



## FIELDWORK, KILLING TIME AND ACCIDENTAL PHOTOGRAPHS

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**Mahhashini, Nongoma, northern KwaZulu-Natal.  
Friday 4 April 2008, 4.04 p.m.**

A Ndwandwe woman is leaving home to marry into another *isibongo* (descent group). It is the day before the wedding. The private, family part of the *umncamo* (send-off ceremony) has just been concluded behind closed doors. The bride is being taken out to the cattle enclosure, where the ancestors will be informed that she is leaving her Ndwandwe home to become a Zulu. The group of people that walk the bride out of the house is led by two young men bearing a brand-new wooden chest – the customary possession that she takes to her new home. Behind them walks one of her ‘fathers’ – either her biological father or an *owasemndenini* (Ndwandwe blood relation who is of her father’s generation). He is tasked with leading the ceremony because he knows how to speak to the ancestors: he knows the Ndwandwe *izithakazelo* (kinship group praises) and the *izibongo* (personal praises) of some of the ancestors he has to address. He also knows the protocol: which forebears of which houses he has to address, and what order he has to address them in.

The bride follows her ‘father’. She is surrounded by her other ‘fathers’ and her ‘brothers’ as well as her *izimpelesi* (bridesmaids). She is in traditional or Zulu dress, as it is commonly called: an *isidwaba* (cowhide skirt), a piece of leather hanging from her neck that covers her breasts, and an *inhloko* (headdress with tassels hanging down the front) covering her face. The group sings ‘*Inj’ emnyama*’, the *ihubo lesizwe* (national hymn) of the Ndwandwe as they walk out of the house. It is a very solemn moment. All of us loitering in the yard, who are forbidden the privilege of taking part in the ceremony indoors, must now be quiet and orderly. Those

