

# Article

## Memories within memories: the dynamics of Zwelibomvu's memories of violence of the 1980s<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

An examination of memories of violence in Zwelibomvu, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in the 1980s suggests that they are influenced by wider social and environmental settings within which the individual is situated. Life in Zwelibomvu in the 1980s was informed by socially constructed meanings of power that were, and still are, based on patriarchal and gendered social relations at a local level. Social settings have provided a framework within which memories of the violence are reconstructed. Details often represent the local interests as much as they represent ordinary people. In this social discourse, local relations of power at family and group levels reinforce dynamics which attempt to influence, shape, and order meanings of events and, by implication, the way in which they (events) would be remembered. Therefore, home-grown forms of belonging have provided local repertoires from which control over, and the ownership of, the story itself is drawn. Supported by local power relations, these networks have continued to manipulate the manner in which the narrative of the violence is told, and the memories of the fighting itself. The second perspective in the essay challenges the bias towards individuals as 'consumers of memory' prevalent in collective memory studies. Collective memory does not permanently diminish the power of individuals. Memory construction thus becomes a landscape of contest between the imposition of a publicly dominant narrative and the reaction of the individuals.

### **Introduction**

My sister did not do anything wrong, she fell in love with the Khwela man. She was engaged to a Magcaba man for years. The guy did not marry her. Instead, he married another Ndimande woman, our cousin. He then

disappeared for years without my sister knowing where he was. Then the Khwela guy proposed to her, and she loved him. My sister was just used for their own agendas. To tell you the truth, the Magcabas and Khwelas were fighting over *indunaship*, not over my sister. When my sister agreed to marry that Khwela man, they used her as an excuse to fight their own battles, the battles she knew nothing about. (Interview, Beauty, August 2014)

The above passage highlights the ambiguities of village life at the centre of which lies the main argument of this article. This essay uses Zwelibomvu as a case study to demonstrate that communities are complex and dynamic, with intricate social relations that influence people's conceptualisation of events and memorisation of certain experiences. Zwelibomvu experienced violence in the 1980s. History has much to say about how, during the same decade, South Africa witnessed the escalation of political violence against apartheid. Zwelibomvu, however, had its own internal dynamics, and structures, which informed the course of, and manner of involvement in, this violence. Meanings of the fight should be sought from broader social, political and cultural settings in which local affiliations, rural leadership privileges, gendered relations of power and patriarchal control over individuals and facts about it determined people's responses to questions about the fight, and how experiences of violence would be remembered. The above quotation suggests that, even when individuals become victims of such a surrounding, they can resist dominant traditions by telling their own side of the story. Memory construction here becomes a struggle in which some accounts are protected to serve certain local interests, and others told to expose untold stories. Such dynamics have informed the manner in which memories surrounding Zwelibomvu's violence of the 1980s are told.

### **Zwelibomvu in regional context**

Zwelibomvu is part of the broader Umbumbulu region. Located about 45 kilometres southwest of Durban, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, the Umbumbulu region comprises 25 districts and nine Traditional Authority Areas, each governed by a traditional leader, the *Nkosi* (plural *Amakhosi*, popularly known as chiefs). Three of these areas are the Mkhize territories, including Embo-Nkasa/Isimahla, which Zwelibomvu is part of, now under *Nkosi* Kusakusa Mkhize, and Embo-Thimuni under *Nkosi* Langelas'Embo. People who reside within the Mkhize jurisdiction are generally known as AbaMbo (the 'Mbo' people) or AbaseMbo (people from

'Mbo') (Wright and Hamilton 1996: 15-32). Following the rise of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka Zulu in the early nineteenth century, the Makhanya and Mkhize are some of the groups who migrated south in what is now KwaZulu-Natal from Zululand, over the Thukela river, and occupied Umbumbulu. Reader (1966: 23-24) states that when the Makhanya occupied the region about 1840, it was already 'in the hands of the Mbo' who had left Zululand before them. Such groups remained physically removed from the centre of Zulu power, but they nevertheless recognised Zulu overlordship (Wright and Hamilton 1996). In the 1840s and 1850s Umbumbulu became part of the colonial processes in Natal in which Africans who had lived without rigid boundaries for years were incorporated into existing African authorities such as the Mkhize and Makhanya, or placed under artificially created chiefs. Under the system of 'indirect rule', traditional African systems of knowledge and governance were utilised to govern African communities through the power of *Amakhosi*.

In the 1950s, under the homeland system<sup>2</sup> Umbumbulu was incorporated into the KwaZulu homeland under Gatsha Buthelezi as its prime minister. In the 1970s, Buthelezi also became the president of Inkatha (later Inkatha Freedom Party, IFP), which began as a cultural movement that represented the Zulu people's past, traditions and cultural symbols. Inkatha used traditional leadership to promote its ethnic politics in the province (Bonnin et al 1996). Since 1994, various policies were put in place to accommodate traditional leaders in the new South Africa. For example, in 2003, the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act approved the incorporation of 'traditional councils' within local government structures. In 2005, the Communal Land Rights Act enhanced the power of the traditional leaders and councilors in the transfer, allocation and ownership of communal land. The 2009 National House of Traditional Leaders Act (Act 22), further augmented the influence of the traditional leaders in the government. Among their duties was the preservation of culture and tradition in the nation building process.

This review highlights the shifts in paradigms in the custodianship of tradition and custom that was carried out by *Amakhosi* since the pre-colonial era, and later supported by the colonial and apartheid governments to ease the administration of Africans. Zwelibomvu was part of these changing histories in Umbumbulu. The chiefdom<sup>3</sup> is located outside Pinetown, west of the city of Durban, in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Magcaba, Khwela, Mabhida, Mkhize, Shange, Ndimande, and Nene are some of the major clans<sup>4</sup>

occupying various areas of Zwelibomvu. These zones include KwaMagcaba, Ofudu, Mkhangoma, Panikeni, Njobokazi and Tafelkop. Inter-marriage and other forms of alliance have created a complex web of kinship networks that have promoted intergroup relations, and have also affected land occupation. Such relations beyond clan lines in Umbumbulu have produced interdependence among clans and between the Embo people and their neighbours, the Makhanya (Reader 1966: 231-3). Mathis (2008) also highlights the role of family relations between two chiefdoms in Mpandwini, Embo-Nkasa and Makhanya, in the escalation of violence in the Umbumbulu region in the 1980s. As this article will show, such multifarious bonds in Zwelibomvu would complicate and inform people's connections with memories of the 1980s fight in the village. Different levels of interactions between groups have produced varying interests that influence the manner in which people respond to questions about the fight, and which memories they choose to share, and why. Between 1984 and 1987, within Zwelibomvu, there were instances of fighting initially between Khwela and Magcaba. Narratives from community residents alleged that a woman from Ndimande clan, referred to as Aunt B in this study, dated a Magcaba man. After that she decided to marry a Khwela man. This resulted in tensions which later involved families and eventually violent clashes between clans, and thus the Khwela-Magcaba fight (interview, Mrs T Magcaba, February 2010).

Ndimande and Magcaba were in the same *ngoma* (traditional dance) chain. Ties of interdependence through the *ngoma* and kinship networks were strengthened during the fight. Magcaba and Ndimande family members collaborated to remove Aunt B from the home of her Khwela husband, to give her back to the Magcabas. That incident was the first violent encounter between the groups which left a Khwela man dead. It is regarded as the beginning of the fight between them which later involved other surnames (interview, Beauty, August 2014). There were different incidents in this fight, happening over a period of four years, and during which over 100 people died. Many left Zwelibomvu and slowly returned in the late 1980s to rebuild their lives in the village after peace agreements were reached between the fighting parties (*UmAfrica*, June 1, 1987, April 19, 1986, May 17, 1987). Such neighbouring communities as Desai, Mangangeni (south of Zwelibomvu) and Ndengezi township in the southeast of the chiefdom also felt the impact of the fight as people took refuge in these areas (*UmAfrica*, April 19, 1986).

The focus of this essay is, however, not on the fight itself, but on social dynamics that have informed the manner in which its stories are told and its

memories shared. This paper examines dynamics of culture, gender, rural power relations and family values in order to illustrate contradictions of rural life, which have influenced Zwelibomvu people's responses to the fight. As intertwined strings holding the community together, these local forces have defined people's attachment to, and conceptualisation of, the Zwelibomvu community as a social, cultural, and political space. This article emphasises the role of local power relations, cultural norms, relationships beyond family lines, and patriarchal control over people and information as factors influencing memories of Zwelibomvu's violence in the 1980s. Family structures and intergroup relations have provided a framework within which human agency in memory construction is manipulated.

Bodnar (1989) calls cases in which local forces attempt to shape and order meanings of events and, by implication, memories surrounding them, 'social discourse'. Social discourse is an interchange of ideas among a group of people associated with one another for personal, group or other benefits. It gives meaning to a series of relations between individuals, groups and institutions. Within this social discourse analysis, individuals recall their encounters in relation to interests of the social groups to which they belong. In this study social discourse refers to social, cultural and gender based forms of representation that produce, influence or locate meanings and memories of the Zwelibomvu fight of the 1980s. There are two sides of the argument in this article. Aunt B, the supposed cause of the fight in question, was not allowed to share her memories of this fight with researchers because such discussions were deliberated in relation to other local interests. The study, however, also challenges the general positioning of residents as passive recipients of various forms of ordering in the manipulation of memory construction. This can be seen, in part, in Aunt B's changing attitude towards me and, later, her willingness to share some of her experiences of the violence with me. The essay recognises memory construction as a landscape of struggle between local dynamics defining community memories, and individual responses to the generally accepted views on the subject in question. Zwelibomvu's construction of memories of this violence can be best understood by analysing some of the subtleties underlying community building within the chiefdom. Community building is defined as a process whereby people of different cultural, class or ethnic backgrounds come to live together as one community. In this study, community building as a unit of analysis sees Zwelibomvu as comprising people with varying backgrounds, and whose interactions at various levels have created a complex web of

existence. This multifaceted nature of Zwelibomvu provides the context within which to locate meanings and memories of the fight of the 1980s.

### **Contextualising the study**

In the twentieth century, the continuity of the pre-capitalist African systems at family and community levels depended on their internal relationship and capacity to resist capitalist influences such as complete proletarianisation (Bozzoli 1983: 143-6). Many African households managed to retain their traditional values. Added to kinship values was the notion of ‘purity’, which provided a specific tool in the control over women. In Zwelibomvu in the 1980s this was observed in labels that were used to refer to those few girls who went to school as ‘whores’ (interviews, Beauty<sup>5</sup>, August 2014, Mrs MK Mkhize, September 2014). Patriarchal power thus remained in the Zwelibomvu’s residents’ daily lives. Merchant capital did not then completely transform pre-capitalist forms of rural leadership and family structures. Instead it buttressed internal gender hierarchy to advance its own interest, and boosted the power of men over women. In her study of Zimbabwe, Elizabeth Schmidt (1992) demonstrates how African men collaborated with colonial masters to control African women’s movements. Bozzoli (1983: 146) called this the ‘Patchwork Quilt’, in which ‘forms of patriarchy are sustained, modified and even entrenched differently, depending on the internal character of the system in place’. In Africa in general (see Cohen and Odhiambo 1992, Glassman 1994), women were subjected to tight control of the chiefs, headmen and heads of families. Aunt B’s case shows the amount of power which her male family members had over her marriage choice, to protect their relationship with the Magcabas. Her bitterness also came from the perceived failure of the *Nkosi* and *induna* to defend her. In the late 1980s, when the parties negotiated to end the fight, she claimed,

nobody called me or cared how I felt. None of the mediators even acknowledged that this was wrong. It was like I did not even exist. Yet, people were calling me names, other spitting when they saw me. (Interview, July 2009)

Beauty, her sister, also stated that their mother was assaulted at a social function when she defended her daughter in a conversation about the fight (interview, Beauty, August 2014). Clearly, this was a community in which women’s views, feelings and interests were not respected. This was also evident in the manner in which Aunt B was forced to marry a Magcaba man against her will, to serve the Magcaba-Ndimande alliance interests.

During the liberation struggle, black women's historical agency was compromised in the name of national freedom (Hassim 1991: 65-82). Hassim (1990: 68-70) observed how the masculine make-up of Inkatha's and African National Congress's (ANC) political movements underpinned patriarchal relations of power, and regarded gender sensitive issues that were essential to feminism as 'soft political matters'. The disparity between resistance to apartheid and the politics of personal and familial relations, and the wider social struggles in general, explains why Aunt B's traumatic experience did not receive much media or political attention. In the 1980s, as Cheryl McEwan (2003: 739-57) states, collective memories of black women were not valued in dominant historical accounts.

In the 1990s, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) in South Africa aimed to expose untold stories and, in so doing, to recognise hidden memories. With its focus on victims of politically motivated human rights abuses, the TRC left out narratives by victims of other forms of violence (Ryan 2010). Such disparities in memory collection made it difficult for the previously disadvantaged groups, notably black rural women, to balance their pre-1994 narratives with the ideology of a new South Africa which the TRC was trying to build (Dwyer 1999: 81-98, Losch 2003: 34). In post-apartheid South Africa social historians are left with the task of unearthing these untold memories. As Zondi (2010) points out, the Zwelibomvu community has largely continued to promote values which perpetuate gender inequality. These are some of the issues in Zwelibomvu influencing or controlling the way in which certain stories are told or remembered, including the fight under study. There is a need to create a new historical agency that does not reproduce exclusionary and suppressive patterns of power in the definition of collective memory, especially for rural women, within the nation building process. Such rural women as Aunt B should be afforded a platform on which to articulate their traumatic experiences of the apartheid era, as custodians of their own memories.

### **Conceptualising the faction fight**

Zwelibomvu's civil disturbances in the 1980s were not unprecedented. In the early decades of the twentieth century there were episodes of unrest in Umbumbulu stemming from conflicts over succession and land shortage that caused tensions among its African residents and between Africans and white farmers. Dilongo (Tilongo) and Sikhukuku, fathers of *Amakhosi* Timuni and Nkasa respectively fought with the Makhanyas in 1918 over a

boundary. Reader (1966: 231-2) comments that ‘when people wanted to start trouble with another group, they waited until there were occasions such as inter-tribal weddings’. Revenge ideology, and the complexity caused by marriage alliances between fighting parties, featured in these Embo-Makhanya conflicts. In 1923 members of the Embo group secretly attended the Makhanya wedding in order to take revenge for the hurt they experienced in 1918. They befriended a Makhanya man who was married to an Embo woman in order to access weapons which were later used to attack the Makhanya party after the wedding. The subsequent manipulation of wedding ceremonies between these groups as trigger points for fights resulted in the decision by the government giving the Makhanya and Embo groups different days for cattle-dipping, a decision which lasted for decades (Reader 1966: 233). As the next sections will show, in Zwelibomvu’s case, such acts of ‘betrayal’ would have serious implications in the construction of memories. It would be difficult for such couples as the Makhanya man and his Embo wife to share such details when relating the story of the fight.

Reader does not identify land as an issue in the Embo-Makhanya conflicts. His description of Embo people in Umbumbulu as ‘warlike’, compared to their neighbours, the Makhanyas, overlooked the boundary dispute as central to their clashes. Sithole (1997) makes the argument that when African populations were in conflict, there was always this stereotypical view that African people had a natural tendency towards fighting, sometimes for minor things. This obscured the role of non-African players in the making of the violent conflict in and between African communities. Sithole places land at the core of the succession dispute within Embo in the 1930s, and how it ‘pushed long simmering tensions into open conflict and violence’ (1997: 231). HC Lugg, the Minister for Native Affairs in Natal, stated that he was not in a position to provide additional land to the Mkhizes because overcrowding was common in all reserves in Natal. Land explanations of violence by such scholars as Lambert (1994), Clegg (1979), and Guy (1979) examine conflicts beyond internal factors such as revenge ideologies or long standing enmity. Beinart (1981) and Phimister and van Onselen (1972) add ethnic dimension to expand the analysis of conflict over resources and land in urban areas. Mathis (2008), in her analysis of violence in the Umbumbulu region in the 1980s, also states that culturally-based explanations such as long standing enmity, or revenge ideology (Argyle 1992, Clegg 1981, Thomas 1972), hold little explanatory power. Mathis however argues that in the 1980s, land value had decreased in the rural areas as Africans became

labour reserves dependent on wage earnings rather than on agriculture or livestock farming. In Zwelibomvu too, land did not come out strongly during interviews as a contributing factor to violence. People give different meanings to the fight, which challenge generalisations about it.

Until the 1980s faction fighting was generally perceived as a rural issue, with the exception of scholars such as Breckenridge (1990) and van Onselen and Phimister (1972) who viewed it in the urban context. Zulu terminology also applies general terms *impi* (plural *izimpi*, meaning fights) and *umbango* (plural *imibango*, meaning disputes), and thus *izimpi zombango* (faction fights). This definition distinguished these fights from broader political movements of the time (Mathis 2008). However, as political violence spread through urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1980s and 1990s, the government defined this violence as a new form of faction fighting, with political affiliations marking different factions. The concept 'political violence' came to refer to conflicts between supporters of the ANC and the IFP. The term had implications for state involvement, implying the broader political and economic forces driving the violence. The state thus dismissed any responsibility for violence by calling it 'faction fight'.

In the 1980s in Mpandwini, Umbumbulu, the Embo-Nkasa people were fighting with the Shozi group. *Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize supported his Embo-Nkasa faction. Mkhandi Shozi, the Shozi war leader, fled with his people into Makhanya from where he launched attacks back into Mpandwini and other neighbouring areas harbouring the Mkhize militia. This came to be known as the Embo-Makhanya war. In the meantime, the Mkhizes within the Makhanya territory, with whom Mkhandi resided, were involved in their own battles with Ndimandes who fled to their relatives in Embo and continued to fight the Mkhizes from their Embo refuge. Such conflicts were characterised by complex alliances, which were further complicated by the ANC and IFP conflicts that beset the province at the time.

Most studies of political violence have focused on urban areas because that is where higher levels of such violence were experienced. The usage of the term political violence to refer to ANC/IFP conflict created conceptual divisions between forms of violence labeled as political and those labeled as faction fights. The Embo-Makhanya war in the 1980s is often relegated to less political categories of faction fight between two chiefs, unrelated to political events of the time in South Africa (Mathis 2008: 83). These divisions often ignore the relationship between these two forms of conflict. Here, the memory becomes distorted because, within the narratives of those recounting

the violence, the role of local disputes and structures of power in instances of political violence has been silenced. The TRC in South Africa contributed to these silences. Local communities have not challenged this alienation of memories regarding the role of local factors in the eruptions of political violence.

The 1980s were marked by the emergence of strong fighting men known as warlords who were Inkatha affiliated, attacking ANC (Freund 1996, Minnaar 1992) Political violence began to affect rural areas, especially in the early 1990s. Umbumbulu is bordered closely by urban centres where violent political conflicts took place. Inkatha recruited leaders in the rural areas to fight ANC in urban areas. Mkhandi Shoji and Siphon Mkhize who featured prominently in the Embo-Makhanya war were later involved in the political movements in the region. Affiliated with the ANC, they had characteristics of warlords, although they were not free to operate as IFP-affiliated warlords were. Although Mkhandi was not politicised in the urban context or trained by ANC, he was introduced to ANC by Siphon Mkhize who was an active member. At some point, as Mathis (2008: 110-1) points out, the government forces tried to recruit Mkhandi to fight against the ANC. These urban-rural networks should thus not be neglected.

Mkhandi was involved in the Zwelibomvu fight. There is no evidence that he was pushed by political interests. During the fight between the Embo-Nkasa and the Shoji in Mpandwini, *Nkosi Zwelinjani Mkhize* had favored the Embo-Nkasa side, forcing Mkhandi to flee. Within Zwelibomvu, some residents claim that during the Magcaba-Khwela fight, *Nkosi Zwelinjani Mkhize*, because of his close relationship with the Magcaba clan, sided with them against the Khwelas (interviews, Aunt B, August 2009, Beauty, August 2014). Therefore, the only rational reason for supporting the Magcabas against the Khwelas would be because they were his in-laws, his wife being a Magcaba. There is also no evidence that IFP was involved in any way in this fight. In post-apartheid South Africa, many of the older generation of Zwelibomvu adult males identify with IFP because they see it as a custodian of Zulu culture and tradition. Mr M Shange (interview, September 2014) emphasised that IFP was not in any way involved in the Zwelibomvu fight. Therefore, in such cases, political affiliation should not be over-estimated because there was a variety of loyalties or identities that were invited to take sides in the dispute, including marriage, friendships, and ethnic affiliation. These all created different memories of the fight.

Chiefdoms are political entities as systems of leadership with un-

centralised but structured power relations oriented to serving local needs. In the 1980s, Zwelibomvu was characterised by traditional forms of leadership, complex social constructions of belonging, and gendered relations of power which all affected recollections of the events. For example, the relationships between surnames, between surnames and individuals, and between individuals and families continue to influence the way in which memories of this violence are engendered. It is not so much what people can remember, but what they can tell, and which memories to protect and why.

In the analysis of memories relating to Zwelibomvu's fight, one may borrow Grant McNulty's argument (2012: 54-57), in his study of Umbumbulu, that 'meanings shift as histories are contested and re-interpreted', with some voices being 'silenced and others privileged'. Different versions of a particular past are produced by different authors, in different contexts, and for various reasons, including the validation of particular claims. All these forms of representation affect the memory construction of the events. Within Zwelibomvu, there is a general consensus that, before violence exploded, there were good relations between the Khwelas and the Magcabas. As Mbongwa Magcaba, the current *induna* (headman) said in July 2014, 'life was wonderful here, there was peace and progress, until violence erupted in 1984'. Another view is that the fight was over a woman, that there were no other underlying issues. This account of the fight was also emphasised by the late *induna*, Mr Israel Magcaba. It is only when such collective memories cease to dominate the construction of meaning that personal memories creep in to reveal the reality (in this case pre-violence relations) that is more complex. Bodnar (1989: 1201-21) makes a distinction between perceptions of the dominant groups and those of individuals. In his study of oral tradition in Africa, Vansina also divides traditions into 'official' and 'private'. In his analysis, 'official' refers to an accepted social and political discourse, 'private' being the ordinary individuals' recollection of events. The 'official account' provided by *induna* signifies the protective role played by a man of influence, who indicated many times that he did not want trouble in his territory, and therefore avoided saying things that might cause trouble. 'Official versions', generally projected in the general interest of the community, guard against 'other' memories that threaten their legitimacy (Vansina 1985: 98-99, Wachtel 1986: 2-11). This became evident in one of the statements by Beauty (August 2014), Aunt B's sister who, while not allowed to share any details with anyone without the approval or presence of male members of the Ndimande clan, shared some important details of the fight

against the ‘norm’, referred to in the introductory quotation.

The role of individual agency ensures that unofficial memories do not always remain permanently private. As an example, Ryan (2010) mentions the rebirth of the Jewish memories in Russia. This revival coincided with *perestroika*, regarded as a period during which the dominant Soviet identity came under scrutiny following the growing influence of religious diversity and private memories as recognised discourses (Ryan 2010: 159-66). This suggests that the official version does not always enjoy full acceptance. Responses to meaning may not necessarily correspond to the ideological interests of those in power. The difference in the presentation of accounts between Beauty and *induna* suggests that collective memory becomes less hegemonic as it is subjected to individual agency and other social forces to reject or re-interpret it. Collective memory, therefore, is always negotiated or contested between the discourse of a public dominant narrative and the reaction of the individual. The dynamic triangular relationship between power, dominant memory and the individual offers a useful context within which to locate the construction and presentation of memories of Zwelibomvu’s violence of the 1980s.

### **Zwelibomvu and the politics of the village**

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), a ministry of the post apartheid government, positions *Amakhosi* as custodians of tradition and custom within the democratic state. In KwaZulu-Natal, with the municipal borders being restructured in the late 1990s, 17 traditional authority areas and their leaders were incorporated into Durban’s extended eThekweni Municipality. The *AmaKhosi* Support Office (ASO) was formed to represent *Amakhosi* and facilitate their working relationship within the new government structures. Whereas *Amakhosi* once operated largely without records, they are now required to keep diaries, write monthly reports and correspond via email. The custodianship of tradition and custom has been subjected to documentary accountability (McNulty 2013).

However, at a leadership level, Zwelibomvu has maintained certain pre-colonial patterns of governance (See Guy 1987) in the sense that the *Nkosi* is at the top of the hierarchy, and his power is hereditary. The ANC government has political power, but the *Nkosi*, through *induna* on the ground, still controls the day-to-day running of the chiefdom. In Zwelibomvu, political rallies are strongly discouraged. Community meetings are organised, administered and monitored by *induna* with the help of the traditional

council in which women and young men are not represented. Although there have been developments in terms of the provision of water and electricity, Zwelibomvu remains rural in terms of people's belief systems and life in general (see Zondi 2010). Rulership is masculine and patriarchal.<sup>6</sup> That feature of public domain translates into power relations in the domestic realm. In other words, as a patriarchal community, Zwelibomvu is characterised by a structured political and domestic rule predominantly governed by men (see Guy 1990). Mrs MK Mkhize (interview, September 2014) stated that most adult women in Zwelibomvu are not educated, and their material conditions are defined within a family, which is their primary everyday context. Brothers or family adult males become guardians of unmarried women (Zondi 2010: 19-25). Tradition is an important element in which gendered identities and hierarchies are created and legitimated. There are two major churches in Zwelibomvu, the Roman Catholic and Shembe. Mrs MK Mkhize (interview, September 2014) said that many family heads prefer the Shembe church because it allows them to practise such traditions as polygamy. Mr A Shozi (interview, January 2015) said, 'these developments in the village, people building nice houses, getting water and electricity, have not changed our belief systems. I have three wives. Any development here will never transcend our way of life'.

In the 1980s these social bonds tended to resist the influence of urban political movements. Even in the 1990s, there was this perceived political distance between the operations of the new South Africa and rulership of the chief, then *Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize, and his traditional executive committees. In 1998 he (*Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize) told the author, then a research assistant for sociologist David Hemson, that as Zwelibomvu leadership they wanted to stay away from the urban structures of the government because they did not need them, that traditional councillors were there to assist him in the running of the chiefdom (interview, May 1998). Indeed, in the 1990s most of the crimes committed in Zwelibomvu were dealt with at a local level, by *induna* with the approval of the *Nkosi* (interview, Mr D Magcaba, August 2010). In the 1980s, Zwelibomvu fell under the Umbumbulu District police jurisdiction, which was far from Zwelibomvu. During violence, some informants say, it took a long time, sometimes even days, for the Umbumbulu police station to respond (interview, Mrs MK Mkhize, September 2014).

*Nkosi* Mkhize's political stand is a manifestation of the legacy of colonial and apartheid systems, under which African pre-colonial ruling systems and

social structures were interwoven with the apparatus of domination. The colonial and apartheid systems turned *Amakhosi* into instruments for indirect rule (Ntsebeza 2005, Oomen 2000: 71-95, Oomen and van Kessel 1997: 561-85). Mamdani (1996) shows how, under the colonial and apartheid systems, traditional rulers were given considerable power over their subjects. Although the colonial presence in Natal was strong, *Amakhosi* retained some degree of autonomy, and household structures remained relatively unchanged (Morrell et al 1996: 33-62). Patriarchal and traditional power was consolidated (Bonnin et al 1996: 148-9, Oomen and van Kessel 1997: 561-4). Ntsebeza (2005: 14-24) points out that, in the 1980s, *Amakhosi* powers remained unchecked.

However, since the 1990s, such systems came under pressure from advances in other areas of development. For example, polygamists and ‘traditionalists’ greeted the proposed legislation to govern customary marriages with hostility in KwaZulu-Natal (Maphumulo 1998). The growing popularity of radio and television sets, and the intrusion of electronic media, has offered alternatives to traditional forms of thinking, celebration, and entertainment. Therefore, rural practices have become vulnerable, and the patriarchs of rural communities exercise fragile cultural defence to protect the old order against these new influences.

Nevertheless, it becomes difficult to apply these encroaching urban political influences to analyse memories of Zwelibomvu’s fight without evidence. Any researcher would be interested in two forms of violence that happened at the same time among African people: the democratic movements for national political freedom, and fights in the rural areas under traditional authorities who played an ambiguous role. Zwelibomvu raises such curiosity because it is adjacent to Shongweni, and the nearby KwaNdengezi township, where intense battles against apartheid took place. Yet, all the narratives from people interviewed suggest that there was no relation between the two. In 2009, the late *induna*, Mr Israel Magcaba, stated that until the 1990s, transport was scarce in Zwelibomvu. People who worked in Pinetown or Durban would walk a couple of miles to the main road, south of Zwelibomvu, to access transport from KwaNdengezi. Mr M Shange (interview, September 2014) indicated that, during the fight, such people were easily targeted and killed on their way back home from work. The KwaNdengezi police did not intervene to stop the fight or help its casualties. The Magcaba man who was *induna* during the fight was ambushed and killed while walking to Umbumbulu to report on what was happening in Zwelibomvu.

Therefore, while McNulty's argument (2014: 14) that 'localized dispute was further crosscut by the broader conflict between members of IFP and ANC, which played itself out in Umbumbulu, as in other peri-urban areas around Durban and beyond, in the late 1980s and early 1990s', may not be disputed, it is difficult to apply a blanket analysis to Zwelibomvu without evidence. It is also true that 'Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha, which operated in the broader and urban political realm, contributed much to the growing power of chiefs in the KwaZulu Bantustan', as McNulty states. However, one of the interviewees, Mrs MK Mkhize (interview, September 2014) stated that 'sometimes people don't understand that rural communities have their own dynamics that need local attention. We had our own issues here that were not in any way related to urban politics'.

Mr M Shange (interview, September 2014) argued that traditional leadership in Zwelibomvu remained divorced from urban politics and operated freely, sometimes abusing their power. During the fight, the lack of the Umbumbulu police presence left power at the hands of the traditional leadership and their councillors to deal with violence, and to keep its details within the village. The absence of media to report on it meant that its details, and recollections, would remain less known outside Zwelibomvu. The current *induna*, Mr Mbongwa Magcaba, stated (interview, July 2014) that even now political rallies are strongly discouraged because of the volatile situation in the village in which people continue to kill one another for reasons that are not clear. Another informant, Mr P Magcaba (interview August 2014) said, 'we have IFP and ANC supporters who vote during elections here. But for rallies, we go to Ndengezi because we do not want to promote things that will divide us. We don't have political rallies here, but community meetings where we discuss matters that affect all of us as community residents. *Induna*, with the approval of the *Nkosi*, decides when and where these meetings should take place'. In such communities, only the old male generation is allowed to discuss important community issues or address matters at community meetings. Ms S Mkhize<sup>7</sup> (conversation, October 2014) said 'we appreciate the new South Africa because it has brought all these development changes to us. All we appreciate from the government is service delivery, not politics'.

It appears, then, that Zwelibomvu has defined democracy in a manner that suits the perceived interests of the community. An example of this can be seen in what one of the informants said: 'We want to keep this village as traditional as possible to avoid crime and other social ills associated with

township life. If the government wants to build a house for me, they must do that here within my yard. We don't want this township style where people live so close to each other. For us democracy is about living our lives according to our own expressions as a traditional community' (interview, Mr M Shange, 2014). These socially constructed meanings of democracy, drawn from patriarchal and traditional resources have, for a long time, afforded Zwelibomvu a model upon which to build a sense of belonging.

Unmarried women, and women in general, and the youth, remain the dependents of their male guardians. In 2008, Aunt B was 59 years old, yet she was forbidden to speak to me by her senior nephew, referred to as K in this study. As K himself said, 'as a black person *sisi* [sister] you understand that you cannot ask her anything without my permission as her guardian' (conversation, K Ndimande, November 2008). These gender- and age-based forms of dependency have been part of family and community structuring that has determined whether or not women, or youth, would be allowed to share their memories. Such paradigms may not be seen as democratic, but they provide room for individuals and groups to practise mutual trust, cooperation, solidarity, reciprocity and agency within and outside the family.

Outside the family in the 1980s Zwelibomvu's male dominance projected itself in various fashions. Local connections, some clan based, asserted a lot of influence on Zwelibomvu's community structuring. Some took the form of *ngoma* (traditional dance) associations. Dancing associations were locally grown formations with common interests, and they reinforced a sense of belonging among Zwelibomvu's rural people. Entertainment, during weddings or other social functions, became part of that social organisation. Different clans had their unique dancing styles. In the area called Mkhangoma in Zwelibomvu, where most Khwelas live, the Khwela *ngoma* (dancing style) was, and still is, dominant. Residents cite the Magcabas and Khwelas as two dominant clans in the community that used to compete at social functions such as traditional weddings. Such competitions sometimes became aggressive as each group struggled to dominate the dancing scene against the other. The Magcabas attracted clans such as Ndimande, Shange, Nene and others around themselves to share a dancing style, the Magcaba *ngoma* (interview, Mr M Shange, September 2014). Therefore, dancing styles came to be influenced by, and also influenced, local subtleties characterising the chiefdom as a rural community. They divided the village into social units, and created a social distance between neighbours that manifested itself when

people who were part of the Magcaba dancing chain supported them against the Khwelas. The Magcabas were, and continue to be, a powerful group not only because of their leadership influence in the community, but also because they 'are the largest group with long history in the village that we all love and respect' (interview, Mr M Shange, September 2014). There are these varied loyalties, associations by marriage and other interests affecting people's responses to research questions, and their memories, about the fight between the Magcabas and the Khwelas.

Kinship has also played a significant role in some of the conflicts in KwaZulu-Natal. The Zwelibomvu fight was referred to as 'Magcaba versus Khwela'. As it progressed, however, it incorporated broader kinship networks. The Khwelas from Mangangeni, a neighbouring chiefdom in the southwest of Zwelibomvu, also joined forces in support of those Khwelas who live in Zwelibomvu. Mkhandi Shози, referred to earlier, was a well known fighter from Mpandwini in Umbumbulu. As the fight in Zwelibomvu advanced in 1986 and 1987, he and his men from Umbumbulu joined the Magcaba forces against the Khwelas (interviews, Beauty, August 2014, Mr M Shange, September 2014, Mrs MK Mkhize, September 2014).

As alluded to earlier, Mkhandi's involvement in Zwelibomvu's fight remains a point of curiosity in this ongoing research because, as McNulty (2014: 14) points out, political conflicts complicated local disputes. This, as Mathis (2008) concurs, blurs the divide between urban and rural politics. However, as indicated earlier, the triangular analysis of the tension between Mkhandi and *Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize during the Mpandwini fight, the close relationship between *Nkosi* Zwelinjani and the Magcabas, and Mkhandi's marriage relationship with the Magcabas makes it difficult to provide an informed political implication of his involvement in the Magcaba-Khwela dispute beyond marriage alliances. The IFP's political ideology operated smoothly in the rural areas through *Amakhosi* in the 1980s. Most elders in Zwelibomvu, including the Magcabas, have been IFP supporters. If Mkhandi was recruited into ANC in the 1980s and 1990s, as Mathis' studies (2008) suggest, Mkhandi had no reason to become politically involved in the Magcaba-Khwela fight in favor of the Magcaba elders who were IFP supporters at the time. Having built a home for his second wife among the Magcaba people, he had every reason to support them as his in-laws.

It was only in the early years of the twenty-first century that, due to influence of media and education, the younger generation in Zwelibomvu began to join the ANC (conversation, Mr A Shози, January 2015). However,

even now, young people and women are not openly politically active. These issues are under investigation in this on-going research. Nevertheless, from data collected, it looks like different clans were pushed by local interests when they joined different sides of the Magcaba-Khwela fight. These varied loyalties make it difficult to attach broader political meanings to a fight with so many levels of interactions. The agency of this violence remains local in people's memories, and relationships on the ground carry more weight than broader political movements.

Relationships between members of clans sharing surnames were also not completely sealed. Cross interactions between individuals, and between individuals and surnames, for example through marriages, complicated the manner of involvement in the conflict (interview, Mrs MK Mkhize, September 2014). For example, a Khwela woman who was married to a Magcaba family would secretly warn the Khwelas on the Magcabas' plan to attack. It would be difficult for her husband to attack the Khwelas, his in-laws (interview, Aunt B, July 2009, conversation, Mrs MMG Ndimande, November 2008). The Ndimandes themselves were not one unit because, as Beauty (August 2014) indicated, the family was divided into those who supported Aunt B's marriage to a Khwela man and those who supported the Magcabas. Families became a locality within which contradicting memories may be expressed to counter either the dominant or individual memories. Therefore, even among members of the same families, memories of the fight would be presented differently.

Nevertheless, at the heart of these wide-ranging alliances were issues of safety and protection. The Magcaba fighting party remained stronger against the Khwelas because of the armed support which they received from their adherents who in turn relied on them for safety (interview, Mr M Shange, September 2014). In their study of the Zulu kingdom before 1840, Wright and Hamilton (1996: 18-19) identified such forms of kinship structures as 'mental maps about who was related to whom, either by descent or by marriage, and therefore about who had what obligations to whom, and who could expect what dues from whom'. In Zwelibomvu too, one observes what Wright and Hamilton called the 'fluidity of kinship groups', in which individuals and social clusters manipulated kinship structures to enjoy social and political privileges accompanying such connections on the ground. To maintain such favours, certain memories should be protected, and thus reluctance to share them. As one of the informants said, 'no I cannot tell you that because we do not want any trouble with the Magcabas, they

trust us' (interview, Mr M Shange, 2014). Such individuals have maintained their loyalty to Magcaba. Therefore, as Bruner (1986: 144) asserts, narratives are not only structures of meaning, 'but of power as well'.

In communities such as Zwelibomvu where there are different degrees of power, the *Nkosi*, *induna* and family levels, secrecy is very important. Here, the ownership, definition, and power over memories, of Zwelibomvu's civil war is not only observed in Aunt B's original fear to talk, but also in the inaccessibility of women to interview, and the reluctance of the Ndimande domain to tell their side. When I first went to Zwelibomvu in 2008 looking for Aunt B, her relatives did not want to tell me where she lived. Some of them said she had died during the fight. It was only in 2009 that one of her adult nieces secretly gave me the details of her residence, which was in Hammarsdale, a township, a few miles west from Pinetown.

When I first met K in November 2008, he did not want me as a researcher to talk to Aunt B about the fight. He also told me that he knew nothing about it. Yet, Aunt B indicated that K and other male family members were part of the fighting party. K's attempts were not only to protect memories that could expose the Ndimande/Magcaba alliance against Aunt B's marriage choice. He was also protecting himself as an individual. He did not want to be implicated in any wrongdoing during the violence. His stand illustrates that memories do not only depend on individual comprehension of the past, but also on the individual's personal interest in it. These are all different levels of secrecy influencing memories, to protect certain interests.

Therefore, collective memory itself is not uniform, it is also shaped by other components such as individual desires to protect themselves. In 2014 when I first met Beauty, we had a short conversation, and she was willing to have another interview with me. When I went to see her again, she had changed her mind, citing her family members as a reason. Here, the individual remains loyal and may adhere to familial memory, rather than the community memory, this done in support of continuity in the individual identification with that family and its beliefs. Family interests permeate people's private memories and consciousness. Farhat Shahzad (2011: 378-91) thus argues that 'human beings are members of groups which at the same time exert different levels of influence on their agency as stores of memories'. Aunt B's family, the Ndimandes, have maintained their loyalty to the Magcaba clan, and protected these memories by refusing to be interviewed.

Loyalty between the Magcabas and the Ndimandes, and the complex identity which they shared, has determined that these are uncomfortable,

delicate, and embarrassing memories to be shared with outsiders such as researchers. That shared history and collective identity between them provided a code through which individuals and groups interpret their memories of the past, and which of those memories could be shared. Interests of families as private domains became infused into this process and, as a result, families reproduce the official version of the event. Where memories are shared, Aunt B is cited as the cause of the fight because, in general terms, it is an acceptable memory to share. Ryan calls this ‘mnemonic socialization’, in which the family as a ‘mnemonic’ community ‘teaches children how to recall their past in a structured and socially acceptable manner’ (2000: 156). Brewer et al thus argues that ‘social acceptance causes the self-stereotyping of identity, and the suppression of individual traits and the attendant cultivation of socially approved mannerism’ (2000: 487). Such individuals as Aunt B would thus not be afforded an independent platform to share their memories for fear that they could share details of the fight ‘in a socially unacceptable manner’ with researchers. Solidarity between mainly the Magcabas and the Ndimandes demonstrated the amount of power and control which household heads had over female members of their families.

Control over discourse, information and memories has serious implications for researchers who work with ‘vulnerable subjects’. African female researchers become even more susceptible in terms of racial and gender classifications and hierarchies within the research community. This is because they are seen by the community, first and foremost, as females who can easily identify with cultural constructions of memories and identities, and cultural settings within which individual events were experienced. It therefore becomes important for researchers, especially female researchers, to understand what Summerfield (2004: 67) calls the ‘cultural ingredients that make up the remembered and interpreted past’. Such dynamics do not only reveal the way in which women are viewed in a patriarchal society (see John 2006). As Nompumelelo Zondi states (2010: 19-25), they also highlight the forces at play to protect the existing status quo, to ensure that individuals share their memories according to the dominant social expectations and beliefs. Nevertheless, the complex web of participation in this fight raises questions beyond Aunt B, who was its supposed cause.

### **Stories beyond the story**

Scholars identify power or succession, death during quarrel, competition for resources, unfair treatment by the state, women, or long standing unresolved

tensions between groups as some of the sources of faction fighting (Sithole 1997, Lambert 1994: 149-64, Phimister and van Onselen 1972: 1-43, Thomas 1979, Argyle 1992). With the deep-seated secrets regarding the history of the Magcaba/Khwela relations, and tensions that have existed to the present,<sup>8</sup> many residents are reluctant to share the details of their (Khwela/Magcaba) conflicts from the past.

However, individuals or marginalised groups are not just passive recipients of measures which the dominant discourse puts at their disposal to construe history. They challenge the notion of collective memory as the sole element of the past. Aunt B claimed that tensions and feud had characterised the relationship between the Khwelas and Magcabas. She repeatedly stated that these two dancing groups never got along, and she felt that they used her as a scapegoat to fight (interview, July 2009). In September 2014, one of the informants revealed that, on the Magcaba side, there has always been this attitude that 'we will not allow the Khwelas to get away with it, who do they think they are?' (interview, Mr M Shange, 2014). Some individuals mentioned that some of the tensions stem from the competition for power, which has become a contested terrain at a village level. One informant revealed that some surnames have, for decades, questioned the leadership practice that allows the position of *induna* (headman) to be always held by a Magcaba person. He claimed that, during violence, some groups even joined the Khwelas against the Magcabas for that reason (interview, Mr D Magcaba, 1998<sup>9</sup>). In this village politics, Aunt B stated, the late Magcaba *induna* supported his people against the Khwelas. Another resident made a comment that, during the fight, the Khwelas gave a false report to *Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize that most of the Magcabas were dead and others had left Zwelibomvu. And that the Khwelas 'wanted to take over control of the village and build a zoo on the ground that used to be the Magcaba stronghold' (interview, Mr M Shange, September 2014). Before the current *induna*, Mr Mbongwa Magcaba, took over, the Nene clan contested for the position against the Magcabas. However, as the informant said, 'the voting results did not work in their favour' (interview, Mrs MK Mkhize, September 2014).

These political undertones within Zwelibomvu explain why Beauty feels that her sister, Aunt B, was used for other hidden agendas, and that, as the quotation in the introduction suggests, there were issues larger than Aunt B's romantic choice to marry a Khwela man. These individual observations and interpretations of events enable individual agency to provide its own

interpretative intervention against, and to undermine the self-sufficiency of, collective memory. Individuals, and minority groups, have power to decipher their own meanings of the events. Beauty's assertion (August 2014) that 'I am tired of people blaming my sister for that, they used her to fight their battles', supports Ryan's argument that individuals as an agency can reject a dominant memory and sometimes imbue it with their own internal thoughts or counter memories. Memory, and its construction, thus becomes a bone of contention between the public dominant narrative and the reaction of the individuals (Ryan 2010:154-9). Talking to Aunt B in Hammarsdale, away from Zwelibomvu, not only helped me to earn her trust. It also afforded her some space to establish herself as an authority in her own narratives. Personal memories, and meanings of the events of the 1980s, became more evident as powerful institutions such as dance groups, her family, and relatives no longer had power over her. Unfortunately her health condition had deteriorated badly, less than two months later, she passed on.

Some individual memories of the events place *Nkosi* Zwelinjani Mkhize at the center of controversy. Some residents, including Aunt B and Beauty, feel that his close relationship with the Magcabas clouded his judgment of events. Aunt B (July 2009) said that *Nkosi* Mkhize did not stop the fight early because 'he enjoyed seeing the Magcabas' victory over the Khwelas'. However, the accuracy of this statement still has to be confirmed as the research continues. Still, all these individual angles to the events suggest a complex mapping of the past, thereby supporting the argument that individual memories are not always passive to the prescriptions of the public/dominant memories aimed at influencing memory construction around the events.

In the final analysis, the dance relationship between the Magcabas and Ndimandes, and its perceived advantages (in terms of Magcaba's influence in the community, and their close connection with *Nkosi* Mkhize), has continued to manipulate the manner in which the narrative is told, and the memories of the fight itself. Individual observations, however, produce memories which influence the reception of the official memory. Some residents blame the former government's indifference towards the fight, and the lack of the police presence to stop or control it (interview, Mr D Magcaba, October 2010). However, there is no evidence suggesting that this was a state driven disruption. Control over information by Zwelibomvu's local authorities kept the media away from the unfolding events. Without written records, unearthing more memories of this violence remains a challenge for

researchers. As the enquiry progresses, however, there is a hope that more stories will come up to help researchers unpack untold memories surrounding this violence.

## Conclusions

Memories make sense if interpreted by the person remembering, but these are also influenced by the wider social and cultural environments within which individuals are placed (Batty 2009: 109-21). As many scholars agree, social factors impose influence upon the memory of an individual. In the construction of memory, individuals remember things from the past in relation to their membership in a certain group which determines the selection and interest value of their personal memories. Other scholars, however, challenge the view of an individual as a passive consumer or recipient of social dictates. Participants should be afforded an opportunity to shape their own narratives in the reconstruction of the past. Social scenery in which historical reconstructions of the past take place provides multiple agents with different positions and purposes. Such a backdrop puts forward conflicting interpretations of events, rendering memory reconstruction broad and controversial.

## Notes

1. Please note that this is ongoing research project in Zwelibomvu by the same author. The study of the Zwelibomvu's violence of the 1980s appears in another work written by the same author. See Cele (2014) 'Dance, violence and patriarchy in the era of political struggle: analysing the Zwelibomvu faction fight of the 1980s, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 3(7). However, that published article dealt with a different subject matter. It was analysing the role of dancing chains in the re-reinforcement of family patriarchal values and the running of Zwelibomvu as a rural community. Please note that such names as Aunt B, Khwela, Magcaba, Zwelibomvu, Ndimande, and others appear in that published work. This article examines social/local factors influencing people's remembering of events, particularly Zwelibomvu's fight of the 1980s.
2. Under the Homeland System (in the 1950s), Africans in South Africa were grouped according to their languages, for example isiZulu speakers in KwaZulu-Natal, which was then the KwaZulu Homeland. Africans were supposedly holding to distinctive sets of practices and common belief systems in each homeland.

3. A chiefdom is a political entity in a geographical area that operates under the governance of the *Nkosi*.
4. In this study a clan is defined as a group of people who share family ties, culture and a line of descent.
5. Real name withheld.
6. Patriarchal System is a form of social structure in a community in which a male person (patriarch) runs and controls a family, clan or chiefdom. Under such arrangements women have no influence. In marriage, children have to be called by their father's surname or clan.
7. Conversation means that this was not an organised interview, it was a conversation.
8. In July 2014, in Zwelibomvu, the current *induna* raised his concern that people are shooting and killing one another. The reasons for such attacks are under police investigation. As a result, he said, it is difficult to even call a meeting out of fear that community meetings might trigger violent confrontations.
9. Exact month cannot be confirmed.

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