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Article

Re-reading the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve: constructions of a 'natural' space

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Introduction

This paper provides a critical perspective on a South African landscape often viewed as an unproblematically 'natural' space: that is, the space of the (postcolonial) game reserve. The particular focus of the paper is the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi reserve is the largest in the province, an amalgam of two game reserves, Umfolozi and Hluhluwe. Both these reserves were proclaimed in 1895 in the decade during which Zululand – ie the then recently conquered Zulu kingdom – fell under direct British imperial control. Nearly a hundred years later, in 1989, the two reserves were amalgamated to form a single park. This reserve remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Of the five 'reserved areas for game' declared in Zululand in 1895, Umfolozi and Hluhluwe are the only two to have survived in anything like their original form. They are also the oldest game reserves in Africa, predating by some years reserves set up in other parts of British Africa and the Transvaal (see Carruthers 1995). While nowhere near as large as the Kruger National Park, the combined extent of the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi parks at 96,453 hectares is substantial (Charlton-Perkins 1995).

This paper does not provide a social and political history of the Zululand reserves, but instead it explores some of the ways in which these spaces are denoted in dominant cultural representations. It argues that the peculiar ease with which it is possible to conceive of natural spaces as existing outside of history, or alternatively as carriers of a romanticised history, is particularly troubling in a postcolonial context such as South Africa. In such contexts, the creation of game reserves inevitably coincided with

TRANSFORMATION 44 (2000) ISSN 0258-7696

broader processes of conquest, and the inclusions and exclusions of the colonial period. 'Natural' spaces such as game reserves need to be placed back in history: to be located in their political and historical context.

Nature and Temporality

The philosopher Kate Soper, in her important study *What is Nature?* (1995), insists that the modern construction of nature includes not only a spatial component, but also a temporal one. The (western) experience of nature, in Soper's view, is inseparable from nostalgic recreations of the past. In 'natural' spaces, time is configured in particular ways. In Soper's words, nature is 'used as a spatial and as a temporal marker: both to distinguish between the grey and the green ... but also as a way of thinking the relations of the older to the newer' (Soper 1995:187).

There are at least two senses in which the cultural category of 'nature' carries with it a hidden time dimension. First, natural spaces are often seen as timeless, outside of time, or located in pre-history, before the beginning of recorded time. To call a particular landscape 'natural' is often to deprive it of its historical context – effectively to remove it from society. The environmental historian William Cronon (1995) has argued that this is especially the case with the modern use of the word 'wilderness'. In the wilderness construction, 'nature' stands as the antithesis to 'culture'. Wilderness space is almost impossible to locate within its human historical context.

Secondly, there is often a sense in which the older (and therefore the more 'natural') was better. The appeal to nature may thus also function as an important element in shaping an idyllic version of the past. A 'natural' space is one untainted by modernity, an extension of an imagined past which was kinder, or braver, or more real. Nature becomes an idealised past, a 'lost time-space', which tantalises us with the possibility of escape from the present. Thus the action of designating a landscape as natural may hide the more unpleasant features of the land's history, such as repressive social relations and the effects on ordinary people's livelihoods of, say, capitalist intervention in the countryside (see Williams 1973, Cosgrove 1984).

Both these strategies – presenting 'wild nature' as a space outside time, and invoking it as a survivor from a lost world – work to deny or obscure the realities of history and of the present. In both cases, nature is 'both a present space and an absent – already lost – time/space' (Soper 1995:62).

Representations of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve

These insights can be fruitfully applied to develop a re-reading of cultural representations of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve. It should be noted that the most powerful contemporary images of game reserves in South Africa are constructed through tourism and ecotourism marketing. As Rassool and Witz recently pointed out, tourism is 'not merely a business. It is also about the construction, packaging, transmission and consumption of images and representations of society and its past' (1996:335). But this is not the whole story. Constructions intended for tourists, I argue, interweave with, and to some extent gain their force from, other stories that have significance to different constituencies: in particular, in this context, conservation workers and local Zulu men.

1. A space 'outside of time'

Like other 'natural spaces', the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve is often presented as being outside of time. Indeed, one could argue that the reserve is nestled in layers of timelessness, rather like the Russian doll that is opened to reveal yet another figurine inside each wooden shell.

a) Timeless Africa

First, Africa as a continent is commonly presented, in a reprisal of a familiar colonial trope, as a place without a history (other than perhaps that conferred upon it by the imperial encounter). Words that recur frequently in the ecotourism and safari marketing literature on East Africa – and increasingly in South Africa – are 'primeval' or 'primordial' (see Norton 1996). Wild animals are essential to this presentation of Africa. As Rassool and Witz note,

> The main attraction for the international tourist to any African destination is the wildlife, for Africa is quintessentially 'animal'. Being on safari in the 'incomparable world of the wild' enables the tourist to experience the make-believe world of Africa 'unchanged since time began'. (Rassool and Witz 1996:349)

This make-believe world of Disney Africa has featured in numerous films, the most recent of which is a Hollywood production recently released on circuit of Kuki Gallman's book *I Dreamed of Africa* (1992). The film stars the American actress Kim Basinger. While the book is set in Kenya, the movie was actually shot in the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi reserve. For purposes of the film, the park was recreated as the heterotopic space of the African game reserve. It was made to stand in for a generic East African savannah

landscape, while providing a more accessible and possibly less costly venue for filming.

As a local newspaper, *The Mercury*, stated hopefully in 1998 when the film was being made:

> Hluhluwe has the good fortune of having the quintessential African look ... If this film goes well, and word spreads that Hluhluwe is the place to make your African movie – well, then, very soon the area could rightfully be christened Hollyveld. ('Hopes Run High in Hluhluwe's Hollyveld', *The Mercury*, October 14, 1998)

And Kim Basinger's (American) project spokesman enthused, when in Hluhluwe during the filming:

> It's the most beautiful and haunting place I've ever been. We went for a drive and came across 13 giraffe at sunset. It was incredible. It took you back to primordial times. We have nothing like that. ('Kim's Bomb Jitters', *Sunday Times*, September 20, 1998)

The power of a kind of primeval timelessness in the marketing of Africa and its 'nature' is clearly immense. As Norton argues, the implication of 'safari' tourism discourse is that this part of the world has no history of civilisation, but is rather 'a land of spectacular natural beauty occupied only by wild animals and savages' (1996:362).

In the case of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi park, the marketing of the game reserve must be located within the overall marketing strategy of the KwaZulu-Natal region. Significantly, the recently launched KwaZulu-Natal tourism marketing initiative is called 'Timeless Afrika' – the 'k' presumably being used in preference to a 'c' in Africa, in order to further exoticise the destination. The theme of timelessness, or being outside of time, has now been adopted as the official marketing strategy for KwaZulu-Natal.

b) Timeless Zululand

A second element in the creation of a space outside of time, supplementary to 'timeless Africa', is 'timeless Zululand'. This is a well-worn notion that long predates the launching of any marketing initiatives for the KwaZulu-Natal region as a whole. It is present, for example, in popular writing on the history of the Anglo-Zulu war. The message that Zululand was a space 'outside of time' prior to the British invasion of 1879, may be conveyed quite subtly, as for example in the captions accompanying old photographs. Thus, in the account of the war by Knight and Castle, a period photograph is said to depict 'what was until then a timeless view of an unchanging landscape' (1993:172).

In addition to wild animals, 'timeless Zululand' is predicated on the persistence of an unchanging Zulu culture. At the tourist attraction of Shakaland, for example, one can expect, according to the tourist brochure, to 'experience the essence of Africa, pulsating tribal rhythms, assegaai wielding warriors and the mysterious rituals of the Sangoma interpreting messages from the Spirits'.[1] Another brochure, produced by the Uthungulu and Zululand Regional Councils, combines a romanticised imperial history, a static and somehow magical Zulu culture, together with the spaces of conservation and nature:

> This land has witnessed one of the greatest challenges to the supremacy of the once mighty British Empire during the tragic but heroic days of the Anglo-Zulu War. It is also steeped in the fascinating culture of the people who call it home. Rich in symbolism and tradition, here the heartbeat of Africa throbs with an almost mystic vitality. Zululand is also home to an astonishing variety of wild game. The many game reserves, parks and farms in the region are dedicated to the conservation and heritage of wildlife preservation.[2]

c) Timeless Umfolozi

Thirdly, the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe game reserve itself is often experienced as a space outside time. The reserve is approached by most tourists as a place of pristine nature or wilderness in which one is effectively removed from history and society. This is particularly striking in the Wilderness Area of Umfolozi, a large section of the park (25,000 hectares) in which no development is allowed and to which the only access is on foot. The Wilderness Area was set aside in the 1950s on the initiative of former game ranger and well-known conservationist, Ian Player.

Player is a sophisticated writer whose constructions of Zululand and the game reserves are far more complex than the one-dimensional tourist marketing images discussed above. The Zululand reserves are intricately linked to Player's own personal history and he has written frankly about the politics of land dispossession involved in their maintenance (Player 1972, 1997). Nonetheless, Player has contributed both through his books and through the creation of the Wilderness Leadership School, to the linking of the Umfolozi reserve, in particular, with representations of a primeval Zululand wilderness.

Player's writing is infused with nostalgia. In an interview broadcast on South African public radio, Player's latest book, *Zululand Wilderness, Shadow and Soul* (1997), was described by the interviewer, John Richards,

as follows:

> It's an account of a remarkable inner journey, a pilgrimage, a friendship, against the background of the animals, the birds, the insects, the ancient wilderness of Africa.[3]

The friendship to which Richards was referring is Player's relationship with a Zulu man, Magqubu Ntombela, who worked all his life as a game guard in the Zululand game reserves.

In attempting to draw Player out on his feelings for the space of the Umfolozi game reserve, Richards suggested:

> So, psychology – well, we'll come to psychology later, because psychology and the philosophy of life is very central to what you would call the wilderness experience. In fact I think you are the man who invented the term, 'the wilderness experience'. And that's another huge part of your life. But again – it comes always back to your association with the land and the people around Umfolozi. You have a very special feeling for that part of the earth. It must be some sort of – some sort of archetypal home for you.[4]

Player responded:

> Well, I think it was an archetypal home for *mankind*. I mean, early man had been there, and the bushmen had been there. There are still remnants of bushman paintings. And one – when you walk on that landscape, you know that you are walking inside a very ancient part of yourself. But you need midwives – you need midwives to enable you to understand it. And that's where old Magqubu was so wonderful.[5]

Player's answer reveals his understanding of a sacred space of nature, outside the normal rules of time and social history. This space must be interpreted to outsiders by people who are 'close to nature' – a construction of 'the native' that Jane Jacobs (1996) has usefully discussed with respect to ecotourist presentations of the Aboriginal presence in Australia. What is being invoked here is, in Jacobs' words, a 'general and variably expressed modern desire to (re)turn to Nature by way of indigenous cultures, to see indigenous peoples as the First Conservationists' (Jacobs 1996:136).

Thus the transformation during his lifetime of the Zulu game guard, Magqubu Ntombela, into an ecological guru, the man whose sacred task it was to interpret the timeless wilderness of the Umfolozi game reserve for spiritually impoverished westerners, is part of a much wider – indeed global – process. The sacred space of the wilderness can be understood fully only by the native; but others, if they have the patience, may access it through his agency.

2. Shades of a 'glorious past'

The notion that the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe game reserve falls outside of time, is not the only possible reconstruction of its past. Another and equally fascinating representation, one which emphasises a glorious history rather than the primeval or timeless character of the reserve, is woven around the nineteenth-century history of the area and in particular around the early nineteenth-century Zulu king Shaka.

Shaka remains a figure of fascination for western tourists and is still significant in the contemporary politics of the region. Dan Wylie's recent study focuses on the creation of 'white' myths about Shaka, particularly in the twentieth century (see Wylie 2000, Hamilton 1998). As Jeff Guy has noted, in post-apartheid South Africa 'we cannot escape the shadow cast by Shaka kaSenzangakhona':

> It still stalks the hills of Zululand, darkens the classrooms with its narrative of violence, and disturbs the politicians' proclamations of national unity, even as they attempt to claim Shaka as their own. (Guy 1998:211)

The mythic status of Shaka and associated celebration of Zulu masculinity are central to the construction of a romanticised history of the Zululand game reserves. This history emphasises the stereotypically masculine activities of fighting and hunting. In particular, it claims the space of the reserves (especially the Umfolozi game reserve) in two ways. Umfolozi, according to popular histories of the reserve, was the site of past Zulu victories in battle, and it was also the royal hunting ground of King Shaka. These constructions resonate powerfully with a number of constituencies: not only tourists, but also local Zulu men, some of whom have served as game guards in the reserves, and white game rangers. I will consider each of these constituencies briefly before turning to the specific histories presented to tourist visitors and in writings on the game reserve.

For the tourist constituency, the comfortably remote history of an African monarchy, long since rendered unthreatening by the (now forgotten) violence of colonialism and capitalist transition, has irresistible romantic appeal. Game or nature reserves are the perfect places in which to digest this romantic past: the glories of Zulu history are much more easily imagined and assimilated by tourists in landscapes from which actual Zulu people have been removed, than they would be in the poverty-stricken tribal areas surrounding the reserves. Connections to the old Zulu monarchy add mystique. Thus a private game reserve near Hluhluwe-Umfolozi

promises tourists that 'Ancient Zulu sites and memorials are brought to life by a personal guide, who is a member of the Zulu royal family' ('Leopard Rock Experience', *Uthambo: News and Views from Timeless Afrika*, January 1999:5).

In contrast to this rather superficial exposure, local Zulu men, operating within an oral history-telling tradition, also see the stories of past battles and hunts as important reminders of a glorious and now unattainable past. It is important to stress, therefore, that the stories discussed below do not constitute an entirely 'invented tradition', manufactured for the benefit of tourists (although this history is no doubt an embroidered one made up of stories that have now attained the status of legends in the region). The point is that local Zulu men have played a formative role in shaping the tourist narrative of the game reserves, and this history is important because it celebrates, for them, the pre-conquest past and their lost independence.

For white men too, this history has a deep resonance. Many of the men who, like Ian Player, spent their formative years as game rangers in the Umfolozi game reserve in particular, became deeply fascinated by the Zulu history taught to them by game guards like Magqubu Ntombela, Player's mentor. Magqubu's connections with the Zulu royal house uniquely qualified him to act as Player's guide to the sacred space of reserve. Player explains:

> Maklwana Ntombela was Magqubu's father. He was son of Nkovana, son of Bidankomo, son of Ngogo, who was an *induna* of King Senzangakhona, an early Zulu king. Then he served Shaka and could imitate the way Shaka spoke. He passed this on to Magqubu. Magqubu would spend hours telling me his lineage and that of Zulu kings, his *indunas* and their praise names. Shaka was a hero of Magqubu's, and we were to walk for over thirty years together in Shaka's footsteps across the Zululand hills. (Player 1997:128)

The construction of white and black masculinities in the reserves is an important theme that deserves more attention than can be given it here. The young white rangers who sat, metaphorically, at the feet of the older Zulu game guards and listened to stories about battles, or about hunting, responded positively to the tales of young Zulu warriors proving their masculinity. Their books are full of admiration for the physical strength and prowess of Zulu men (see Steele 1968, 1992, Pooley 1992). Versions like Player's have grown out of the interaction, over many years, between black men and white men *in place*, and it would be difficult to decide for whom, the white men or the black, the past is recreated with greater nostalgia.

a) The Nqabaneni Battle

This is evident in, for example, the various accounts of the Nqabaneni batle. Battle sites are a central component of any romantic history, and in Zulu history great victories presided over by Shaka are especially celebrated. One such site is said to be located at the Nqabaneni hill, a cliff overlooking the White Mfolozi river in the south-western section of the reserve, now the Wilderness Area of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve.

As early as 1974, Magqubu Ntombela was relating the story of the battle of Nqabaneni to visitors. A journalist writing for the magazine *Bantu* describes Magqubu reciting the story of this 'great battle'. He led the party to the edge of the cliff and began:

> 'When Chaka Zulu was a captain in the Mthetwa [sic] army, they met their old enemy, Zwide, chief of the Ndwandwes, here at Nqabaneni. After challenging Zwide, who was strongly ensconced on the hill, the Mthetwas were ordered to swim the river and breast Zwide on the opposite side. The order was executed promptly and the Mthetwas fought valiantly, driving the Ndwandwes up the hill, through the bush and over the rocks. When they reached the top, Zwide turned tail, hotly pursued by the Mthetwas who chased him over the hill beyond Mahlabatini, across the Black Umfolozi, across the Pongola, across the Usuthu and right into the country of the Shangaans'.

The journalist 'gazed at the brooding slopes of the Nqabaneni and ... thought of the charging mass of brown bodies splashing through the muddy river' ('Maqubu's Wilderness', *Bantu* 1974:17).

Today, wilderness trailists are taken to the edge of the cliff and told much the same story. While it is not my main purpose to verify the accuracy of the history of the battle, it is worth noting that the whole question of Zulu battles against the Ndwandwe in the early nineteenth century is controversial. While the Zulu-Ndwandwe clash is traditionally regarded as 'a hinge event in the rise of Zulu power', this is now contested (see Wylie 2000:229).

With respect to the battle of Nqabaneni in particular, there are several specific problems. First, this battle is not mentioned in any of the sources for the early nineteenth-century history of the region. The most important source for early Zulu history is the oral evidence collected much later in the century by an official of the Zululand government, James Stuart, now available in four published volumes (Webb and Wright 1976). Bryant's (1929) account of Zulu history is also significant, despite the fact that Bryant was attempting to reconstruct events that had taken place a hundred years before. Both sources, though flawed in different ways, are far more

reliable than the popular but almost entirely invented account, *Shaka Zulu* by Ritter, published in 1955 (see Wylie 2000:231).

All these sources describe aspects of the Zulu-Ndwandwe clash of this period, probably 1818-1819. Much has been made of one particular battle, the battle of Qokli hill. This hill is located on the White Mfolozi river, and is thus a possible candidate for the site of the Nqabaneni battle. However, Qokli hill is located at a point *west* of the Umfolozi game reserve, not inside it.

And the Qokli hill battle is itself disputed. As Wylie points out, there are only a couple of references to this battle by informants who contributed to the *James Stuart Archive*, and it does not appear in other oral traditions (Wylie 2000:231). The historian whose work has focused on this period, John Wright, agrees that if a battle did take place at Qokli hill, it was certainly not a clear victory for the Zulus. The battle appears in Bryant (1929:174), and Ritter (1955) devotes an entire chapter to it. But it seems clear that Ritter's account is based 'on little more than a hint and a name, and that it is essentially a fabrication of his (and possibly his father's) fascination with matters military' (Wylie 2000:231).

There is another candidate for the supposed battle of Nqabaneni, a later skirmish in which the Ndwandwe were convincingly routed by the Zulu and driven north of the Pongola River. This battle appears to have taken place near the Mandawe hill – a hill located not on the Mfolozi River, but on the Mthlatuze river, some distance south of the Umfolozi game reserve. According to informants' accounts in the *James Stuart Archive*, the decisive battle took place as the Ndwandwe were attempting to escape after a disastrous encounter with Shaka's troops at kwaNomveve. The struggle actually took place in the river, very much as described by Magqubu with respect to the Nqabaneni battle. But it was not fought on the White Mfolozi.

It seems possible – and this point would require further detailed investigation – that this second battle's location has been transposed, in the oral history tradition, from the Mhlatuze river north to the Mfolozi, into the time-space of the Umfolozi game reserve. It has also, perhaps, been confused with the highly-coloured accounts of the Qokli hill battle presented in Ritter's (1955) book. While apparently finding resonance with tourists, African game guards and white rangers since at least the 1970s, the 'history' of such a battle must also be read against current critical scholarship on the entire Zulu-Ndwandwe clash during this period. The extent to which feedback has occurred into living oral traditions in the region from

fabricated accounts like Ritter's, is a fascinating question, which cannot be answered here.

b) Shaka's Royal Hunting Ground

If, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Umfolozi game reserve was the site of great Zulu victories won by Shaka's lieutenants, it has also been celebrated, for a later period, as 'Shaka's Royal Hunting Ground'. This idea is well established in the lore of the Zululand game reserves. A recent four-part documentary series on life in the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve, filmed in 1997, shows wilderness trailists walking through the Umfolozi Wilderness Area and being shown game pits which were used to trap wild animals at this time. The trailists are told by their (white) ranger guide that:

> This was the place where the Zulus made the iron that they used for spearheads ... in Shaka's days, this area was set aside as a royal hunting ground and no-one was allowed to live here. But he allowed the smiths access to the place and they lived here and made metal for the spearheads of his army.[6]

The narrative of the royal hunting grounds clearly provides the guardians of the game reserve with another opportunity to invoke, for the benefit of tourists, the magical name of Shaka and to establish his presence there. Yet it would be wrong to dismiss the story as a mere cynical invention for tourists. The idea that Shaka was in some sense a conservationist who protected game in the area between the Black and White Umfolozi rivers, continues to have great significance for conservation workers, white and black, for whom it provides a justificatory narrative for the social practices that maintain the reserve.

The idea that he was living in the old hunting ground of Shaka's impis, infused the childhood experience of the son of an Umfolozi game ranger in the 1970s, recreated by South African writer Mark Behr in his novel *Embrace* (Behr 2000). The young hero of this novel and his sister Lena are brought up in the Umfolozi reserve:

> We walked and stalked the veld, played on the boulders above the donkey compound and secretly explored the overgrown cliffs beneath the [wilderness] trail office. After Lena and I saw a leopard there, I abandoned my idea of walking with the dogs all the way down to the White Umfolozi to look for the cave where Dr Ian Player said he had found a young boy's skeleton. Maybe killed in the times of Chaka, when Umfolozi was the hunting ground of the Zulus. From the house

> you could see the White Umfolozi snaking its dull water and white sand east towards Chaka Zulu's hunting pits. (Behr 2000:22)

Interviews conducted in tribal authority areas neighbouring the Umfolozi section of the game reserve in 1997, suggest that this narrative is important not only to the people of the game reserve. For local Zulu men not directly involved in the park, the story of the Umfolozi hunting grounds in the early nineteenth century constitutes part of the glorious history of the Zulu nation. A homestead near the Mambeni gate of the game reserve was the location for a number of interviews. At the first interview, the *induna* [headman] whose homestead it was, insisted that it was important for us to understand how the area in which he lived was named:

> I must tell you how this area got its name, Esiyembeni. There is a big cliff where the two rivers meet. The Black Mfolozi and White Mfolozi. I can show you, if we go outside, where they meet. At the place where these two rivers meet, there is a big cliff. There is also a mountain. The mountain itself is called Esiyembeni. This area is now called Esiyembeni, the whole of this area.[7]

At the second interview, the idea that there was a Shakan hunting ground somewhere in the vicinity was tentatively raised. The *induna* responded:

> Yes, we know that place. It is between the two Mfolozi rivers. It is between the White and the Black Mfolozi. If you remember, last time I showed you the place where the two rivers meet. Individual hunting was not allowed in that area. They only allowed group hunting. During group hunting, the regiments used to prepare themselves a day before the hunting day. Everything that happened during hunting was under the instruction of *nkosi* [chief].[8]

The *induna*'s brother, a long-serving game guard in the reserve, offered an interpretation placing more emphasis on the history of conservation represented by the hunting ground – the justificatory narrative discussed above:

> King Shaka had his own hunting ground. He gave his people a chance to hunt certain animals for him. Those animals were hung on a tree. That ground is still there and there is evidence that Zulu people were staying there because you can see grinding stones. There is also an area where Shaka used to rest. As far as we understand, he used to rest for almost a week. So I think people in the past had their own way of preserving animals. Although those ways were controlled by *amakhosi* [chiefs]. They had their own ways of guarding the animals. This thing of preserving animals is not a new thing, but it was happening even in the past.[9]

In referring to the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe reserve, local people are careful to distinguish between two conceptual spaces. These are: *indawo yenkosi yokuzingela*, the royal hunting grounds, and *isiqiwu*, the fenced colonial (and postcolonial) game reserve. The older meaning of the word *isiqiwu* was 'beacon' or 'boundary mark' (see Dent and Nyembezi 1969:469, Samuelson 1923:395). This suggests that the primary feature of the reserve, in the experience of the people who lived near it, was the fact that they were excluded from this land. Dispossession, as symbolised by the beacons, was a more obvious component than conservation.

In the wider public and, of course, English-speaking domain, these two meanings – *isiqiwu* and *indawo yenkosi yokuzingela* – tend to be conflated into a single concept. Thus, in Jane Carruthers' account of the history of the Kruger National Park, we find the statement that, in the pre-colonial period in Southern Africa, 'there were even royal hunting preserves, out of bounds to commoners, the best known of which was Shaka's game reserve in the Umfolozi district of Zululand, set aside in the 1820s' (Carruthers 1995:7). However, Carruthers herself notes that a successful myth generally provides 'evidence of a direct unchanging link between the past and the present' (1995:81). This is clearly the case in presentations of Shaka's royal hunting grounds at Umfolozi. The link is extremely useful for contemporary conservationists. As the *induna*'s brother suggested, if Shaka protected game before white people came to Zululand, then in setting up game reserves, the colonial government was not introducing anything new, but was simply extending a Shakan tradition.

The notion of 'Shaka's game reserve' is given credence by the presence of large game pits in the Umfolozi reserve, pits that the archaeologist Martin Hall concluded were used on several occasions during the period of Shaka's rule (Hall 1977). This fact, however, seems to have been embroidered to create a wider mythology which appeals to images of Zulu nationhood. Hall's article on the game pits, published in 1977, is generally taken as confirmation of the veracity of 'Shaka's royal hunting grounds'. Yet Hall himself raised doubts at the time about how far we can take this:

> ... there is the disadvantage that it is now more than 150 years since Shaka's time. Consequently, informants with detailed knowledge are difficult to find, and their evidence is less substantial than that recovered by Bryant and Ritter. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the originality of some information. The story of the game pits has now been known for some years, and there has probably been a degree of

> 'feedback' from the popularized written accounts, for instance in the face of demands for information from tourists. (Hall 1977:7)

One of Hall's aims in undertaking this research was to try to combine archaeological evidence with oral sources. The historian John Wright accompanied him and conducted interviews with two Zulu game guards, whose stories are included as appendices to Hall's paper. Wright noted:

> Mthembu, aged c. 60, had more than twenty years' service with the Natal Parks Board. Sikhakhane, aged c. 40 or less, had eight years' service. In answer to my questions it was the latter who did most of the talking. He was intelligent, and articulate to the point of making me suspicious as to how much of his information was traditional, and how much was derived from outside sources. (Hall 1977:11)

The idea of Shaka's game reserve or royal hunting ground was obviously well established in Natal Parks Board lore by the 1970s and the mythology had probably become self-perpetuating. Wright now wonders whether the history of the royal hunting ground might be better read as an 'inverted pyramid', ie a partly invented history resting on a rather narrow base of fact.[10] These lands, full of bush and game, may well have been used for hunting, sometimes on the instructions of Shaka. Yet it seems likely that control was far more informal than would be suggested by the use of the term 'game reserve'. As indicated by the changing meaning of *isiqiwu* – from 'boundary marker' to 'game reserve' – the introduction of beacons and fences created a new and unwelcome dynamic in the lived experience of local people.

Conclusion

My intention has not been to try to establish 'the truth' about the nineteenth-century history of the game reserve. Rather, I have explored current constructions of temporality in presentations of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi reserve. In particular, two elements have been elaborated: that of a nostalgic space located 'outside of time', and that of a romantic space imbued with an exciting (and, for local people, uplifting) Shakan history.

In these presentations of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi reserve, other, less palatable histories are suppressed. These include, for example, large-scale slaughter of animals by the authorities during the anti-nagana [trypanomiasis] campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s; the removal of communities from the Corridor area between the two reserves, also in the 1940s; and a bitter history of conflict over land, particularly in the western section of the Umfolozi game reserve. The nostalgic journey tourists are

asked to take when visiting the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi park is to the world of a century and a half ago. This is easy in a space where history has apparently been frozen, where nothing seems to have changed.

But preservationist discourses of nature are continually disrupted by those who remain outside them. In the twentieth-century history of the reserves these constituencies have included local African people, white farmers and developers. In the post-apartheid climate, where land reform has gained new priority, some game reserves in the province are subject to land claims. These spaces are under threat and the nostalgic presentation of a pristine space of nature and/or romantic history is being challenged.

Yet the power of international ecotourism and conservation discourse – linked, of course, to a commoditised nature – remains immense. The 'Kingdom of the Zulu' is being marketed under the rubric of 'Timeless Afrika'. The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve, with its luxury camp Hilltop, is a conservation and tourism showpiece for the province and it seems unlikely that this major game reserve will be used for any form of land restitution or redistribution. Given this context, ways must be found to offer tourists and others more complex and inclusive interpretations of the history and landscape of the game reserves.

Notes

1. From 'Zululand Map', non-dated tourist brochure published by Azalea Promotions and available in 1999 from Timeless Afrika, First Floor, Tourist Junction, Old Station Building, Durban.
2. From 'Zululand Tourist Map', non-dated tourist brochure produced by the Uthungulu Regional Council, Richards Bay and the Zululand Regional Council, Ulundi, available in 1999 from Timeless Afrika, First Floor, Tourist Junction, Old Station Building, Durban.
3. Interview with Ian Player, 'Total Exposure', SAFM Radio, broadcast January 1998.
4. Player interview, SAFM, January 1998.
5. Player interview, SAFM, January 1998.
6. 'Life and Death', Episode 1 of a 4-part documentary series on the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi park, produced by the BBC and screened on SABC2 in July 1998.
7. Interview at Gumede homestead, Mpukonyoni Tribal Authority, January 30, 1997. Translation by Bheki Nxumalo.
8. Interview at Gumede homestead, Mpukonyoni Tribal Authority, February 15, 1997. Translation by Bheki Nxumalo.

9. Interview at Gumede homestead, Mpukonyoni Tribal Authority, February 15, 1997. Translation by Bheki Nxumalo.
10. John Wright, Personal Communication, June 5, 1998.

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