

Ballot safe from seer's gaze



INDIGENOUS HEALERS: Call to draw them into voter education programmes.

VOTER educators in the Western, Eastern and Southern Cape are concerned about anxiety among some voters that their votes will not be secret from traditional diviners.

It seems that some traditional healers, used to acting as some form of social control, are threatening dire consequences to those who vote for a party other than the one suggested by themselves. Others say that once their diviner has prophesied which party must win, they must vote accordingly.

Traditionalist African healers or diviners (termed *izangoma* and *amagqirha* among the Zulu and Xhosa respectively) are reputedly all-knowing clairvoyants. They are said to be able to reveal intimate details of the social background, lives and actions of those who consult them for advice – details which ordinarily are hidden unless revealed by the individual concerned.

Diviners are believed to receive a call to the vocation from their deceased senior male ancestors (women, traditionally regarded as subordinate to men, do not call diviners to their vocation). Diviners are also believed to be in constant touch with the ancestral spirits, particularly in dreams and waking visions.

**How secret is the secret ballot?
Can traditional diviners unveil the
secret? Are voters safe from the
power of the sangoma to reveal
what is hidden? MANTON HIRST
investigates.**

As one informant put it, diviners and the ancestors are connected by a cosmic telephone. Diviners ultimately speak on behalf of the ancestors, from whom they derive the associated power to uncover concealed truths about their clients.

The ancestors give these perceptive powers to diviners so that they can decide what rituals are needed to overcome whatever illness or misfortune has overtaken the individual or community.

However, the diviners' capacity to reveal concealed truths depends in the first place on the willingness of clients to allow them to do so. A consultation with a diviner is a service that clients must pay for. This is the first giving of permission to the diviner to come close. Then, those who consult diviners participate actively in the consultation. This is the sec-

ond level of giving permission to the diviner.

It is an unbreakable rule of divinatory practice – as it is of fortune telling or psychotherapy – that those consulting the diviner must interact with her or him. Unless this interaction happens, the diviner (or fortune teller or psychotherapist) has no way of selecting the bits and pieces of the client's story that are relevant to the healing task. Naturally the diviner is then unable to do any healing.

In other words, a diviner can only claim to expose a concealed truth if a client is a willing participant – who requests this service, pays for it, and validates the procedure. Essentially, all the information "exposed" by the diviner is actually given to the diviner by the client.

So, from the perspective of actual performance, the diviner as all-knowing clairvoyant appears to be a sort of socio-cultural fiction. To some extent this is reflected in two Xhosa riddles:

• *Ndinamntu wam; uzidla ngobuxoki. Liqqirha elivumisayo* (I have a person of mine; he prides himself on being a liar. It is a traditional diviner).

Ballot safe

From Page 9

● *Ndinamntu wam; uye athethe, athi umntu nguzipeqe kanti akamazi. Ligqirha xa livumisayo* (I have a person of mine; she is used to speaking and saying a person is this and that, and yet she does not know the person. It is a diviner when she divines).

Nevertheless, the old sociological axiom remains valid that what people define as real becomes real in its consequences. If people believe that it is impossible for their votes to remain hidden from magical powers, these beliefs need to be taken seriously.

Claiming to have the power to know how people voted is a form of political intimidation. Intimidation is illegal. The social control function of healers is not compatible with the democratic process.

'The diviners' capacity to reveal concealed truths depends in the first place on the willingness of clients to allow them to do so'

However, short of locking up all the indigenous healers in the country, what can be done to address the problem?

Although there is a whole mythological complex which surrounds diviners, it is important to remember that in reality diviners are often as illiterate as the people to whom they give advice. In the same way as everyone else, diviners rely on the media for information.

The only effective solution is for indigenous healers country-wide to become a target group for voter education. Various bodies represent indigenous healers throughout the country and could co-operate in the task of taking voter education to their members.

Voter educators can make contact with indigenous healers in a particular locality – for example the rural/urban areas of Crossroads or Nyanga East – and explain why it is important for the ballot to remain secret.

Based on close contact with Cape Nguni diviners over the past 20 years, my own impression is that most indigenous healers will respond positively if they are approached politely and respectfully. Such an approach delivered co-operation between health workers and diviners in Grahams-town to set up a TB clinic.

Manton Hirst is the Principal Museum Human Scientist at the Kaffrarian Museum in King William's Town.

Date with destiny

From Page 1

manageable," she told *The Weekly Mail* in the first week of March. "Yes, we are coping," she said early in April. "We're keeping up to date with our timetable. We've got some really good people in place and good relations among them all. Everyone is carrying out their tasks."

IEC commissioner Ben van der Ross agrees. "We South Africans are a pretty resourceful lot. We're getting the message from the United Nations crowd that we can't do it. But we'll pull this thing together."

Fellow commissioner Helen Suzman shares this determination. Looking forward to retirement after what she hopes will be the final stretch of long public service ("This is Custer's last stand!"), she said of the IEC brief: "It's a pretty awesome task but everyone is working flat out and we intend to complete the job."

Suzman emphasises that the election should be seen as the harvest of years of struggle. "Although the fruits of victory are somewhat sour in some instances, they are to be savoured," she says.

Burton agrees, says work in the IEC is giving her a real sense of the delightful flavour that life in the new South Africa could have.

"One of the things that is wonderful is that people working in the IEC come from all sorts of different political persuasions and histories. This is illustrated by the fact that security in IEC offices is being provided jointly by the South African Police and the ANC. To see them working together day after day, shift after shift, is wonderful.

"In our office we're beginning to get a real sense of what things are going to be like in the future. So that's what I hope: that we're developing a little model of how things can be."

And it's not just the police and old ANC cadres who are in on the act of building the future. An astonishing variety of people have flooded IEC offices with offers of help. The person now responsible for human resources in Burton's office demanded to be released from his top-level job in the commercial sector for the election period. "This is the first and possibly the last time I can do something for my country," he told his boss, "and I am determined to do it."

It is also important to remember that, in addition to the vast effort of the IEC and other transitional structures, thousands of South Africans are quietly working away at

hundreds of projects, big and small, to build a better future. These people seldom make newspaper headlines. Their projects are unsung. Yet in a range of fields – from education to agriculture, from small business to conservation – South Africans are already engaged in reconstruction.

So, when you see the latest catalogue of horror on your TV screen, remember that you see only part of the picture. Over 90 percent of our country is at peace. The vast majority of South Africans want peace and many are actively engaged in making it happen.

At the same time we cannot be indifferent to how much suffering there is. Nightly we see or hear about the savagery that has been part of the South African political landscape for decades. Each person speechless with loss, each weeping victim of atrocity is one too many. Each rightly evokes our horror, our deep sympathy, our sense of outrage, our commitment to urgently seek ways to end the terror.

This commitment was a fundamental part of the motivation behind the meeting between State President FW de Klerk, ANC president Nelson Mandela, KwaZulu Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi and King Goodwill Zwelithini that took place on 8 April. The meeting was preceded by an encounter between three of these leaders – and others – at the traditional Zion Christian Church assembly of millions in Moria over the Easter weekend.

'In our office we're beginning to get a real sense of what things are going to be like in the future. So that's what I hope: that we're developing a little model of how things can be'

However sceptical some might have been about their motives, the sight of the three on their knees amid the masses of the faithful gave hope that there could at last be a breakthrough. It is profoundly disappointing, although not really surprising, that there was not.

Nevertheless, we should not despair. De Klerk said after the meeting that he thought much progress had been made, adding: "I think we have achieved today the beginning of negotiations that should have started long ago." The king said he hoped the meeting would show people at grassroots level what South Africa's leaders expected their followers to do. A task group has been set up to pursue unsolved issues.