South African Anthropologists at Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, Johannesburg, in September 1984.

[2] By "Gcaleka" I mean Xhosa-speakers historically identifiable as members of the Gcaleka chiefdom, the senior branch of the Xhosa chiefdom cluster.

[3] *Umsindleko* can also be held for unsuccessful migrants.

[4] Nowadays a father who kills something for his son on the latter's return from work addresses the son briefly just before the slaughtering, saying: "You have returned from work. I am doing this for you because of that, in order to encourage you" or something similar. There is no other formal speaking on this occasion.

[5] In Willowvale most "caretakers" (oosipatheleni) were members of the absent migrant's agnatic lineage (McAllister 1979:44-46).

[6] I have not tried to explain why *umamlambo* is conceived of as a snake (nor am I certain that I would be able to do so). It is the only Cape Nguni familiar associated specifically with male witches, and is widely conceived of as something that can take on many forms, including that of a snake. The outstanding characteristic of *umamlambo* is this ability to change form (Soga 1931:193). As a familiar with "ambiguous boundaries" it is an apt symbol for the ambiguity of the migrant son as described here (Hammond-Tooke 1970).

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