The Role of Izangoma in Bringing the Zulu Goddess Back to Her People

Kendall

Where there are humans there will be gods and where there are gods there will be ritual. The urge for it is deeply embedded in the psychic matrix of humanity, and, being part of psyche, it behaves as if it will go on living. Ritual does not die though it can be neglected, trivialized, misused and to some extent ignored.

—Bani Shorter (1996:117)

Izangoma (plural form of isangoma, Zulu traditional healer) are appreciated and trained as performers whose primary function is healing. The illnesses treated by izangoma may be individual, such as headaches and stomach ailments, or communal, such as the separation of a community from the approval, guidance, and protection of its ancestors and gods. “Treatments” may include ritual performances of song, dance, and prayer, and various uses of herbs or mixtures of vegetable and animal matter. Izangoma perform a vital community function and are believed by many Zulu people to communicate messages from spirits to people, to unite visible and invisible realms, and to bring energy and health to their communities (Thorpe 1993:103). Certainly izangoma evoke shared memory through repetition of familiar songs and dances, and they promote harmony—both literal, vocal harmony manifested in song, and symbolic harmony in terms of amicable and peaceful relations in society and in community life (117–21).

Most izangoma are women (Bryant [(1917) 1970], Gluckmann [1935], Berglund [1975], and Thorpe [1993] all estimate 95 percent, and my observations bear that out). Several izangoma near the town of Bulwer, in southern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, have been involved from 1995 through 1998 as directors and performers of rituals designed to bring back the Zulu goddess. My interviews and observations of izangoma and their roles in the movement to bring back the goddess suggest that Zulu izangoma, like Yoruba diviners, are “ritual specialists” (Drewel 1992:24); that among Zulu people the call to become an isangoma is also a call to become a performer or performance artist; and that the resuscitation of belief in the Zulu goddess may be empowering for Zulu women in general and for women izangoma in particular.
Who is Nomkhubulwane and where has she been?

One theory popular among Zulu izangoma is that many problems of the Zulu people can be attributed to the fact that many have so neglected their ancestors and gods that the spirits have turned their backs on the people and must be called home before health can be restored (Ngobese 1995; Ngubane 1996). Gugu Ngobese first approached me in 1995 when she heard I was a videographer. She had just run a “trial version” of a festival to the Zulu goddess Nomkhubulwane in Impendle, which is in the southern part of KwaZulu-Natal where Ngobese is headmistress of a two-room school. That first celebration, Ngobese claims, attracted about 150 teenagers plus a few izangoma and interested parents, and included dancing, singing, and the sacrifice and consumption of a cow. Ngobese told me she had been instructed by one of her ancestors in a dream in 1994 to create “a festival to bring back Nomkhubulwane” and that she wanted me to document this festival on video (Ngobese 1995).

The belief that evil results not from malicious acts of gods and ancestors but from divine spirits going away from a community because of that community’s neglect, is common among many southern African peoples (Thorpe 1993:117). M. Vera Buhrmann notes that many Xhosa traditional healers believe “One of the main concerns of the ancestors is that the customs be kept and the necessary ceremonies be performed” (1987:442). Indeed, the idea that the primary demand of the gods is that they be remembered is attributed by James Hillman to many cultures, including the classical Greeks (1996:112). Hillman could be describing izangoma when he writes, “The great task of a life-sustaining culture is to keep the invisibles attached, the gods smiling and pleased; to invite them to remain by propitiations and rituals; by singing and dancing, smudging and chanting” (1996:112).
There is widespread oral and printed agreement with the idea that Nomkhubulwane turned away from her people when they adopted Christianity and abandoned their rituals to her. In the 1960s an anthropologist, Axel-Ivar Berglund, found an old woman at Ceza who claimed that the cause of droughts was the fact that people had stopped honoring Nomkhubulwane. She told Berglund, “I say to you, when also those who honour her today no longer do this, then we shall all die because of drought” (1976:65).

On the day in December 1995 when I visited Ngobese’s home village to help her begin the research on how to (re)create the rituals to Nomkhubulwane, a neighboring home had been burnt the night before in political violence and was still smoking. A young man looking over the damage observed to me, “The violence goes on because we as Africans have lost our identity and the respect for our ancestors and Nomkhubulwane, and they have left us” (Makhaya, December 1995). Months later, Ngobese and I interviewed Velenine Ndebele, an elder isangoma in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Ndebele’s son, also an isangoma, listened quietly for a time but interrupted to tell us, “We are in great trouble due to the fact that we left and did not obey Nomkhubulwane’s ceremony” (Ndebele, May 1996).

Indeed the belief that current troubles are at least partly the fault of neglect of ancestors and Zulu tradition proved to be commonplace. Malunga Ngubane, one of the Bulwer-area izangoma, explains:

> Today people are living an individualistic life compared to olden days. […] Long time ago when someone does not have something to eat, people will come along and give them at least a cow for milk for the children without expecting the person to pay it back. But nowadays the way of doing things has changed completely. So I believe this is the major reason why Nomkhubulwane has run away, because of the things we are doing. (July 1996)

This accords with older English-language records, which emphasize that Nomkhubulwane protects her people and brings good but never evil; that evil comes to the people only when she turns away from them (Pettersson [1953] 1973:187).

Recent oral sources (Ngubane, Mabi, and Mkhulise 1996–1998) and older written sources (Kunene 1982, Berglund 1976, Krige 1950, Pettersson [1953] 1973, Gluckmann 1935, and Bryant [1917] 1970) agree on the following major beliefs about Zulu cosmology and Nomkhubulwane in particular: In the beginning were two (or three) great spirits who are still with us, one male and one (or two) female(s), and male and female energies were balanced, harmonious, and equally necessary to creation. The male spirit, Mvelingqangi, is austere, sometimes fierce, and virile, given to striding through the ethers trailing streams of glory and thunder, taking lesser female spirits as wives. His daughter, Nomkhubulwane, is calmer and somewhat more accessible, though neither spirit can be approached directly by adults except through ancestral spirits. Nomkhubulwane does show herself to virgin girls and may be directly contacted through girls or spirits only. Nomkhubulwane lives near bodies of water, emanating mists. She is associated with light, with rain, and with fertility. The rainbow, in particular, is Nomkhubulwane’s symbol. Her emissary is the snake, especially a two-headed snake.

The goddess never married and never will, and she never bore children, but she considers all izintombi (Zulu girl children or virgins) her daughters. Until recent times she possessed herself in compassionate quietude, receiving the annual performances of izintombi and dedicating herself to protecting them and making them, the earth, wet with life waters, healthy, and whole. But if the Zulu...
people do not pay her respect, Nomkhubulwane can turn her back and walk away. Her absence can be read in droughts, in great storms, terrible winds, and soil that lies exhausted and barren. When she turns her back on the people, horrible things can happen: beauty and civility go with her; her people can suffer domination by outsiders; her daughters have no protection from rape; violence erupts between brothers; and unheard of diseases strike people and animals.

Berglund’s sources told him Nomkhubulwane is “dressed in white” or “may reveal herself in a multicoloured gown” (1976:65). Ntombi Mkhulise, however, who has dreamed seeing a spirit she believes is Nomkhubulwane, says Nomkhubulwane’s colors are red and white. As if in confirmation, Masizi Kunene writes in a poem entitled “Vision of Nomkhubulwane”: “[Nomkhubulwane] is the white cloud veiled in crimson” (1982:11). Isangoma Nsizwaazifani Mabi says, “The beads we wear are red and white because those are her colors” (1996).

The position of Nomkhubulwane in Zulu cosmology is one area in which contemporary oral sources differ slightly from earlier (white-authored) sources. I told Mabi that some white missionaries described Nomkhubulwane as “a rain goddess,” and he was so shocked that he answered me in English. He laughed: “As if we have a lot of goddesses of this and that. Yes, she brings rain. She brings fertility. She can be very angry because the people go away from her. But she is not just some kind of rain goddess.” His face grew serious, and his manner changed. “She is the daughter of god, the only daughter. There is only one goddess. She is not separate from god. She is the female part of god. She is god. Nomkhubulwane” (1996).

In a similar spirit Kunene writes:

Nomkhubulwane is the most central symbol of creation. She establishes the female principle as philosophically the primary force in creation. Through the female principle, the seemingly irreconcilable elements are brought together. Thus the conciliation of opposites and the establishment of balance become the very essence of growth and creation.

(1981:xxvi)

Mabi and Kunene thus regard Nomkhubulwane with considerably more respect than is suggested in Krige’s account, in which “She seems to be a kind of goddess of the corn, virtually a Zulu Ceres presiding over the growth of...
the grain, and from her, it is said, the people learnt how to make beer” (1950:197). Nomkhubulwane is said to be able to take various forms, which may explain the image of the goddess captured by an early missionary and passed on in the (white) canon of Zulu religious beliefs: “a very little animal as large as a polecat and marked with black and white stripes” (Callaway in Krige 1950:197).

Mabi’s insistence that Nomkhubulwane is the only goddess in Zulu tradition conflicts with some of Berglund’s sources, who distinguished between the Heavenly Queen, or inkosikazi, the Great Mother (the mother of Nomkhubulwane), and the Heavenly Princess, or inkosazana, Nomkhubulwane (1976:63). Yet Berglund notes that the concept of the Heavenly Queen had been lost by the 1960s and concludes that his sources knew little or nothing about Nomkhubulwane’s mother. Information I gathered from izangoma and elders substantiates that point. Indeed, Nomkhubulwane seems now to have been conflated with her mother, for Ntombini KaNdabuko, an aged member of the Zulu royal family, interviewed at her son’s home in Ulundi (northern Natal), states, “Nomkhubulwane is a queen, right from the beginning. Umbhenqagi (variant of the name of the supreme male deity) is higher than she, but Nomkhubulwane is far more important, for she is a queen and it is through her that we ask God for everything” (KaNdabuko, May 1996).

Whether Nomkhubulwane is the Queen or the Princess of Zulu cosmology, she is in any case Zulu divinity in female form. She is the agent of well-being, health, harmony, and peace. Most importantly, she is the protector of girls and the emblem of female strength, fertility, and autonomy. It is significant that she never marries and thus never passes from the house of her father, the supreme deity, to a lesser male being’s house.

The idea of a mass gathering or “festival” at which many young people could perform was entirely Ngobese’s idea and was not based on (re)creating tradi-

3. Through celebration of Zulu culture, Gugu Ngobese hopes to contribute to the the development of self-respect, self-esteem, and pride in Zulu people. Here, Ngobese leads a parade of izintombi to the garden for ritual planting in the Nomkhubulwane festival. (Photo by Kendall)
Izangoma

We Zulu people cannot stay in the dark with our old ways. We must have electricity, and a sound stage to attract the youth and show them that we are up to date. Bringing back Nomkhubulwane is part of our cultural development, and it is necessary for it to be a modernized celebration so that the youth will participate. (Ngobese 1997)

Ngobese organized the festivals of 1996 and 1997 in an effort to salvage or reinvent aspects of Zulu tradition that had been eclipsed by colonization and Christianization, and to provide a showcase for teenagers, especially girls, performing “traditional” song and dance. Ngobese hopes the festivals will help to restore what she believes was ancient Zulu respect for virginity. Through restoration of reverence for virginity, Ngobese hopes communities will alter teenage sexual behavior and curb illegitimate pregnancy and the spread of AIDS and STDs. Through celebration of Zulu culture, Ngobese hopes to contribute to the development of self-respect, self-esteem, and pride in Zulu people, particularly, she always emphasizes, “the youth” (Ngobese 1995–1997).

Research Methods, Ethics, and Ground Rules

I am a middle-aged, white, female scholar, mother, and grandmother born in the USA. My academic background is in performance studies and women’s studies. I came to southern Africa in 1992, and to South Africa in 1995, with a postmodern-deconstructionist-lesbian-feminist-materialist theoretical bias. I do not speak Zulu, and my first contact with Zulu-speaking people occurred in 1995. Gugu Ngobese first heard of me as a videographer and invited me to document the festival on video. She had just enrolled for an Honours degree in Zulu, and I suggested she make the Nomkhubulwane festival her Honours project. This led to the research she and I conducted jointly on the history of rituals to Nomkhubulwane, and to the festival of 1996; Ngobese served as translator and interpreter for me during 1995 and 1996. When Ngobese finished her Honours project and returned to her school and family, I engaged other Zulu women as research assistants, translators, and interpreters with the help of research funds from the University of Natal.

Stellar Zulu, Zandile Majola, and Lindiwe Nkala, three research assistants who worked with me from mid-1996 through 1997, are urban Zulu women pursuing university degrees. All had heard the name of Nomkhubulwane before doing this research but knew nothing other than that she was a Zulu mythological figure. They claim to have found this work empowering for themselves as Zulu women, though Stellar Zulu complains, “The Zulu nation places more sexual responsibility on females than on males.” She notes: “This attitude [reflected in the procedure of virginity testing at the festival] allows males to be sexually irresponsible” (1997). For this reason Zulu questions how empowering virginity testing is for young girls, and I certainly share her doubts.

I also enlisted my entire community theatre class in the research in 1996 and 1997, and have accumulated several hundred interviews, plus audio and videotapes. In 1996 my community theatre class consisted of nine students: eight Zulu-speaking South African undergraduates and one Indian South African
postgrad. The festival took place at the end of September, and we had six
weeks to prepare for it. In 1997, the festival took place at the end of August,
which gave us only two class-meetings for preparations. The class had grown to
22, and of those, only six were Zulu-speaking undergraduates. The remainder
consisted of four African American, one Asian American, and three white
American undergrads on an exchange program; one South African, one
Indian South African, and three non-Zulu black South African undergrads; and
three postgraduate students: one white British, one Nigerian, and one Zulu.

Clearly it was necessary to ask under what circumstances it might be ethical
for such a cohort of researchers to observe, interview, and write about a ritual
performance principally designed for Zulu girls. It would be necessary to pre-
pare for and expect distortions of perception, significant silences (non-virginal
Zulu girls not attending the festival are of course not heard from; girls who
failed the virginity tests could not be interviewed). We discussed ground rules as
suggested by a variety of scholars: (1) that we take care to obtain interviewees’
names to “unmask the assumed homogeneity” of indigenous people (Bruner
1993:327); (2) that we suspend our own beliefs about supernatural or religious
phenomena, if necessary, to avoid “an imperialism of normal consciousness that
dominate and suppress other forms of consciousness” (Kalweit 1992:262); (3)
that we consider that cultural performances may “themselves be active agencies
of change” (Turner 1987:24); and (4) that we try to identify the analytic stan-
dards by which participants evaluate the effectiveness of the performance
(Richards 1995:71–72). I emphasized Margaret Drewel’s research on Yoruba
peoples and her insistence on centering “Western” attitudes and
foregrounding what indigenous people say about their rituals (1992). When we
arrived, we found we were not the only non-Zulu visitors. A TV news crew,
some journalists, and several art historians from my university were also present.

Isangoma Thulani Shezi believes the presence of visitors validates the im-
portance of the event: “To have visitors who come to watch them makes the
girls to see that what they are doing is good and very important” (Masinga
1997). Another point is made by isangoma Njimbili KaMathe, who says the
festival “shows the white people how it was like in South Africa before they
arrived to confuse our people about their cultures and to sell theirs to them”
(Masinga 1997).

I immersed myself in participatory research with three izangoma who were
principal performers of the rituals that occurred in 1996, and who became my
friends and teachers: Ntombi Mkhulise, Nsizwazifani Mabi, and Malunga
Ngubane. Mkhulise speaks fluent English, and my Mosotho housemate is fluent
in Zulu; as a result it has been possible for Mkhulise and me to become close
friends, and this friendship extends to our families and households. Mkhulise
has treated and healed illnesses that have beset me and my family. She has per-
formed rituals for and with me and has taught me how to use various herbal
medicines she prepared to heal my headaches and fatigue and to intensify my
dreams. She has taught me a great deal about the lives and beliefs of izangoma;
she has frequently spent the night at my house, and I have helped to finance the
education of her children.

Mabi speaks a good deal of English, and I have visited his spirit-houses and his
home many times, have shared family crises, and consider him a friend. Ngubane
speaks no English but is very physically expressive, as I am, and we communicate
well through interpreters and often even without them. All three izangoma value
the photographs and videotapes I have made of their performances and given to
them. Ngubane and Mkhulise asked me to videotape a lengthy ritual they per-
formed alone (but for me and the video camera) early in 1997.

The boundaries between Kendall-as-researcher and Kendall-as-person,
friend, and spirit-in-transit have been as permeable as I could make them. For
as Drewal writes, fieldwork is itself a performance, and she urges “breaking down the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity; and engaging in a more truly dialogical relationship with our subjects of study so that both researcher and researched are coeval participants in a performance discourse” (1992:11).

The University of Natal library is richly stocked with English-language texts on Zulu history and culture (mostly, but not entirely, compiled by white missionaries and scholars). Predictably, much of what was published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is unabashedly racist and suffers from deep unacknowledged cultural bias (see for example Bryant 1970; Fynney 1880). Like those white scholars, I come to my task from another culture, with certain habits of thinking, seeing, and inquiring that limit and distort my vision. The major difference between me and them is that I am aware that my vision must be limited and distorted by white privilege, and I am conscious of the racism in the ways I was trained to “see.” Rather than ignoring or denying my racism, I assume that it must exist, and I consciously work to counteract it. Nor can the English language adequately represent Zulu ways of thinking and experiencing life and divinity.

Malidoma Somé, writing in English about perceptions of divinity in his native Burkina Faso, notes: “The things that I talk about here did not happen in English; they happened in a language that has a very different mind set about reality” (1995:2). Yet he undertook to serve as a “medium,” translating ideas from one culture into words and, he hoped, understanding for another. He explains: “Unless we as individuals find new ways of understanding between people, ways that can touch and transform the heart and soul deeply, both indigenous cultures and those in the West will continue to fade away […]” (1995:2).

I am at least two steps removed from Malidoma Somé’s mediumship, as the customs I describe are not those of the cultures of my birth, nor did they occur in a language I can speak and understand. Had a Zulu scholar undertaken this study, or chosen to write this article with me, the results would no doubt have been different. A Zulu man’s eyes might have seen differently from mine or from a Zulu woman’s; a Zulu scholar’s analysis might have highlighted different aspects of the festival than I have chosen to study. I position myself as an outsider attempting, in Somé’s words, to find new ways of understanding, and to record and document what I believe is an important moment in Zulu cultural history.

**Nomkhubulwane, Izangoma, and the Rituals**

Bulwer-area izangoma explain that it is not merely because they are the keepers of the Zulu religion that they want to see the celebrations to Nomkhubulwane reenacted. Many izangoma have a special relationship to Nomkhubulwane. Although they cannot see her nor pray directly to her (only izintombi can do that), they communicate with her in dreams and through their spirits and their ancestors. As a shaman or link between the visible and invisible realms, an isangoma uses her privileged lines of communication with
Kendall the spirit-world to bring Nomkhubulwane’s directives to the people (Mkhulise, April 1996).

Mkhulise explains, “When a person is *ukuthwasa* [experiencing an illness associated with the call to become isangoma], the person sees a lake where Nomkhubulwane is. You see her sitting at the side of your ancestors, deep in the lake but at the side […]” (May 1996). Mkhulise goes on to explain that every isangoma has an *ithongo* (spirit) who goes to Nomkhubulwane and gets a particular song, which becomes that isangoma’s song for life. Mabi, listening to Mkhulise’s account of this process, adds, “There is only one song that is just especially for you, from your ithongo” (May 1996); and, adds Ngubane, “It’s the song you got from Nomkhubulwane” (May 1996).

Ntombini KaNdabuko believes spring rites to Nomkhubulwane were rites of initiation into womanhood as well as rituals to the goddess. KaNdabuko describes groups of izintombi wearing *izibhenene* (*izibheshu*, traditional skin dress), with *umutya* (beaded aprons) or *izigege* (small beaded aprons that cover the pubic area only), going into the mountains to celebrate with feasting and beer-drinking, song, and dance. She also describes the planting of Nomkhubulwane’s garden: “Plowed, planted and hoed with hands and sticks or anything” (KaNdabuko, May 1996).

Isangoma Velenine Ndebele, in Nongoma (in northern Natal) says she heard about the Nomkhubulwane celebrations from her grandmother, who participated in them and described them as rites of puberty or passage and rites of veneration of the deity. According to Ndebele, girls would collect, from the whole community, foods for a feast to be held in the mountains. They would take the foods to the mountain and consume them, and then go to a river to wash and apply *ibomvu* (clay) to their bodies before returning home. Their grandmothers would then examine the girls “to see if they are still virgins” and then each family of bonafide virgins would slaughter a goat (Ndebele, May 1996). Ndebele and KaNdabuko describe rituals like those described by Max Gluckmann in 1935. Gluckmann’s account of what he called “hoecultural rituals” to Nomkhubulwane covers all the activities described by Ndebele and KaNdabuko and includes only one additional: the herding of cattle by girls wearing men’s clothing. That this aspect of the old rituals should be the one aspect forgotten, overlooked, or buried is no doubt significant, but explanations can only be conjectural.
Izangoma in southern KwaZulu-Natal report very similar rituals. Mabi says that in time of drought, both the izintombi and izinsizwa (young or virginal men) went to the river wearing umsenge leaves, to sing and dance as a way of invoking Nomkhubulwane to send rain, “and before they reach their homes it will be raining heavily” (May 1996). Mabi continues that each year before planting,

[Each and every house used to donate seeds. The izintombi will take those seeds to a certain field to be planted. They will call it Nomkhubulwane’s plowing. [...] The field was hoed by the nation. The seeds were dispersed and no one will eat or share the harvest except for the birds of heaven and the animals. (May 1996)]

Ngubane reports a slight variation on the story, as follows:

I was told by my grandfathers about Nomkhubulwane, a princess living on the mountains. If the people were troubled, wanting, or in need of something, they used to send izintombi in their traditional attire or wearing imisenge leaves. Before they could be sent they must first be checked, because only girls who are still virgins were wanted. [...] Their grandmothers checked them. [...] There were many paths that were used to go to Nomkhubulwane. You see, when the people see that there is drought, no rain, they used to go and make sacrifices. (April 1996)

Ngubane goes on to explain that people would sacrifice whatever was dear to them, of livestock or food, as an offering to the goddess. If the smoke from the sacrificial fire went straight up into the sky, instead of spreading out laterally, they would know that the sacrifice had been accepted and their prayers would be granted (April 1996). Usefully, Ngubane concludes his description of the ceremonies: “Each and every community will decide to do their own thing in their own style that is their Nomkhubulwane ceremony. Thereafter it will differ according to places” (April 1996).

Ngubane reports that when Nomkhubulwane was present, life was essentially harmonious; girls were respected; the society was well (June 1996). But when Nomkhubulwane turned her back, Zulu society lost its balance. Disease swept through the people, and so the people came to rely on izangoma to perform songs, dances, and rituals in order to restore harmony and health (July 1996).

In February 1997, I showed the videotapes of the September 1996 ritual to Mabi and Mkhulise and made a video of them watching those videotapes and responding to my questions about the festival. I asked about the meanings of certain events or actions. Where appropriate, I include the explanations they furnished to me while watching and discussing the videos. The description that follows is my own eyewitness account of the 1996 opening ritual, buttressed by videotapes and research assistants’ translations.

A gravelly outcrop of rock, roughly circular in outline, was selected and cleared, and on the first day of the celebrations, Friday morning, some of the Zulu girls were instructed to begin hauling wattle branches up to it for a bonfire. The ritual began with a procession. Once the crowd reached the ceremonial space, a man with a megaphone called the izintombi to come and witness. The izangoma established themselves on the eastern side of the circle, built a pyramidal tower of wattle about a meter high with the wood hauled up by the girls, and began dancing and singing, “both to summon our spirits and ancestors, and to entertain the audience as it gathered” (Mabi, February 1997). Shyly at first, and then with more and more interest, about 200 izintombi appeared, wearing short skirts over shorts and T-shirts. The man with the megaphone gave an order, and the girls all took their T-shirts off, baring their
breasts to the morning sunshine. At that the izangoma intensified their singing and dancing, many women watching from the sides ululated, and the ritual seemed officially to have begun.

Nsizwazifani Mabi, Malunga Ngubane, and a female isangoma named Sellinah Ndlovu moved into the center of the circle. Ndlovu seemed to take primary responsibility for getting the fire going and keeping it. Ngubane took over handling the goat. Mabi gave instructions to whoever was near him and seemed to be directing proceedings: “I am the one with the most powerful spirits, so it was my job to tell the others what to do” (February 1997). The TV news crew moved into the center of the ceremonial space and began interviewing Mabi who, “both for the visitors [TV crew] and for the ritual” (Mabi, February 1997), began leading a call-and-response. All the proceedings were in Zulu, translated for me by research assistants. Mabi would intone a line, such as, “We are doing these rituals for Nomkhubulwane!” or “We must not forget our culture!” and the izangoma would respond, “Makhosi!” (Ancestors!). “We wanted this thing to be good for the TV, because we want the generations to come to know the importance of Nomkhubulwane and the importance of izangoma and because this is something that they do not know” (Mkhulise, February 1997). When Mabi seemed to have said all he wanted to say, Mkhulise started singing a song she had been given in a dream, and had earlier rehearsed with the izangoma, the words to which (translated into English) are: “You take other people’s cultures and leave yours.” As the song gathered force and became familiar through repetition, the izintombi began singing along.

Ngubane, in a skin apron and cloak, and with goat skins attached to the calves of his legs, led the goat into the center of the circle, near the fire. Eleven Zulu women in Western dress also came forward with chickens. Prayers were said. Herbs were burned and waved around the circle and specifically around the animals’ heads. Gugu Ngobese, in a traditional skin skirt, beads, and a maroon lace bra, brought forward a black clay pot of traditional
beer and made libation. Some of the izangoma, though not all, took a ceremonial drink of the beer.

After saying a prayer to Nomkhubulwane and again circling the goat’s head with smoke from the burning herbs, Ngubane took a small pocket-knife out of his pocket and cut the goat’s throat. Immediately after the goat died, Mabi and Ngubane took the goat by the back legs and the ears, and carried it slowly and deliberately around the fire, circling the fire with a stream of blood “to make a kraal [enclosure] for Nomkhubulwane, and to prevent anything that comes with bad intentions” (Mabi, February 1997). When they returned to the spot where the animal’s throat had been cut, they put it down. Mabi then dipped two fingers of his right hand into the goat’s still-bleeding neck, and offered a taste of the blood to Ndlovu and Ngubane. Then Mabi cried out, “Woza!” (Come!), and all the izangoma lined up and took turns receiving a taste of the blood of the goat from Mabi’s fingers “to help the izangoma contact their spirits” (Mabi, February 1997). More singing and ululating ensued as the goat was eviscerated and placed, hair, legs, and head, on top of the fire. As the goat burned and the izangoma’s singing and dancing continued, each of the 11 chickens was sacrificed in the same way: neck cut, blood dripped in a circle around the fire, stomach taken out, then onto the fire—feathers, feet, and all.

The smoke from the fire rose straight into the sky, a sign that the sacrifices had been accepted. The tone of the singing and dancing was ecstatic. Each isangoma had his or her moment of moving into the center of the circle, near the fire, to dance alone to the cries and approval of the crowd. Some seemed to enter trance states and had to be supported or protected to keep them from dancing into the fire in their enthusiasm. The sacrifice of the animals took about an hour and a half, after which small groups of izintombi danced and sang while the fire burned the animals down to ashes. Spectators began to leave. The TV cameras were taken to another part of the festival grounds. As the last feathers disappeared into ash, the izangoma left, one by one and each in her or his own time, smiling and radiant. The opening ritual was finished. The weather was perfect: soft spring sunshine, a barely discernible breeze.

The ritual was partly what Barbara Myerhoff calls a “nonce ritual,” a ritual created to meet the needs of a certain situation, and by which “a community propels itself into conviction about the truth of its invisible kingdom: an invented, recent culture that is an adaption to contemporary circumstances” (1990:248). Although the izangoma’s ritual was a means to propel their community into conviction about certain invisible truths, the ritual was creatively improvised from elements commonly used by izangoma rather than “invented.” There is nothing “recent” about most of the activities performed in the ritual, although the situation that occasioned it (neglect of the ancestors and of Nomkhubulwane) is relatively “recent,” and Mkhulise’s song is a comment on that very point. Animal sacrifices, though common in Zulu cultural life, do not usually take place before such large crowds, do not commonly include TV cameras and outside observers, and normally do include eating the flesh of the animals sacrificed. (Several of the izintombi interviewed at the festival expressed surprise that the goat and the chickens were left to burn up completely [Nzimande 1996].)
This “nonce ritual” was similar to Yoruba rituals Drewal describes in which practitioners of Yoruba religion “often express the need to modify rituals to address current social conditions” (1992:8). The Nomkhubulwane ritual, created from elements of other rituals and assembled for this particular occasion, was both recreated and restored, taking the place of lost rituals to Nomkhubulwane much as Mescalero Apache rituals have been reconstituted and “directed to two groups simultaneously: themselves and their audience of outsiders” (Farrer 1987:529). Because the audience included izintombi being educated about their own culture; TV cameras operated by black South Africans; and outsiders (including me with my video camera, and my students with their cameras and tape recorders), the rituals took place in the realm of the social and the political (Carlson 1996:198). Given the historical context of the forced separation of Zulu people from their religion by Christian missionaries, colonization, and apartheid, the ritual calling Nomkhubulwane home to Zulu culture and resuscitating Zulu belief in Nomkhubulwane must be seen as a political act, as well as a social and religious act.

In this context, izangoma perform political, cultural, and religious functions for their communities, as the restoring of rituals to Nomkhubulwane serve to strengthen identity formation among the izintombi, to counteract internalized racism absorbed from the views of Zulu history and culture taught in the infamous Bantu schools, and to re-invigorate spiritual beliefs that are particularly likely to lead to increased female self-esteem. It would be hard to imagine izintombi not being affected by watching their whole community pay its respects to divinity in a form like theirs: Nomkhubulwane is a divine intombi who is Zulu, female, beautiful, and powerful. Further, the izintombi had the opportunity to see their whole community watching them perform the mass rituals, and that too is bound to have had an impact on them. In 1935, when Gluckmann observed izintombi enacting the rituals to Nomkhubulwane, he observed that it was “the only occasion on which the women can make an offering to any ‘god,’” and that the “unusual privileges” granted to izintombi during the rituals gave them “a certain social triumph” (268) and “temporary importance” (269). The same seemed to be true in 1996.

It appeared to me that, to the extent that some balance in gender relations might be created or restored among Zulu communities as a result of these rituals, it was owing to the agency of the izangoma, who are first and fore-
most performers—not performers involved in *mimesis*, like modern actors, who may pretend to be other than they are, but performers involved in the poetics of the moment, performers who bring a sense of what Eugenio Barba calls “extra-daily” consciousness and importance to what they do (1995:9). In the physical tension of their bodies, the presentational qualities of their movements, song, and speech, the izangoma at the festival created a sense of momentary transcendence.

Barba calls extra-daily use of the body “technique” and notes that it may be “conscious and codified or unconscious but implicit” (1995:9). Izangoma wear extra-daily costumes most of the time and live extra-daily lives all the time. The isangoma is an actor who puts on a particular role, that of healer and living representative of Nomkhulu and the spirits who use the isangoma as a medium. She or he is chosen by Nomkhulu and by other spirits but also chooses to embrace the role and from that moment is in some ways an outsider in her or his own community, one who interprets the spirit world to the mundane world—a border person.

My own observations suggest that the extra-daily performance techniques of the izangoma are conscious and codified but subject to improvisation and play. Piers Vitebsky describes a great shaman whose strength was “his success at performing” and notes: “Shamanic performance is a highly skilled activity in which the delicate collective mood is vulnerable to collapse, resulting in the failure of the purpose of the ritual. In this light, healing power is a form of artistry” (1995:121). It was such artistry that held the rituals to Nomkhulu together. The sheer weight of numbers of participant/observers threatened to overwhelm the proceedings. An estimated 7,000 people attended over the three days of the festival in 1996 and 11,000 in 1997 (Smith 1997). Microphones, cameras, megaphones, rowdy young boys who had imbibed Western values: all of these intrusions could have caused the collapse of the ritual into chaos and disor-
der. Only the izangoma’s force of purpose kept events in motion. The isangoma functions as not only healer and interpreter of the ancestors’ messages to the community, but as director of the community’s rituals. These are all functions of the “shaman” described by Mercea Eliade, Vitebsky, Holger Kalweit, and others; and the shamanic functions fulfill what Turner terms a “transformative” role associated with “social transitions” (1987:157–58).

James Hillman (1996) could be proposing Zulu izangoma as antidotes to contemporary ills when he observes that in most technologically developed countries, biogenetics has replaced spirit, and illness is commonly treated chemically by persons who have no truck with spiritual matters or by psychotherapists who blame the individual’s parenting. In “other societies” (which he does not name) concern for the invisible world, and respect for those who provide links with that world, is present in daily life (89). “As spirits,” Hillman continues, “ancestors are concerned with other spirits, the community as a whole, the things they live with, the locations in their environments, and the particular image in the heart that keeps your person hale and sees you through [...]” (89). In such life-sustaining cultures, Hillman continues, illness or disease, of individuals and communities, comes from “elsewhere: spells; taboo breaking; rituals unperformed; bad airs, waters, places, a distant enemy; an angry divinity; a neglected duty or forgotten offence” (89). Hillman concludes by alluding to a myth popular in Western societies for at least the past 60 years, “But never, never could the state of your soul be attributed to what your mother or father did to you some thirty years ago!” (89).

According to Mkhulise, the isangoma may have a career prior to her “call” to become an isangoma, but must desert that career and serve the ancestors or ill will befall her (February 1997). Once called, a person cannot refuse or turn back. From that point forward, the isangoma must follow the dictates of the spirits: her costume, where she goes, what she does every day of the rest of her life, is determined by the spirits. “Listening to the spirits” and following their dictates becomes paramount: an isangoma will sicken and may die if she refuses to obey (Mkhulise, February 1997). This is why it is difficult for izangoma to make appointments or time commitments. If they are called to go into the forest, or to a river, or to the seaside on a particular day, they must go (Mabi and Mkhulise, February 1997). Izangoma are what Clarissa Estes (1992) calls “wild women,” people in touch with their intuitional natures. Like performing artists in northern-hemisphere cultures, izangoma are people who consciously choose lives of financial insecurity and hardship because those lives offer something they value more: primacy of self-expression, primacy of intuition, encouragement to follow the spirit’s lead despite material pressures and constraints.

Izangoma are performing artists and healers, and they are busy people. Like actors or dancers in other traditions, they depend on their physical bodies to function as their instruments. Their bodies must execute spiritual orders, which may be fiercely demanding. On occasions when I have visited 52-year-old Ntombi Mkhulise’s house without an appointment, she is more likely than not to be out scaling the hillsides and hacking her way through the bush to harvest wild herbs and plants. If she is at home, she may be drying and pulverizing these plants and mixing them to make medicines, or consulting clients (which may include singing, dancing, and trance) in her spirit-house. Nor is her work merely that of gathering herbs, singing, and dancing. Sometimes the spirits instruct her to slit the throat of one of her favorite animals and plunge her face into the hot cavity to suck the blood from the still-pumping aorta, or to wring the neck of a red cock, drink its blood, and rip its still flapping body apart with her hands.2 If she were to faint, vomit, or otherwise fail to execute these orders, most of which come to her in dreams, she could lose her spirit-power, sicken and die. The voices of the spirits make a wide
range of demands. It is her business to perform and to heal illnesses, and, it
must be noted, like other performers and doctors, she offers her services in
exchange for fees. She makes her living, haphazard as it is, by charging money
for her services. Her time is money.

Yet she and the other izangoma involved in the 1996 Nomkhubulwane fes-
tival spent days planning, preparing, rehearsing, and discussing—for no
money. They performed the rituals for no money. Mabi donated one of his
own goats for the 1996 sacrifice. The izangoma seemed to be committed to
healing something much larger than an individual’s illness or their personal
needs. Writing about Zulu izangoma, S.A. Thorpe observes that they are
“generally caring individuals who are keenly aware of the need for a holistic
approach to illnesses. They are specialists in diagnosing and prescribing cures

In this festival, the izangoma donated their formidable energies to the ser-
vice of the deity who selected them for the work they do, in order to try to
help cure a cultural illness that has affected their own psychic or spirit-power
and has reduced them to the role of “witch doctor” ascribed to them by racist
and culturally ignorant missionaries and colonizers. Evidence of the kind of
offence against Zulu culture and izangoma in particular committed by whites
who posed as “experts” capable of interpreting Zulu life and culture for both
Zulu and non-Zulu people is Alfred T. Bryant’s Zulu Medicine and Medicine
Men ([1909] 1970). For many years accepted as an authoritative source of in-
formation, Bryant’s description of the “medicine man” includes the following:
“His [sic] well-wrinkled features bear the unmistakable stamp of a thinking
mind, and his intelligent eye has that flash of deep cunning so well suited to
one who has so often been the accomplice, behind the scene, to sinister deeds
[…].” (1970:9). Dripping condescension and racist venom, Bryant goes on to
insult the isangoma’s dress, bearing, and ability to heal, concluding with a
flourish, “He could not even give a schoolboy explanation of the functions of
any one of the principal organs” (1970:15).

This view of the isangoma is still being taught to both black and white stu-
dents in some of the schools in South Africa and is the point of view of many
black and white Christians. Despite the work of medical ethnobotanists,
medical sociologists, and Zulu historians, izangoma are still regarded with sus-
picion, distrust, and derision in many quarters of South African society. In the
early months of this project, Mkhulise was afraid to allow university students
to serve as interpreters because, she said, “They will laugh at us. They think
we are fools” (1996). Mkhulise, Mabi, and Ngubane all claim to be Christians
and have no difficulty reconciling beliefs in Nomkhubulwane with beliefs in
Christian traditions, or their practice as izangoma with Christian practices. In
fact, Mkhulise describes the arrival of Gugu Ngobese and me in the Bulwer
area in terms of Christian symbolism, as follows: “You came because you saw
the light, like the wise men saw the star. You followed the light to us, and
you helped us, because that is what you were supposed to do” (February
1997). Yet not all Christians feel that way.

Venancia Hlongwane, a member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, told me that
her grandmother’s grandparents believed in Nomkhubulwane and went to
izangoma for guidance and healing. “But now people believe in God. You
can’t believe in both of them” (1995). Other Christian Zulu people, aware
that I was working with izangoma on a festival to Nomkhubulwane, refused
to grant me interviews. One South African white man with several university
degrees advised me to abandon the research or risk “falling victim to dark
forces.” Both Mkhulise and Mabi say they have more power when they wear
proper isangoma clothing, but sometimes they sacrifice power to avoid ridi-
cule. Mabi says, “I don’t go everywhere wearing my proper attire because
people laugh at you when you take a taxi or board a bus. To them we look like someone who doesn’t have brains, someone insane, someone who is uncivilized” (February 1997). It is against this backdrop of ridicule and disrespect that the courage of the izangoma in performing for crowds, visitors, and TV cameras must be acknowledged.

What is perhaps most amazing about the rituals enacted by the izangoma for the Nomkhubulwane celebration in 1996 is that, despite the weight of racist history and derision, they had such a sense of playfulness and joy about them. They fit the description Victor Turner uses in his often-quoted study of ritual and/as performance: “‘sacred’ if you like, provided that you recognize that they are the scenes of play and experimentation, as much as of solemnity and rules” (1987:25).

The Future of the Nomkhubulwane Rituals

South Africa is now the rape capital of the world; a South African female is raped every three minutes, and one-third of those raped are children (Mlangeni 1997; Morris 1997). Statistics vary, and the estimated numbers of black South African women raped and beaten are so large as to make the problem appear insoluble. What is known is that “poor and disadvantaged women are more likely to be raped than any other women” because “those most vulnerable to sexual attack are those without cars, those living in houses without proper security and those who live in violent areas” (Jeffery and Garman 1996:9). Given that the entire province of KwaZulu-Natal is considered a “violent area,” and that the historically black areas are more violent than anywhere else, nearly every Zulu woman living in rural KwaZulu-Natal is particularly vulnerable, and many of the women who participated in the festival are triply vulnerable: as poor women, as black women, and as residents of violent areas.

One public prosecutor has noted a “disturbing trend” in KwaZulu-Natal in which boys of 12 to 15 are raping little girls, some as young as 18 months of age (Pillay 1997:5). As sex education is haphazard at best among rural Zulu people, many of the children who survive rape do not even know that what has been done to them is a crime or has a name. Elder women who examine girls at the festival look at the openings of the girls’ vaginas. If the openings are closed and tight, the girls are believed to be virgins. Some “checkers” say they realized in the course of the examinations that many of the Zulu girls

10. Malunga Ngubane, in ritual dress, stands proudly by the blood of a sacrificed cow in 1997 while a group of men skin and disembowel it. (Photo by Kendall)
11. & 12. After a girl’s virginity has been verified, she is given a green mark on the forehead and is then smeared with red mud. (Photos by Kendall)
who believed themselves to be virgins were not. Some of the girls confessed they had been forced to have sex (Adeyemi 1997).

Rural Zulu women claim that girls were almost never raped “in our grandmothers’ time.” Gugu Ngobese’s mother-in-law, who is about 80 years old, claims, “When Nomkhubulwane was here, men did not beat women, and boys did not rape girls” (Rosalia Ngobese, December 1995). This belief was seconded by a male member of Ntombini KaNdabuko’s household who insisted that rape was unthinkable in his youth (KaNdabuko, May 1996); and by Malunga Ngubane, who describes a system, popular in his youth, of drilling into young males’ rectums with sticks in order to let blood and decrease sex drive (Ngubane, May 1996). All Zulu people interviewed who view pre-colonial times as a kind of paradise in which rape and many other ills did not occur, blame modernization and all its attendant ills for the change; but they also claim that if Nomkhubulwane were “present” in young people’s consciousness, and if young girls and young men were properly trained and observed the ancient rituals, rape and woman-abuse would not happen (Ngobese, Mkhulise, Ngubane 1996).

In any case, the fact that only verified virgins could participate in the rituals to Nomkhubulwane brought to open discussion the large numbers of Zulu girls who are rape survivors. The decision to be examined remained with each girl or woman. The ensuing discussions about rape and sexual behavior may well have been beneficial to rape survivors and to their communities. In discussing the way forward for the 1997 rituals, Mkhulise and Mabi expressed a need for a new ritual to cleanse girls who have been raped. Mabi said he wanted to perform such a ritual in 1996, but it required the sacrifice of a sheep, and nobody donated a sheep (December 1996). Mkhulise said that doing such a ritual would also serve to cleanse the wounds of Shaka, the Zulu king credited with bringing the nation together in the late 19th century. She says: “Although Shaka was stabbed long ago, many izangoma dream they need to cleanse Shaka’s wound. The ritual of purifying girls who have been raped will help those girls, but it will also help the nation” (December 1996).

Interestingly, this very point was made by another female isangoma, who came from the northern part of the province and was invited to lead the rituals in 1997. “We must cleanse Shaka’s wounds before we can move ahead,” she proclaimed, “and these rituals will do it” (August 1997). Ngobese invited izangoma from the north but failed to inform Bulwer-area izangoma of this fact ahead of time and broke protocol by failing to take time for formal introductions of the visiting izangoma to the local izangoma before the Friday ritual. As a result the Bulwer izangoma felt slighted and insulted. Mkhulise and Mabi felt they both gained “spirit-power” after the 1996 festival but lost it after the one in 1997 (December 1997, January 1998).

The differences between the 1996 and 1997 festivals were striking, and may be attributed in part to a breakdown of organization in 1997, and perhaps in part to an attempt by some politicians to co-opt the rituals for political gain. For at least the past decade, Zulu cultural identity has been used as a pawn by politicians eager to gain the votes of the majority Zulu population of the province. There is evidence that the political struggle for Zulu allegiance was begun and financed by conservative whites in South Africa who hoped to see Zulu people kill each other (proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are available on the Internet at http://www.truth.org.za). The IFP-ANC struggle in the decade between 1986 and 1996 resulted in the deaths of about 10,000 people, most of them Zulu (Aitchison 1997). I was unable to discover whether the izangoma from the north were associated with the Inkatha Freedom Party, which has its strength in the north, but I suspect they may have been. I do know that some of the southern izangoma are associated with the majority Afri-
can National Congress. I don’t wish to overemphasize what is only my unsub-
stantiated suspicion, but it is certainly true that KwaZulu-Natal has been the
scene of political rivalry tantamount to civil war, and that north/south divisions
are highly sensitive in the region, though the issue is by no means so simple as
north/south. In the north, which is primarily IFP-influenced, there are many
ANC Zulu people. In the south there are areas where IFP and ANC followers
live in the same villages, which is one of the reasons why the violence has been
particularly damaging to the lives of people in the south. That is in part why I
have never discussed political party allegiance with Mabi and Mkhulise, al-
though both have referred to harrowing escapes by themselves and members of
their families during the worst years of the violence. Since 1995, when I began
my fieldwork, it has been clear that it is simply not respectful for an outsider to
mention political parties nor to ask an isangoma her party allegiance. The sub-
ject can bring up animosities that the izangoma are attempting to heal.

In 1997 a cow and two sheep were sacrificed during the opening rituals,
but no one mentioned the need for a ritual for rape survivors, nor was such a
ritual enacted in 1998. According to Mabi, “We forgot about that part be-
cause our hearts were sore about the way we had been treated” (January
1998). Mkhulise adds, “There were many things we forgot because the noise
of our own sadness was loud in our ears” (January 1998). Relatively few
izangoma attended the Friday rituals in 1997; there were disputes about where
the rituals would be held, right up to the moment 15 minutes before they be-

During the second day of the 1997 festival a storm broke over the festival
grounds and a rainbow appeared clearly and distinctly overhead: Nomkhu-
bulwane had demonstrated her approval in a way recognized by Zulu people
since ancient times. The festival was considered an enormous success, even by
the sore-hearted izangoma from Bulwer (Mkhulise and Mabi, January 1998).
As Mabi told me, the goddess is bigger than our personal squabbles.

I find it useful to note the performative aspect of the rituals and their effects
on the female izangoma, at least in 1996. Near the end of the festivities in
1996, at a luncheon for izangoma and guests of the festival, the female
izangoma refused to serve the males their food. The men seemed shocked,
and Mabi cried out, “What’s wrong? You don’t serve us any more?” The
women looked down at their plates and ignored the men, who gradually
stood up and served themselves, laughing and shaking their heads.

Prior to this time there had been several occasions when we had eaten to-
gether, and always the women had served food to the men, who remained
seated and waited to be served. After the festival, I asked Mkhulise why the
women had not served the men on that day. Mkhulise explained, “We were
feeling so good about ourselves on that day, we were as big as the men and
we did not have to serve them” (1997).

What made the women feel “big”? I suggest it may have been the success
of their performances, coupled with identification with female divinity. The
Nomkhubulwane rituals are a reminder to Zulu people that in Zulu cosmol-
ogy it is possible for a female to have greater status than any male other than
her father. During the festival the women izangoma experienced increased
visibility, public validation, and agency from the very public nature of the
rituals. Here Gluckmann’s observations in 1935 may be helpful, for he mused,
“It does seem that the only socially recognized way […] that a woman can es-
cape from an impossible situation […] is to become a diviner. It is also the
only way an outstanding woman can win general social prestige” (270).

My observation is that this is still true for rural Zulu women who have not
yet gained the access to education, mobility, and a broader range of personal


options that are slowly coming to some Zulu women in urban areas. By performing herself as an extra-daily being, by performing in public and taking a public role as a community healer, a rural Zulu woman has access to status and enhanced self-esteem. Perhaps equally important, through her performances of song, dance, and rituals and her prescriptions of healing medicines, an isangoma is able (if only just barely) to support herself. If a genuine (as opposed to a politically expedient) resurgence in belief in Zulu religion and a resuscitation of rituals in which izangoma have central roles should occur in Zulu communities both rural and urban, izangoma could experience enhanced prestige and earning capacity. The rituals to Nomkhubulwane could enhance female izangomas’ sense of themselves as capable spirit-mediums, as valued performers in their communities, and as women acting for the well-being and empowerment of other women.

However, this is by no means a sure thing, and the spiritual meaning of the festival is under severe and increasing threat. Since 1995, a cultural arm of the Inkatha Freedom Party, represented by a woman named Andile Gumede, has been demanding a return to mandatory testing of virgins as part of its “return to our cultural practices” initiative. Gumede joined forces with Ngobese in 1997 and attended that year’s festival to supervise the virginity testing. Although some female izangoma do participate in virginity testing, the testing is not an activity associated with izangoma, is not directed or initiated by izangoma, and has nothing to do with the relation of the spirit to the visible world, healing, or any of the roles of the izangoma.

Precolonial virginity testing was performed privately by women in girls’ own families. The recent introduction of mass public testing is not traditional but is being represented as being so, and is being touted as a solution to AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and the spread of STDs because, as Ngobese says, “If girls know they are going to be tested publicly at least once a year, it will give them the strength to say ‘no’ to sex” (October 1998). Many Zulu observers, both
men and women, believe that mandatory and public virginity testing is
disempowering to young women and bodes a deepened patriarchalism that can
be harmful to Zulu women of all ages (Ntombela 1997; Masinga 1997; Zulu
1997). Thus the success of the festival as a spirit event directed by spiritual
leaders in 1996, and to some extant in 1997 is important to document: it re-
mains to be seen whether sexual and political party politics at the end of the
millennium will subsume a ritual that could have been both spiritually and cul-
turally strengthening to many Zulu people, especially izangoma and women.

Notes

1. References with name and year are to interviews I have conducted with the person
named in the reference. References that include month and year are to audio and/or
vitaped interviews, which have been stored in the Alan Paton Centre at the Uni-
versity of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.
2. I provided the transport and was asked to document on video a blood-sucking ritual
involving a goat and a cock on 8 March 1998.
3. The Inkatha Freedom Party frequently proclaims this initiative by means of speeches on
radio and television.

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