

**THE BINARY OPPOSITION OF RIGHT AND LEFT  
IN ZULU SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

by

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of the study

If the subject matter of "oral studies" or "orality" is narrowly defined to refer mainly or only to "oral literature", then the subject of this essay cannot be directly connected to it. However, if a broader definition is used, to include aspects of a people's beliefs, values, attitudes and practises that are expressed and transmitted very largely by oral means, the essay is relevant because it deals with concepts and practises that extend very widely throughout Zulu society and culture. Indeed, they spread so widely that there may well be open references to them in such forms of oral literature as folktales, legends, praise-poems, proverbs etc. But I have not tried in this essay to look for the beliefs and practises in such places, because I already had so much other material to cover and much of this material would in any case have to be dealt with first, as a necessary background to any understanding of whatever references to them may exist in the oral literature.

Just to take one example of the need for such a background, the contents of my essay should be very relevant for interpreting the set of verses called *Isandla*, by J C Dlamini in his collection of poems (nd : 17-25). Of course, this example is "written", rather than "oral", literature, but these verses are full of

references to the traditional terminology, and to the beliefs and practises, associated with right and left amongst the Zulu. The verses therefore cannot be properly understood outside the traditional context from which they stem. My essay is an attempt to provide some of that social and cultural context which has been increasingly emphasised as essential for interpreting "oral literature" (see Murphy 1978: 124-132). In doing this for the topic of "right" and "left", I follow the example of some important work done mainly by anthropologists and try to apply it to the case of the Zulu who have not received the same attention in this respect.

## 1.2 Literature used

There have been many studies by anthropologists on the symbolism of the right and left sides (or "lateral symbolism" as it is sometimes called) since the original classic study by Robert Hertz<sup>1</sup> down to the major collection edited by Needham (1973) and there have been numerous others published since that collection. In this essay, I have used the Needham collection as my main source of comparative literature on the subject. It has long been recognised that there is also much symbolism attaching to right and left among the Zulu and certain aspects of this symbolism are mentioned to a limited extent in such relatively recent works as those by Berglund (1976) and Raum (1973) and I have made use of these and other sources on the Zulu in this essay.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in 1909; translated from the French in Needham 1973: 3-31

Despite all this comparative literature and the scattered references to the topic in works on the Zulu, as far as I know nobody has taken the subject of the "lateral symbolism" of Right and Left as a separate, distinct project amongst the Zulu until I made this one. Therefore I claim in this essay to have brought together relevant material from different published sources and also to have added new "oral" information on the subject in the material collected from my informants.

### 1.3 Fieldwork

This "oral" information was gathered during my fieldwork, done in my spare time, between February and November 1990, in the districts of Dlangezwa, Mthunzini, Esikhaweni, KwaMthethwa, Kwa Somkhele, Mtubatuba and Hlabisa. In these districts, live such "clans" as the Mkhwanazi, Dube, Mthethwa, together with many others. In these areas, I interviewed a total of sixty people of whom thirty were female and thirty were male. They were also differentiated by age, level of education and occupation. Most informants came from the areas in and around Empangeni, but some were from the other, more distant areas to which I travelled to gain further information. Further details about my informants are reflected in the appendix at the end of this essay .

Besides interviewing people, I used informal ways of gathering information, such as listening to conversations and debates at social gatherings or on the Zulu services of the radio and television. I also got quite a lot of ideas from

what I saw, as well as from what I heard, so that my "oral" studies have also been "visual" ones .

#### 1.4 Wider implications of the study

Many of the practices and beliefs about right and left that I have found amongst the Zulu are not unique to them, but there are many similar ones in the published sources I have used. I have therefore mentioned from time to time some of these similarities, particularly from articles in Needham (1973) dealing with East African peoples. These comparisons show that many of the details of the right-left symbolism are widespread among Bantu-speaking peoples and among those belonging to other African language families. These comparisons thus show that "Zulu oral tradition" is often a local version of a much wider tradition found throughout Africa and, as Needham shows, often repeated throughout the world .

Of course, the Zulu have got their own ways of expressing that wider tradition and these ways are most obvious in the spoken word, so that in this essay presented for a degree in oral studies, I have used Chapter Two to discuss the Zulu terminology associated with right and left. In Chapter Three, dealing with various manifestations of the symbolism in both beliefs and practises, I have also cited other Zulu terminology, used particularly in those contexts, to continue emphasising the oral aspect. In Chapter Four, dealing with the Zulu homestead, I try to show how the symbolism of right and left underlies some of the most important aspects of Zulu social organisation.



## **CHAPTER TWO - TERMINOLOGY**

### **2.1 Zulu Terminology for Right and Left**

My study of the binary opposition of right and left in Zulu culture has caused me to review first the linguistic terms for this opposition, as I have realised that a discussion of these terms is an essential first step in presenting the rest of my material. The linguistic terms discussed here include both those terms that have been found in existing literature on the Zulu, which have been verified by me through interviews on their use, and also some terms that I have not found in the literature, but have obtained from my various informants. I present the terms under headings which express some of the main concepts associated with them.

#### **2.1 Terms associated with gender**

From the comparative literature (eg Needham 1973), it is well known that terms for right and left are commonly associated all over the world with male and female gender. It is therefore not surprising to find in Raum (1973:) and Berglund (1976: 186, 363) on the Zulu, confirmed by my informants, that the right hand is associated with men (*isandla samadoda or isandla sabesilisa*) and

the left hand with women (*isandla sabesifazane or isandla sabesimame*). Thus Berglund writes (1976: 185—186), in connection with the ten “knucklebones” of animals traditionally used for divination by *izanusi*, that one diviner classified the “fingers” as being according to the hands, so that the fingers of the right hand are the male ones, while those of the left hand are the female fingers. Another indication of the same association is that some of my informants referred to a naturally left-handed person as using *isandla somfazi*, the female hand. These gender associations are connected with others, referring to physical attributes.

## 2.2 Terms associated with physical qualities

The main contrast here is between “strength” and “weakness”, which are very often regarded as natural attributes of the two sexes. So my informants told me that right is for men and left is for women, because they believe that men are physically stronger than the women, just as the right arm is stronger than the left. That is why the right side is that of men and the left that of women. Where strength is required, it is the work of the men; where tenderness is required, it is the work of women.

This contrast is expressed in such common terms as *isandla sokunene* for the right hand. This term must derive originally from a common Bantu root, *-nene* meaning “big”, “strong” etc (see Werner 1973, 429), though the term now has other references in Zulu (see below). More explicitly, in Zulu the right is specifically referred to as the pole of strength and life (*isandla samandla*

*nempilo*), whereas from my informants I learned that the left hand is the "small" hand (*isandla esincane*) or "weak" hand (*isandla esilula*). The right is also referred to as the throwing hand (*isandla sokuphonsa*). Throwing is often a vigorous or aggressive action, such as throwing spears or stones, so that this term again conveys the idea of strength. Taken together, these terms do imply an inequality of ranking between the sexes, though a division of functions is also implied in the different roles for "strength" and "tenderness" mentioned by some of my informants.

Berglund refers (1976: 364) to this division and states that men are not necessarily regarded as superior to women, just because they are associated with the right side, nor are the women inferior, just because they are associated with the left side. It is rather a matter of oppositions which complement each other. This complementarity is expressed by Zulu references to other paired parts of the body, besides the two hands. We have the two eyes and two ears, but if one of these was to be closed or cut, there would be no proper functioning of the body (Berglund 1976: 364). That is what men and women are like to each other.

The same view that the left hand is for women and right for men, but the two are complementary to each other was referred to in a "debate" programme of Radio Zulu I heard on the evening of 21-07-90. The debate was on the roles of a woman and her husband at home. Participants in the debate stressed that men should not let work be done only by their wives and added spontaneously the metaphor that the right can do nothing without the left.

However, these views about complementarity may appear to be contradicted by yet other terms which refer to moral, rather than physical, characteristics and which seem to be strongly opposed to each other.

### 2.3 Terms associated with moral attributes

The right hand is seen as the reliable, honest, trusted hand (*isandla esiqotho nesithembekile*) and also as the kind hand (*isandla sobunene or esinobunene*), or the good hand (*isandla esihle*). The left hand, by contrast, is "unreliable", "bad", "dishonest" etc (*isandla esingethembekile, isandla sobubi; sokwenza okungalungile, sokungcola*), so that it is associated with the evil deeds like bewitching others or with stealing. The left hand is also the aggressive, selfish hand (*isandla esinolaka, esinomona*). There are yet other associations of the left hand with situations involving unreliability and secretiveness .

Thus the left hand is said to be used for hiding things and is therefore also referred to as the secretive or forgetting hand (*isandla semfihlo, sokhohlo, sokukhohlwa*). An actual event illustrating this association comes from my own experience . Sometime in April 1990, I visited one of the supermarkets, at the Esikhawini township called Ntokozweni, to buy a few groceries. I had a fifty rand note. After I had picked out the items I needed for the day, I went to the counter, but before I reached it, I wanted to calculate the money, but the fifty rand note was nowhere to be found. I had to leave the groceries and go home. When I talked to one of my female friends about this incident, she told me that for sure the money was in my left hand, so it was no wonder that it got lost.

This was a spontaneous comment and is therefore especially useful in showing that this attitude to the left hand is not something obtained only in answers from informants to direct questions. It also shows that the attitude about the failings of the left hand is expressed by women, and not just by men.

The same idea appears in another context in the literature, when Myburgh (1942: 297) maintains that women on the left hand side of the homestead are always "forgotten" (see below, for further discussion of this point).

This set of terms, like some of the other sets, clearly implies actions, as well as characteristics or attributes, and I now consider further terms associating the hands more directly with particular kinds of actions, especially those in the spheres of magic and ritual.

#### 2.4 Terms associated with divination and witchcraft

Berglund (1976: 371) and my informants associate the left hand with the diviners (*isandla sokubhula* or *samathwasa* or *isandla sokuhlola*). Since divination can be regarded as a beneficial activity, it may seem as if these terms for the left hand imply approval for this use of the hand. But I believe it is also because the diviners are often trying to find something that has been hidden, lost, stolen or to reveal the cause of some misfortune, and so they use the left hand. The association of this hand with such situations is therefore shown and strengthened by the diviners's use of it. Also this is the hand of bewitching (*isandla sokuloya*), because the Zulu believe that if medicine of witchcraft is placed by the left hand the enemy will die, or if the left hand has

been used in preparing the medicine, it is a powerful ingredient. All in all, I would say these various terms show that misfortunes of many kinds have to do with the left hand. There are corresponding terms related to other ritual contexts which show that the right hand is connected with the prospect or hope of good fortune.

## 2.5 Terms associated with the ancestral cult

Some of my informants told me that when the head of the homestead (*umuzi*) had slaughtered the cow or goat in a sacrifice for his ancestors, he would put the skin bangle on his right hand, thus it is referred to as the hand of the ancestors (*isandla samadlozi*). These distinctions in terms for ritual uses of the hands correspond to some other ones referring to more ordinary actions which are also classified into two contrasting kinds.

## 2.6 Terms associated with routine physical use of limbs

The right hand is very commonly called the eating hand (*isandla sokudla*), because only it should be used for taking food and putting it in the mouth. The right hand is also used for receiving and giving (*ukwamukela nokupha*) objects. Again, it is the hand used for greeting (*isandla sokuxhawula*). It is the lucky hand that is why we use it for greeting. The other activities are also desirable or necessary.

It is a common belief that the left hand is not to be used for any of these socially desirable acts. So traditional Zulu people dislike a person who uses the left hand for such purposes. My informants told me that the left hand is used instead for "dirty" acts such as cleaning the genitals or blowing one's nose and when you spit, you should do it to the left. It is consistent with such uses that it is prohibited to use the left hand for eating or greeting.

These uses and prohibitions lie behind what might otherwise seem to be the strange association of the left hand with the baboon, for the left hand is sometimes called the hand of the baboon (*isandla semfene*). People claim that the baboon uses the left hand for doing everything, thus breaking the prohibitions relating to use of the left hand by humans. The unfavourable associations of the left hand are thus stressed again by linking them with an animal which cannot distinguish between correct and incorrect behaviour.

## 2.7 The Zulu lateral terminology in a comparative context

As I mentioned above, in section 1.4, the Zulu are not unique in making and expressing such distinctions between left and right. Thus, Zulu was only one of 18 (or 21) from a sample of 37 Bantu languages examined by Werner which referred to the right hand as the "eating hand" (Werner in Needham 1973: 427—428).

Yet another example is that of the Kaguru, as studied by Beidelman in Needham (1973), who view the right hand as the clean (*kulume*), or the auspicious hand that has strength (*ngufu*). The left hand is viewed as the unclean or

inauspicious (*muafu*) and weak hand (*ngufu lechaka*), the hand that has no strength. The Kaguru believe that the male is always physically stronger than female and that likewise the right hand is stronger than the left. The Kaguru believe that this was due to the way people were fashioned in the womb; because they say that a person was made of two joined sides; the right half deriving from the father, the left from the mother. The right hand is also referred to by Kaguru as the upper hand and the left as the lower hand, a distinction which also appears in Zulu as *isandla esikhulu/esingenhla* for the right hand and *isandla esincane or sangezansi* for the left hand.

Beidelman also says that amongst the Kaguru a child who grows up to favour his left hand is no way punished, but people may comment on this, and if it is a boy, they may say that he is like a wife, thus showing again the association of this hand with the female gender.

## 2.8 Implications of the terminology

The material presented shows that the Zulu terminology for right and left is much more elaborate than the usual dictionary renderings for "right (side)" and "left (side)" would suggest. Thus Doke, Malcolm and Sikakana (1958) give -*esokunene* and *esokudla* for "right" and -*bunxele* and -*sekhlo* for "left". These renderings are correct, in the sense that they are those in most common use and three out of the four of them derive from roots which are found in other Bantu languages, so that they may be regarded as "primary" terms in that sense, too.



(The root in the fourth term, *-nxele* begins with a nasal click and may therefore be of ultimate Khoisan origin).

However, as I have shown, there are numerous other Zulu terms and some of these are also in fairly common use. Other terms may appear only in the special contexts where they are relevant. Taken all together, the terms show that the basic "binary" distinction may spread in all sorts of ways that cannot be fully covered, if one sticks only to the most common "oral" expressions of that distinction. To go still further, beyond merely listing the terms, towards an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which the less common terms occur, I need to follow the "leads" given by my discussion of the terminology into various other spheres of Zulu beliefs and practises. The next two chapters therefore consider several of these spheres, in differing degrees of detail.

## CHAPTER 3 - BELIEFS AND PRACTISES

### 3.1 Habits and practises in Zulu life that are related to the right or left hand side

The listing of the terms in the previous chapter already showed that the distinction between right and left appears in many different spheres of Zulu life. In this chapter, I give first more details about some beliefs and practises relating to right and left in recurrent or regular situations of everyday life. One set of *beliefs* concerns omens which are generally quite important in deciding how people interpret and order the activities or experiences they have in their lives.

Some *practises* relate to those activities, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, greeting, giving, taking and sexual relations which are all part of normal life. Secondly, there are a number of ceremonies and rituals which occur at particular points in the life cycle of a Zulu individual and I give some examples of the role of the right-left distinction in them. Finally, in this chapter, some aspects of the symbolism of right and left in general religious practises and in divination are discussed.

### 3.2 Right and left in omens

As far as the omens are concerned, Zulu people have a strong belief in them, as Krige (1936: 288) noted, but she did not mention that quite a lot of them are associated with right and left, reflecting also some of the various qualities which I have shown in the previous chapter are linked with these sides. That is, the omens can refer to such matters as gender and good or bad fortune. The omens can show themselves in different ways, of which some common ones are physical sensations in parts of the body; the directions in which animals and birds move, relative to the observer; the directions from which animal and bird sounds come [and dreams;] certain kinds of dreams.

Thus for gender, if you feel your right hand is itching, it means that you will receive a letter from a male, but itching of the left hand is for a letter from a female. Berglund mentions that a pregnant woman who feels a twitching in her right eye will expect to have a boy, but, if it is in her left eye, a girl. A variation of this omen for a woman who is not pregnant is that twitching of the right eye indicates a forthcoming visit by male relatives of the woman's lineage and of the left eye a visit from female relatives (1976: 363).

As for good or bad luck, besides being told by my informants, I believe that the twitching of the upper right eyelid indicates that some absent members of the family will come back or some other pleasant event is in store for you; but the twitching of the upper left eyelid means that a member of your family will die or you will experience some other sorrow, so that you will have reason to cry. A different kind of physical experience conveys a similar message about

the outcome of a journey to visit someone. If a someone on such a journey stubs the toes of the left foot, the person to be visited will not be at home, but stubbing the right toes indicates one will make one's contacts.

Omens relating to movement of animals include the belief that if a person sees a hare (*uNogwaja*) or a mongoose (*uChakide*) running towards the left side of the settlement or if one of these animals crosses the path from the right to left, then a bad thing shall happen. Alternatively, when one is on a journey, a bush-rat or snake crossing one's path from left to right announces success for the purpose of the journey. But a move from right to left by the animal would mean failure.

Similarly, the direction from which the sounds made by certain birds come can indicate good or bad fortune. If the ground hornbill (*inGududu*) is heard crying on the right, it is a good sign, but if it cries from the left, it is a bad sign.

Many kinds of omens can be experienced in dreams and some of them can involve the associations of right and left. One actual example of an omen referring to the use of the hands in a dream was told to me by the relative of my friend who died in a car accident in 1989. I was told that before her death my friend had dreamed of seeing her grandfather greeting (*-xhawula*) her by his left hand and on the following day she died.

These are only a few examples of such omens involving left and right which are quite common, so that I expected to find references to them in the more recent literature on the Zulu, but, except for the one item quoted above, I have not found any mention in Berglund of these particular omens involving

right and left, though he does mention that if some omen associated with misfortune occurs, "one spits to the left or over the left shoulder". Perhaps more surprisingly, Raum (1973) also apparently does not refer to the omens of right and left, though some of them do relate to Zulu customs about prohibitions and avoidances with which his large book is concerned.

There are, however, repeated references to very similar omens amongst other African peoples in the Needham collection. Thus Wieschof cites (1973: 63, 64, 65, 67) instances of omens relating to twitching or itching of right and left parts of the body, particularly the eyelids, from several widely separated parts of the continent and he mentions (p 65) the Chagga interpretation of stubbing the toes of the right or left foot on a journey. He has more numerous examples referring to the movement of animals, the flight of birds and their cries (1973: 64-67). Beidelman mentions (1973: 134) bird cries and stubbing the toes among the Kaguru. These items are sufficient to show that not only the general principle of the right/left distinction but also many of its particular details are widespread in African beliefs about omens and therefore the Zulu ones are part of a pan-African tradition and can sometimes be better understood by reference to that tradition, rather than treating them in isolation, as being specifically and exclusively "Zulu" oral tradition.

### 3.3 Right and left in recurrent activities

#### 3.3.1 Eating and drinking

The common term, *isandla sokudla*, itself summarises the fact that the right hand should be used for eating and this convention is more or less taken for granted. There are, however, a number of special observances which emphasise the use of right or, sometimes, the left hand in eating or drinking.

For example, if a feast is being held at a homestead, members of it gather at the "great house" (*indlunkulu* - see next chapter for further discussion of the homestead) to eat meat of the slaughtered beast (*ukudla isithebe senyama* or *ugqoko lwenyama*). The senior woman (*umdlunkulu*) holds the meat with her left hand and cuts it with the right hand and thereafter distributes it to the members of the homestead, again using her right hand which in this context, as in others, is therefore the hand for giving food (*isandla esiphayo*). In giving out the meat, women will be served in accordance with their position in the sections into which the homestead is divided. I discuss these sections in the next chapter; here it is sufficient to note that the women of the section of the right hand are served before those of the left hand section. This particular feature is therefore representing the relative seniority of the women within the homestead.

Another context in which special uses of the hands are observed is in the eating of thick or sour milk (*amasi*). In actually taking the milk, you must

either use a wooden spoon (*ukhezo*) held in the right hand or you may just dip in the right hand itself. However, you must not actually eat the milk with or from the right hand. Instead, you must pour it from the spoon in your right hand or from the right hand itself into your left hand and eat it from that hand. I have not been given any explanation for this practise which is, of course, contrary to the usual concept of the right hand as the "eating hand".

Raum, who has a lengthy discussion of observances relating to sour milk, only once mentions taking it with the right hand and then eating it from the left hand, in connection with children being forbidden to use a spoon for eating sour milk from their father's pot. He states that this prohibition is *hlonipha* towards the parents and that it is an "inversion", since the parents themselves use spoons and eat directly from the pot (1973: 343) (ie do not pour it into their left hands?). This prohibition on using a spoon may be another example of the idea that a child behaving exactly like the father in relation to his own sour milk would be "overshadowing" him, ie symbolically taking his place (Raum 1973: 338). Similarly, to eat sour milk directly from the right hand would again be acting too much like the father (who can eat from or with that hand?). He also mentions that a wife could not eat with her husband's sour milk spoon, but could only ladle sour milk out of the pot with it and then had to eat the milk from her palm (361), and, similarly, that a child could not eat sour milk from a mother's brother's spoon, but could use it to ladle milk into its palm (102). In neither case does Raum specify which hand, but one can infer it must be the palm of the left hand, since the spoon should be held in the right hand.

Whether or not a spoon is used, the milk should be taken from the container with the right hand and it seems to be implied that using the left hand for taking it would be "polluting" the milk. Certainly, my informants mentioned sanctions against using the left hand for serving the milk which may reflect an underlying fear of such pollution. It is said that the head of the homestead (*umnumzane*) always wants his cattle to increase in their numbers (*zizande*). Should members of the homestead not follow this custom and take sour milk with the left hand, there is a fear that the cattle will die. So the well-being of the inhabitants will suffer and so will the status (*isithunzi*) of the headman. In any case, the distinction between right and left is again clearly marked.

Another "modern" context involving pouring liquids was mentioned by one of my informants who remarked that when drinking tea, you usually pour it into your cup using your right hand. However, if the teapot is so hot that the right hand could be burnt, you will use the left hand which in this case then acts as the protecting, assisting hand (*isandla esivikelayo* or *esincedayo*). In her remarks, my informant was interpreting a physical situation involving hot liquids in terms which reflect another aspect of the use of the hands with food. As I have already indicated, one is normally given food (or anything else) with the right hand. One should also receive it in the right hand which may be supported by the left hand placed underneath the right one. This gesture is not confined to receiving food, so it may be treated in the next sub-section.



### 3.3.2 Receiving

The use of the left hand to support the right one when receiving anything may be practised by anyone, but it is particularly expected of children and also of women receiving something from males. Thus a wife receiving money from her husband should take it in her right hand, supported by the left. This gesture is therefore one of respect and often indicates relative seniority between giver and receiver. The placing of the left under the right hand expresses the difference in status. A similar positioning of the two hands is required of children shaking hands with their parents or any adult (Raum 1973: 87).

### 3.3.3 Gestures and signs

If one needs to express the idea of height, the right hand is raised above the left which is held horizontal and motionless, while the idea of lowness is expressed by lowering the inferior, left hand below the right. This positioning again suggests the "superiority" of the right and the "inferiority" of the left. Consistent with this ranking is the modern use of the right hand at political meetings as, for example, at Inkatha meetings and rallies, where the right fist is raised and the slogan *"Amandla awethu; songoba simunye"* is shouted. It is true that this practise was probably adopted from the ANC, but it fits very well with the other Zulu beliefs and practises in which the raised right hand signifies bravery, power and virility.

In greeting (*ukubingelela*) someone from a distance, the right hand may be raised high above the head. When close to each other, people may greet by gripping or shaking (*ukuxhawula*) each other's right hand.

Therefore, we can summarise many of these usages by saying that for all positive actions and forms of respect the right hand is used, so that in cooking food, giving or handing over of things to other people, the right hand is used. The right hand adds dignity in all that we do.

Once again, details of the Zulu practises resemble those of many other African peoples. To take an example from only one of them, the Kaguru eat with the right hand and they use it for shaking hands. Beidelman emphasizes that none of these acts would be performed politely with the left hand.

#### 3.3.4 Walking and kneeling

When a married couple are walking together, the wife should be on the left side of the husband. One reason given for walking in this manner is that should they be attacked, the man can put his wife behind him with his left hand and fight the attacker with his right hand. But the arrangement also implies marital status, because it will be assumed that a woman walking on the right side of a man is his sister or some other female relative of his. Also, in the rural areas, they say that if a youth is trying to court a girl, he should not walk on the right side when with her, because he has not been formally accepted by her. He should walk on her left side until she has accepted him as a lover (*usemqomile* or *usemvumile*).

Yet another everyday situation in which one side is favoured can be seen in the way in which women sit, particularly in the presence of senior males. A woman in approaching such a man should first kneel before him and then, when give permission should sit on the floor or ground leaning towards her left side and supporting herself on her left hand. To sit in any other fashion would be considered improper and disrespectful. Men do not sit in this way.

### 3.3.5 Sleeping

At least for those Zulu who still live in dwellings of a traditional form, the hut is divided internally into right and left sides (see next chapter for more detailed discussion of this division). Males should sleep on right side of the hut and the females on the left.

### 3.3.6 Sex

Concerning this issue, there are three aspects to consider. The first is the place where intercourse occurs. I was told that a woman crosses to the man's side of the hut when they are to sleep together. Old people put it frankly by saying that a woman comes to the right hand side when she is invited by the male for sex (*uma emenyiwe owesilisa*). Otherwise, she dare not enter the right hand side. Moreover, I was also told that if men sleep on the left hand side of the hut when having sex, the child will be like its mother. But if it is the wife that

sleeps on her husband's side, ie the right hand side, the child looks exactly like its father. Since men presumably want their children to resemble them, this stereotype may reinforce the preference for the right side of the hut. But since children often do resemble their mothers, the belief may also recognise that the preference is often not enforced !

The second aspect is the position assumed by the couple before copulation. Berglund states (1976: 363) that during the sex play the man lies traditionally on his right side while the female lies on her left side. This position, which leaves the man's left hand free, would be consistent with what some of my informants said about the use of the hands during the play which is the third aspect to consider.

Elderly or middle-aged and uneducated informants from the rural areas tended to stress that the man should use his left hand. I was even told that if the woman should hold her husband's left hand tightly, he would ask her to release it so that he could continue using it. One man insisted that he could not use his right hand for sex as he takes it to be a sacred, reliable hand with which to hold and open the Holy Book (Bible). In contrast to this view, some of my older rural informants remarked that when sleeping with your wife you would place your wife on your left hand side and cover her with your right hand which is the hand of luck and love. These contrasting statements suggest that any rule there may be is again not strictly followed. Certainly, my middle-aged, educated informants maintained that even the right hand is used for sex, depending on the position or the side on which each of the partners may be lying.

That there nevertheless are, or were, definite conventions amongst the Zulu on these matters is again supported by the comparative literature which shows that they were shared with other African peoples. Beidelman, for example, reports that Kaguru men lie on the right side during coitus and this position enables them to use the left hand for sex-play, whereas a woman lies on her left side and must therefore use her right hand (1973: 133, 135). Needham (1973: 305) cites Beattie's report that a Nyoro man lies on his right side during sex and the woman on her left; he infers that the man's left hand is therefore used for sex play. The same positions are taken among the Gogo for whom the left hand is the appropriate one to use (Rigby 1973: 266).

Besides all these contexts from ordinary life, there are others which occur less frequently, but are prominent in Zulu culture and in which the symbolism of right and left can be observed in the associated practises. Some of these contexts concern the successive stages through which an individual may pass in the course of a full life and I have grouped them according to the natural sequence they follow.

### 3.4 Right and left in the individual life cycle practises

#### 3.4.1 Birth

Only a very few old informants who were brought up in Zululand, and who had continued to live according to the traditional way, knew what was done for the woman and child during and immediately after the birth. Their information corresponds to that reproduced from an old source by Berglund (1976: 363) which stated that the umbilical cord was buried immediately to the right of the (*umsamo*) seen facing inwards from the doorway of the hut in the case of a male child, and to the left of the *umsamo*, if it is a girl. Such isolated reports on the Zulu may seem doubtful, until one reads that amongst the Nyoro the father of a new-born child digs a hole on the right side of the hut floor for a boy and on the left side for a girl and the placenta is buried in this hole (Needham 1973: 301).

At a subsequent Zulu rite, a new-born baby was passed through the smoke of a fire in which the medicine of the clan is burned (*ukushuqisa isinyamazane*). According to Kidd, as cited by Berglund (1976: 363), in this rite the child receives the ancestral spirit (*ithongo*) of its lineage. It is said that as part of the rite the father of the child scraped sweat from his right arm and shoulder if the child to be treated was a boy. If it was a girl, he would take sweat from the left arm.

### 3.4.2 Ear-piercing

Before children achieved puberty, the lobes of the ears should be pierced (*ukugumbuzza, ukukleza*). Traditionally, the ceremonies for this operation were quite elaborate and are described at some length by Krige (1936: 81-87), but she does not mention that the right ear is pierced first in the case of boys, followed by the left ear. In the case of girls, the left is treated first and then the right. This sequence for the piercing is not mentioned by Raum (1973: 276), but it is confirmed by Berglund (1976: 363) from his own research. So in this ceremony, the association of the two sides with gender is clearly symbolised. The same association is found amongst certain Congo people who pierce first the right or left lobes of newborn infants according to their sex (Wieschoff 1973: 60).

### 3.4.3 Wedding practices related to left/right hand sides

The symbolism of right and left is prominent at several points in the wedding ceremonies which traditionally were elaborate and lengthy (Krige 1936: 135-155), but have nowadays been shortened. Quite a lot of the remaining symbolism at weddings involves the lay-out of the homestead, so I describe that in the next chapter. Here I merely note features involving the hands or the sides of the main actors in the ceremonies, not noticed in Krige's sources.

On the wedding day, the father of the bride hands over his daughter to the bridegroom with his right hand which is said to be the hand of the ancestor

(*isandla samadlozi*). The arm on which the bride wears the (*isiphandla*) or skin bracelet depends on who has slaughtered the goat for her: if it is the skin of a goat from her mother's people, she wears it on her left arm, if it is from her father's people, she wears it on her right arm, because the right is the hand for the father's people (*isandla sabakithi*).

The bride on her wedding day carries a shield in her left hand and a special knife (*isingindi*) with the right hand. This is demonstrated by a traditional wedding at Gobandlovu (Esikhawini) between Mr Mngadi and Thuli Xaba, shown below in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1

Krige does not state (1936: 141) in which hand the knife is held but claims that "it signifies that she is a virgin". I was told that holding the knife (*isingindi*)



with the right hand symbolizes that she has come to look after the people of the groom's homestead. She has come to feed them (*isandla sokupha* or *sokuphatha*).

After the wedding day, the contents of a gallbladder (*inyongo*) from a beast will be poured or squeezed down the right hand side and also down the right leg of the bride. Raum refers (1973 :296) to this action, but without mentioning the side on which it is poured. The side is significant because pouring the gall on the right is supposed to fortify her and give her good luck. I have been told that it would not be lucky to squeeze the gall on the left hand side, because this is the *ikhohlwa* side and the *Umakoti* would subsequently be "forgotten" by her husband whenever he was giving presents to his other wives (see next chapter for further discussion of this context). In this case, therefore, the association of the two sides is with good and bad fortune.

### 3.4.4 Death and burial

#### 3.4.4.1 *Preparing the grave*

My informants, as well as my own observations, have confirmed the statement by one of Raum's informants (1973: 144) that at the burial of the head of the homestead (*umnumzane*), the men who carry the stones for making the niche (see Krige 1936: 162, 172 and Bryant 1967: 701, 713) in the grave for receiving the corpse have to walk up the right side of the homestead. I observed this

practise of carrying stones up the right side at the burial of a man in the Mtubatuba district in 1989. In traditional Zulu society, the grave of the head of the homestead is dug either next to the right hand side at the top of the homestead outside the cattle byre, or inside the byre at the top end, not far from the Great Hut (Krige 1936: 161, Raum 1973: 309 and see again my next chapter for details of the homestead lay-out). This emphasis on the right can be seen as continuing the respect accorded to the *umnumzane* in his life. Krige remarks (1936: 160) "the death of a kraal head is accompanied by much more ritual and a much longer mourning period", but again she has no information on the associated lateral symbolism.

#### 3.4.4.2 *Preparing and carrying the corpse*

By contrast, during other phases of the burial, a number of "funerary inversions" as Berglund calls them (1976: 364) are provided in the information he gives and none of which are found in Krige. For example, it was said to be the duty of the senior wife to wash her husband's body before interment and she would be told to do so with the left, instead of the right, hand. It was also asserted that the eyes of the deceased ought to be closed with the left hand, "so that the deceased may not be troubled" (1976: 365). Berglund refers to several cases (1976: 365), when the body of a polygynously married man being taken to the grave, was carried by the right hand wife (*inqadi*) on the left hand side, while the (*ikhohlwa*) wife, the left hand wife, carried it on the right hand side, thus reversing their traditional positions in the homestead, on which one of

Berglund's informants commented that it was "so that the husband may leave his home nicely". This vague remark does not bring out what may be the underlying idea indicated by other such "reversals" in the procedures for burial which suggest that death is polluting and that the dead should be dealt with in such a way that they do not return to trouble the living. A corpse that is buried outside the homestead will never leave it along the right hand side of the *umuzi*, because that side is associated with good, pure things and not with bad, impure things, such as death, which are associated with the left.

#### 3.4.4.3 *Grave goods and the corpse*

Another of Berglund's observations, also reported earlier by Krige (1936: 162) and by Bryant (1967: 701, 713), concerns the placing (*ukufumbathisa*) of all kinds of seeds in the hand of the corpse. Unlike both Krige and Bryant, Berglund specifies (1973: 368) that the seeds are placed in the right hand of the deceased, if it is a woman, and in the left hand, if a man. I was able to witness this custom on February 13, 1988, in Hlabisa district, where my aunt (*umamekazi*), by the name of Jabulisiwe Mhlaba, was indeed buried with seeds in her right hand. This was said to symbolise that she should not go away with food, but instead make the survivors get food. This interpretation is in line with Berglund's report that the custom "generally is associated with future fertility" (1976: 368), also given by Krige (1936: 162), though she was not aware which hand was selected. Berglund could not find any further explanation for the actual "reversal" of the hands, but the general one given at least indicates the

belief that the dead can continue to influence the living. The same belief can be noticed in another of my cases referring to placing another kind of object in the hand of the dead.

I was told by one of my informants, Mamhlongo, who lives in the Mtholo area of Mtubatuba district, that in 1981, at the burial of the son of one of the inhabitants of her area, she saw the relatives of the deceased place the deceased in a sitting position in the grave. A short spear (*injula*) was put in his right hand. The reason why the deceased was made to hold the spear was that they believed someone had killed him, but did not know who it was. They had therefore treated the spear with medicines, so that whilst he was holding it in his grave the person who had killed him would die. The right hand is, of course, the one in which weapons are usually held, so that there was no inversion of the sides here, but the episode can be seen as a "reversal" of the normal practise, reported by Bryant, that the survivors are particularly careful to ensure that none of a man's personal spears are buried with him, just because of the fear that he might use it "for maliciously 'stabbing' the offending member of his family" (Bryant 1967: 702). In my case, the family wanted him to "stab" the unknown offender and had therefore given him the means to do so.

#### 3.4.4.4 *Other funeral practises*

In his section on funeral inversions, Berglund also mentions (1976: 365) a claim that after the funeral of Chief Nkantini Zulu, the cattle in the royal byre were

milked from the left hand side which reversed the normal practise by which the milker sits to the right of the cow (1976: 363). One of the herd-boys confirmed this claim and said he had been instructed to do it in this way by a senior member of the family. A striking parallel to this detail, which helps indirectly to confirm the claim, again comes from Needham's discussion of the Nyoro where he remarks that cows must normally be milked from the right side, but when the King dies a special cow is milked from the left side (1973: 304, 306).

Needham's further comment on the Nyoro can therefore be applied to this Zulu instance and to many of the other Zulu practises associated with death and burial that I have mentioned:

[it] can readily be seen as a situational reversal; it distinguishes the situation by the employment of the side which is expressly associated with death and which is otherwise shunned and regarded as ill-omened. The ultimate in the inauspicious (namely, death) has taken place, and this event is recognized by an appropriate lateral symbol  
(1973:306)

Of course, for the Zulu death and burial are not the end of relationships with the dead, since at least some of them become ancestral spirits of continuing importance to the living. So this topic leads on to the next one of religion in which right and left again figure prominently in various rituals.

### 3.5 Right and left in religion

#### 3.5.1 Sacrifices to the ancestors

##### 3.5.5.1 *Slaughtering, skinning and dividing the beast*

The beast is slaughtered by stabbing it on its right hand side (*ngasesandleni sokuphonsa*). The person responsible for killing the beast (*umhlabi*) will stab it and quickly lie down on the ground on his right hand side, so that the beast can quickly die. Berglund adds that they ensure that the beast falls on its right side (1976: 217). C T Msimang (1975), as well as my informants, report the same idea or belief that when the beast is skinned, the 'skinner' (*umhlinzi*) should begin on its right hand side. Similarly, at the time of the distribution of the various parts of the beast, the skinner should also begin on the right side (*isandla sokuphonsa*). This process goes as follows: the skinner will start by cutting the right front limbs, after which the left limbs are cut (*uhlangothi lwesokhohlo*).

When the skinner has finished, he will put the head of the slaughtered beast in the skin and it is very important to note that when it is taken to the main house (*indlunkulu*), the people carrying it should walk on the right side of the homestead and even on entering the house they should approach the ritual area (*umsamo*) at the back, behind the fireplace, from the right hand side. The boys coming back from the eating of the lung (*ukudla ubhedu* or *iphaphu*) outside the homestead will enter the on the right hand side.

### 3.5.1.2 *Uses of the gall-bladder*

As in other contexts, such as marriage already mentioned, the gallbladder of the beast is very important in Zulu ancestral sacrifices. When the beast has been slaughtered for the feast (*idili*), the gallbladder will be pierced and gall poured on the forefinger of the right hand of the homestead head (*ithelwa kunkomba wesandla sokuphonsa somnumzane*)(cf Berglund 1976: 218).

Afterwards the emptied bag of the gallbladder will be worn on the right wrist by the headman, that is, it is worn on the lucky hand (*esandleni senhlanhla*), the hand through which he can make contact with the ancestors.

My informant Xolisile Ziqubu told me that if a beast or goat was slaughtered for a married woman by her in-laws, she would wear the gallbladder (*isiphandla*) on the right hand because by marriage she belonged to the new clan; she has been incorporated to the ancestors of her husband. It is the gallbladder of the beast slaughtered by her people that will be worn on the left hand, because she no more belongs to them.

If the sacrifice was made for an undetermined male ancestor, the string was tied round the big toe of the right foot, but round the big toe of the left foot when a female ancestor was honoured.

### 3.5.1.3 *Use of skin bracelet*

The wearing of the armband the (*isiphandla*) which is another common practice amongst the Zulus is also found amongst the Wachagga of whom Henry says

that the piece of skin is cut from the hide of a sacred bull and wear it around the middle finger of the right hand. If the person to whom the bull was sacrificed belongs to the father's family, the skin will be worn on the right finger but if the person to whom the bull was sacrificed belong to the mother's family it would be worn on the left.

As an example of these practices, I include as Figure 3.2 a photo from the thanks-giving celebration (*ukukhunga/ukubonga*) of Phiwinhlanhla Mpile-nhle Sfiso Buthelezi which coincided with his first birthday in May when his father slaughtered a goat. After the celebration, he was made to wear an armlet of skin (*isiphandla*) on his right wrist, because it was slaughtered by his people, that is by his father.



Figure 3.2



### 3.5.2 Divination

The use of lateral symbolism in Zulu divination has received relatively detailed attention from Berglund, partly because it often involves "reversals" or "inversions" of the usual associations of right and left. The general notion of "inversion" is represented amongst diviners by their frequent claim that they see things upside down (Berglund 1976: 371-372). More specific examples are that they often carry the bag with their equipment in the left hand and use that hand to cast the bones during a divination session (1973: 3-3). Since such use of the left hand by diviners in other African societies has figured in the comparative literature, particularly in Needham's analysis of the Nyoro (1973: 300-301, ), I give more detailed attention to it from my own material which throws some additional light on the matter.

I have observed one diviner who collected the bones with *both* the left *and* the right hand. The explanation given for using the right hand as well was that it is the hand of the ancestors or the great people (*isandla samadlozi* or *sabakhulu*). So they are invited here to come and help in the divination process. However, this diviner uses the left hand when actually interpreting the message spelt out by the thrown bones. When the inquirer had gone, the bones were again collected in the container by the diviner with the right hand. From this example, it can be seen that there are individual differences between diviners in the use of the hands, though all seem to acknowledge that the particular use does have special significance.

Looking more closely at the reason why the left hand and left side are important during divination, I was told by both diviners and non-diviners that it is a common belief amongst the Zulu people that the left hand is for the secrets. They made supporting statements like saying that if you want to hide a thing, you should use the left hand, because then the people will not see that thing. It follows that for a diviner to see or discover the hidden thing or a secret, he or she should divine using the left hand and sit on the left hand side of the hut. There are, however, individual variations in the side where a diviner prefers to sit or the hand that is used for pointing at the bones during the process of divining.

An example of such variation was provided by a male diviner (*isangoma*), Khanyile-Langa of Ntambanana, Empangeni. Like some other diviners, he does sit on the left hand side of the hut, which is the women's side, but to point or "talk" to his bones he would use the right hand. His reason is that the right hand is the lucky one and the hand through which your ancestors give you money (*isandla senhlanhla, isandla semali*). The same usage of the right hand and essentially the same interpretation for it was confirmed by another diviner, Xolisile Ziqubu of Mkhobosa area (Esikhawini), but born in Weenen.

These differing uses of the hands and the reasons given for them make it difficult to apply to the Zulu diviners Needham's interpretation of the use of the left hand by the male Nyoro diviner as a "symbolic reversal", by which

he is physically male, but through his left hand he is symbolically associated with the feminine (1973: 309) [and] ... also with other values which themselves are connected, either by direct association or by analogy, with the feminine. Black, evil, danger, the inauspicious, and death ... all

conjoin to make of the diviner what the Nyoro themselves may well conceive as an agent of the powers of darkness, and the left hand as the readiest symbol of this condition  
(1973: 315)

Berglund correctly comments on this interpretation by Needham that

it does not follow that ... the left hand side throughout is a symbol of the feminine or of evil. For a symbol requires an interpretation related to its context  
(1976: 378)

He then suggests that for Zulu diviners there is a third context, besides the feminine and evil, and that is their close connection with the ancestral shades.

He claims that it is this context which explains the "reversals" of the usual lateral symbolism by diviners because they are

the servants of the shades ... The shades, in turn, are associated with inversions because they are the inhabitants of the nether world where everything is reversed  
(1976: 379)

This interpretation certainly seems more applicable to the Zulu case than Needham's, especially since most Zulu diviners are in any case women and his version of the "symbolic reversal" can hardly apply to them ! However, Berglund's view may still be too inclusive in that he apparently tries to explain *all* uses of the left hand or side by diviners in the same way, as "inversions", so that he is following Needham's general approach, though not the latter's particular version of it. In doing this, Berglund is not observing the procedure he uses at other places in the same chapter where, for example, he points out that the symbolic use of water can have at least four different meanings, depending on the precise context in which it occurs (1976: 385). It follows that the use of the left hand by diviners need not have only one meaning, but may vary from case to case.

Therefore the explanations given by some of my informants for preferring the left hand when manipulating the divining implements deserve consideration. Unlike those offered by Needham and Berglund, they come from members of the society. Moreover, they go with the terms expressing the special association of the left hand with "hidden" or "forgotten" or "secret" things that I have already given in Chapter Two.

There are some other associations between particular items of the diviner's equipment and the hands in which they should be held. For example, Xolisile Ziqubu made the point that the diviner's "brush" (*ishoba*) will always be held with the right hand (*isandla sabakhulu/samadlozi*) or "hand of the ancestors", as a means of inviting the ancestors to come and protect during the process of divination. In Figure 3.3, diviner Xolisile Ziqubu (who is kneeling on the left hand side, as she takes the right hand side as belonging to men) indeed has the *ishoba* in her right hand and holds the shield (*ihawu*) in the left to symbolize protection from the evil spirits during divination.

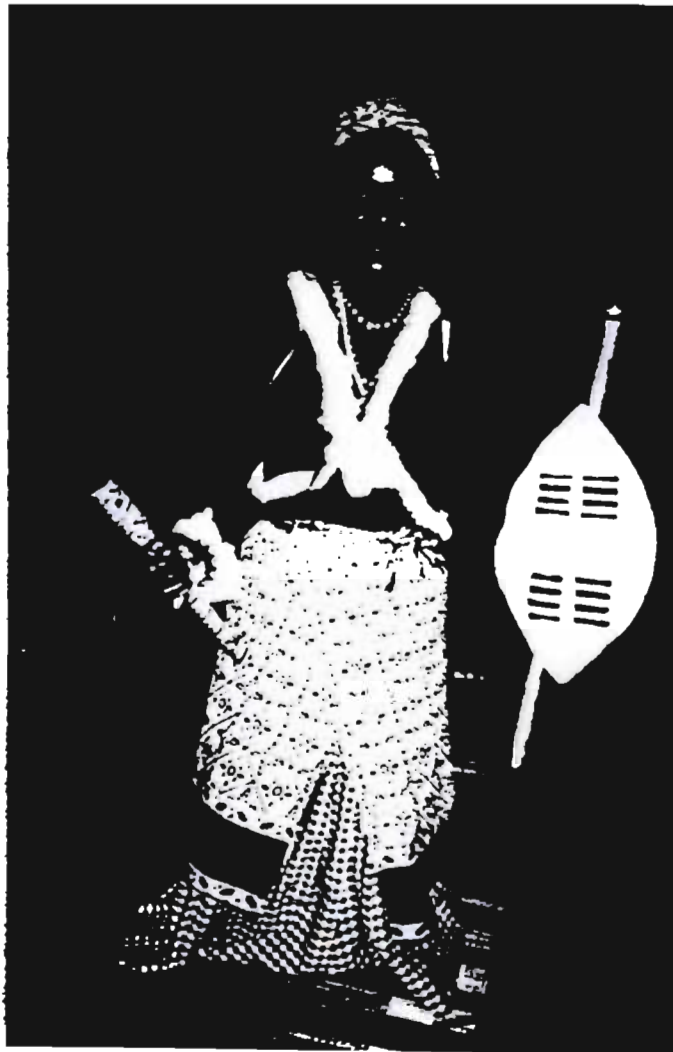


Figure 3.3

In Figure 3.4, the *ishoba* is again in the right hand, with a stick (*isakila*) for "protection" in the left hand. This photograph also gives prominence to the skin bracelets, with the one on the right wrist from a beast slaughtered by the father's people and that on the left from one slaughtered by the mother's people (*abasekhaya konina* or *komakime*). This isangoma is also wearing the skin bangles on both ankles which is said to protect against the attack by the evil spirits (*imibhulelo*), ie against witchcraft.



Figure 3.4

By contrast, in Figure 3.5, a novice diviner (*ithwasa*) has only the stick held in the right hand, which was again called the hand of the ancestors (*isandla sezidalua*). The skin bracelet on her left wrist should have come from a sacrifice to her maternal ancestors.



Figure 3.5

✦ These examples and much of the previous material therefore show that there can be differences as well as similarities in the use and interpretation of traditional symbols and I show more such variations in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4 - THE ZULU HOMESTEAD (*Umuzi*)

### 4.1 The layout of the homestead

In a fairly recent discussion of symbolic aspects of the southern Bantu homestead, Kuper (1980) has summarised the facts contained in some of the older literature about both the general layout of traditional Nguni homesteads and the specific variations of that layout which can be found amongst the different Nguni groups. Following his lead, I will first discuss some features of the general homestead layout as found among the Zulu and then present some facts about the details of that layout which differ from those given by Kuper.

As amongst all the Nguni, the centre of the traditional Zulu homestead is the more or less circular *isibaya* or cattle byre, usually made from wooden poles or branches, though in some of the upland areas it could be made of stone. The byre always has one main gate which normally lies on the axis leading through the byre from the main hut (*indlunkulu*) at the top of the site (which is frequently on a slope) down to the main entrance to the homestead itself at the bottom of the site. A byre may also have two smaller gates (*izintuba*) on each of its two side arcs corresponding to the grouping of the living huts in the homestead. These huts extend on either side of the main hut, following the curve of the byre down towards the main entrance. One side is known as the

right hand side and the other the left hand side. In a large homestead, the huts might reach as far as the main entrance, thus forming another almost complete circle around the byre. In the old days, the whole homestead was often surrounded by an outer fence which might be of poles or specially planted vegetation, such as thorns. In this outer fence, there was a main gate entrance below the bottom of the cattle byre, and there could again be two other, smaller gates used by the inmates of the two sides, the right and the left, of the homestead.

A representation of this basic pattern, as it obtained amongst the Zulu, is shown in the illustration reproduced from Nyembezi (1966: 40)

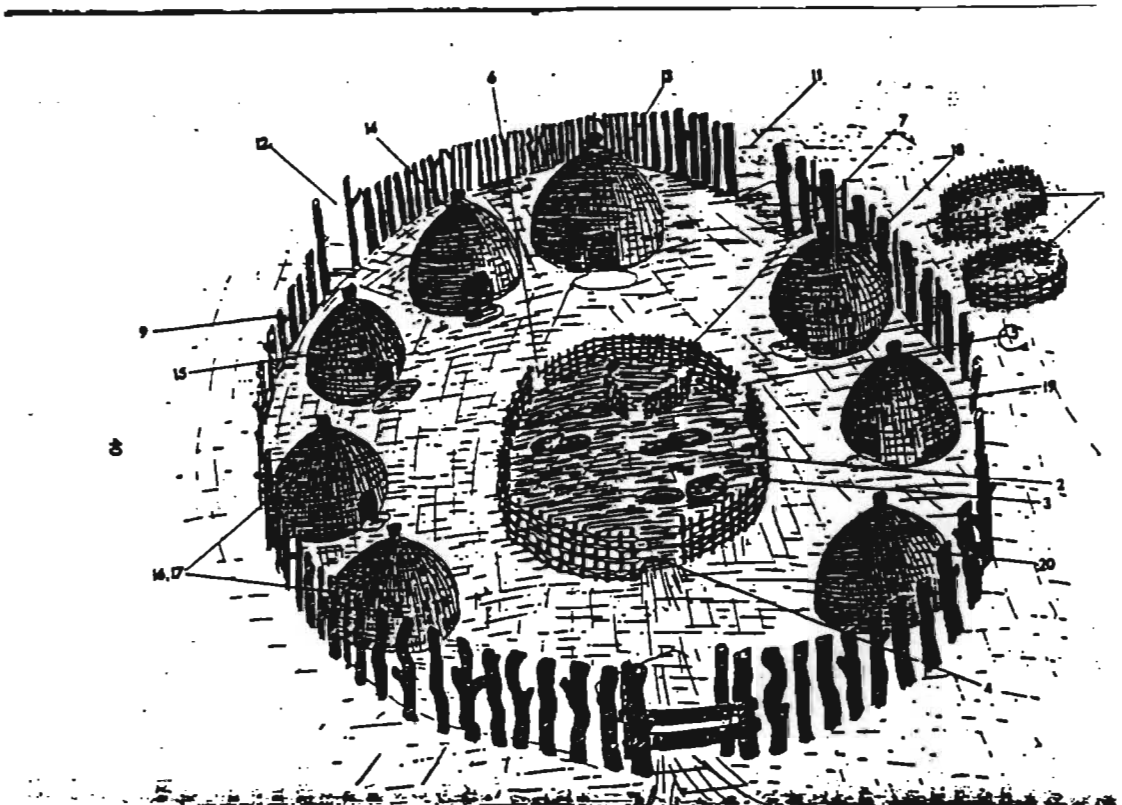


Figure 4.1



Some details of this figure 4.1 in fact assume a particular combination of the variations possible in the basic Nguni homestead pattern and I now look at some of these. Kuper has indicated (1980:8-9) that two of the variations concern (a) the location of the main entrance to the cattle byre and (b) the orientation from which the right and left sides of the homestead are determined.

#### 4.1.1 Location of the cattle byre entrance

For the first of these variations, the main entrance to the byre can be at its top, facing the *indlunkulu*. Kuper finds examples of this position of the byre gate amongst the southern Nguni, specifically the Mpondo and Bomvana. The other position is to have the main gate of the byre at its bottom end, facing the entrance to the homestead (which in the old days would be the main gate in the surrounding fence). Kuper shows this position obtaining amongst the northern Nguni, ie the Zulu and the Swazi. The information I got from my informants and my own observations of present homesteads confirm this bottom location of the byre gate.

The other, second variation on the overall pattern, concerning the orientation, is less straightforward and has been the cause of confusion and disagreements in the literature and I therefore pay more attention to it. Although he does not put it in quite this way, it is obvious from the information summarised by Kuper (1980: 8-10) that the direction of orientation from

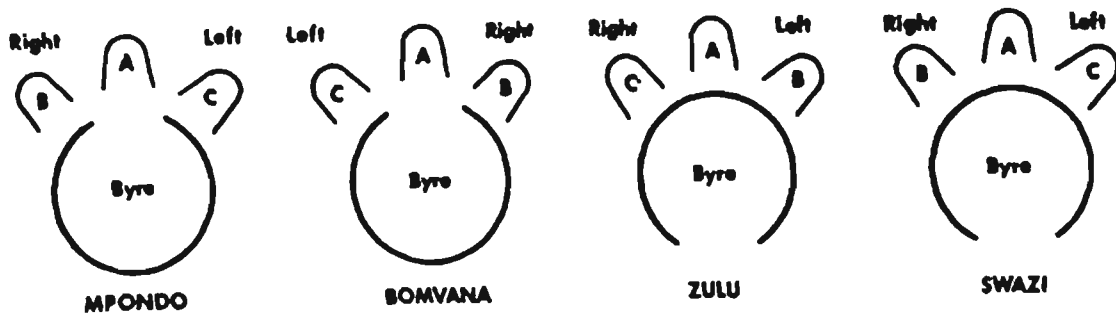
which the right and left sides of the homestead are defined typically has two variations among the Nguni.

#### 4.1.2 The orientation for right and left

In one variation, the sides can be defined from the point of view of someone standing at, say, the main entrance to the homestead and looking upwards across the byre towards the *indlunkulu*. For convenience and the sake of clarity, I shall from now on refer to this point of view as the "upward" orientation. For Kuper, this upward orientation for determining the right and left sides is represented in his Nguni sample only amongst the Bomvana.

In the second variation, the orientation is from the point of view of someone standing at, say, the doorway of the *indlunkulu*, looking downwards across the byre towards the main entrance of the homestead. I therefore call this the "downward" orientation. Kuper finds this downward orientation to be the most common one amongst his Nguni sample, since it is adopted by the Mpondo, the Swazi and, according to him, by the Zulu. He seems to be relying mainly on the authority of Holleman in assigning this orientation to the Zulu. He could, however, have added the authority of Nyembezi and Nxumalo (1966) who also give this downward orientation as the typical Zulu one (see Figure 4.1)

As it happens, the downward orientation was also presented by two of my informants, Steam Manqede, originally from Buxedeni, near Nongoma, and Johannes Mthethwa, originally from Mahlabatini. It is noticeable, however, that they were in a small minority on this issue and that both of them came



The letters A,B & C indicate the order of seniority of the women

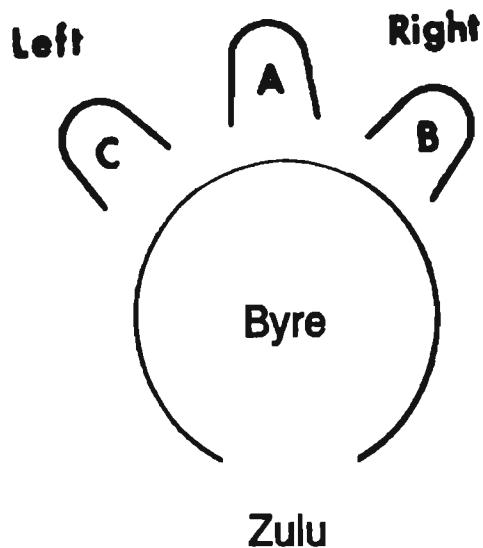


Figure 4.2 - Homestead Orientation for Zulu and other Nguni

Obviously such diagrams show only a simplified version of the distribution of the huts and of the different sorts of people who occupy them. To show in more detail how they are arranged, I give an example of an actual homestead from my fieldwork in Figure 4.3 on the next page:

originally from more northern parts of Zululand. Since Holleman also seems to have worked mainly in the Nongoma district, I suspect that this downward orientation may be one which is prevalent in those more northern parts of the Zulu area.

Certainly, it is precisely the opposite, *upward* orientation that is favoured by other authorities on the Zulu. For example, Bryant states (1967: 414)

... the 'right-hand' side (*ekuNene*) of a Zulu kraal, it must be carefully remembered, was always that so standing, when one looked up the kraal from the entrance at the bottom

This orientation is also supported by well-documented sources that are largely independent of each other, such as Myburgh (1943 *passim*); Raum (1973:154); Samuelson (1929: 144 ff, 249-253).

In addition, the large majority of my informants told me that the right and left sides are established by facing towards the *indlunkulu* from the entrance gate down below the cattle byre. Finally, my own experience in the areas I visited is that homesteads which still resemble the traditional plan are based on this upward orientation. So I would claim that the upward orientation was and still is the "majority" one for the Zulu and the downward version given by Kuper must be a "minority" one which should be a local variation on the more common pattern. Kuper's summary diagram (1980: 9, Fig 1) of the four kinds of overall Nguni homestead plan he detected, covering variations in both the location of the byre entrance and the orientation for right and left, must therefore be supplemented by the fifth one I have included in Figure 4.2 on the next page to cover the Zulu case adequately:

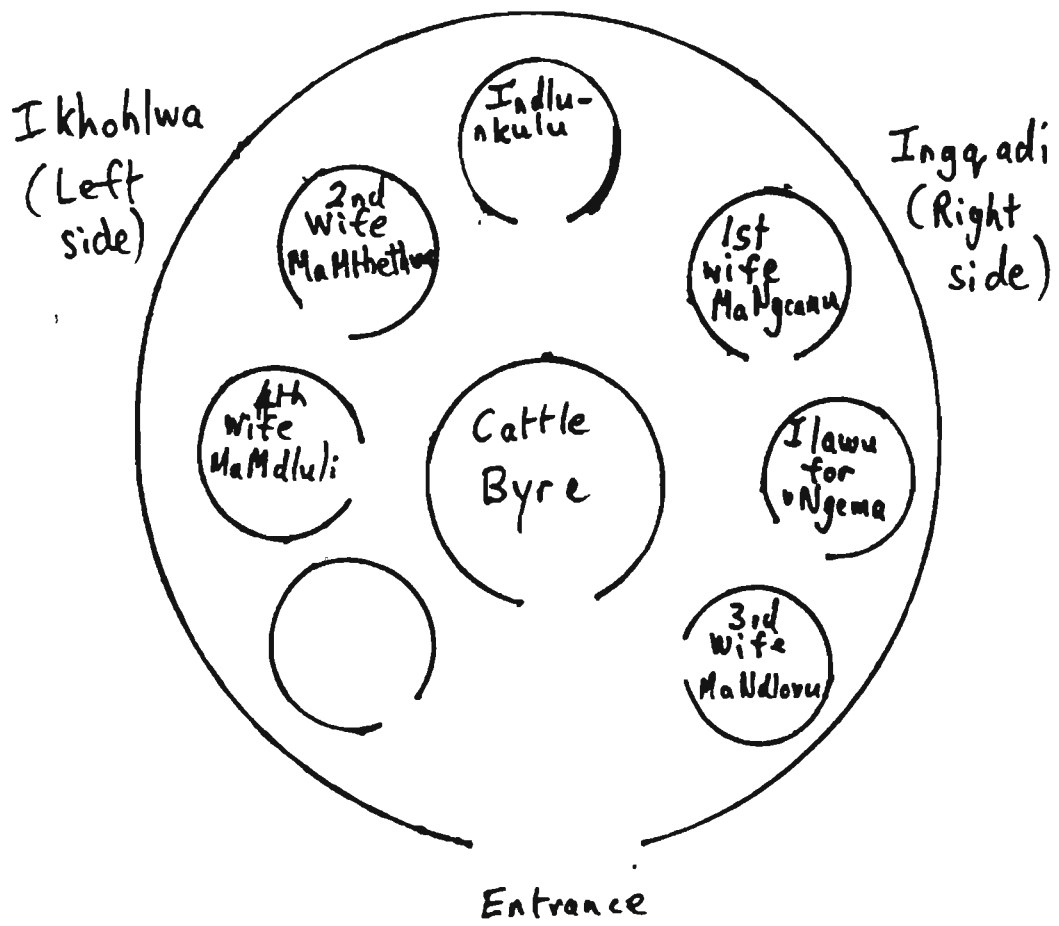


Figure 4.3 Homestead of uMnumzana uNgema, KwaMthethwa, near KwaMbonambi

### 4.1.3 Arrangement of the huts

Having clarified the question of the orientation for right and left, I now consider how the division into the two sides is actually implemented over time. By adopting a chronological or "dynamic", approach, I again intend to clarify some points which are often confused in "static" presentations of the division of the homestead into two sides.

The starting point in the building of the huts in a new homestead is (or ought to be) the construction of the main or great hut (*indlunkulu*). This hut can also be called the *indluyangasenhla* referring to its position "above" or at the "top" of the cattle byre. Another common term for this hut is *kwaGogo*. The implication of this term is that it is associated not with a woman as a wife, but with a woman who is a grandmother, ie the elderly mother of the homestead head. Obviously, such a woman cannot always be present, so that the *indlunkulu* may also be associated with the most senior wife of the homestead head. Kuper notes (1980: 8) the possibilities:

there is variation as to the description of the senior woman ... who occupies the *indlunkulu* ... She may be a 'mother' or a 'great wife', or first a 'mother' and then a 'great wife'.

There are certain further implications about this sequence in the "occupation" of the *indlunkulu* by these women of different status which are not made plain in the literature, so I report here what I learned about the *indlunkulu* from my informants and from my observations.

#### 4.1.4 Occupation of the *indlunkulu*

Amongst the homesteads that I visited, I discovered that in those that had the head's mother (*uGogo*) living, she was indeed to be found in the great house (*indlunkulu*). The same situation seems to be prevalent in the Nyuswa reserve where Vilakazi states (1962: 20) that "the Great House ... is generally the kraal head's mother's hut". In that situation, the senior, first married wife (*inkosikazi*) of the homestead would be occupying a hut on the right side of the *indlunkulu* and a second wife would have one on the left side (as in uNgema's homestead in Figure 4.3).

In this situation, people expect that the head's mother would usually be a widow when she occupies the *indlunkulu*. This status in turn means that she would be expected not to engage in any sexual activity in the hut. One of my informants, Johannes Mthethwa, did tell me that an elderly mother whose husband is still alive could live and sleep in the *indlunkulu* with him, because he is an *umkhulu* or grandfather and it is supposed that because they are old, they no longer have sex with each other, so *abasenamanyala* - they do not pollute the *indlunkulu*. The point is that this hut is particularly associated with the ancestral spirits, so no polluting activity should take place there. The great house is often decorated with skulls of cattle, goats sacrificed to the headman's ancestors and other signs of its connection with them.

Where the great woman (*ugogo*) had died after occupying the *indlunkulu*, it would continue to be used for family gatherings, ie for giving sacrifices to the ancestors or cooking. Consequently, after the death of the head's mother, his senior wife may take charge of the *indlunkulu* and be responsible for looking

after it, but would not normally move in to occupy it. If, rarely, a wife did move into the hut, she would not sleep there with her husband, but would have to visit him in his own *ilawu*. This is again because no sexually active woman can actually use the *indlunkulu* as a normal hut in which sex can take place.

This view of the special use made of the *indlunkulu* is indirectly supported by Holleman's report, cited by Kuper (1980: 10), that when a "great wife" moves into the *indlunkulu* after the death of the head's mother, she may share it with a man known as *uyise wa bantu*, "father of the (homestead) people". This man should be the first son of the fifth wife of the homestead head. I therefore wonder if it is quite accurate to state, as Holleman does, that this man "lives as a second inhabitant of the main hut with the *inkosikazi enkulu*" (cited in Kuper 1980: 10). If he were actually sleeping in the same hut as she was, then this might raise the shocking idea of sexual relations with the "great wife" which would be both adulterous and incestuous, since she would be his classificatory "mother". Moreover, neither of them could be having sexual relations with his or her own spouse in the *indlunkulu* in the presence of the other, while they were supposedly sharing the hut with each other. Furthermore, Holleman added that

It is said of him that he stands *emadlozini*, by the ancestor spirits, that he is the keeper of the old hearth-stones, the guardian of the old kraal (in Kuper 1980:10)

In other words, I suggest that it is not so much the "occupation" of the great hut that he shares with the "great wife", but rather the responsibility of looking after the *indlunkulu* and the various rituals that are performed there. Therefore any description in the literature of the Zulu homestead which states or implies that the *indlunkulu* is used as an ordinary living and sleeping hut by



a "mother" or by a "great" or "senior" wife of the homestead head would be misleading as far as my information goes.

There are other restrictions on the use of the *indlunkulu*, besides those on sexual relations, which also prevent it from being used as an ordinary hut. My informants stressed that in the case of an *idili* (party) being held at a homestead, guests who are not members of the family cannot enter the *indlunkulu* to drink beer and eat meat or chat with the homestead head there. It is feared that such "outsiders" might steal bones or other remnants of what has been sacrificed to the ancestors in the *indlunkulu* and use them to bewitch the whole homestead. To avoid this happening, the head of the homestead would sit at ease with the visitors in his own hut (*elawini*) or perhaps in the hut of one of the wives, if she has prepared for the party.

So in my experience, the *indlunkulu* is essentially a place for ceremonial and ritual matters affecting members of the homestead, rather than a dwelling hut. It therefore provides a centre or focus for the division of the other huts of homestead into right and left sides, but does not itself usually form part of those sides, even though the right-hand side may sometimes be referred to as that of the *indlunkulu*. With this point in mind, I now turn to the steps which lead to the creation of the two sides.

#### 4.1.5 Creation of the right and left sides

It is important to note that it is the right hand (*isandla sokudla* or *sokunene*) that is used to begin the division of the Zulu homestead into right and left hand sides. That is, my informants stated that the right-hand wife will be the one

married first and her hut will therefore be the next to be built, on the right-side of the *indlunkulu*. In this context, the right hand can therefore be referred to as *isandla sokudabula umuzi*, the hand for dividing the homestead. Also on this side and usually close to the *indlunkulu* will be the hut of the homestead head (*ilawu lomnumzane*) (cf Krige 1936: 42), if he has one of his own which is not always the case.

The creation of the left side of the homestead begins only when the head marries a second wife whose hut will be built to the left of the *indlunkulu*. It may be called the "small hut", (*indlu encane*), but the usual term for this side is *ikhohlwa* with *ikhohlo* as a variant. With the creation of this side, the basic structure of the homestead is complete and it determines the distribution of any further buildings added later. For most homesteads, such additions would be few, because even in the old days, relatively few men could afford to acquire more than two wives. For those that did, the third wife married would be assigned to the right-hand side where her hut would be built below that of the great wife. She was usually known as the *inqadi* wife. If a fourth wife was married, then she was assigned to the left side where her hut would be built below that of the *ikhohlwa* wife. My informants said that the fourth wife, together with any others attached to the *ikhohlwa* side, is one of the *amabibi* wives. A rare modern example in which this stage has been achieved has already been illustrated in Figure 4.3. Any further wives would be distributed in turn between these two sides, the fifth wife going to the right side, the sixth to the left side and so on.

#### 4.1.6 Differences in the divisions of the homestead

It seems that the pattern I have presented, based on what my informants told me and what I observed, differs from the model presented in the older literature (summarised in Krige 1936: 40-42). In that model, the homestead is represented as being based on a distinct *indlunkulu* section at the top of the homestead, above the byre, with the senior wife (not necessarily the first married) occupying the main hut in it, flanked on either side by the huts of subordinate wives placed by the head in this *indlunkulu* section. A separate second section was on the left side of the byre, based on the hut of the *ikhohlwa* wife (who might even be the first wife married), accompanied by the huts of her subordinate wives. A corresponding third section could be on the right side of the cattle-byre, based on the hut of the *inqadi* wife who was therefore sometimes called the "right-hand" wife and might have her own subordinate wives in that section. This model is therefore tri-partite, rather than the bi-partite one I have presented and it seems as if the left-hand side could come into existence *before* the right-hand side, rather than after it, as in my version.

I suggest that these differences may partly be accounted for by differences of scale. The old model supposes a large number of wives and therefore cannot have been common. Indeed, it is often presented as being characteristic of chiefs or other wealthy men. It therefore should be taken as an ideal, rather than a typical, pattern. Certainly, nowadays, few, if any, men could create homesteads on such a scale and therefore the simpler, bi-partite version I have given is more appropriate to modern circumstances. It is worth noting that

even in the older, large-scale model there was a tendency to assimilate the *indlunkulu* and the *inqadi* sections, so that

this [right] side of the kraal is usually referred to, not as the *inGqadi* side, but as part of the *indlunkulu*, while the whole of the left side of the kraal is the *iKhohlwa* side  
(Krige 1936: 41)

The same assimilation is expressed in another set of terms:

The *Indhlunkulu* and *Iqadi* side of the kraal is called *Isibaya Esikhulu* and the *Ikhohlwe* side is called *Isibaya Esincane*  
(Samuelson 1929: 251)

and Holleman also records the use of the phrase *isibay'esikhulu* for one of two "halves" into which the homestead is divided (in Kuper 1980:11).

It therefore seems as if even in the older model there was a tendency to collapse the three sections into two. In modern times, this tendency has become more marked with the reduction in the number of large homesteads, so that three sets of wives in three sections are not likely to be found any more. Instead, there may be a right-hand side, including the senior wife and the *inqadi* wife, and a left-hand side of the *ikhohlwa* wife and any *ibibi* wife. The *indlunkulu* hut does not become the centre of its own section, but remains as the centre for ritual and ceremonies affecting the homestead as a whole. Having described this basic division into two sides, I now discuss in the following section some of the social functions associated with the basic division of the homestead into two sides.

#### 4.1.7 Functions of the homestead division

##### 4.1.7.1 *Economic functions*

It seems that a main function of this division is to regulate the distribution of resources between the different households created through polygynous marriage. It is well known that such households are likely to be in competition with each other for the basic resources and this competition could lead to serious conflict if it is not controlled in some way. To reduce this competition, each household was allocated its own share of the basic resources, especially livestock and fields, over which it exercised more or less exclusive control, a system that has been called the "house-property complex". The independence of each house in relation to its own resources is expressed in the Zulu saying quoted by Vilakazi (1962: 18): "*indlu ayikhezwa phezu kwenye* - one never builds a house on top of another".

There was, however, an obligation on the junior houses within each of the two sides to pay certain customary ceremonial tributes (*ukwethula* - see Vilakazi 1962:19-20) to the senior house in that section - ie that of the *inkosikazi* in the right hand side and that of the *ikhohiwa* wife in the left hand side. A wife in a junior house could also be called upon to provide a son as an heir in a senior house of which the wife had failed to produce one. This system of providing substitute heirs meant that the identity and continuity of individual

houses, especially the senior ones, could be preserved, despite natural demographic accidents which might otherwise frequently eliminate them.

In this connection, it was an important function of the right-hand side to provide the main heir to the position and property of the homestead head - the *umnumzane*. His property included that which he had inherited from his predecessors and that which he had acquired by his own efforts during his lifetime and had not allocated to any house in his homestead. The rule is that this heir, *indlalifa* or *inkosana*, should be the eldest son of the great wife, *inkosikazi*. If she has no son, then the son of the *inqadi* wife would take his place. My informants were generally aware of such rules and tended to stress them as a key feature of the division into two sides, because, as they pointed out, the main heir to the head cannot come from the *ikhohlwa* or *indlu encane* side. This exclusion they gave in the form of sayings: *inzele aliwuphathi umuzi* or *inzele aliwakhi*, "the left-hand cannot lead" or "the left-hand cannot build". I also heard remarks about the left side being "forgotten" in this matter, which refers to the literal meaning of the root from which the term *ikhohlwa* comes and is in line with the characteristics of the left-hand that I mentioned in my discussion of terminology in Chapter Two. My informants were, however, aware of the rules which allowed for an heir on the *ikhohlwa* side and of the possibility of this side setting up its own independent homestead on the death of the head.

There were also other, more complicated rules governing patterns of inheritance in the large homesteads of chiefs and other important men, but since I did not find such homesteads in my research, I will now turn to other

contexts in which the basic division of the homestead into the right and left sides is still evident. One of the most common of these contexts is that relating to courtship and marriage which are important matters for the homestead and are controlled by conventions some of which refer to the lay-out of the homestead.

#### 4.1.7.2 Some ceremonial functions

It is particularly in relation to this context that Raum has stated (1973: 144) that the right side or "yard" (*igceke*)

forms the honoured or Ceremonial Path. Up it move the parties in an anti-clockwise direction at the great ceremonies of the Zulu. They leave it going down the left-hand yard which has no ritual significance

Raum further refers (1973: 144) to the left hand side as the path of avoidance. This label would be in Zulu *yokuhlonipha* or *yokuzila*, which means that this side would either be avoided itself or used in order to avoid using the right-hand side, depending on the context.

The importance of this ceremonial distinction already appears in events relating to a girl's progress towards the marriageable state. Thus Raum notes as one example that when an *umnumzana* holds the ceremony associated with the physical maturity of his daughter (*ukwemula* or *ukukhehla*), the men eligible to court her should enter his homestead up the right hand side.

Similar observances are in fact required of all outsiders or visitors (*izihambi*) who have some publicly acknowledged business at the homestead and are particularly prominent during actual wedding ceremonies. These have been described in considerable detail in Zulu by Myburgh with accompanying diagrams of the movements of the parties involved (1943: 63-128). Much of these ceremonies may nowadays be shortened, but the essentials are confirmed by my informants and my own observations of weddings. The bridal party (*umthimba* or *udwendwe*), singing their clan song (*ihubo*), must enter the homestead of the groom through the main entrance, where the groom's party waits for them on the left side. The bridal party go up the right hand side to the *indlunkulu*. They are then allocated huts to occupy which, in my experience, are on the right side of the homestead. Indeed, during the wedding the *umthimba* have charge of the right side, while the groom's party (*ikhetho abasemzini*) occupy the left side of the homestead. Some of my informants told me that even if the bridal party is sometimes given a hut on the left side, they still have to enter by the right hand side and move towards the left hand side. A comment on this was that the bride would like to be placed on that side of the homestead.

Myburgh describes and shows a whole series of more complex movements by the bridal party go from the right side down the left and then turn back round the cattle-byre from left to right and enter the byre, again on the right and go round inside it towards the left, from where they again return to the right side. There is, then a pattern, repeated at various stages of the ceremonies, by which the initial movement is always *anti-clockwise*, ie starting



at the right and proceeding to the left. A *clockwise* movement, from left to right, can only follow from and after a previous anti-clockwise one. In this way the priority of the right side is constantly emphasised and recognition is given to the special status of the bride and her party.

Such status is even accorded to a girl who takes the exceptional step of finding a husband herself in a "run-away" (*ukubaleka*) marriage. Here, the girl goes, with a friend, into the homestead of a man she has selected and walks boldly up the right-hand side (Raum 1973: 144) to stand at the top of the byre where she waits to indicate, when asked, the man she wants. This public display is acceptable, because it is understood that she has come "to fetch cattle" (*izodla izinkomo* ie the cattle which would eventually be given in bridewealth) for her father from this homestead. It is therefore appropriate to use the right-hand path. Besides these occasions associated with marriage, there are others where the division of the homestead into two sides is significant. One of those cited by Raum (1974: 144) is at the burial of an *umnumzana*, when the men who carry the stones which will be used to make the niche in the grave have to proceed up the right side of the homestead.

These examples are sufficient to show the importance of the right-left division of the *umuzi* in the symbolic sphere, as well as in the distribution of people and resources in the lay-out of the homestead. They do not, however, complete the picture of its importance in the lives of the residents, because the division can be seen operating also in what might be called the "internal" space of the homestead, ie *inside* the living huts of which the homestead is composed. I therefore now consider the division in that context.

## 4.2 Inside the Zulu hut

The traditional Zulu *indlu* or hut had a circular ground-plan and was of a "beehive" structure. This kind of structure is now relatively rare, but the circular plan is preserved in the common "rondavel" building that has largely replaced the beehive. Such a rondavel has one entrance or doorway, leading directly into the inner space. It can be seen from Figure 4.4 (taken from Nyembezi 1966: 44) that this space is in effect divided in two by the centre poles (*izinsika*, nowadays often only one pole - *impundu*), next to which is the fire-place (*iziko*) on the floor.

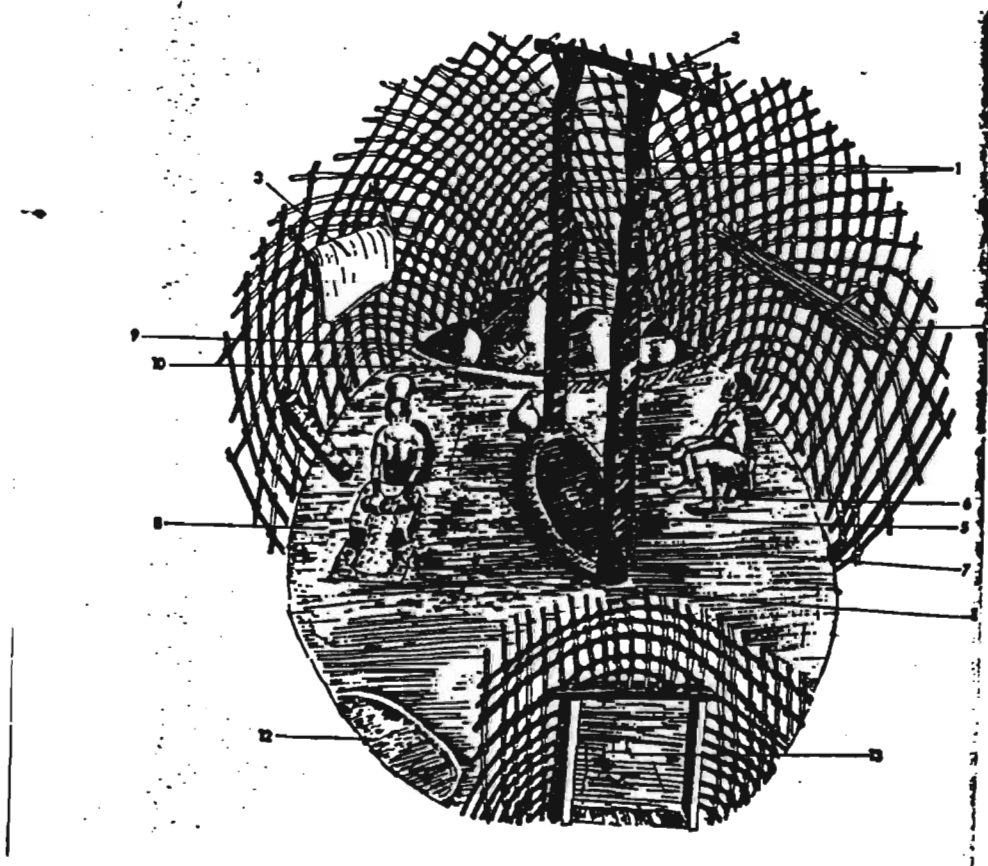


Figure 4.4 Inside a traditional Zulu hut

As with the homestead itself, these two sides are designated as right and left, but before considering the meaning of this internal division, there is the same preliminary problem about determining the orientation from which the right and left sides are defined.

#### 4.2.1 Orientation for right and left inside the hut

My informants stressed that the orientation for determining right and left is taken as one enters the hut through the door, looking into the hut and this is confirmed by my observations in the many huts I have visited. I call this orientation the "inward" one. Unlike the orientation for the homestead, we therefore agree with Nyembezi & Nxumalo (1966: 44) who show the same "inward" orientation of the hut in Figure 4.4. The inward orientation is also reported by Berglund (1976: 106, 363). According to other literature also, this inward orientation for the right and left sides of the hut is general for the Nguni, though the Bomvana are an exception to this rule, as they reverse the right and left orientation for huts as determined amongst the Swazi, Zulu and Mpondo (Kuper 1980: 14). However, this reversal is not unique to the Bomvana, and is apparently found amongst some Zulu, since Bryant reported at one point that right and left were defined by looking "from the back of the hut towards the door" (1967: 78) which would be an "outward" orientation, though elsewhere Bryant writes as if the orientation was inward.

Furthermore Raum (1973: 157) has also stated:

there is thus in every living hut an inferior and a superior half. Studerus with an extensive experience states that men sit on the right and women on the left. My experience led me to huts where the opposite arrangement preponderated.

Since Raum deliberately chose to define the right and left sides *always* from "the direction of approach, ie, from below the kraal" (1973: 154), which would mean looking into the hut from the doorway (ie the inward orientation), the last sentence in the quotation must mean that he met Zulu people who, like the Bomvana, were rather defining the sides by looking *outwards* from the hut, through the doorway. Consequently, what Kuper and Raum call, in these two cases, the left side of the hut was, for the Bomvana and for at least some Zulu people Raum met, the right side and, correspondingly, what Kuper and Raum call the right side was for them the left side. Raum's material thus shows once again that there is local, and perhaps even individual, variation among the Zulu in the direction from which right and left are defined, but there seems from the literature on the Zulu to be less such variation for huts than for homesteads, so that Raum's experience may have been rather unusual <sup>1</sup> Whichever orientation may be used, the division into two sides and their designation as right and left affect the ways in which the space is allocated to the different sorts of people who may be in the hut.

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<sup>1</sup> He does not tell us if these same people also defined the right and left sides of their *homesteads* in the same way, ie by looking down the homestead towards the main entrance. If they did, they would have been consistent in their definitions. If they did not, then they were inconsistent, but that may not have worried them !

#### 4.2.2. Use of the sides within the hut

The allocation is basically by gender, so that the right side (*isandla sokudla*) is also the place for men (*isilili samadoda*) and the left side (*isandla sokunxele*) is the place for women (*isilili sesifazane*). I myself observe the division by sex when entering a house, at least in the rural areas. That is, on entering, I would move to sit on the left side. If there is no space there, when I enter, the occupants will see to it that they make it possible for me to sit down on that side.

However, there are also distinctions made within the sexes, as Kuper showed (1980: 14, fig K) in his reproduction of Hunter's sketch of the positions assumed by different groups of people when they are sitting inside a Pondo hut. Since these positions are very similar to those found among the Zulu, I have adapted this sketch in Figure 4.5 on the next page to show these positions with the corresponding Zulu terms for the sides and the kinds of people who sit in the positions shown in the sketch.

This diagram shows clearly the opposition between male and female, occupying the right and left sides respectively, but also indicates that differences in seniority are marked within each of the sides. As Kuper further points out (1980: 14), there are other ways in which the division into right and left can be used to encode relative seniority, rather than gender. Thus, if a homestead-head (*umnumzane*) sits in a hut with no women present, but just his sons, he will sit on the right as usual, but his sons will sit on the left side, instead of

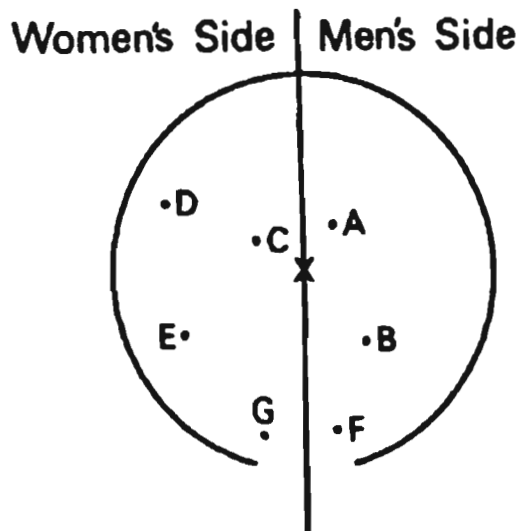


Figure 4.5 Allocation of space in the Zulu hut

**Key:**

- A = *umnumzane*, owner or head of *umuzi*
- B = *amadodana*, other men of the *umuzi*
- C = *izihambeli*, male visitors
- D = *inkosikazi yomuzi*, principal woman of the *umuzi*
- E = *umakoti*, recently married wife
- F = *amadodakazi nabanye abesifazane bomuzi*, other women of the *umuzi*
- G = *izihambeli zabetesimame*, women visitors
- X = *iziko*, the fire-place

being in position B on the right side. If the head leaves the hut, the senior son will move to sit on the right, the other, more junior ones remaining on the left.

I may add that receiving a male guest in a hut where no women are present, the host places the guest to the left and he will himself go on the right hand side.

To round off this account of the traditional use of the inside space of the Zulu hut, I draw attention to some other features of the previous illustration, from Nyembezi, Figure 4.4. It shows the weapons or arms (*izikhali* or *iphanda*), and one may add general household tools (such as yokes and ploughs, hammers), are stored to the right, male side of a hut as one enters through the doorway. Consistent with this need for defense is that it is said that the modern wooden door should be hung, so that it opens inwards to the left, leaving the right hand side clear for defense against any enemy trying to get into the hut. Tools used by women are found to the left. Sleeping mats and blankets which are rolled out by the women in the evening are also stored to the left of the house, *ohlangothini iwabesifazane*.

Another feature of the picture 4.4 shows that on the left side near the door is the place where a calf sleeps, if it is sick or if the cow died. What is remarkable with this arrangement is that it is not put on the side of the males (*ohlangothini lwesilisa*), who are supposed to look after cattle, but on the female side, which may be because the left is taken as the impure, unclean side.

By way of further explanation for the division within the hut according to gender, I report that one of my informants, the diviner Xolisile Ziqubu, told me that in the Zulu culture women should sit on the left hand side, because the left side is the side of secrets, the forgotten side, while the men should sit on the right hand side, because it is the side for strength. The right is the side

from where the man can fight enemies when they attack the hut, because the man is the only person that is supposed or has the right to open the door for strangers. The woman is not allowed to open the door for the strangers, she is supposed to inform the man or husband. It is believed that if an enemy enters the door the woman occupying her left hand side will not be seen, will be forgotten and the enemy will fight the man only. If women were allowed to sit on the right hand side, it means that they would always be victims, if the hut were attacked.

Nowadays some of these practises have been changed by the frequent building of special cooking huts or "kitchens", where cooking utensils and other household items may be kept. Even so, it is noticeable that there is still a tendency, to build the kitchen on the left side of the living hut, though some are found on the right hand side. Traditionally, a building on the right hand side would have been an *ilawu* for the young bachelors of the family.

#### **4.3 Some modern adaptations of the traditional layout**

It is not only in the modern homesteads that one finds the persistence of the division between right and left. It can be seen, too, in buildings erected for quite other purposes, as I show in the next sub-sections.



#### 4.3.1 Secular uses of the layout

For example, in schools, where one will find that the principal's office is often on the right hand side of the building. I found this arrangement, irrespective of whether the principal was a male or a female, at such schools as: Mthunzini High, Ngobamalehesi High, Khula S S, Ntondweni Higher Primary, Msizi Lower Primary and Mdlamfe S S.

One of my informants, by the name of Nomagugu Maphalala, gave me further confirmation that, for people who are still governed by this Zulu custom, offices will always occupy the right hand side of the building as seen or approached from the gateway or main entrance. She told me that, as head of a department in her school, she was given an office that was formerly occupied by the principal who had then chosen to use a new house in between the classrooms as his office. She told me that each time a visitor or parent comes to the school, she or he will without hesitation knock at my informant's office expecting to find the principal there. She observed that she was always wondering as to why people choose her office in mistake for that of the principal. So my research helped to solve this problem - her office occupied the position in the school layout where people *expected* to find the principal.

### 4.3.2 Religious uses of the layout

The persistence and modifications of the traditional layout are even more noticeable in the physical lay-outs followed in some modern Zulu religious movements. For example, in the Shembe Church members say that the women or married persons will sit on the left hand side and men on the right together with the young, unmarried girls (*izintombi/isigodlo*). An interesting adaptation to modern conditions is that the unmarried women who have had children sit in the centre, as they belong to both sides, that is to the left and right sides (*amaqhashambeleko; osisimakoti; ondingasithebeni*).

Similarly, a deacon in the Reformed Church told me that seating in their church relates to Zulu culture and a striking feature is that male elders sit on the right hand which is the hand of power and authority, because they watch the deacons and can expel them from the church. The deacons sit on the left side because they are not concerned with important issues. The division here emphasises that difference in seniority, rather than gender, which can appear inside a Zulu hut.

I made actual observations and photographs of the gender divisions by right and left in church during the annual gathering of the St John's Church in Clermont (Natal) in May 1990. One of my photos shows the observance of the positions by right and left, when men and women were assembling for baptism around the Baptism dam (*esiwashweni*). Approaching from the front, one observed that men were standing on the right and women on the left. Unfortunately, the photo is not clear enough to reproduce here. However, other photos,

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 below, show males and females of the St John's congregation sitting inside the church on the right and left (looking "outward" from the minister's dais towards the main door) during a service at Esikhawini.



Figure 4.6

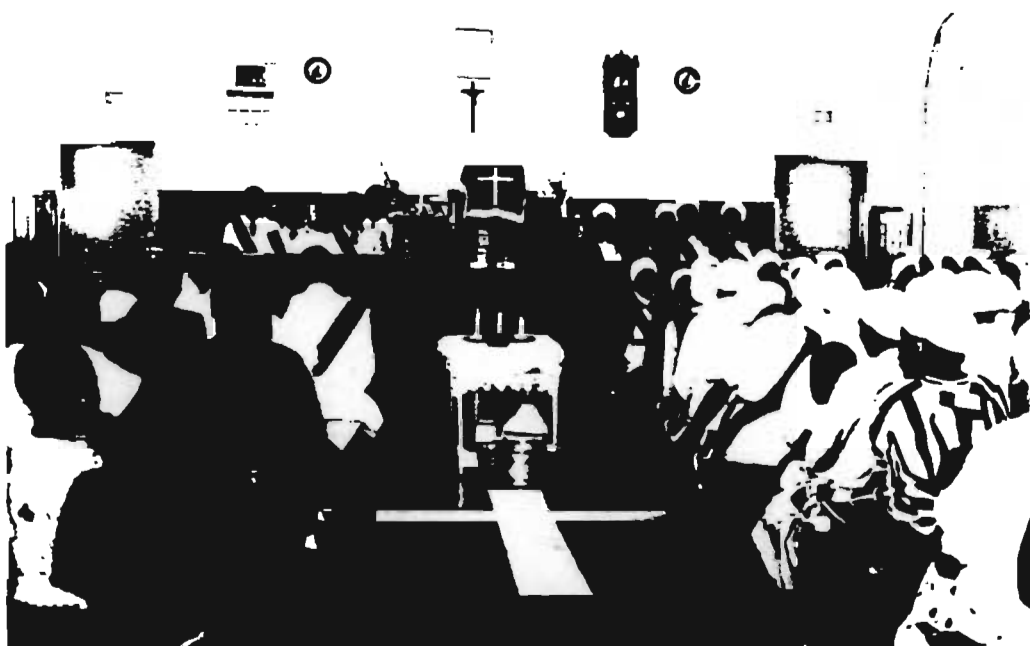


Figure 4.7

Similarly, on another visit to the Methodist Church at Dlangezwa, I again gathered the same information that men sit on the right and women on the left side. What was also striking there was that it applied also to the toilets, with men's toilets on the right side and women's on the left side.

On yet another visit, to the Apostolic church, Fakazi baka Jehova, at Dlangezwa in Ngoye district, I noticed that they observed the allocation of males to the right side and females to the left side of the circular, mud-brick building in which they held their service. The relative seniority of members of the church was also observed in the allocation of places on the respective sides. The information in the diagram showing these allocations, Figure 4.8 on the next page, was given to me by Johannes Mthethwa who is one of the junior catechists in the church.

There is an obvious and striking parallel between these arrangements in these different kinds of African "independent" churches and those shown in the diagram of the seating in an ordinary domestic hut. It shows that the fundamental distinction between right and left continues to influence the activities of many Zulu today. There are other manifestations of the principle even in contexts where it seems to be reversed, such as in the homesteads of some diviners which I discuss briefly in the next and last section of this chapter.

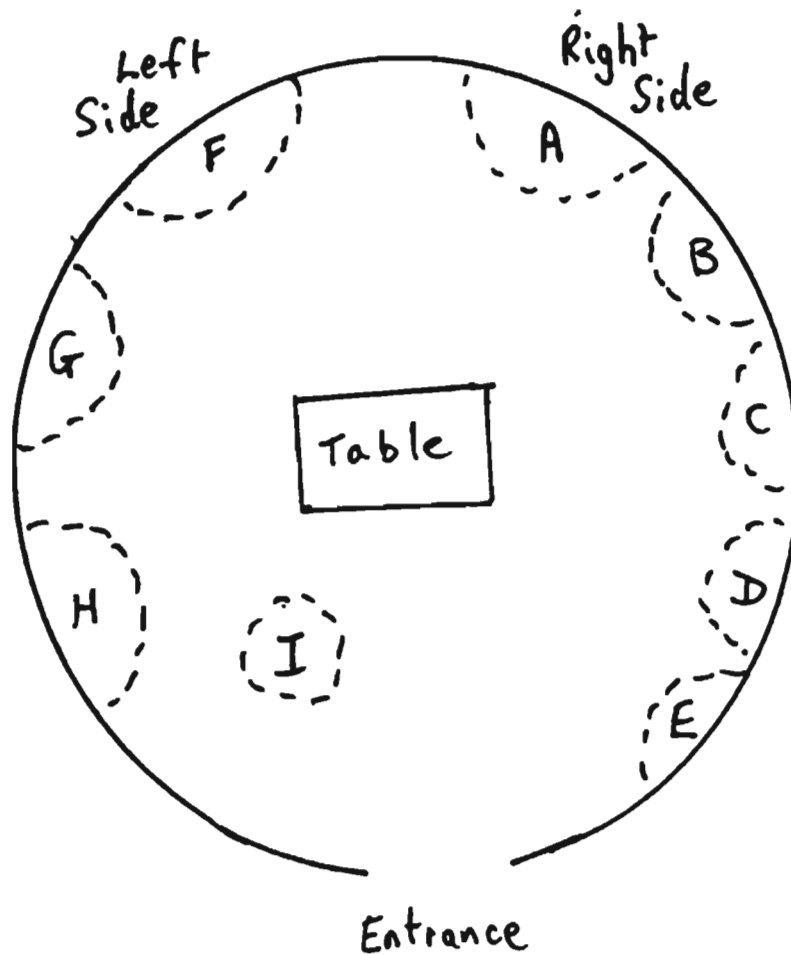


Figure 4.8 Allocation of space in an Apostolic church

**KEY:**

- A = *abafundisi*, the ministers
- B = *abavangeli*, senior catechists
- C = *abashumayeli*, junior catechists
- D = *amadoda*, older male members of church
- E = *intsha yabafana*, youths and boys
- F = *amakhosikazi abafundisi*, wives of ministers and catechists
- G = *amakhosikazi amanye*, other, older married women
- H = *amakoti*, younger, married women
- I = *intsha yamantombazane*, young girls

#### 4.4 Reversal of spatial allocations by diviners

Berglund (1976) in his research discovered that some diviners' homesteads are laid out differently from those of ordinary mens. In the case of the diviner, Laduma, his homestead was without a cattle-pen and the path leading to it approached it from above, unlike other homesteads which must be approached from below. Even the distribution of huts is said to have been the reverse of the normal pattern. The head's residence was at the bottom of the homestead, the visitors' hut at the top, while the womens' huts lay between them on various levels of the site.

My findings supported Berglund's by showing that the lay-out of some diviners' homesteads has been the reverse to that of ordinary homesteads. Thus, the main entrance to the homestead can be behind the main hut (*indlunkulu*), instead of being opposite the cattle enclosure gate. The hut of the *ingqadi* wife, the right-hand wife, is found on the *left* hand side of the *indlunkulu*, while the *ikhohlwa* wife lives to the *right* of *indlunkulu*, as seen from the gateway at the byre and facing the *indlunkulu*. Conservative male diviners pass much time in the lower section of the homestead in the vicinity of the cattle gate. Indeed, the diviner's own house may be situated to the left of the cattle gate, if the diviner is a male.

Similarly, when you enter a diviner's hut for consultation, you will discover that if it is a male, he will often sit on the left of the entrance, and to the right if the diviner is a female. Likewise some male diviners sleep on the left side of the hut, ie the usual side for women, while female diviners can be found sleeping on the right side. Diviners face the left side when divining. I also noticed that during the important ceremony of *ingoma yokuvuma*, for the training of a male novice diviner, the novice sits on the left hand side in the hut in which the dance is conducted, with women sitting to the right seen from the doorway of the hut.

All these features of the ways in which some diviners lay out their homesteads or use their huts are obviously in line with how they use their

hands and their equipment which I discussed in sub-section 3.5.2 of Chapter Three. They could therefore be seen as further examples of those "reversals" or "inversions" which others have claimed are characteristic of diviners and which are perhaps summarised in the claim of some Zulu diviners that they "see things upside down". I suspect, however, that there may be other aspects of the ways in which diviners use their homestead and domestic space, but unfortunately I have not been able to study the topic any further and must therefore leave the matter with these observations and proceed to my final chapter in which I try to summarise the main findings of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Tabular summary of Zulu opposition between right and left

In the literature on "binary opposition", such as that found in the Needham collection (1973), it has become almost conventional to summarise in tables the main features of such opposition, as they are found in a particular culture. Although such tables risk reducing the often complex symbolism involved to over simple generalisations, they are useful in showing not just particular oppositions, but also the ways in which they are related to each and together form a system. The table therefore has to be read "vertically" in each column, as well as "horizontally" in each row.

Right hand side	Left hand side
Male	Female
Strength	Weakness
Tough	Tender
Superior	Inferior
Security	Danger
Good	Evil
Life	Death
"Clean" hand in everyday activities	"Dirty" hand in everyday activities
Good omen	Bad omen
Ritually propitious side	Ritually unpropitious side
Side associated with ancestors	Side associated with witchcraft
Side for good fortune in divination	Side for revealing or discovering hidden things in divination
Ritually propitious side of homestead	Ritually unpropitious side of homestead



Side of homestead for senior women	Side of homestead for junior women
Side of homestead for main heir	Side of homestead for junior heir
Male or senior side in the hut	Female or junior side in the hut
Side associated with paternal kin	Side associated with maternal kin

## 5.2 Some implications of the study

The table by itself may seem just to confirm what I have previously stated at various points in the thesis: that there is nothing particularly unusual about the Zulu lateral symbolism. It closely resembles that of other African peoples and indeed of peoples in many other parts of the world. However, I do not feel that I have merely repeated what is already well known. I have shown that there are a number of gaps and confusions in the existing literature on the Zulu, despite the relatively recent publication of such exceptionally detailed publications as those by Berglund and Raum. I have also been able to suggest modifications to some interpretations found in the comparative literature, in the light of the Zulu evidence.

To a considerable extent, I have been able to do these things only because I undertook fieldwork which revealed that much of the symbolism still survives and that it is still possible to get new data. I admit that the fieldwork was often superficial and I am sure that there is a lot more that could be discovered. In the meantime, I hope that I have at least shown the continuing value of fieldwork in the field of "oral studies" which cannot afford to rely on already existing texts, even when they are as numerous as they are for the Zulu.

### APPENDIX -List of Informants

1	Ernestina Khumalo	F.50	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 7
2	H.N. Biyela	M.45	Esikhawini	Std 10
3	Nozipho Mthiyane	F.30	Esikhawini	Teacher
4	E. Nyawo	M.46	Esikhawini	Teacher
5	N. Ntuli	M.33	Esikhawini	Teacher
6	L. Mabuya	M.39	Esikhawini	Teacher
7	S. Ngcobo	M.32	Esikhawini	Teacher
8	E. Shozi	M.33	Esikhawini	Teacher
9	MaMdluli Mthethwa	F.60	Kwa-Mthethwa	None

10	E. Makhathini	F.32	Esikhawini	Clerk
11	M. Mkhwanazi	M.58	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 4
12	MaMbokazi Khumalo	F.50	Esikhawini	Std 6
13	Bhekisisa Mthethwa	M.33	Kwa-Mthethwa	Teacher
14	Mthembeni Sibiya	M.40	Kwa-Mthethwa	Std 2
15	S. Ngema	M.59	Kwa-Mthethwa	Std 7
16	T. Gumede	F.46	Esikhawini	Std 6
17	N. Mthethwa	F.44	Kwa-Mthethwa	None
18	M. Mdletshe	M.63	Kwa-Mthethwa	None
19	Esther Khumalo	F.49	Esikhawini	Std 5
20	M. Buthelezi	M.30	Empangeni	Teacher
21	Them bani Nxumalo	M.60	Mtubatuba	None

22	Mkhipheni Ndlanzi	M.66	Mtubatuba	None
23	Zephania Mbuyazi	M.60	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 4
24	Mkhulumeni Mkhuanazi	M.56	Mtubatuba	None
25	T.F. Gwala	M.25	Mtubatuba	Std 10
26	Mandlakayise Ngema	M.50	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 8
27	Chris Shandu	M.45	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 10
28	Mlandeni Mhlongo	M.60	Kwa-Mbonambi	None
29	Mirriam MaNyoni Xaba	F.60	Esikhawini	Std 6
30	Tryphina Zulu	F.54	Mtubatuba	None
31	Veli Mgenge	M.50	Esikhawini	Std 10
32	Amos Mkhwanazi	M.60	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 10
33	Bhekizenzo Gumbi	M.48	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 10

46	Nkenzo Mkhwanazi	M.66	Kwa-Dlangezwa	None
47	Kestina Dube	F.65	Kwa-Dlangezwa	None
48	Petros Mngomezulu	M.45	Mtubatuba	Std 10
49	Elina Mbuyazi	M.58	Mtubatuba	Std 6
50	Joseph Nzama	M.40	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 8
51	Jumainah MaNtengu	F.60	Mtubatuba	None
52	Irene Mbatha	F.54	Gingindhlovu	Teacher
53	John Ntenga	M.40	Esikhawini	Std 7
54	Amos Mthembu	M.64	Mtubatuba	None
55	Alphina Zulu	M.54	Hlabisa	Std 6
56	Margaret Mthembu	F.56	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 4
57	Minah Mkhwanazi	F.60	Mtubatuba	None

34	Busisiwe Madonsela	F.49	Eshowe	Std 8
35	Aaron Mdluli	M.48	Kwa-Mbonambi	Std 4
36	Anna Mhlongo	F.60	Kwa-Dlangezwa	Std 2
37	Esther Mthethwa	F.65	Kwa-Mthethwa	None
38	Steam Mangele	M.54	Mtubatuba	Std 4
39	Annesia Magagula	F.65	Mtubatuba	Std 7
40	Theresa Zulu	F.49	Esikhawini	None
41	Mbongeleni Ntsele	F.64	Esikhawini	None
42	Bonginkosi Mkhuanazi	M.52	Kwa-Dlangezwa	None
43	Joseph Msweli	M.62	Mtubatuba	None
44	Kenias Ndlovu	M.60	Mtubatuba	None
45	Mthandeni Ntuli	M.58	Mtubatuba	Std 5

58 Nestar Mchunu	F.65	Kwa-Dlangezwa	None
59 Isaac Mantengu	M.48	Mtubatuba	Std 8
60 Agnes Ngwane	F.60	Hlabisa	Std 4

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