

LAND DISPUTES, SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND THE STATE IN THE *IZIMPI ZEMIBANGO* IN THE UMZINTO DISTRICT, 1930–1935¹

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Abstract

This article challenges the widespread tendency to label and dismiss all manner of violent conflicts involving rural African communities as “faction fights”, “tribal disturbances” or “native unrest” primarily because such a generalisation perpetuates a stereotypical belief that there is an inherent propensity towards mindless violence among African people. By tracing the long roots of conflicts in the Umzinto district it illustrates that tensions brewed for long periods of time before they deteriorated into violence, and that violence was often the last resort, chosen when people had explored and exhausted all avenues for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Careful examination of the political and economic contexts in which tensions surfaced and degenerated into violence also reveals that there were non-African players who contributed to the outbreak of violent conflicts.

Introduction

The KwaZulu-Natal Province was in the news headlines during the first three months of 2000 not so much because of political violence, for which it was notorious during the 1980s and the 1990s, but because of the much disputed municipal land demarcation process that was taking place on the eve of that year’s local government elections. The Zulu monarch, Zwelithini Goodwill, and various *amakhosi* (chiefs) vehemently protested against the municipal land demarcation process, claiming that it was intended to undermine their authority.² They organised protest marches and held several meetings with President Thabo Mbeki and members of his cabinet, Deputy President Jacob Zuma and Sydney Mufamadi, the Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs.³ Dissatisfaction with municipal demarcation, remarkably, elicited similar responses from both the *amakhosi* aligned with the African National Congress (ANC), and those aligned with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). In an opinion piece which appeared in the

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at an International Conference in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2000. My gratitude goes to William Beinart and Saul Dubow for their constructive criticism at the conference. However, unless otherwise stated, the views expressed herein are those of the author.

² I ordinarily prefer to use the terms “chief”/ “chiefs” for the “traditional leaders” of the various chiefdoms to *inkosi/amakhosi* or *ubukhosi* because of the ideological baggage which gave rise to the preferred use of the latter during the last two decades.

³ See Afrol News (The African News Agency), “South African Local Government Elections, 5 December 2000, Issue Briefing: Traditional Leadership and Democratic Local Government”, in http://www.afrol.com/html/countries/SouthAfrica/background/backgr_elections2000.htm. (last accessed on 2 April 2009); For more on the reports on this see various editions of *The Witness*, *The Mercury*, *Ilanga LaseNatali*, *The Daily News*, *City Press* and the *Mail & Guardian* of January to March 2000.

February 2000 edition of the *Mail and Guardian*, for instance, the President of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA), Chief Pathekile Holomisa, claimed that *ubukhosi* (the institution of traditional leadership) was the bedrock of African democracy.⁴ This drew sharp criticism from Lungisile Ntsebeza and Fred Hendricks who maintained that the chieftaincy system was rooted in apartheid and by no means democratic. They questioned the degree to which “traditional” leaders could, in fact, be said to be traditional.⁵ The IFP President and the then Chair of the KwaZulu-Natal House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi, warned that municipal demarcation processes, which had never enjoyed the support of *amakhosi*, risked the outbreak of “faction fights” in most parts of rural KwaZulu-Natal.⁶

This case study explores the social and political contexts in which rural conflicts, which are often superficially generalised as “faction fights”, erupted in the Umzinto district of southern Natal during the first half of the 1930s (see Map 1). As I argue elsewhere, the remarkable tendency to label and dismiss all manner of violent conflicts involving rural African communities as “faction fights”, “tribal disturbances” or “native unrest” not only erroneously propagates and upholds the stereotypical belief that there is an inherent propensity towards mindless violence among African people, but has often obscured the role of non-African players in the making of such conflicts and violence.⁷ This case study highlights two key points about simple labels, including that of *izimpi zemibango* (wars which are a result of disputes), the term preferred in this paper to describe these conflicts. Firstly, they do not help us understand what causes latent conflicts to degenerate into armed hostilities; and secondly, they never satisfactorily explain what causes participants to play certain roles in both the conflicts and full-blown violence. Instead generalised and superficial labels provide us with unquestioning explanations which tend to oversimplify complex and dynamic contexts for conflicts and violence.

The study challenges the alleged “deviant nature” of conflicts and violence within and between chiefdoms and maintains that we can best understand why the rural African communities of the Umzinto district turned to violence by analysing the material crisis conditions and political contexts in which conflicts originated and degenerated to violence, together with events which triggered the outbreak of violence. The study is organised into a brief overview of the violent conflicts at Umzinto. It then traces long roots of conflicts and explores the role of the state in creating the conditions that allowed tensions to degenerate into violence. Finally, it briefly analyses the motives that chiefs,

⁴ P. Holomisa, “*Ubukhosi*: The Bedrock of African Democracy” *Mail and Guardian*, 11–17 Feb 2000.

⁵ Lungisile Ntsebeza and Fred Hendricks, “The Chieftaincy System is Rooted in Apartheid”, *Mail & Guardian*, 18–24 Feb 2000.

⁶ M. G. Buthelezi, “Media Briefing”, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) News Report, Channel One, February 2000.

⁷ This case study complements John Lambert’s work on violence and the state in colonial Natal, and my work on the state and violence in the Umbumbulu district during the 1920s and 1930s. For more on this, see J. Lambert, “Undermining the Homestead Economy in Colonial Natal”, *South African Historical Journal (SAHJ)* 23, Dec. 1990, 54–73; J. Lambert, “Violence and the State in Colonial Natal: Conflict Between and Within Chiefdoms”, *SAHJ*, 31, Nov. 1994, 149–164; J. Sithole, “Tale of Two Boundaries: Land Disputes and the *Izimpi Zemibango* in the Umlazi Location of the Pinetown District, 1920–1936”, *SAHJ* 37, Nov. 1997, 78–106; and D. J. Sithole, “Land, Officials, Chiefs and Commoners in the *Izimpi Zemibango* in the Umlazi Location of the Pinetown District in the Context of Natal’s Changing Political Economy, 1920–1936”, (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1998).

their headmen and ordinary men had in participating in acts of violence, and how local state officials' actions exacerbated rather than prevented conflicts from deteriorating into violence.

Chronological Overview

This case study concentrates on four arenas of violent conflicts between and within various chiefdoms of the Umzinto district in southern Natal from early December of 1930 to late August of 1935. The first violent conflicts, which involved the supporters of the Duma and the abaMbo chieftaincies, broke out on 8 December 1930.⁸ Mr Sebephu Ntshangase was fatally wounded and several other men were critically injured in the fighting.⁹ The police intervened and contained the situation and yet tensions continued to boil underneath the surface during the following seven months. The native commissioner for the Umzinto district reported that the Dumisa people were threatening more violence in July 1931.¹⁰ The next set of fights took place on the Crown Lands farm, "Mount McAndrew", and at the Mkunya and Bhewula locations in October 1932 and July 1933. They involved members of the Dumisa and the Mabheleni chiefdoms. Six men died from assegai wounds and 65 others were injured in the 1932 clash, a total of 19 *imizi* were set on fire, cattle were stabbed and other property was destroyed.¹¹ In the July 1933 fight, which was precipitated by allegations of stock theft, many *imizi* were burned down and several men were injured. Subjects of Chief Jack Duma, named Mcitshwa, Mpakama, Myengwa and Samson, started the fight when they attacked Chief Malahleka Mbhele's subject Ntelezi on 14 July 1933. Ntelezi and other Mabheleni men retaliated by setting Mcitshwa's hut on fire on 15 July 1933. They also raided the Zembeni section of the Bhewula location. While land disputes provided the basis for these fights, cattle raids characterised this violence. During the raid on the Bhewula location the Dumisa men confiscated 26 cattle belonging to Chief Hlomela Zembe's subjects named Gemaso Mzobe and Makadeni Gumede. Only 13 cattle were later recovered.¹²

The third set of land related incidents of violence involved the two Dumisa chiefdoms and the Zembeni chiefdom and took place from 13 to 28 August 1935. Trouble began on 13 August when the subjects of Chief Hlomela Zembe assaulted one of Chief Jack Duma's subjects named Mkibe Hlengwa. Unknown people, presumably

⁸ Dumisa is the *isithakazelo* (a form of polite address) for the Duma people. It originates from the first of the Duma chiefs named Dumisa ka (son of) Mvenya who led the chiefdom between the 1840s and 1870s. I use Dumisa and Duma interchangeably in this study. AbaMbo is the *isithakazelo* for the Mkhize people and their numerous chieftaincies which emerged after they had fled into southern Natal from Dingane's armies during the 1830s. For more on this, see notes from a formal conversation between Edmund Duma and Jabulani Sithole at Umzumbe on 6 September 2009; and telephonic interview with Gladman Ngubo conducted by Jabulani Sithole on 8 October 2009.

⁹ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR) Chief Native Commissioners' Papers (CNC) 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, Native Commissioner (NC) Umzinto to CNC, 8 December 1930.

¹⁰ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, NC Umzinto to CNC, 15 July 1931.

¹¹ PAR CNC 89 63/2 N1/9/2 (x), South African Police (SAP) Idududu to NC Umzinto, 3 November 1932.

¹² PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), "Communal Responsibility"; PAR CNC 74A 57/269 N1/1/3(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933; CNC 89 63/2 N1/9/2(x), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 15 November 1933; Mzobe and Gumede were among the Dumisa commoners who were incorporated into Chief Hlomela Zembe's chiefdom in 1925.

Dumisa people, retaliated and burned down two huts of the Zembeni people during the night of 18 August 1935. This sparked off a series of violent clashes between the subjects of the two chieftaincies.¹³ Most fighting took place on the portion of the Crown Lands where the *imizi* of the Dumisa and Zembeni people were mixed, and on the farm “Mount McAndrew” where a number of the Dumisa *imizi* were situated on the Zembeni portion of the Bhewula location.¹⁴ The final arena of conflict involved fighting between the Duma and Chiliza chiefdoms in January 1933.¹⁵ As we shall be able to show below, this violent conflict seemed to be an odd case which did not fit in neatly with the land-related incidents of violence within and between chiefdoms of the Umzinto district during the first half of the 1930s.

Perspectives on Violent Conflicts in Southern Africa: A Conceptual Framework

There is a rich literature on violent conflicts within and between African chiefdoms in the southern African historiography as result of the fact that violence, although admittedly on nothing like the scale of the political conflicts that wracked the Natal and KwaZulu region during the 1980s and the 1990s was widespread throughout the colonial, segregationist and apartheid periods in the region. Few rural African communities, if any, could have escaped it. Colonial officials and anthropologists provided an influential view of violent conflicts within and between African communities during the early colonial period in southern Africa: writing primarily for metropolitan audiences, aiming to justify their violent actions against the recently colonised and subjugated peoples, they presented these peoples (and more especially African societies) as intrinsically violent and barbarous. The conquerors, who had usually been the original invaders and who had introduced more destructive weaponry were depicted as essentially peaceful.¹⁶ The African people were portrayed and popularised as “marauding bands of blood-thirsty hordes”.¹⁷ The images of the African people that were conjured up bore a close resemblance to those found in studies of crowd protests in late nineteenth century Europe, which perceived crowds as socially reprehensible and reflective of the low moral and social status of the people constituting them.¹⁸

A second perspective, associated with the African intellectuals who were either involved in continent-wide anti-colonial struggles or in South African anti-apartheid struggles, attributed violence to the colonial and apartheid states. They argued that the oppressed and colonised were forced to resort to the armed struggle in order to match the violence of the oppressors. South African intellectuals and activists, usually writing from

¹³ PAR CNC 90A 63/8 N1/9/2(x), SAP Idududu to District Commandant (DC) Ixopo, 14 August 1935.

¹⁴ PAR 90A File 63/8 N1/9/2(x), SAP Idududu to DC Ixopo, 20 August 1935; and SAP Umzinto to DC Ixopo, 23 August 1935.

¹⁵ The Chiliza chiefdom is often referred to as the Madungeni chiefdom. Madungeni is an *isithakazelo* of the Chiliza people and their chieftaincy. I use Chiliza and Madungeni interchangeably in this case study.

¹⁶ See W. Beinart, “Political and Collective Violence”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (JSAS) 18, no. 3, September 1992, 455–457; and Lambert, “Violence and the State in Colonial Natal”, 152.

¹⁷ G. M. Theal, *South Africa* (London: Ernest Baum, 1917), 6–7; and Robert Godlonton, *Introductory Remarks to a Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), 4–5.

¹⁸ For discussion of this, see M. A. Byerley, “Mass Violence in Durban’s Settlements in the 1980s”, (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989), 8–9.

exile during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, tended to present the turn to the armed struggle as a natural, inevitable option given the refusal of the apartheid regime to listen to the grievances of black people. They argued with considerable justification that since the South African government had turned to violence in putting down popular opposition, the liberation movements were left with no option but to turn to violence themselves.¹⁹ In response, academics such as William Beinart have expressed scepticism about the romantic views which denied the existence of conflicts and violence in pre-colonial African societies. He maintains that while anti-colonial intellectuals like Frantz Fanon have quite rightly asserted the need to locate violence in its historical context, they tend to include ahistorical assumptions that violence in Africa was only born in the colonial era.²⁰

Authors who subscribe to the third view relevant to this case study have either rejected the notion of “faction fights” for describing rural conflicts because it assumes that African people had a natural propensity for violence—or have cautioned against the simplistic assumption that material crisis conditions explain how tensions degenerate into violence. J. K. MacNamara, for instance, has argued that the term “faction fights” is too simplistic, superficial and general and prevents an understanding of the complex nature of causes and contexts in which conflict and violence occur.²¹ Johnny Clegg and John Lambert too have rejected the alleged deviant nature of the acts of violence upon which members of various chiefdoms embarked. They argue that legitimate land related grievances lay behind and informed the behaviour of African men within the African chiefdoms of late nineteenth century Natal. Clegg and Lambert have attributed conflicts and violence to a deepening land shortage which undermined the power and authority of chiefs. While the power and authority of chiefs lay in their ability to allocate land resources to their subjects and followers during the pre-colonial period, for grazing and for building of *imizi*, they lost control over these resources with the advent of colonialism.

The colonial state complicated matters and hastened the outbreak of violence when it allocated land which had “traditionally” been occupied by people who paid allegiance to one chiefdom to another, rival chiefdom.²² This land allocation exerted pressure on the occupants of the land which had been ceded for a variety of reasons. People never had any material assistance to facilitate relocation from the land which had been ceded to a rival chiefdom. Those who were either reluctant to lose their arable lands or who could not afford the expenses which were associated with relocation to lands that fell under their chiefs often, but not always, turned to violence in a desperate bid to negotiate a favourable outcome to their situation. Once violence had broken out, chiefs and their *izinduna* (headmen) often quietly encouraged the newly relocated followers to encroach on lands of the neighbouring chiefdoms where boundaries were undefined,

¹⁹ J. B. Wright, “The 1960s: The Armed Struggle, Bantustans and the Growth of State Power”, in T. Nuttall, et al., *From Apartheid to Democracy, South Africa, 1948–1994* (Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town and Johannesburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1998), 66–67.

²⁰ Beinart, “Political and Collective Violence”, 469.

²¹ J. K. MacNamara, “Black Worker Conflicts on South African Gold Mines 1973–1982”, (Ph.D. diss., University of Witwatersrand, 1986), Chapter 7.

²² J. Clegg, “*Ukubuyisa Isidumbu*: ‘Bringing Back the Body’”, in P. Bonner (ed.), *Working Papers in Southern African Studies*, (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1981), 2: 188–194; and Lambert, “Violence and the State in Colonial Natal”, 149–64.

since they had an interest in acquiring larger chiefdoms because the colonial authorities calculated their stipends in accordance with the number of people who resided in their chiefdoms.

William Beinart and Mark Byerley, on the other hand, have cautioned against narrow contextual analyses that suggest material crisis conditions are the key sources of violence. They have argued that, while the material crisis conditions provide the underlying reason for discontent and for actions based on that discontent, they are insufficient as a reason for the outbreak of violence. Because it does not necessarily follow that there would be an outbreak of violence whenever conflict develops, there is a need to establish what exactly precipitates the breakdown of peaceful conflict resolution.²³ Daniel Crummey has added that there is a need to establish how and why people turn to violence because while they have the capacity for outrage and may resort to bloody violence, their outrage should be seen within a social setting.²⁴

As I show elsewhere, while the term “collective violence” is a useful alternative to “faction fights” because its open-endedness allows for a whole range of causes and consequences of violence, its inherent weakness is its descriptiveness, which means that, like other terms, “collective violence” necessarily reduces a very complex phenomenon to oversimplified generalisations that are equally open to racial stereotypes and prejudices against African societies.²⁵ Since we cannot work without some organising concepts, I have chosen to label the violent conflicts which broke out between and within various chiefdoms of Umzinto during the early 1930s as *izimpi zemibango* (wars which are a result of disputes) for two reasons. The first is that, like “collective violence”, the term is open-ended and thus affords us the possibility of exploring a variety of actors, issues and interests which should be considered when studying rural conflicts. There is not the simple closure that is involved in “faction fights”. The second is that there is sufficient evidence to show that African communities in Natal were using, and are still using the term *izimpi zemibango* when referring to conflicts within and between chiefdoms.²⁶

The Changing Political Economy: a Context for the Umzinto Land Conflicts

It is necessary to retrace our steps in order to put the conflicts in the Umzinto district in a slighter deeper historical context. The Natal reserves were established in the middle of the nineteenth century as a feature of the colonial land and labour policy. They were based on the recommendations of the 1846–47 Locations Commission which demarcated African reserve areas and locations.²⁷ They later became political and administrative control mechanisms for Natal. The African people were ruled through a hierarchy of command from the central government officials, through resident magistrates and native commissioners to the various levels of chiefs and *izinduna*. The hierarchy had the

²³ Beinart, “Political and Collective Violence”, 469.

²⁴ D. Crummey, “Introduction” to D. Crummey, (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London: James Currey, 1986), 1–3.

²⁵ Sithole, “Tale of Two Boundaries”, 78–106.

²⁶ See also: Sithole, “Land, Officials, Chiefs and Commoners”, 8–9.

²⁷ D. Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Natal, 1845–1910*, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press (OUP), 1973), 7–15.

Governor-General, who acted as the supreme chief, at the apex. The various chieftaincies were adapted to the needs of the colonial administration and the chiefs became petty judicial officials who performed duties on behalf of successive (colonial) governments. They served as the symbols of a patriarchal authority that was based in homesteads, especially during the rise of the migrant labour system in early twentieth century Natal. From the time of their establishment in the nineteenth century the small and scattered reserves suffered from serious overcrowding, since much of the ground to be occupied was in hilly and broken regions that were always vulnerable to soil erosion.²⁸

The Umzinto district, alongside other reserve areas of southern Natal, experienced land shortage from as far back as the late nineteenth century. Landlessness had reached new crisis levels by the 1920s and 1930s. Land shortage could be attributed to at least three causes. Firstly, the sales of the Crown Lands during the 1880s opened up the area to white settlement and gave rise to increased utilization of new farm lands by the settler population, exerting pressure on the African people who were evicted from the newly purchased commercial farms.²⁹ Many approached various chiefs within the district where they applied for permission to relocate their *imizi* to the already crowded reserve areas. It was often difficult for a chief to turn down land applications from the *abanumzane* (homestead heads) who brought large followers with them, especially because the chiefs' stipends were paid in accordance with the number of their subjects. Secondly, the failure of successive governments to allocate land to the African people especially during the first three decades of the twentieth century worsened landlessness at a time of rapid population increases among the African people. Between 1916 and 1936 there was a 54 % increase in Natal's reserve population and yet no new lands were allocated to the African people.³⁰ The magistrate of the Umzinto district drew the attention of the NAD (Native Affairs Department) to the congestion in his district in 1888, and expressed the fear that "the whole of Natal will, before very long, be too circumscribed to contain the fast-increasing Native population."³¹ Thirdly, the new employment opportunities in Durban led to an influx of job-seekers into the reserve areas which lay a short distance from the city centre.

The reserve areas of the Umzinto and neighbouring districts such as Umbumbulu and Camperdown were extensively incorporated into Durban's regional economy, especially as suppliers of male migrant labour, as early as 1915. The outbreak of the First World War had stimulated industrial expansion in the city especially in the manufacturing sector. This in turn gave rise to a high demand for African wage labour in industrializing Natal towns such as Durban. The city's growth rate was evident in the increase in employment figures, albeit with a decline in 1929/1930, from 43, 561 in 1924 to 65, 070 in 1940. Umzinto, alongside other districts of southern Natal which lay within a radius of 40 kilometres from Durban, supplied a very high proportion of these

²⁸ J. Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995), 11.

²⁹ Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, 105 and 129; Lambert, "Violence and the State in Colonial Natal", 158–159.

³⁰ E. H. Brookes and N. Hurwitz, *The Native Reserves of Natal* (Cape Town: OUP, 1957), 63.

³¹ Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, 106.

workers.³² Even in lesser centres such as Pietermaritzburg, African labour was in constant demand.

Employment opportunities were becoming available within the Umzinto district itself. The two small holiday resorts of Scottsburgh and Umkhomazi, which had already begun to enjoy an urban status in 1921, grew rapidly between 1921 and 1946. Meanwhile, Park Rynie, another small seaside white residential area, acquired urban status during the same period.³³ The Umzinto town, a sugar milling centre and the only other urban area in the district at the time, increased in size as a result of the prosperity of the sugar industry. As a result of these employment opportunities, the total urban population of Umzinto increased by approximately 6,000 people between 1921 and 1946, while the population of the surrounding rural areas, which were mainly devoted to sugar cultivation, increased by nearly 40,000 people.³⁴ These population distribution patterns were a consequence of an influx of job seekers who were attracted to the area because of potential job opportunities. Since the Durban municipal authorities only provided accommodation for African migrant workers in specially built hostels and compounds, those who could not find accommodation in the hostels used the surrounding reserve areas as dormitory centres from which they could commute either on a daily or weekly basis. Parts of the Umzinto reserve served as dormitory centres for people who were flocking in from outlying areas such as the Transkei and Pondoland.³⁵

Long Roots of Conflict: Land Crisis and Disputes at Umzinto, 1886–1913

The incidents of violence which broke out in the early 1930s were not the first of their kind in the Umzinto district. There were numerous violent encounters between men of the Duma, Mkhize, Mbhele and Zembeni chiefdoms between the 1880s and 1913. Lambert has attributed these conflicts to disputes over land in the aftermath of the sale of the Crown Lands within the Umzinto district, which was then known as the Alexandra County. Chief Sawoti Duma—who, on the one hand, had developed a reputation as a chief who was intolerant of any encroachment onto the Dumisa lands, while on the other, he quietly encouraged his people to encroach on the territories of the neighbouring chiefdoms of the abaMbo under Chiefs Mabuna Mkhize and Kaduphi Mkhize—featured prominently in these conflicts. His followers consequently clashed regularly with the subjects of the neighbouring chiefdoms. The local magistrate sentenced Chief Sawoti Duma to two years' imprisonment in 1886 for an alleged assault on a man from the neighbouring chiefdom. This sentence was later reduced to a fine on appeal from his *izinduna*.³⁶ After this incident Chief Sawoti became decidedly contemptuous of the Natal colonial government's attempts to control him. He publicly boasted that he was stronger than the local magistrate and he developed a reputation as a troublemaker who constantly clashed with the local Natal colonial officials until his death in 1903.

³² C. Kelly, "Durban's Industrialisation and the Life and Labour of the Black Workers, 1920–1950", (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989), 12 and 21.

³³ M. H. Alsop, *The Population of Natal* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1952), 102.

³⁴ Alsop, *The Population of Natal*, 102–103.

³⁵ See W. Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers and Youth Labour on the Natal Sugar Estates, 1918–1948", in *Journal of African History*, 32, 1991, 41–63.

³⁶ Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, 129.

After the death of Chief Sawoti, a succession dispute developed between two of his sons, Jack Duma and Mofi Duma.³⁷ By then the Natal colonial government had developed a reputation for resolving succession disputes by dividing the chiefdom concerned into small sections under the rule of rival claimants. It had done this to the Mkhize chieftaincy when a succession dispute erupted after the death of Chief Ngunezi Mkhize in 1894.³⁸ It seems that there were no serious outbreaks of *izimpi zemibango* between the Dumisa and neighbouring chiefdoms during the ten year period between 1903 and 1913. In the absence of a clear explanation for this, one can only assume that this was a result of the Natal colonial and, later the Native Affairs Department (NAD) officials' tighter control over the affairs of the Dumisa chiefdom following their mutually disagreeable encounters with Sawoti before 1903 and the outbreak of an *impi yombango* between Jack Duma's followers and the Zembeni people in 1903.³⁹ In response, the state officials had delayed confirming Jack Duma's right to the Duma chieftaincy until 1913. During this period Jack Duma remained an acting chief. He was therefore at the mercy of the NAD officials who could easily refuse to confirm his chiefship should he show signs of disloyalty. His co-chieftainship over the Dumisa people was only confirmed in June 1913, and it coincided with the death of Chief Mofi Duma during the same year. His son, Njeza Duma, succeeded him as a co-chief of the Dumisa people.⁴⁰ I have not been able to establish whether the outbreak clashes over land that broke out between Jack Duma's subjects and the neighbouring abaMbo chiefdom were in anyway linked to his confirmation as a chief.

The dividing of chiefdoms often left deep-seated feelings of animosity between the followers of the claimants to the chieftainship. However, the appointment of Jack Duma and Mofi Duma as co-chiefs of the Dumisa people never seriously divided their followers. They continued to perceive themselves as one people, and they sometimes fought jointly against people from the neighbouring chiefdoms. The Dumisa men from the rival chiefdoms fought jointly against the abaMbo people under Chief Nxamalala Mkhize in 1913 and against the adherents of the Mbhele chief named Tshukumisa Mbhele in 1918.⁴¹ Although the roots of most Umzinto conflicts dated back to 1913–1914 and 1925, they only degenerated into fierce fights during the first half of the 1930s.

Social Identities, Regional Dynamics and Violent Conflicts, 1913–1930

The *impi yombango* which broke out between the Dumisa (under Jack Duma) and the abaMbo (under Nxamalala Mkhize) on 3 December 1930 had its roots in a 1914 land settlement. In June 1913, a dispute over land culminated in a fatality; a Mkhize man named Vumazonke was killed. Approximately 400 men participated.⁴² The magistrate

³⁷ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, CNC for Natal to the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA), 17 December 1918.

³⁸ PAR SNA 1/1/192, SNA Natal to Colonial SNA, 22 September 1894; Sithole, "Tale of Two Boundaries", 89.

³⁹ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, CNC Natal to SNA, 17 December 1918.

⁴⁰ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, CNC Natal to SNA, 14 June 1913.

⁴¹ Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, 129.

⁴² PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, Ixopo Magistrate to CNC, 7 August 1913. Although this conflict occurred against a background of widespread protests against the 1913 Native Land Act, I could not find

who presided over the trial after this fight recommended that clear boundaries be demarcated between these chiefdoms. The boundary line was fixed in 1914 (see Map 2). It stretched from where the Alexandra location fence divided the Alexandra and Ixopo divisions.⁴³ It then ran along the following streams: Mtelela, Mzililo, Gobodana, Putuputu and back to the boundary separating the two divisions.⁴⁴ This land settlement placed six *imizi* of the Dumisa people within territory that was ceded to the Mkhize chieftaincy. The Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) for Natal gave the affected Dumisa people a choice of either retaining their *imizi* where they were, and still being considered Jack Duma's subjects, or of removing themselves at their own expense to the Dumisa chiefdom.⁴⁵

These people objected to the NAD ruling. They hired a Durban advocate named L. Renaud to represent them in court. In a petition which Advocate Renaud sent to the CNC for Natal, the Dumisa people invoked a form of group identity which centred round the Duma chieftaincy and through which they laid claim to most land ownership in the Umzinto district for themselves. They claimed to have arrived before all other groups in the district and that by virtue of first land occupation they regarded other chiefs and their subjects as "protégés" of the Duma chieftaincy. The petition stated that "some time after our petitioners' grandfathers had established themselves in this neighbourhood other natives begged permission to build their 'kraals' within the ground allocated to them by the Duma chieftaincy. They were allowed to live there, but unfortunately precaution was not taken to make them abandon their late chief and come under the said Dumisa."⁴⁶ The CNC refused to deal with Renaud on the grounds that lawyers were not welcome to meddle in native administration. When the legal channel was closed down, the Dumisa victims of the 1914 land settlement chose to stay on the abaMbo side of the new boundary line. They quietly maintained their Dumisa identity and continued to see themselves as the followers of Chief Jack Duma.

Tensions between the Dumisa and the abaMbo people resurfaced in 1926. Chief Jack Duma was the first to launch a complaint with the NAD officials in which he accused the abaMbo people of tilling lands which belonged to his chiefdom. The NAD investigated the complaint and uncovered that one *induna* of the abaMbo chiefdom named Nsini was indeed tilling lands on the Dumisa side of the 1914 boundary line.⁴⁷ However, twenty-seven months later, in October 1928, two of Chief Nxamalala Mkhize's *izinduna*, Nsini and Bhékinkosi, paid a visit to the NAD offices in Pietermaritzburg where they laid a complaint about the provisions of the 1914 land allocation, especially the failure to remove the Dumisa people from the land which the NAD officials had allocated to the Mkhize chieftaincy.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter Chief Nxamalala Mkhize himself accused the Dumisa people who resided within his chiefdom of "treating him with contempt". He too appealed to the Umzinto district native

evidence linking it to the activities of the recently formed South African Native National Congress (after 1923 renamed the African National Congress).

⁴³ Note that the Umzinto district was known as Alexandra Locations 1–5 before it was renamed Umzinto in the early twentieth century.

⁴⁴ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC to SNA, 29 April 1914.

⁴⁵ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC to SNA, 29 April 1914.

⁴⁶ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, Advocate L. Renaud to CNC for Natal, 1915.

⁴⁷ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC Natal to NC Umzinto, 13 July 1926.

⁴⁸ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC Natal to NC Umzinto, 15 November 1928.

commissioner, to remove them from his territory. The CNC for Natal, Theodore Norton, came out in support of Chief Mkhize. In November 1928 he ordered the Dumisa people either to remove their *imizi* from the abaMbo lands or to accept incorporation into the abaMbo chiefdom.⁴⁹

On 30 October 1930 the native commissioner for Umzinto informed Theodore Norton that the Dumisa people had expressed surprise at the new order because the NAD officials had never demanded that they remove their *imizi* from the abaMbo territory since the June 1914 land settlement. He added that they were neither prepared to relocate their *imizi* to the Dumisa chiefdom, nor to pledge loyalty to the abaMbo chieftaincy. On 8 December 1930 the Dumisa men launched an attack on the abaMbo people who were sharing the disputed territory with them. Eleven days later the CNC ruled that they were *ipso facto* subjects of Chief Nxamalala Mkhize.⁵⁰ This decision aggravated the already tense conflict. Although the NAD authorities prevailed over the Dumisa people, their decision to force the supporters of the Duma chief to become abaMbo subjects never resolved the problem. It merely suppressed anger and, in this way, laid seeds for future conflict.

“We do not accept this from you!” Land Disputes between the Duma, Mbhele and Zembe Chiefdoms, 1918–1933

Another flashpoint was the *izimpi zemibango* between the Dumisa chiefdom under Chief Jack Duma, on the one hand, and the Mbhele and the Chiliza chiefdoms, on the other, in October 1932 and July 1933. Most fights took place on the Crown Lands farm, “Mount McAndrew” and on the Mkunya and Bhewula locations (see Map 3). Violence broke out on 19 October 1932 when the Mbhele men attacked an *umuzi* which belonged to one of Jack Duma’s subjects named Zubu on the Crown Lands. This *umuzi* was situated in the Mandlathi area which the Mbhele claimed as theirs. The clashes between the subjects of Chiefs Jack Duma and Malahleka Mbhele took place on 14 and 15 July 1933.⁵¹ Like the *izimpi zemibango* between the Dumisa and the abaMbo people, the Dumisa–Mbhele enmity was based on longstanding land disputes in the Mkunya and Bhewula locations and on the Crown Lands farm “Mount McAndrew”, which dated back to March 1925. The subjects of the Duma, Mbhele and Zembeni chieftaincies had lived side by side on the Crown Lands, and on the Mkunya and Bhewula locations since the 1880s. A minor clash over land broke out between Jack Duma’s followers and the Zembeni people in 1903. The police intervened in good time and prevented an outbreak of a serious *impi*.⁵² However, serious fighting involving between 200 and 300 men—subjects of Chiefs Jack

⁴⁹ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC Natal to NC Umzinto, 28 November 1928.

⁵⁰ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC Natal to NC Umzinto, 19 December 1930.

⁵¹ PAR CNC 89 63/2 N1/9/2 (x), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 3 November 1932; CNC 89 63/2 N1/9/2 (x) SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 15 November 1933; CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43) “Communal Responsibility”; CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43)SAP, Idududu to NC, Umzinto, 20 July 1933.

⁵² PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, NC Umzinto to CNC Natal, 12 December 1918; and CNC 315 421/10/1918, CNC Natal to SNA, 17 December 1918.

and Njeza Duma, on the one hand, and Chief Tshukumisa Mbhele on the other—broke out on 12 July 1918.⁵³

The police and NAD officials expressed frustration over the fact that, although more than 200 Dumisa men were allegedly involved in the July 1918 clashes, they were only given about a dozen names during their investigation. The NAD officials placed the blame at the doorstep of Chiefs Jack and Njeza Duma. They accused them firstly, of failing to stop violence involving their supporters, and secondly of having been reluctant to report this conflict to the police and the NAD officials.⁵⁴ The state consequently suspended the stipends of the two Duma chiefs for whole year in 1919.⁵⁵ The NAD officials acted harshly against the Dumisa men as well. They imposed what they called “a collective penalty” on all men of the two Duma chiefdoms who were residing in the vicinity of the farm “Mount McAndrew” and the Mkunya and Bhewula locations. Furthermore, they suspended the Dumisa men from attending traditional ceremonies and functions within the Mabheleni and Zembeni chiefdoms and at Mkunya and Bhewula locations and “Mount McAndrew”, for a period of twelve months.⁵⁶ The heavy-handedness of the NAD officials towards the two Duma chiefs and their followers cemented the bonds of Dumisa solidarity between the two sections of the Duma chieftaincy and between the commoners and the two chiefs. Harsh punishment which the local state officials meted out against the Dumisa people merely postponed the outbreak of more serious clashes to a later date.

In 1925, tensions involving the subjects of the two Duma chiefs, Jack and Njeza Duma, on the one hand, and those of the Mabheleni and Zembeni chieftaincies, on the other, resurfaced on the farm “Mount McAndrew” and at the Mkunya and Bhewula locations.⁵⁷ The state intervened directly when the Umzinto native commissioner convened a meeting to demarcate new boundaries between the two Dumisa chiefdoms and those of the Zembeni and Mabheleni people. The state awarded a piece of land on which a total of 76 *imizi* of the Dumisa people were situated to the Mabheleni and Zembeni chiefdoms. The affected Dumisa people were given only two years to relocate from the Mabheleni and Zembeni chiefdoms to the Dumisa territory at their own expense. Those who failed to meet the deadline were informed that they would have to accept the rule of the Mbhele and the Zembeni chieftaincies.

Chief Njeza Duma protested vehemently against this boundary allocation. In response, the NAD deposed him from the Duma co-chieftainship with immediate effect. The NAD further threatened his followers with deportation when they protested against both the land demarcation and the deposition of their chief. The Dumisa people who attended the meeting expressed doubts that the actions of the native commissioner had the blessing of either the provincial or central governments. They thought that it was his ploy, aimed at forcing them to accept the rule of the chieftaincies that they had always regarded as junior to their own. A spokesperson for the Dumisa delegation said:

⁵³ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, “Statements which the members of the SAP took from witnesses and participants at the Umzinto Charge Office on 20–23 July 1918”.

⁵⁴ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, Acting Magistrate Umzinto to CNC, 17 August 1918.

⁵⁵ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, Minister of Native Affairs (MNA) to CNC Natal, 26 May 1919, “Confirmation of the Suspension of the Stipends of Chiefs Jack and Njeza Duma”.

⁵⁶ PAR CNC 315 421/10/1918, NC Umzinto to CNC Natal, 31 December 1918.

⁵⁷ PAR CNC 83A 57/464 N1/1/7(43), CNC to NC, Umzinto, 2 March 1925.

We do not accept this from you. I say this without any disrespect for you. We can only accept this decision if we get it from *hulumeni* [government] in Pietermaritzburg—I mean the successor of *Somsewu* [sic: Shepstone]. And if we can't get satisfaction there we will go to Pretoria, even to Cape Town.⁵⁸

They were shocked to learn that the native commissioner was carrying out the orders of his superiors. They secured the services of Advocate Renaud who was once more frustrated when the NAD officials insisted that they were not prepared to let legal practitioners interfere in “native administrative matters”.⁵⁹ The state refusal to give them a legal hearing left them with deep-seated feelings of resentment and bitterness. Once more, the Dumisa people only opted for violence when all amicable means of resolving the land disputes, including negotiations and legal representations, had failed. Although the *izimpi zemibango* of 14 and 15 July 1933 never helped to change the official status of the deposed Duma chief, Njeza, he continued to earn the recognition and respect of his subjects who regarded him as their “shadow chief”. This infuriated the state officials who had deposed him in March 1925 and who were forced to grudgingly admit that he continued to enjoy much respect and support from his people ten years after his dismissal.⁶⁰

The Resurfacing of Land Disputes between the Dumisa and Zembeni Chiefdoms, August 1935

More land-related conflicts broke out in the Mkunya and Bhewula locations, where the *imizi* of the subjects of Chief Hlomela Zembe and Chief Jack Duma were mixed, and on the Crown Lands farm “Mount McAndrew” where a number of the *imizi* that belonged to the Dumisa people were situated on the Zembeni portion of Bhewula location.⁶¹ Fighting took place on 13 and 18 August 1935 and skirmishes continued until the end of that month. The Zembeni men were the initial aggressors and the Dumisa warriors launched retaliatory strikes. Women and children fled their homes in the vicinity of the boundary line between the Dumisa and Zembeni chiefdoms during the fighting. Heavily armed groups, made up mainly of young men, converged at vantage points on hill tops. From these positions they launched surprise attacks on each others' *imizi*. There was a recrudescence of hut burning in which more than 100 huts were gutted by fire. A gruesome attack was carried out when the Dumisa men descended on a hut in which 11 Zembeni men were asleep. They threw grass against the door and set it alight. Ten men escaped unhurt and one was burnt to death.⁶²

⁵⁸ PAR CNC 83A 57/464 N1/1/7(43), Report of the Umzinto meeting, 29 April 1925.

⁵⁹ PAR CNC 133 1329/13 A491/13/16, CNC to NC Umzinto, 15 June 1931; and CNC 83A 57/464 N1/1/7(43), Adv. L. Renaud to CNC, 25 April 1925; and CNC 83A 57/464 N1/1/7(43), CNC to Adv. L. Renaud, 29 April 1925.

⁶⁰ PAR CNC 90A 3/8 N1/9/2(x), F. S. Heaton to CNC Natal, 25 September 1935.

⁶¹ PAR CNC 90A 63/8 N1/9/2(x), SAP Idududu to District Commandant Ixopo, 20 August 1935; and CNC 90A 63/8 N1/9/2(x), SAP Umzinto to District Commandant Ixopo, 23 August 1935.

⁶² PAR CNC 90A File No.63/8 N1/9/2(x), NC Umzinto, F. S. Heaton, to CNC, H.C. Lugg, 2 September 1935; and Heaton to Lugg, 14 September 1935.

Indiscriminate destruction of property characterised the August 1935 fighting. The Dumisa men, for instance, killed three cattle belonging to people of the Zembeni chiefdom on their way to Chief Duma's funeral. On 28 August 1935 the South African Police (SAP) reported that 50 fowls and ducks and one pig had been killed in both the Dumisa and Zembeni chiefdoms. Many huts, too, were burnt to ashes.⁶³ The outbreak of this violence confirms that the Dumisa people had indeed never accepted the NAD's boundary line that ceded a portion of land with a total of 76 of the Dumisa *imizi* to the Mabheleni and Zembeni chiefdoms, ten years earlier. The Zembeni men brought the salient Dumisa identity to the surface when they attacked one of the Dumisa men on 13 August 1935. By then the Dumisa people strongly held that their chiefdoms were victims of the NAD officials who were determined to humiliate them by excising their lands and allocating them to the neighbouring chiefdoms. The Dumisa men had already fought running battles with the Chiliza people in defence of the dignity and authority of the Duma chieftaincy 28 months earlier in January 1933.

“The spilling of salt”: The *Impi Yombango* between the Duma and Chiliza Chiefdoms, January 1933

Fighting which did not fit in neatly with other land related disputes broke out between the subjects of the two Duma chiefdoms and the Chiliza chiefdom in January 1933. Chief Tshesi Chiliza's son sparked off the conflict when he knocked a parcel from the head of an unnamed Dumisa woman and trampled on it. When the Dumisa men who were present at the scene of conflict tried to stop him he cut open a packet of salt and then spilled it on the ground and briskly walked away. The Dumisa people perceived the cutting and the spilling of the salt as an act of aggression and symbolic offence against them as a people because one of the late Duma chiefs was named *Sawoti* (salt). They regarded the spilling of salt on the ground as a symbolic message that Chief Chiliza's son despised the Duma chieftaincy and that he intended to destroy it.⁶⁴

Chief Jack Duma explored an amicable way of resolving this conflict despite the fact that Chief Chiliza's son's actions were demeaning to the Duma chieftaincy and its people. He despatched a delegation of prominent *izinduna* and *abanumzane* to report the conduct of Chief Tshesi Chiliza's son to his father. It was only after Chief Chiliza had come out in support of his son's actions and the Duma delegation had narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Madungeni warriors that the Dumisa people resorted to *impi*.⁶⁵ Pitched battles were fought between the men of the Dumisa and Madungeni chiefdoms near the Hlokozi forest where two people were killed and many others were wounded. At Ngayi 40 huts were set alight. Two huts of the Madungeni people were destroyed on 25 January 1933. The next day the Dumisa men launched a decisive raid on the Madungeni territory in which a total of 27 huts, including Chief

⁶³ PAR CNC 90A File No.63/8 N1/9/2(x), SAP Umzinto to DC Ixopo, 25 August 1935; and SAP Idududu to DC Ixopo, 28 August 1935.

⁶⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 January 1933.

⁶⁵ PAR CNC 89 63/2 N1/9/2 (x), Assistant Magistrate Umzinto to CNC Natal, 31 January 1931.

Chiliza's own homestead were razed to the ground. The Madungeni men were forced to flee in the direction of the Umthwalume River late that afternoon.⁶⁶

Making Sense of the *izimpi zemibango* in the Umzinto District during the 1930s

Almost all the *izimpi zemibango* in the Umzinto district during the 1930s, except for one, originated from longstanding disputes over land which dated back to 1914 and 1925. The people of the two Duma chiefdoms had consistently tried to explore amicable ways of resolving conflicts over land and their social status. They held direct negotiations with the local state officials and challenged what they regarded as illegitimate resolution of conflicts over land through legal channels. Their legal efforts were frustrated when the state denied them legal representation on the grounds that it could not allow lawyers to interfere in "native administrative matters". This meant that they were not entitled to representation which could expose unjust practices towards them, since the state had unilaterally reserved for itself the right to act as the judge and the jury on matters affecting the rural African communities.

Most fighting occurred in the context of alarming conditions of famine in the district. The local native commissioner, for instance, reported that more than 82 *imizi* in Chief Hlomela Zembe's chiefdom were without food in 1933. The South African Police too reported acute conditions of poverty and unemployment in the chiefdoms of chiefs Duma and Mbhele. Unemployment was hastened by the closure of the Umtwalumi Valley Estates. In November 1933 the Umzinto district native commissioner, F. S. Heaton, informed the CNC that people were eating leaves to survive in most chiefdoms of Umzinto.⁶⁷ However it is unclear whether the district commissioner's comment regarding the eating of the leaves was an indication of famine or a misunderstanding of the nature of people's diets in the region. For example, the district commissioner may not have been aware of the common cultural practice of eating a local plant known as *imbuya* as *imifino* (vegetables).

Widespread depletion of arable lands as a result of soil erosion, drought conditions, and the outbreak of malaria epidemics further deepened the material crisis conditions of the early 1930s.⁶⁸ The agricultural officer for the Umzinto district blamed soil erosion on overgrazing, indiscriminate ploughing and overstocking. The NAD initiated campaigns that were aimed at combating soil erosion. The new CNC for Natal, Harry C. Lugg, held several meetings with the chiefs of the Umzinto district in which he persuaded them to encourage their followers to sell off their cattle in 1933. In one of these meetings he said that "grazing land and water were scarce, and unless the cattle were thinned out, the grass would prove insufficient for them and they would die of starvation." He then suggested that the death of their cattle would hasten famine.⁶⁹ The extent to which Harry Lugg's statement was motivated by the state's bid to destroy

⁶⁶ PAR CNC 89A File No. 63/2A N1/9/2(x), NC Umzinto to CNC Natal, 31 January 1933; SAP Sawoti to SAP Commandant Ixopo, 1 February 1933; *The Natal Mercury*, 30 January 1933; *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 and 31 January 1933.

⁶⁷ PAR CNC 95A 68/1 N7/8/2 (x), F. S. Heaton to Harry Lugg, 21 November 1933.

⁶⁸ See J. B. Brain, "But Only Black Men Die: The 1929–1933 Malaria Epidemics in Natal and Zululand", (paper presented to Workshop, University of Natal, October 1988), 1–16.

⁶⁹ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), Minutes of the Meeting at Umzinto, 25 July 1933.

economic self-sufficiency among rural African homesteads, whose male members were not yet willing to take up wage labour voluntarily, will never be known. However, we do know that most African people continued to view the state measures aimed at containing soil erosion with a great deal of suspicion.

The changing nature of native administrative policy in South Africa also contributed to the enabling conditions for the outbreak of violence. The South African government modernised “tradition” through what became known as the “re-tribalisation initiatives” in response to the influx of young African men into the urban areas and the rise of radical working class politics. Re-tribalisation, which was enshrined in the 1927 Native Administration Act, was a national social and political initiative that was designed to shore up South Africa’s “tribal” order in the context of urbanisation and class based resistance politics.⁷⁰ It extended the Natal system of reserve administration to the rest of South Africa and protected loyal chiefs and acted harshly against the recalcitrant ones. This in turn created instability within the reserve areas when loyal chiefdoms began to lay claim to lands which originally belonged to rival chiefdoms in the knowledge that local state officials would receive their claims sympathetically.

Patronage relations between the state and the chiefs and between the chiefs and their followers resulted in ambivalent behaviours on the part of chiefs and their *izinduna*. The arbitrary powers to depose and to appoint chiefs, that the state exercised, dissuaded them from publicly indulging in acts which could damage their relationship with the local NAD officials. However, some chiefs covertly supported their followers’ use of violence for political ends while publicly distancing themselves from such incidents. This behaviour was a result of the pressing need to strike a delicate balance between retaining good relationships with both their subjects and the NAD officials. Failure to do so could land them in an awkward situation in which they lost respect within their chiefdoms and simultaneously got rejected by the NAD officials. A few examples will suffice.

Chief Malahleka Mbhele’s image and reputation were tarnished and damaged in the eyes of his subjects during the fights with the Dumisa chiefdom in 1932 and 1933. He went into hiding during these fights, claiming that Jack Duma had ordered his men to capture him and bring him over to the Dumisa chiefly homestead.⁷¹ He repeated this claim during the fighting which erupted in July 1933.⁷² After these incidents Chief Mbhele lost control of his chiefdom as his male subjects in particular began to disobey him and the NAD officials began to dislike him.⁷³ The native commissioner for the Umzinto district, A. D. Graham, accused Chief Mbhele of neglecting his duties.⁷⁴ Graham’s successor as the native commissioner of the Umzinto district, F. S. Heaton, called him a weakling who could not control his subjects. The police also expressed their disapproval and suggested that he should be deposed.⁷⁵ This confirms that the chiefs’

⁷⁰ PAR CNC 108A 94/4 N7/9/2(x), “The Native Administration Bill”, undated; and T. A. Nuttall, “Class, Race and Nation: African Politics in Durban, 1929–1949”, (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1991), 98.

⁷¹ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 3 November 1932.

⁷² PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933.

⁷³ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933; and CNC 89A63/2A N1/9/2(x), J. Mbhele’s testimony before the Assistant Magistrate Umzinto, 2 December 1932.

⁷⁴ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), A. D. Graham to the Assistant NC Umzinto, 2 December 1932.

⁷⁵ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933; and CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), F. S. Heaton to Harry C. Lugg, 4 October 1933.

failure to maintain good relations with their followers could create problems for them.

Daring behaviour did not help, either. The experience of Chief Chiliza, who actively urged his subjects to attack the Dumisa people in January 1933, bore testimony to this. When full-scale fighting broke out he remained on the battlefields with his men. He allegedly refused to heed the police order to have his men dispersed. One of his *izinduna* asked the police to let them fight for at least an hour. The police had first hand evidence which they used to press charges of inciting violence and of mobilising the Madungeni men to attack the Dumisa delegation that had come to report his son's aggression against an unnamed woman. What this illustrates is that while Chief Chiliza's male subjects developed trust in him, he was rendered vulnerable to severe state punishment.

Chief Jack Duma survived because he took extra precautions during the conflicts. He often created alibis if he knew that fighting was to occur. When he could not come up with an alibi in time, he showed up soon after the outbreak of violence and pretended to be assisting the police in suppressing it. The native commissioner for Umzinto and the police reported that he cooperated with them during the 1932 and 1933 fighting between his chiefdom and that of the Mabheleni.⁷⁶ He was consequently exonerated from any guilt that was related to these fights. It was this type of behaviour that helped Chief Jack Duma enjoy the confidence and support of his subjects, on the one hand, and simultaneously secure his position as a chief, on the other. Whenever chiefs were unable to create alibis or come up with other safe methods of preventing harsh state actions, the unwritten rule was that their *izinduna* would shoulder the blame. For example, when the chief native commissioner and the police demanded that Jack Duma produce the participants in the Dumisa–Madungeni fighting in January 1933, in order to avoid a repeat of the harsh punishment and possible suspension of his stipend which he had suffered in 1918, he told them that his *izinduna* would know the perpetrators of violence.⁷⁷

While most chiefs avoided confrontation with the NAD officials at all costs, the *izinduna* often risked conflicts with both the NAD officials and the police. The NAD consequently dismissed most of them on the grounds that they were the “warlords or war-generals”. The Natal chief native commissioner, J. M. Young, threatened to depose Jack Duma and Tshesi Chiliza if they failed to produce participants after the fighting between the Dumisa and Madungeni chiefdoms in January 1933.⁷⁸ Chief Jack Duma subsequently demoted three of his *izinduna* on the orders of the NAD officials who accused them of organising fighters for the *impi* between the Dumisa and Mabheleni people.⁷⁹ They demanded that many others be stripped of their positions in the Mabheleni and Madungeni chiefdoms. The *izinduna* were always prepared to risk dismissals from their positions because outstanding performance in battles could earn them a great deal of respect from young men. Furthermore, they could expect tributes from people in the territories under their control and possibly challenge chiefs politically if they amassed enough support.

⁷⁶ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), A. D. Graham to the Asst. NC Umzinto, 2 December 1933.

⁷⁷ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), Minutes of the meeting with CNC, 10 February 1933.

⁷⁸ PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), Minutes of the meeting with CNC, 10 February 1933.

⁷⁹ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933; and CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), F. S. Heaton to Harry C. Lugg, 4 October 1933.

The varying patterns of resistance—from clandestine support for violence on the part of some chiefs, to risky behaviour among most *izinduna*, to open defiance among commoners—suggest that there were differing conceptions of the law, legitimate authority and acceptable collective behaviour between the officials of native administration, on the one hand, and the people of the Dumisa, abaMbo, Mabheleni, Madungeni and the Zembeni chiefdoms, on the other. The police complained on numerous occasions about lack of cooperation from the local population when they tried to arrest participants in the fights. Lt. L. J. Joubert of the Idududu police post said that police work was difficult because as soon as they were seen in the area “the fact was broadcasted from one hilltop to another”. This gave suspects sufficient time to hide. During the 1935 fighting between the Dumisa and Zembeni chiefdoms the police reported that Jack Duma’s armed men gathered mostly on the hilltops from where they could see a long distance off. When the police patrols approached they disappeared into the inaccessible rugged country.⁸⁰ The success of the protection of warriors by the local people could be measured by the small number of arrests which were made after the 1932 Dumisa–Mabheleni clashes. Only 39 of the more than 200 men who participated in the fighting were arrested.⁸¹ The native commissioners of Umzinto, Messrs A. D. Graham and F. S. Heaton, complained about the apparent conspiracy to suppress and hide the names of those who participated in the incidents of *izimpi zemibango* in both the Dumisa and the Mabheleni chiefdoms in 1932 and 1933.

Young men from the various chiefdoms served as catalysts for the actual fighting, and the Dumisa leaders were able to mobilise more than 2, 000 men, of the total of 5, 000 fighters who participated in the Dumisa–Madungeni clashes.⁸² During the fight between the Dumisa and the Mabheleni chiefdoms in July 1933 the South African Police found only women and children at home in the 50 to 60 *imizi* which they visited because the men had gone across the Umkhomazi River to plan the conduct of war.⁸³ In these patriarchal communities women, like children, were treated as minors that needed protection during the *izimpi zemibango*. The Umzinto magistrate endorsed this view when he exonerated the Zembeni men from any guilt associated with their armed assembly during the clashes between the Dumisa and Mabheleni men in July 1933, on the grounds that they had armed themselves on hearing the cries for help from their women.⁸⁴

The huge numbers of men who participated in the fights between and within chiefdoms suggest that young men had been socialised to fulfil the role of warriors, ready to be organised to fight for a range of objectives. Although evidence for this is difficult to obtain and therefore remains a subject for further research, at least in the case of the Dumisa, it is possible to suggest that one of the sources of mobilisation was a distinctive group consciousness which drew inspiration from a commonly held view of a position of seniority which the Dumisa chiefs and their subjects were believed to hold in the region of south-western Natal. These group identities were both defensive and aggressive in character and centred on the Duma chieftaincy with two Duma chiefs,

⁸⁰ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Umzinto to DC Ixopo, 23 August 1935.

⁸¹ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933.

⁸² PAR CNC 89A 63/2A N1/9/2(x), SAP Sawoti to DC Ixopo, 1 February 1933.

⁸³ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933.

⁸⁴ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), NC Umzinto to CNC Natal, 4 October 1933.

Dumisa and Sawoti, used as rallying symbols. The Dumisa people constructed an exclusionist version of local history to press claims to land, claiming legitimate right over most lands by virtue of their early arrival in the district and the fact that they regarded all other chiefs and their people as vassals to the Duma chieftaincy.

The superiority complex of the Dumisa, which often surfaced in the escalation of political conflicts in south-western Natal, had long historical roots. The House of Dumisa had historically been regarded as the most senior chieftaincy in the region falling under the Nhangwini territory that stretched from Mqatsheni in the Sani Pass area down to Umzimkhulu, Harding and Port Shepstone through to Umzinto along the south coast. Its founder, Dumisa Duma, was a prominent subject of the Nhangwini ruling family who resided near the present day Lourdes Roman Catholic Mission at Umzimkhulu. He endeared himself to the Nhangwini leader named Nombewu, ka (son of) Gansa ka Mencwa kaTiba because of the expertise he had in hunting and capturing large game from elephants to rhinoceros and many others. He had allegedly acquired this knowledge from his in-laws, the Khoisan hunter-gatherer communities who lived on the Drakensberg mountains.⁸⁵ He consequently attracted a large following among the local people who often assembled at his vast homestead to feast on the meat and sorghum beer which were always available in abundance. Upon hearing of his influence Nombewu appointed him as one of the more than three dozen chiefs who paid their allegiance to the Nhangwini rule. He allocated Dumisa a piece of land in the present day Umzinto area where he was tasked with looking after the local Nhangwini subjects.

Dumisa subsequently established himself as the regional powerhouse in the lower parts of south-western Natal on the eve of colonial rule in the area. Other chiefs knew and accepted this seniority before Theophilus Shepstone began to interfere with the local power dynamics during the 1840s and 1850s.⁸⁶ Junior chiefs who resented Dumisa's power aligned themselves with the colonial authorities in the hope of challenging not only the Dumisa but also the Nhangwini paramount rule. Power dynamics occasionally surfaced whenever there were tensions in the region. The NAD officials consequently viewed various Duma chiefs as the most disloyal and recalcitrant chiefs in the Umzinto area.

The Dumisa group identities which had been latent before assumed a more defiant and resilient character during the 1930s. The Dumisa people resisted forced incorporation into the Mabheleni and Zembeni chiefdoms because they regarded this as a form of banishment. Chief Hlomela Zembe explained to the police in July 1933 that his subjects at the Bhewula location still regarded themselves as the Dumisa people. He added “when the *amaBhele* tribe [sic] have any trouble with Jack's people [sic], that section of Bhewula who were under ex-chief Njeza still regarded Jack's people [sic] as their ‘brothers’ and sided with them against my people.”⁸⁷ The determination of the Dumisa people to resist all forms of state land impositions forced the Umzinto district native commissioner, F. S. Heaton, to acknowledge that Chief Zembe's control of the territory which previously belonged to the Duma chiefdom was the main source of

⁸⁵ See G. Ngubo, *Umlando Ofinqiwe wobukhosi baseNhangwini* (unpublished manuscript, 2008), 5–6. Also, private communication and notes of conversation between Edmund Duma and Jabulani Sithole, Umzumbe 6 September 2009, in possession of the author.

⁸⁶ Ngubo, *Umlando Ofinqiwe wobukhosi baseNhangwini*, 6.

⁸⁷ PAR CNC 74A 57/156 N1/9/2(43), SAP Idududu to NC Umzinto, 20 July 1933.

tension.⁸⁸ Although it has not been possible to establish how the people of Dumisa viewed their group identity in relation to emerging Zulu ethnicity during the 1930s, it is clear that it was used to rally community support behind the Duma chieftaincy whenever conflicts erupted.

Conclusion

By tracing the long roots of conflicts in the Umzinto district this study illustrates six key points. The first is that tensions brewed for long periods of time before they deteriorated into violence. The second is that violence was often the last resort, chosen when people had explored and exhausted all avenues of peaceful resolution of conflicts. The third is that colonial and segregationist states were the major actors in these incidents of violence. They created conditions for conflict to originate and intensify. The fourth is that it was the young men from the various chiefdoms who served as the main catalysts for the outbreak of violence. The fifth is that fighting was specifically reserved for young men as these patriarchal societies regarded women and children as minors. They therefore remained at their homesteads during the fights because of the commonly observed convention that women and children should not be interfered with. The final point is that the prevailing material crisis conditions at the time hastened the outbreak of violence. Looting, which was widespread during the fights, was therefore a means of alleviating famine while the burning of huts was a strategy designed to force the opponents out of the disputed territories permanently.

The NAD officials and the police were unable to prevent local people affording warriors protection, or to do anything about the continued respect and support which deposed chiefs and *izinduna* enjoyed in their areas. The local people had their own conventions which exonerated from guilt those people whom the state defined as culprits. Their willingness to shield the warriors from the police bore features of Donald Crummey's social banditry in that it challenged the state not by confronting it, but by reaching for alternative forms of authority and power. It simultaneously shielded warriors from the law of the state in a manner reminiscent of Hobsbawm's "primitive rebels".⁸⁹

The conflicts that erupted in the Umzinto district during the 1930s were certainly not a result of any mindlessness on the part of the local residents and thus cannot justifiably be dismissed as "faction fighting". Unfortunately, no measure of objections seem to filter through to our politicians because they continue to unwittingly deploy terms which are steeped in racial stereotypes, as they did on the eve of the 2000 local government elections. It is also incorrect to assume that, because the system of chiefly rule was open to political manipulation, abuse and distortions during the colonial and apartheid periods, it is inherently undemocratic as suggested by Ntsebeza and Hendriks. The institution of chieftainship predates colonialism and therefore cannot be rooted in apartheid. Furthermore, despite its backwardness in the present day context, a significant number of rural African communities still embrace it and regard it as relevant to their way of life.

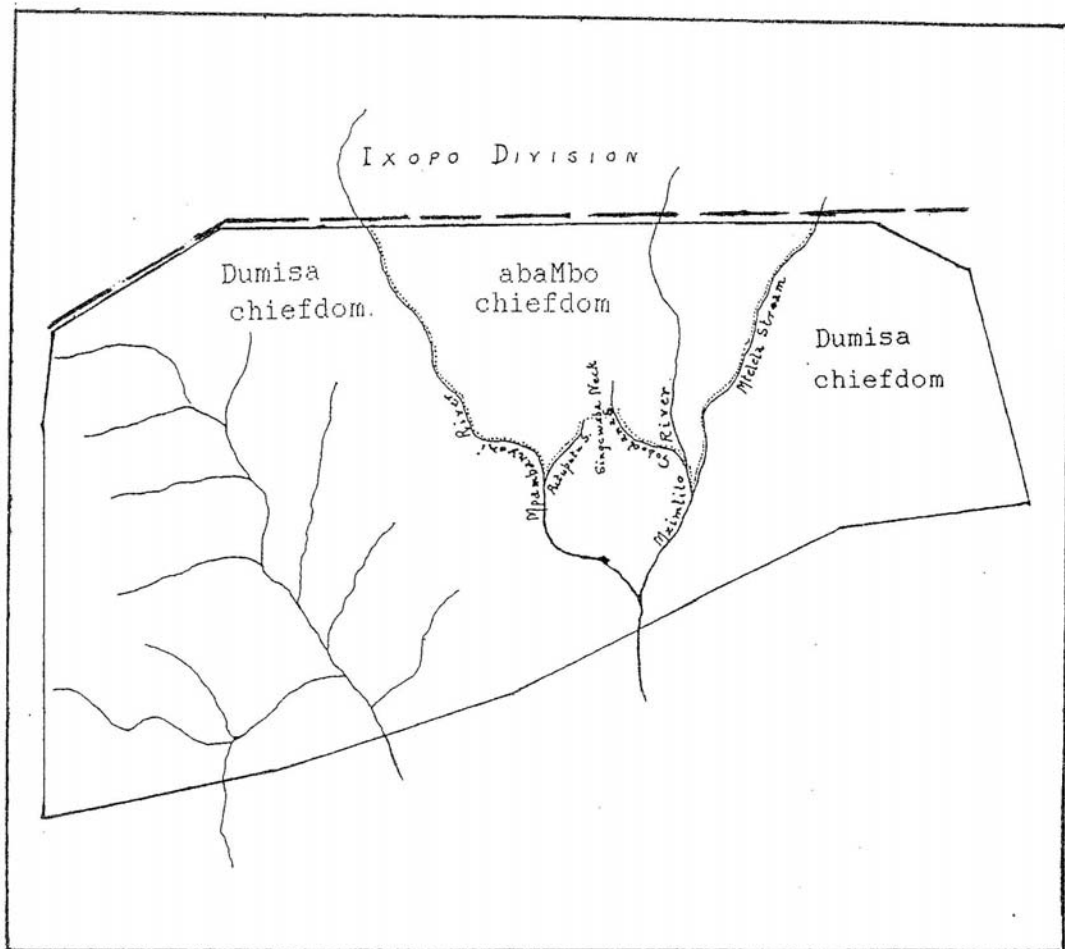
⁸⁸ PAR CNC 90A 63/8 N1/9/2(x), NC Umzinto to CNC Natal, 2 December 1935.

⁸⁹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

Map 1. The Umzinto and the Umbumbulu districts c. 1989. (The boundaries are relatively the same as in the 1930s)



Map 2. The 1914 NAD boundary between the Dumisa and the abaMbo chiefdoms..



— — — Inter - Divisional Boundary

..... Boundary Laid Down By The Chief Native Commissioner

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