

NAVIGATE

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"Everyone Has Her Own Hand": Pottery as Autographed Memory

It is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand.

—Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"

Avavumbeli mbita eku cukumeta.
(Potters don't mold clay into a pot to throw it away.)

—Henri P. Junod, *The Wisdom of the Tsonga-Shangana People*

"Everyone Has Her Own Hand"

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Introduction

If my most meaningful early social encounters in the district were the rambling, unplanned conversations during which my neighbors Rosalina and Juliana introduced me to the patterns of women's life-storytelling, then my earliest visual memory of Magude is of the terra-cotta, hive-shaped ovens whose peaks rose above the thatch homesteads lining the approach to the Nkomati River bridge. On the afternoon in January 1995 when John, Liz and I made our first exploratory trip to Magude, these ovens were surrounded by heaps of firewood and mountains of bricks, and smoke curled out from their pointed chimneys into the hazy, long-rainless sky. Clay bricks, in fact, seemed to be the principal product of these ovens, and the new brick houses (in various stages of construction) that dotted the horizon beyond this stretch of road were testament both to the devastation of the war and to the energy with which Magude's inhabitants were laboring to rebuild in its wake.



Yet there were also piles of new clay pots clustered, presumably for sale, in the shade of the tallest tree near each oven; and scattered haphazardly across the yards of all the homesteads in sight were dozens of older pots, their abundance suggesting something of pottery's utility and value in postwar Magude. After we drove through the small cement center of Magude town and parked the car where the paved road abruptly ended just past the market at the town's northern edge, a short walk down a sandy path revealed a landscape similarly crowded with evidence of the area's historic relationship with works of clay. Upside-down pots capped the peaks of conical thatch roofs, broken pots held down the corrugated metal sheets covering square cement houses, clay pots sat in doorways and simmered on outdoor cooking fires, potsherds of every shape and size poked up through the thick sand under our feet—almost caricaturing, as I later wrote in my journal, the vision I had harbored of pottery as a still-vital form of women's material culture despite the ravages of the war. ¹

I later learned that the bulk of the earthenware we saw during that visit was in fact mass-produced, wheel-thrown, and man-made—manufactured in male-owned ovens such as the ones we passed on the south bank of the Nkomati or at the larger male-staffed pottery run by the Catholic São Jerónimo Mission in Magude town. Yet the outwardly masculine complexion of Magude's postwar ceramic industry had neither diminished the status of pottery in women's understanding of the past nor eliminated its diverse functions in the present. Women's home-based potmaking in Magude has endured many challenges and displacements in the past two centuries, and it has certainly not survived intact in the face of changes in the agrarian economy and environment, in gender and generational relations, in residential arrangements, and in cultural practices and beliefs. Indeed, female potters were rare in Magude during the period of my fieldwork, and many interviewees blamed the Renamo war above all else for nearly destroying a pursuit passed down by their foremothers of "long ago." Their regret, however, focused less on the decline of a particular craft than on the attenuation of webs of community that potmaking had once enabled rural women to create and foster among

themselves. This connectedness again crossed kinship, ethnic, and political lines, and it undergirded a distinctly feminine historical consciousness. As a form of women's remembering, pots—like life stories—offer representations of the past that are firmly rooted in women's shared vision of their present. Yet clay pottery often records experiences that life-storytelling does not, or cannot, articulate. That a handful of older women were determined to revive what they called an "ancient" tradition despite fierce competition from male commercial potters, a weak local market, and the harsh living conditions of postwar Magude hints at the power of pottery as a medium for conveying women's knowledge of the past—as another category of *xitsundzuxo* with conventions and meanings all its own.

Like clay pots, women's life stories "exchange experiences,"² self-consciously passing on, as history and counsel, things their "heart has known" and their "eyes have seen" to the younger women who will live on after them. There are limits, though, to what women can or will say in life stories. Social expectations and cultural norms about the appropriate course of a woman's life—her affective priorities, her material objectives, the primary coordinates of her identity—help to explain why the oral narratives presented in chapter 3 highlight relationships grounded in marriage and motherhood, emphasize actions and accomplishments consistent with local definitions of "women's work," and dwell on the imperative that women adhere to strict traditional laws of feminine behavior. Older women tell life stories to assert both their belonging to and their responsibility for a gendered social order whose main purpose is agrarian survival; even memories of defiance or "difficult" character are set against historical precedents of some kind, whether a grandmother's teaching, a mother's advice, or a sister's wayward example. Emphasizing continuity rather than change, women's life-storytelling reveals their deep involvement in extensive kin-based social networks (consanguineal, affinal, fictive), but places marriage and uterine ties consistently in the narrative foreground. In much the same way, women direct these stories principally to the ears of daughters and granddaughters, necessarily excluding other categories of girls and women for reasons of *xichavo* (respect), privacy, or self-protection. Life stories, in other words, are not intended for indiscriminate public consumption, nor would they be immediately comprehensible beyond a narrator's social circle, given their often-unnamed cast of characters and the situations they allusively describe.

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Women's pottery, on the other hand, both circulates more widely over time and space than women's life stories and is more vigilantly restricted to all-female audiences. Written, oral, and clay sources indicate that women's pots have tended to travel great distances along networks of exchange, migration, visiting, and exogamous marriage; these clay wares have also shown a remarkable capacity for outlasting their creators. Unlike life stories, which women do not typically preserve for more than two or three generations, some of the pottery styles I saw in postwar Magude appear in archaeological accounts from as early as the second century. Moreover, while the informal conventions of life-storytelling make it fairly easy for these narratives to spread to audiences their tellers may not intend, women rigorously control the work of pottery through laws and "taboos" that establish danger-laden boundaries around the contexts in which potmaking may be done. An explicitly female domain, home-based potmaking is not exactly scorned by men, but it is regarded with a degree of condescension as part of the mundane domestic world with which males from puberty on should not concern themselves. Small boys may assist their female elders, willingly or otherwise, with the simpler tasks of pottery production—gathering sand for temper, for example, or bundling dried grass for firing—and, as this chapter shows, social and economic changes during the twentieth century have drawn older boys and men to these activities, in Magude as elsewhere, in unprecedented numbers. Yet the association of pottery with feminine domestic culture persisted in popular attitudes even toward and among the male potters I knew in Magude. The men at the São Jerónimo factory, for instance, became visibly uncomfortable when I questioned them about links between their craft and female ceramic traditions, sensitive to the suggestion that they were doing women's work even though all of them had been employed by the factory since the 1950s.³¹

In one important way, however, these salaried male artisans were carrying on a legacy of their female counterparts—one that sets pottery as a form of women's remembering further apart from life-storytelling and the other kinds of memory examined in this study. Each of the São Jerónimo potters claimed to be able to identify his own creations from the hundreds of vessels the mission factory produced every day, despite what seemed to me the perfect resemblance among their respective stockpiles in terms of shape, size, and decoration.⁴ Similarly, the women I interviewed insisted that a potter's idiosyncratic style, aesthetic sense, and experiential knowledge determined the appearance of her vessels, claiming that each

individual's clay wares were as unique and identifiable "as if we put our name on them." Indeed, women potters described the distinctive features of their style as a kind of autograph, a personal signature that carried their artistic reputation as far as trade or travel might carry the pot in which their creative imprint was embedded. Every clay pot, then, was as singular as the ideas and experiences of its maker, and reflected a positive notion of feminine selfhood and innovation that I rarely heard in women's life stories. This socially sanctioned celebration of female individualism was echoed in the informal rankings of potters that floated along channels of local gossip in Magude. While in theory all women in a community could engage in home-based pottery production, and while pottery was not considered the specialized preserve of a particular group, everyone recognized the superior practitioners in their neighborhood, and those who were less talented openly strove to develop their skill by imitating the more expert potters among them.

Yet even as women stressed the uniqueness of their work, every potter (*mumbi*) we interviewed also proudly asserted her connection both to a genealogy of female potters and to a contemporary group of female practitioners of her craft. Indeed, perhaps the most dramatic difference between women's potmaking and women's life stories is that the techniques and products of potmaking were often learned, practiced, and transferred along social networks that had been forged through bonds of companionship and affection rather than ascribed by kinship or formal marriage: Grandmothers, mothers, and mothers-in-law were one source of instruction in ceramic traditions, but so were female friends, neighbors, and non-related visitors. Moreover, women's recollections of their development as potters emphasized less who taught or showed them their skills than how *they* watched, heard, and "guarded" each bit of new information in their *nhloko* (head) or with their *qondo* (common sense/knowledge). It is not coincidental that I found the potters featured in this chapter living near one another, for throughout their careers these women had expanded their repertoires and honed their talents in tandem with fellow craftswomen with whom they interacted and exchanged ideas on a regular basis. Their pots, then, inscribed not only their makers' individual experience but the ceramic communities in which these women worked. And because these women, like other potters, hoped to distribute their wares (through exchange, gift, or sale) outside their home community, their individual works of clay were fashioned with an eye to the tastes of a broader audience, and thus reflected female linkages and stylistic preferences across geographic space as well.

By the same token, if women's handmade pottery communicates unique experiential knowledge, that knowledge is both explicitly gendered and self-consciously grounded in a feminine vision of the past. Every clay pot simultaneously contains an individual woman's remembrance and women's collective understanding of their relationship—*through* this ceramic history—with one another. Women potters strictly observe "taboos" ⁵ surrounding the gathering and preparation of clay, reasoning that by doing so they are perpetuating "the ways of long ago," an obligation they assume simply because their foremothers "did it this way, and I was there, I saw them." ⁶ In addition, clay pots are symbolically identified with women's bodies: The parts of a pot are called by corresponding parts of human anatomy (mouth, neck, shoulders, belly, buttocks), and decorative markings are called *tinhlanga*, the same term used generically for the tattoos on women's skin. ⁷ As demonstrated in the following proverbs, there is also a clear metaphoric equation of women's pottery with women's responsibility for shaping children's character through education:

<i>Vatirha hi vumba rahatsakama</i>	Clay is molded while still wet (A child is educated while still young).
<i>Mbita loko yingahisiwanga ayitiyi</i>	When a pot is not properly kilned it cannot last (Adversity or hard work shows a person's mettle) ⁸
Other proverbs use clay pots as metaphors for personal knowledge—	
<i>A mbita yitiviwa hi muphameri</i>	The one who serves the food knows the pot (Everyone knows what concerns him- or herself)
physical well-being—	
<i>Mbita ya vovo yidlele tingengenza</i>	The old cracked cooking-pot has killed the strong and healthy clay vessels (Said of a sickly person who survives the

	strong and healthy)
and proper behavior in interpersonal relationships—	
<i>A voko rin'we aringipimisa vumba</i>	One hand cannot measure clay (One person cannot achieve anything, do the work of two people)
<i>Nyama yo ndzovoteriwa yihandzula mbita</i>	Meat that is forced into the cooking-pot breaks the pot (The use of force creates ill-feeling, conflict). ⁹

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However, the proverb that best expresses the gendered historical purpose of women's pottery is *Mbita yo sweka yitlula hi yo chulela ka yona* (The pot into which the cooked food is poured surpasses the one in which the food has been cooked)—meaning, according to Junod, that a story is always elaborated and improved as it is transmitted from one teller to another. ¹⁰ Pottery, too, I argue in this chapter, is made in order to be shared. Its value derives not just from private enjoyment or use but also from its dissemination, across time and space, along a chain of women who will each individually surpass—build on, add her own experience to—the work and knowledge of the ones who went before her. Every clay pot tells a story, then, of women's separate and connected pasts, and both remembers and reminds them of a constellation of relationships that are bounded in theory only by gender and by potters' ability to maximize their markets, skills, and creative talents.

This chapter draws on archival and published sources on ceramics from southern Mozambique and South Africa, oral testimony of men and women from across Magude district, and the work and words of two female potters from Xihluku (in the chieftaincy of Xihlahla, across the Nkomati River from Magude town) to explore the historical memories embodied in women's clay vessels. Women's homemade pottery shows a distinct trajectory of decline during the twentieth century, having been displaced, to an extent, by factory-made wares that serve similar functions, that may be acquired independently of the women who were once their exclusive creators, and that are now more easily obtainable within the district and beyond its borders than ever before. In 1995-96, handmade clay pots were more expensive and harder to come by than plastic or metal containers or factory-produced clay pots, mainly because home pottery production required resources that were not available to most older women at that time: firewood and dyes, assistance from younger women and children, and of course time away from farming.

While the effects of Portuguese colonialism, mission Christianity, and the changing regional economy will be evident in the memories examined in this chapter, perhaps the most remarkable feature of women's pottery in postwar Magude was the way it still resembled, in its basic essentials, the pots made by the women of "long ago," and how few traces it bore of Western cultural or technological influence. Not only had the enormous output of Portuguese-



and African (male)-run ceramic factories had little effect on the social meanings, shapes, and decorative patterns of women's clay pots, but the Xihluku potters who were pursuing their "ancient" craft with such determination had deliberately integrated elements of the *xilungu* world into traditions learned from their foremothers. The trend they were battling was not, in their eyes, the inevitable replacement of their wares by cheaper, mass-produced domestic commodities, but the gradual weakening of the intergenerational chain of transmission that required younger women to carry on these clay memories after their elders died. Set in motion by some of the same processes that transformed women's naming practices and the relational networks recalled in women's life stories, this trend was also noticeably accelerated by the physical displacements accompanying independence and especially the Renamo war. While naming and life-storytelling will certainly endure in a modified fashion as they have done through the past hundred years or more, it is not clear that women's pottery will survive as a form of historical memory once Magude's last female potters have become too old to make pots themselves, or when their remaining handmade vessels finally "die," as women say, and can be replaced only by factory-produced containers.

Approaches to Magude's Ceramic Past: Ethnography, Archaeology

Scholarship on ceramic production in Mozambique, as in southern Africa more generally, tends to fall into one of two categories. Ethnographic studies have treated clay pottery as a consummate example of "tribal" material culture and "native" industry—important for its own sake—whose survival was threatened by the intrusion of commodity capitalism and European consumer aesthetics into the countryside. According to this work, any change in ceramic practice necessarily has meant the loss or disappearance of cultural tradition. ¹¹ In archaeological studies, on the other hand, pottery figures as a crucial form of evidence for the arrival, differentiation, and geographic spread of African peoples across the region during the centuries beyond the reach of oral or written sources. ¹² This scholarship has valued women's ceramic production principally as a medium through which collective social identities have been (unthinkingly) inscribed, leaving traces of their existence both in the physical remnants of old clay pots and in the (unconscious) persistence of ceramic traditions over time. The two approaches share a typologizing view of pottery, one that has constructed and reproduced its categories, for the most part, along lines of ethnic difference, whether to illuminate the diverse panoply of local cultures or to accomplish the grander-scale, *longue durée* goal of archaeological "sequence-building." ¹³



Yet these two approaches have also diverged in revealing ways. Ethnographic studies, more concerned with contemporary quotidian details of social context and symbolic meaning, have devoted most of their efforts to identifying the division of labor in pottery production, how pottery fits into women's work routines, and the taboos or cultural rules surrounding the various stages of this activity. Archaeological studies, on the other hand, have concentrated on the broader political, economic, and environmental context of potmaking as part of an overarching endeavor to reconstruct past processes of human settlement and societal development measured primarily in terms of technological change. ¹⁴ Ethnographers have shown little awareness of the ways in which archaeology might shed light on the historical constitution of cultural identity; archaeologists, that ethnographic inquiry could help solve the riddle of the origins and diffusion of pottery styles. Few in either group seem to have recognized that the other offers clues to its own most pressing questions, and attempts to collaborate across this divide remain few and far between. ¹⁵

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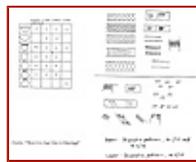
As was illustrated in chapter 1, the Magude area is conspicuous in archaeological literature mainly by its absence. Falling squarely between important South African and Mozambican excavation sites dating from early in the first millennium A.D., Magude is situated within what archaeologists refer to as the southeastern lowlands, a region stretching from the Limpopo River south to the Transkei and inland from the Indian Ocean coast to the escarpment marking the eastern limit of the Transvaal highveld. With its blend of fertile alluvial soils and excellent pasture, its strategic location for travel and trade along the Nkomati River, its once abundant water and timber resources, and the easily defensible bluffs where ancient stone tools were uncovered in the 1940s, ¹⁶ Magude possesses all of the prerequisites for the kind of early (pre-A.D. 1000) farming and potmaking settlement (also known as Early Iron Age) described by Martin Hall and others. Because no one has investigated the ceramic industry of Magude itself, we do not yet have physical evidence that pottery was actually produced there before the twentieth century. However, given the excellent clay sources throughout the district, and the insistence by elderly men and women that pottery has been manufactured locally since the days of "our grandmothers' grandmothers," it is likely that Magude shares much of the ceramic history of the surrounding region.



According to Hall, arguing against his colleagues' previous efforts to classify African ceramics into discrete ethnic "streams" or traditions, the most significant feature of first-millennium pottery across the southeast was the basic similarity and "conservativeness" of ceramic decoration over space and time. Drawing on the work of ethnoarchaeologist Ian Hodder, Hall interpreted this pattern as evidence of a "wide-ranging network of shared obligations": "By exchanging cereal products in vessels similarly decorated with potent symbols, householders would simultaneously signify and reaffirm their mutual connectedness."¹⁷ If this was true for Magude as well, first-millennium potters would have produced wares resembling those unearthed along the southern Mozambique and Natal coast, in the Tukela River basin, and at such Transvaal sites as Lydenburg, Harmony, and Eiland: globular (spherical or subspherical) pots without necks or with short upright or short straight everted necks; hemispherical bowls, either shallow and wide-mouthed or deep and open-mouthed, with straight rims; occasional carination on both bowls and pots and occasional beveling or fluting on pot rims; and, as for decorative patterns, combinations of motifs based on incised lines (e.g., short parallel oblique lines, multiple horizontal lines, cross-hatching, herringbone, chevrons, triangles) or stamped impressions (by means of, e.g., shells, grass stalks), usually placed in single or multiple bands around the rim, neck, shoulder, and/or body of the vessel.¹⁸



Most archaeologists agree that the end of the first millennium brought fundamental changes to both political economy and ceramic practice throughout the southeast. As households began to accumulate larger cattle herds, cattle assumed an increasingly important role not only as the principal anchor of agrarian livelihoods but also as the primary means of expressing intercommunity relationships and political power, notably power over people through the transfer of cattle as bridewealth. Wide-ranging networks of mutual obligation therefore became less necessary than when people had depended mainly on crops for survival, and the ceramic styles of the "Late Iron Age" as a result became increasingly localized.¹⁹ For such riverine settlements as the three uncovered in 1973 along the Olifants River at Massingir, just north of Magude district, another factor in this transition was communities' growing involvement in regional and coastal trade, indicated by the presence of copper beads from Phalaborwa and glass beads of Indian or European origin among the remnants.²⁰ One of these sites, Massingir 1/72, was carbon-dated to A.D. 980 (+/-40).²¹ This site and a second one directly across



river (Massingir 2/75) have attracted attention because their ceramics—in shape and decoration, similar to ninth-century pottery from Phalaborwa²²—have been claimed as evidence of a Sotho migration from the Transvaal. The third site, Massingir 4/75, only 35 km upstream from the others, contained what author Ricardo Duarte described as "an essentially different pottery,"²³ including globular vessels with straight-walled necks, no carination, and a fairly distinct set of decorative patterns.

Duarte cites oral tradition to identify Massingir 4/75 as an "ancient Cossa village,"²⁴ a claim that seems to support Hall's hypothesis about the link between narrowing geographic parameters of ceramic style and increasingly localized ethnopolitical structures from circa A.D. 1000 on. However, scholars have also noted overlaps between the Massingir 4/75 pottery and remnants that historian Gerhard Liesegang collected at the site of the Gaza Nguni capital at Chaimite (Gaza province). Liesegang concluded that the Chaimite pottery from the 1850s belonged to a different tradition than that of shards he gathered some 430 km to the north, at the 1880s site of Ngungunyana's residence. This claim presents an interesting challenge to Hall's argument, since it indicates not only that an ethnopolitical community could possess more than one ceramic pattern but also that structures of political power were not always perfectly mirrored in ceramic styles.²⁵

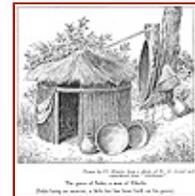
Of course, shards alone cannot tell us who the makers of either set of pottery were. Were they Nguni women who adapted their style to that of local potters, or were they local women who refused to adopt the ceramic practices of a foreign political elite? Either way, this evidence of a disjuncture between political structures and ceramic style suggests that we need to rethink assumptions about how and why practices of pottery changed—or, indeed, to ask why certain elements of ceramic practice have actually remained consistent over space and time. All three Massingir sites, for instance, contained wide-mouthed hemispherical bowls with straight rims,

bowls with narrower mouths and vertical walls, and decorations involving incised parallel oblique lines and various kinds of stamping. Similarly, both Gaza sites included globular pots with straight and slightly everted necks, comb-stamping, and graphite coloring. It is impossible, in other words—for the tenth and nineteenth centuries as for the centuries before, between, and since—to draw airtight boundaries around the pottery style of any one group or to make absolute claims about the ceramic tradition responsible for all the remnants found at a particular site. Caught up in the minutiae of ceramic difference in their quest to reconstruct cultural and political change, archaeologists have tended to neglect such evidence of continuities, linkages, and blurry border zones in the region's ceramic past.

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Ethnographic and written sources on pottery from the mid-nineteenth through the twentieth centuries contain abundant evidence of such wide-ranging ceramic connections and continuities. References to female pottery in early European documents reveal only that women's clay pots were one form of "native industry" observed by Portuguese officials stationed at Lourenço Marques in the 1870s ²⁶ and that white travelers blazing imperial trails across the landscape were supplied with water or beer by clay pot-bearing African women. ²⁷ European visitors more intent on recording African customs, however, noted the centrality of women's pottery to practices surrounding birth, healing, and death. Henry Fynn wrote in 1823 that beer-filled pots were placed on the graves of "the ordinary class of people" in "Mapoota" country outside Delagoa Bay. ²⁸ Philippe Jeanneret's description of "Ma-Khoça" funereal practices near Antioka in the 1890s highlighted the dramatic role of a woman's pots in the cooking, beer-serving, and pot-breaking rituals conducted by *masungukati* (elderly women) on the day of the woman's burial. ²⁹

According to H. A. Junod, writing from Rikatla about men's burials some fifteen years later, old clay pots were broken on a man's grave "to show anger against death"; the deceased's clay drinking vessel was pierced on the bottom and placed on the grave to serve as a receptacle for beer offerings; and new pots were either put at the foot of a tree near the grave or in front of the deceased's abandoned hut. ³⁰ Clay pots and potsherds were also prominent in medical treatment, particularly in the medicinal protection of infants against worldly dangers (wild animals) and illnesses such as epilepsy. ³¹ E. Dora Earthy, who lived and worked among VaLenge women in southeast Gaza province between 1917 and 1930, documents the medicinal uses of potsherds and potting clay, noting that, while a woman's pots might be put on her grave or buried with her, more often they were thrown away so as not to remind her daughters of their loss. ³² Fynn mentions "Mapoota" women coming to Delagoa Bay in the 1820s with their clay wares to "freely offer for Sale to Europeans"; and both Junod and Earthy allude to a busy trade in women's handmade pots within and among rural communities. ³ However, it is Fynn's brief narrative of how the "King of the Mapoota" met every morning with his subjects at "the Village Tree" that most explicitly conveys the metonymic power of women's pots as carriers not only of food and drink but of the obligatory benevolence—and complexly gendered power—of chiefly rule:



The King has always attending on him a Fool or Harlequin who dresses and talks in a most ridiculous manner, and telling the King that he does not kill enough Bullocks; why not give his people plenty to eat and Beyarlar [*byala*] to drink, &c. This he keeps repeating, intermixing it with whistling and singing. . . . [A]bout 10 o'clock the King's Steward brings a piece of Meat cooked on a Scure and a Jar of Beyarlar which he gives to His Majesty. A party of Women then come from the next village bringing a number of large pots filled with Indian Corn, Beans, Sweet Potatoes, Beyarlar and Tobacco. These provisions being placed before the King is delivered by the Steward to the several parties one pot to each. ³⁴

Unfortunately, these sources provide few details about the physical appearance and decoration of women's pottery. All Junod has to say on this subject is that potters apply "very simple designs, generally triangular" to their vessels. ³⁵ Even Earthy, whose writings show much greater admiration for women's material culture, notes only that "the favourite designs round the neck are series of incised triangles, each pair being placed apex to apex"; that designs are made with a thorn or shell; and that pot decoration represents both the potter's "handwriting" or "trade-mark" and women's cicatrization scars, or *tinhlanga*. ³⁶ Both commentators pay more attention to decorative coloring than to graphic ornamentation, perhaps because the former, a

more technically complicated process, strikes them as more relevant to an appreciation of pottery as "industry." Junod briefly describes the painting of fired pots "a brilliant brown . . . a decoction of the bark of the mangrove (*nkapa*) and of the *nkanye*, boiled with a kind of creeper (*mahlehlwa*), which has a sticky sap," ³⁷ while Earthy records that Lenge women sometimes colored their pots with *tsumane* (red ochre), which they found on the roots of rotting marsh grass, mixed with clay, and pounded and formed into "little cakes" that were left to dry in the sun and then roasted in the fire. ³⁸ The similar attitude that, as ethnographers, they share toward ceramic decoration in southern Mozambique is reflected in the visual representation of material culture in their texts: Junod's sketches and photographs show Ronga pottery as bare of all graphic design, while Earthy provides only one, blurred image, entitled "Ndau Women with Pots," in which decorative marks are either imperceptible or absent.



It is principally in their more detailed descriptions of pottery production methods and vessel types that Junod and Earthy indicate the kinds of supraethnic, transhistorical, and transspatial continuities suggested by archaeological accounts. There are few differences, for instance, between Junod's and Earthy's explanations of the various stages of women's potmaking, despite the geographic and temporal distance separating their studies. Both represent pottery as neither hereditary nor limited to a particular family or class; any woman living within reach of a source of *vumba* (clay) could engage in potmaking, and that clay source was freely accessible to all. Once the clay was gathered, women wrapped it in large *nhlampfurha* (castor-oil) leaves and buried it at the foot of a tree to keep it moist. On the day chosen for potmaking, they mixed the damp clay with ground fragments of old pots. They then added sand and water and kneaded the tempered clay until it was blended and pliable. For each vessel, the potter formed a lump of clay into a ball and then set it down—according to Earthy, on a *xirhengele* (potsherd) lined with *nhlampfurha* leaves, which could be turned while the pot was being formed—and began to mold it into the desired shape by making a hole in the center, hollowing it out, and using the fingers of one hand (or a flat piece of wood) on the inside to draw the clay upwards while flattening and raising the vessel walls. (For very large pots, the sides were built up with additional clay coils.) Potters applied decorative markings when the pots were still wet. They then left the vessels to dry, either with the opening covered to prevent the wind from ruining its shape or with a larger, inverted pot put over each vessel to prevent overexposure. After a few days, they overturned the partially dried pots in order to smooth and round the bottoms. After the pots had thoroughly dried, potters dug a hole in the sandy ground, arranged the pots carefully inside, covered them with firewood, and lit a fire to cook the vessels. Both accounts highlight the inseparable social and spiritual dimensions of women's potmaking, identifying taboos that potters and those around them were obliged to observe in order to prevent pots from breaking during firing (e.g., no one could speak to a woman who was returning home with fresh clay, and no one could walk over the spot where the clay was buried). Junod and Earthy also detail the ritual procedures potters were supposed to follow to test their new vessels before use. ³⁹ Junod in particular emphasized the relationship between the profoundly collective character of potmaking and the quality of the finished product, noting that a woman whose pots kept breaking despite her ritual precautions would go to consult the divining bones, usually to be told that her ancestor spirits—upset that she had not shared the proceeds of her pottery trade—required an offering of some kind. Apparently, problems of this nature had caused Junod's Rikatla informant to give up pottery altogether by the time he spoke with her: All of the woman's pots were cracking, she said, because she was the only potter in the area. Unlike her birth home near Marracuene, Rikatla lacked the feminine ceramic community necessary for potters to "strengthen each other (*tiyisana*)." ⁴⁰



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In their basic outlines, these two accounts from the early colonial period are almost perfectly echoed in more recent studies of women's potmaking in southern Mozambique and the Transvaal. ⁴¹ Perhaps more striking, Junod and Earthy provide lists of women's pottery types that bear a remarkably close resemblance to archaeologists' findings for this region over the previous two millennia. Junod names five categories of clay containers produced around Rikatla:

nhlambeto, a wide-mouthed pot used for cooking
xinhlambetwana (the term is a diminutive form of *nhlambeto*), a smaller version of the above

khuwana, a beer jar, whose size is comparable to that of the *nhlambeto* but which is distinguished by its straight neck
hotjo or *hotso*, an "enormous" version of the beer jar
mbenga (small plate), presumably used for serving food

Earthy in her longer inventory includes all of these types and adds eight more:

xihiso, a large open bowl used as a mortar or grinding-bowl
xitolelo, a small *mbita*-type pot used for oil and ocher
khamba, a large, wide-mouthed bowl used as a washbasin
ndzomeya or *djomela*, a pot with a narrower mouth and in-turned rim for drinking beer
xikalaviso, a larger-mouthed vessel used as a "goblet"
galangu or *kalangu*, a large pot "used in distilling gin" and said to be of Tsonga origin ⁴²
xigalangwana, a smaller version of the *galangu*
xikutsu, a water pot named for and made to resemble a kind of gourd ⁴³

Significantly, the range of vessel forms Earthy identifies virtually mirrors not only the "Iron Age" pottery of the southeastern lowlands, but the vessels described and pictured in accounts from the 1960s and 1970s for a somewhat narrower area whose inhabitants include people of Tsonga, Chopi, Venda, Lemba, and Sotho origin.

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With respect to vessel *shape*, then, very little seems to have changed over the past twenty centuries across the southern Mozambique/Transvaal swath of the southeast—an astonishing achievement when we consider the waves of political, economic, and social transformation that this area has undergone. A. C. Lawton, whose regional survey from 1967 draws on older published literature as well as field investigation, expressed surprise about the degree to which the pottery of Tsonga and Chopi women in particular had remained "unchanged" despite Nguni conquest and the introduction of "vast quantities of pottery made in Portuguese-owned factories [and] available at very low prices" across southern Mozambique. ⁴⁴ In fact, Lawton found that, in the large ceramic factories in Lourenço Marques, Xai Xai, and Xinavane (15 km east of Magude town), as well as in the "numerous independent, one-man factories in this region, owned by Bantu men who have mastered the techniques of the kick-wheel," ⁴⁵ the bulk of the vessels made were still "traditional" in form. Moreover, a "very great trade" still existed in women's handmade ceramics, which were preferred to factory-produced wares for cooking and food and beverage storage. ⁴⁶ Lawton attributed the broad vessel-type similarities and shared ceramic terminology across Tsonga and Chopi groups (as well as reflections in Tsonga and Chopi work of Sotho, Venda, Lemba and Ndaue ceramic styles) to "the fact that, unlike the Nguni, they do not form closely-knit tribal units, and are therefore more susceptible to outside influence," and to their having lived in "such close contact for many years." ⁴⁷ Yet despite such remarkable evidence of artistic continuity in the face of rather intense cross-cultural interaction, Lawton failed to ask why women potters might have pursued this ceramic strategy, given the enormous changes and divisive pressures they had experienced in most aspects of their lives.

In fact, as Lawton's survey and more recent studies show, changes had occurred in certain aspects of women's ceramic production. These changes ranged from the simple supplementing or substitution of new materials for old (e.g., the use of metal spoons, forks, and knives for decorating ⁴⁸) to matters as complex as the social dynamics and political economy of ceramic production and markets. Some authors note the diminished number and advanced age of women still making pottery in the second half of the twentieth century. ⁴⁹ One effect of colonial rule was the reduced accessibility of such key materials as clay, graphite, and ocher. Dias, writing on Chopi pottery near Manjacaze (Gaza) in 1960, described clay as "the property of the *regulado*" and "rigorously prohibited" to anyone who did not "belong" to the chieftaincy ⁵⁰—a situation starkly different from that reported by Earthy and probably a reflection of mounting tensions related to late colonial chiefly government and land politics. By this time, though, many potters were purchasing ocher and graphite (or manufactured substitutes) from peddlers or shops. ⁵¹ Local and regional pottery markets had also been affected not only by mass-produced factory ceramics but also by fluctuating agricultural conditions, cash incomes,

commodity-exchange values, and trade and travel infrastructures. By the 1960s, the opportunity costs of producing certain kinds of clay vessels—in money or time spent away from other activities, especially farming—often made it economically reasonable for a woman to purchase (or barter for) a factory-made clay, metal, or plastic container instead. Commentators point to the integration of these modern commodities into rural communities as the reason for perhaps the most noteworthy change observed in women's potmaking across the region in the twentieth century: the "gradual disappearance," declining importance, and increasing simplicity of the decorative patterns women were putting on their handmade pots. ⁵²

Written evidence on women's potmaking in colonial Magde, while scarce, suggests similar trends. A circumscription report from 1909 merely lists potmaking as one of a few surviving "native" industries. ⁵³ An ethnographic study of the "Cossa" from 1957 portrays women's ceramics as "rudimentary," and lacking "any ornamentation or artistic design." The author's brief description of pottery methods, and his list of the four vessel types with which he was familiar—a large (40-liter) *phisso* (pot for water storage), a 15-liter *hotso* (pot for carrying water), a 5-liter *hlembeto* (pot for cooking), and a 1-2-liter *cuana* (pot for beer-drinking)—resonate closely with other twentieth-century accounts. ⁵⁴ Written sources that are silent on homemade pottery contain slightly more information about factory ceramic production in Magde from the 1930s onward. In an article from 1935, the author describes pottery manufactured at the Catholic São Jerónimo Mission in Magde town as "without doubt, of good decorative effect and . . . [conforming] so well to the exoticism of furniture [currently] in style," but laments that this pottery was being produced by European rather than "native" artists. ⁵⁵



My own interviews with Armando Baine Khosa and João Ambrósio Chauke, two male potters who had worked at the Mission pottery since 1949 and 1952 respectively, revealed that by midcentury Portuguese *padres* were training local men to work the pottery wheels and that decorative patterns and vessel shapes were more "traditional," derived (the men reluctantly admitted) from the ceramic styles of local women. ⁵⁶ In 1953, a Native Affairs Department (ISANI) report for Magde included accounts of inspection visits to three ceramic factories: a private factory at Xinavane, at the time still part of Magde circumscription; another, at "Moolela," ten kilometers from Magde town, which produced bricks and roofing tiles (the report does not mention pottery) and which was taken over by the colonial administration after the death of its owner, who owed the state 5,000 *contos*; and the factory at the São Jerónimo Mission, where by the 1950s it was one element of a sprawling complex that included a carpentry, mill, locksmith, and tailor. All three factories were struggling and, according to the report, unable, for various reasons, to satisfy local demand. ⁵⁷ There is no information in this document about what types of pottery the Xinavane or São Jerónimo factories were producing, and all we are told about the identities of the potters is that the Xinavane factory employed two Europeans and thirty-two "native volunteers," and the Moolela factory four Europeans and thirty "native volunteer workers, of which about half [were] minors." ⁵⁸

Pots of Memory, Memories of Pots

The most common responses I heard when I first asked Magde elders about handmade pottery in the past were that women who had been making pots before the war had either died, emigrated to South Africa, or forgotten this skill "because no one has time anymore." I



also heard that the old pots people had inherited from mothers and grandmothers had been smashed by the Renamo soldiers who had looted their homes and stolen or destroyed their possessions during the war. Although, sadly, to a great extent such statements were true, I came to learn that they were also exaggerations, inflamed by bitterness over wartime losses and by the social and cultural significance of the blow the war had dealt to local ceramic traditions. When I arrived in the district in 1995, São Jerónimo and the numerous private potteries in the area—many owned by men who had learned wheel-thrown pottery and brickmaking from Portuguese mission staff before the war—were doing a bustling trade in bricks and a limited range of clay vessels, including such traditional types as the *xihiso*, *khuwana*, *kalangu*, and *mbita*, and smaller quantities of such *xilungu* styles (for distinctly *xilungu* purposes) as flowerpots, water pitchers, and coin banks. ⁵⁹

Yet in the less visible corners of everyday life in Magude, handmade pottery seemed to occupy just as symbolically and practically prominent a place as it had over a century ago, lining the walls of women's huts and cooking areas and serving as storage places for seeds and *byala* (beer), tucked away as containers for potent herbal medicines, and mixed with factory-made clay and aluminum vessels in the carefully tended shade of family graves.

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Some women had managed, despite enormous difficulties suffered en route, to carry especially treasured old pots from homesteads situated as far as northern Mapulanguene through South Africa and back to Magude town when they were on the run during the war; others had buried their old pots in the ground before they left and were happy to discover them still lying in remembered hiding places when they returned home after the fighting was over. ⁶⁰ Moreover, women's pottery was the subject of lively and detailed reminiscences by men as well as women, and the historical distinction still attached to traditional ceramics was apparent in the enthusiasm with which two male district officials helped me to meet two women, Julia Chambale and Laurinda Ubisse, who were all that remained of a once extensive community of active female potters in Xihluku, a short wade (before the drought broke in December 1995) across the Nkomati River from the District Administration office. Through Julia, I later learned that a third potter, Elena Khosa—born and married in Xihluku as well—was still living as a *deslocada* on the edge of the Matendeni settlement on the bluff across the river from Xihluku. Although she was by then "too old," as she claimed, to do much potmaking herself, she was more consistently enthusiastic about talking with us than were Julia and Laurinda, who like many returnees in Xihluku spent a great deal of time participating in (or recovering from) communal drinking of *thothotho*, a powerful home-distilled liquor.



While considerably reduced in quantity, in other words, women's pottery in postwar Magude had not by any means vanished from the landscape or from popular memory by 1995-96. The stories that elderly men and women told Ruti, Aida and myself about pots in the past add rich layers of context, and a rather different perspective, to the material on pottery summarized above. These oral narratives help to illuminate both the feminine histories embedded in present-day clay pots and the gendered meanings that the long-term persistence—and recent decline—of pottery have for women in this area.

Oral accounts of women's pottery look back as far as the mid-nineteenth century. They often cropped up unexpectedly in interviews. Caissene Mundlovu, for example, near the beginning of our first meeting surprised me with his response to a question about the birthplace of his clan ancestors. He told a long, excited story about a pre-1900 trade in hand-forged iron hoes and clay pots. Set in the eastern Transvaal and the Lebombo hills, Caissene's narrative wove women's work, marriage, and feminine social networks into a story (more familiar to scholars) about chiefly politics and long-distance trade in precolonial times. According to Caissene, his Mundlovu ancestors fled from their original home near Natal to a site he called "Kenhoek," in the Transvaal lowveld, because of the Gaza Nguni succession war in the early 1860s. Putting themselves under the protection of the Hlanganu chief Magwagwaza Munisse, the Mundlovu newcomers settled into a life of farming and friendly interaction with their hosts until rumors that the war was advancing prompted the refugees to move a short distance east, to a place known as Kumana (or Muqelene) in the Lebombo hills on the eastern edge of what is now Kruger Park in South Africa. ⁶¹ As Caissene told it, before this second exodus "a son of Mundlovu, he courts ⁶² a girl there, a MuHlanganu, in the family of Magwagwaza." The boy was Ngwavula Mbanyisa Mundlovu; the girl, Makassane Munisse, was the daughter of chief Magwagwaza's brother. Although Caissene says the two "loved each other," he also explains

their marriage as arising from concerns that were rather more practical:

Well, this one, she gives birth to my mother—you will listen well! She accepted the son of the Mundlovu family, *wa ka Mbanyisa*. When she accepted him, well, they [i.e., Makassane's people] have this work, which is making pots. Those of the Mundlovu, those of our family, they didn't know that work, of making pots. Well, since they courted each other over there, they're *maseve* [in-laws], with in-laws—you listen well! Yah. Well, when they were *maseve*, they [i.e., Mundlovus] want hoes, over there—because they don't have hoes. Well, they make *swihiso* [pl. of *xihiso*] and pots like this one here [Caissene points to *khuwana*], and *madjomela* [pl. of *djomela*], that you drink from. They make all these pots, those grandparents who gave birth to our mothers. Well, when they make those things, they take the pots, they go with them over there, to Vecha. ⁶³ There, in Vecha, they grind corn by hand, with stones. They're [living] over there in the place of stones [*maribyeni*]. ⁶⁴ VaVecha, they're another race, they're not MaChangana [i.e., Shangaan]. . . . Well, they [i.e., Mundlovus] want to buy hoes—there in Vecha they *lovola* a wife with just one of these hoes. Yah. They buy them with pots, they exchange with each other. . . . ⁶⁵

Caissene's maternal grandmother Makassane, in other words, was a potter, who learned potmaking as a girl in chief Magwagwaza's village at a time when Hlanganu communities were trading their pottery for the hand-forged iron hoes of their Vecha neighbors to the north. According to Caissene, all Hlanganu women made pots, but the chief chose and sent only some of the women to take their wares to Vecha. The chiefs had an understanding about the terms of this exchange, and Makassane and the other women delivered directly into the hands of chief Magwagwaza the hoes they received for their pots. When the Mundlovus moved from Kenhoek to Kumana, their Hlanganu wives went with them, including Makassane and her sister Maphosa, who probably married Ngwavula as a *nhlantswa*. ⁶⁶ But these women regularly went back to Magwagwaza's place to visit their family, making it very easy for their Mundlovu in-laws to tap into this trade network themselves and to acquire a stockpile of Vecha hoes, which they carried with them when they migrated yet again from Kumana to the area of present-day Mapulanguene, probably around 1890.

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At first, according to Caissene, Makassane and her fellow potters continued to travel across the Lebombos and to return home with hoes, which they presented to the local chief, Ngacene Mukavele. However, when in 1897 the Portuguese replaced chief Ngacene's successor—his daughter, N'waNgacene—with Munyamana Mathye Mundlovu, as a reward for Munyamana's having betrayed Maguiguana Khosa's hiding place, ⁶⁷ the Mathye branch of the Mundlovu clan assumed, along with colonial chiefship, control over the Vecha hoe supply. The valuable objects of a then dwindling regional exchange system were stored in the hillside cave that the Mundlovus had made into the sacred graveyard of their *mintimu* (ancestors). Mundlovu chiefs doled out these hoes with extreme care and ritual precaution to young Mundlovu men to use as bridewealth. "One hoe for one woman," as Caissene repeated, the policy of the Mundlovus in this regard being a continuation of that of the Hlanganu and Vecha chiefs before them. ⁶⁸

Caissene was somewhat less confident about the details of his grandmother's pottery practices and on this subject could only repeat that Makassane had taken three types of clay vessels—the *xihiso*, *khuwana*, and *djomela*—to exchange at Vecha. "When I knew her," he said apologetically, "she was very old, . . . one of those *masungukati* of long ago, who prop up the chiefs." ⁶⁹ He did remember that Makassane had taught potmaking to many women, including her daughter Motasse (Caissene's mother), in both Kenhoek and the Mapulanguene area, that Motasse in turn had taught pottery to her daughters, and that at least one of those daughters (Caissene's elder sister, Mafunasse) had taught her daughters as well. Since Mafunasse and her sisters married in different places (some in the Mapulanguene area, others scattered in the eastern Transvaal and elsewhere in western Magude), it is conceivable that the pottery skills Makassane learned at *ka* Magwagwaza continued to spread with the geographic dispersal of her female descendants and students and that somewhere in this wider, ethnically diverse region there are still women making pots—or even just harboring memories of pots—that embody the methods of this Hlanganu woman from the mid-nineteenth century.

As we will see below, the circulation of this pottery through trade may have spread Makassane's influence even further, although Caissene's account of his mother's pottery practices indicates that ceramic-exchange networks had changed considerably between Makassane's lifetime and Motasse's. Unlike her mother, as Caissene recalls from his boyhood, Motasse made pots principally to use at home rather than to trade or sell. Insisting that at that time "they didn't sell those things of the land," he added that Motasse did occasionally exchange her pots but within a social universe that was rather more restricted than her mother's:

In this time when the rains are falling everywhere, they had a lot of peanuts. A person comes, maybe a relative, [Motasse] says, "I want peanuts, peanuts for seed." She comes with peanuts. She'll arrive, [Motasse] picks out a *khuwana*. She takes it and gives it to her. [The other woman] gives her the seeds. She takes it and gives it to her, they didn't sell to each other. [70](#)

Through their accounts of the potmaking activities of their mothers and grandmothers, the women we interviewed sketched a similar pattern of female ceramic networks shrinking spatially over time, but they tell a more complex history of this process through their memories of the pots themselves. Cufassane Munisse was born in the chiefdom of Muqakaze in northern Moamba district circa 1915, a few years before Caissene. Because her father died when she was very young, Cufassane and her three elder brothers went to live at the large homestead of their maternal grandparents about ten kilometers to the northeast, not far from Macaene, the present-day commercial center in southwestern Magude. Although she remembers a junior wife of her grandfather as the "mother" who raised her, Cufassane told Ruti and I many stories about N'waXidyula Mahlane, the birth mother of her own birth mother—stories based on things she had witnessed as a child or had heard from N'waXidyula herself or had heard about N'waXidyula from other adult women in her grandfather's *muti*. Cufassane identified N'waXidyula's birthplace as *tintshaveni* (in the mountains); she could not give us a more specific place-name, but she also referred to the same area as *manghezeni*, indicating that it was on the South African side of the Lebombos. As a young woman, N'waXidyula moved across the hills to *ka Mavila* to live with her married brother after her parents died. There she was courted by Cufassane's maternal grandfather, Chale Munisse, a young man from the Macaene area who was attending a *lovolo* ceremony at the homestead of a neighbor of N'waXidyula's brother. Some time later the two married, and N'waXidyula moved to her *vukatini* in Macaene, where she would later bring up Cufassane and her three brothers.

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Cufassane introduced the subject of her grandmother's pottery while describing how N'waXidyula had taught her to pound and grind corn when she was young—after remembering with a laugh that she was allowed to use only a *xikhodo* (wooden bowl) because the first time she tried her grandmother's handmade *xihiso* she put a hole through the bottom of it. "Grandmother, she made pots from clay. *Makhuwana*, she made them. *Madjomela*, she made them. With women of the Muzimba family. They write on them, she buys this thing, *xikope* [graphite], over there in *tintshaveni*. They write, they write, they write, on those makhuwana. . . ." Cufassane later told us that N'waXidyula had learned potmaking from her mother, Mbakweni Nyakana:

She learns at her home. She was a girl, she sees her mother, when she makes pots. . . . [Her mother] teaches her. She says, "You could suffer, my child. You could suffer at your *vukatini*." Well, she learns to make pots. When [her mother] rolls the clay in her hands there, she rolls it. Her mother begins for her. Well, she too, she takes out some clay when she was still a girl. . . . [71](#)

Like Caissene's grandmother (and at roughly the same time), N'waXidyula carried her potmaking skills with her when she moved from the western Lebombos to *ka Mavila* and then on to her marital homestead in Macaene. And like Makassane, N'waXidyula continued to travel back and forth between her *vukatini* and her birthplace throughout her adult life, usually in the company of other married women who had natal kinfolk on one side of the hills and affines on the other. As Cufassane narrates these journeys, though, they had a dual purpose: N'waXidyula may have been visiting her family, but she was also going in search of graphite, a material she considered essential to her potmaking:

- C: Here, there was no *xikope*, so when she wants it she follows it over there, *tintshaveni*. And those people over there, when they travel here, they come with it, because they know that here, in Hlanganu, they want it. Mm-mmm. They bring it. When they come with it, they sell it. And they [N'waXidyula and others], when they go over there, to the place of their *maxaka* [relatives], over there in *tintshaveni*, they go to buy it, they return with it. . . . ⁷² Long ago, they travel on foot. They sit down, they sleep in the moonlight. . . . These things that go *buuu!* [i.e., motor vehicles], they hadn't come out yet. They go, they sleep, it takes them three days. On the fourth day, they enter—because they are going on foot. . . . Those slow walkers ⁷³ like me, their legs swell up, they stay behind, there in the bush. It's far. . . .
- H: When your grandmother made these trips, whom did she travel with?
- C: There was a group of them, those who go to the place of their relatives, over there. Others, they were born over there, in *tintshaveni*. Well, N'waXidyula, she leaves from her *vukatini*, she travels to *ka rikwavo* [her country]. She leaves with a person, there are others who want to go. And they walk in single file. Maybe four, maybe five. They go thus, in this way. It's there where she was born. She goes, she goes to her home there, her country, the place where her parents are. . . . ⁷⁴

The role of women's pottery as a medium or vehicle for sustaining geographically distant feminine kinship connections also emerges vividly from Cufassane's account of how Mbakweni used to cross the Lebombos in the other direction to visit her married daughter in Macaene, in a party of women each of whom carried a pot of *byala* on her head. Cufassane does not mention whether the pots transported on these occasions—before she was born—were traded, left with N'waXidyula, or taken home to *tintshaveni* (perhaps filled with food or seed) by their owners. Nor did we learn whether N'waXidyula took some of her own pottery to trade when she went to visit her family and obtain graphite. In trying to follow Cufassane's narrative lead we heard mainly what she wanted to tell us, and she either may not have known about a long-distance trade in women's pots at that time or may have considered such matters too self-evident to require comment. The trade she did describe to us was the one she observed as a young woman living in N'waXidyula's household, probably in the late 1920s and the 1930s:

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They come, people who will buy those *swibye* [dishes]. They buy them with money—long ago, truly, we didn't [use] paper, it was this red money, of *nsimbi* [iron]. When we roast it in the fire, the fire shone red! . . . Long ago, they weren't expensive. She has a *dzuka*, ⁷⁵ she takes a *xikhuwana*. She finds two *macheleni*, she takes a big *khuwana*. . . . *Djomela*, it's *dzuka*. A *nkambana*, when she buys a *nhlambeto*, she buys a *xikhuwana*, the *nkambana* they give it to her as a gift. Three *macheleni*, you go home with three dishes. They weren't expensive yet. . . . When you want, a person [buys pots] with those things that were sown, *n'wahuva*, maybe *maxalana*, maybe *xikombe*, maybe *xibelana*, maybe *maphila*. ⁷⁶ When she comes with a *xirhundzu* [basket] full of grain, she'll go home with four dishes. She fills the pot [that she wants] until it's full, she takes it. ⁷⁷

Not far from Motasse's marital community in Mapulanguene, then, N'waXidyula was also trading pots out of her home rather than peddling them for an outside market. While the latter's advancing age may have had something to do with what Cufassane implied was her grandmother's reduced mobility in this period, the waning of women's long-distance travel suggested by both accounts echoes what other women of Cufassane's generation recalled of their mothers' and grandmothers' experiences, and is cast in even sharper relief by what they told us of their own. For several possible reasons—government control over cross-border movement was tightened (especially with Kruger Park a fenced, state-surveilled reality after 1926); the final defeat of Gaza Nguni power removed the main causes of cross-border family migration and refugee flight; other forms of economic or social change had reduced the incentive for maintaining or creating such far-flung kinship ties—women married in the Magude area were, by the second quarter of the twentieth century, less likely to have come from a

distance of more than, say, one day's walk from Magude, or from west of the Lebombo hills at all. Perhaps clay pots were losing value as a regional trade currency and therefore declining in importance as a factor in marriage decisions; perhaps other factors were transforming the geography of courtship and marriage choices, resulting in a narrowing of the physical landscape on which women potters drew for their materials and across which they carried their wares. In either case, what is clear is that changes in ceramic practice and marriage patterns were bound up intimately together—and that, even if links with the Transvaal continued through the use of South African coins as currency for Magude women's pots, the potters themselves played a less mobile role in this relationship.

Cufassane's recollections of N'waXidyula's pottery methods, on the other hand, let us see how ceramic traditions could preserve histories of spatially wide-ranging feminine communities even when the communities themselves were no longer part of women's immediate experiential horizons. In the portions of the two interviews we devoted to this subject, Cufassane told and retold—not always in the same order, but in narrative fragments whose language and style rarely changed from one telling to the next—how, from start to finish, N'waXidyula used to make and decorate her pots. Building her account around key verbs, which she would both act out while she spoke and express in onomatopoeic rhythms and tones that (re)produced history even as she uttered it, Cufassane gave the impression that she was an expert potter even though she had never made a pot in her life. Her memories of production methods alone teach us much about the potential of pottery as a source of insight into women's pasts, for they represent the active transmission of a form of feminine historical knowledge from the northern Transvaal in the early nineteenth century to Magude town in the late twentieth. They also furnish a revealing example of the relational context and consequences of potmaking for rural women.

Although there were no formal kinship ties between N'waXidyula and the women of the Muzimba family with whom Cufassane remembers her grandmother making pots in Macaene, one of these women eventually became part of Cufassane's own affinal kinship network, because she was a *kokwana* (grandmother) to a future *nyatihomu* (sister-in-law) of Cufassane. And it is very likely, given women's active part in negotiating marriage at this time (see chapter 3), that the longstanding connection between the older women played some role in bringing Cufassane and her husband together. ⁷⁸ Finally, the mix of vessels Cufassane recalls her grandmother making—including the *nhlambeto* or *kalangu*, a type Lawton found among Shangaan and Chopi potters near the coast but not in the repertoire of Hlanganu potters in the Transvaal—and the distinctly gendered vocabulary of her account, with its echoes of other feminine activities such as food preparation and mud-plastering, indicate that women's ceramic practice was both premised on and productive of connections among women who might share little beyond gender and physical proximity on the land.  [Audio](#)

N'waXidyula, she makes *swikhuwana* [small *khuwana*], she makes those ones over there [Cufassane points to *khuwana*]. These big *makhuwana* for *byala*, she makes them. And *madjomela*. Mmm. . . . And those *swihiso*, she made them, and *nkambana*, and *nhlambeto*, *kalangu*. . . .

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Grandmother N'waXidyula, she takes her hoe. She digs a little hole, here where there is clay. Well, she returns with it. When she arrives [at home], she finds a pot. She fills it, she fills it. Well, she draws water. She moistens the clay here. Well, when it's moistened, tomorrow. Well, she takes that clay. She looks for a *xirhengele* [potsherd]. She takes some of that clay, she kneads, ⁷⁹ she smacks it down, smacks it down. ⁸⁰ Well, when she's finished smacking, . . . she goes like this [Cufassane rubs her hands together, as in rolling clay between palms to make a coil]. It stre-e-e-tches, it really stretches. Well, she takes it, she coils coils coils coils ⁸¹ . . . until it reaches about here [Cufassane indicates about two feet high]. Well, when it has reached up to here, well, she takes a *rikatla* [mussel shell]. Well, she makes it grow with that thing, she shapes with it, she shapes with it [i.e., uses the shell to smooth walls from the inside, drawing clay upward and blending coils together], it grows, it grows, it grows. It grows until, maybe she's shaping a *khuwana*, it grows, [the *rikatla*] cuts it here [i.e., slices across top to make it level]. Well, she looks for more [clay]. She kneads kneads kneads kneads ⁸² [i.e., makes clay coil by rubbing between palms]. Eh-*heh*. Well, she

takes [the coil], she joins it here [to walls of pot], she joins, joins, joins, joins. ⁸³ Well, that *rikatla* there, she pulls [the clay], she fixes it, here on the neck, it finishes with the neck. Eeh. . . .

They make them beautiful, they write things on them, things that they know. *Makandu*, ⁸⁴ whatever. If she wants to, she writes, she writes those things that she knows. Mmm. She goes around, goes around. ⁸⁵ The *khuwana*, she writes this way, like this [Cufassane demonstrates on a borrowed pot that *makandu* were drawn around the vessel neck]. She can write these things. Here [below the neck], she didn't write them. . . . *Makalangu*, she doesn't write anything. *Swihiso*, she doesn't write anything. This *mbita*, they wrote, here on the neck. On the body here, they didn't write. These things that they wrote, all over the body of the pot, it's on the *djomela*. On those big *makhuwana*, she doesn't write anything. She writes here on the small ones, only. . . .

Well, if they want [graphite] to make pots, they go to buy it. Well, she breaks it into pieces, ⁸⁶ she grinds grinds grinds grinds grinds grinds grinds, ⁸⁷ it becomes soft enough. ⁸⁸ It's black, it's still black. Well, they pour water in there. Well, she takes it there, in her hand. She writes those things that she knows. . . . She writes *eee* [Cufassane indicates around her waist], she writes *eee* [Cufassane indicates around her breasts]. Eh-heh. On this belly of the *djomela*, she can paint the whole body, everything with that black. Well, she takes a stone, she rubs rubs rubs. ⁸⁹ It's beautiful. Well, then what? She turns it upside down. The sun rises. Tomorrow. She takes it out, she scrapes ⁹⁰ there on the clay, there on the base. She wipes wipes wipes wipes wipes. . . . ⁹¹ She fixes it, she fixes it, she makes it right. . . .

Well, when [the pots] have dried, well they gather firewood. They begin with some firewood there at the bottom [of the firing pit]. Well, they take the pots, they pile the wood here, this one she piles she piles she piles. Well, she takes the *makhuwana*, she places them on top. She piles piles piles. Well, she piles some more firewood, she does it by standing the firewood on end [i.e., stacking the branches vertically, around the sides of the pit]. She surrounds those pots. Well, she takes grass, ⁹² she covers them. ⁹³ Well, she takes fire, she goes "*ntloo!*" It's like the way it's done at the priest's place. Mmm. ⁹⁴

Cufassane's memory of the specific designs with which N'waXidyula beautified her pots, moreover, suggests that, while her grandmother adapted some aspects of her potmaking to the social circumstances in which she spent her adult life, she also deliberately preserved some of what she brought with her from *tintshaveni* as a girl and, in all likelihood passed these practices on to other Macaene potters as she in turn acquired new practices and pottery types from them.



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Cufassane stressed that N'waXidyula's decorating decisions always depended on what she wanted to do. They varied to some extent from one batch to the next and obeyed only a minimal set of practical guidelines: Larger pots were left bare, because it was too time-consuming to decorate them; graphite coloring was never used on *tinhlambeto*, because they would be blackened by the smoke of the cooking fire anyway. Sometimes N'waXidyula put a band of *xikope* around the "shoulders" or "belly" of her *makhuwana*, sometimes she applied it in both places, sometimes she colored the body and/or inside the neck with *tsumane* (red ochre), and sometimes she left the vessel body unpainted but polished it with a stone to produce a burnished finish. Sometimes she covered the entire body of a *djomela* with incised lines (the exact pattern was difficult for us to pin down); other times she just painted or polished it below the line of decorative markings on the vessel shoulders.

On one point, however, Cufassane was insistent that her grandmother "always wrote the same thing" and that this "writing" was something "she already knows when she goes to marry." On her *makhuwana* and *madjomela*, while the clay was still wet, N'waXidyula used her fingernail

to carve two thin, straight parallel lines around the vessel neck, and then to make alternating angled incisions to create a band of *makandu* (triangles) between the two lines. Then she dipped her little finger into the graphite mix and delicately painted every other triangle black, after which she would take a little stone and rub the painted areas, "so the clay and the *xikope* can grab each other." What is most remarkable about this particular memory is that the decorations Cufassane recalls N'waXidyula producing in this manner exactly match those on a very old *xikhuwana* Lawton found in a museum in the eastern Transvaal in 1963, labelled as the work of an unknown "Nhlanganu" potter from the area.



Comparing what we know of N'waXidyula's potmaking activities in the rural border area of Magude district with women's memories of pottery in the communities ringing Magude town underscores both the evidentiary importance of such details as ceramic decoration and the profound implications, for women's lives and women's histories, of changes in these practices over time. Julieta Chavango and Tamara Khosa, born in 1916 (Facazisse) and 1918 (Makuvulane) respectively, are Swiss Mission-schooled women who learned potmaking when they were young but then gave it up after they were married, each to a man from a prominent Christian family who divided his working life between wage employment and commercial farming. ⁹⁵

Julieta acquired her pottery skills, she said, by "looking at" the methods of two adult potters who lived near her while she was growing up on the outskirts of the Antioka mission station. One of these women, Fohleya Nhlongo, was a "mother" to Julieta because she was married to Julieta's father's brother; the other, N'waDlihe (Lastina) Muhlanga, eventually became a grandmother (*kokwana*) when Julieta married the son of N'waDlihe's husband's sister. When she was eleven or twelve, Julieta and her "fellow girls" used to go to these women's yards to "sit and watch them, because it's beautiful when they work." Julieta wanted to learn, she said, "because I see that those potters, people come to buy. . . . Well, and me, I won't buy them. I'll make pots for myself." ⁹⁶

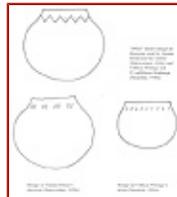
Tamara Khosa identified a more pressing reason for her own decision to take up potmaking: As the eldest daughter in a large family, she felt compelled to help her mother, Natália Hobyana, when she began to make pots to sell in order to feed and clothe her children after the sudden death of her husband in 1927. With happy nostalgia, Tamara recalled her years as a potter and even claimed she delayed her prestigious church wedding until 1940 so that she could continue making and selling pots alongside her mother. ⁹⁷ However, the shrugging way in which Tamara told us that she abandoned this work after she got married (because she "didn't have time anymore") echoed the dismissiveness in Julieta's tone when she explained that she gave up potmaking because it had no "value," a notion she expressed using the Portuguese term *valor* rather than *risima*, its Shangaan equivalent. Yet even Julieta, a reserved woman who carries in her somber face the emotional burden of having lost two sons to a brutal Renamo attack near the end of the war, brightened up visibly when she spoke of her pottery, especially while recounting how she had given one of her pots, a small *ximbitana*, to her young sister-in-law when Julieta first moved into her husband's family homestead—"because I will feed her *vuswa* from that pot. I'll serve food from that pot. I'll put it by the cooking fire. It will simmer—well, she'll eat it as her first meal of the day." ⁹⁸



In the accounts provided by Julieta and Tamara, the tension between positive and negative valuing of women's pottery activities stems from the position of those activities in relation to a broader shift in the social context and meaning of ceramic production in Magude district, especially near town, in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Both Julieta and Tamara

learned potmaking from women who had married into the Magude area from elsewhere and for whom pottery was not only an economic undertaking, a source of income in cash or food crops, but also a way of binding themselves into the gendered social universe of their *vukatini* through ties more extensive, intimate, and manageable than affinal status alone could offer them. According to Tamara, her mother (and Tamara after her) deliberately imitated the decorative patterns used by Makuvulane potters, beautifying her vessels by copying the designs on pots she had previously bought from them. (Julieta, who told us she only "played" at potmaking for a couple of years, insisted she never decorated her own pots.)

The overlap between Natália's *tinhlanga* and those used by Julieta's teachers across the river in Facazisse indicates that such efforts to belong to a broad-based ceramic community transcended political and administrative boundaries as well. It is also clear that this community



was flourishing when Julieta and Tamara joined and participated in it in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Both recall the production of a wide range of pottery types based on the common shapes of *mbita*, *khuwana*, *xihiso*, and *nkambana*, each of which was made in a variety of sizes with its own unique function and value and sometimes its own name. Julieta's teachers, for instance, did a busy trade in the special large-sized *mbita* used only for *tihove*, a local food made from ground corn, peanuts, and beans. And Tamara and her mother were often asked to make a *khuwana*-shaped pot called *xitseka* which was used solely for steeping corn in water before it was stamped or ground to make *vuswa*. Furthermore, it was potters who set the terms of these exchanges—in particular, choosing whether they would trade for cash or food—and who decided when and which kinds of pots they would produce. ("You weren't forced by anyone," Julieta stated firmly. "You did it only when you wanted to.") Indeed, Tamara remembers such insistent demand for her pots that she had to hide the ones she made for herself inside her hut (the especially "beautiful" ones) so that women who came to buy from her would not strip her mother's hearth bare.

Significantly, Julieta's reflections on the ceramic landscape she belonged to "long ago" emphasized the elements of geographic mobility and inclusiveness that were so central to the experience of Cufassane's grandmother. When asked where she used to gather clay, Julieta described a small depression (pan, or *qivi*) below the bluff where Antioka is located, and then added, "In that time, they didn't refuse anyone. . . . Because women from outside, from far away, they come, they come to dig there, they go and make pots." And while reminiscing about the pottery market itself, Julieta went from marveling at how inexpensive handmade pots used to be to narrating this trade in terms not of a traffic in commodities but of the physical movement and social interaction of the buyers and sellers of clay wares: "They were people of the *tiko* who came to buy them, they come to buy, those people who don't know how to make pots themselves," she said, and "The potters, they walk around, they go from *muti* to *muti*, selling." ⁹⁹ Even two women who engaged in potmaking for mainly instrumental purposes, then, understood this activity to embrace far more than the production of a utilitarian article of trade. Homemade clay pots brought women together—across lines of ascribed kinship, age, class, religious belief, education, residence—on the basis of shared responsibilities, needs, and notions of beauty and at the same time embodied these connections in an object whose everyday uses, from the most recondite to the most mundane, made it a powerful reminder of feminine skills and labors and of their importance to the proper running of agrarian society.

Yet while Julieta's and Tamara's pottery teachers continued their work beyond 1940, by this time their two protégées—both married locally, each in the community of her birth—had given up potmaking, and were regarding this traditional skill as an unnecessary and "value"-less form of "play" best left behind with childhood. Although neither of the two women portrayed her own experience or perspective as typical (their status as Swiss Mission-bred Christians set them self-consciously apart from other men and women of the *tiko*), Julieta's explanation for what she viewed as the declining prestige and practice of women's pottery after mid-century hinted at the complicated interplay of factors shaping ceramic change across the district. We need to keep her status in mind when thinking about the following passage. As an extant memory of women's potmaking, however, her account nicely represents a kind of dominant discourse (local and scholarly) about the fate of this feminine tradition. At the same time it (ironically) prefigures the historical narratives embedded in the clay pots still being made by women in Magude after the civil war.

- J: In that time there were many potters over there in Xihlahla, *ka Mawelele*. They're here, even now, the ones who make pots. Well, they stop a little, when at the *pado's* [priest's] place they begin to teach people to make pots.
- H: Do you mean that women stopped making their own pots *because* the [São Jerónimo] mission opened its pottery?
- J: Ah, that was obvious. Because . . . in the time [the women] are making pots, they go around, they go from *muti* to *muti*, selling. Mmm. Now it's for corn, they say, "We want corn." It's like this hunger now. They'll go around, when they want corn, they want people to buy from them. When they have dishes, maybe they have corn, and they want people to buy from them, they have to *come*. Even if it's [for] money, they come. Mmm. . . .
- H: Mmm. Which do people prefer, the pots made by women or the pots made by the mission?
- J: With the dishes from the mission, there were no *timbita*. There were only *makalangu*. Well, you don't cook with *makalangu*. Well, the things of *xilungu* came, there were those *mabota* [cast-iron pots]. Many people were buying those, those *mabota* were being sold. There were no *xilandin* [100](#) things being sold, there were only *mabota*, when you saw them.
- H: I've heard some women say that *vuswa* tastes better in clay pots than in the metal ones.
- J: Mmm, those things taste better. The *xilungu* pots, they burn in a hurry. Whereas the *mbita*, it takes a long time to get cold [i.e., it keeps food hot longer]. Now the girls say [clay pots] take too long, they don't like to wait for them.
- H: Which do you prefer, *vovo*?
- J: Ah, maybe I like the *mabota*. Because the *timbita*, they're not here anymore. . . . [101](#)

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Like the accounts of Caissene and Cufassane, Julieta's words here express a particular, socially positioned understanding—and, perhaps more consciously in Julieta's case, a claim—of the role of women's pottery in the past. A potter's stated position on this subject, though, could be complicated (even challenged) by the memories embedded in her pots. Beauty in women's pottery rests primarily in its decorative embellishment, and so Julieta's insistence that she never decorated her pots seems inconsistent with her memory of wanting to learn potmaking "because it's beautiful," until we recognize that Julieta's bare vessels express a truth she is unable or unwilling to put into words: that engaging wholeheartedly with the cultural traditions and relationships that women's potmaking represented would have meant publicly committing herself to a lifeway from which she was trying to distance herself as she reached adulthood. Indeed, it is when we place these sometimes contrary accounts side by side that we begin to see the contours of the larger story this form of "autographed" memory is telling. Between the early nineteenth century, when Cufassane's and Caissene's great-grandmothers were learning the ceramic skills they would pass on to their daughters as part of their necessary preparation for married life, and the mid-twentieth century, when Julieta and Tamara were turning their backs on an activity they considered economically unnecessary and socially beneath them, women's pottery declined in quantity (the number of potters and the scale of production), in exchange value (from currency for bridewealth to the equivalent of a few cents or a few days' worth of food), in status, and in the breadth of the social and spatial horizons of potters' ceramic inheritance.

In part, these changes were linked to transformations in marriage patterns and structures of political power; yet clay and oral sources, such as my exchange with Julieta above, suggest that female pottery production, trade, and use were also affected by changes in women's mobility, attitudes toward time and work, aesthetic standards, and gender ideologies. While it would be easy to assume that the principal reason for pottery's decline was the advent of factory-produced clay vessels and of metal and plastic containers, which were introduced in the Magude area after the 1920s, it is significant that oral accounts do not depict competition from wheel-thrown ceramics as terribly threatening or problematic. Even Julieta, the only interviewee who raised the issue of the São Jerónimo potters without my asking about it, does not say that women's pottery was displaced by the mere presence of a commodity alternative.

What she implies is that its dominance depended on female potters "coming [to trade]," and that women began buying cast-iron pots not because they were cheaper or better but because key categories of traditional clayware were becoming more and more difficult to find.

"Writing" History in Clay: Elena Khosa and Julia Chambale

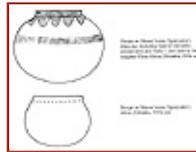
The most cogent explanations for the career of women's handmade ceramics during and after the colonial period lie in the oral and clay testimony of women who remained active as potters throughout, and in self-conscious defiance of, the decline of this ancient industry. Again, setting women's memories of pottery alongside the vessels themselves allows us to see the complex ways in which pots tell stories of women's pasts, histories that their makers might otherwise never voice. In the examples presented in this section, though, pottery is an ongoing (or only recently discontinued) practice of historical remembering rather than an activity nostalgically recalled long after the fact. Contextualizing the words and clay wares of two women whose ceramic careers are inseparable from one another lays bare the critical relational content of pottery-as-history, and reveals what this form of remembering itself has to say about the causes and consequences of its change over time.



Elena Khosa and Julia Chambale were born and raised in the early 1920s and 1939 respectively, in Xihlahla, the community Julieta refers to as a former center for women's potmaking in Magude. Both women laughed when I asked if they had had any formal education. Although each reached the second form at the São Jerónimo Mission school, they pointedly identified themselves as people who "didn't study," and Elena in particular recalled school as something mothers and grandmothers "didn't want!" for girls when she was young. ¹⁰² Both women grew up with their mothers in households that were de facto fatherless, Julia because her father was constantly traveling between Xihlahla and "Joni," Elena because her mother left her *vukatini* to live with her own mother shortly after Elena was born, no longer willing to put up with a mother-in-law who resented sharing her son's migrant earnings and who "didn't love her." ¹⁰³

Elena and Julie both married in Xihlahla, to local men (Julia's husband, in fact, was her neighbor while she was growing up) who were also migrant workers, and even during the worst years of the Renamo war these women never ventured far from home, never farther than Magude town. In 1995-96, both were widows and heads of their own small, struggling households. When we met Elena in late 1995, she was still living in her wartime residence at Matendeni, with two daughters-in-law and four grandchildren. Julia had been resettled with her young daughter and son (she has two older daughters, both married) at the site of her former homestead near the Nkomati riverbank since early 1994. Elena's potmaking days were behind her, and she was being supported by her son, who worked in the coastal town of Palmeira, and by the agricultural labors of her daughters-in-law. Julia, on the other hand, was supporting herself and her children through a combination of farming and pottery sales, both of which she anxiously resumed as soon as she returned to Xihlahla after the war. Until recently, three other women potters had lived nearby, but one of them had died and a second became too ill to continue working. The third, Laurinda Ubisse, was slightly younger than Julia and similarly supporting children without a husband. Laurinda was also born in Xihlahla and had learned to make pottery from her mother-in-law after she married. Later, Julia took over as Laurinda's "teacher," and when I met them these two women were the only working female potters in Xihlahla. As Elena said ruefully, "It's those two now, that's all." ¹⁰⁴

Elena and Julia learned potmaking from their mothers, and their memories of their mothers' pottery activities combined with their own provide an unusually detailed picture of women's ceramic histories in twentieth-century Xihlahla. Elena's mother, Munen'wasse Ngonyama, was born in Ntimane (Manhiça) and learned potmaking from her mother, Muchurhu Sitoi, an Ndau woman from "Musapa"—north of the Save River, near Beira—who arrived in Ntimane as either a captive of or a refugee from late nineteenth-century Gaza warfare. Elena's mother married in Xihlahla, and at some point before Munen'wasse left her husband, Muchurhu, then widowed, moved to Xihlahla to live near her daughter. Elena remembers that, when she was growing up with her mother and maternal grandmother, Munen'wasse would make various sizes of a wide range of pots: *mbita*, *khuwana*, *djomela*, *nkambana*, and *xihiso*. Munen'wasse left the latter



three types undecorated, but on her *timbita* and *makhuwana* she "always" used a limited but distinctive set of decorative markings, which she applied with a mussel shell: on the *timbita*, a single line of short, angled incised cuts around the shoulder; on the *makhuwana*, a band of inverted triangles around the junction between and neck and shoulders, with each triangle filled in with horizontal lines, and sometimes—when she had it, and "when she wanted"—colored above the triangles (on the "throat") and below (around the "belly") with red ocher. She also occasionally painted the bodies of her *madjomela* with red ocher, which she bought from traders who came from "far away, *ka* Ximbukutzu, over there near Maputo." She applied the coloring first by using a stone to scrape the area she wished to "paint," "writing" with the ocher on the clay, and then rubbing the painted areas with a stone again, to polish them.

Although she did the creative work of forming and decorating her pottery alone, at other stages of the process Munen'wasse received help from or enjoyed the company of other women in the community. Her younger sister Cufasse, for instance, who had also married in Xihlahla, often fetched clay or water for her, in exchange for one or two vessels from the batch her sister was making. "Many" Xihlahla potters came to watch and learn from her, and Munen'wasse would oversee their work, "changing it for them"—mending their mistakes—when they had trouble getting something right. Sometimes Munen'wasse sold her pots from home, to women who came from elsewhere in Xihlahla, from the other side of the river (e.g., Facazisse) and from chieftaincies as far afield as Timanguene and Nguvane. In times of "hunger," though, she set off with a group of *vavumbi kulobye* (her fellow potters) to peddle her wares wherever harvests had been plentiful that year:

E: They went around, selling. They were many! Because there were many of them making pots then. Mmm. Maybe three, maybe four, maybe five, maybe six. They go, the ones who had dishes [to sell], and she too. They go over there, *ka* Mavavaze. They know us there in Mavavaze, out in the desert, everywhere. *Ka* Xisangwana, and *ka* N'waFekula, even Mahele, they arrived there, they went around selling, when there was hunger. They go on foot. She carries a sack on her head. This one carries a sack on her head, this one carries a sack on her head, because they were many, the potters. Even if they didn't have a sack, since those sacks, they weren't here then, they carry [pots] on their head in a *mubobo*.

R: *Mubobo*, what's that?

E: *Mubobo*—you take a *nguvu* [length of cloth]. You do this, this [Elena explains how an *nguvu* was folded and tied to serve as a sack]. . . . Even the girls went out selling. They go with their mothers. . . . People buy [pots] with food. They pour [food into] an *mbita*, maybe peanuts—they pour it here—maybe *n'wahuva* [sorghum], maybe *maphila* [sorghum], or *xikombe* [millet]. They poured it in there, in the *mbita*. Yoh! Money, they didn't have it. Money was scarce, long ago.

H: How did they decide where to go?

E: There's this one who knows the *mbangu* [place]. She heard that at so-and-so's place, there's food. There's corn. It's here that they go. I don't know them, who they were. This one, she hears the word first, that in such-and-such a place, they're selling [food]. Well, they have to go there. . . .

H: Where did they stay, if they didn't know anyone?

E: Long ago, they did it this way. When you arrived at a *muti*, this one where you begin to sell your pots, maybe everyone here at this *muti* buys. You'll take that corn, you'll leave it here. You'll sleep here, at this *muti*. Mmm. They arrived, they ask, "We want to put our corn here, so that [people] can buy pots from us. Here, where we put our corn when we go around selling, we'll sleep here." Well, they say, "Sleep!" [105](#)

Elena learned potmaking as a girl, when she was beginning to develop breasts, and at a time when she recalls there still being "many, many" women potters in Xihlahla, including the wives and sisters of the chief.  [Audio](#)

Because my mother, she was making pots. I'm always seeing her, when she makes pots over there. And I learn. Mmm. Well, indeed, I learned. . . . The way of learning, it's this way. When *mamana* sat over there, *mamana* sits there, making pots. I look at her, what she's doing. And me, I long for it. I say, "I want to do these things." Well, and I, I take these things, and I try them. I take them. I make pots. Well, these things, they enter my *qondo* [knowledge]. It's this way it begins. [106](#)

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While she was living with her mother, Elena insists, her pottery was exactly like her mother's in method of production, style range, and decorative design:

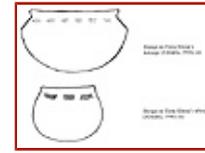
Everything was the same. I liked her ways, only. These things that she begins with, she learned them here. They learn them here. Well, and I, I followed all these things that she was doing. I didn't go around finding the work of someone else, some other person who was making pots. . . . I do it for *mamana*, and me. I learned her ways. [107](#)

Although she rarely accompanied Munen'wasse on her trading journeys when she was a girl, Elena occasionally went out herself, with her mother's younger sister and other fellow girls, on similar overnight foot-trips around the area to sell her pottery. More often, though, she sold her pots from home or on the street in Magude town, keeping the money she received for them to spend on small luxuries such as headscarves or soap.

It was only, she says, after she married Elias Mambane and moved from her mother's household to her *vukatini* that Elena's pottery began to change. Her mother-in-law, Motasse Dzimba, was also a potter, but Elena recalls being so busy and afraid of her in-laws during her first two years of married life that she did no potmaking herself. "Well, I go on, I begin to settle a little, I got used to those people. I say, 'I'm going to make pots.'" Elena's relationship with her mother-in-law remained uneasy, however, and the lack of trust or intimacy between them is reflected in Elena's memory of their relationship as potters—especially in her failure to remember how Motasse decorated her vessels: "I forget, because I didn't follow them. . . . Because I see myself, that her way of making pots, it doesn't make me happy." At the beginning, she continued making and decorating pottery exactly as her mother had taught her, but soon she made two important changes in her repertoire. The first involved a decision to use a different decorative pattern on her *timbita*: a band of intermittent sets of three parallel, slightly wavy, horizontal incised lines instead of her mother's short vertical cuts, because "I didn't want my mother's anymore, so I think of this one."

The second innovation was more dramatic and stemmed from an affinal connection dating back to Elena's adolescence. When she was a "big girl," having already "accepted" her future husband, Elena traveled with a group of friends to attend a *lovolo* ceremony in Manhiça. There, she met a young woman, N'waMusakaza Ntimane, who through marriage would become Elena's *ntukulu* (granddaughter), because N'waMusakaza's mother's father and Elena's future father-in-law were uterine siblings. [108](#) N'waMusakaza was serving food at the homestead where Elena and her friends were staying and, after a while, according to Elena, "Well, we laugh, we talk, and she says, 'I want you to be my friend.' Well, I say, 'That's good.' Well, she travels to visit me, and I, I travel to visit her." During her first visit back to Manhiça, still before she was married, Elena watched her "granddaughter" making a *kalangu*, a type of clay vessel that, she says, N'waMusakaza learned from the "VaNhambane" (people of Inhambane, a

predominantly Chopi region) and was unknown in Xihlahla at that time. "Well, I stand there, and I watch her. Well, I take it a little, with my eyes." Several years later, during a severe famine that affected the Magude area in 1945-46, Elena's father-in-law sent her and her children to live with his relatives in Manhiça until the drought broke. During the nine months she spent there as N'waMusaka's neighbor, Elena "kept on studying" until, she says, "it really enters my head, I really know it. I return home, I sit down to make pots—well, that *kalangu*, it comes out." Elena also copied the decorative pattern that N'waMusakaza always used on her *makalangu*: a single line of stamped impressions made with the pointed end of the shell of a snail-like creature found only along the coast. ¹⁰⁹ In this way, she says modestly, she "sowed the seed" of *makalangu*—a pot from "outside"—among her fellow potters back in Xihlahla. Referring both to the *kalangu* and to the new decorative pattern she was using on her *timbita*, Elena remembers, "They see me, and they do it too". ¹¹⁰



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The story of how Elena expanded her stock of pottery types and designs—and the circumstances in which she told it—highlight a crucial tension at the heart of women's ceramic histories. In response to our questions about changes in her pottery over time, Elena repeatedly stated that even after she moved to her *vukatini* she did not add to or modify in any way the repertoire she learned from her mother. Her pots, however, betrayed her, and it was only when we asked about the origins of a couple of them lying around her yard that she "remembered" the *kalangu* story and her decision to adopt a new decorative pattern for her *timbita*. There was a similar cageyness in Elena's reaction, first when we remarked on the close resemblance between her *tinhlanga* and the ones we saw on Julia's and Laurinda's pots, and then when I expressed surprise at her comment that an older Xihlahla woman had put on her *timbita* exactly the same decoration—sets of three wavy horizontal lines—that Elena said she had "thought of" on her own:  [Audio](#)

- E: They don't resemble each other, truly, the way of making pots. Everyone has her own way, these things she uses. Everyone has her own way. . . .
- H: Do you know how it happened that you and Favasse used the same designs?
- E: [laughs] Can I know how this happens? I don't know! Maybe it's because of our mothers, maybe it's whatever, over there, I don't know where [she learned it]. Because truly, on the *timbita*, and the *makhuwana*, those designs She didn't learn them from me, and me, I didn't learn them from her. We make pots for ourselves, and she, over there at her home, she makes pots herself. But, when we go out to sell, our designs are the same. . . .
- H: So, when you see another woman's pots, and they look the same, can you tell who made them?
- E: When it's we from our own *ganga* [district]? *Eeh*. When I go out, maybe [our pots] are all mixed together, here, from the valley. . . . I'll arrive, I say, "There, that pot was made by so-and-so."
- H: You can tell?
- E: Mmm. I say, "That pot was made by so-and-so." Even now that I'm an old woman! [laughs] My *makalangu*, when I go and I reach somewhere, I rest, [at a place where] this person knows how to take care of her pots. I'll arrive, I say, "This *kalangu* was made by me." Even those two over there, N'waMundawu [i.e., Laurinda] and mamana Julia, when they sell [their pots], I'll arrive, I say, "This one, it's N'waMundawu's *mbita*." Mmm. I know her way.
- H: So Do women want their pots to be different from each other, or do they want them to be the same?
- E: Mmm. It's to be beautiful.
- H: No, that's not what I mean Does each woman try to make her pots *look* like those of her fellow potters, or does she try to make them unique?

- E: You! [laughs] You know. I make pots, maybe there are five of us, making pots. I, I begin, and I want to pass all these others. And she, this one who follows me, she wants to pass all of us. And she, this one, she wants to pass all of us, and this one she wants to pass us, *all* of us! But, because the *rikatla* [shell], you hold it in your hand to make a pot, you hold it well, won't you pass them? You leave them behind. . . . It's here in the way you make your pot, you're all making pots the same way, but by beauty—you leave them behind
- H: Okay. . . . [Say a woman marries here in Xihlahla, but she comes from another place, and she already knows how to make pots], will this woman try to copy the designs of *mamana*, or will she say no, I want my own designs on my pots?
- E: [becomes animated] Some of them, the ones who want to, they take those designs. But this one, she'll try this way of writing, she won't be able to do it. She'll write that design, but it's not beautiful, truly. Another one, if she doesn't want [to copy], she'll say, "Ah, now I'm making pots my way, it's like this." But that one, she longs for it, she wants to write that design. But she can't do it. Because, it rests in the *voko* [hand]. Even [turns to R]—aren't people different, the way they write, there in the school?
- R: Mmm, they're different.
- E: Truly, [handwriting] speaks that way. Some of it will be different, some goes down-down-down [i.e., cannot keep a straight line], some of it is very big [laughs] But it speaks this way, the *words* are the same. It's just like when you make pots. She'll long for [your *tinhlanga*], she takes it. It's not she who writes it [for the first time]. She thinks that, "Hah! All this time, I have written thus." Yet it's not the same, they're different.
- H: Okay. . . . When there are some women in the same area who make pots, does each woman want her own design, or do the women want—
- R: The same design.
- E: Ah! It's this way. If someone longs for it, we don't go out and sit down together, in secret, saying "Let's all make our pots with one design." Everyone writes for herself, in her way, only. Everyone writes for herself, only. Well, if they're the same, if they're not the same, we didn't know. Mmm. . . . Truly, everyone has her own *xiyandla* [palm-i.e., hand]. [111](#)

Potmaking, in other words, was in one sense highly competitive and individualistic. However, potters strove to surpass one another "by beauty" within the spatially bounded ceramic community of their *ganga*, [112](#) a community whose members shared what was in effect the common language or "speech" of their decorative designs. While stressing the individual uniqueness of *tinhlanga* "handwriting" among her peers in her corner of Xihlahla, Elena was just as determined to represent her personal decorative practices as completely faithful to her mother's and N'waMukakaza's. These somewhat contradictory claims are in fact crucial to one of the meanings of handmade pottery as feminine historical practice. A woman's *tinhlanga* preserve memories of an artistic genealogy and of female affective ties that transcend distances of time and space. In doing (or claiming to do) everything "just like" her mother, Elena was fulfilling her responsibility to guard and pass on the ways of long ago to future generations of female potters. And yet in adding the style of one of her "granddaughters" to her repertoire, Elena was not only augmenting her pottery range but also helping to spread a variation of ceramic beauty from another place (in this case, from a kinswoman, but, as N'waXidyula's example suggests, kinship was not necessary for such exchanges) across a wider geographic landscape, an act that also brought Xihlahla pottery fashions up to date.

What joins the strands of this tension is Elena herself: Her experiential uniqueness was simultaneously what made it possible for this broadly shared feminine knowledge of "long ago" to adapt and go on. Under the guise of obedient reproduction of the past, pottery decoration also provided a space—public, yet barely visible; permanent, yet open to change—where as individuals women could vie with one another for recognized superiority in artistry and skill, a contest that paradoxically both enabled and encouraged their collective purpose. Moreover, the ranking established through such informal rivalries could have material consequences. Elena's

mother, for instance, whose vessels were exceptionally "beautiful," could usually command more help from younger women for gathering her materials and marketing her wares than could other, less-talented potters in her community.

This quality of collaborative competition is also evident in Elena's account of her involvement in the long-distance pottery trade between 1940 and 1970. With her *makalangu* especially in



demand, Elena had customers from as far away as Maputo city buying from her at home (she sold only for money) whenever she had vessels to sell, which depended in turn on whether she needed or wanted money for a particular reason: "I made pots when I see that my heart, well—I sell when, maybe it's a dress that I see, maybe it's whatever. And this friend, she has one. Well, I get to work, I light the fire, I sell." ¹¹³ In times of

hunger, however, Elena followed in the intrepid footsteps of previous generations of Xihlahla potters. In her narrative of this commerce, the subjects of her verbs are often plural, attesting to the strength of the cooperative spirit among the women she portrayed above as such energetic rivals:

- E: We carried them on our heads, here in our *nguvu*. You stack, you stack, you stack, you stack, you stack. ¹¹⁴ You arrange, arrange, arrange, in that big *nguvu*. . . . We put them on our heads, we go. Ka Nyongane, eee! We went to all those lands over there, in the desert! It's because of hunger. We go looking for sorghum, and millet, and corn, and peanuts, everything. We went until we found it. . . . You [plural] arrived there. You arrive, you ask [permission] to take the dishes from your head. You divide them up, some [pots] stay there. You scatter, you go and you sell. These [women] go to one place, these go to another place, these go to another place. Well, you return in the afternoon. This one, who has luck, she'll go home with [her pots] finished. This one who doesn't have luck, she'll go home with some left. . . .
- H: Did you always go to the same place to sell?
- E: There's a *mbangu* [place], because Xihlahla, it has *ganga ni ganga* [districts and districts—i.e., several divisions]. Well, you [plural] arrive there, you take a pot, you give it to her [i.e., the host]. You arrive there, truly, because you're secretly told to go. ¹¹⁵ Well, you [plural] wake up in the morning, you go to that *ganga* [that you know], and you return there, and you all go again. . . . ¹¹⁶

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As this quote implies, a degree of trade rivalry did exist between potters of different *miganga*. Elena made her trading journeys with fellow potters of her own neighborhood in Xihlahla, and when they reached their destination they targeted their peddling according to previous knowledge (a "tip") about the *miganga* in that area where farmers were likely to have surpluses to sell. Elena volunteered another story (and repeated it three times, to make sure we understood) which illustrated even more forcefully this localized sense of ceramic identity and solidarity. To demonstrate her point about the social boundaries of common decorative language, she recounted how once during a visit to a woman's home outside of Xihlahla she saw a broken *kalangu* beside the hearth of her host. The pot's owner told her the vessel came from Xihlahla. Elena indignantly replied, "That's not *our* pot, from the valley, because our pots don't break that way. It must be from the potters at *ka mukulu* [the chief's place] ¹¹⁷. . . ."

Although Elena surely had many occasions to see *ka mukulu* pottery during her lifetime, when we asked how these potters decorated their wares, she answered coolly:

You won't know. . . . It's by *ndawu* [place], the way of the place. Well, the *ndawu* tells you that—there's an *ndawu*, there are those of the valley, and those of *ka mukulu*. Well, if they ask you, "These pots, are they yours?" you deny it. You say, "It's not our place, because they make pots over there in *ka mukulu*, over there. Well, and we, we make pots here." . . . I don't know what *tinhlanga* they used, because I didn't go out selling with them. I didn't see their dishes. ¹¹⁸

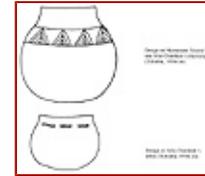
These hints of intra-chieftaincy ceramic competition—between geographic areas as small as the *ganga*, rarely more than a few square kilometers in size—both suggest a new perspective on archaeological theories of pottery diffusion and offer compelling evidence of a dramatic shift over time in the relational histories inscribed in women's clay wares. On the one hand, Elena's comments identify women's personal interactions—through residence and travel, kinship and friendship, birth and marriage—as the key site where individual potters made and remade decisions about *tinhlanga*, on an ongoing basis and with little regard for the parameters of formal politics. When people were organized on the landscape into chieftaincies, there was a degree of ceramic continuity across a community of potters roughly corresponding to the boundaries of the chiefdom. However, to the extent that women moved beyond and between these sociopolitical units, ceramic boundaries blurred or realigned themselves accordingly. On the other hand, the extreme and sharply defined localism of the *tinhlanga* rivalry among Xihlahla potters in the second half of the twentieth century suggests a marked contrast with the easy mix-and-match approach to pottery decoration that Caissene and Cufassane recalled from their widely traveled grandmothers. While Makassane and N'waXidyula might have told the story differently themselves, the implications of Elena's own stories (oral and ceramic) are fairly clear: As the geographic breadth of women's life histories (through marriage, trade, and travel) became increasingly restricted over time, so did the parameters of feminine ceramic community become progressively smaller and more fixed.

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Julia Chambale did not begin her career as a potter until the late 1940s. By then Elena—married, with three children—already had a well-established reputation and a network of ceramic customers across Magude and beyond. Like Elena, Julia first learned potmaking from her mother, Nkotassane Xixava, a Xihlahla-born woman who (like Elena) married locally. Although not able to say for sure how her mother learned to make pots, Julia believed it was probably from her mother, Julia's grandmother, Xidyumana Sive. Julia remembers that as a child her mother would make *timbita*, *madjomela*, *makhuwana*, and *minkambana* of various sizes, including a 50-liter *khuwana* used for storing beer. By then, though, the *xihiso* was not part of Nkotassane's repertoire, for, according to Julia, her mother and other women were already "used to buying [*swihiso*] at the priest's place." At an early age Julia decided she wanted to be able to make pots just like Nkotassane, in part because her mother had convinced her of pottery's cultural and historical significance: "The value of this work, of making pots, is this. It gave them life, long ago. Because long ago, the *xihiso*, they used to grind grain in a *xihiso* made of clay, the *xilandin* way. The food then, they cooked it in *xilandin* pots. *Byala*, they cooked it in *xilandin* pots." ¹¹⁹ Even so, when Julia first tried to imitate her mother's potmaking, "They refuse me, because I was very small. My breasts were not yet out. Well, I long for it. I leave. I go and hide. I try it by myself. I dig clay for myself. I moisten it, and I work." ¹²⁰

Julia explained her resolve in the same way as she explained how "pottery entered [her] head," and her words here allude to a more general understanding of the profound connection between potmaking and a woman's being or essential nature, a topic to which Julia returned in interviews again and again: "I love it with my heart. I love it with my heart—because it's like cooking. When the heart of your daughter is crooked, ¹²¹ even though you teach her, you're wasting your time." Julia's first successful pots were of a type called *xitsorhi*, an extremely small vessel (4 to 5 inches tall) used only to prepare medicines for infants and pregnant women. "I go and take the clay, me. I shape it into a pot, here in the *xirhengele* [potsherd]. Well, I try to do it in the way of my mother, over there. Well, she says, 'Bring it here.' I give it to her. She goes, 'eee,' she fixes it for me. Well, I saw [what was wrong with it]. It's just like school. Writing, it's difficult!" In describing pottery decoration as "writing," and in comparing the difficulty of home-based pottery production to the challenges of cooking and formal education, Julia posed an implicit challenge to gender stereotypes, both vernacular and academic. Always proud to identify herself as unschooled, at least to us, Julia both portrayed female potters as the intellectual equals (or better) of educated men and women, and likened the technological sophistication of indigenous women's oldest (allegedly most "primitive" or "traditional") skills—cooking and clay pot-making—to the powerful *xilungu* technology of literate communication. Her choice of simile expressed Julia's conviction that she could have acquired the skills of literacy had she been interested in schooling, or had she tried to learn "writing" with the passionate dedication she had brought to ceramic work since childhood. Pottery, in her view, was not an activity women should be ashamed of—nor formal schooling necessarily an endeavor worthy of their attention.

Within a few years Julia was producing the same range of pots as was her mother, and self-consciously replicating her mother's *tinhlanga* as well. Around the shoulder of her *makhuwana* she put a band of incised triangles made from sets of three or four parallel lines angled against each other; and on her *timbita* she "wrote" sets of two (as opposed to Elena's three) parallel, slightly wavy, horizontal incised lines. She was not alone in deferring to Nkotassane's ceramic expertise, for her mother regularly had women from neighboring homesteads dropping in to watch her work and to seek her advice. Nkotassane's status as a superior potter was also evident in her trade, both in the abundance of food (sorghums, millets, corn, sesame, peanuts, castor-oil seeds) Julia remembers being "given" to them at home from people of "other lands" who came to buy her wares and in her mother's ability to call on her *vanyatihomu*—the wives of her brothers—to help carry her pottery when "in times of hunger" she wished to peddle it in other communities. "Mmm, they go, sometimes she stays home. They go to *ka Moine*, Xivonguine, everywhere!" That Julia's notion of "everywhere" as expressed in this statement is not the same—or as geographically extensive—as Elena's, even though they were residents of the same *ganga* of Xihlahla, hints at a further reduction in women's patterns of movement across the landscape between the peak period of Elena's trading activity in the 1940s through the 50s and the time in Nkotassane's pottery career that Julia knows best, from the mid-1950s through the 1960s.



Yet when we focus on women's pottery-production methods across these decades, very little seems to have changed. In fact, in this respect there are remarkably few differences between Julia's account of what she learned from her mother, Elena's description of her own practices, and what I observed of Julia's and her friend Laurinda's methods during my several visits and interviews with them in 1995-96. To an even greater extent than with pottery decoration, these women swore to an absolute conservatism—a perfect, step-by-step imitation of the women of long ago—in their approach to the physical routines of every stage of pottery production, including the procedures for gathering clay and firing finished vessels. ¹²² When it came to the metaphysical aspects of potmaking—the ritual prohibitions surrounding every stage of the potmaking process—they expressed an even more zealous traditionalism, and showed heightened eagerness to discuss their knowledge with Aida, Ruti and me. Ethnographic and archaeological studies of the region's ceramic history had not prepared me for the possibility that the ritual trappings of home-based potmaking, the "taboos" that outside observers have tended to dismiss as "superstition," might contain the most powerful—and most historical—memories of all.





According to Elena and Julia, the most danger-laden pottery taboos involved the gathering and handling of the *vumba* or *ridaka* (clay) itself. A woman who had had sexual intercourse, was menstruating, or was bleeding from her nose the night before or the day of a trip to the clay fields was perilously "hot" and had to take precautions—*kulahela*, to use medicine to prevent misfortune—in order to "cool" herself so that her pots would not split during drying or firing. To eliminate this *nghozi* (danger), when she arrived at the clay source she was required to crumble a little clay in her hands and then smear it over her abdomen and thighs, around her pubic area, and (if she had had a nosebleed) over her face as well. Before she returned home, she had to scrape the clay from her skin and "throw it away," back into the hole from which she had dug it. Even when a woman was not hot, she was still supposed to tie her *nguvu* between her legs while she was digging for clay. For the same reason, women stored their clay underground at the foot of a tree some distance away from their hut and, while making their pots, were careful to keep their *makululelo* (scraps of clay) in a tidy heap beside them rather than randomly scattered on the ground, so that if someone "[came] out from inside" (i.e., after having intercourse) the "things [s/he] had" (i.e., heat, impurity) would not "be seized by the clay." If they were, they would "strike" and ruin the pots.

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When I asked Elena and Julia (separately) to explain why a woman's bodily heat would endanger clay, they laughed and gave nearly identical responses. Elena: "Eee! They followed those *milawu* [laws] long ago. And we, we have to follow them." Julia: "Those women of long ago, they did it this way. Well, and we, we try to do it this way too." ¹²³ Significantly, even their justifications of the more practical procedures of potmaking—their use of sand from the Nkomati River as temper; their preference for the broad, heavy leaves of the castor-oil bush as lining for the potsherd that served as their rotating base; their exclusive reliance on mussel shells for smoothing and shaping the coil-formed walls of their vessels; their strict observance of the rule that you must not fire pots on a cloudy day—emphasized less the physical reasons for choosing one method or material over another than the imperative of following the rules they were taught and the way of the ceramic lineage to which they belonged. As Elena told us with regard to tempering clay, "There is another way, they make pots [this way] in other lands. . . . They mix the clay with pieces of old pots. But the way of Xihlahla, we mix in sand, from the river, the Nkomati. Those who work with *swirhengele*, they're out there, in the desert, out *there!*" ¹²⁴ In like manner, Elena, Julia and Laurinda all displayed a strong attachment to the *rikatla* as a tool for the important steps of fashioning the vessel body, "cutting" and forming the rim (or mouth), writing their *tinhlanga*, and rounding and smoothing the vessel base on the second day—even though producing one batch of pots required at least a dozen shells (which they had to walk to the riverbank to gather), and even though each woman had, lying about her yard, similarly sharp-edged objects (knives, metal scraps) that might have served these purposes just as well.

However, it is in the way Elena, Julia and Laurinda *narrated* their pottery methods that the most extraordinary consistency emerged, not only across three generations of Xihlahla potters but between those accounts and the ones we heard from women elsewhere in the district, speaking from very different historical places and times. Elena, for instance, in describing how she used to fire her pots, used a sequence of repeated verbs that almost exactly echoed Cufassane's reenactment of her grandmother's firing process. The only noteworthy difference between them was Elena's claim that the firing pit had to be lined with the skin of a *xidzidzi* (honey badger); otherwise, she warned, "your dishes could die." ¹²⁵

Mirroring the contradiction between Elena's pots and what she claimed about them, though, Julia's stubborn representation of her own pottery as an exact, unchanging reproduction of her mother's (and that of her mother's teachers before her) was belied by truths written in the vessels themselves. Early on during our first opportunity to watch Julia at work, as we watched her deftly cut Nkotassane's triangular pattern onto a *khuwana* and then burnish the outer walls

of a *djomela* because, she said, "my mother taught me this way," there seemed no reason to question her claim. But by the end of that afternoon, when we had seen more of Julia's repertoire and I was better able to distinguish among different types of pots, it had become apparent that she too was "forgetting" or concealing something from us. For one thing, Julia's *timbata* were decorated with three sets of wavy horizontal lines instead of two—like Elena's, that is, instead of following the pattern of Julia's mother. When we asked Julia about it the first time, she explained that she thought of using this decorative pattern after she moved to her marital homestead and saw it one day on Elena's pots. Yet when the subject of decorative change came up in a later interview, Julia laughingly denied that she had ever copied from anyone else: "They copy from me, they copy from me!" she shouted, boasting that after she got married she taught potmaking to "many" women, including her mother-in-law and the wife of one of her husband's brothers. For another thing, although Julia had told us initially that she made exactly the same range of pots as did her mother, we noticed a rather large number of *makalangu* drying in the sun. Again, after questioning, Julia admitted that Elena—who considers Julia kin because "she was a friend of my daughter" and secondarily because Elena's husband and Julia's father were related—was also the one who taught her to make the *kalangu*, at present still Julia's best-selling pot. [126](#)

Finally, and perhaps most interesting, at the end of the afternoon we spent watching Julia work, her teenage daughter (who had been busy the whole time fetching water for the women and finishing the bottoms of pots made the previous day) took out two D-size batteries (National Hyper brand), broke them open, emptied them into a *xirhengele*, and proceeded to grind their contents into a fine black powder. When she had mixed the powder with water and tested the consistency, Julia took a small piece of cloth and used it to apply the paint in wide stripes down the sides of a *nkambana*. Immediately afterwards, Julia rubbed the blackened areas with a small stone. She was "beautifying" the vessel, she said, in the same manner her mother used to—except that in her mother's time potters used red ocher for this purpose, when they were able to acquire this substance from shops or peddlers in Magude town. When I pointed out that here Julia had surely departed from the potmaking ways of "long ago," she acknowledged that economic change could indeed force modifications in women's ceramic practice. Yet she was adamant that such minor adjustments neither eliminated nor corrupted the integrity of this ancient tradition.



Julia's admission of change within women's practices of home-based pottery production enabled us to explore some other ways in which external circumstances had affected potmaking in the course of Julia's adult life. The changes Julia most wished to discuss involved the trade in women's pottery, and for her these changes were considerably more upsetting than the substitution of batteries for red ocher. When she was young, Julia recalled, "If I believe in soap, and I don't have soap for bathing, I take my hoe. I go to the hole. I dig clay. I'll return home and I'll make pots. I'll sell to people. They give me money. Well, I've bathed [i.e., found money to buy soap]!" [127](#) In her younger days, in other words, potmaking was "play" for women, a source of extra income to buy "headscarves, cloth, dresses," *xilungu* foods such as sugar and tea, or nice clothing for the children. In recent years, though, both Julia and Laurinda lamented, potmaking had become necessary for survival, to buy flour for their ordinary food supply, for instance, instead of only in times of famine. What made matters even worse, they noted, was the terrible deflation of pottery's purchasing power in the straitened economy of the countryside since the end of the war. [128](#)

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In fact, as we witnessed, the perpetual demands of "hunger" were forcing Julia to take risky shortcuts with her pottery, such as leaving her vessels outside to dry quickly in the sun where they were vulnerable to damage from wind and overexposure. Yet such compromises did not deeply trouble Julia or the other Xihluku potters. The changes they deplored were far less tangible or straightforward, and they did not stem, as we might expect, from the commercial rivalry presented by the São Jerónimo Mission pottery. According to both Elena and Julia, it took the male factory potters a long time before their wares were considered even competitive with those of the Xihlahla women. As long as Portuguese mission staff were running the pottery, Elena recalls, "they didn't know that, this clay, you have to put sand in it" and, since they were adding no temper to their clay, their *makalangu* always "split open, there in the fireplace!" [129](#) Indeed, none of the women we interviewed on this subject even hinted that wheel-thrown pottery was as good as, let alone better than, women's handmade clay vessels. On the contrary, women considered the Mission's pots acceptable substitutes only when

handmade containers were not readily available, and agreed that rather than trying to drive one another from the market, São Jerónimo and the women at first more or less divided the pottery market between them. Until roughly the 1960s, they recalled, the factory specialized in manufacturing mainly *xilungu* vessel styles (table pitchers, flower pots) and the trickier *xihiso* (which is easier to make on a wheel than by hand), while women continued producing popular old-time styles for cooking and drinking (in particular, the *mbita*, *kalangu*, *khuwana*, and *djomela*).

By the end of the colonial period, however, and especially (according to Elena) by the time of the "war of *inazimiti* [Ian Smith]," fewer and fewer women were making pots at home anymore. ¹³⁰ Senior generations of potters were dying or "growing old" and younger women, apparently, were no longer willing to take their place. Elena explained:

They want to study, you know. Truly, my child, living the life of long ago, those things are no longer here now. These children to whom we gave birth, who is there for us to teach? Do they know how to make pots? School—she comes home from school. She doesn't even know how to cultivate. All the children now, when you cultivate, they don't know anything, even though school, it causes [your daughter] to run off and elope. Well, you teach her, and where is she? ¹³¹

Julia and Elena expressed more pointed criticism about their own married daughters, none of whom had embraced potmaking with enthusiasm despite their mother's strenuous efforts to teach them. Julia scoffed when I complimented her youngest daughter for her careful work on her mother's pots, and she based her prediction that the girl's interest in potmaking would not last on the example of Julia's two elder daughters, who had married and gone off to live in "Xilunguine" (Maputo city):

- J: Oh, she'll abandon it at her *vukatini*. She'll arrive there, she'll leave it. She'll just make dresses.
- H: Why do you think that?
- J: It's her heart. Working? They marry her, your daughter. She'll really work hard! Because she'll work for her husband, for his mother. Well, when she's married, it's difficult to make pots there. Maybe her husband, he says, "Don't play in the mud, dear, you'll get dirty." "Dear, leave it. Why are you working?" "Don't cultivate, dear. You have everything here at home." ¹³²

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Elena identified a similar nexus of causes in her daughter's refusal to learn potmaking at all, although she went one step further than did Julia when she attributed the reluctance of younger women to sustain female ceramic traditions ultimately not to the demands of husbands or mothers-in-law but to their weaker "heart":

- E: Oh! Will I know her heart? If you long for it, you learn it. She didn't learn it. She despised that clay. You become covered with clay. It's despised, by this woman.
- H: But you wanted to teach her?
- E: I *really* wanted it! She didn't want to be covered with clay. She didn't want it. Truly, this work, it's difficult. It's repulsive. ¹³³ It covers you with stains. If you don't have soap, you won't be clean. And your shoulders, they hurt very much. Long ago, if your heart isn't pure, ¹³⁴ you'll abandon it. You won't know it. It needs for God ¹³⁵ to have given you a pure heart. It really needs that. If your heart isn't pure, hah! You won't know it. ¹³⁶

Conclusion

Hearts that scorn dirt and husbands who scorn work for their wives, young girls who are schooled in what their elders consider promiscuity rather than farming and other necessary feminine skills, married women who choose dressmaking over potmaking (and, if we recall the words of Tamara Khosa and Julieta Chavango, have no time for an activity with so little "value")—these are the causes, according to Julia and Elena, for home-based pottery's decline in late-twentieth-century Magude. Their origins lie not in commodity capitalism and the spread of factory-produced pottery along commercial arteries into the countryside, but rather in the interconnected transformation of gender ideologies and generational relations resulting from mission Christianity and *xilungu* education—and violently hastened by women's scattering, displacement from the land, and immersion in town life throughout the long years of the war. Yet according to the women who in 1995-96 saw themselves at the center of a battle to preserve a custom that "gave life, long ago," the most disturbing aspect of this process was not simply the dwindling of a venerated female craft. Nor did their oral reminiscences suggest that the decline of women's pottery in Magude had much to do with what some scholars, interpreting similar trends elsewhere on the continent, have described as the colonization of African culture and consciousness by the hegemonic discourses of industrial capitalist modernity. [137](#)



Their deepest regrets were, first, that the impending disappearance of female potters and their pots meant the loss of a source of individual and collective influence for women in the spheres of healing, the food economy, chiefly politics, and intercommunity relations. Second, this loss in turn meant the silencing of a form of female remembering through which women had forged and handed down memories of critical (and often unspoken) elements of their common experience: temporally deep and geographically extensive networks of affiliation, actively sought and mediated across the many lines that have arisen to divide them. Julia's and Elena's pottery narratives and practices together attest to a shrinking of the geographic parameters of Magude's female ceramic communities since the turn of the twentieth century, part and parcel of increasing physical, administrative, and social constraints on women's mobility but also of the class and cultural differentiations generated by colonial society. Even so, women's pots still speak of the more expansive landscapes of their pasts, for the *tinhlanga* carefully carved onto the Xihluku potters' *makhuwana* bear a striking resemblance to designs found on similarly shaped vessels from "long ago" and far away—Elena's on remnants unearthed at the site of the tenth-century Khosa village at Massingir and on a "Tswa" pot from Inhambane, found in South Africa in the 1960s; Julia's on remnants from the other two, allegedly Sotho Massingir sites, and on modern as well as ancient Phalaborwa pots photographed by researchers in the early 1970s.

The disdain of daughters for home-based potmaking, then, threatens a feminine construction of Magude's history, a construction whose value rests not only in its ancestral claims but in its indifference to male-defined boundaries of all kinds. That this feminine version of history also embodies a formidable kind of gendered power was illustrated most dramatically to me the day Ruti and I returned to Xihlahla for a second interview with Julia, this time alone. When I told her that I had a few questions about pottery taboos, which we had discussed only briefly on the previous occasion, Julia turned indignantly to Ruti and said:

Did you hear? They insulted me. They say, "Indeed, you take these taboos, you tell them to the *mulungu*?" I say, "Truly, she came to study. Well, if they come to study, should I put on finery for them?" Many people, they scorn us. They say, "It's not good, what you tell them." Well, those people of the Swiss Mission, they found out that you came and I told you what is forbidden when making pots. [139](#)

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In all my time in Magude, this was the only time I heard that "those people of the Swiss Mission"—Christians (in this case, Christian women) of Facazisse, who could have learned what Julia told me only from Aida—were so unhappy with the content of our interviews that they tried to prevent someone from speaking openly to me. The gravity of their insult in Julia's eyes was such that we had to stop the tape recorder and talk for a while to persuade her that I too was upset about Aida's breach of confidentiality and that I would speak to both Aida and the Antioka elders to ensure (as far as I could) that such an incident would not occur again.

But Julia's complaint made it starkly clear that even after the war, women's pottery still represented a great deal more than a primitive local industry for manufacturing implements for everyday domestic use. What was, and surely still is, at stake in pottery's persistence in (or disappearance from) Magude is its dangerous authority as a form of female storytelling about the past—a unique expression of autographed memory whose power resides in the experiential truths written on bodies of clay. The association, through the taboos Julia was supposed to conceal (in "finery") from me, of female bodies with danger is what makes the relational histories imprinted on women's handmade pottery so important. As we will see in the following chapter, women have etched even bolder truths directly (and permanently) onto their own bodies, in the *tinhlanga* with which they have beautified themselves, like their pots, with mnemonic scars.

Notes:

Note 1: Journal 2 (22 January 1995), 19-22. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 83. As Benjamin writes of oral storytelling in general (as opposed to other forms of communication such as "information or a report"), "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others . . . [and] makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (87). [Back.](#)

Note 3: Interview with João Ambrósio Chauke, Armando Khosa, and David Agosto Masangu, 26 July 1995, São Jerónimo, Magude town. [Back.](#)

Note 4: Field notes 2 (27 July 1995), 82. [Back.](#)

Note 5: In Shangaan, the verb *kuyila* means to be taboo, or forbidden. *Swa yila* (it is [lit. these things are] forbidden) is the most common usage of this term. I do not know of a noun in Shangaan equivalent to the English noun "taboo." [Back.](#)

Note 6: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 7: Jan Vansina reports finding a clay pot at a Bushong shrine that was decorated with the same kind of "scars" that women "wear on their abdomens." Jan Vansina, *Living With Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 20. Also see chap. 5. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Henri P. Junod, *The Wisdom of the Tsonga-Shangana People*, 3d ed., (Braamfontein: Sasavona, 1990), 166-67, 322-23. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Henri P. Junod, *Wisdom*, 206-7, 204-5, 252-53, 210-11. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Henri P. Junod, *Wisdom*, 206-7, 204-5, 252-53, 210-11. [Back.](#)

Note 11: E.g., Ana Roque, "Algumas notas para o estudo da olaria entre os Makua de Cabo Delgado," *Cadernos de História* 1 (1985): 59-68; Margot Dias, "Aspectos técnicos e sociais da olaria dos Chopos," *Garcia de Orta* 8, no. 4 (1960): 779-85; E. Dora Earchy, *Valenge Women: The Social and Economic Life of the Valenge Women of Portuguese East Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 53-56; Henri A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, (New York: University Books, 1962), 2:112-18; Maria do Rosário Rodrigues Martins, *Mozambique: Aspectos da cultural material* (Lisbon, 1986), 61-65, figs. 10-25. [Back.](#)

Note 12: For Mozambique, see Ricardo T. Duarte, "Three Iron Age Sites in Massingir Area, Gaza Province, Moçambique and Their Importance in the Southern Moçambique Bantu Settlement," in *Iron Age Research in Mozambique*, ed. M. L. T. Duarte, T. Cruz e Silva, J. C. de Senna Martinez, J. Morais, and R. T. Duarte (Maputo: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Moçambique, 1976); Gerhard Liesegang, "Historical Continuity and Ceramic Change: A Note on the Wares Used by the Gaza Nguni in the Nineteenth Century," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 29 (1971): 60-64; João Morais, *The Early Farming Communities of Southern Mozambique* (*Studies in African Archaeology* 3, Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique and Central Board of National Antiquities, Sweden, 1988); João Morais and Teresa Cruz e Silva, "A Tentative Construction of a Model: Modern Traditional Pottery from the coastal plain, Gaza province," in *Prehistoric Research in Moçambique: The Earlier Prehistoric Research in*

"*Portuguese East Africa, the Present Projects, Investigation Plans and Proposals*, ed. J. M. Morais (Maputo: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Moçambique, 1976). On South Africa, see T. M. Evers, and Nikolaas J. van der Merwe, "Iron Age Ceramics from Phalaborwa, Northeastern Transvaal Lowveld, South Africa," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 42 (1987): 87-106; Martin Hall, *Farmers, Kings, and Traders: The People of Southern Africa, 200-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Nikolaas J. van der Merwe and Robert T. K. Scully, "The Phalaborwa Story: Archaeological and Ethnographic Investigation of a South African Iron Age Group," *World Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (1971): 178-96. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Paul J. J. Sinclair, "Some Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Ceramic Studies in Mozambique," Working Papers in African Studies, 20 (Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, 1986), 3. [Back.](#)

Note 14: For overviews of developments in southern African archaeology, see Martin Hall, "Tribes, Traditions, and Numbers: The American Model in Southern African Iron Age Ceramic Studies," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 38 (1983): 51-57; Hall, *Farmers, Kings, and Traders*; Tim Maggs and Gavin Whitelaw, "A Review of Recent Archaeological Research on Food-Producing Communities in Southern Africa," *Journal of African History* 32 (1991): 3-24. For Mozambique, see João Morais, "Mozambican Archaeology: Past and Present," *African Archaeological Review* 2 (1984): 113-28; Morais, "Fontes Historiográficas e Arqueologia em Moçambique," *Leba* 7 (1997): 301-17. [Back.](#)

Note 15: One important collaborative effort in the eastern Transvaal is discussed in van der Merwe and Scully, "The Phalaborwa Story." A more narrowly technical cross-disciplinary effort in Mozambique is Paul J. J. Sinclair, "Ethno-Archaeological Surveys of the Save River Valley, South-Central Mozambique," Working Papers in African Studies, 11 (Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, 1985). [Back.](#)

Note 16: Henri Breuil and Clarence van Riet Lowe, *The First Impressions of an Archaeological Tour of the Southern Extremity of the Colony of Mozambique* (Lourenço Marques: Comissão de Monumentos e Relíquias Históricas de Moçambique, 1944); L. A. Barradas, "Uma estação paleolítica em Magude," *Boletim da Sociedade de Estudos da Colónia de Moçambique* 45 (1942): 83-101. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Hall, *Farmers, Kings, and Traders*, 71. Hall is drawing here on *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture*, by Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). [Back.](#)

Note 18: On ceramic findings from the first millennium, see Teresa Cruz e Silva, "A Preliminary Report on an Early Iron Age Site: Matola IV 1/68," in *Prehistoric Research in Moçambique*, ed. Morais; T. M. Evers, "Excavations at the Lydenburg Heads Site, Eastern Transvaal, South Africa," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 37 (1982): 16-33; Menno Klapwijk, "A Preliminary Report on Pottery from the North-Eastern Transvaal, South Africa," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 29 (1974): 19-23. For terminology on pot shape and decoration, I am relying on A. C. Lawton, "Bantu Pottery of Southern Africa," *Annals of the South African Museum* 49, no. 1 (1967): 1-440, and especially on figs. 17-29. Lawton defines *carination* as "an angled inflection in the vessel wall forming a ridge on the outer surface," which may occur at the widest diameter of the pot/bowl or at the base of the neck (25). [Back.](#)

Note 19: Hall, *Farmers, Kings, and Traders*, 72. See also Evers, "The Iron Age in the Eastern Transvaal"; Tim Maggs, "The Iron Age South of the Zambezi." [Back.](#)

Note 20: See also António Rita-Ferreira, *Fixação Portuguesa e história pre-colonial de Moçambique* (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical / Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1982), 43. The hypothesized transition from "Early" to "Late Iron Age" circa A.D. 1000 is also said to have included a general movement of settlements from river valleys to hilltops and possibly to have coincided with the origins of the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal kinship, agnatic inheritance, and virilocal marriage among Shona, Sotho, and Nguni peoples south of the Zambezi. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Morais, *Early Farming Communities*, 120. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Van der Merwe and Scully, "The Phalaborwa Story." [Back.](#)

Note 23: Duarte, "Three Iron Age Sites in Massingir Area," 18. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Duarte does not address the possibility that Massingir 4/75 is a much later site than the other two, and he does not address its implications—in particular, what it would mean if this site were contemporaneous with them, given that it exhibits such different ceramic patterns.

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Note 25: Ngungunyana's father Mzila moved the Gaza capital from the Chaimite area to north of the Save River in 1862, during the Gaza civil war; Ngungunyana himself inhabited and ruled in this area from 1886 to 1889, when he moved south again, to present-day Manjacaze, about 55 kilometers east of Chaimite. Liesegang, "Historical Continuity and Ceramic Change." [Back.](#)

Note 26: E.g., Augusto Castilho, "Relatório do Governador do districto de Lourenço Marques no anno económico de 1876 a 1877," *Boletim Oficial do Governo da Província de Moçambique* 47 (1877): 340. [Back.](#)

Note 27: E.g., Claude Fuller, *Louis Trigardt's Trek Across the Drakensberg, 1837-1838* (Cape Town: The Van Riebeeck Society, 1932), 111; Robert Briggs Struthers, *Hunting Journal 1852-1856 in the Zulu Kingdom and the Tsonga Regions*, ed. Patricia L. Merrett and Ronald Butcher (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1991), 98; St. Vincent Erskine, "Third and Fourth Journeys in Gaza, or Southern Mozambique, 1873 to 1874, and 1874 to 1875," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 48 (1878): 31; D. Fernandes das Neves, *A Hunting Expedition to the Transvaal*, tr. Mariana Monteiro (London: George Bell and Sons, 1879), 43.

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Note 28: Henry Francis Fynn, "Delagoa Bay (1823)," in *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, ed. George McCall Theall, (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1964), 2:482. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Philippe Jeanneret, "Les Ma-Khoça," *Bulletin de la Société Neuchateloise de Géographie* 8 (1894-95): 138-39. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 1:140-41. Junod writes that clay pots of various sizes were generally used as "altars" (singular, *gandzelo*) where offerings were made to ancestor spirits.

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Note 31: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 1:43-44; 2:458 ff. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 56. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Fynn, "Delagoa Bay," 482; Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 2:112, 116; Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 53. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Fynn, "Delagoa Bay," 485. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 2:114. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 54, 56. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 2:115. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 55. [Back.](#)

Note 39: The Shangaan verb for this process is *kukhangula*, which also means to use a cooking pot for the first time. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 2:112-17; Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 53-56. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Margot Dias, "Aspectos técnicos e sociais da olaria dos Chopos," *Garcia de Orta* 8, no. 4 (1960): 779-85; Lawton, "Bantu Pottery of Southern Africa," 80-230; Morais and Cruz e Silva, "Tentative Construction of a Model;" Martins, "Sobre os Vandaus (Sofala-Moçambique)," chap. in *Mozambique: Aspectos da cultural material*. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Although Henri A. Junod's photographs show his Ronga potter making what appear to be *makalangu*, he does not include this type in his list. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Earthy, *Valenge Women*, 54. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Lawton, "Bantu Pottery," 82. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Ibid., 82. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Ibid, 85, 87, 94, 101-2. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Ibid., 102 (my emphasis), 311. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Ibid., 80, 83. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Ibid., 86; Morais and Cruz e Silva, "A Tentative Construction," 4. [Back.](#)

Note 50: Dias, "Aspectos técnicos," 779. [Back.](#)

Note 51: Dias, "Aspectos técnicos," 782; Lawton, "Bantu Pottery," 86, 308; Morais and Cruz e Silva, "Tentative Construction," 7. Lawton comments that a "flourishing trade between hawkers, sometimes from far afield, and potters, in the areas where there was no local deposit [of ochre or graphite]" suggests that "the decoration of pottery with these materials is a tribal tradition and not only a matter of availability" (308). These accounts of Magude potters suggest a different explanation (see below in this chapter). [Back.](#)

Note 52: Lawton, "Bantu Pottery," 85, 101; Morais and Cruz e Silva, "Tentative Construction," 10. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Pedro de Mesquita Pimental, "4a Circumscrição: Magude," in *Circumscrições de Lourenço Marques: Respostas aos quesitos*, ed. F. X. Ferrão de Castelo Branco (Lourenço Marques: Imprensa Nacional, 1909), 103. [Back.](#)

Note 54: José Fonseca, *Monografia da tribo Cossa* (unpublished MS, Inhambane, 1957), 19 (AHM Seccção Especial a.III, p.6, no. 28). I have not heard or read the term *phisso* in any other discussion of pottery from southern Mozambique, and *hotso* is a term I have come across only in Henri A. Junod. That suggests it may be a Ronga or coastal term not used in the Magude area. [Back.](#)

Note 55: Nunes de Oliveira, "Arte gentílica em Moçambique," *Moçambique—Documentário Trimestral* 3 (1935): 52. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Interview with João Ambrósio Chauke, Armando Baine Khosa, and David Agosto Masangu, 26 July 1995, São Jerónimo, Magude town; Field notes 2, (26 July 1995), 75-83. None of these men initially wanted to work in the Mission pottery: João Chauke hoped to be trained as a locksmith and Armando Khosa as a carpenter, but "the *padres*" sent them to the pottery instead. I have not yet been able to determine exactly when the Mission first started manufacturing pottery. Although the complex in which the pottery is currently housed was built in 1937, oral sources indicate that the Mission had already been producing clay pots for several years by then. [Back.](#)

Note 57: The report attributes underproduction at the Mission pottery in the early 1950s to the fact that "in the last three years not a drop of water [i.e. rain] has fallen." The drought and the Mission's production levels seem to have reversed dramatically by 1956, by which time, according to Armando Khosa, there were "many people"—all men—working in the pottery, and more wheels were added to accommodate the large number of men who "wanted to do this work." [Back.](#)

Note 58: António Policarpo de Sousa Santos, *Relatório das Inspeções as Administrações de Concelho de Gaza, Circunscrição de Bilene, Circunscrição de Manhiça, e Circunscrição de Magude* (1953), ISANI, Caixa 20, AHM, pp. 0482-83, 0490-91. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Interview with João Ambrósio Chauke, Armando Baine Khosa, and David Agosto Masangu, 26 July 1995, São Jerónimo, Magude town; Field notes 2, (26 July 1995), 77-79. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Interview with Jane Mundlovu, 31 August 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 61: According to written sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Hlanganu lived in the Transvaal lowveld near present-day Leydenburg and in the Lebombo hills between the Sabié and Olifants Rivers (i.e., straddling the present border). Unlike other Tsonga-speaking communities in the region, the Hlanganu were never conquered or directly governed by the Gaza Nguni, although they seem to have been among the principal victims of

the Gaza succession war in the lowveld. Hlanganu territory was claimed by the Swazis, who were fighting on the side of Mawewe. James Stevenson-Hamilton wrote that he heard a "vivid account" of one Swazi raid from "an old *induna* of the ba-Hlangane" named Kumane-ka-Mure, who appears to be the "Kumana" of Caissene's story. See James Stevenson-Hamilton, *The Low-Veld: Its Wild Life and Its People*, 2d ed. (London: Cassell, 1935), 172-73; A. A. Jaques, *Swivongo swa Machangana*, 5th ed., (Braamfontein: Sasavona, 1995), 87; Henri A. Junod, "The Ba-Thonga of the Transvaal," *South African Journal of Science* 10 (1913): 224; Henri A. Junod, *Life*, 1:17-18; William Hammond-Tooke, "Notes on the East Coast Bantu of Eighty Years Ago," *South African Journal of Science* 8 (1911): 84. [Back.](#)

Note 62: I translate as "court" the rather more colorful and suggestive Shangaan verb *kugangisa*, which refers to a boy's or man's efforts to persuade a girl or woman to accept him as her lover. See chap. 3. [Back.](#)

Note 63: I.e., the Spelonken area (see chap. 2). [Back.](#)

Note 64: I.e., the people of Vecha did not have clay grinders (*swihiso*), because the soil there was too rocky to use for pottery. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Interview with Caissene Mundlovu, 17 August 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 66: A woman's younger sister, married by her husband. [Back.](#)

Note 67: See chap. 2. Before he was made *régulo* by the Portuguese, Munyamana was one of the Mukavele chief's "police." [Back.](#)

Note 68: Interviews with Caissene Mundlovu, 17 August 1995 and 2 October 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). Caissene said nothing in our two interviews about European-made iron hoes replacing or supplementing Vecha hoes as bridewealth, although Patrick Harries has written that, in the 1860s and 1870s, imported imitations were flooding southern Mozambique and playing a critical role in the mounting struggle, between young wage-earning men and chiefs / homestead heads, over access to bridewealth and marriage. I do not know how to reconcile Caissene's insistence that "one hoe was for one woman" with Harries's meticulously documented report that chiefs had "inflated" bridewealth "from five hoes in the late 1860s to over fifty a decade later"—except that perhaps the declining trade in hand-forged hoes made them that much more valuable and coveted in relation to mass-produced European imitations. See Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1994), chap. 4. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Interview with Caissene Mundlovu, 17 August 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 70: Interview with Caissene Mundlovu, 17 August 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 71: Interview with Cufassane Munisse, 17 August 1996, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 72: In the previous interview, Cufassane had said that *xikope* "is made by the whites over there in *manghezeni*," but it is not clear whether she meant now or during the time N'waXidyula would have been buying it. According to Lawton, some Venda and Lemba potters were still obtaining graphite directly from deposits in the rocky, mountainous areas of the northern Transvaal in the mid-1960s. By that time, however, most were purchasing it in lump or powder form from peddlers or shops, as it seems N'waXidyula was doing. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Singular, *xidanda*: slow walker, one who tires quickly, who delays others. [Back.](#)

Note 74: *Parents* here (*vatswari*) refers not solely to birth parents but to one's birth family in general. Interview with Cufassane Munisse, 7 February 1996, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 75: A *dzuka* was worth 2.5 *escudos* (roughly US\$0.10). One *cheleni* was worth 5 *escudos*, two *macheleni* were worth 10 *escudos*, etc. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Varieties of millet or sorghum. [Back.](#)

Note 77: Interview with Cufassane Munisse, 28 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 78: *Nyatihomu* technically refers to that sister-in-law whose marriage provides the *lovolo* for one's own marriage—i.e., one of the birth sisters of Cufassane's husband. However, Cufassane was acquired as the fourth wife of a much older man by one of her husband's senior wives, with cattle the latter had accumulated herself through the proceeds of her harvests. It is not clear whether Cufassane here was referring to this woman (whom she also sometimes called "mother-in-law") as *nyatihomu* or was using *nyatihomu* simply to refer to one of her husband's sisters. [Back.](#)

Note 79: *kupfuva*: to knead (dough, for example); to mix (mortar, for example). [Back.](#)

Note 80: Cufassane uses the verb *kuvuwa*, which as far as I can tell is related to the noun *vuwa* (declivity, downward slope) and is derived from the verb *kuwa* (to fall, drop). I translate it as "smack it down" because this is the best way I can think of to describe the action Cufassane demonstrated for us, of the potter hitting, pushing down, and shaping and preparing her lump of clay with the palms and heels of her two hands. [Back.](#)

Note 81: *kuthandela*: to wind around (a piece of string, for example). [Back.](#)

Note 82: *kukanyanga*: to get hold of food with the hand and knead it in an untidy way. The term is commonly used for shaping clay into coils. [Back.](#)

Note 83: *kutlhaviketela*: from *kutlhaviketa*, which means to join, splice, knot together. [Back.](#)

Note 84: From *makandzwa*, a term (plural) for ornamental cicatrization scars on a woman's abdomen (see below and chap. 5). [Back.](#)

Note 85: *kurhendzelekela*: to surround, go around—in this context, to inscribe designs all the way around the pot. [Back.](#)

Note 86: *kufaya*: to break or smash (clay pots, for example) into fragments. [Back.](#)

Note 87: *kusila*: to grind grain on a stone. [Back.](#)

Note 88: *kuvupfa*: to ripen, become sufficiently cooked or soft. [Back.](#)

Note 89: *kurhidela*: to flatten and harden a floor by beating and polishing with stone; to smooth a pot by rubbing it with a stone—i.e., to burnish. [Back.](#)

Note 90: *kuhala*: to scrape (a pot, for example, or a hide). [Back.](#)

Note 91: *kukulula*: to remove (for example, bracelets from one's arm or porridge from a stirrer) with a sliding motion. [Back.](#)

Note 92: *kenya*: a large bundle of thatch tied in such a way that it can be unrolled on the roof. [Back.](#)

Note 93: *kuthandhela*: to cover, as clothes cover those who wear them or a bandage covers a wound. [Back.](#)

Note 94: Interviews with Cufassane Munisse, 28 December 1995 and 7 February 1996, Matendeni (Magude town). See also Field sketchbook 1 (28 December 1995), 93-94; Field notes 5 (28 December 1995), 105-7; Field notes 6 (7 February 1996), 26-27. [Back.](#)

Note 95: At the time of our interview, Tamara Khosa's daughter was married to the president of the Executive Council of the Mozambique Presbyterian Church (IPM), formerly the Swiss Mission. [Back.](#)

Note 96: Interview with Julieta Chavango, 9 June 1995, Facazisse. [Back.](#)

Note 97: Interview with Tamara Khosa, 19 August 1995, Makuvulane. [Back.](#)

Note 98: Interview with Julieta Chavango, 9 June 1995, Facazisse. [Back.](#)

Note 99: Interview with Julieta Chavango, 30 November 1995, Facazisse. [Back.](#)

Note 100: *Xilandin* can refer to Tsonga-Shangaan culture or language or, more generally to "black" or African "ways"; here, as is most often the case in everyday discourse, *xilandin* is contrasted to *xilungu* (white or European language or ways) and understood more in the latter, generically "African" sense. [Back.](#)

Note 101: Interview with Julieta Chavango, 30 November 1995, Facazisse. Emphasis is Julieta's. [Back.](#)

Note 102: See Elena's comment on attitudes toward mission schooling (chap. 3). Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 103: Elena's birth name, Mayalatshama (literally, "she refuses to stay"), records her mother's unhappiness at her marital home and her final decision to give up on her marriage. Elena never knew her father, whom she says was so "angry" at his mother for her harsh treatment of her daughter-in-law that he decided to live in South Africa permanently. [Back.](#)

Note 104: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 105: *Etlelani*, the imperative plural, is used here not as a command but as an invitation and acceptance of the potters' request. Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 106: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 107: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 108: N'waMusakaza's mother would become Elena's *hahane* (usually, paternal aunt), thus separating the two young women by two generations, hence making Elena a *kokwana* (grandmother) to N'waMusakaza. [Back.](#)

Note 109: Neither Elena nor Ruti could remember the Shangaan name for this shellfish, although they were sure it was a sea creature and could only be found on the coast. [Back.](#)

Note 110: For "to be beautiful," Elena used the verb *kusaseka*, which can also mean to be nice, or admirable. [Back.](#)

Note 111: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1996, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 112: *Ganga* (or *muganga*) refers to a long ridge or plateau or to the high ground between two rivers, but it also means district, as in the area ruled by a *ndzhuna* (the headman or counselor under the chief). Elena uses it here in the latter sense as a term for her "zone" (as it is usually translated in Portuguese [*zona*]) within Xihlahla, a depressed area (*nkoveni*) near the river. Most chieftaincies that I visited consisted of from three to five *miganga*, always including *ka mukulu*, "the chief's place." [Back.](#)

Note 113: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 114: *kunanekele*, from *kunaneke*, to lay poles horizontally, e.g. for granary support. [Back.](#)

Note 115: *kuhlevela*, to tell in secret, give a hint to, give someone a "tip." [Back.](#)

Note 116: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1996, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 117: *Ka mukulu*, in its general sense as a *ganga* place-name, could refer to women who actually live in the chief's *muti*, or simply to women who live in the vicinity of the chief, within his *ganga*. [Back.](#)

Note 118: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 119: Interview with Julia Chambale, 25 November 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

Note 120: Interview with Julia Chambale and Laurinda Ubisse, 25 August 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

Note 121: *kuhomboloka*, to be crooked, twisted, warped, as a stick, a person's character. [Back.](#)

Note 122: *Kuvumba* refers to the work of actually fashioning clay pots; it does not include the steps of gathering the clay or firing pots. I tried many times to schedule a visit to the Xihlahla clay fields with Julia, and to coordinate a visit to Xihlahla with Julia's plans for firing her pots. While Julia always appeared enthusiastic, for a number of reasons it was very difficult to make or keep fixed appointments with her, and we never managed to get there together. [Back.](#)

Note 123: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town); interview with Julia Chambale and Laurinda Ubisse, 25 August 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

Note 124: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 125: Interview with Elena Khosa, 29 December 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 126: Unlike Elena, Julia put no decorative marks on her *makalangu*, perhaps because the sea snail Elena used was not locally available. Instead, she simply burnished the inside and outside surfaces of these vessels. [Back.](#)

Note 127: Interview with Julia Chambale, 25 November 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

Note 128: Interview with Julia Chambale, 25 November 1995, Xihlahla; interview with Julia Chambale and Laurinda Ubisse, 25 August 1995, Xihlahla. For example, Julia was lucky if she could get 3,000 *meticais* (in late 1996, about US\$0.25) for a *ximbitana*, while the cheapest (and poorest quality) *nguvu* available in Magude shops at the time cost 15,000-20,000 *mt*; sugar cost 8,000-10,000 *mt* per kilo; a loaf of bread cost 1,000-2,000 *mt*; flour cost at least 12,000 *mt* per kilo; and a one-liter container of corn (for seed or grinding for *vuswa*) cost about the same. Julia remembers getting a *dzuka* (2.5 *escudos*) for a *ximbitana* before independence, when two *macheleni* (four *dzuka*, or ten *escudos*, roughly US\$0.40) could buy a 5-liter *lata* of corn. [Back.](#)

Note 129: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 130: Ian Smith was the Prime Minister of white minority-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the war for Zimbabwean independence (mid-1960s to 1980). [Back.](#)

Note 131: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 132: Interview with Julia Chambale and Laurinda Ubisse, 25 August 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

Note 133: *kunyenetsa*, a very strong verb meaning to disgust, cause repugnance, be repulsive as a dirty, smelly person. [Back.](#)

Note 134: *Kubasa mbilu*. *Kubasa* means clean, pure, white, clear. This expression is usually translated into Portuguese as "to be courageous" and "to be patient." [Back.](#)

Note 135: As far as I could tell, Elena had never been a churchgoer and would not call herself Christian. However, like many people who have lived in or near Magude, with its long history of Swiss and Portuguese mission activity, she occasionally referred to God—the word *xikwembu* originally means *spirit* (as in ancestor spirit)—to explain mysterious or unconventional behavior or otherwise inexplicable good or bad fortune. In this sense the Christian *Xikwembu* plays the same role in human affairs as do the ancestors. [Back.](#)

Note 136: Interview with Elena Khosa, 6 March 1995, Matendeni (Magude town). [Back.](#)

Note 137: E.g., Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). [Back.](#)

Note 138: Interview with Julia Chambale, 25 November 1995, Xihlahla. [Back.](#)

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