

THE 'NEW' AND STILL THE 'OLD' SOUTH AFRICA

Old traditions



The marriage ceremony of Jacob Zuma and Thobeka Madiba, 2 January 2010 (iafrica.com)

Many of our urban black people have become almost entirely westernised in terms of dress and custom; others still practice polygamy, circumcision and other African traditions; and some are a mixture of both.

When President Jacob Zuma married his fifth wife at his rural homestead of Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal on 2 January 2010, the President wore leopard skins and his bride, Thobeka Madiba wore traditional dress with a turban imported from the fashion house of Louis Vuitton in France.

The previous Christmas, in 2009, President Jacob Zuma went back to Nkandla in rural KwaZulu-Natal where he grew up. He rose early, tied a catapult to kill birds around his neck and went out with his brother to greet his extended family. They crossed the small uMikiza river to Mpinda-Mshaye at the foot of a mountain where their father, grandfather and mother are buried. They then went around the homestead greeting and eating goat meat with their family and drinking umqombothi (traditional beer) from a calabash, while Jacob Zuma regaled his family with stories of the days when he was a herder and witnessed a python kill a hyena. He also talked about the uMkikiza river (meaning naked) so named because the women used to gather there, strip naked and lay out their izidwaba (skirts made of cowhide) so that fleas could be burnt by the sun.

No doubt a few days later he would have been back in an urban setting, dressed in a formal suit, addressing foreign visitors.



A city Sotho man returns to his roots through traditional dance, probably in a rural area, where his ancestors came from.

The thanksgiving ceremony, *Mgidi* is also still practiced in both urban and rural centres. This is when the *sangomas* honour the ancestors. It involves the slaughtering of animals and is met with horror by many people, both white and black nowadays. Chickens are slaughtered with a knife, goats and cows with an assegai through the heart. If the animal cries out it is seen as a good sign, because it means it is calling the ancestors. The *sangoma* drinks some of the animal's blood which is believed to keep the *Ena*, or spirit of the ancestors alive. The ceremony is accompanied by dancing and rhythmic drumming and generally lasts 24 hours. As one black journalist explained: 'We must hold on to our Africanness and know who we are and where we have come from'.¹

Traditional leaders also still play a role and are recognised by the government, but not funded in any way for the development projects they undertake in the rural areas. This is a bone of contention because many people, including Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, traditional prime minister to the Zulu king in KwaZulu/Natal, believe traditional leaders play a significant role in communities, ensuring social cohesion and keeping alive the values and mores of the African people in a changing world.



President Jacob Zuma at the opening of the National House of traditional leaders. Interestingly, he is wearing formal western-style suit rather than traditional clothes on this occasion. Picture from Gallo Images

¹ Tselane Tambo, *The Star* 29 December 2009

MILESTONE MOMENTS

There are no restrictions on relationships anymore. The fear that people lived in if they were involved in inter-racial liaisons no longer exists.



DA Party leader, Mmusi Maimane with his wife, Natalie in June 2015. Picture from Gallo Images



Inconceivable 30 years ago: Two mixed race couples, Former Springbok rugby players, Bryan Habana and Chester Williams with their wives at the J & B Met Horse Race meeting in Cape Town, Picture by Matthew Jordan, The Saturday Star , 6 February 2010



Change for the better. A group of mixed race children exchanging stories of the day as they wait to be taken home at the end of a day at Parkview Junior School in Johannesburg (Photo Rhona Williams.)

NATIONAL TREASURES

Visitors to South Africa have commented on our wonderful climate, friendly people and national treasures: the game parks, mountain resorts, wine farms, beaches and even the desert, fascinating in its own way.

Our museums are also worth a visit, painful though most of our history is, but hopefully, too, visitors to our country will also experience the good things: African music in the pubs and shebeens, tribal dancing, the braaivleis (barbecue) with boerewors, pap and vleis, babootie, and other traditional Cape Malay dishes, Indian curries and our local beer and wine.



The Apartheid Museum (left) and Constitutional Hill (right) built on the site of the old fort prison where Nelson Mandela and other activists were held



A cycle tour through Soweto Township outside Johannesburg (left) and a walking tour through the bush at the Pilansberg Reserve (right). Photos by Errol Natrass



Typical weekend past time: the braai (photo by Rhona Williams)



The traditional braai with boerewors, pap and vleis (Picture courtesy of Christo Greylin Boerewors is a sausage spiced with coriander; it comes from the words boer (farmer) and wors (sausage); pap is a stiff bland porridge made from maize meal and vleis is meat, usually steak, ribs or chops).



Visitors to the Lion Park near Johannesburg get to cuddle a lion cub (photo by Gail Natrass)



The motto of the new coat of arms of South Africa is written in the Khoisan language of the !Xam people and translates as 'Diverse people unite'.

The rising sun symbolizes the promise of rebirth; the secretary bird which can slay serpents protects us against those who would do us harm; the crossed spear and knobkerrie show authority; the protea flower in the centre is symbolic of the beauty of South Africa; the two San figures enclosed in a shield surrounded by wheat ears are a symbol of growth and fertility; and the elephant tusks enclosing the bottom half represent wisdom, strength, moderation and eternity