



**Meeting Women and
History in Magude**
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Meeting Women and History in Magude: Fieldwork Methods

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Introduction

I arrived in Magude district in early 1995 with a research agenda defined by several overlapping streams of scholarship: oral history in South Africa, life histories of African women, Mozambican historiography, and writing on women's oral traditions and material culture in other parts of the world. Each stream offered a model for how I might explore the lives and histories of women in rural Magude; taken together, they equipped me with what I believed were conceptual tools and methodological strategies more than adequate for carrying out my project. Unfortunately, these models did not prove very helpful in my initial efforts to negotiate interview relationships with women. In fact, so unprepared did I turn out to be for this venture that I spent my first few months in Magude battling a growing conviction that my research had been hijacked by mysterious local forces who had convinced the women of the district to pretend they knew nothing about the past.



Below, in the section "History in Translation," I discuss the reasons for this paranoia, particularly those that prompted me to alter my interview tactics and to reflect on the significance of my stumbling—on the lessons murmuring beneath the deceptively simple surface of what went wrong, and why. It was in the course of these reflections, and as I slowly became more adept at interviewing the women of Magude, that I began to understand how women's forms of memory—women's *switsundzuxo*—could constitute history in their own right. In this history, the Shangaan language displays a subversive feminine side; female activities and affections stand at the center of historical memories, and in the act of remembering what is highlighted—through oral and material forms that are inseparable from memories' meanings—is not what, when, or where but with whom things have happened.

In the final two sections, "Interviews" and "Archives and Libraries," I describe the body of evidence on which the arguments of this book rest: the oral, visual, artefactual, and documentary sources I used in Magude and elsewhere. In "Interviews" I explain in some detail both how I came to know the women I interviewed and how the political and environmental conditions of postwar Magude influenced the geographic distribution and the social dynamics of my conversations with them. I also outline there a profile of the full cohort of 81 interviewees and the core group of 13 women with whom I spent the most time. The section concludes with a brief discussion of my use of questions within the interviews and of other, more participatory methods of learning women's histories between these tape-recorded sessions; a summary of my approach to transcribing women's oral narratives; and a note on various other kinds of evidence I collected or created in the field—photographs, sketches, and my field notes and personal journals. In "Archives and Libraries," I identify the archival materials that were helpful to my research in a supplementary way—not as a check on women's memories but as a source of contextual fabric to clothe them more fully.

History in Translation: Gendered Meanings, Gendered Pasts

The circumstances in which I moved to Magude district—specifically to the locality of Facazisse, where I lived for the duration of my fieldwork—were enormously important in determining how the women of Magude responded to me and in shaping the dynamics of early interviews. While in Maputo, I had been fortunate to arrange tutoring in Shangaan from Professor Fernando Khosa, a language instructor at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane and an ordained minister of the Mozambique Presbyterian Church (Igreja Presbiteriano de Moçambique, or IPM—formerly the Swiss Mission). Knowing my interest in the area he liked to call "Khoseni," after the clan whose chiefs had ruled the Magude area in late precolonial times, Professor Khosa invited John and I to accompany him to a weekend pastoral retreat at the Antioka church in Facazisse in March 1995.



There, we had the pleasure of conversing, singing, eating, and attending worship services with church leaders ranging from Dr. Simão Chamango, president of the IPM synod council, to Presbyterian pastors and layworkers from all over southern Mozambique. We also enjoyed meeting the Antioka pastor Carlos Mbanza, chatting with the women who worked endlessly to keep everyone fed, and bantering with the children who giggled at their

valungu (white) guests at every opportunity.

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During the retreat, Dr. Chamango and Pastor Mbanza offered us the use of a small rondavel hut on the Antioka grounds, one of nine used to house patients of the mission hospital until Renamo forces burned much of the property in the mid-1980s. By the time I arrived, about ten years later, only three of the huts were remotely habitable, and two of them were already occupied by two unrelated elderly women, Rosalina Malungana and Juliana Kwinika, who had recently returned to the countryside from their wartime residences in Magude town. Neither woman, we were told, had a male relative willing to help with the construction of



a new home, and so for the foreseeable future they would remain on Antioka property as guests of the church. The third hut needed minor repairs but otherwise seemed an ideal spot for us to live: four kilometers from Magude town, less than one kilometer from the Nkomati River (the local water source), and along a major footpath that connected Facazisse to the road



into town and marked the outer limit of the Antioka property. After finishing the necessary renovations, which included covering a hole in the reed roof and fashioning a ceiling from nylon mesh (to divide the interior space between ourselves and the resident bats), we moved into our new home in April 1995.

For the first few weeks, it was easy to believe that we were unconditionally welcome in the community and that the people of Facazisse viewed our arrival as an exciting and auspicious event. We were treated as honored guests at Antioka worship services, and enthusiastic



greetings—and large amounts of food—were offered by many of our churchgoing neighbors. Much unsolicited community labor was spent trying (unsuccessfully) to expel the bats from our roof; when these efforts failed, a boisterous group of church women trooped over to give the bat urine-stained floor of our hut a salutary scrub. It soon became clear, from this outpouring of Christian hospitality, that many people thought we were

missionaries, and that they viewed the purpose of our apparent "return" to Antioka—still known to most local folk as *ka muni*, "the missionary's place"—as the rehabilitation of the church's once-grand facilities and the revival of the tradition of Swiss medical and social service which ended at independence. The local church hierarchy itself strenuously tried to define us as prestigious visitors whose presence would bring unspecified rewards to the struggling congregation. As I later learned, rumor had it we had come to "help," like the other *valungu* who had begun streaming into Mozambique toward the end of the war, pumping money, food, and materials into the countryside to "wake up" the land from its disaster-stricken slumber. As far as I remember, we did nothing to suggest or encourage the notion that the people of Magude would gain in tangible ways from supporting my research. But the Swiss legacy was remembered with acute nostalgia at this particular time, and people trying to rebuild war-shattered lives were quick to pin their hopes for recovery on—and lend their own meanings to—the *deus ex machina* we unwittingly represented.

Before long, of course, as word spread that neither of us was a minister or a medical doctor, as our supply of aspirin ran out, and as we began occasionally to miss Sunday morning services, popular opinion was forced to adjust, though not without some expressions of disappointment.

Not everyone in Facazisse took the news as hard as one neighbor we knew only as Lizzie, who concluded that *valungu* who were not missionaries could only have evil intentions. Though partially deaf, she liked to shout to passers-by that I must be an "arms trader from America" come to reignite the civil war. Despite the handful of returning migrant workers who knocked on our door to inquire suspiciously about our motives in Magude (because, they said, we "looked like Boers"), we continued to enjoy friendly visits from members of the community, especially from non-Christians who had been wary of us early on. But the mood of expectant goodwill that had surrounded our arrival began to dissipate, leaving us with the task of redefining our identities more carefully, and me in particular with the uncomfortable feeling that I had let people down and would now have to work harder to generate local interest in my project.

A second dilemma I faced arose because of how our hosts initially translated my research to the people of Facazisse. At the pastoral retreat in March, seeking to win the church community's approval, Professor Khosa had introduced me in Shangaan as a "student" who had come from "very far away, in America" to learn about "the history of the Antioka church in Khoseni." Not wanting to contradict him, but anxious to avoid misrepresentation, I stood and introduced myself (in a halting mix of Portuguese and Shangaan that was probably incomprehensible to most of the audience) as someone who wanted to learn "the history of Magude, especially family and community history, from women's point of view." As subsequent conversations made plain, Professor Khosa's version had prevailed, and all that endured of mine was that I wanted to know something about women.

Professor Khosa's choice of words dictated how the community interpreted my agenda, and how women in particular construed their relationship to my research. Khoseni (literally, the place of the Khosa) recalled the precolonial political grandeur of the Khosa clan. It also struck a chord with prominent men in Facazisse's chiefly family ¹ who were taking seriously the Frelimo government's postwar promises to restore traditional leaders to power and who, to achieve that end, were actively involved in the Magude branch of the new Organização das Autoridades Tradicionais de Moçambique. Antioka, on the other hand, evoked the special status of the Swiss Mission's first Christian community in Mozambique. ² Although this recognition swelled the pride of church members, non-Christians (and Christians of other denominations) felt excluded, and they believed that my Antioka affiliation meant I would want nothing to do with them. Since many women in Facazisse belonged to non-Presbyterian congregations (either to the Catholic Missão São Jerónimo or to such syncretic churches as the Igreja da Assembleia de Deus, Igreja de Doze Apóstolos, and Igreja Zionista, Testemunhas de Jeová), this perception was worrisome, and indeed it hindered my relationships with some women for months to come. Antioka Christians, for their part, insistently tried to persuade me of the social and cultural gulf separating them from *vahedeni* (heathens) and, because this distinction was constituted largely through stereotypes about benighted traditions, church members also took it for granted that I would keep my professional and personal distance from people whose pasts did not share the virtue of their (or, they presumed, my) own.

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However, in my early interactions with women, it was Professor Khosa's translation of "history" into Shangaan that turned out to be most problematic issue of all. The term he used, *matimu*, appears in Swiss-authored Tsonga/Shangaan dictionaries as "stories of the past, history," ³ and every Swiss Mission-educated man I met in Magude recognized it readily enough. But as soon as I began speaking with local women, I discovered that *matimu* was not a generally accepted term for Shangaan knowledge or accounts of the past. In fact, most older women claimed not to know the word at all. Men's familiarity with *matimu* thus seemed related to their deeper involvement with Swiss missionaries, through evangelization and schooling, and to the impact that Swiss linguistic interventions have had on indigenous ways of knowing and telling history. ⁴ According to Henri A. Junod, the most prolific Swiss missionary-ethnographer in southern Mozambique, *matimu* represented the closest approximation of "history" available among the Shangaan (or "Thonga," as the Swiss called them):

. . . [W]hen you inquire into what [the Thongas] know of the past, you find first, a story about their origin which bears a strongly mythical character; secondly, traditions more or less legendary about the migrations of the various clans; thirdly, genealogies of the royal family containing eight to ten names, and fourthly, historical narratives which go back as far as the beginning of the 19th century, and which give the impression of true historical facts. History, amongst the Thongas, begins only one hundred years ago. What took place before that is almost entirely

forgotten. ⁵

Junod went to some length to assess the historicity—the "trustworthiness"—of these four kinds of historical narrative, which he and other missionaries included within the genre of *matimu*. Although he claimed to have corroborated portions of the genealogies and traditions recounting political events from the nineteenth century, he concluded (with just a hint of disdain) that these oral stories overall had limited historical value: "Before the introduction of a system of writing[,] traditions regarding the ancient past can hardly be relied on." ⁶

More importantly, in his evaluation of local historical practices Junod imposed a narrow—and gendered—definition of "history" itself, distinguishing *matimu* (the preserve of men) from "mythical" and "legendary" narratives on the basis of whether they consisted of "true facts" and could be securely anchored in linear, dated time. To qualify as *matimu*, in Junod's classification, a story had to be rooted in "actual" events in the past, unlike the "purely imaginative" stories Junod heard from middle-aged and elderly Shangaan women. ⁷ Men's *matimu* would also have been more recognizable to the missionaries as history because these narratives bore a fairly close resemblance to contemporary European notions of what history should be: purportedly factual, teleological narratives (e.g., migration stories explaining how each clan came to occupy its current territory); preoccupied with political events (e.g., chiefly succession, war); and serving as a charter of power, justifying land claims or one lineage's domination over another. ⁸

Our perceived missionary connections combined with Professor Khosa's translation of my topic to spark a quick blaze of male enthusiasm for my research. Pastor Mbanza, for example, took it upon himself to introduce me to knowledgeable church men and to encourage senior men among the traditionalists of Facazisse to present themselves to me as authorities on the past. Although I had planned to spend at least two months improving my language skills, getting to know women in Facazisse and visiting other parts of the district before I started interviewing, I found myself scheduling interviews with men by early June. I felt unprepared, but it would have been rude to ignore their overtures; besides, I could speak with most of the men in Portuguese, without the aid of a translator.

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As it turned out, the first interviews with the elderly men of Facazisse were easier by far than those I conducted with women over the next few months. These men, ranging in age from 57 to 87, had different levels of education, different employment experience, and different positions within the Antioka church or Facazisse's ruling family. Their behavior within the interviews, however, showed striking similarities. They all approached the session in a formal, almost businesslike manner; all arranged for us to sit on chairs, sometimes around a table, in a space set apart from the rest of their household; all veered away from such personal topics as childhood and family relationships, preferring to speak as authorities on more general masculine domains of experience (politics, wage work); and all seemed not only to expect but to hope that I would tape-record what they had to say about the past. In fact, they usually had prepared for the interview in some way, either by rehearsing what they would tell me or by gathering printed materials to which they referred if their memories failed them. In two cases, men proudly showed me documents they had written and typed themselves, documents whose content revealed not only crossovers between oral and written modes of representing the past ⁹ but also a distinct missionary imprint in their definition of the past that needed to be remembered. The most active lay leader of the Antioka congregation, for instance, offered me two worn and yellowed manuscripts—"History [*Matimu*] of the House of Ancestor Pontia up to the Time of Our Fathers" and "History [*Matimu*] of the Arrival of the Evangelist in the Land of Khoseni"—which he was proud to have preserved even through his chaotic movements during the war. In both cases, his *matimu* consisted of an amalgam of church- and clan-origin stories, whose plotlines were meticulously chronologized and driven by the actions of chiefs, male family heads, military leaders, missionaries, and colonial administrators.

Unfortunately, the conditions that facilitated my interviews with men worked against me when I began to interview women. Having been told that my research dealt with the church and men's brand of history, many women appeared uncomfortable—or simply laughed—when I asked if I could interview them. Churchwomen accepted somewhat more readily but were quick to disavow that they knew anything about *matimu*, and in the first interview (as I later found out) they concealed features of their pasts that were not consistent with their identity as Christians. Hearing about and witnessing my sessions with men—on chairs, set apart, defined as "work"

that should not be disturbed by the nuisances of domestic life—deepened women's sense that interviewing was a power-laden, masculine affair and a test to measure knowledge they believed they did not possess. In this respect, women initially viewed me as more male than female, a suspicion confirmed when they happened to see John cooking or going to the market while I went out to "work." Women expressed further doubt about my gender when they insisted that I sit on a chair when I interviewed them, while they sat on a *sangu* (reed mat) on the ground off to one side. It was a struggle to convince women that I preferred to sit with them on the *sangu*, the symbolic and literal seat of everyday feminine discourse. More seriously still, it was difficult to dispel the belief of some women that I must be somehow connected to the government and thus had the power to "seize" (i.e., imprison) them if they failed to drop whatever they were doing to submit to my questions. ¹⁰ I developed several strategies to combat these perceptions: recasting my appearance at their home as an informal "visit," describing the interview as *kubula* (talking), plopping myself down on a mat before a chair could be offered, and designing our interview schedule to accommodate women's work routines. ¹¹ Yet while these strategies eased some of the preliminary tensions, they were not sufficient on their own to overcome women's concerns completely.



I had planned to hire female research assistants to work with me in Magude, principally to help with the task of translating between Portuguese and Shangaan. Although I hoped to become reasonably fluent in Shangaan, I assumed that a local woman's knowledge of idiomatic speech and local language history would enrich my understanding of both the interviews and women's culture, however well I might eventually be able to communicate on my own. Finding assistants, though, posed an interesting (and not entirely unexpected) challenge. Few women in Facazisse were sufficiently fluent in Portuguese to translate effectively, while those who could speak Portuguese were often too citified to look favorably on work that involved spending long hours in the "bush" with "peasants." As happened with Pastor Mbanza's young wife, whom her husband eagerly put forward as an ideal candidate (even though she came from the capital city and was not a native Shangaan speaker), such women also tended to be too self-consciously Christian or "modern" to feel comfortable translating the reminiscences of elderly rural women. Their discomfort had a silencing effect on interviewees, who sensed that their words were being regarded with contempt or censored out of the translation altogether.

After several frustrating interviews, I sought out two women with whom I was already acquainted because we crossed paths every day—Ruti Nkuna, a primary-school teacher in her forties (and a divorced mother of five) who conducted classes in the shell of the infirmary building about thirty yards from our hut, and Aida Dzamba, an educated but unemployed woman in her early thirties who lived with her mother and her young son, and who (after Rosalina and Juliana) was our closest neighbor. Ruti and Aida shared several key qualities: a respectful attitude toward their elders, curiosity about their foremothers' pasts, a certain amount of formal schooling, and deep embeddedness in local kinship networks. They were also both single mothers, and as such they displayed a kind of emotional



toughness that seemed to be valued by elderly women, who bantered with me regularly about the importance of "strength" (*ntamu, matimba*) as a feminine virtue. The main difference between these two women was that Ruti had a more gregarious personality and spurred us to considerably greater lengths to "court" (*kugangisa* ¹²) and win the trust of the women we interviewed. This process involved preliminary visits to women's homes, exchanges of greetings and gossip, much laughing and teasing, and the creation of a "life story" for me so that I was transformed from a *mulungu* into a *munhu* (person), someone the women could compare to themselves and speak to as a woman rather than as an embodiment of masculine, state, or white/Western power. ¹³





I cannot overstate the importance of these exertions, particularly Ruti's, in shaping how women in Facazisse and elsewhere in the district came to understand my position and my reasons for wanting to interview them. Above all, it was Aida and Ruti—supplemented after a while by stories circulated through female gossip networks once women could report on the interview experience firsthand—who helped convince women with no formal schooling, no church connections, and marginal social and economic status (women who laughingly described themselves to me as "donkeys") that they might also know something of value about the past. It mattered



that I worked constantly to improve my ability in Shangaan and that I adapted to the local diet and lifestyle as far as I could—efforts that were remarked on consistently more by women than by men. ¹⁴ But I would never on my own have accomplished what Aida and Ruti ultimately did: a public redefinition of my research agenda so that local authorities in every community we approached came to know me simply as the *mulungu* who "liked to talk to old women," while women themselves came to consider our visits as an entertaining diversion rather than an encounter to be endured, avoided, or feared.

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One final problem remained. If women denied knowledge of *matimu*, how could I ask them to talk about their pasts? My first interviews with women in Facazisse—very kind, very elderly churchwomen who graciously succumbed to Pastor Mbanza's overtures—were strained, sometimes comically, by my failure to understand the appropriate vocabulary for soliciting women's historical knowledge in Shangaan. I discovered a further linguistic handicap when I tried to explain "life history," the methodological key (I presumed) to the gate of rural women's pasts. There is no direct way to translate the concept of "life history" in Shangaan and, as the following table illustrates, all approximate translations alter the conventional meaning of this term in rather fundamental ways:

English	Portuguese	Shangaan	English
history	história		
	(1) history	(1) <i>matimu</i> ->	history, stories of the past
	(2) story, narration, tale	(2) <i>nkaringana, nsungu, xitori nthyeketo</i> ->	story, fable
life	<i>vida</i>	<i>vutomi</i> -> <i>mahanyelo</i> ->	life, health way of living, customs, habits
past	<i>passado</i>	<i>khale</i> -> <i>tolo</i> -> <i>ntumbuluko</i> ->	long ago yesterday creation, nature, origin; old custom

life history
—
história da sua vida (Port.)
—

vutomi bya khale/tolo/ntumbuluko = life of long ago (in the beginning)

mahanyelo ya khale/tolo/ntumbuluko = way of life (customs) of long ago (in the beginning)

matimu ya vutomi bya khale = stories (formal narratives) of life of long ago

nkaringana ya vutomi bya khale = stories (fables) of life of long ago

The translation problem charted here exposes an incongruence of language at three crucial sites. First, in English as in Portuguese, "history" (*história*) simultaneously denotes past events, knowledge of those events, and their narrativized representation. In Shangaan, the collective noun *matimu* refers exclusively to the latter; such terms as *mhaka* (event, affair, deed, fact) or *ntivo* (knowledge) can apply to the past—as in *timhaka ya khale* (events of the past) or *ntivo wa khale* (knowledge of the past)—but women rarely used this language, and when they did it was to speak of events or knowledge they considered alien to them. As discussed above, *matimu* deal with weightier matters than personal memories or everyday experience—the (hi)story of a clan, perhaps, but not that of an ordinary individual, and certainly not that of a woman. Yet if we instead use a Shangaan term for "story" (e.g., *nkaringana*) to elicit an individual's history, we collapse that person's remembered experience into a genre that includes the ogres, witches, talking animals, and supernatural occurrences typical of folktales—in other words, fiction.

A second incongruence involves the notion of an individual "life" as the subject of a history or story. *Vutomi* means "life" not as a period of existence but as the quality of existing, of being alive and—importantly—well. Neither it nor *mahanyelo* conveys the sense of one person's experiences as a discrete package, an abstract isolable entity with a beginning, middle, and end. ¹⁵ Indeed, *mahanyelo* is most often used to describe the shared customs, traditions, or way of life of a group of people, and as such it bears strongly moral and normative connotations: the proper way of life, the way things *should* be. Both *mahanyelo* and *vutomi*, moreover, lack the dynamic, processual element implied by the term "life history," the idea that a life develops and changes over time. As in the third site of incongruence, which surrounds ways of expressing "the past" in Shangaan, this linguistic masking of the diachronic quality of experience can leave us with little more than a depersonalized nostalgia. *Khale* and *tolo*, for example, both constitute pastness as a separate, synchronic state that exists in opposition to the present ("now," *swoswi*; "today," *namuntlha*), and *khale* in particular is infused with idealistic judgement. *Mahanyelo ya khale*, then, means the "ways of long ago," where "long ago" has less to do with a specific moment in chronological time than with what speakers in the present consider the proper social order of a mythologized past, usually within two or three generations of memory.

Another connotation of *khale* is "originally" or "in the beginning," a meaning it shares with the complex concept of *ntumbuluko*. *Ntumbuluko*, which also refers to "creation," comes closer to encompassing the multiple meanings of the English word "history" by implying both narrative and events that happened before the present. In practice, *ntumbuluko* is most frequently used for explanations of clan origins. To identify the *ntumbuluko* of one's clan, then, is to tell the story of where it came from. This association with the subject matter of *matimu*, however, caused many of the women I interviewed to balk at questions in which I mentioned *ntumbuluko* without qualifying it in some way. One of the eldest interviewees snorted at a question in which I used *ntumbuluko* (about the geographic origins of her paternal kin) and dismissed Aida and me with a mocking "We could know such things?" before advising us to speak with her mission-educated daughter—the only surviving relative who could still "recite clan praises" (*kutlhokovela*). ¹⁶ In her response, this woman was alluding to another form of oral history-telling: Shangaan *swivongo* (clan praise songs—sing. *xivongo*). Like the Nguni *izibongo*, the most elaborate Shangaan *swivongo* are those of chiefs, whose praises were traditionally sung by a *mbongi* (court poet-historian). However, even the *swivongo* of ordinary folk today consist of a laudatory epigram referring to events or people from the past—a claiming of history, experience, and identity through names that can still be important to social relationships in the present. ¹⁷ Yet because of their identification with patrilineal clan hierarchies, the women I knew considered *swivongo* just as masculine a form of history as *matimu*, and questions in which I carelessly referred to *ntumbuluko* reinforced women's belief—unless, ironically, they had received some formal schooling—that they did not possess the knowledge I sought.

I am embarrassed to admit that it took several months of battering my head against the sturdy wall of Shangaan before I realized it was English vocabulary I needed to discard if I wanted the women of Magude to speak their memories without self-consciousness or fear. As Ruti and Aida patiently taught me to understand, *matimu* and *ntumbuluko* were the masculine tip of an historical iceberg: Shangaan might not permit the direct translation of "life history," but Shangaan-speaking women still possessed abundant linguistic resources for talking about their pasts—resources grounded in their own understandings of the vocabulary examined above. First, though, I had to stop asking women for "stories." The slightest hint that I expected a formalized narrative either prompted women to offer a folktale or silenced those with no *minkaringana* to offer. And then, of course, I had to start listening to what interviewees did tell me, and why. Eventually I noticed that questions containing the very words I thought antithetical to my approach—*mahanyelo*, *vutomi*, *ntumbuluko*, *khale*—prompted the most loquacious responses from older women. The phrase *mahanyelo ya khale* (ways of long ago), which both my assistants and interviewees sometimes interchanged with *milawu ya khale* (laws of long ago), brought forth elaborate reminiscences about what women regarded as their spheres of expertise: trends in sexual behavior, moral authority, personal relationships, spirituality, bodily welfare, and, perhaps above all, the *vutomi bya tiko* (life [or health] of the land). Questions involving *vutomi bya ntumbuluko* (life in the beginning) and *ntumbuluko wa tiko* (origins and traditions of the land) could summon similarly rich stories because they addressed the cultural and experiential fields in which women's knowledge was embedded. Framed in these terms, the past became a subject about which women could talk intelligently, passionately, and at great length—suddenly front and center, discursively marginal no more. Through the stories they told, and through the memories that filled them, I began to glimpse not only the changing contours of women's lives but also the history-telling—and history-keeping—purpose of the memories themselves. As it turned out, what women had to say to me was just the beginning of the story.

Interviews

My dependence on the Antioka church leaders in the weeks after our arrival meant that my first interviews were with prominent Christians in Facazisse and with members of the former Swiss Mission parish just across the Nkomati River in Makuvulane. The men and women who participated in these interviews, along with the first Facazisse women to whom Ruti and Aida independently introduced me, were all members of long-established local families recently returned from wherever they had been living during the war. Although I was not aware of it at the time, the individuals who were so helpful in selecting my first interviewees steered me clear of newcomers to the district, specifically of *deslocados* (internally displaced persons)—the majority of whom were, in fact, older women—who had relocated here from other, more rural parts of Magude in the mid- to late 1980s. Many of these *deslocados* had managed to obtain land for residence and farming within walking distance of the garrisoned district capital and then after the war decided to postpone their plans to return home, or abandoned them altogether. [18](#)



In 1995-96, the continued presence of *deslocados* in and around Magude town was becoming increasingly problematic. Returnees were appearing on officials' doorsteps with greater frequency, either asking to resettle their old "places" (sing. *mbangu*) or complaining because those sites were already occupied by displaced families. It took me some time to realize the seriousness—and the social consequences—of this situation, perhaps because the people I knew hesitated initially to discuss this matter with me. I confronted a similar reluctance to acknowledge the tense politics of postwar resettlement when I first approached António Cebola, the Magude district administrator (DA), to inquire about interviewing women in more remote communities beyond Magude town. The DA deftly skirted my request by instructing his secretary to organize a meeting for me with all the "old people" in the town's so-called Transit Center, built for displaced people who had recently returned from South Africa. An overcrowded shanty settlement patched together out of blue nylon tarps (donated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees), torn canvas tents, and scraps of corrugated metal, the Transit Center was known by everyone outside the DA's office as Matendeni (in the tents). Most of the men, women, and children living in Matendeni were part of a larger group of people who in 1988 fled from Mapulanguene on foot across the border to former Gazankulu (South Africa) and then been caught up in the tangled domestic and international politics of repatriation—claimed by Renamo soldiers who occupied Mapulanguene, conveyed with South African assistance back into the hands of the Mozambican state, and targeted by humanitarian agencies as high-priority

recipients of food aid. With the establishment of the Transit Center in late 1991, they were trucked back to their home district (though not to their actual homes), and then, on the eve of the Rome Peace Accord and during the campaign for the national elections, they were held up by the government as a symbol of Frelimo benevolence—as redeemed refugees and, at the same time, as *deslocados* on the way home. [19](#)

When I first met Matendeni residents in mid-1995, they were still patiently waiting for the government to fulfill its promise to transport them back home to Mapulanguene. However, district officials seemed just as reluctant to support this effort as they were to allow me to travel unescorted into what they derisively referred to as "the bush." On the few occasions when government personnel agreed to accompany me outside the safe perimeter of Magude town, they were willing to visit only the sites of officially sanctioned returnee communities at the *sedes* of the district's four rural administrative posts: Motaze, Mahele, Phadjane, and Mapulanguene. No one forbade me to travel beyond these points, but moving out into areas beyond the fringe of government control required a considerable investment of time and effort, luck with the weather and road conditions, and an enormous commitment from my assistants, who were busy women with their own reasonably strong opinions about where and how we should (or should not) travel. In the end, the spatial distribution of our interviews across the district was decided by weighing all of these concerns against our—my, Ruti's, and Aida's—feelings about where the reward for our efforts would be worth the risks or hardships involved. The most easily accessible options were communities within walking distance of Facazisse and Magude town, including nearby villages such as Makuvulane, Maguiguana, and Xihlahla, all of which contained a mix of long-time local residents and *deslocados* from every corner of the district. Elderly women (and men) at Matendeni were, not surprisingly, enthusiastic to talk about their memories of a place to which they were anxious to return. With their help, and as I organized an effort, funded by the Norwegian Refugee Council, to move them home, we also established relationships and conducted interviews with women in Mapulanguene itself.

In Phadjane we met Ernesto Muhlanga, a retired schoolteacher, and Adelaida Muzimba, his wife. With her warm hospitality and his passion for history, we found there a home away from home, and also a base from which we could venture out to dispersed communities close to the South African border (Nhiuana, Tlhongana, Muchangana, Chacana, Honwana). This couple, along with



their neighbor (and our fearless driver) Alexander "Hukweni" Xivuri, also accompanied us and provided crucial assistance on each of our trips out to the Renamo base at Ngungwe, by 1995 an isolated settlement of ex-combatants and semicaptive women and children [20](#) straddling the boundary between Magude and Moamba districts and huddled up against the South African border, its economic lifeline. Toward the end of my stay, I hired another young man, Sergio Dzimba, to drive us to the rural reaches of Motaze (where, again, my Citi Golf could not go) for a series of interviews focused on postwar land use and tenure conflicts. Here too, this assistant's enthusiasm for our research enriched the process in countless ways, from winning the support of wary *secretários* and nervous women to offering lessons in the history of Portuguese settlement in the area. My interest in this subject prompted a trip to Timanguene, a few kilometers west of Magude town along the Nkomati River, where from women farmers I learned a bit of the fascinating story of the colonial Delagoa Bay plantation—and of the expensive failure of the state farm that replaced it. Finally, I visited a community of refugees in Hluvukani in Mpumalanga province (former Gazankulu), South Africa, where with the generous assistance of Chris Dolan, Vusi Nkuna, Nicola Johnston, and Caetano Simbine (all affiliated at the time with the University of the Witwatersrand Rural Facility) I participated in group interviews with local authorities and female relatives of women I had met at Matendeni and Mapulanguene. [21](#)

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In total, we conducted prearranged tape-recorded individual interviews with 81 women, all born between circa 1905 and 1945. In addition to formal interviews, I made frequent informal visits to women's homes, talked (and sometimes hoed) with them while they were working in their fields, and conversed with many on an everyday basis when women visited me, when we passed on the footpath, or when we met on the riverbank, at the market, or in church. Although I tried to achieve a certain geographic spread with the interviews, my only initial criterion for selection of women was age, which I defined by birth year (before 1945) or generational category: women considered "grandmothers" (sing. *kokwana*) or "old women" (sing. *xikoxana*). [22](#)

I did not insist that the interview group be representative in any other way. As it happened, the group as a whole was relatively diverse. Very few of the 81 women had more than two or three years of formal schooling, although a handful had completed primary school in the colonial system. Through marketing, casual wage work, or self-employment, roughly half had been involved with the cash economy at some point in their life; the rest described their *ntirho* (work) as farming, cooking, hauling water and firewood, and caring for children and grandchildren. About a dozen had lived a decade or more in a town or city in Mozambique or South Africa, although nearly all had spent some time in an urban setting during the war. Approximately two-thirds of them had had at least fleeting contact with one or more established religious group, whether Protestant, Catholic, syncretic, or Muslim. Five women were the daughters of *régulos* (colonial chiefs). Two had lived for several years as the common-law wife of a Portuguese settler; two were the daughter or granddaughter of interracial unions. Ten had worked (or were still working) as spirit mediums (sing. *nyamusoro*) or diviner-healers (sing. *n'anga*), although a much larger number had experienced spirit possession at some point in their life. Well over half of the group were widows, although less than one-quarter had a regular male partner (husband or lover) present during the fieldwork period: The majority either were divorced, had never formally married, were married to a man who had been absent for many years, ²³ or had chosen (after having been separated or abandoned) to live without a man. About 10 percent of the total were childless. Nearly one-third were still living in various stages of displacement—that is, they did not view their current residence as permanent—although, before I left Magude in December 1996, several women in this group did manage to relocate to a place they called home.

From this group, I selected a smaller number of women for repeat interviews, so that in the end I interviewed 33 women twice or more, a core group of 12 women (from Facazisse, Matendeni/Mapulanguene, and Phadjane) five to eight times each, and one woman—my neighbor, Rosalina Malungana—a total of twelve times. This final group of 13 women was somewhat less diverse than the total, since here my selection procedure was influenced as much by the women themselves as by any standards I had in mind. The majority (seven) were living in Facazisse; with two exceptions they were all born before 1930; all but one were living without a male partner; four were childless; and eight were residing more or less alone. This breakdown on its own suggests some of the reasons for the makeup of the core group: Besides physical accessibility, the conditions that most often yielded rewarding interviews were a woman's advanced age and some form of residential or social solitude. While we had many wonderful sessions with younger and still-married women, and while not all elderly women living alone wanted to be interviewed more than once (e.g., my other neighbor, Juliana Kwinika), it was these solitary *swikoxana* (old women)—who also tended to describe themselves as *xisiwana* (needy, destitute person; orphan, widow)—who consistently showed the most eagerness to be "visited" by us and with whom Ruti, Aida, and I developed the closest relationships.

The interviews did not represent an insignificant demand on the women's time, particularly given the economic and environmental conditions during the period of my fieldwork. Until December 1995, Magude was in the grip of the prolonged drought that had affected southern Africa for the previous three years. When I arrived in the district earlier that year, the Nkomati River was barely knee-deep (making it easier for pedestrians and livestock to cross back and forth but rendering the water even less safe than usual for drinking and washing) and its major affluents in the district—the Mazimhlopes, N'wanetzi, and Massintonto Rivers—were completely dry. Once the rains resumed, Magude suffered a series of torrential downpours and severe flooding of the Nkomati three times between December 1995 and March 1996. These floods not only caused many of the farmers in Facazisse and other riverine communities to lose entire harvests, small livestock, and in some cases their homes, but they also cut off transport between Magude town and other parts of the district (including Facazisse) for weeks at a time. ²⁴ Many women expressed concern about the discomfort they imagined we must be feeling as Ruti, Aida, and I traipsed through weather extremes ranging from suffocating dry heat to the clammy chill and thick mud during the rains (especially once in Mapulanguene, when Ruti and I had to forge the chest-deep waters of the N'wanetzi River and then spend the next two days in wet clothes, because the flooding prevented us from returning to Facazisse). However, our "suffering," as they called it, paled beside the round-the-clock hardships these women and their families endured as they tried to salvage food crops from the beleaguered soil, find clean water to drink when the rivers were either virtually dry or churning with swallowed debris, and protect their health and their belongings within woefully inadequate shelters.



Nor were the interviews emotionally effortless for the women, although I did my best to adapt my agenda to the rhythms and reflexes of their habits of talk. Interview sessions lasted about two hours on average, although some of the later interviews with women in the core group went on for well over three hours, depending on their schedule, interest, and physical comfort. As a gesture of thanks, and in keeping with the local tradition of food-exchange between visitors, I gave women a small gift (usually tea and sugar) at the conclusion of each interview. I prefaced my questioning, at our first meeting, with an explanation of the book I was hoping to write based on what women remembered about their pasts. Once we had completed a small set of basic biographical questions (e.g., name, place and time of birth, residential status), interviews became fairly open-ended in the sense that I would usually introduce a general topic (e.g., childhood) by asking "What do you remember about . . .?" or "What was it like when . . .?" Subsequent interviews tended to follow up on topics raised in the previous session. However, when women changed the subject (which happened more often than not), opened an interview by launching into a topic of their own choice, or appeared uneasy about or indifferent to a subject I had introduced, our conversation followed whatever narrative route they preferred, shaped by the interplay of their recollections and our requests for elaboration or clarification of something they had said. Indeed, as the transcripts reflect, Ruti, Aida, and I often participated actively in women's narratives, in large part because local conventions of conversation—particularly surrounding oral reminiscence—require all listeners to affirm, echo, encourage, and in many other ways engage in a speaker's story. Nonverbal utterances such as "mmm" or "eee," assenting phrases such as *hi swona* (that is so), restatement (or statement in unison) of the last words of a sentence, and questions that literally ask the speaker to repeat information she has just given (but whose effect is to draw out a more detailed version of the story) are some of the more common ways in which Ruti, Aida, and I (once I understood these patterns) were involved in women's recollections. [25](#)

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Our inquiries did become somewhat more directive when women turned to the topics that emerged as central to their strategies for remembering and sharing knowledge of the past. During discussions of pottery, tattooing, land-use strategies, and women's practices of naming and life-storytelling, I asked a set of standard questions about social context (i.e., the identities of and relationships among individuals involved), the temporal and spatial dimensions of these activities (when and where they occurred), and, where applicable, the materials used and how and where women obtained them. I also learned in as much detail as possible how each activity was accomplished, from the social occasions shaping acts of naming to the often gory details of scarification and the dusty labors involved in farming and fashioning clay pots. Some of my methods were more participatory than others. I spent many hours with women in their fields, sometimes hoeing or sowing alongside them; I sat and watched the process of potmaking and tried kneading and molding the clay myself; I attended nighttime performances of oral storytelling, and my inquiries, on New Year's Eve, about Antioka's prewar tradition of storytelling may have been partly responsible for the church elders' last-minute decision to revive the beloved event to ring in 1996. I did not, however, witness body-marking, nor did I accept the offer of several women to cut scars into my "belly," although I have no doubt that elderly women would have embraced me as a real *muchangana* (Shangaan person) had I been willing to submit to the procedure.

While we also, rather unexpectedly, devoted a significant amount of interview and visiting time to the topic of spirit possession, I have not explored this overwhelmingly female phenomenon in the chapters of this book. From my first night at Antioka I had been aware of the nocturnal drumming of *vanyamusoro* (in Portuguese, *curandeiros*) drifting up to the former mission grounds from the direction of Magude town, or echoing closer to home from the tightly clustered settlements of Facazisse. Women occasionally mentioned *kuhlupeka hi swikwembu* (suffering from spirits) during interviews, but for many months my assistants treated such admissions gingerly, apparently concerned that I might be shocked or disturbed to know that these "heathen" beliefs (in their words) still existed. When I finally broached the subject with Ruti, I learned that not only the incidence of spirit possession among women but the number of women practicing—and earning relatively good incomes—as spirit mediums had increased dramatically during and immediately after the war, the result of pervasive physical and mental health problems (certainly stemming from war-related trauma) and the absence of other sources of income for rural women, particularly during the years of drought. Curious, I think, to observe my response, Ruti arranged for me to meet and then interview two popular *vanyamusoro* whose homesteads were virtually in Antioka's backyard. These initial interviews led to several lengthy follow-up meetings, dinner invitations, and requests that Ruti and I join these charismatic female healers for the dramatic ceremonies in which their powers, and their devoted followings, would be displayed to greatest effect. I was fascinated to learn that both the affliction of spirit possession and the skill of spirit mediumship engage women, intellectually and (as Steven Feierman has put it) kinesthetically, in a boldly gendered reinterpretation of the region's tumultuous late precolonial past. ²⁶ For this reason, I originally hoped to examine spirit possession alongside other "old ways" of remembering, ways salient to women in postwar Magude. However, the more I learned about this consuming and complicated practice, the more ill-equipped I felt to do justice, as a historian, to its variegated meanings in women's lives. Simultaneously deploying multiple identities, multiple vocations, multiple languages (Shangaan, Ndau, Zulu, Chopi), multiple medical epistemologies, multiple systems of authority, and multiple interpretations of patrilineal kinship and marriage, the female *vanyamusoro* of Magude—a district renowned for its mediums ²⁷—deserve a book-length historical analysis of their own.

With one exception, I transcribed and translated the oral material presented in this book myself. Because of her damaged voice and unusually old vocabulary, our interviews with Valentina Chauke presented problems serious enough that I enlisted Aida's help to transfer Valentina's words to paper and then translate them from Shangaan to Portuguese. While hiring an experienced transcriber and translator in Maputo would have saved me time and effort in the field, once I moved to Facazisse I did not spend sufficient time in the capital city to organize such assistance. More importantly, though, in many ways my immersion in women's lives and everyday discourse in the countryside supplied me with a vocabulary and sense of local idiom that young, educated, urban Mozambicans would not necessarily have possessed. I also, constantly and repeatedly—in interviews and outside of them—asked women to explain Shangaan expressions that seemed particularly meaningful in their ordinary speech. My determined (and, to some, probably tedious) efforts to learn *xichangana* (Shangaan ways of talk) and, as many female interviewees noted approvingly, "to understand things thoroughly" (*kuswitwisisa*) was a source of frequent teasing from women but also a crucial element of the relationships I eventually developed with them. The term *xichangana* in fact refers both to the Shangaan language and to Shangaan customs and habits, so that learning women's language meant—indeed, required—learning women's ways of life as well. Conversely, the disdain for the Shangaan language (and preference for Portuguese) shown by many local men and younger women represented contempt for older women's lifestyle and knowledge, a rejection of the truths of older women's histories as embedded in their talk.

Indeed, perhaps my deepest regret about the written text of this book is how poorly it conveys the eloquent meanings contained in the gestures, nonverbal sounds, rhythms, syntax, and word-play that render older women's speech a form of history-telling in itself. Although I have tried to approximate these speech elements by translating oral testimony in a way that remains as faithful to Shangaan grammar and sentence structure—and women's manipulation of it—as possible, and although the audio clips scattered throughout this e-book offer a taste of women's expressive speaking style, I realize that these efforts are a pale substitute for the live performance. I am also aware that the transcribed narratives may sometimes seem awkward, redundant, or grammatically wrong in English—for instance, when women repeat the same pronoun or verb over and over or mix past and present tenses. I have edited such features out of the translation when they did not appear to contribute to the speaker's meaning; however,

for the most part, I have retained them, and I hope they add at least a note of immediacy and personality to written words that were powerfully dramatic when they were spoken aloud.

I gathered other types of evidence while in Magude, in addition to the tape-recorded interviews. Photographs of clay pottery and potters at work supplemented their oral accounts, providing necessary visual information on social context and environment as well as the production process and the appearance of the pots themselves. For women's body-markings, I chose to sketch rather than photograph the patterned scars they wore on their face, arms, abdomen, back, and legs. Although more than one woman offered to pose so that I could photograph her, I felt uncomfortable about the message we might send by doing so—that I was objectifying women's bodies by photographing them, partially nude, for the sake of their tattoos. I probably should have exercised as much caution when I decided to photograph (as well as sketch) the location, contents, and sometimes barely discernible boundaries of women's cultivated fields, especially in and around Facazisse. Fixing a camera on farm land in this fertile and highly coveted riverine area—at a time when outsiders (Mozambican and foreign, black and white) were beginning to scout around for investment opportunities in the region—invariably attracted people's attention, occasionally provoking suspicion (and, once, a furious storm of shouting) when women who did not know Ruti, Aida, or myself wondered why we would show such interest in a particular piece of land.

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Besides these visual records, I took copious and detailed notes on a wide range of subjects: my daily activities, Shangaan vocabulary, weather and local politics, recipes and cropping schedules, reflections on interviews, information I learned about women's lives or local history through casual conversations. Some of the information acquired through this last means was told to me in confidence, and some represented second- or third-hand opinion (or gossip) about people I knew, in which case I do not draw on it explicitly in the following chapters, even though it may sometimes have contributed to my understanding of women's lives. Where such information was more or less public knowledge (i.e., repeated to me by many people or observed by me), and where it is relevant to an argument I make in the book, I cite it by date and source. Although I could have lumped all of these annotations generically together into a single category called "field notes," at the time—probably because of the overwhelming newness and complexity (for me) of daily life in Magude—I chose to record this information, which I obtained in a variety of ways and situations, in several carefully segregated types of notebooks. I produced a total of four personal diaries, referred to in citations (by number) as "[Journal](#)"; two interview journals (containing a two-page entry for each of the 230 formal interviews I conducted), referred to (by number) as "[Interview log](#)"; nine notebooks containing miscellaneous information (observations, reflections, statistics) gathered in Magude and Maputo and referred to (by number) as "[Field notes](#)"; four notebooks containing rough transcriptions of some of the interviews, often including additional commentary, and referred to (by number) as "[Interview notes](#)"; and one book of sketches, referred to as "[Field sketchbook](#)." My hope in using and sharing examples of this sometimes inchoate, sometimes confused, always openly subjective material is not only to illustrate how I came to know what I think I know about the women of Magude; it is also to expose, through evidence of my personal and contextualized role in the production of that knowledge, the fruitfully (and intrinsically) ethnographic side of historical fieldwork—a dimension of our practice that historians of Africa and elsewhere still tend to hide, yet the source of many of our most powerful insights. [28](#)

Archives and Libraries

Although my analysis in the chapters that follow relies primarily on the oral and material sources discussed above, I also draw on published and unpublished written sources to support and, where necessary, add details of political or economic context to women's memories. I gathered these materials in several archives and libraries in Europe and southern Africa, where I conducted research for roughly six months before I reached Magude, and intermittently (totalling perhaps another month) during occasional brief trips to Maputo or Johannesburg between April 1995 and December 1996.

In Lisbon, after rather unproductive explorations of the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino and Biblioteca Nacional, I focused on the Sociedade Geografia de Lisboa, whose library contains an extensive collection of materials on Lusophone Africa. In Lausanne, I spent three weeks in the archives of the Swiss Mission (the Département Missionnaire des Églises Protestantes de la Suisse Romande), where the meticulously organized paper traces of very prolific mission

personnel fill shelves of file boxes with photographs, diaries, station reports, and correspondence from the 1880s to the 1960s. I could have spent months burrowing through their collection; as it is, I have used only a small portion of the material I was able, with the kind and patient assistance of librarian Joffre Dias, to gather during my brief time there. In South Africa, I found two libraries—the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and the library of the University of South Africa in Pretoria—to be helpful sources for nineteenth-century travel accounts, unpublished theses, and hard-to-come-by scholarly monographs and journals, ethnographies, and government reports on the eastern Transvaal and Mozambique. In Maputo, I spent the bulk of my archive time in the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique (AHM), benefiting from the generous help of archivist António Sopa. There, I examined official documents (correspondence, statistics, etc.) and published government reports on the Magude area from the late nineteenth century and through the colonial period, more nineteenth-century travelers' accounts, periodicals and newspapers, and university theses. The deceptively small libraries of the Arquivo do Património Cultural (ARPAC) and of the Archaeology and Anthropology department at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane contained useful ethnographic and local-history surveys, fugitive journal articles, and old colonial maps.

Finally, during my second trip to Mozambique, when I was working principally on land issues, I spent a total of about two weeks working in the archives of the provincial and national offices of the Direcção Nacional de Geografia e Cadastre (DINAGECA), where I found a wealth of documentary material related to land concessions and rural land politics during the colonial and postindependence periods (e.g., cadastral registers and maps, technical reports, surveys, correspondence). I did not have time to explore all of the indexed documentation (let alone the vastly larger nonindexed collection) of materials on Magude at the AHM but, for the kind of information I sought, the time I spent digging through DINAGECA files and boxes yielded a much higher return than did the months spent squinting at government documents that revealed precious little about women's historical knowledge or experience in the countryside.

Notes:

Note 1: The *regulado* (chiefdom) of Facazisse was a creation of the Portuguese colonial state. Its administrative history is discussed in chapter 6. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Although the Swiss Mission's first permanent station in Mozambique was built in 1887 at Rikatla, about 15 miles north of Lourenço Marques (now Maputo city), Magude was the site of the mission's first evangelizing effort in Mozambique. The Antioka station is particularly important in popular and official memory of the mission's origins because the evangelical effort was initiated here by an African, Yosefa Mhalamhala. Yosefa's parents, along with many other refugees, had fled the Magude area for the Transvaal during the Gaza Nguni succession war (c. 1856-62), and they raised their children there. Swiss missionaries in Spelonken educated and ordained young Yosefa, who then traveled to Chief Magudzu's capital in 1880 to seek permission to evangelize in the area. For information on the Swiss Mission's early history in Mozambique and on Yosefa's controversial relationship to it, see Paul Berthoud, *Les negres Gouamba; ou, les vingt premières années de la Mission romande* (Lausanne: Conseil de la Mission romande, 1896); Arthur Grandjean, *La Mission romande. Ses racines dans le sol suisse romand. Son épanouissement dans la race thonga* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1917); Hilário Matusse, "Igreja Presbiteriana: Das origens e vicissitudes até a independência do País," *Tempo*, 23 February 1986, 16-23; Jan van Butselaar, *Africains, missionnaires et colonialistes: Les origines de l'Eglise Presbyterienne du Mozambique (Mission Suisse), 1880-1896* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984). [Back.](#)

Note 3: As in *Tsonga-English Dictionary*, comp. R. Cuenod (Braamfontein: Sasavona, 1991), s.v. "matimu." [Back.](#)

Note 4: Patrick Harries discusses the linguistic interventions of Swiss missionaries in southern Africa, particularly their efforts to systematize and transliterate "Tsonga" as a standard idiom of evangelization. See his article "The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa," *African Affairs* 346 (1988): 25-52. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Henri A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (New York: University Books, 1962), 1:21. [Back.](#)

Note 6: See Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 1:21-29, for examples and discussion. Junod claimed to have found "conclusive proof" that some chiefly genealogies actually reached back several hundred

years; however, because many names had been dropped from the list, he viewed these genealogies as "incomplete" and hence of limited historical value (26). See also Henri Alexander Junod, "The Ba-Thonga of the Transvaal," *South African Journal of Science* (1913): 225-29. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 2:214. [Back.](#)

Note 8: See Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), especially chapter 5 ("Men and Facts"), for a discussion of gender in the practice of "scientific," politics-centered history in late nineteenth-century European history. Henri A. Junod's recognition of *matimu* as "historical" in this sense is somewhat ironic, given contemporary theories according to which African cultures had no "history" at all, since they lacked a European-style nation-state to serve as professional history's inspiration and subject. See, for example, G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Willey, 1944), cited by Smith (149). [Back.](#)

Note 9: In an insightful review article, Isabel Hofmeyr stresses that it is important to recognize the interplay between orality and literacy rather than to insist that they are "discrete and sundered domains" and to treat as "impure" any oral evidence bearing the influence of written media. See Isabel Hofmeyr, "'Wailing for Purity:' Oral Studies in Southern African Studies," *African Studies* 54, no. 2 (1995): 16-31. [Back.](#)

Note 10: A full discussion of the effects that the civil war have had on Mozambicans' attitudes toward foreign (especially white) researchers, and on the experience of rural fieldwork in particular, is beyond the scope of this book. Not all women responded fearfully to my first appearance at their home, and only one of the more than eighty women I asked to interview refused outright. However, during the early stages of my fieldwork in Magude, many women (and men) became uneasy if I took written notes while they were speaking (even when the tape recorder did not bother them), if I questioned them too closely about the names and locations of family members, or if I asked them for details about their actions during the war or about their current political opinions. Even the presence of the local women who worked as my assistants (see below) did not always convince people to trust me on sight. Reminiscent of what Linda Green has written of a very different context (Guatemala), the prolonged experience of terrible violence had made fear and suspicion—of not only strangers but even one another—a "chronic condition" in postwar Magude. Most strikingly, though, people in Magude expressed fear that I was affiliated with the *xikanekiso* (fort), a Shangaan word that was widely used as a generic metonym for *government*—and whose militaristic, defensive connotations reveal that postwar fears had as much to do with the ruling party, Frelimo, as with Renamo or white strangers. Fortunately, once we clarified my identity and the purpose of our visit, people's concerns seemed to dissipate quickly, and my assistants and I were always extended a warm welcome. See Linda Green, "Living in a State of Fear," in *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 105. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Other researchers have described similar variations on this strategy for adapting personal and professional behavior to local conventions in order to build trust with potential interviewees. See, for example, Beverly B. Mack, "Women's Work in Kano," in *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*, ed. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996); Richa Nagar, "Exploring Methodological Borderlands through Oral Narratives," in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, and Representation*, ed. John Paul Jones III, Heidi J. Nast, and Susan M. Roberts (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). [Back.](#)

Note 12: The term *kugangisa* is normally used only of boys or men, to denote their efforts to persuade girls or women to accept them as lovers. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Alessandro Portelli writes that "An inter/view is an exchange between two subjects: literally a mutual sighting. One party cannot really see the other unless the other can see him or her in turn. The two interacting subjects cannot act together unless some kind of mutuality is established." See Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 31. This process of elaborating a life story for me continued in the interviews themselves, as when women, responding to my questions about their lives, asked me questions about mine, particularly on such topics as marriage and parent-child relationships. Establishing mutuality was also a concern when Ruti and Aida arrived for the first time in a place where we wanted to do interviews, or

when one of them substituted for the other in an interview with a woman who had become used to a particular translator. For example, after Ruti and I had done five long interviews with Cufassane Munisse, my arrival for a sixth interview with Aida made Cufassane visibly uncomfortable. It was only after I introduced Aida as my *mavisweni* (namesake), and Aida described for Cufassane her place within kinship networks familiar to the older woman, that Cufassane relaxed and began to speak as openly as she had with Ruti. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Many researchers have commented on the valuable ways in which "living daily life" (in the context of fieldwork) contributes to their understanding of a community's past. Few report that gender affects local reactions to researchers' efforts in this sphere; in Magude, however, the difference between men's and women's attitudes toward (and even awareness of) my efforts was striking. See Carolyn Keyes Adenaike, "Reading the Pursuit: An Introduction," in *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*, ed. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996). [Back.](#)

Note 15: Lila Abu-Lughod reported a similar problem in her research among Bedouin women: "[T]he conventional form of 'a life' as a self-centered passage through time was not familiar." Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 46. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Interview with Valentina Chauke, 27 June 1995, Facazisse. [Back.](#)

Note 17: See Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 1:360-62, 424; 2:194-95. One example Junod offers of a nonroyal *xivongo* is that of the Makaneta, a subclan of the Mazwaya: "*Makaneta, n'wa yindlo ya ntima!*" (Makaneta, of the black hut!). According to Junod, this *xivongo* means "'You who belong to a village where the huts have had time to become black; they have never been destroyed by enemies, as no enemy dares to attack your clan. So the roofs have blackened inside from the effects of the smoke and outside from those of the rain.'" For further examples in Shangaan, see A.A. Jaques, *Swivongo Swa Machangana* (5th ed., Braamfontein: Sasavona, 1995). Cf. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "The Development of Forms: Ndebele Royal Praises," in *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); and Liz Gunner, "Clashes of Interest: Gender, Status and Power in Zulu Praise Poetry," in *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature*, ed. Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). [Back.](#)

Note 18: Magude Sede, which includes Magude town, was more densely populated and commercially developed, and better equipped with amenities and infrastructure, than the other PAs before the war and in vastly better shape in the years immediately after it. The civil war intensified across Magude district in the early 1980s. In 1984, Renamo established a base at Ngungwe in northern Moamba district (neighboring Magude), ten kilometers from the South African border and about twenty kilometers from the sede of Phadjane. As Renamo attacks against civilians and infrastructure in the district increased, the Mozambican government began to try to organize the rural population into *aldeias comunais* (communal villages) under the protection of the Mozambican Armed Forces. By 1987-88, when the communal villages came under serious attack, most local residents made the decision to flee the countryside. The rural evacuation was especially sudden and desperate in Mapulanguene, Mahele, and Phadjane, which Renamo occupied at this time; the worst fighting, and the worst destruction, occurred in Mapulanguene, a strategically important site because of its proximity to the South African border and Renamo's supply center at Phalaborwa. Residents of these PAs fled to a number of locations inside and outside of Mozambique, exactly where depending on geography, family ties, and perceptions of security. Families from border PAs such as Mapulanguene and Phadjane typically went to Gazankulu in South Africa, Massingir (north of Magude district), or Magude town; people from Motaze and Mahele went to Magude town or Chokwe, in neighboring Gaza province; people from Magude Sede went first to Magude town and then in many cases to the capital city, Maputo. After the signing of the Peace Accord in 1992, Renamo set up formal "administrations" in Mahele and Mapulanguene, which remained in place until 1995—i.e., several months after Frelimo's victory in the October 1994 elections. Families began to return to rural Magude, in a very slow and hesitant trickle, in 1993-94. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Many people I spoke with believed that district officials took even more cynical advantage of the Matendeni group—for example, by appropriating donated foodstuffs intended for them and trying to dissuade them from returning to Mapulanguene before the November 1994 elections. At the time, Mapulanguene was still under de facto Renamo control, and transferring *deslocados* to Renamo territory meant a potential loss of votes to the opposition. [Back.](#)

Note 20: On the experiences of girls and women as Renamo captives (and often "brides") during the war, see Kathleen Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2002), 198-99. For a focused study of this painful topic and of the dilemma such women faced after the war, see Elisa Muianga, "Mulheres e guerra: Reintegração social das mulheres regressadas das 'Zonas da Renamo' no Distrito de Mandlakazi," *Arquivo: Boletim do Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique* 18 (1995): 47-92. [Back.](#)

Note 21: During my second stay in Magude from September through mid-December 1996, I conducted, for the Norwegian Refugee Council, a study on women's access to land in the context of postwar resettlement. It was through the NRC office in Maputo, and particularly with the assistance of Nina Berg, the director of NRC (Mozambique) at the time, that I linked up with researchers working with Mozambican refugees in South Africa and was able to conduct this trip. See Heidi Gengenbach, *Women, Land, and Resettlement in Magude District: A Field Study* (Maputo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 1997). [Back.](#)

Note 22: Although in present-day Magude people often use the term *xikoxana* with derogatory intent, it also still serves as a nonjudgmental shorthand reference for postmenopausal women. Older women themselves also employ this term (sometimes wryly or self-deprecatingly) to refer to themselves or one another. While women born in the 1940s may not be old by Western standards, in rural Mozambique a woman in her early fifties is considered more or less old (especially if she is a widow) because she is usually already a grandmother and can no longer be included in the next-junior category of adult women, *tinhlanguwana* (sing. *nhlanguwana*, referring to women who still have young children). [Back.](#)

Note 23: While some of these absent husbands were migrant workers who returned to Magude to visit their families every year or so, others had gone to South Africa long ago and then either opted to stay there or simply stopped contacting their wives. A few women had no idea where (or, sadly, if) their husbands were living because they had lost track of one another during the war. [Back.](#)

Note 24: While a significant disruption at the time, the localized flooding of late 1995 through early 1996 was not nearly as catastrophic as the floods that devastated southern Mozambique, including Magude district, in February 2000. For a detailed account of this disaster, see Frances Christie and Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique and the Great Flood of 2000* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). [Back.](#)

Note 25: For an interesting discussion of how such "phatic" responses can function as an integral part of the "communicative interaction and exchange" (i.e., conversation) that constitutes an interview, see Corinne Kratz, "Conversations and Lives," in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History*, ed. Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 138-50. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Steven Feierman, "The Creation of Invisible Histories," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 196. See also Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "The Possession of the Dispossessed: Songs as History among Tumbuka Women," in *Power and the Praise Poem*. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Júlio Afonso da Silva Tavares, "A arte de curar entre os indígenas das terras de Magude: Relatório do Facultativo de 2a class—28 de Agosto de 1909," *Moçambique: Documentário Trimestral* 14, no. 53 (1948): 111-32. [Back.](#)

Note 28: While African historiography in the past decade or so has been transformed by ethnographically inspired methods of cultural analysis, it is still rare for historians to disclose their own records of the messy, uncertain, and inescapably contingent stages of this process. For an important discussion of the relationship of ethnography to history, see Jean and John Comaroff, "Ethnography and the Historical Imagination," in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colol.: Westview, 1992). For a wider range of perspectives on the rewards and challenges that fieldwork yields for historians of Africa, see the contributions to *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*, ed. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996). [Back.](#)

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