

## **Naming farmland: Cultural legacies of named landscape in South Africa**

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Land is among the myriad objects to which humans compulsively assign names. The tendency to name features of the physical environment is so widespread that it seems unimaginable that the practice did not evolve alongside spoken language. Continuous interactions between groups of humans throughout history, however, have given these names their significance or deeper meaning. In the context of the South African landscape, the nature of such associations is also a topic of considerable scholarly discussion.

The photographs included in this article show how some South African farmers have added an element of artistic expression to the names for their land. The images were collected over the course of three years during several trips spent driving along rural roads throughout the country. Locating these individual examples of idiosyncratic creativity was largely a matter of chance, but in the search for more gates to take pictures of, countless other farm names offered themselves along the roadside. This essay is an effort to place the names of farms, as they appear on gates, within the larger context of land and farming in our history.

South Africa's past can be seen as an extended conflict over land and its resources, a struggle contested over centuries by many communities and individuals. Access to the land and its productive capacity was often the cause of hostile and bloody confrontation, as factions fought for exclusive rights of tenure to territory. The need to sustain family life through the provision of food and water became entwined with memories of heroic victory and the anguish of loss and defeat. This process imparted competing descriptions of the natural terrain, and an emotional theme that has been widely expressed in art and poetry.

Each community in South Africa thus retains a collective memory of names, which are inscribed on the landscape, and which carry different connotations of the past. It is, in fact, this lingering association with history that transforms the rugged valleys and open plains into instruments of symbolic value. According to one definition of this concept,

[i]t is not spaces which ground identification, but places. How then does space become place? By being named; as the flows of power and negotiation of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed.<sup>1</sup>

These incidental characteristics of places are clearly visible in significant landmarks such as towns and battlefields, or, to a lesser extent, in street names. In recent years, the bitter debates over the renaming of South African roads and municipalities provide evidence of how seriously contemporary society regards such subtexts.

However, the unfolding memory of human endeavour on the landscape can be traced back for millennia. In a few places, distant memories of hunting and gathering still pay homage to a time before the introduction of farming to southern Africa. After two thousand years of agriculture, however, most of the names given to the land by the Bushmen and their ancestors have vanished under waves of new arrivals. African names on the land are mostly preserved in languages spoken either by Khoikhoi pastoralists in the south and west of the country, or through dialects used by Sotho and Nguni farmers of the Highveld and eastern coastal regions, respectively.

Until the industrial extraction of South Africa's mineral wealth began in the late 19th century, agriculture formed the basis of economic activity. Since the first introduction of cattle, sheep and goats to southern Africa, followed by indigenous African crops of millet and sorghum, the people of this region have depended on agriculture for survival.<sup>2</sup> Although great kingdoms and military traditions later eclipsed the fundamental importance of farming in popular imagination, the everyday existence of Iron Age civilisations was filled with the routine activities of cultivation. Proximity to the natural world also meant that names for animals and plants became enshrined within folk memories of farming livelihoods.

Before the arrival of white settlers from Europe, the only lasting memorials for African kings and commoners were praise poems, known as *izibongo* in Zulu and *iibongo* in Xhosa. A vital element in this oral poetry was the countryside, which formed the backdrop to all social activity. On occasion, the land itself came to the fore, assuming critical positions in matters of state and stories of conquest. Valleys of prized pasturage,

fought over for generations, jostled with the favourite haunts of mighty warriors in poems that became part of a national heritage.

Inscribing shared memories on physical surroundings within the structure of praise poems was not only limited to the realm of politics and warfare, however. Families immortalised even the modest achievements of kinfolk and neighbours, while descriptions of landmarks in the physical world found their way into poems recording events within family homesteads. Vivid accounts of events or commonplace domestic arrangements familiarised listeners with the personal context of the lives described, and entrenched oral history in a recognisable landscape.

Over time, the format of praise poetry included an 'aesthetic of naming' that combined the appreciation of landforms with the biographies it sought to convey through metaphor. In this literary device, 'the land becomes the person; [and] the social and historical self is perceived through the land'.<sup>3</sup> The dynamic established between people and places in dramatically declaimed verse was often imprinted on specific locations through association with the domestic dwellings of the one being praised. This also gave individual homesteads a title of sorts, which served as an address for the family who lived there.

The name of an African homestead performed essentially a dual function, as both a practical and a creative expression of identity. In a pre-literate culture, when many people living in the same area often shared the same clan or family name, it was useful to assign unique names to individual homes in order to identify specific people and places.<sup>4</sup> To a lesser extent, the intent behind any name ascribed to a home in this way could also be to highlight characteristics attributed to either the inhabitants or the site, or both. Traditions were ultimately established for various categories of names bestowed on homesteads.

In his comprehensive study of names in the Zulu language, Adrian Koopman devotes an entire chapter to distinctions between homestead name-types.<sup>5</sup> His research divides names into two basic groups: those that designated a specific place and those that carried a social message. Site names were often merely descriptive of the physical conditions or vegetation, but could sometimes also contain allusions to individuals associated with the residence. Subtle nuances can also be detected when certain names are compared, expressing essentially different elements of the same idea. For

instance, a homestead that belonged to King Shaka kaSenzangakhona was named *uQekethe* (meaning 'hard spot') due to its impenetrable, unploughable land. Another dwelling, however, was named *eNkanini* (meaning 'obstinacy') because the residents were known for stubborn behavior.<sup>6</sup>

According to Koopman, the complexity of names assigned to African homesteads expands further when the underlying implications include social conduct. This category of appellation reveals three basic principles, which are defined as anecdotal designations, names referring to family aspirations and names arising from social tensions. Anecdotal names serve as reminders of major events, or sometimes even minor incidents. During the heyday of the Zulu kingdom, it was common practice to name the barracks of royal regiments in this way, and the names recorded a version of national history on the landscape.

If the type of name bestowed on an African homestead by its inhabitants or surrounding community demonstrated a strong desire for social harmony, it conformed to the second broad principle – of titles that displayed aspirations:

A large number of homestead names reflect the inmate's desire for peace, good health and happiness. The most popular choice in this category is *eKuthuleni* ('peace'). A common explanation is that parents or grandparents always wish that cordiality would prevail in their homestead. In some cases gratifying peace already existed and a wish was expressed through the name that nothing should disturb it.<sup>7</sup>

For the societies of Iron Age farmers who created these types of names, a yearning for happiness served as a poignant reminder that goodwill among families and neighbours was a precious commodity. This cherished ideal stands in stark contrast with the third category of social name identified by Koopman.

Conflict within pre-colonial African communities was clearly a frequent occurrence, as is evident from the great number of homestead names that commemorate social tensions. These range from petty jealousy over wealth and inheritance between the wives and children of polygamous families to more brutal actions of war.<sup>8</sup> The names of homesteads served to remind subsequent generations of the social upheaval that gave

rise to the Zulu kingdom. Fighting over territory was not, however, restricted to the wars fought between African princes.

### **The advent of Europeans**

Disputes over agricultural land took on a new dimension after 1652, when the Dutch East India Company, or VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), founded an outpost at Table Bay to supply food for its ships. The first extended conflict involving Dutch-speaking settlers and nearby Khoikhoi pastoralists erupted only seven years after the Company established its base. To some extent it is remarkable that open warfare between the two groups did not break out sooner. Isolated incidents of violence had been a recurring feature of interactions between Khoikhoi inhabitants of the Cape Peninsula and crews of ships bound for (or returning from) Asia. The first war began when leaders of the cattle-herding African communities realised that their land and independence were under threat.

In April 1657, a man named Doman was selected for training as a translator and was sent away to the Dutch trading stations in the Spice Islands of what is now Indonesia. Among the Dutch warehouses and trading posts scattered throughout the Indies, though particularly on the island of Java, Doman witnessed the consequences of European colonisation at first hand. He was alarmed to see that wherever the Dutch made settlements, local people lost control of their own land and their political autonomy was effectively destroyed.

Doman became convinced that his own community would inevitably face the same future. The Company encampment nestled below Table Mountain was not temporary, and the Dutch would stay unless the Khoikhoi violently opposed their presence. Since 1656, the gardens and farms of European settlers had begun to encroach on the pasturage of the cattle-herding communities living near the Cape Flats. Doman rallied his people with the simple slogan, 'We must evict the Dutch or submit like the Javanese'.<sup>9</sup> Khoikhoi militants identified the lumbering oxen that drew ploughs across Dutch fields as a crucial symbol of the foreign invasion. As a result, these draught animals became the first targets of the insurgency that broke out early in 1659; the cattle were driven away to prevent more fields from being ploughed.

On 1 May 1659 Dutch commandos were recruited for a full-scale offensive that became

known as the First Khoikhoi War. It is significant that the primary objective of the First Khoikhoi War was to obstruct farming by white pioneers. The Khoikhoi had recognised oxen as the main mechanism for creating new fields and gardens. However, at that early juncture they failed to grasp that the most serious threat to their way of life actually lay in European notions of private ownership. For the next three centuries, South Africa was to endure many more battles stemming from two opposing concepts of land.

Under African belief systems, although someone's name could be associated with places in the landscape, the ground itself was owned by the whole community and administered by the chiefs.<sup>10</sup> The idea of permanent ownership of land by any one individual, or that person's heirs, was completely alien to pre-colonial farming societies in southern Africa. As white and black communities grappled with this issue, the critical difference in perceptions of land led to many further complications.

In fact, the Dutch had begun the process of demarcating and naming land as the assets of European settlers two years before the outbreak of the First Khoikhoi War. In 1657, the VOC had made small grants of garden lots along the Liesbeeck River at Rondebosch to employees who elected to stay at the Cape when their contracts expired. The first private property to be surveyed and registered in South Africa was allocated to one Jacob Cloeten, originally from Cologne in Germany. He was given freehold title for 20 *morgen* of land (approximately 17 hectares), on the provision that the land was suitably cultivated.<sup>11</sup> It is not recorded whether Cloeten gave his small farm a name, but it seems extremely unlikely that he did not, as this was customary in Europe. Whatever the case, the naming of farms has been a universal practice in South Africa since Cloeten's time.

Over the next 150 years, the Dutch authorities allocated a further 1364 grants of private land. The expansion of European farms happened slowly at first, and was mostly limited to the Cape Peninsula and surrounding districts as far as the Hottentots Holland Mountains. The majority of farms awarded during this phase were small, with an average size of only 20 *morgen* (17 hectares), and very few over 60 *morgen* (52 hectares), for a total area of 29 612 *morgen* (just over 25 300 hectares).<sup>12</sup> This included the two urban areas of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, as well as the French Huguenot enclave of Franschhoek.

Substantial estates, such as Groot Constantia, Meerlust and Vergelegen, were

established at this time. A distinctive architectural style developed on these farmsteads, blending Dutch gables with the practical requirements of life in Africa. Similarly, the names given to houses and land reflected a particular local heritage that increasingly emerged. European settlers often acknowledged their origins with farm names that recalled their place of birth, but just as often chose titles that described physical aspects of the new location. The example of Vergelegen ('situated far away'), outside Somerset West, indicates merely its relatively distant setting from Cape Town and does not imply any reference to a former homeland.

### **Surveying the land**

The introduction of private land ownership in South Africa also brought about a new system of legal documentation to verify possession of discrete portions of land. There is evidence that land has been measured since agriculture first developed in the Middle East, and paintings on the walls of Egyptian tombs depict men with knotted ropes calculating the size of a field in the presence of an official.<sup>13</sup> The main reason for verifying the dimensions of land was for the purpose of taxation, which was generally determined by the amount of property a person owned.<sup>14</sup> Until the late 18th century, the methods and units of surveying varied considerably, depending on local regulations and according to established practice in different countries. The modern cadastral survey – the precise measurement of boundaries and dimensions to establish property lines and ownership – has its origin as a function of the British military, emphasising the part played by private property in the conquest of southern Africa.

The first accurate military survey was undertaken in Scotland between 1747 and 1755, when Lieutenant-Colonel David Watson commissioned a detailed map of the Highlands during British efforts to 'pacify' the heartland of the Jacobite rebellion.<sup>15</sup> The task of actually producing the map was assigned to William Roy, and, over the next four decades, this Ordnance officer transformed the way in which land was measured and documented. Roy made use of triangulation, a technique that allowed surveyors to resection, or precisely calculate, the position of any point inside a triangle where the three corners were already determined. This procedure required the creation of long linked triangles of 'known' points on the landscape, but once these were located the system of measuring and documenting pieces of ground became much easier. The military and civilian applications of such an approach were immediately obvious to the

British authorities of the time, and the system was soon exported to distant corners of the empire, which after 1806 also included the Cape.

The advent of British administration at the Cape introduced these new techniques of surveying land, which also coincided with a considerable expansion of property under private ownership. The boundaries of the colony were extended as many frontier farmers literally tried to distance themselves from the new colonial government and moved further into the interior. An effort to promote agricultural development was undertaken by Sir John Cradock in 1813, when he introduced the quitrent system.<sup>16</sup> The Governor wanted to avert the practice of subsistence farming, in which large expanses of land often lay vacant in the hands of absentee landlords. Under his ruling, no land could be sold unless it was properly surveyed and registered, and farmers were obliged to pay annual taxes (or else 'quit' the property).

Under the combined force of new legislation and social pressure, more than 24 million *morgen* came into private ownership during the first fifty years of British administration.<sup>17</sup> In more remote parts of the country, exact boundaries were not important to the farmer, and the most common method used to determine property lines still dated from the 18th century. The landowner placed beacon markers in a circle simply described with a radius of a half-hour walk, which resulted in a farm of approximately 3000 *morgen* (2570 hectares).<sup>18</sup> There was almost no official inspection of beacons, and the centre position of such farms was not usually surveyed either. Roughly round farms came into existence in this way, and can sometimes be discerned on modern cadastral maps. Such old-fashioned demarcations often created significant gaps between farms, which were termed *uitvalgronde* (meaning 'leftover ground'). These had to be surveyed later as separate pieces, and were deemed government property.

The problem of *uitvalgronde* was not the only one brought about by the relics of a formerly quaint approach to land. Pleading with administrators to speed up the modernisation of their field, land surveyors addressed a petition to the government in 1857. Their call went largely unheeded, however, and seventy years would pass until the necessary law was enacted and brought the confusion to an end. In the meantime, though, concepts of private land ownership and outdated survey customs were dispersed across the hinterland when many Afrikaans frontier farmers participated in the Great Trek and left the Cape.



In 1879, Sir David Gill was appointed as Astronomer Royal at the Cape. Four years later, he began the key task of providing a standard basis of reference for land measurements in South Africa by fixing triangulation points along the 30th meridian of longitude.<sup>19</sup> His foresight and significant efforts gave the Cape surveyors access to detailed information and allowed for more accurate appraisal of land – at a time when most of Europe was not yet triangulated. When completed, Gill's system in South Africa was only surpassed by the Indian triangulation, which was the most advanced in the world. Finally, by 1927, government surveyors added another layer of statistics by putting a secondary level of triangulation within the original. This furnished the definite location of all beacons, and the precise shape of any farm.<sup>20</sup>

The Land Survey Act (9 of 1927)<sup>21</sup> consolidated all previous legislation relating to the measurement, disposal and transfer of land. The new law provided for the appointment of a Director-General of Surveys, whose office was required to supervise and control the survey of land for the purposes of registration in the Deeds Registry; examine provisions for planning and diagrams of surveys of land before the registration of land; and prepare, certify and issue copies of diagrams and other documents pertaining to the sale of land.

In addition, the Land Survey Act laid down the responsibilities of private surveyors, who were expected to fulfil three obligations. These were the provision of rectangular coordinates of all boundary beacons on the property in question; the lengths and directions of all straight lines forming boundaries, or angles between lines; and finally, the area in hectares and decimals.

### **Acquiring names**

The Act demanded only impersonal numerical data, but farms invariably also have a name. The manner in which such titles are acquired indicates a variety of quite personal choices. Although not part of the formal requirement for surveying, there is the 'official' name that appears on the government survey maps. Often, several properties share the same name, and are designated portions of an original farm that was subdivided at some stage. Such names were sometimes bestowed by the first owners granted title to the land. More commonly, however, names on the cadastral map were allocated during the initial government survey to demarcate ground for the purpose of registration and sale, a task that became the responsibility of the surveyor in charge.<sup>22</sup> This practice accounts for themes that are evident in certain areas, where a number of farm names all

relate to the same topic.

While the motivation for adopting a theme, or even a specific name, is rarely recorded, it is also unlikely that the person responsible spent much time thinking about it. Giving names to land was a rather mundane part of the surveyor's job; anecdotal accounts sometimes hint at nationalist nostalgia, patriotic feelings or a certain romantic persuasion. Retired land surveyor John Murray relates that an Irish-born surveyor was responsible for a series of farm names commemorating the counties and cities of Ireland along the R521 district road between Polokwane and Alldays in Limpopo province. Any direct link between the surveyor and particular names is hard to prove though. In fact, the predictability of generating new names with a theme was probably the main value of the technique, instead of any sentimental homage paid to particular preferences. Once a course of names was selected the surveyor could assign new names from the category without much thought.

Due to the frequency of subdivision, with the result that several neighbouring farms might share an 'official' name, landowners would settle on a title of their own preference. This private name, usually displayed next to the farm entrance, has no legal bearing, and successive owners of the land are not obliged to retain what is, in effect, a nickname for a piece of ground. Choices for this type of title reveal a more significant degree of personal taste and, often, some form of cultural or historical indication. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of South African history must acknowledge that farms are more than just pieces of land. For at least three centuries, bitter struggles have been waged over this most basic resource, and the legacy of conflict and hardship is often registered in the layers of private names bestowed on land.

Generally, farm names are given in either Afrikaans or English. African names are among the smattering of other languages that occur, which include Dutch, French, German and Gaelic. The overwhelming prevalence of European-language names for South African farms is a blunt reminder of 19th-century wars of conquest. As a result, the occasional exception stands out: for example, the farm 'Tokoza' (from the Zulu *thokoza* meaning 'be happy') near Ixopo; or the Saunders estate 'Tongaat' (after the nearby uThongathi River). Names recalling actual conflicts or famous battles emphasise the heritage of invasion: 'Strydrievier' ('conflict river'), 'Commando Kraal' ('patrol base'), 'Rassehaat' ('race hatred') or 'Grensplaas' ('border farm').

Disagreements between family members and neighbours were just as common among the early settlers, and these squabbles can be seen in certain farm names like 'Twis' ('quarrel') and 'Strydfontein' ('conflict springs'). While the causes of some disputes are recorded – for example, 'Afgunst' ('envy'), 'Aanstoot' ('give offence' or 'appal') and 'Ongegund' ('not given', implying a disputed estate) – so is the desire to avoid bickering. This can be seen in the names of farms such as 'Twisniet' ('don't quarrel'), 'Vrede' ('peace') and 'Concordia'. Many other variations of these titles create the overall impression that names were bestowed both as a reflection of prevailing social tensions and in the hope that these might be resolved.

English farm names tend to be reminders of other places, mostly showing links to the British imperial legacy.<sup>23</sup> Some homesteads are explicit reminders of ethnic origins that lie in distant parts of Europe, and entire districts often evoke the sense of longing felt by settlers from Scotland, Ireland or France. Names such as 'Balmoral', 'Armagh' and 'Clairvaux' are examples of farms that suggest these recollections. Only a small minority of English names – a good example is 'Fairview' – are descriptive of the natural surroundings or physical environment, a rather common feature of Afrikaans farm names.

The vital importance of water on farms results in the widespread use of the suffixes '-fontein' ('spring') and '-vlei' ('wetland'). The regularly recurring names 'Rietvlei' ('reed bed'), 'Rietfontein' ('reed springs') and 'Mooifontein' ('pretty spring') are among the most ubiquitous. The plentiful supply of water on some farms has resulted in names like 'Driefontein' ('three springs') or 'Vierfontein' ('four springs'). The presence of water does not always guarantee refreshment, though, as can be seen in names such as 'Brakfontein' ('brackish spring'), 'Moddergat' ('mud hole') and 'Stinkfontein' ('stink water'). In arid parts of the country, the desire for water has resulted in some farms being named for hydrous features that simply do not exist, such as the farm 'Waterval' ('waterfall'), near Nieuwoudtville, which has no waterfalls.

Scenic titles incorporating hills, mountains and plains are also familiar, giving rise to names such as 'Vaalkrans' ('dull cliffs') and 'Dwarsberg' ('horizontal mountain'). Afrikaans farm names such as 'Bergplaas' ('mountain farm') and 'Bergsig' ('mountain view') indicate upland locations, while elevation is implied in the familiar 'Uitkyk' ('lookout'). Rocky terrain is described by the frequent use of the word 'klip' ('stone') as a

prefix for a large range of names, such as the widespread 'Klipfontein' ('stone spring'). In some instances, vegetation is linked with topography: for example, 'Grasrand' ('grassy ridge) and 'Bosch Hoek' ('bushy corner'). An absence of vegetation is possibly denoted by the name 'Kaalbult' ('bare ridge'), although this also conveys a sense of the hardships endured by early settlers.

Vanished multitudes of wildlife are immortalised by innumerable farms called 'Elandsfontein' ('eland spring') or 'Buffelslaagte' ('buffalo plains'). Even the demise of such game animals at the hands of hunters is captured in the name 'Jagersfontein' ('hunters' spring'). The smaller creatures that remain also find their way onto farm names such as Baviaanskrantz ('baboon cliff) and 'Dassiesfontein' ('dassie springs'). Among birdlife described in farm names, the most common by far is the Dutch word for 'vulture', which is used in a wide variety of combinations, such as 'Aasvogellaagte' ('vulture plains') and 'Aasvogelkrantz' ('vulture cliffs'). The central point of names like these is the attention paid to the immediate surroundings. Significantly, almost all are in Afrikaans.

An alternative group of Afrikaans farm names can be described as philosophical or poetic.<sup>24</sup> In the arid interior, isolated from other communities, survival called for a stoic determination that found its echo in names for homesteads. The difficulties experienced by the pioneers are apparent in names such as 'Soebatsfontein' ('pleading springs'), 'Noodhulp' ('emergency') and 'Helpmekaar' ('help one another'). The causes of such suffering, as well as brutal descriptions of the consequences, appear in names like 'Dorstvlakte' ('drought plain') and 'Armoed' ('poverty'). Some settlers sought seclusion from society, reflected in descriptors like 'Ruimte' ('space'), 'Afzondering' ('setting apart') and 'Eenzaamheid' ('loneliness'). Many names, however, anticipated a better life or told of gratitude: for example, 'De Hoop' ('hope'), 'De Rust' ('rest') and 'Geduld' ('patience').

Such poignant names create an overwhelming impression of suffering and endurance, befitting the well-established caricature of South African farmers. Many farm names, however, have a celebratory aspect to them, and include cheerful expressions of pleasure; among these are 'Blydschap' ('happiness'), 'Grootgeluk' ('great fortune') and 'Welge Gund' ('good gift'). A sense of reward well earned is carried in the names 'De Gunst' ('favour') and 'Langverwacht' ('long expected'), though even more so in the classic South African farm name of 'Nooitgedacht' ('never expected').

Pride in the ownership of land, as well as a sense of accomplishment, is evident in these

contented names, but there are also farm names that demonstrate a quirky sense of humour. Just outside the village of Haenertsburg in Mpumalanga is the farm of 'Bally-will-will'. John Murray relates that a prospective buyer designated the farm in this way after a vehement argument during the negotiations: the man slammed his fist down and declared, 'I bally will, will have that farm'. In Limpopo province, a farm bearing the unique name of 'Kiss me quick and go my honey' evokes a sense of both romance and wit.

Finally, a great many South African farm names prosaically describe what the farmer does. These include names such as 'Beestekraal' ('cattle byre') and 'Oskop' ('ox hill'), or involve breeds of livestock like 'Merino' (sheep) and 'Angora' (goats).

Taken collectively, there can be no doubt that farm names are a testament to the enduring meaning land holds in South Africa. With very few exceptions, the titles are inscribed at farm entrances. On the whole, farmers are guided by function rather than form, and do not flaunt much creativity on their gates. Most are modest, with two posts on either side of the driveway and a simple rectangular metal plate attached to the fence, or to a pole. Occasionally, though, natural reserve gives way to the pride owners feel for their land and personal accomplishments. In such cases, the gate becomes an extension of the farm and a window into the attitude and temperament of the landowner.

Such gates are indicative of the farmer's personality, as well as a constant reminder to friends and neighbours. Some take the form of an arch, the ancient Roman symbol of triumph, resurrected in more unassuming form but with the same symbolic intent. Others feature obsolete farm implements or objects manufactured specifically to adorn the gate. Regardless of the form, the extraordinary gates made by a handful of South African farmers all serve the same purpose: to mark the presence, or past, of an individual spirit.

Scattered across South Africa's countryside, often hidden along remote dirt roads, some farm gates transcend the mere functional purpose of marking the entrance to a piece of land. Treated as a type of vernacular design, these portals assume the form of sculpture when landowners seek to convey their personality in one of the few media available to them. Examples of this rural eccentricity extend from the conventional format rendered in a quirky or striking style, often enhanced by haunting settings, to illustrations of purely whimsical indulgence.

The conventional view of agricultural aesthetics in South Africa is generally an unkind

one. In fact the term 'agricultural aesthetics' is hardly ever used, owing to the general perception that farmers are dour folk with little appreciation of art, or scant interest in it. Like most generalisations, this notion proves untrue when it is investigated more thoroughly. Many icons of South African interior design originated in the homes of farmers. These range from ironic kitsch, such as the now-ubiquitous animal trophy horns, to kitchen enamelware, sturdy functional furniture and the beloved *stoep*, or veranda, which serves as the perfect intermediary social space between home and outdoors. In its own quiet way, the vast hinterland of our country harbours an important element of its character, for better or worse, and it can be found right along the road – if you care to look.







## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> E. Carter, J. Donald & J. Squires (eds.), *Space and Place: Theories of identity and location* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. xii.
- <sup>2</sup> T.N. Huffman, *Handbook to the Iron Age: The archaeology of pre-colonial farming societies in southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), p. xi.
- <sup>3</sup> L. Gunner, 'Names and the land: Poetry of belonging and unbelonging, a comparative approach' in *Text, theory, space*, K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner & S. Nuttall (eds.), (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 120.
- <sup>4</sup> D.B.Z. Ntuli, 'The significance of Zulu homestead names', *Nomina Africana*, vol. 6 number 1, 1992, p. 14.
- <sup>5</sup> A. Koopman, *Zulu names* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2002), p. 183.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Koopman, *Zulu names* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2002), p. 188.
- <sup>7</sup> D.B.Z. Ntuli, 'The significance of Zulu homestead names', *Nomina Africana*, vol. 6 number 1, 1992, p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> A. Koopman, *Zulu names* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2002), p. 192.
- <sup>9</sup> E. Boonzaier, C. Malherbe, A. Smith & P. Behrens, *The Cape Herders* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p. 71.
- <sup>10</sup> H.E. Bartle Frere, 'On systems of land tenure among aboriginal tribes in South Africa', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 12 (1883), p. 265.
- <sup>11</sup> K.W. Simpson & G.M.J. Sweeney, *The Land Surveyor and the Law* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1973), p. 15.
- <sup>12</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> K.W. Simpson & G.M.J. Sweeney, *The Land Surveyor and the Law* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1973), p. 12.
- <sup>14</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 2.
- <sup>15</sup> W.A. Seymour (ed.), *History of the Ordnance Survey* (Folkestone, William Dawson & Sons, 1980), p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup> K.W. Simpson & G.M.J. Sweeney, *The Land Surveyor and the Law* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1973), p. 15.
- <sup>17</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 10.
- <sup>20</sup> H. Biesheuval, 'Maps and Land Use' (University of Natal, inaugural lecture, 21 April 1955), p. 11.
- <sup>21</sup> S.R. Simpson, *Land Law and Registration* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 105.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with John Murray, 20 November 2009.
- <sup>23</sup> A. Koopman, 'Cultural and linguistic patterns in selected toponyms of KwaZulu-Natal' (unpublished paper, University of KwaZulu-Natal), p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> A. Koopman, 'Cultural and linguistic patterns in selected toponyms of KwaZulu-Natal' (unpublished paper, University of KwaZulu-Natal), p. 6.

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