Ritual slaughter in South Africa

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South Africa
Background

Slaughter is the main area of animal management in which cultural and religious factors become issues. There are large populations of practicing Jews and Muslims, within Southern Africa, requiring Kosher and Halal meats respectively. There are also many strong African traditions that are still followed. What these beliefs have in common is the requirement for the animal to be alive and fully conscious for the slaughter.

“The Rainbow Nation”

South Africa has many different races and cultures. Nelson Mandela called it a “Rainbow Nation”.

Legislation SA

- The Constitution of South Africa allows “Religious Freedom” This includes ritual slaughter of animals.
- Legislation on public health, slaughter of livestock and abattoirs, allows slaughter for “own consumption”, not for sale.
- Under animal welfare legislation, “unnecessary cruelty” is a criminal offence
Meat Hygiene Control in SA

To make provision for the maintenance of proper standards of hygiene in the slaughtering of animals for the purpose of obtaining suitable meat for human and animal consumption, and in the handling, keeping and conveyance of such meat and animal products at and from abattoirs; to that end to prohibit the slaughtering of animals at any place other than an abattoir which complies with certain requirements with regard to the outlay and structure thereon, and the fixed equipment and other facilities to be installed or provided thereat, and which have been approved in terms of this Act; to require that such meat and animal products shall be handled or kept at and be removed from abattoirs in accordance with prescribed requirements; to provide that meat shall not be imported except on the authority of a permit issued by the director; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

The SPCA in SA

The National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA), founded in 1956 as the Federation of SPCAs, is the umbrella body for 97 Societies situated throughout the Republic of South Africa. All of these Societies are autonomous but are governed by The Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 169 of 1993.

Work of the NSPCA

- The NSPCA deals with national issues and has four operational units, namely, “Farm Animals”, “Society Liaison”, “Special Projects” and “Wildlife”, which work pro-actively to prevent cruelty.
- The NSPCA is also involved in addressing national issues and problems including legislation (laws, regulations, by-laws, codes of practice), providing registered training courses, defining policy, assisting SPCAs and dealing with national disaster relief.
Animals and People First

Why good animal welfare is important for feeding people, for trade and for the future

WSPCA, Eurogroup for Animal Welfare and RSPCA, 2005

Animal Welfare and Slaughter

- The SPCA and other welfare societies have a strong lobby and influence government decisions and policies.
- This includes abattoir construction and ritual slaughter.
- Both Halaal and Kosher slaughter allow the use of stunning before bleeding in cattle, smallstock and chickens in SA.

Three types of ritual slaughter

- **Halaal** slaughter of cattle, sheep, goats and chickens
- **Kosher** slaughter of cattle, sheep, goats and chickens
- **Traditional** ritual slaughter of mainly cattle and goats, also chickens
Halaal

- All Halaal slaughter is controlled by the Muslim Judicial Council Halaal Trust.
- Certified Muslim slaughterman are appointed by the MJC Halaal Trust
- A Halaal supervisor is appointed by the MJC Halaal Trust
- The MJC accepts slaughter by christian or jewish slaughtermen under certain conditions
- Pre-slaughter stunning using non-penetrating concussion stunning is permitted

Halaal rules

1. The "animal" or the "bird" must not be forbidden for Muslim consumption.
2. The actual process of cutting the neck (slaughter) must be done by a rational Muslim.
3. At the time of slaughtering, the slaughterman must be fully conscious, and he must have the intention of making a slaughter.
4. During slaughtering, both fronts of the animal are facing Makkah, and there is no difference whether on its left or right or standing upright.
5. At the time of cutting the neck, the animal or the bird must be fully alive with a settled life and the sign of this settled life is their moves after slaughtering.

Halaal rules (cont.)

6. At the time of slaughtering, the slaughter man must utter the prayer: "Bismillah Allahu Akbar" which means "In the name of Allah Almighty great" and he should not mention any name other than Allah mentioning the name of Allah should be on each animal/bird "Zahiba".
7. The slaughtering process has to be done using a sharp knife made of iron.
8. The animal slaughtered in a fast manner in such a way that both the trachea, the oesophagus and the jugular veins are quickly cut (with a single cut i.e. the knife must not be lifted) cut below Adam’s apple, it must be retained on head and blood drained out in full killing the animal quickly.
Halaal rules: (cont.)

9. The actual cut on the neck has to be on the slaughtering site i.e. from the front of the neck and not from its back.
10. During the slaughtering process, the neck should neither be cut completely nor broken thus avoiding the severance of the spinal cord, which results in an instance death.
11. The distance from slaughtering site to scalding site must be long enough to insure complete death of the bird.
12. During the slaughtering process avoid cutting any part of the animal/bird until complete death is assured.

Halaal rules (cont.)

13. The equipment used for killing pigs must be NOT used for slaughtering animals or birds aimed for halaal consumption; also the area must be free of all contamination by pig meat or by non-halaal meat.
14. There should not be any chance of contamination of "halaal" meat with "pig" meat (or "non-halaal" meat of other animals) either in the slaughterhouses, freezers, and chillers or at the time of packing, loading or unloading.
15. The complete operation/process of the shipment must be supervised by a devoted Muslim who fully understands the above mentioned halaal rules.

Halaal : welfare problems

- Main problem in halaal slaughter in South Africa is export of cattle and goats to Mauritius by ship.
- Some questions exist about humane transport by sea.
- Mauritius does not allow stunning during halaal slaughter.
- Home slaughter of goats during festivals is not monitored. It is legal.
- Non-penetrating concussion stunning is reversible – cattle can “wake-up” if not bled out quickly.
Kosher

Kosher (dietary laws) means the observance of kosher according to the Torah. The Jewish interpretation of the bible states that the laws of kashrut were given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai and it is due to these laws that Jewish food must be kosher (ritually fit) before it can be consumed. The word Torah in essence means “teaching” and states that Jews should not eat pork and details which of the animals of the land, sky and sea are allowed to eaten and which are not, even insects that may and may not be utilized. There are also writings telling believers they are not allowed to eat animals not slaughtered according to the instructions given in the Torah.

Kosher slaughter (shehitah)

Rules for religious slaughter (kashrut) were written down in a series of volumes of the Talmud as well as in other religious texts. A part of kashrut deals with the method of killing animals for food (shehitah). This ritual slaughter may only be performed by a person who has studied the method for over a year. He is known as a shochet. During his year of study a shochet learns to sharpen the slaughter knife, known as a challif. The shochet kills the animal by cutting its neck in a single stroke. If the meat is to remain kosher it must go through the oesophagus, trachea as well as both the carotid arteries and jugular veins, without excessive damage to the animal’s tissue. The animals must be alive and fully conscious during the proceedings and as such pre-stunning is not allowed.
Kosher slaughter in SA

The NSPCA approves the use of an upright box with a chin lift ("cradle") for Kosher slaughter with post-cut stunning within 20 seconds (NSPCA, 2007). According to Veary (Personal communication, 2006) shock percussion stunning causes a loss of consciousness for between 30 - 60 seconds. Brain anoxia due to exsanguination takes 7-10 seconds in calves and 85-120 seconds in adult cattle. The vertebral artery maintains blood supply and cerebral activity after throat cutting. This has welfare implications if animals are not stunned. There are also rules for kosher slaughter of poultry after stunning.

Kosher slaughter: problems

- Too few kosher abattoirs as the "cradle" for slaughtering and the rules for meat inspection are too costly
- Post-cut stunning of adult bovines may not cover the period of exsanguination

Traditional/cultural slaughter

Most of the African cultures have traditional methods of slaughtering cattle for special occasions such as weddings and deaths. These traditions are not as common in the present day, where family groups and tribes have been split up, but they still occur – often in the rural areas and even in back yards of houses in the cities. In South Africa ‘backyard slaughter’ in urban areas, whether for cultural reasons or home consumption, requires permission from the city council in the form of a permit.
Cultural slaughter: Pedi people

The Pedi people treat cattle with such reverence they are referred to as 'kgomo ke modimo mo nko e metsa' (a beast is a god with a wet nose). They are slaughtered only on special occasions. The slaughtering must be done at dawn at the cattle kraal, in the presence of other cattle. The slaughtering weapon is an assegai, which is plunged behind the animal's left shoulder to pierce the heart. It is good luck if the blow causes instantaneous death and the animal rolls over on its side. As soon as the animal is down, the butchers cut its throat and collect the blood (madi), to be used in cooking. The rest of the cattle in the kraal are turned out and must walk in the blood of the slaughtered animal.

Ritual slaughter: Zulu people

Cattle are slaughtered on all major occasions such as marriage, on reaching puberty and for death. Sacrifices are also held occasionally in order for the living to come into contact with ancestral spirits to ask for favours or thank them for their blessings. Bulls are killed in honour of male ancestors and cows in honour of female ancestors. Even nowadays, most men try to sacrifice a beast for their ancestors at least once.

The general procedure for the slaughter is that the cattle are brought in from the pasture then the sacrificial beast, as well as several others are driven into the kraal. The priest walks to the cattle fold shouting praises to the ancestors. The bovine is then stabbed with an ancestral assegai in the heart. If the animal does not die on the first stroke the girls are paid to cover up its wounds with white beads. If the beast does not bellow when it is slaughtered, it means the spirits will not accept the animal and another must be slaughtered.
Ritual slaughter: Goats
- Goats are slaughtered to please the ancestors or ask them for help with any problems.
- The ancestors are called "amadlozi" in isiZulu, "izinyanya" in isiXhosa, and "badimo" in Sesotho.
- Often this is associated with traditional healers.
- It is also a major source of income for informal traders.

Problems with ritual slaughter
- Goats are transported over 2500 km from Namibia to Kwa-Zulu Natal for ritual and informal slaughter.
- Cattle are often transported in unsuitable vehicles and may sometimes be immobilised on arrival by severing the tendons in the carpus and tarsus.
- There is no monitoring and the slaughterman may have no experience.
OIE

In 2003 the OIE working group on animal welfare developed a work programme and reviewed the scope, drafted terms of reference, and identified potential members for four separate groups covering land transport, sea transport, humane slaughter (including religious slaughter) and humane killing for disease control purposes.

Duties of veterinarians (OIE)

According to the OIE welfare group, the duties of veterinarians include active involvement in animal welfare organisations such as the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in a number of countries.

Discussion & Conclusions

- Although ritual slaughter is allowed under freedom of religion in SA, it is still governed by the welfare organisations (SPCA) as there may be no "unnecessary cruelty".
- Legislation on slaughter and meat hygiene in South Africa is in line with the OIE recommendations.
- Halaal and Kosher slaughter in SA include stunning, thanks to lobbying by the SPCA and veterinarians in VPH.
Thank you for your attention. Are there any questions?