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 Chapter Summaries

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Relations of Remembrance: Women as Tellers and Makers of History in Magude

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Summary of the Arguments

Overview

This book advances two separate but related arguments. The first involves historical methodology and efforts to engage the ongoing debate among academic historians over how to identify and interpret evidence of Africa's past. Although I trace the roots of this argument to a longstanding concern about the scant attention paid to gender in scholarly discussions of orality, memory, and narrative in southern Africa, especially southern Mozambique, and although women and their ways of telling and making history are the subject of this book, my intention here is not to speak solely to historians of women and gender. Sources bedevil everyone who seeks to understand African history. Whether the topic is rural women or urban men, subsistence farming or wage labor, slavery or racism or the colonial state, historians of Africa typically agonize a bit more over how they know what they think they know about the past—and why they may legitimately know it—than do historians of other parts of the world. Yet a preoccupation with the mutually revealing rewards and limitations of written versus oral sources, with history as narrative or as text, has distracted attention from the other forms in which history might be done or made in African communities and from how people there might understand history itself. In this respect, a focus on women and gender does not narrow the issue so much as highlight one of the more glaring examples of the pasts we hide with our epistemological ethnocentrism—with evidentiary practices that exclude forms of memory and history that do not look or talk like our own.



The book's second argument addresses a more specific historical question: What difference do rural women's "old ways" of remembering and doing history make to our understanding of the history of Magude, of southern Mozambique, and perhaps of Africa more broadly? That I conducted this research in the early aftermath of Mozambique's civil war should not lessen the historical significance of women's memories as they shared them with me. Certainly these memories were not only framed but deeply colored by the present in which we met; postwar circumstances necessarily lent both a desperate determination to everyone's remembering as well as a heightened value to the particular pasts women and men had so suddenly, violently lost when the war drove them from the land. Those pasts were, in turn, the product of other histories—of Gaza Nguni conquest, of migrant labor, of mission Christianity, of Portuguese colonialism, of nationalism, of the mixed liberations and losses of independence. But as women's remembering so insistently tells us, those prewar pasts were the product of much else besides. If the elderly women of Magude chose to treat me as a conduit for that lesson, then perhaps instead of doubting their reliability as historians we should interrogate the historical meanings of that choice. For in using the occasion of my arrival in the district to draw me into the skein of their remembering, these women were both enacting how they believed history should be done and reenacting what they knew—and needed—to be true about the region's past.

Relations of Remembrance

. . . voice depends on resonance, on a relationship that encourages and enlarges its expression. . . .

—Carol Gilligan, foreword to *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey among Hasidic Girls*, by Stephanie Wellen Levine (2003)

History, for the women I interviewed, consisted of memories of female social nexus. These memories, or *switsundzuxo* (reminders), may once, long ago, have taken as many forms as rural women had tasks to perform together. In postwar Magude, however, the stark exigencies

of agrarian survival in the context of resettlement, environmental crisis, food shortage, lack of infrastructure, barely functioning local administration, cash poverty, structural adjustment, and, pervading all else, the multilayered trauma of loss, circumscribed the possibilities for women's remembering while at the same time dramatically heightening its importance. The diverse forms of memory that I explore in this book—personal names, life-storytelling, pottery, tattoos, the boundaries of cultivated fields—may represent all that remains, for now, of a once broader repertoire of female strategies for recording and recalling experience. But what these oral and material practices of remembering have in common is that they simultaneously invoke and seek to activate (or reactivate) relationships among women, relationships that include but range far beyond the ascribed ties of patrilineal kinship and marriage.

I have wrestled for a long time with the language for categorizing these practices as an expression of something historical, as phenomena that communicate the past—that is, knowledge of the past—deliberately in the present. Neither *source* nor *account*, *narrative* nor *text*, *tradition* nor *discourse* adequately captures the idea of memories that women do not articulate as story or conveys the purposefully, indeed ineluctably social quality of *switsundzuxo*'s narrative and nonnarrative forms. As "representations of pastness," spoken historical narratives are, as Elizabeth Tonkin has described oral history, "actively 'dialogic': they are social activities in real time," their meaning depending on the occasion for and objective of the performance, on shared rhetorical rules and expectations of genre, and on the relationship between teller and audience. ¹ Taking my cue from Tonkin's insight, but expanding and modifying it to embrace modes of history whose product is inseparable (sometimes literally) not only from its producer but from the interpretive community among and for whom it is produced, I argue that women's *switsundzuxo* are best understood not as things (e.g., texts), representations, or performances but as *relations*: relations of remembrance. The women I interviewed may remember (*kutsundzuka*) or ponder the past individually, but the memories that endure originate in acts of remembering—or *kutsunduxa* (reminding, *causing* to remember)—that they engage in together. In creating these memories, women are relating in the sense of recounting or transmitting experience to one another, but they are also deliberately forging relations on several levels: as newly connected parts (members) of a social whole (community), as individuals acknowledging their reciprocal interests and intents, and, most crucially, as experiential kin—women who consider one another *maxaka* (relatives) because at a certain point in their respective life paths they met and decided to bind their histories, and so their futures, permanently together.

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This relational conception of history also helps to explain how and why the elderly women of Magude responded to the opportunity of my visit and the (redefined) forum of our interviews. The ways of the past—the ways of history, the *mahanyelo ya khale* (ways of long ago)—were still, for them, the ways of memory. And remembering meant, above all, creating a record of shared experience that would link the women involved in networks of informal relationship and (when needed) mutual support. When I arrived in Magude and solicited these women's participation in my project, I joined their experiential landscape and thus inadvertently bid them to weave my history—my memories, my life, my talk—into theirs. The *switsundzuxo* we produced together include interview recordings and transcripts, sketches and photographs, stories we told of one another ("The day we drank *vukanyi* at Facazisse's place," "The time *mamana* Heidi was stung by a scorpion"), stories they solicited of my family and my past, modest gifts we exchanged when I left the district for good. These memories, like women's clay pots or the boundaries of their fields, their life stories or their lists of personal names, exist and persist and will only ever fully "mean" in their relational contexts, as relations among particular women whose experiences crossed at specific places and times. And yet something more than a tangle of particular female attachments emerges from these memories, and it is for this reason that in the chapters that follow I have chosen to acknowledge (and sometimes highlight) my role in women's remembering. I neither created women's memories nor controlled the form they took. Their methods and conventions of recall clearly predated my presence in their midst and had socially structuring effects that were revealed in the distinctive and often widespread patterns in women's oral narratives, as in their material mnemonic practices. On the other hand, I fully appreciate that these women were remembering in my presence *for me*—not because I required them to, not because they felt intimidated by my whiteness, but because at that precise historical moment I represented a link to networks of other, presumably better-off women in my own *tiko* (land or country) whose affiliation and support they were desperately eager to obtain.

How, though, are these relations more than relationships—how are they *history* in a recognizable (for scholars) sense of that term? Even when articulated as narrative, as in tales of name-giving or in life stories, women's forms of remembering do not look or sound much like conventional academic history: They never profess to be empirically truthful statements (or even narrative constructions) of what happened in the past, attempt explicitly to describe or interpret patterns of change, or chronicle events anchored in linear, dated time. The artefactual memories of pottery, the bodily memories of tattoos, and the spatial memories of lines dividing cultivated fields boast little obvious explanatory power, seeming to survive more as accidental or passive traces of rural women's workaday routines than as conscious records of experience, as "histories" holding remembrance in the needful grip of the present day.

Yet in Magude, a patrilineal, gender-bifurcated social environment characterized by the exportation of male labor, an environment in which girls learn in childhood that community survival depends on their quiescent subordination, it should come as no surprise that women know their world, past and present, differently than men do and have cause to express and *remember* that knowledge differently too. ² Indeed, the very expectation of female quiescence—the normative value placed on rural women's silent acceptance of their social position, on their tacit agreement not to make trouble—has made public forms of oral historical memory (e.g., praise poetry, clan "geochronology," ³ dynastic accounts) in Shangaan communities problematic and mostly off-limits for women. This stifling pressure on women's public speech accounts for both the quality and the diversity of narrative and nonnarrative forms of older women's remembering in postwar Magude. Surviving evidence suggests that the same pressure shaped memory practices in prewar Magude among women across an even broader age range. In much the same way as women in this region farm multiple fields in diverse types of soil, often pooling or exchanging their labor, in order to maximize food security in a precarious environment, they have created and kept memories of experience in multiple places, varied their methods of accessing and transmitting these memories, and above all pooled the labor of remembering, using memories made in relational practice to knit individual women's histories into a collectively self-sustaining whole.

The more challenging question about women's forms of remembering is how one interprets such narrative or nonnarrative relations historically—that is, as claims about the past. Critics of oral history's romanticized marshalling of individual "voices" as incontrovertible "evidence of experience" rightly complicate our understanding of oral reminiscence by drawing attention to the discursive limitations of language. Noting that "individuals speak from social worlds" and that there are events, perceptions and emotions that language cannot convey, these commentators point out that oral testimony is no more transparent or all-encompassing a window than is written evidence on the textured realities of the lives of individuals in the past. ⁴ Yet what *happens* to experience that exceeds—or resists, or subverts—the explanatory capacity of language, or to experience that is so intrinsically, self-consciously tied to a particular group (a group construed more precisely than the concept of *social world* writ large) that one person's discursive account *wittingly* articulates no more than a part of the whole? Here, I would argue, is where, instead of throwing up our hands at the ultimate unknowability of the past (or, alternatively, making unknowability the subject of our work), we need to look beyond language for other, nondiscursive forms through which we might apprehend the past as our subjects know it—and then apply the insights we gain there to a more carefully grounded reconsideration of what language does enable or encourage people to say.

The choice not to use words for memory contains, in itself, the seeds of historical explanation: Some experiences might simply be processed and recalled more authentically, more safely, or more durably (for the person or persons whose experiences they are) through the medium of an object or image or action than through speech. ⁵ It is up to historians to understand both why particular people in particular situations, particular places and times, opt for nonverbal forms of remembering and what the forms they choose reveal about the past they are recalling and, perhaps, also about the present in which that recollection takes place. But whether memory is expressed in words or in things, the more difficult and necessary challenge of interpretation is understanding how that memory is, specifically and concretely, *social*: by whom, among whom, for whom, and with whose habitual practices and conventions past experience is being called up and put to use in the present day.

Precisely because of the relational epistemology that underlies them, women's memories are produced within and productive of elaborate webs of female affiliation. In several ways, we can read these memories as history. First, the creative properties and processes that generate a memory, a "reminder" or *xitsundzuxo*, tell stories of their own: How, where, and in what circumstances women make a memory, and with which resources (for verbal accounts—style, theme, plot, character, symbolism; for objects—physical materials, patterns, tools), lay bare important facets of women's agrarian worlds at the time the memory was made. Changes in these properties and processes over time provide clues to women's engagement with, or subjection to, shifts in their ideational and material surroundings. New name choices, life-story role models, clay sources, tattoo designs, or means of measuring cultivable spaces may indicate the transformative impact of Portuguese colonialism or Christianity or capitalism in rural communities, or they may indicate women's selective incorporation of new concepts and things into still essentially indigenous practices.

Second, women's explanations of the meaning and origin of the choices they make for encoding and recording (that is, relating) a particular experience in a particular way serve to locate individual memory practice in a broad yet definable social context of gendered claims about the past. Typically, these explanations center on educational, competitive, imitative, or simply affectionate bonds among girls or women, at some times stretching vertically backward and forward across generations and at other times extending horizontally among kin-tied or spatially connected groups of female peers. At the most basic level, the shifting shape and character of these allegiances over time illuminate, and suggest reasons for, the changing social architecture of the experiential landscapes of rural women. The identities and relationships among women involved in the creation of a particular memory, the female forebears from whom they obtained the knowledge and skills necessary to tell or make that memory, and the women or girls with whom they share not only the knowledge and skills of memory-making but also the bracing social mesh of the memory itself—such information, contextualized by women's accounts of their most salient relations of remembrance at different moments in the course of their life, can deeply enhance historians' appreciation of the gendered dimensions and dynamics of rural society in southern Mozambique during almost the entire span of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

When we keep in mind that interviewees were recalling these relationships not only from the vantage point of a countryside, and of a consciousness, dramatically transformed by the events of intervening years, but also through the medium of an informal yet always somehow contrived "conversation" with me and either Ruti or Aida, we can also gain insight into the entangled cultural processes of gender, memory, and history in rural Shangaan society. Literacy and Christianity, for example, have given even nonliterate, non-churchgoing women new vocabulary and symbols for conceptualizing, and sometimes contesting, local practices and meanings related to traditional feminine qualities, duties, and roles. The calamitous civil war, on the other hand, by exposing faultlines in Frelimo's claim to represent "the Mozambican people" in its ambitious crusade to modernize the nation's economy and culture, has freed women to question the government's early condemnation of their most cherished traditions and to do so in a manner not possible in the immediate afterglow of independence. In all probability, the women whose memories I explore in this book would not have uttered the same words, or shared the same nonverbal *switsundzuxo*, had I asked them the same questions ten or twenty or thirty years ago and would not do so if someone other than myself were to ask them similar questions today. But by framing the specific "reminders" they did collectively present to me against the backdrop of conditions in Magude district and the circumstances of our meetings in 1994-95, we can come closer to the everyday nature and purposes of historical memory for women in this community—to why and how remembering the past is both ideally and actually done—than documentary sources or formal oral traditions would ever allow. As I hope I have made clear by now, for the women I interviewed memory and history were inseparable notions, constituted by prevailing (though never static) assumptions about gender at their essential core. Remembering experiences of female relationship was as much a part of being a *muchangana wa xisati* (Shangaan woman) as were farming, giving birth, and having the *ntamu* (strength) to endure the long absences of men. And it was ultimately my own (belated) recognition that this form of remembering was history for women—in a sense, the female equivalent of men's *matimu*—that convinced the women of Magude that I was, at heart, a *nsati* too.

Of perhaps most profound significance for academic historians, however, is how the panorama of women's evolving relations of remembrance—the diachronic sweep of their "binding

memories"—may provide a kind of grammar for communicating gendered meanings of past realities having to do with everything from ethnicity to agriculture to colonial power to international relations in southeastern Africa and sometimes beyond. Scholars have tended to analyze these phenomena (among others) with little regard for the explanatory potential of women's modes of expression, forms of remembering, or historical points of view. Even feminist historians' labelling of women's remembrances as "hidden" or oppositional (as implied in the term *counternarrative*) obscures what anthropologist Ruth Behar once described as women's "subjective mapping of experience, the working out of a culture and social system"—and, I would add, history—of their own. ⁶ While each type of history-telling I examine in this book claims a slightly different understanding of the Magude region's past, in their interwoven and sometimes contradictory assertions women's *switsundzuxo* offer an unapologetically female-centered view of social change since the early nineteenth century. As I argue in the following section, the history told through the memories of Magude's *swikoxana* (old women, sing. *xikoxana*) poses some unsettling—though for researchers, I would hope, also exciting—challenges to the existing historiography of rural southern Mozambique.

Being a History of the Land of Magude as Told by the Memories of Its "Old Women" . . .

The historical memories of the "old women" of Magude suggest that, through the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, the parameters of women's lives were geographically and socially wide-ranging and encompassed networks of relations far more expansive than stereotypes of patrilineage- and marriage-bound Shangaan women allow. Women also clearly played a critical role in marking and mediating the frontiers between the diverse peoples whose paths crossed (and sometimes clashed) throughout this turbulent period. These trends, I argue, were due in large part to women's practices of history-telling, whose heavy emphasis on (and effort to ensure) transgenerational continuity—on preserving and transmitting the "laws" and "ways" of "long ago" down a matrilineal narrative chain—conferred great authority on *masungukati* (elderly, postmenopausal women) and justified the concentration of great social and ritual power in their hands. Responsible by virtue of age and gender for leadership and practical guidance in matters related to birth, sexuality, marriage, and death, and for ceremonial regulation of the "health" of people and the land, *masungukati* exercised considerable de facto control over the incorporation of outsiders into local communities, helping to promote a sense of commonality among women across lines of clan, ethnicity, wealth, and status and to foster an understanding that boundaries of difference, even among women, were constituted through feminine action in the relations and material culture of everyday life.

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According to women's relations of remembrance, and contrary to what most historians of southern Mozambique have argued, neither submission to Gaza Nguni rule after the 1820s, the rise of male labor migrancy to South Africa after the 1860s, the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 1880s, nor Portuguese colonial conquest in 1895 significantly disrupted the social fabric of the countryside. Patterns of change in their memories from this period indicate that, to define the meaning and mitigate the hardships of these exogenous events, women in the Magude area used their forms of history-telling as well as the extensive female social networks these practices underwrote. Gaza Nguni violence and economic exactions; the influx of refugees and captives from the east and north; men's partial proletarianization and the advent of money and commodity exchange; the appearance of Swiss missionaries who claimed superiority in spiritual, moral, and medical matters; the replacement of local chiefs with Portuguese officials; and the introduction of laws to organize the theft of African earnings and labor on the one hand, and, on the other, to enforce racial hierarchies of opportunity and privilege—in the face of this battery of new peoples, objects, and systems of power, women not only sustained but expanded the traditions of feminine community through which the most threatening elements of intruding foreign worlds could be domesticated or appropriated into their own.

For these women, the critical watersheds were associated not with events in the realms of masculine politics or economy but with the processes—piecemeal, conflicted, and later in time—whereby colonial institutions and discourses began to invade, and seek to undermine or usurp, women's principal spheres of authority. From the 1920s on, *xilungu* (white or European) schooling, medicine, gender ideologies, marriage and family norms, and methods of land administration consolidated their influence across Magude district, unevenly but steadily, and never without the shaping impact of local actors and meanings. Colonial notions of proper ("civilized") feminine comportment and appearance, sexuality and work, domestic material

culture, farming, child-rearing, health care, and even forms of speech increasingly devalued the old ways in which women's historical authority and representations of matrilineal continuity were embedded and empowered. With the temporal depth of female bonds thus under threat, and with colonialism encouraging new kinds of social divisions in the countryside, women's relations of remembrance underwent a shift in emphasis, away from a focus on reproducing the ways and relationships of long ago and toward nurturing ever more inclusive contemporaneous ties, often on the basis of intragenerational connections. Yet even as intensifying material pressures and restrictions on women in the mid-to-late colonial period were circumscribing female mobility and far-flung spatial linkages in unprecedented ways, elderly women remember imagining, and creating memories of, experiences and identities that integrated elements of a modern, colonial-capitalist world alongside (indeed, within) traditions learned from mothers and grandmothers.

As these *swikoxana* tell it, the generations of their daughters and granddaughters—women born after circa 1950—lacked the same balance of "old" (*swa khale*) and "new" (*swa ntshwa*) in their practices of remembering, indeed in their knowledge of their own or the region's past. More inclined to lifeways learned in mission churches, colonial schools, and a more deeply commercialized and town-oriented rural landscape, these women were not necessarily abandoning the *milawu* (laws) of their foremothers, and indeed they often continued to advocate and practice some of the old ways as well. But forms of memory that stressed transgenerational continuity (birth-naming by midwives and divination, handmade pottery, oral storytelling) suffered a decline of status, and that, together with the ascendance or transformation of those forms promoting feminine affiliations of shallower time-depth but broader spatial or social reach (puberty naming, tattooing, informal land transfers), contributed to the decline of elderly women's authority and willingness to persist in, or to teach, old practices themselves.

After independence and the outbreak of the Renamo war in the mid-1970s, however, a truly dramatic rupture—the disappearance (or "death") of the "old ways" and of the *xichavo* (respect) that defined their relational content—seems to have occurred. First sternly prohibited by Frelimo from carrying on the "obscurantist" practices of traditional culture, and then driven by the war from their land and the hard-won histories of feminine community rooted in generations of shared agrarian routines, and then facing the formidable challenge of postwar recovery as structural adjustment and market reforms wreaked economic havoc in the countryside ^z—in these circumstances, the spheres of social life in which women could claim to exercise authority over the present, let alone the past, were few indeed. It should come as no surprise, then, that female spirit possession and witchcraft tensions among women—particularly surrounding access to food, cash, and arable land—were intensifying dramatically during the period of my fieldwork in Magude. In a very important sense, both phenomena were (and probably continue to be) struggles to defend the binding power of women's relations of remembrance by highlighting the bodily, psychic, and social dangers of ignoring female knowledge of the past. Women's forms of historical memory may never have been more vulnerable than they were at the moment I encountered them in Magude; at the same time, as my "fellow women" persistently made clear to me, the stakes of fighting for their survival had never been higher.

Summaries of the Chapters

In chapter 1, "Mapping Magude," I examine the history of the Magude area as it has been represented, or mapped, in the bodies of evidence other scholars have used to reconstruct the past in this corner of southern Africa: archaeology; travel accounts; ethnography; colonial and missionary documents; postindependence political, academic, and humanitarian discourses; and the oral testimony and clan traditions of local men. While women's own definitions of their place in Magude's past, of the historical terrain of their experience, do not neatly correspond with the discursive geography produced by these outsider/official/elite images and texts, each form of map examined in this chapter constitutes a genre of (situated) knowledge of Magude's history and relies on and reproduces a particular view of rural women's place within it. All of these maps, pictorial and narrative, have impinged in some way on the everyday lives and identities of the women at the center of this book and thus provide a necessary context for understanding women's memories both in their own right and as a new way of engaging with southern Mozambique's past.

In chapter two, "Locating a Woman's Life," I recount my introduction to communities of women in Magude and their forms of history-telling and explain how that introduction was shaped by the circumstances in which I arrived in the district. With women's relationship to geographic place so profoundly disrupted by the war, and with the stakes of place-identity mounting in the harsh conditions of postwar resettlement, my initial attempts to pin down the social and spatial parameters of women's lives, through what I assumed would be the straightforward task of recording women's names, foundered in the face of a kind of history-telling I had not expected to find. If men in these communities have used clan names to anchor fixed notions of self in a politically territorialized landscape, women's names and naming stories map female identities as innately ambiguous, stubbornly diverse, and infinitely adaptable. Ethnic, clan, and personal appellations have offered women a narrative vehicle, both for asserting the centrality of female affective ties and activities to processes of change and for securing their belonging to multiple circles of female kin and friends. Naming stories, however, also reflect the increasing temporal constriction and rigidity of women's histories during the twentieth century—a theme illustrated in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

In chapter 3, "Based on a True Story," I present a selection of narratives told to me by three of the eldest women I interviewed—Valentina Chauke, Albertina Tiwana, and Rosalina Malungana—about the experiences of their grandmothers, their mothers, and themselves as girls and adult women. These narratives, which I call life stories, are accompanied by analytical commentary that draws comparatively on life-story narratives I recorded from the entire group of interviewees. Life-storytelling, I argue in this chapter, is a critical form of remembering and history-telling for women, a kind of talk—in a way, an oral tradition—restricted to female social spaces and audiences and through which elderly women offer young women and girls prescriptive models for living well and avoiding suffering in adulthood. An idiom for claiming a range of relational identities past and present, women's life stories stress the vital importance of faithfully reproducing the "ways" and "laws" of "long ago" even as they pass on instructive examples of courageous female agency, agrarian innovation, and behavioral change. As in their naming stories, women's life stories move female hierarchies and affiliations, knowledge and power to center stage, foregrounding memories of how they have struggled to use relationships with kinswomen and friends to balance their responsibility for maintaining the *vutomi* (life) of rural society against the often contrary impulses of their hearts. Here, we see most explicitly how for these women history consists of the deliberate remembering not of dates or events but of the webs of social connection that bind women through shared habits of agrarian survival, which themselves simultaneously persist and change over time. In stories from the late precolonial and colonial periods about work and play, courtship and marriage, farming and trading, education and spiritualism, and—most challengingly—relations between blacks and whites, the "old women" of Magude explain how *xilungu* (the ways of whites) have contributed to the shrinking and fracturing of women's relations of remembrance in the countryside, most devastatingly since independence and, above all, because of the civil war.

In chapter 4, "Autographed Evidence," I turn to clay pottery, one of the most ancient forms of female cultural production in southern Africa, and draw on archaeological, oral, and ceramic evidence to explore how and why women in the Magude area have tried to preserve, in as unchanged a manner as possible, the potmaking practices of their foremothers. While shifts in agrarian politics, economy, and society over the past two centuries have prompted certain adjustments, two patterns are striking in the local ceramic industry as women had, on a very small scale, begun to revive it in postwar Magude. First is the overall continuity in methods and styles not only since 1800 but since early in the first millennium, and second is the paradoxical insistence of potters that, while they follow the ways of their foremothers down to the last ritual detail, their own pots are as individual "as if we put our name on them." As in life-storytelling, the relational histories women "write," as they say, in the *tinhlanga* (decorative markings) on their pots both reflect and reproduce memories of common experience across the many lines that have arisen to divide them. Yet pottery's stories, which go largely unspoken, claim an even more inclusive vision, whose capacity to affect relationships in the present is expressed in taboos linking the dangers of female sexuality to the "strength" of the clay that is its medium. In this regard, younger women's disdain for the hard labor and dirt involved in potmaking (a disdain fostered by mission Christianity, colonial education, and urban living, especially during the war) threatens not only a venerated female craft but the phenomenological power, in everyday life, of the ways of long ago. Faced with the possibility that this rich female tradition may disappear from the countryside for good, Magude's elderly women recognize with great sadness the diminished resources that daughters and granddaughters will have at their disposal to overcome the increasingly divisive pressures of the twenty-first century.

In chapter 5, "Boundaries of Beauty," I examine *tinhlanga* of another kind: the range of keloid, incised, and needle-pierced tattoos with which women in Magude (and elsewhere in rural southern Mozambique) have been decorating their bodies since at least the late eighteenth century. Like the histories inscribed in women's pottery, the memories embedded in tattoos express interpretations of experience, interpretations that women have been unwilling or unable to put into words. While women's oral narratives of tattooing portray *tinhlanga* in terms of shared notions of beauty among geographically proximate cohorts of girls and women, the tattoos themselves, and patterns of change in tattooing practice over space and time, communicate a much bolder claim about the region's past. Signs both of women's efforts to negotiate the frontiers of their social universe and of the informal networks of affiliation through which they have mediated androcentric authority structures, *tinhlanga* have offered an idiom for women to assert ever wider grounds of community and identity for themselves in the context of intensifying economic hardship and social differentiations set in motion by colonialism. As European and European-trained African missionaries and schoolteachers raised the stakes of women's tattooing by redefining it as resistance against the "civilized" dressings of *xilungu* culture, women, fully aware that their bodies were a battlefield in this colonial contest, used their skin to constitute racial identity by redefining, through tattoo symbols, the frontier between white ways and black ways. Indeed, it is the persistence and, for some women, elaboration of *tinhlanga* practice from roughly the 1940s on—at the same time as pottery and other forms of women's remembrance began their gradual decline—that illustrates most decisively the core historical argument of this book: that women's histories emphasizing matrilineal continuity and time depth (birth-naming, pottery, life-storytelling) have weakened gradually during the twentieth century and declined markedly since independence, while those that stress more-expansive contemporaneous female connections (puberty-naming, tattooing, field boundaries) have proliferated in the same period, usually at the expense of older women's historical authority.

In chapter 6, "'I'll Bury You in the Border!'" I turn to the farmland where the women of Magude have spent the greater part of their working lives and created perhaps their most potent yet also most mnemonically unfixed form of historical memory. In this chapter I focus on the locality of Facazisse, the site of vigorous land competition since the 1920s and an area that experienced unusually fierce, and at first glance oddly petty, incidents of land conflict after the end of the Renamo war. These struggles occurred predominantly among female farmers and surrounded the fairness of post-independence methods of land distribution, resentment of *deslocados* who refused to give up borrowed land, and disputes over the proper location of boundaries (*mindzelekana*) between cultivated fields. Women's postwar land struggles illuminate how the once remarkably elastic and permeable limits of what I call women's "cultivating communities" have undergone radical redefinition since 1975. During this period, the cumulative impact of colonial land alienations, modern methods of land division, and wartime land-allocation measures greatly eroded women's authority and autonomy in this vital sphere, leading in the mid-1990s to sharply escalating competition over tiny scraps of land and a spate of *xifula* witchcraft accusations—including one woman's death from alleged witchcraft poisoning. Field boundaries scratched into the soil are an especially elusive nonnarrative way of remembering shared experience, and their impermanence and vulnerability to covert adjustment (especially in sandy soils) render them not only highly unstable as memories but also readily available as weapons of social exclusion in times of shortage or distress. While informal practices of land distribution once fostered webs of female relationship that joined women across lines of marriage, lineage, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, the drastically narrowed cultivating communities of postwar Facazisse may have portended more profound changes for Magude district, and perhaps for rural southern Mozambique, as a whole. Certainly, they revealed one of the tragic possible outcomes when women's "old ways" of binding memory through relations of remembrance collide with the dispossessions and inequalities of the new global capitalist order at their door.

Notes:

Note 1: Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 52, and chapter 3, passim. By "representations of pastness," Tonkin explains, she means "chains of words, either spoken or written, ordered in patterns of discourse that represent events." She distinguishes this "history-as-recorded" from "history-as-lived"—i.e., from "the past" (2-3). [Back.](#)

Note 2: The view that women in highly sex-segregated societies may develop distinctive and separate female communities and cultural forms has appeared before in feminist historical and anthropological writing. See, for example, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, 1 (1975): 1-29; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Barbara M. Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900-1989* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1997). Scholars have devoted less attention to the ways in which such pervasive experience of gender segregation might shape social cognition and, in turn, memory and memory's expression as knowledge of the past (as history). I am not implying here that all women in Magude share an essentialized, biology-bound view of the past or that masculine and feminine memories exist in absolute isolation from one another. Men and women do talk to each other about history, as they do about most things, and the chapters of this book contain examples both of differences among women's approaches to remembering and of similarities (or interactions) between male and female historical consciousness. [Back.](#)

Note 3: I borrow this term from Elizabeth Tonkin, who uses it to refer to group- migration narratives whose plots are structured as itineraries (as answers to the question "How did this people come to be where they are now?") and that mark temporality by movement through space rather than movement in time. See Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*, 29-33. [Back.](#)

Note 4: See Luise White, "Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History," in "'Not Telling': Secrecy, Lies, and History," ed. Gary Minkley and Martin Legassick, special issue, *History and Theory* 39 (December 2000): 17; and Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (summer 1991): 773-97. [Back.](#)

Note 5: In her research on Mpiemu communities in the Central African Republic, Tamara Giles-Vernick explores narrative and nonnarrative practices of recalling the past. See, for example, Tamara Giles-Vernick, "Lives, Histories, and Sites of Recollection," in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). See also Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). [Back.](#)

Note 6: Ruth Behar, "Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 2 (summer 1990): 225. [Back.](#)

Note 7: See Joseph Hanlon, *Peace without Profit: How the IMF Blocks Rebuilding in Mozambique* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); and Joseph Hanlon, *Mozambique: Who Calls the Shots?* (London: James Currey, 1991). For a focus on the effects of structural adjustment on women, see Kathleen Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2002), ch. 7. [Back.](#)

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