

This paper represents the *first* attempt at a description of my continuing dissertation research and an engagement with literature I have encountered during my time in South Africa. I am deeply grateful to the History Department for allowing me to present, and welcome all comments and suggestions.

## **The Aesthetics of Communication, Communicating Aesthetics: Contemporary Zulu Ceramics & ‘Polite’ Production**

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Elizabeth Perrill, Dept. of the History of Art, Indiana University

### **Interview transcript selections 18/10/2006, discussing 03/23/2006: Elizabeth Perrill, Sithabile Cele, and Daliwe Magwaza.**

Sithabile Cele (SC): Usuku lokuqala siya eArts uyakhumbula ukuthi kwenzekani, sahlala nobani, sahlala kuphi? Ngicela uxoxe kabanzi nje yonke into eyenzeka ngalelosuku.

The first day you went to the Arts Centre, do you remember how things went, who was there, who sat where? I would like you to discuss how everything happened that day.

Daliwe Magawza (DM): Sahlangana edolobheni, ephethe amabhodwe ami esuka nawo eflathini, mina ngizosuka eMlazi. Sahlangana eWorkshop saya kwa-Arts Centre. Khathi singena kwakukhona usisi lo Hlengiwe, angimazi lo omunye igama lakhe. Kodwa babe ufour sebebonke. Safika sabeka izinkambi phansi, wase eyangibika uElizabeth, bathatha izithombe. Babuza ukuthi zenziwa ubani, ngasho ukuthi zenziwa uMa wami. Babuza nokuthi silitathaphi ubumba, ngasho ukuthi

silitathatha endaweni ekude nasekhaya. Bese kuyima siluyisa ekhaya sibumbe. Base bathi bangathanda ukuza ekhaya bezozibonela. Bathenga bathi bafuna ukuthenga kumina njalo angishiye imininingwane yami. Bathenga ngo cash, ngahamba senginemali yami nami. Ngangingazi ukuthi ngizobiza malini kodwa ngangazi ukuthi uMa wami ubiza malini. Ngahamba sengino R350. Ngahamba ngihappy, ngafonela uMa ngamutshela.

*We met in town; she had brought all the pots from her flat, I was coming from uMlazi. We met at the Workshop and we went to the Arts centre. When at the Art centre there were four ladies one of them was Hlengiwe, I don't remember the other white ladies. When we arrived we put the pots on the floor and Elizabeth introduced me, they took photographs. They asked who makes the pots and I told them it was my mother. They also wanted to know where we got the clay from. I told them we get it far away from our home, than we bring it to the home to make the pots. They said that they would like to come visit our home one day. They bought the pots and said I need to leave all my details with them because they are interested in buying from me again. They bought with cash, when I left I had money, I was so happy. I had R350, I phoned my mother to tell her. [break]*

SC: Ucabanga ukuthi wafunda ukuthi bathanda inkambi ezinjani?  
Do you think that you learned what types of pots they like?

DM: Bangitshela ukuthi abazithandi ezimnyama, bathanda ezibomvu. Wathi asibofaka iCobra polish hhayi upholishi omnyama. Abelungu abazithandi ezimnyama. Nalezi ezinkulu abazithandi bathanda ezincane. Kodwa bayazithenga nazo ezinkulu. Kodwa uthi abaqhamuka phesheya bathanda ezincane ngoba bayakwazi ukuzithwala. Bathanda imilobo emihle ayi enjengeyase Durban Station.

*They told me that they don't like the black ones, they like the red ones. She said that we should polish them with Cobra polish not the black polish. White people don't like the black ones and they like the small ones not the big ones. But they do also buy the big ones. The white people from overseas prefer the small ones because they are easy to carry when traveling. They also like beautiful drawings, not like the ones from Durban Station.*

**Elizabeth Perrill, narrative account of 23 March, 2006:**

*Daliwe and I had to take two trips to the car with our arms full of boxes or a large pots and arrived, in the end, with seven vessels of various sizes from 20 to 35 centimeters in diameter. I introduced Daliwe and Anthea Martin the Art Centre Director in mixed isiZulu and English. My Zulu and Daliwe's even more limited English were both at a loss in this nerve-wracking situation. Anthea tried to ease the way saying how happy she was that we'd arrived and that she had been trying to get pots from the Magwazas into the Art Centre for years.*

*After a brief pause, Daliwe looked at me and then, in the space between the pots and the boardroom table, she sat down on the floor, legs tucked to one side, hands in her lap with rounded shoulders, waiting. I looked fleetingly at the chairs, at Anthea standing next to her desk, and sat down on the carpeted floor with Daliwe. Anthea pulled a chair up next to us facing the pots, mentioning that Hlengiwe Dube, the staff member in charge of purchasing who speaks fluent Zulu, would be in shortly.*

*Hlengiwe entered and the evaluation of the work began. She stood over the group, pots and people. Each pot was lifted and visually inspected for cracks, rapped on with knuckles and listened to for hollow sounds indicating fractures, and even sniffed and rubbed to test the surface treatments, gestures which caused Daliwe to cast a glance of inquiry and surprise in my direction. Hlengiwe and Anthea both expressed their disappointment, looking directly at me, that the mouths of the pots were rough, that the largest pot had a hair-line crack, and that the drawing on one pot was far too similar to works produced in local street markets. Anthea inquired whether the Magwazas blackened their pots with shoe polish. There was at this point a length discussion of other polishes that could be used that might not have the strong smell of shoe polish, either black or brown, and that Cobra floor polish might show the contrasting burn marks left on pots by pit firings while still providing a nice shine.*

## **Introduction:**

Daliwe Magwaza's experiences exemplify the micro-level actions, communications, and anxieties that have been shaping ceramic aesthetic production through interstitial promotions and sales. Since her move to Durban in 2003, she has been acting as an intermediary for her family, traveling at least bi-monthly to her father's homestead in Mpabalana, KwaZulu-Natal. Daliwe has been confronted with and negotiating new situations and social roles with increasing frequency. With what she considers to be the proper reserve and a soft tone Daliwe politely accepts evaluations while quietly keeping her feelings and thoughts *phakathi*, inside.<sup>1</sup> Despite her newfound role as an agent within her family's ceramic sales, Daliwe has emphasized to me that she tries to maintain 'polite' *inhlonipho*<sup>2</sup> behavior regardless of her position in urbanized or rural spaces.<sup>3</sup> Yet, how is the deployment of *ukuhlonipha* negotiated between Durban and Mpabalana and how does it affect ceramic production?

The current paper is a first step within a dissertation writing process that contributes to ongoing discussions concerning the development and promotion of ceramic arts in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Using the interviews I have gathered to date, I am slowly burnishing my understandings of the communication styles practiced between Zulu-speaking ceramic artists and individuals promoting and purchasing ceramics in South Africa's urban centers. Sales and negotiations of ceramic objects to museums and white urban patrons have been taking place in KwaZulu-Natal at least as early as 1905.<sup>4</sup> The influence of non-Zulu patronage has lead scholars of Zulu ceramics to separate ceramics sold and held in collections into many symbolic categories, including 'domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking of moments when family members accuse her of influencing sales: Masebena kanjalo mina angibi right, kufanele ngiqhubeke ngibasize . kufanele mina noma ngizwa ukuthi ngifila bad ngaphakathi ngibe happy. Noma ngizwa ukuthi akusekho right kumele ngenze ngathi ngi happy.[When they do all of these things it hurts inside. But I have to smile and pretend that it doesn't make me sad, because I have to help them. Even if they sometimes blame me it hurts but I cannot show it, I always have to be happy.] Daliwe Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/06.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will try to adapt to an inter-linguistic negotiation of Zulu words. For example *hloniphile* (polite) when describing something in an adjectival form, *ukuhlonipha* (to be polite) when speaking of the overall construction or non-verbal aspects of politeness, and *isihlonipho* (polite speech) when discussing speech acts. I am indebted to the work of Stephanie Rudwick and Magcino Shange (2006, in press), and their engagement with R. Finlayson, in setting an excellent precedent for this word usage.

<sup>3</sup> D. Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/06

<sup>4</sup> Calder, 1996, 16.

ware,’ ‘*umsamo* ware,’ ‘tourist ware,’ and ‘collector’s pottery.’<sup>5</sup> These are categories that remain in flux, but within this process of categorization contacts between potters and patrons have been widely acknowledged as a force in shifting and re(de)fining the aesthetic qualities of Zulu ceramic vessels consumed with urban markets.<sup>6</sup> However, the preformative moments in which aesthetic (re)definition occurs have remained as silences in the scholarship.

Within this paper, I will discuss how communicative acts, particularly those that lie beneath the surface of explicit speech, are integral to understanding negotiations of aesthetic changes to *izinkamba* (Zulu beer pots) sold within urban South African spaces. This is the first step in a larger contextualization of Zulu ceramic creation and promotion within global networks of ceramic connoisseurship. Through an examination of Daliwe Magwaza’s interaction with the staff of the African Art Centre and a subsequent discussion of the Magwazas’ ceramic production and communicative negotiations, I hope to contextualize ‘polite’ communications as processes that mediate aesthetic change and the unfolding maintenance of categorizations of contemporary Zulu ceramic production. This case study deals exclusively with the Magwaza family and their engagement with sales and promotions. As I work through the over 80 interviews, extensive field-notes, and museum and archival research within subsequent dissertation chapters, I will explore the similarities and differences of communicative action employed by other Zulu-speaking independent ceramic artists working in both rural and urban settings in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **Part I: Aesthetics of Communication**

### **‘Normal’ Actions and Reactions**

I would first like to draw the reader’s attention to my description within the vignette above of Daliwe Magwaza sitting in the African Art Centre “*on the floor, legs tucked to one side, hands in her lap with rounded shoulders, waiting.*” Some readers

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<sup>5</sup> Armstrong 1998, 2005; Calder, 1996, 1998. One of the related chapters of my dissertation will focus on parsing out the particular aesthetic qualities which have been used over the last ten years in forming these categories and tying this process to networks of international promotions. However, this process will require an extremely detailed identification of aesthetic categories that have been used during this unfolding history of consumption and promotions that is not possible at present.

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong 1996, 1998, 2005; Garrett 1997, 1998; Calder 1996,1998; Leeb du Toit 1998.

might assume that an unfamiliarity or discomfort with the room's furnishings may have motivated Daliwe to sit on the floor and take this as a gesture of cultural miscommunication. However, I would like to flesh out our picture of Daliwe and to open space for a more complex reading of this act.

After moving to Durban in 2003, Daliwe spent a year searching for employment. At first, she was intent on finding a computer-training course to enroll in, but found that tuition costs were prohibitive. After adjusting her aspirations to the economic struggles of urban life, Daliwe submitted her CV to several positions she had found in newspapers, and began working as a part-time barrista, making coffee at a restaurant in the Gateway shopping mall, the largest mall in the Durban area. At a pay-rate of fifty rand a day, roughly seven U.S. dollars, she works seven hours a day making coffee for three to five days a week. When we have walked around the city's malls or city centre Daliwe has always seemed relatively accustomed to the material accoutrements of city life. During our interviews at my flat in Durban she has always sat comfortably in my lounge chairs. Likewise, I have visited the home in Umlazi where Daliwe lives with her cousins and was offered a seat on her family's lounge while sitting and chatting.

Despite this comfort with urban life, Daliwe sat immediately on the *floor* upon entering the African Art Centre. Yet, during our subsequent interviews, Daliwe did not think of her action of sitting on the floor worth remarking. When asked *directly* about where people sat and what they physically did she did not even acknowledge the non-verbal acts of sitting and standing, but rather discussed the introductions and instructions received.<sup>7</sup> I am curious in exploring what the act of sitting *phansi*, on the floor, might connote within Daliwe's unfolding interactions between the spaces of Mpabalana and Durban, and the ways that acts might invoke the participation in the negotiation of symbolic systems.

Sitting immediately upon entering a room is part of the overall *ukuhlonipha* system at Daliwe's home in Mpabalana. A visit to a friend, relative, or elder would all be marked as polite through sitting as one enters a room. This act is also widely understood within normative descriptions of *ukuhlonipha* practice. It is 'proper' for one to enter a

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<sup>7</sup> Daliwe Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/2006.

building/room and sit down immediately, rather than waiting to be offered a place.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent to this exchange, I have come to observe and have been told explicitly by art centre staff members that it is common for Zulu-speaking women entering the gallery space to sit in the same space, and that it has become something that is also un-noticed by staff members, a part of ‘normal’ commercial interactions.<sup>9</sup> Given the acceptable, unremarkable, and un-remarked-on, bodily comportment of all of the actors in this situation I take it to be a part of an embodied habitus.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, even in a non-for-profit institution like the African Art Centre, it would seem naïve to take the image of a commercial buyer standing over an artist for granted within the historical context of South African art connoisseurship. Sabine Marschall has even remarked on the African Art Centre’s particularly strong role, “in providing exhibition and sales opportunities for black artists, . . . and function[ing] as an important stepping stone into the white-dominated art establishment” by engaging in “presumed universal standards of quality determined by the discerning eye of the connoisseur.”<sup>11</sup> The connoisseur that Marschall is referring to is the late Jo Thorpe, of whom Hlengiwe Dube was an apprentice and employee. Within subsequent chapters of my dissertation I will explore the ways in which art retailers participate in connoisseurship to create commercial viable businesses within a global marketplace.

What I am interested in understanding further within this paper is how Hlengiwe’s connoisseurship is called upon by Daliwe in a specific framework of Zulu-based communicative action and subsequent negotiations of connoisseurship by the Magwaza family. Within the space of the African Art Centre, Daliwe and Hlengiwe’s actions were taken for granted, and seemed ‘normal’ to all actors in the situation except for myself, as my own practice and adaptation to *ukuhlonipha* bodily enactment has been a conscious

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<sup>8</sup> I have had this practice described to me multiple times both by the isiZulu staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg and have encountered it on every visit to rural and urban Zulu-speaking homes in KwaZulu-Natal. While informing foreign scholars of *ukuhlonipha* behaviors this is one of the first actions the UKZN staff impress as varying from European-based systems of polite behavior.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Dunn, personal correspondence, 19/10/2006.

<sup>10</sup> Hoy 1999, 12-13. Hoy is here referring to Pierre Bourdieu’s definitions of habitus. While Hoy is specifically focused on the bodily and embodied manifestations of habitus; Bourdieu’s definition reminds the reader of the socio-economic causes and implications of this ‘structured and structuring structure,’ particularly when it is perceived as ‘natural’. (1984, 170-2).

<sup>11</sup> Marschall 2001, 53-4.

adaptation over the course of several years. While Daliwe's positioning of herself on the floor of the art centre does not seem to be a strategic action, it can be understood in terms of embodied habitus in which we can account for "action as reasonable even if not the product of reasoned design, or as 'intelligible and coherent' without springing from an intention of coherences and a deliberate decision."<sup>12</sup> Within the context of *ukuhlonipha* systems of behavior, non-verbal communication, and responsibility the invocation of a 'polite' relationship between Daliwe and Hlengiwe takes on a richer texture as a negotiated isiZulu and a commercial habitus.

### **Bodily Ukuhlonipha**

One of the first monographs to focus entirely on *ukuhlonipha* is Otto F. Raum's, *The Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos Among the Zulu*, which established a strong precedent for the study of non-verbal components of *ukuhlonipha* that stood unattended to until the past decade. Following the work of A.T. Bryant, Axel-Ivar Berglund, A.C. Lawton, and Eileen Krige, Raum's work bears the historical markings of a taxonomic anthropological approach to understandings of this complex social structure. Raum's work is a particularly fastidious didactic catalogue of *ukuhlonipha* practices, and he goes into great deal of depth on women's practice of avoiding of the initial syllable(s) of a spouse or in-law's name during daily conversation, the iconic version of *ukuhlonipha* referred to in most of the literature mentioned above.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, Raum treats *ukuhlonipha* as an ordinary set of behaviors, despite his acknowledgement within the preface of his 1973 publication, *The Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos Among the Zulu* that 'avoidances and taboos' are,

not merely of academic interest. These sociological phenomena are of imminent practical importance. Among members of the 'Zulu Society' which flourished in the thirties and forties, and which represented 'educated' Zulu opinion, there was a decided inclination to preserve and revive avoidance customs. Hlonipha, as they are called, are an expression of the pyramid of respect upon which the Zulu ethos is raised.

- Raum 1973, 1.

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<sup>12</sup> Hoy 1999, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ruam 1973, 4-6.

Nevertheless, Raum's work also pointed out the reciprocal and gestural sets of normative behavior that were part of this register of isiZulu communication:

Hlonipha is not restricted to women, nor is it a mere linguistic phenomenon. Hlonipha as respectful avoidance is observed, as will be demonstrated, in many relations of superordination and subordination, by men and children, chiefs and commoners, nor is it restricted to avoidances but often covers 'positive' actions, from gestures to benefactions. The term has abstract aspects, its meaning shaded from to obey, e.g., one's parents, to sense of decency, (in a phrase like akusikho ukuHlonipha uma owesifazane ehlezi ngokuBhenyeka: there is no sense of decency when a woman sits with her knees up), and to approved custom in general. The aim of education may be described as ukuHlonipha (respectful attitude).

-Raum 1973, 5.

Contemporary scholars of *ukuhlonipha* concur with Raum that *ukuhlonipha* is not based upon 'mere linguistic phenomenon,' and have brought the study of this practice into a more historicized discourse.<sup>14</sup> Working on the negotiations and fluidity of *ukuhlonipha* in contemporary Durban, Elizabeth de Kadt conducted research on cross-cultural Zulu politeness. The participants within de Kadt's work overtly state what the potters in my interviews have often demonstrated, that non-verbal practices form the basis of polite Zulu communicative strategies. When reflecting on their participation in role-playing of different scenarios designed to explore the use of directives, "males and females [in the study] concur that politeness is expressed primarily by tone of voice and body language."<sup>15</sup>

In their work on the gendered aspects of politeness in urban Zulu-speakers' identities, Ige and de Kadt have pushed for an understanding of *ukuhlonipha* as a practice of politeness that diverges from 'Western' linguistic understandings of politeness theorized by the linguists Brown and Levinson.<sup>16</sup> With its primary focus on maintenance of 'face,' or of an individualistic self, Brown and Levinson's theory was first challenged

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<sup>14</sup> de Kadt, 1995. Ige and de Kadt, 2002. Rudwick and Shange, in press.

<sup>15</sup> Ige and de Kadt, 2002, 149.

<sup>16</sup> 1987.



due to its inadequacy in dealing with Japanese models of politeness.<sup>17</sup> Ige and de Kadt have further broken down this universalizing theoretical model by asserting that,

‘Face’ in African context is a public property that is shared and cared for by all . . . . Hence, politeness in the African context is not only about saving and losing ‘face’ with reference to the individual self, but also with reference to self as given to individuals by the society or culture.”

– Ige and de Kadt, 2002, 149.

Ige and de Kadt employed this definition of ‘face’ to explain the negotiations and obligations involved in requests within hierarchical relationships in contemporary KwaZulu-Natal. It is referring directly to an inter-subjective construction of self that in which *both* the ‘relations of superordination and subordination,’ as mentioned by Raum, are integral to the enactment of an embodied propriety.<sup>18</sup>

I would emphasize that the type of negotiations explored by Ige and de Kadt, and present in my observations of ceramic negotiations, are embodied within spaces of urban/rural fluidity and adaptation. If we understand *ukuhlonipa* as a dialogic system, constituted on both sides, rather than unidirectional subservience, *ukuhlonipa* practice can be understood as a highly adaptable system. The other implication is that within spaces of ceramic sales, both in the African Art Centre and within broader moments of ceramic negotiation, *ukuhlonipa*’s continued practice is also highly dependant upon *both* the *response* of ‘superordinates’ and the *deference* of the ‘subordinates’.

Sitting as she did in the African Art Centre, Daliwe’s ‘non-free’ body posture.<sup>19</sup> was claiming a participation in a system of symbolic actions, as well as marking her deference. She placed herself in the role of a ‘subordinate,’ but was also awaiting

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<sup>17</sup> de Kadt 1995, 59.

<sup>18</sup> This reciprocal and, I would emphasize, ongoing but often unconsciously enacted components of habitus are also part of what the ubuntu philosopher Mogobe Ramose has described as “be-ing becoming,” in which (inter)actions are part of a practice and philosophy of not separating the doer with the action of doing. (Ramose 1999, 41-56.)

<sup>19</sup> The methodologies of role-playing and close visual analysis of recorded dialogues are used as the primary research tool of Ige, de Kadt, and, Dhalielutchmee Appairaju, another of de Kadt’s co-author’s. The discussions with participants after role-playing helped to establish the terminology of ‘free’ and ‘non free’ body postures in Ige and de Kadt 2002. These publications have analyzed fairly limited sets of Zulu speakers, primarily students at universities and schools (de Kadt 1995, Ige and de Kadt 2002, Appalraju and de Kadt, 2002). I am thankful that this research has laid a foundation for the terminology of *ukuhlonipa* socio-linguistic analysis I use here, yet, only the briefest sketch is drawn for the interpretation and study of *ukuhlonipa* in a dynamic inter-cultural environment where power and commerce are key concerns of vested actions.

instruction and the acceptance of responsibility for the guidance of subsequent actions by the individual who took on the role of ‘superordinate’, in this case Hlengiwe Dube.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the art centre the “durable, transposable” dispositions inculcated by *ukuhlonipha* habitus were “adaptable enough to reproduced [themselves] as circumstances change.”<sup>21</sup>

In the non-verbal, embodied set of movements described above, I attempted to align myself with Daliwe Magwaza as someone to be instructed. This was a conscientious act on my part as a participant-observer wanting to understand the evaluative process shaping ceramic production and ally myself with Daliwe during her first trip to the art centre.<sup>22</sup> Though Daliwe’s actions were at the time slightly disarming I now perceive her to have been initiating a dialogic exchange within the discourse of *ukuhlonipha*. The director of the African Art Centre, Anthea Martin, suspended her role as a possible ‘superordinate’ by awaiting Hlengiwe’s arrival. Daliwe’s claim for her to accept the role of ‘superordinate’ was not reciprocated. In a dialogic understanding of *ukuhlonipha* where a claim of ‘subordination’ can be a call for support, it was Hlengiwe who responded to Daliwe’s claim, not only by her position standing above the group, but by responding to Daliwe’s non-verbal call for support, guidance, and acquiescence to the request that Hlengiwe purchase the ceramics that sat next to Daliwe. The bodily interactions between these two women directly parallel a role-playing exercise conducted by Elizabeth de Kadt:

. . . both constantly reinforce their status by posture and gesture, with the employer using typically free posture and gesture, while the employee sits down immediately on entering, without asking permission, and maintains non-free posture. While her few gestures are all prescribed behaviors signaling respect and the employer’s ‘free’ posture acknowledges a substantial status differential, these behaviors could be seen to be in the

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<sup>20</sup> Some scholars familiar with the female-male practices of *ukuhlonipha* may question the female-female power relationship; however, it has been shown within Finlayson’s work the importance of female-female respect (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Hoy 1999, 13.

<sup>22</sup> I also acknowledge that my presence added weight to Daliwe’s claim for a meeting at the Art Centre. However, my arrival by Daliwe was upon requests by both Anthea Martin for a means to get the Magwaza’s pots into the centre and Daliwe’s consistent requests to find a site of sales in Durban. Thus, I feel that a similar encounter would have taken place without my presence, though perhaps not as quickly without my conveyance of information.

employee's interest, in that they simultaneously more or less implicate the employer to an attitude of caring and responsibility.

-de Kadt 1995, 65.

In many ways Daliwe's claim was fulfilled, she was not only acquiesced to in the purchase of the works presented, but was also provided with guidance and input on the aesthetic preferences of both Hlengiwe and Anthea. In the setting of a commercial art centre, although it may be non-profit, 'caring and responsibility' were adapted and translated into commercial advice. Suggestions were made for the 'improvement' of the Magwaza's ceramic works according to Hlengiwe and Anthea's understandings not only of consumer demands but to supposedly 'universal' categories of connoisseurship.<sup>23</sup>

The smoothing out of the mouths, *imilomo*, of the pots was desired. The adherence to explicit sizes was to be taken into account for future commissions. And, the use of black and brown boot polish was identified as a practice that spurred disapproval. The possible use of an alternative polish, clear Cobra floor polish, was suggested, as it would reveal the swirling marks left after a smoke-firing but not smell as strongly. These recommendations were all provided as direct statements of desires, while Daliwe sat quietly. This form of direct requesting and silent reception again fits into models of *ukuhlonipha* strategies in isiZulu.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, an evaluation of these interactions as 'polite' within understandings of isiZulu linguistic scholarship too easily naturalizes the economic and semiotic systems in which rural art works are evaluated by tourists, scholars, or connoisseurs. Dichotomous relationships have become iconic within both scholarly and popular understandings isiZulu *ukuhlonipha* communicative action to the extent that it is almost assumed that asymmetrical relationships must exist for 'respectful' interactions to take place. Within the transforming habitus of *ukuhlonipha* practices these relationships could exist between ages, genders, or other power hierarchies based on structures within schools or

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<sup>23</sup> Again, this is a complex network of power relations that I hope to unpack in future writing. Citing the work of Bennetta Jules-Rosette and Anitra Nettleton, Ian Calder has noted that 'collector's potter' in KwaZulu-Natal "invariably invoke and experience of the 'exotic other,' and visual markers of African 'ethnic' specificity (such as fire-flashes)." However, I believe that understanding the system of power that defines ceramic connoisseurship in South Africa will require linking historical developments in collecting that are not only invested in concepts of African exoticism but to the traditions of British and Japanese ceramic connoisseurship that are highly impacted by the legacies of William Morris, Bernard Leach, and Yanagi Muneyoshi (Moeran 1984, 12).

<sup>24</sup> de Kadt 1995, 57.

business.<sup>25</sup> I suggest that an unintended form of *erasure*, to use the semiotic vocabulary employed by Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, has been taking place within depictions of *ukuhlonipha* which all too readily reinforce hierarchical, and when interactions between genders are at play, patriarchal social interactions as normative.

“Erasure is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away.”<sup>26</sup> The hierarchical interactions in isiZulu *appear* to be an inherent necessity, *iconic* within *ukuhlonipha* registers. Linguistic inquiry in an isiZulu context has historically highlighted dichotomous relationships, often royal households and patriarchy were a specific fascination in more structuralist and ‘originary’ understandings of Zulu cultural practice, as with Raum’s work. In contemporary scholarship, business/school settings and gender relationships are primary foci of research for many scholars interested in the ways that *ukuhlonipha* practices are adapting to urban contexts.<sup>27</sup>

Though the dialogic construction of power has been acknowledged within recent writings, I would like to suggest that there are also subtle moments and objectified material negotiations *within* and *around* the enactment of ‘polite’ hierarchical relationships that are integral to *ukuhlonipha* communication. These are moments which fall away if we focus only on the overt ‘normalized’ hierarchical aspects of linguistic acts.<sup>28</sup> An analysis of the negotiations of social power and their performative aspects which are enacted through more than mere dichotomies, fall out of the picture. Following de Kadt’s call for more in-depth analyses of non-verbal points of *ukuhlonipha*,<sup>29</sup> I would like to open the next section of the paper by asserting that *ukuhlonipha* is a communicative system which is formed as much by silence as it is by that which is

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<sup>25</sup> 1995, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Irvine and Gal, 2000, 38.

<sup>27</sup> see Ige and de Kadt 2002, de Kadt 1995, Apparaju and de Kadt 2002, Rudwick 2004. Rudwick and Shange, in press.

<sup>28</sup> Rudwick and Shange, in their forthcoming publication, provide a strong theoretical argument for the use of *isiHlonipho* speech as a powerful means for women’s pride in their Zuluness. The authors discuss the more open choice of many urban women in constructing their propriety through *isiHlonipho*; however, there is still a tone of *either* disempowerment *or* pride linked with *isiHlonipho* that does not allow for the simultaneous performative negotiations of *both* subordination and resistance.

<sup>29</sup> de Kadt, 1995.

stated. Within the silences there is a space created for flexibility in the negotiation of desires, social power, and change.<sup>30</sup>

## **Part II: Communicating Aesthetics**

How are aesthetic qualities of ‘Zulu’ ceramics sold in urban areas affected by normalized hierarchical communication styles and the silences that surround them? Are the un-remarked-on acts of sitting *phansi*, on the floor, and the quiet reception of the Art Centre staff merely neutral? Is it adequate to simply understand this communicative moment as an indication of receptivity? What processes of negotiation, and can we see taking place in and around the polite silence of potters creating work for urban markets?

Laba basekhaya bafunda ngokuthi umuntu mayezothenga uthenga ziphi kakhulu. Futhi bayasho ukuthi bathanda ziphi. . . . Nemilobo bayasho ukuthi thina sithanda onje. Like, uJuliet bayazi ukuthi uthanda onje. Laba base Underberg bathanda imilobo yezihlahla. So oMa bayazi ukuthi bathanda ziphi. Noma besengabatshelelanga abangaphandle. Khona umlungu owafikayo wabatshela ukuthi ngaphambi kokuthi balugudle ukhamba, kumele bafake icooking oil, khona lizo cwebezela. Bayigcobe yonke indawo bese beya libeka lome. Khona kuzothi usulugudla selicwebezela. Manje wonke umuntu uyakwenza lokho.

*The potters from my home learn what people will buy and which they will buy more often. . . . The drawings they also say which ones they like. Like, Juliet they know which ones she likes. The people from Underberg like the leaves design on the pots. So the potters know which ones people like. Even though they don't tell people from outside. A white man came he said that to make the pots shine more, before rubbing the pots with a stone they should first put cooking oil to make it shiny, than leave it to dry. After it dries, than they could rub it with a stone. Now everyone does it like that.*

-Daliwe Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/06.

The Magwazas have at least four major patrons from urban galleries and art centres, and the commentaries and actions of many individuals have been incorporated into the general understanding of external aesthetic desires and the internal group connoisseurship of what makes a good pot. Some innovations, such as the use of oil to create a high shine on pots surfaces treatment mentioned above by Daliwe [Magwaza],

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<sup>30</sup> In a highly optimistic suggestion, I would also like to call for an exploration of the practicability of *ukuhlonipha* within contexts of *collaboration* on the part of Zulu-speaking actors, or even between Zulu and non-Zulu speaking actors, scenarios which have fallen outside the realm of ‘polite’ possibilities. The possibility of collaborative polite interactions that could still be considered *ukuhlonipha* has occurred to me during many visits and discussions with artists as we relax and work on ceramic vessels.

have been adapted into a broader standardized practice. The selective incorporation of aesthetic change is indicative of the fact that potters within KwaZulu-Natal are negotiating the *overlapping* sets of aesthetic criterion aimed at specific patrons, an issue that will be explored below, as well as creating their own sets of familial connoisseurship.

With this acknowledgement of multiple audiences and the recreation of specific aesthetic qualities I would like to return to Daliwe's recollections of the African Art Centre's preferences concerning surface treatments.

Bangitshela ukuthi abazithandi ezimnyama, bathanda ezibomvu. Wathi asibofaka iCobra polish hhayi upholishi omnyama.

*They told me that they don't like the black ones, they like the red ones. She said that we should polish them with Cobra polish not the black polish.*

-Daliwe Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/2006.

Following the visit to the African Art Centre where these recommendations took place, I stayed at the Magwaza homestead in Mpabalana, near a tributary of the Tugela River, for a few days to discuss ceramic techniques and travel with the Magwazas to some points of sale.

During my stay, I had an extensive discussion with Khulumaleni Magwaza, Daliwe's mother, concerning the possible use of Cobra floor polish. Using a pair of pots that were on hand ready to be polished we applied both brown shoe polish and cobra polish surface treatments. As the vessels were coated, worked over with a toothbrush to get the polish into the crevices, and buffed first with a shoe brush and then cloth it became apparent that the Cobra polish was accumulating within the fine grooves of the pot's surface, leaving a noticeable white residue. There were several attempts made, by both Khulumaleni and myself, to use different brushes to remove the residue. However, Khulumaleni abandoned the experimentation much more quickly than I. She turned and continued inscribing lines onto a leather-hard vessel that she had been working on and allowed me to continue my efforts. Though no strict rejection of the Cobra polish was made, the silent look and abandonment of this small pink and black pot made me wonder what type of negotiation might unfold over the course of what both Khulumaleni and Daliwe Magwaza hope will become a regular business relationship.

Four months after my trip to with Daliwe to the African Art Centre, I also traveled with her and staff members of the African Art Centre to the Magwaza homestead. While

driving to the Mpabalana, Daliwe received a cell phone call from her family. The reason for this call was apparent shortly after our arrival. Female relatives who live perhaps twenty minutes walk from Daliwe's father's home were already showing up with pots. The vast majority of these were small and *bomvu* (red, which is how the Magwazas refer to pots treated with brown shoe polish). Daliwe had quite obviously re-emphasized the perceived preferences of the African Art Centre staff. However, there was also an obvious lack of any pots treated with Cobra polish.

The fact that the recommendations of the art centre were not fulfilled explicitly may be seen in two ways. On the one hand, it could be assumed that the labor involved in producing a vessel that was aesthetically pleasing by Khulumaleni, or the other Magwaza potters, using Cobra polish was simply disproportionately intensive and therefore impractical. Removing the white residue from the surface of a pot coated with Cobra polish would take a half-hour instead of a few minutes. However, there is also a longer history of the rejection of changing from shoe polish to other forms of surface finish in the Magwazas', and other potters', production. I have heard, and been told numerous accounts of, white connoisseurs complaining and expressing their dislike of shoe polish as a surface finish to potters, including the Magwazas. Despite this criticism, the shine of pots brought out by shoe polish that the Magwaza family, the Nala family, as well as potters in Eshowe, Nongoma, and Pongola is praised internally by fellow Zulu-speaking potters. One potter who recently learned of using shoe polish from the Magwazas and Ntombi Nala, a potter from near Eshowe, gave an explanation of her adoption of shoe polish as an aesthetically motivated. Commenting on the differences between the application process used in applying *amafutha enkomo* (cow's fat that many potters used prior to shoe polish) or shoe polish, she stated, "Kuyafana, ukuthi nje upholishi uzenza zibemnyama kahle." [It's the same, it's just that polish makes them [the pots] beautifully black.]<sup>31</sup> Other potters have recounted shining pots with shoe polish in a back room prior to a gallery exhibition, so as to keep this offending material out of the view of buyers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Peni Gumbi, Interview, 26/09/06. An alternate translation of this sentence could be [It's the same, it's just that polish makes them [the pots] black well/effectively.] Kahle has several meanings in isiZulu. However, I concur with my translators that Peni went on to state that she and her local customers preferred the look of pots with boot polish.

<sup>32</sup> Azolina Mccunu, Interview, 3/10/06. Shongaziphi Magwaza, Interview, 20/03/06.

Far from following dictates, when it comes to particular aesthetic qualities, potters can be selective in their responses to outside demands or suggestions. Nevertheless, the direct confrontation of buyers is rare. Declarations of aesthetic wants and desires are most often received with little or no commentary or discussion by rural potters in a style analogous with Dahliwe's closed body posture and polite passivity described in the first section of this paper. They are participating in a certain aspect of politeness that is elusive in the analysis of verbal discourse. Through silent reception and then the subsequent *selective* production and presentation of works for purchase that conform to perceived desires, but still satisfy familial aesthetic preferences, potters avoid any direct challenges to economic power structures. This is a style of non-confrontational behavior that allows the artist to adopt or reject aesthetic recommendations with subtlety, while still maintaining the mutually constituted 'face' relationships, as described by Ige and de Kadt.<sup>33</sup> It is through an elision in production or presentation that direct verbal confrontation or rejection is respectfully avoided.

This politics of presentation also arise within 'polite' negotiations of aesthetic preferences tied to concepts of 'authenticity'. Economic disparities between depressed rural areas and the wealth of urban patrons have made sales to urban consumers the desired and targeted market for many independent ceramic artists<sup>34</sup> working in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Indeed, the majority of the Magwaza family, and the even more well known Nala family, produce work exclusively for art centres and galleries.<sup>35</sup> Within South African ceramic scholarship the patterns of consumption and production that have resulted from this economic situation seems to have been cause for anxiety surrounding authenticity and the symbolic value of ceramic aesthetics.

. . . ill-informed dealers are dictating to these women what they perceive as potentially viable works of art, which have nothing to do with the dignified [umsamo] ritual, imbued with symbolism and meaning. The intrinsic beauty, meaning and dignity of this work is being undermined. . .  
-Armstrong 2005, 343.

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<sup>33</sup> 2002, 149.

<sup>34</sup> By 'independent ceramic artists' I mean artists who are not working for a studio, development project, or any other explicitly designed arts program. The focus of my overall research is on artists functioning outside of these sorts of projects and structures.

<sup>35</sup> Garrett 1998, 47. N. Nala, interview, J. Nala, interview, K. Magawaza,



Ian Calder has conducted thorough catalogue work within local museums and written extensively on the ways in which sculptural traditions have been erased from ceramic histories and what he terms “the so-called *amasumpa* style of decoration” has become the normatively held ‘traditional’ Zulu style.<sup>36</sup> He points out that,

It is apparent for most of this century that black ceramists have generally produced and marketed two kinds of wares, one for domestic consumption and the other – so-called tourist wares – in response to a foreign audience. Both are equally valid productions, but domestic traditions and those mainly to do with potter are frequently represented – uncritically, it is contended here – as the more ‘authentic’.

-Calder 1998, 61.

The construction and use of categories, such as ‘*amasumpa* style,’ ‘tourist,’ or ‘domestic’ wares within the above scholarly discussion of vessels, or at the very least the evaluative criterion that define them, have not gone unnoticed by rural potters.<sup>37</sup> At the Magwaza household a variety of pots with different aesthetic qualities of overall shape, decorative technique, or surface finish might be present in each potter’s home at any one time: flat or rounded, with raised or drawn designs, black or red in color. However, only a selection of pieces will be brought out for specific consumers. Depending upon the potters’ perceptions of the buyer’s desires or needs specific aesthetic categories will be taken into consideration. One example of this selective process that was described to me by several potters within the homestead, and mentioned above by Daliwe, is that ‘Juliet’ [Armstrong] does not like pots with flatter forms, called *ndoklo* (literally ‘flat’)<sup>38</sup> produced by the Magwaza family, and prefers blackened pots with *amasumpa* raised designs. Several of the fourteen potters in Mpabalana have told me that they keep works

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<sup>36</sup> Calder 1997, 1.

<sup>37</sup> As mentioned in the opening section of this paper, attempts to separate the wares into those that have been affected by ‘foreign audiences’ and those which have not, scholars have tried to place ceramics produced and held within provincial collections into categories such as ‘tourist ware’ ‘collector’s pottery,’ ‘umsamo ware,’ and ‘domestic ware’. (Armstrong 1998, 2005; Calder, 1996, 1998.) However, while gathering over eighty interviews with potters in KwaZulu-Natal and photographed hundreds of ceramic vessels, both in ceramists’ homes and national collections, I have come to realize that the lines between these ware categories are best captured through Calder’s emphatic use of the term ‘so called’ in describing ‘*amasumpa* ware’. ‘So-called’ here is as apt as the South African catch phrase ‘so-called coloured;’ it connotes a historical complexity and a constructed character of the categories in use. The construction and constant negotiation of these scholarly categories will remain the subject of another chapter. Within the present paper I am interested in exploring the communicative acts that centre on the artists’ perspective on this discourse.

<sup>38</sup> Thandiwe Magwaza, Interview, 20/03/2006.

produced for other buyers out of sight when Juliet visits. This selective display is a rich area of communicative action that is integral to the negotiations of ‘politeness’ and ‘face’ discussed above.

The selective display of work to known buyers maintains both the Magwazas’ and the buyer’s socially produced senses of ‘face,’ as well as acknowledging their knowledge of a shared set of socially constructed aesthetic markers. The artists I have spoken with in the Magwaza household have remarked on the anxious tone with which Juliet has received flattened *ndoklo* forms and the shift away from the use of raised applied designs, *amasumpa*. They have also discussed extensively their perceptions of Juliet’s power as a scholar who also brings in and advises buyers.

Mayehamba nabanye ufike abakhombise ukuthi bathenge maphi amabhodwe, abakhombele. Noma umuntu ethanda olunye uzothi akathathe lolo alishiwo uyena.

*When she comes she comes with people she arrives and points out which pots they should buy, she points it out to them. Even if a person likes a different one she will say he/she should take the one she said.*

-Dahliwe Magwaza, Interview, 18/10/2006.

The production and presentation of works that are rounded, blackened, and bear *amasumpa* at the Magwaza homestead can be understood within the theoretical framework of mutually constituted concept of ‘face’ associated with *ukuhlonipha*. Within the discourse of ‘face,’ the Magwazas are asserting their desire to continue in a relationship with Juliet. “Conforming to the behavior expected of one’s group signals one’s desire for membership in the community.”<sup>39</sup> The community here is that of potters who are known to produce the *amasumpa* style of decoration. ‘Conform[ity]’ is possibility because of the Magwazas’ astute perceptions of Juliet’s anxiety, which seems tied to her statements that ‘traditional pottery’ is being “commodified and bastardized by entrepreneurs.”<sup>40</sup> As with the Magwazas’ negotiation of the African Art Centre’s recommendation to use Cobra polish, a dialogic (re)construction of a system of aesthetic value takes place not in the realm of words, but in a physical negotiation and objectification, in pots. Socially perceived roles and needs, here to assuage an anxiety and

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<sup>39</sup> De Kadt 1995, 145.

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong 2005, 344.

continue a patronage-relationship, are maintained. The Magwazas respond to consumers' demands or aesthetic preferences with prescriptive<sup>41</sup> selections and displays of a portion of their overall ceramic production.

However, there is also a fascinating blending and 'bundling' that occurs within the satisfaction of a consumers symbolic categories.<sup>42</sup> The 'material' existence of pots means that they *cannot* bear the qualities that satisfy one 'iconic' value, for instance the 'traditional' *amasumpa* raised designs,<sup>43</sup> without bearing other material, aesthetic qualities. Each pot cannot bear a design without also having a specific type of surface treatment, shape, or size. The same pot might be at one time marked, or marketed, as desirable or 'traditional' through its raised *amasumpa* designs within one context and in another be perceived, through a rub and a smell of the surface, as undesirable and 'non-tradition' because an artist has used shoe polish instead of rubbing the surface with *amafutha enkomo* (cow's fat). Thus, ceramic artists must negotiate the 'bundled' sets of qualities that are taken to be symbolic or iconic by different consumptive audiences and are "thoroughly enmeshed with the dynamics of social value and authority."<sup>44</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks and Questions**

While entering into specific processes of politeness that include embodied moments of non-verbal communication, non-confrontational methods of receiving criticism or advice, and mediated processes of production and presentation the Magwazas, and other ceramic artists producing work in rural KwaZulu-Natal, are constantly transforming and negotiating the dynamic aesthetics of their ceramic production. As we see above, compliance and subtle resistance to outside demands *both* play a part in the creative and economic processes of ceramic production. Artists are also (re)creating forms of *ukuhlonipha* politeness and indirect communication within commercial interactions. Within not only silences and actions, but the pots that they produce the Magwazas and their patrons are constantly negotiating and the symbolic politics of 'tradition,' 'authenticity,' and 'value'.

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<sup>41</sup> The linguistic connotations of the word prescriptive, as the attempt to impose correct rules of language, should be read here.

<sup>42</sup> Keane 2003, 414.

<sup>43</sup> Calder 1997, 1,15.

<sup>44</sup> Keane 2003, 415.

The questions that now confront me within my research and writing are tied to larger structures of power and patronage. Artists practicing rural-based production, like the Magwazas, and the patrons who contact them directly are also part of a broader connoisseurship in ceramics. The negotiations and (re)constitutions of both systems of *ukuhlonipha* and aesthetic evaluation mentioned above are functioning within networks of global ceramic consumption. Within my dissertation writing process, I will attempt to contextualizing some of the evaluative negotiations discussed within this paper in relation to historical discourses and contemporary practices of global ceramic connoisseurship and consumption.

It is within these networks that the economic viability of Zulu ceramic arts sold in urban spaces is often determined. Institutions like the African Art Centre and other commercial venues, are constantly trying to pinpoint markets. Most recently the African Art Centre moved from the Tourist Junction in downtown Durban to 94 Florida Road, on one of the most ‘hip’ roads within upper to upper-middle class suburban life. Within his reportage on this recent move Alex Sudheim of the *Mail & Gaurdian* newspaper remarked that the centre “can finally shed the ‘tourist’ stigma from an establishment committed to removing the spurious distinction between art and craft.”<sup>45</sup> As South African art institutions refine and redefine their roles, so may the qualities and categories of consumption and aesthetic evaluation shift and be recontextualized within urban consumptive geographies and international markets. The implications of the unfolding history of ceramic promotions and aesthetic categorization remains a topic to be parsed out in relation to the silences and symbols of ‘polite production’.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Oct 20-26, 2006, 10.

<sup>46</sup> \*My sincerest thanks to Marijke du Toit, Bernard Dubbeld, and Stephanie Rudwick for their valuable comments on drafts of this text. Thanks also to my research assistants Sithabile Cele and Nothando Mabaso for their consistent patience. I would also like to thank the staff of the African Art Centre, Daliwe Magwaza, and all of my interviewees; their interview time is certainly worth much more than the compensation provided.

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