

IN PIETERMARITZBURG the event was unlike any normally held in the sedate suburb. Khaba Mkhize, columnist of the *Natal Witness*, described it as the “first truly indigenous party right in the heart of Pietermaritzburg’s affluency ... It was the day when the walls of apartheid group areas crumbled. It was the celebration of the arrival of a Native Boy in Eurocentric Country.”

There were high-megawatt speakers blaring, an ox was slaughtered as well as two sheep and one goat. The ox horns were placed on the side patio and freshly skinned hides were pinned on the green grass for drying.

When dawn broke and the music stopped a different row erupted — in the letters’ columns of the *Natal Witness*. These letters reflected adjustments whites in a comfortable, quiet suburb miles from the nearest township, were making to the new experience. Here, ENOCH ZULU, director of African Languages Publishing at Centaur Publications, explains some aspects of Zulu culture and custom in the context of residential integration now taking place in cities across the country.

Animal slaughter is a rite

CULTURE, any culture, is at once static and dynamic.

Culture is stable in so far as it will continue to exist and manifest itself in the life of a particular group for as long as that group exists as a cultural entity. It will thus be handed down from generation to generation within the group. On the other hand, culture is dynamic in that it is subject to adaptation to its continuously changing environment.

Zulu culture is no exception. I want to believe that it will always be there for as long as there are people who identify themselves as Zulu people, and who continue to give expression to it. However, changing circumstances will compel it to adapt.

It should be noted that Zulu culture has religious foundations. Long before the advent of missionaries from Europe and America the Zulu people were aware of and acknowledging the existence of God — *uMvelinqangi*, as they called Him. They acknowledged Him as the Almighty God, and Creator of all things. It is wrong, therefore, to assume that the Zulu’s conception of God only started when white missionaries came to Africa.

The Zulu people also believed, and they still do believe in life after death. To them life in the hereafter is a reality, and not just a remote concept. They believe that through death a human being is transformed into a personage of a higher order than that of mortals. This brings us to the notion of ancestors or ancestral spirits — *amadlozi* or *amathongo* or *izinyanga*.

Amadlozi are the deceased people of a particular family or lineage. Every family or lineage has its own ancestors whose responsibility it is to mediate between God and man and to look after the welfare of those family members who are still living. Communication is possible between the ancestral spirits and their living wards.

This is a two-way process. Ancestors communicate with the living through

dreams and other media. The living can also communicate with their ancestors, and in certain cases this involves animal slaughter. For those who still ardently believe in ancestral spirit and their guardian power over the living, animal slaughter is almost inevitable especially where rites of passage such as birth, marriage and death are involved.

Animal slaughter is quite congruous with a rurally orientated culture such as Zulu culture. In the Zulu context this involves the slaughter of goats and/or beasts. It is also important to understand that in ceremonial slaughter only the head of the family or his male appointee from within the family group can officiate and carry out the actual slaughtering. The officiating member is also the one who must address the *amadlozi* on behalf of the entire family.

There is also the social dimension to take into account when there is a ceremony in a family involving festivities. To a Zulu person, a person is a person through other people — *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Neighbours and other members of the community do not have to be invited individually to come and take part in the festivities. Although the ceremony itself has a bearing only on family, other people are welcome to come and partake of any food that may be offered.

Ceremonies and rituals which involve slaughtering are numerous. One can call to mind such ceremonies as *imbeleko yomntwana* (a thanksgiving ceremony to the newly born), *umshado* (marriage ceremony), *ukwemula* (recognition by the head of the family that his daughter has reached marriageable age), *ukubika inxiwa* (sod-turning ceremony), and, of course, rituals associated with death.

However such rituals and ceremonies do not happen everyday in one family. Many years may pass between one ceremony and another. Some Zulu people do not even observe some of

these customs any more. Therefore it is not the case of *There is a Zulu family living next-door, so there will be ritual slaughters every week-end*.

I have said that culture is static yet dynamic. There is absolutely no reason why Zulu culture cannot adapt to its changing environment, to the extent that its bearers can continue to practise it without necessarily inconveniencing neighbours who might not be Zulus and might not wish to be “disturbed”. Zulu culture has already demonstrated, to a certain degree, its potential to adapt to its changing environment. Its manifestations in urban townships are no longer exactly the same as in rural situations.

What I wish to emphasize here is a spirit of compromise on both sides of the cultural line in places where residential integration is already taking place. This should not be the case only where Zulu culture is concerned, but should be the norm in respect of all other cultures. People should be left free to practise their culture, but they should also ascertain that the immediate neighbourhood is not unduly inconvenienced by their doing so.

It is equally important that an informed review of the existing municipal by-laws should take place. It must be remembered that these by-laws were promulgated at a time when circumstances in the country were still different. The review should take into account the now factual co-existence of people of different cultural backgrounds in the same neighbourhoods. Such a review should ask relevant questions about any particular culture, identify in an unimpassioned way what the real problems are in it, and seek solutions in a spirit of compromise.

Those problems will only be solved if people are prepared to put aside their personal prejudices about other people’s cultures and genuinely apply themselves to finding equitable solutions. ●