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Abstract

This study traces the history of the Zwelibomvu faction fight of the 1980s. Zwelibomvu is a rural village outside the city of Pinetown, in the KwaZulu-Natal province, in the north east of South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal province is often confused with popular notions of ethnic history that sees Africans living within a chiefdom as one unit. This universal outlook fails to acknowledge the agency in the role of ordinary people in shaping the development of their own communities. The study of Zwelibomvu illuminates a complex gendered web of interactions between groups that cut across blood or clan lines. In the 1980s these social networks took the form of ingoma (traditional Zulu dance) dancing chains that were associated with certain surnames or clans in the community, and thus, for example, a Khwela or Magcaba dance. Community groups were attracted to certain dancing styles, and would join the Magcaba or Khwela dance group to form dancing chains with those surnames (in this case Khwela and Magcaba).

I argue on the basis of research that these dancing associations did not serve the entertainment purposes only. They also served the political and patriarchal interests of Zwelibomvu as a traditional rural village. In Zwelibomvu, claims to security in times of war were attached to people’s affiliation to certain dancing chains. The multiple role of the dancing chains became more pronounced during the Zwelibomvu faction fight of the 1980s, in which the Zwelibomvu groups fought on different sides of the fight, their involvement being informed mainly by their affiliation to certain dancing chains. The analysis of the faction fight becomes more complex as scholars try to understand its root cause. The rules of engagement in it were informed by dynamics of Zwelibomvu as a patriarchal community, unique political affiliations within the chiefdom and other broad patterns of control within which gendered relations of power were enveloped. The analysis Zwelibomvu faction fight, and response to and involvement in it, thus forces scholars to apply different frameworks to accommodate different contours that influenced it. Analyzing the role of the dancing chains during the fight, the study concludes that in the 1980s ingoma played a multiple role: to address tensions from the past, reinforce the power of patriarchy, stabilize political relations within the chiefdom, and manipulate local social relations between groups and, by extension, the manner of involvement in the faction fight.

Keywords: Dance, Violence And Patriarchy, Faction Fight.

INTRODUCTION

No one asked me anything. Who cared what I felt and wanted? Yet, people were spitting when they saw me, they called me “a woman of war”. I used to get so pissed off. At one stage I even insulted them, calling them under their mothers’ skirts. All I ever wanted was to get married, have children and be a wife like other women. Why did life punish me like this, with all these people dying in my name, just for loving someone? When am I going to
die and forget about this? And you are here now, asking me to go back to those days and relive the experience…

The above quotation expresses emotions and sentiments that were expressed by a lady, referred to as aunt B in this study, during one of the conversations between her and the author in 2009. The quotation captures the contradictions and complexity of village life at the heart of which is the analysis of the faction fight, which is the focus of this article. This essay uses the case study of the Zwelibomvu faction fight to demonstrate that faction fights are dynamic and complex, and should not be viewed through one lens. In the twentieth century, the history of Zwelibomvu has been characterized by ambiguities of belonging to social formations that transcended family or ethnic identity boundaries and fashioned complex social interactions at a village level. In the 1980s claims to safety and security were attached to affiliation to certain social groups known as dancing chains or associations in Zwelibomvu.

This paper draws attention to how these dancing associations influenced human interactions during the faction fight, re-enforced family patriarchal values and influenced, and also influenced by, the operation of Zwelibomvu as a traditional political authority. The multifaceted role of these dancing associations becomes more pronounced in the analysis of the Zwelibomvu faction fight that took place in the 1980s. The analysis of the history of the Zwelibomvu faction fight emphasizes the significance of shared sentiments beyond blood lines, patriarchal control over individuals and information, the complexity of traditional political leadership, and how these factors all informed the manner in which the fight itself was/is remembered. The article concludes that individual and group responses to the faction fight were drawn from broad social, political and cultural contexts which cannot be defined within a single framework. To demonstrate this, the article examines three aspects of the Zwelibomvu faction fight, outlined in the background to the study below.

Background to the Study

In the 1980s, in a small village called Zwelimoovu, just outside Pinetown, about thirty miles west from the city of Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province, in the north east of South Africa, a fight involving three major surnames/clans; Khwela, Magcaba and Ndindane, broke out, leaving many people dead and some injured from both sides of the fight. Aunt B belonged to the Ndindane clan. The dynamics of the fight unfolded when what began as a romantic relationship between her (aunt B) and a Khwela man caused clashes between the Khwela clan and her former lover’s clan, Magcaba, a story that has come to be known as the Zwelibomvu Faction Fight. Narratives from Zwelimoovu residents place aunt B at the center of the clashes, hence “the woman of war”.

This article forms part of a new research project that the author is conducting. In the late 1990s the author was a student who also worked as a research assistant for Dr David Hemson, a researcher and sociologist who is currently a director for Human Sciences Research Council in Durban, South Africa. Dr Hemson examined the dynamics of the Zweliboovu faction fight in

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2 In this study a clan is defined as a group of people sharing family ties, culture and a line of descent. In KwaZulu-Natal, in the north east of South Africa, males take surnames from some common distant ancestors, from whom they claim direct descent through male lines.

3 South African historiography has been selective in its definition of political violence. In the 1980s and 1990s the term political violence was used to describe political conflict between opposition (political) parties, mainly the United Democratic Front/African National Congress (UDF/ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The strict use of the term political violence left the definition of faction fight outside its scope. The supposed lack of political affiliation in the faction fights has relegated them to the older less political category.

4 Mrs Magcaba T, interview with the author, May 1998, Zweliboovu, near Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and telephonic conversation with her (Mrs Magcaba), November 2010.
relation to its social and economic impact. The author is revisiting the subject from a completely different academic angle, the main goal being to publish a book at the end of 2015. The dynamics of this fight are complex. This article is a preliminary analysis of three of the key aspects covered in the book. Firstly, the article analyzes some of the broader patterns of control within which gendered relations of power are embedded. It examines the manner in which patriarchal control played out in the context of *ingoma* (traditional Zulu dance) as a tool for social inclusion or exclusion. Through *ingoma*, boundaries of gender and space were policed, exposing structural dynamics of power within which patterns of coercion and control were effected. The analysis of the Zwelibomvu fight exposes clashes between patriarchal limits on women’s action and space and her (aunt B’s) decision to love outside the accepted norm, which led to violence. Secondly, the article examines the definition of traditional political leadership as a complex social structure. The formation of *ingoma* dancing chains or associations in the 1980s, in which surnames or clans came together to share a particular dancing style, was/is part and parcel of community building in Zwelibomvu. As a form of entertainment at social gatherings, *ingoma* plays a significant social role of bringing people together. In the case of Zwelibomvu in the 1980s, such social institutions as *ingoma* dancing chains were, however, also influenced by local dynamics governing the chiefdom as a traditional authority. For example, people who joined the Magcaba dance group were those who favored a Magcaba person as a headman in the village. The Magcaba clan was known to have a special political relationship with the late Chief Zwelinjani Mkhize, under whose leadership Zwelibomvu was in the 1980s. During the fight, the Magcaba clan enjoyed their political influence as groups that supported them, and their adherents from inside and outside the village, joined them to form a strong force against the Khwelas.

However, relationships and distinctions between surnames or clans were not completely cut and dry. There have been cross interactions between individuals, for example through marriages, which to some extent challenge the validity of singularly categorizing social groupings. Nonetheless, Chief Mkhize’s part in the matter remains ambiguous, to a point where some residents claim that he favored one side of the fight, the Magcabas and their adherents. Finally, the article examines the role of aunt B’s family in the fight, and the manner in which patriarchal control at a family level reinforced traditional community values that impinged upon her basic human rights as a family member and a citizen. In conclusion, in the 1980s *ingoma* played a multiple role: to address tensions from the past, reinforce the power of patriarchy, stabilize political relations within the chiefdom, and manipulate local social relations between groups and, by extension, the manner of involvement in the faction fight. This is the context within which to analyze the Zwelibomvu faction fight of the 1980s.

**Notes on sources**

The absence of sources written by Africans themselves is an obvious obstacle in this study. In public records there is hardly available data on Zwelibomvu that could help assess the economic and social dynamics that have shaped its history since its inception as a community and political entity in the nineteenth century. The Mbumbulu Magistrate court, south of Durban, within whose administrative jurisdiction Zwelibomvu fell when disturbances erupted, does not house many written records about the chiefdom. Housed in the Mbumbulu Magistrate Court are records about faction fights within the Mbumbulu district. IsiZulu language newspapers, mainly

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5 South Africa is divided into urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Rural areas are structured into chiefdoms. Traditional authority refers to a leadership structure that comprises mainly chiefs at the top of the pyramid, headmen and traditional councillors. Under such leadership structures chiefly power is hereditary.

6 In this study, a chiefdom is defined as a political entity in a geographical territory under the administration of the chief.

7 The Mbumbulu Magistrate Court houses documents in which experiences of the Mbumbulu residents during the Mbumbulu fights between factions were recorded. See for example Mbumbulu Court Records, Inquest
Ilanga lase Natal and UmAfrica, between 1983 and 1989, also reported on many faction fights and political disturbances in the province. In all these records however, very few articles refer to the Zwelibomvu violence. Generally, the magistrate court and newspapers carry records with limited data.

The history of Zwelibomvu therefore relies mostly upon the collection and interpretation of oral records. Oral sources also carry their own flaws. Not all of them are completely useful; it is not always easy to glean anything helpful from them on the case study under discussion. Moreover, in some cases, responses were influenced by the informant’s political interests or social affiliation. For example, an individual who is part of the Magcaba dance group or a member of the Magcaba clan, or a traditional councillor who works closely with the Magcaba headman, is likely to speak in favour of the Magcabas, against the Khwelas. However, as mentioned earlier, marriages between the Magcabas, Khwelas, Ndimandes and other surnames have created a complex social network which, to some extent, influences Zwelibomvu people’s connection to, and judgement of, the fight. Nevertheless, sensitive issues still demand extreme caution and sensitivity. Hence sources, whether archival or oral, should be treated with caution. Despite these challenges however, progress is being made in interviewing many men and women of the Zwelibomvu community.

The Zwelibomvu chiefdom

Zwelibomvu is a small chiefdom of one and a half to two million residents next to Shongweni dam, about thirty miles west from the city of Durban. Some of the residents interviewed claim that the Magcaba clan was the first one to occupy Zwelibomvu from Zululand in the nineteenth century. There is a perceived political power that the Magcabas have over other clans who joined them later in Zwelibomvu. Such political claims have, however, not gone unchallenged. In the late twentieth century, headmanship has been contested between the Magcabas and other surnames. Although the contest was subtle, it has influenced the manner in which community building took shape in Zwelibomvu. As indicated somewhere in this article, the dancing relationships between the Magcabas and the Ndimandes, and other surnames, were partly shaped by political choices in which certain clans/surnames preferred a Magcaba clan member to be a headman. Community building in Zwelibomvu has operated under a wide range of relations. For example, women have continued to marry across their clan boundaries, creating new bonds of kinship in the community. This not only created a diverse community, but also promoted matrilineal relations that directly and indirectly affected land inheritance and political and social relations between groups. These community dynamics complicated people’s involvement in the faction fight which initially involved the Magcaba, Khwela and Ndimande clans. Rules of engagement in the fight were informed by a negotiated sense of belonging to particular families, clans and dancing chains. Such social formations as ingoma dancing chains were

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9 In a traditional political system, there are three layers in the pyramid of power. At the top is a chief, a headman in the middle who works closely with the chief, and traditional councillors who represent different wards in the leadership structure. These form the traditional executive council of the chiefdom.

10 Zululand forms the northern part of the present KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa.
11 As the interview with Mr Magcaba D, April 2011, Zwelibomvu, suggests, the fact that senior officials with influence in the chiefdom at a local level, mainly the headmen, have always come from the Magcaba clan suggests the amount of political influence that the Magcaba clan holds in the community.
12 Magcaba D, interview with the author, October 2009, Zwelibomvu.
13 Community building in this context is defined as a process whereby people of different social, class or cultural backgrounds come to live together as one community.
influenced by political forces governing the chiefdom as a traditional authority. For example, some Zwelibomvu residents argue that Chief ZweliniJani Mkhize deliberately did not stop the fight because of his close political relationship with the Magcaba clan and its adherents whom he favored. 14 Therefore, community building in Zwelibomvu followed identity traits that were locally produced by people to consolidate and negotiate their space in the community.

Traditional Leadership in South African Historiography

The role of traditional leadership has been under spotlight since the dawn of democracy in the new South Africa. Such scholars as Barbara Oomen, Ineke Van Kessel and Lungisile Ntsebeza produced impressive works on the subject. 15 Since the pre-colonial era, chiefs have played various roles. Under colonial and apartheid systems they served as instruments for indirect rule. 16 After 1948 they stabilized the Homeland/Bantustan policy. 17 Up until the 1980s, traditional leaders were seen as coercive agents of the colonial and Bantustan regimes. 18 They have not been seen as allies in the liberation struggle. Zwelibomvu is one of the traditional authorities that, until recently, resisted the influence of popular democratic movements into their areas. This left the chiefs and their traditional executive committee with enormous power that the new democratic state minimally interfered with. 19 As Mamdani points out, the traditional patriarchal system 20 of power places the king at the centre of power, “the chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch (male family head) in every homestead or kraal. Whether in the homestead, or village of the kingdom, authority was considered a tribute of personal despotism”. 21 So in the 1980s, there was an enormous power of the traditional in Zwelibomvu. Accompanying this were gendered customary reinforcements that were also reflected in the absence of female representation in the community’s leadership forums. The relevance, and context, of emphasizing this is that these unequal power relations were extended to families. They gave aunt B’s family senior male members enormous power to try and control her marriage choices and strengthened their relationship with her former lover’s clan, the Magcabras, against her wish to marry outside the dancing chain.

14 Discussion with Ndimande aunt B, July 2009, Hammarsdale.
16 Indirect Rule referred to a system of ruling Africans through their traditional leaders, mainly chiefs, who served as instruments of colonial rule.
17 Under the Homeland System (from the 1950s), Africans were grouped according to their language, for example isiZulu speakers in the KwaZulu Homeland (now KwaZulu-Natal province). Africans were supposedly holding to distinctive sets of practices and common belief systems in each homeland.
19 In one of his telephonic conversation with the magistrate in the Mbumbulu Tribal Court, under whose jurisdiction Zwelibomvu falls, Dr David Hemson, the Director of the Human Science Research Council in Durban with whom the author conducted research in Zwelibomvu towards the end of the 1990s, was shocked that the magistrate had never heard of, or been in, Zwelibomvu, which suggests a lack of interest in the chiefdom on the government side. For more details see Hemson and Cele, 1998, “The earth is Red: The Popular Traditional and Community in KwaZulu-Natal”, an unpublished paper co-presented at the Workshop on “Popular Culture and Democracy”, Westbrook Hotel, Tongaat, KwaZulu-Natal, 15-20 November 1998.
20 Patriarchal System is a form of social system in a community in which a male person (patriarch) runs and controls a family, clan or chiefdom. Under such systems women have no influence. For example, in marriage, children have to be called by their father’s surname or clan.
In traditional communities such as Zwelibomvu, issues of secrecy, power and security are at the heart of ruling. There is a general understanding that those in power control the information, and that certain information is not to be given out to strangers without the local authorities’ approval. As a result, for many residents, what caused violence between the Magcabas and the Khwelas is a “privileged” information of the ruling class, in this case the chief, headmen and traditional councillors. Because of control over information, the fight in Zwelibomvu has continued to be explained as having been caused by “a woman”, aunt B. In addition to gender divisions and generation gaps in terms of governing, the patriarchs wanted independence from the urban political and administrative structures of the government. In his response to one of the research questions, Chief Zwelinjani Mkhize said, “we want to exclude ourselves from the government structures, we do not need them here, we have traditional councillors”. The patriarchs maintained a local and tribal traditionalist-citizenship which disenfranchised women and younger men, and posed a black-on-black distinction between urban and rural.

In the late 1990s, however, water was being provided by a Water Board, primary education by the national department, a radio-telephone system installed by Telkom, and electricity links by Eskom. The intrusion of electronic media, which offers alternatives to traditional forms of celebration such as ingoma, has already made inroads into traditional institutions of control, imposing its own influence. Some of the community residents belong to certain political parties, mainly Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). During elections people go to voting stations to cast their ballots. What all this means is that tradition and modernity have co-existed to the present. Nevertheless, in the face of unrelenting modernity accompanied by popular democratic advances, the patriarchs of tribal communities still see/saw traditional institutions as part of the last remaining primary resistance to a political order which they do not want. Such powers have remained unchecked in many rural areas, including Zwelibomvu. The situation has been exacerbated by political imbalance, or lack of common grounds, between rural areas and urban political movements and developments in South Africa. This is another context within which to analyse the violence which took place in Zwelibomvu in the 1980s.

The Zwelibomvu Faction Fight

Like other communities, Zwelibomvu has had its share of civil disturbances, one of them being the devastating civil war that took place between 1984 and 1990. As mentioned earlier in the introduction of this article, Zwelibomvu residents claim that the war was “over a woman”, aunt B.

23 Interview with Khwela F, 3 July 1997, Zwelibomvu.
24 Mkhize, Chief Z, interview with the author, 6 May 1998, Mbumbulu.
25 Mr Sithole D, interview with the author, 28 January 1997, Zwelibomvu.
26 Magcaba D, interview with the author, February 9 2011, Zwelibomvu.
Houses were burned down, people dispersed as refugees throughout the region. The impact of the fight was also felt in the neighboring areas such as Desai and Mangangeni areas. Criminals took advantage of the situation. In 1986, Fano Ntinga, the leader of the Mangangeni fighting party which had joined the fight said:

The chief is in hiding because of threats by those people who want to attack him. Be careful that no one takes over your property while you are away. Once you settle in your house, when you hear the gun shots by criminals, do not think that the war is back and run away. We will continue to have such meetings and make sure that peace is restored among fighting parties. 29

It seems surprising that, while South Africa witnessed chaotic conditions of resistance and repression in the 1980s, Zwelibomvu would sacrifice everything in the battle over the ‘ownership’ of a woman-bride. A glimpse of community life shortly before and during the conflict provides a framework within which to understand the contradictions of patriarchal life accompanying the fight. As already alluded to, in the 1980s in Zwelibomvu the Ingoma dance associations formed an important element in community building. These were pockets of interest groups that, while not defined within the national political context of the time in South Africa, asserted a certain degree of influence on social relations within the chiefdom. Various dancing styles were associated with certain clans or surnames. The Magcabas and Khwelas have been known for fighting over which dance group dances better at social functions such as traditional weddings. Various dancing styles attracted other surnames/clans to either dance group. For example, in the 1980s in Zwelibomvu, the Ndimande males joined the Magcaba dancing group, and the Nenes and Ndlovus joined the Khwela dancing group. Such social formations as dancing chains do not always have a name, racial or ethnic, they are/were social groups with common interests and aspirations.

Tensions became apparent early through the ‘alliance’ of clans in dancing formations. Ingoma was/is important in the celebration of traditional life. As one informant said, “ingoma is good because it keeps people together, and makes you proud of yourself”. 30 In a sense it (ingoma) was a parade of men, an exhibition of their prowess and the presentation of the ability of individual men. Ingoma was/is also important to the presentation of the clan and to courtship. It did not only extoll social values, it also exhibited attractive sexual energies of men. As some informants said, “You know traditional dance is good because it impresses women, you know it makes you popular and women love you. Women like noise, as long as it’s music, and made by men you know….women shout when the men dance, so it impresses women”. 31

In a patriarchal system, in Zwelibomvu in this case, male dominance, pride and prowess was/is defined and projected in various fashions. In a setting where antagonism between the groups was already severe, competition over women’s attention was likely to take a more violent turn with dire consequences. Indeed the breakdown in relationships between the two clans, the Magcabas and the Khwelas, first became openly visible in the dance contest: “They were not in good terms, they used to fight over such things as ingoma. The one party danced better than the other, which created jealousy”, one of the interviewees said. 32 In the dancing contests alliances were formed; the Magcabas and the Ndimandes came together as a troupe to weigh in against the other clans. They adopted a common style and presentation. Ingoma allowed the Magcabas to draw the lesser clans around themselves and to extol a dominant style of dance which even the Khwelas acknowledged was of some antiquity, it became known as the Magcabas’ ingoma: “I think they came with it from Zululand. Anyone who came here later, found them here, and they were dancing it. During these traditional gatherings people used

28 Desai is an area in the south eastern ends of Zwelibomvu, and Mangangeni is a small chiefdom in the north east of Zwelibomvu.
31 Mr Khwela, MB, interview with the author, 7 August 1997, Zwelibomvu.
to compete. Some people are known to be the best dancers here”, as another interviewee said.

Unfortunately the contesting styles lead to a sharp division: “You know, if they were at a feast, and all used to dance ingoma, the Khwelas used to do it wrongly, and when they were told that that was not the way to do it, they just picked up their weapons and fought”, one of the interviewees said.

Matters came to a head over the proposal to, and abduction of, a woman from the Ndimande clan. After a feast in the community, the woman who had long been engaged to a Magcaba man (who had another wife) was abducted and taken to the Khwela family. When the Khwelas came to her family to negotiate lobola (bridewealth), the Ndimandes sent them away out of respect for their former ‘son-in-law’, the Magcaba man. The Ndimandes and Magcabras then came together, formed an army and took the woman back by force. As one informant said:

As they were leaving with the woman from the Khwela home, the Khwelas followed them, pleading with them to leave the woman but the Ndimandes said “No this is our daughter”. As they reached the area next to the clinic, the parties stopped and the Ndimandes said to the Magcabras: “Here is your bride, take her, you paid cows for her…these Khwelas are mad, they can go to hell if they like”.

According to one interviewee, one of the Khwelas who went to plead for her return was put to death and the battle began in earnest. As clashes between the Khwela and Magcaba clans advanced, the alliances made around the ingoma dancing formed the fighting groups. Before aunt B’s experience, tensions over women were part of Zwelibomvu’s daily life, but they had not led to a serious warfare. During this particular one, clashes turned into skirmishes, and the internal war gathered momentum. Initially there was a limited war in which both sides fought within a ‘traditional’ version of warfare. These limits were overthrown, however, as the battle approximated to a stalemate.

People died, killing one another with the spear, a traditional weapon, before starting to use guns. After a few months people began to use guns. That made all people run away because killing was becoming easy. We went to the surrounding townships. And more than 100 people died. We all went away, this became the world of animals. It became thick bushes for animals.

Houses on both sides were burnt down. The area was looted of whatever remained by either party or organized outside gangs who descended on the area in trucks and took away everything to the very last object of value: these included corrugated iron roofs, car engines, furniture, sleeping blankets, clothes, pots, traditional skirts, cutlery, ploughs and yokes. The devastation was absolute, and the war had to come to an end. In the late 1980s, the chief who had been absent in all these events officiated over a peace agreement, and a new headman was appointed to rebuild the area. The role of the state was limited to picking up some of the bodies and issuing death certificates. Between 100-150 men died, and yet there is no official record extant in the Natal archives, no police report, and no prosecutions.

While there is no evidence to connect this fight to issues of political resistance and change of the 1980s in South Africa, as mentioned earlier, it seems unconvincing that clans who had intermarried and lived together could sacrifice everything in the battle over the “ownership” of a woman-bride. Scholars have identified various factors that generally lead to faction fighting. These include power or succession, death during quarrel, competition, insults, and women related

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34 Mrs Khoza M, and Mrs Magcaba T, interview with the author, 20 March 1996, Zwelibomvu.
35 Ndimande, aunt B, conversation with the author, Hammersdale. April 2009, in which she (aunt B) stated that the Magcaba man did not love her that much, they had not seen each other for some years, and she had lost interest in him.
36 Mrs Khoza and Mrs Magcaba, interview with the author, 20 March 1996, Zwelibomvu.
conflicts. 38 Faction fights can also be caused by structural problems. These include land shortage, unfair treatment by the state, competition for resources, or long standing unresolved tensions between groups. 39 While some Zwelibomvu residents interviewed claim that the fight was over a woman, the analysis of narratives from other residents reveal the complexity and contradictions of the traditional patriarchal life. In social and academic discourse, revenge ideology and long term enmity are cited as common cultural explanations of violent conflicts in which social gatherings such as weddings or dance events trigger a sense of revenge or retaliation. 40 The notion of tensions due to quarrels from the past is more plausible for Zwelibomvu, a chiefdom within which small interest groups lived together and occasionally fought one another. Aunt B and other Zwelibomvu residents stated that there have always been tensions between the Magcabas and the Khwelas, the source of which many residents are not comfortable to freely talk about. But they share the sentiments that:

Well, they never got along, they used to fight when they met at a social occasion. These dance conflicts have always been serious between these two groups. If the Magcabas dance at a traditional wedding and win the dance competition, the Khwelas would be angry and want to dance better to revenge the defeat at the next social occasion. 41

Mr D Magcaba, the son of the late local headman who passed away in 2010, shared with the researcher that some surnames, mainly the Khwelas, have had problems with the fact that the position of headman has stayed within the Magcaba clan. Such claims convinced aunt B that the late Magcaba headman deliberately did not stop the fight because “he wanted the Magcabas to crush and finish the Khwelas. I hate that man. I hope he rots in hell one day”. 42 In February 2014, Mr B. Mkhize made a comment that “we, the Mkhizes, have been sidelined. The chief here is a Mkhize. Why do we have Magcaba people as headmen and traditional councilors? This is our heritage as Mkhize people. We have been sidelined”. 43 Mr Mkhize declined to comment on the role of the Mkhizes in the fight. In January 2014, Mr A. Mabhida, one of the community residents, pointed out that although the Mkhizes were divided in terms of their involvement in the fight, most of them sided with the Khwelas. 44 Mr D Magcaba said:

the headman will always be a Magcaba. My father and other Magcaba people tell me that they want me to be a headman after my father passes away. Headmanship is a Magcaba thing, it is our legacy as a clan. We came here first, and all these other people came later, so we own this place. Some surnames have not been particularly happy about that. They even joined the Khwelas against us. 45

40 Argyle, J, “Faction fights, feuds, ethnicity and political conflict in Natal: a Comparative View”.
43 Discussion with Mr Mkhize B, February 2014, Zwelibomvu.
44 Interview with Mr Mabhida A, January 2014, Zwelibomvu.
45 Magcaba D, interview with the author, October 2009, Zwelibomvu.
These sentiments suggest deep seated divisions between the Zwelibomvu clans, with some groups siding with the Magcaba in terms of their headman choices, others expressing dissatisfaction with the manner in which power is distributed within the chiefdom. These are political undertones which, while not in the scale of the liberation movements of the 1980s in South Africa, informed the manner in which groups chose the dance affiliations. Such divisions in the name of ingoma, to some extent, served that understated political purpose during the fight.

The analysis of the complexity of the faction fight put the position of Chief Mkhize (Zwelijani) under scrutiny. Some residents claimed that he (the chief) did not intervene to stop the killings because of his close relationship with the Magcabas. During the conversation between him and the author in 1998, he declined to share detailed information about the fight.46 One may link these residents’ claims, and the chief’s reluctance to share details about the fight, to his statement early in this article that he did not want any association with the national democratic principles of the post 1994 South Africa. In another interview with Mrs MaCele Ntini, she (Ntini) shared with the author that, in the 1990s in Zwelibomvu, there was a rape case involving a father who raped his five/six months old daughter. Ntini pointed out that the chief suggested the matter be not reported to the police, and that it should be addressed at a family level, and that the headman would facilitate that.47 This supports Mamdani’s argument that the apartheid government gave the chiefs a lot of power over their constituency, the village people. Because of that, in some instances, there would be abuse of power, in this case manifesting itself in the chief’s protection of the perpetrators and his reluctance to address serious issues that needed his immediate attention as a custodian of tradition and protector of his people’s interests in the chiefdom. It was only in the late 1980s that the chief, who had not demonstrated much interest in the fight, negotiated peace agreement with the fighting parties, and appointed a new headman to ask people to return to their homes and rebuild the area. The dance relationship between the Magcabas and Ndimandes, and the perceived political security accompanying it, 48 has continued to manipulate the manner in which the narrative is told and the memories of the war itself. These are political interests that, while not defined within the political scope of the urban democratic movements, have shaped the chiefdom to the present. Dancing chains were formulated along these politically motivated lines. Varied loyalties, including territorial affiliation, kinship, marriage alliances and political interests all supported the escalation of the local tensions into more serious conflicts.

What all this suggests is that the story of the Zwelibomvu Magcaba versus Khwela is complex, explaining why aunt B felt that she was used for some personal agendas, and that, she believed, there were larger issues behind the dancing chains, the dynamics of which shaped the memory and information about the war itself. Aunt B had no power, or say, concerning the fight. The complexity of the fight overshadowed her as a supposed cause of it. In a discussion with her niece-in-law (her nephew’s wife), she (her nephew’s wife) argued that aunt B was used as a pawn by the fighting groups to cover their scores and settle their differences from the past. 49 Indeed, as aunt B herself says in the introductory quotation, it seems that she was not even an issue in the discussions surrounding the fight that she was supposedly the source of. These are some of the specific questions which the study is pursuing in this ongoing research.

The lack of political interest from the former government in this war did not help the situation. As one of the interviewees said, “there were so many bodies lying there, rotting, flies all over. The police did not come. The government of the time did not care”.50 Over 100 men died in the conflict and many women were raped but, as David Hemson and Nokuthula Cele pointed out:

47 Mrs Ntini MC, interview with the author, June 1998, Zwelibomvu.
48 In terms of Magcaba’s powerful influence in the community, and their close connection with Chief Mkhize.
49 Discussion with Mrs Ndimande MC, March 2014, Hammarsdale.
50 Discussion with Magcaba D, June 2010 and April 2010, Zwelibomvu, and with Mrs Magcaba and Mrs Khoza, 1998, Zwelibomvu.
At the end of it no account in newspaper, police files, magisterial reports, or any other document can be found. Officially the events never happened, and as the community painfully reconstructs its life and material culture, the memory is too painful to be easily recalled and research is problematic.

As the *UmAfrica* newspaper editor commented in 1984, the state censored the media reporting. Journalists were not allowed to report on, or take pictures in, violence ridden areas. In December 1985, as the number of deaths escalated due to growing violence, 995 allegedly died since the beginning of violence in 1984. Many cases of this nature were not reported.

There is a general feeling among residents that the former (apartheid) government did not intervene to consciously promote black on black violence. One of the residents said, "You know the old government, it enjoyed watching blacks killing one another. Even today people are dying, like at Richmond, it was like that. The apartheid government did not care."

However, there is no evidence suggesting that this was a state driven destabilization. There is a general consent among the Zwelibomvu residents that violence was largely local and clan based. Nevertheless, the Zwelibomvu faction fight did not only suffer from the lack of media attention. It also left aunt B’s family between the chiefly power and traditional leadership in Zwelibomvu whose role in the matter was not thoroughly investigated and thus not accountable, and the apartheid state that was not there to protect her or hear her side of the story. The lack of the then South African government in the matter left a lot of power at the hands of the traditional executive council who not only dragged their feet in stopping the fight, but also took sides in the matter and controlled the information about the fight itself and, in the process, influenced the manner in which the information was filtered down to researchers such as David Hemson in the late 1990s. The situation was exacerbated by the dynamics within aunt B’s family, discussed below.

**Family, Community and Patriarchy**

One of the key features of a patriarchal community is a structured domestic rule at the head of which is homestead heads. Power is passed down to senior sons or nephews. The patriarchal and masculinist nature of this rural order is reflected in what aunt B’s senior nephew, referred to as K in this study, said to the author in 2009:

> My father and his brothers passed away. I am the guardian of this family now. Nothing happens without my permission. I forbid you from talking to her about this issue. The story of that war is very complex and painful, we don’t want to talk about it. As you can see, aunt B’s health condition is fragile. I don’t want anything that will take her back to that history. So do not talk to her about it.

These are some of the challenges that female researchers, especially African female researchers, face in a conservative community with its own notions of power and gender stereotypes. K denied any knowledge about the fight, and refused to answer any question about it. Yet, aunt B mentioned that K was a young man in his twenties when the fight began. He and his other brothers were drafted into it. Discussions on violence and internal wars are a sensitive subject. In Zwelibomvu its discourse is complex and, to some degree, embarrassing. Those who participated in the war should guard against revealing themselves as the aggressors or reveal any concrete detail that would identify them as having been involved in occasions at which there were many deaths. More importantly, as K argued, there is a general concern that any concrete description would once again open the lines of conflict which are only partially submerged within the community. He expressed his concern, that “you know sister, we

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52 *UmAfrica* Newspaper, December 14 1985.
54 Conversation with Mr Ndimande K, January 2009, Zwelibomvu.
buried these tensions years ago. For the sake of peace, we do not want to talk about them again. We do not want to open old wounds, from which the community is still trying to recover”. 55

Within the Ndimande clan that K comes from, there is a fear of revealing illegal activities, and reluctance to relive the experience of extreme forms of violence, the narratives do not flow easily. One of the major secrets is that the family was divided: those who supported the Magcaba, and those who supported their new in-laws, the Khwelas. As aunt B pointed out, the Ndimande patriarchs are reluctant to talk about the war because that may betray their historical dance association with the Magcabas. Besides, they do not want to talk about atrocities that they (family patriarchs) committed during the fight, actions that saw aunt B being literally removed from the home of her husband, the Khwela household, by certain members of her own clan, giving her over to the Magcabas, from whom her former lover came. “They physically forced me to leave my Khwela in-laws”, she said. 56 All this reveals the amount of control which her male “guardians” had over her. When the fight ended, aunt B was an embarrassment to her family, male family members disowned her. They chased her away, which is how she ended up living with her niece-in-law in Hammarsdale, 57 a township that is about forty miles away from Zwelibomvu where she lived before the fight. Her social position as an unmarried, homeless, uneducated, unemployed and childless woman, with a deteriorating health condition, made her life miserable until her death in November 2009.

Aunt B’s experiences reveal the ambiguity about the way in which women are seen in a patriarchal society. She trespassed the boundaries of social, romantic and emotional space when she decided to marry beyond the supposed boundaries, an act which DeShong defines as a “subversion to prescribed codes of behaviour”. This was read not only as a threat to bonds of friendship between her family and the Magcabas, but also as a challenge to her former partner’s and her brothers’ and nephews’ masculine identity. 58 Her actions fell outside the accepted codes of behaviour attributed to “virtuous femininity” expected of her in the Ndimande-Magcaba dancing circles. In the minds of many community members, war was a response to that perceived usurpation of power by her. The act of physically removing her from the Khwela homestead by her male family members and those of the Magcaba clan, made her own male family members perpetrators of violence and other forms of limitations against her. She felt that this was a punishment against her attempts to challenge the structures of power within the village and her family. Some people called her names, some spitting when they saw her, seeing her as a woman of no morals. The discourse on spatial/romantic limitations merged with ideas about sexual morality and female respectability. These unequal arrangements provided the context for analysis of the war that occurred in her name.

Issues of honor, pride, manhood and consciousness are not uniquely a Zwelibomvu phenomenon. In the colonial period, Zimbabwean women tried to break the patriarchal bonds by running away to mines, towns and cities. To regain their honor as men, and control over their runaway daughters and wives, African chiefs, headmen and elders collaborated with colonial authorities in Zimbabwe to re-enforce customary laws that gave more power to the male elders over the masses, especially women and junior men. 59 Jonathan Glass’s work also illuminates the complexity and ambiguity of local patterns of control over community institutions in East Africa. 60 Outside Africa, various scholars have

56 Interview with Ndimande aunt B, August 2009, Hammarsdale.
57 Discussion with Mrs Ndimande MC, February 2014, Hammarsdale.
60 Glassman J, Feasts and Riots: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888 (edited by Allen
exposed the dynamics that informed the definition of men’s honor in colonial Latin America. 61 Aunt B’s defiance against patriarchal control over her romantic choices was therefore not unique.

Conclusion

The conflict began around the exchange of women between the clans, and contradictory views were expressed: both that women are invaluable to African society and that they are also the cause of conflict. This view is not particularly novel, but it does reveal the inner nature of ambiguity about the way in which women are seen in patriarchal society. However, the issue of the faction fight in Zwelibomvu goes beyond the story of a woman. In Zwelibomvu, clans/surnames have used ingoma events to stake claims to higher positions on the social ladder, negotiate differences, create socioeconomic security networks, establish and mark group identity and, sometimes, manipulate marriage choices at a village level. The ingoma associations have been part of community building since the pre-colonial period. When the colonial system took over in Natal, it tapped into some of these local systems and, where possible, had them interwoven within the colonial apparatus of domination. The history of such cultural networks should be unearthed because they underpin the cultural, social and political workings of the community. The author hopes to uncover more answers to the story of the Zwelibomvu faction fight of the 1980s, which is the main goal of this ongoing research.

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