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## Points of cultural weapons

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## Writing on the Wall

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WHEN is a cultural weapon?

Thoroughly confused by the Government's latest thinking on the issue, I sought enlightenment from a high-level source who preferred not to be named for traditional reasons. This record of our discussion may or may not prove culturally enlightening:

**Q:** I see the State has banned the carrying of a long list of dangerous weapons in unrest areas, on pain of 10 years' jail or a R20 000 fine, but the list doesn't include spears and "ceremonial" axes. Why so?

**A:** First, I suggest you consider all the stuff we have banned. It covers firearms, including machine guns, sticks shod with metal, metal rods and pipes, clubs, petrol bombs, stones, bricks, crossbows and bows and arrows, daggers, swords, knives, ordinary axes...

**Q:** But what about those ceremonial axes and spears?

**A:** I hadn't quite finished. Also banned are stones and bricks, picks, pick handles, garden forks, spades, hoes, pitchforks, sickles and scythes, plus hammers, spanners, screwdrivers, chains and tubes or tyres. You've got to agree that's a pretty comprehensive list.

**Q:** Ja no fine, but what about those spears...?

**A:** You might wonder about the position of someone found carrying a garden fork, spade, a spanner or screwdriver in the line of his work. The economy could be in even deeper trouble than it is already if we tried to ban those. So we've made special provision for genuine workers.

**Q:** But...

**A:** Such workers are exempt if they carry written proof from their employer. This can be demanded by a member of the security forces who may arrest and detain the person for up to 12 hours if he can't show it. You can't call us unreasonable in this regard.

**Q:** Great. Now tell why spears and ceremonial axes are left out.

**A:** Dear me, you can be tiresome. In certain cultures in this colourful land of ours it is traditional and perfectly normal to carry a spear or ceremonial axe. They are cultural adjuncts, especially on legitimate cultural occasions, and it would be bitterly resented if they were banned outright. Look at the US — even their constitution specifies the right to bear arms.

**Q:** But doesn't this give Inkatha and the Zulus unfair advantage?

**A:** No particular tribes or groups are specified. It could apply to anyone. For instance, most whites probably regard some sort of firearm or handgun as a traditional weapon these days. We must make allowances for everyone's culture, although we'd probably draw the line at landmines or missiles to protect suburban property from crime.

**Q:** What if the ANC were to say that AK-47s and petrol bombs are its own traditional weapons?

**A:** If they could motivate a good case, we'd consider it. They'd need to show the legitimacy of the occasion. Anyway, remember that the ANC already uses cultural weapons — look at its advocacy of a cultural boycott. Be fair.

**Q:** But that never killed anyone. What about the old saying — sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me?

**A:** Well, we could argue about that. In the last few decades there've been some bitterly anti-South African novels and plays written. That's why the State was forced to ban those. We threw the book at them, if you'll pardon the pun, as a counter-cultural weapon. Why, even music can be a weapon. Think of the East European composer Chopin and his "Revolutionary Etudes". But we digress.

**Q:** Okay, give me a definition of a legitimate cultural occasion?

**A:** Well, a peace rally for instance — the Inkatha people like to take spears and ceremonial axes to those.

**Q:** And if it ends up in further bloodshed?

**A:** Bad luck, but they say it wouldn't be a proper peace rally without weapons.

**Q:** And you believe them?

**A:** Well, that's what they consistently tell the security forces. They've told it to everybody — the police, the army and Military Intelligence. I understand they've even told it to the Marines. □