

A documentary film on the Magwaza potters' production of Zulu beer  
ceramics

by

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“As the candidate’s supervisor, I have /have not approved this thesis/dissertation for submission.”

Signed:

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## **Declaration**

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Pietermaritzburg 2006

## Abstract

This dissertation consists of two components. Firstly, a documentation of the production of Zulu beer ceramics by the Magwaza potters of Mpabelane, using the medium of documentary film; secondly, a written consideration of issues of representation, in relation to the documentary film, regarding the ceramists and the ceramics.

In October 1994 I stayed with the Magwaza family for 5 days. During this time 12 of the Magwaza women produced vessels. They were Khulumeleni Magwaza, Shongaziphi Magwaza, Thandiwe Magwaza, Bonisiwe Magwaza, Esther (also called Buyaphi) Magwaza, Sholoni Magwaza, Buzephi Magwaza, Sindisiwe Magwaza, Mkoso Magwaza, Thuleleni Magwaza, Konzeni Magwaza, Qikiza Magwaza and Mancani Magwaza.

The vessels were produced over four days. The potters each individually produced a vessel using the coiling method. On the first day the vessels were formed using the coiling method. Decoration was done on the second day. The vessels were decorated with either *scraffito* or applied *amasumpa* (little nodes or warts), or a combination of both methods. On the third day fat (vegetable oil or soap) was applied to the vessels and they were burnished with river stones. At sunrise of the fourth day the vessels were fired. Dried aloe was packed below and around the vessels. A small pile of dried grass was packed on top of the aloe kiln. This was lit and the flames spread from the top down, burning for 25 minutes. After this the pots were blackened by various means.

This process was filmed and edited. A year after the filming an interview was conducted with Khulumeleni, Shongaziphi and Thandiwe Magwaza to clarify some of the production methods that they used.

The paper considers issues of representation prior to filming and editing the documentary, as well as post-production considerations of these same issues. The pre-production consideration section is based on various extracts from texts on representation, particularly of a cultural other. The post-production analysis reconsiders these notions of representation in the light of what occurred during filming and editing.

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**The Magwaza potters’ production of Zulu beer ceramics – Dvd in pocket inside back cover**

# **MAFA thesis: A documentary film on the Magwaza potters' production of Zulu beer ceramics.**

## **Pre and post-production considerations on the documentary film.**

### **1. Introduction**

Various aspects of the production of Zulu beer ceramics have been previously researched and written about. This thesis aims to record the production of these vessels using the visual means of documentary film to compensate for the previous lack of documentation of the production of these ceramics in this way, and for the descriptive qualities which film will bring to this documentation of the production of these vessels.

In addition to focusing on creating a visual record of this ceramic practice, there will be the additional focus on the method of representation of both the ceramists and ceramics. Reflexive concerns of being an outsider filmmaker, that is, someone culturally other to the ceramists, will be discussed.

This paper consists of the preparation for making the documentary, working with and filming the ceramists, as well as post-production considerations.

## **A. Pre-production considerations**

### **2. Research paradigm**

The theoretical position I will adopt in this project is qualitative research on an aspect of ceramic production. The qualitative paradigm is suitable to this project because of its focus on relativistic truth as opposed to the quantitative paradigm with its focus on absolute truth (Locke et al 1993: 99).

An additional statement of Lawrence Locke's clarifies his statement on relativistic and absolute truth: he claims that people make sense of and create their own reality, and understanding (Locke et al 1993: 99). This idea of multiple realities and relativistic truth is applicable to this project due to it being based on an art/craft practice - where ideas of beauty and worth are subjective.

In addition to this, qualitative research is suitable for data that the researcher wants to treat in a descriptive way (Moore 2000: 149), which this project will do. My work will be exploratory, and descriptive on the found phenomena, taking note of aesthetic and cultural aspects of the ceramic vessels produced by the Magwazas (Dane 1990: 5-8).

Regarding gathering and analyzing data in qualitative research, Nick Moore states that gathering the data in qualitative research is less structured than the collection of data for quantitative research, and various informal techniques can be used. The unspecified



nature of data gathering can be problematic, so it can be difficult to plan exactly how it will be captured in advance (Moore 2000: 121, 128). Data analysis will be inductive as opposed too deductive. Locke states that with qualitative research, data is collected and then theory is created to explain it, as opposed to quantitative research where data is collected to test a theory. There may be some preconceived ideas, but focus develops with the project (Locke et al 1993: 100).

### **3. Focus of research**

I shall focus on the production of the documentary film describing the production of the vessels. I shall also focus on issues of representation of the ceramists and ceramics in the film.

Although this project will to some extent cover similar ground to previous research, the film format should validate this research, as this information has not been previously extensively presented in such a format.

Regarding the choice of film over writing, film is the best way to document this artistic practice because of its visual descriptive qualities. For example, how the ceramist coils the clay, and moulds and shapes it into a vessel will be well described by a moving image. The element of time will be included in the description of how the vessels are produced. Although time will be compressed in the film in general, understanding how the ceramists work over time, moving from step to step makes the description interesting

and more accurate. Bill Nichols states that films give a visual representation for which the written language gives us concepts (Nichols 2001: 65). Images can be seen as having a closer and different link to their subject, and portraying the living experience better (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 1, 35). Creating a visual representation of the production of Zulu beer vessels and portraying the living experience of their creation is what I hope to achieve with this film.

#### **4. Previous research on Zulu ceramics, Zulu culture and documentary filmmaking**

##### **4.1. Zulu ceramics**

This project is primarily part of the continuum of research on Zulu beer ceramics. The main difference between this project and previous papers on Zulu beer ceramics is that it is visually based as opposed to textually based. No specifically new information is being sought; the value of this project comes through it being presented in film form, and clarifying the process of production of the vessels through a visual means.

Various papers have been written on Zulu ceramics, these include:

*Classification and collapse: the ethnohistory of Zulu ceramic use* – Kent D. Fowler (2006)

*The Magwaza family* – Juliet Armstrong (1998)

*The Tourist Potters at Mtunzini* – Juliet Armstrong (1998)

*Beer* – Mary de Haas (1998)

*The Social Life of Pots* – Dieter Reusch (1998)

*Nesta Nala : An Overview* – Ian Garrett (1998)

*The Magwaza Family – Potters of Distinction* – Juliet Armstrong (1997)

*Umsamo Ceramics* – Juliet Armstrong (1996)

*Traditional Zulu Pottery* – Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder (1996)

*Reflections Concerning the Pottery from KwaMabaso, Msinga* – Dieter Reusch (1996)

*Amasumpa in Ceramics* – Juliet Armstrong (1995)

A general overview of these papers on Zulu beer ceramics provides a brief history of pottery in the Kwa-Zulu Natal, and a mention of the lack of documentation up to this point. (Armstrong and Calder 1996: 1)

The cited papers refer to various aspects of Zulu ceramics, such as who produces the vessels, and who teaches the potters their skills. The practices in general of making and using pots, as well as specific potters are discussed in these papers. These papers also focus on pottery's everyday use, where it is kept in the house, and the ritual contexts of pottery in Zulu life - for example ancestor commemoration, and communality. A further focus is the economic and stylistic aspects of making pots to sell. Beer is looked at in detail, how it is made, its use as a nutritional food source and its celebratory use. The different types of pots and their functions are described. When it comes to the production of the pots, how clay is collected, how the pots are made, tools used in making, decorating and firing are all described. The different types of designs and what they symbolize are described in detail.

In addition to book reviews I have reviewed two documentary films as part of this literature review. *Upangela* (Ruddiman, Ndlovu 2003), a 16-minute film, shows the ceramist Ntombi Nala producing a specific vessel in the museum setting. Dieter Reusch made a previous film on ceramics in the Msinga area, in the late 1980's, which is unavailable. The second film I have reviewed to see how the subject of presenting a South African artists work and life is dealt with. *Muelelwa – Noria Mabasa* concentrates on the life and history of the Venda sculptor.

A positive aspect of using film as a medium for presenting documentary research on Zulu ceramic vessels is that it has been done so little in the past. My proposed project will focus on different artists, a wider variety of types of vessels being produced, and the setting will be the home of the artists where they usually produce and use the vessels. The variations between my project and this previous work warrant this additional project in the field of Zulu ceramics.

The cinematography of both of the reviewed films gives direction on what to avoid and which techniques work well. Zooms and overuse of effects detract from the information. Shots of family members and the surrounds aid in setting the scene and mood. Simple cinematography works well, with the camera either staying still on a subject, or making slow pans. Quick movements of the camera are distracting.

#### **4.2. Zulu culture**

While previously mentioned texts on Zulu ceramics include some information on Zulu culture the book *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* by Axel-Ivar Berglund, published in 1976, looks at the whole of Zulu culture and life and includes beer, communicating with the ancestors, and the ritual use of beer in this communication.

#### **4.3. Documentary film**

I have used four texts to research documentary film making. *Directing the Documentary* by Michael Rabiger and *Introduction to Documentary* by Bill Nichols are both fairly straightforward texts. The additional two texts pertain more specifically to this project, *Cross Cultural Filmmaking* by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor emphasizes documentary making when the filmmaker is from a different culture to the participants and *Woman Native Other* is written by Trinh Minh-ha, a filmmaker who has explored the ideas of ethnography in film, particularly in *Reassemblage*, a film she made about ethnography and African women. In this text she does not refer specifically to documentary, but to how people, particularly women, are written about and represented.

#### **5. Using visuals in research**

Marcus Banks refers to three ways of using visuals in research: making images from what is directly in front of the camera, looking at already existing images, and collaborating with people to make new images (Pink 2001: 30). This thesis focuses on collaborating with the Magwazas to make new images.

This project is about using visuals in research, and as the research body. The general ideas found in Sarah Pink's text *Doing Visual Ethnography* can be applied to using images in art history and cultural studies research. These ideas are 'a critical "postmodern" theoretical approach to subjectivity, experience, knowledge and representation, a reflexive approach... and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity' (Pink 2001: 2).

Using a visual medium for this project has two primary positive points (referred to above). Firstly, research on Zulu ceramists' working methods using a visual medium to record information has not been done extensively in the past. Secondly, the strength of using documentary film is in its ability to accurately record and clearly describe the physical. For example, when describing the coiling and moulding of a vessel or the application of decoration it will be very clear what the ceramists are doing. The inclusion of time and motion in recording information will add to the effectiveness of the information.

The appropriateness of the visual method can be looked at in two ways according to Pink. These are the fit to the research question, and in relation to the technological and visual culture of the people involved (Pink 2001: 33). In answer to the first question – the visual presentation of the vessels and their makers can be more precise in its description than text would be, particularly of the technical production of the vessels. Regarding its use in relation to the visual culture of the participants, there are some problem areas. These are that the participants are not very well acquainted with this technique, although on a

research visit to the Magwaza household the camera was well received by the majority of people present, particularly the playback function. One of the members of the household, the only man present, was the one person to complain about the camera, making it clear that he did not want to be filmed.

## **6. Representation and reflections on working as an ‘outsider’ filmmaker**

### **6.1. Representing the ceramists**

Barbash and Taylor define working with people culturally different to yourself (the researcher) as having an outsider identity - as opposed to being an insider, that is, being of the same cultural background to the participants in the research (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 72). The primary problem linked to researching people, or the work of people, of a different cultural background is *othering*. I stated in my proposal: ‘As a white female researcher looking at rural African artists, the representation of the participants and the issue of *othering* is a concern’. My primary concern regarding the representation of the Magwaza ceramists in this project is how to avoid *othering*.

*Othering* involves marginalizing those different to you. It could also be interpreted as a two way process with the researcher and participants viewing each other through such strong cultural biases that information is not correctly received and interpreted. The audiences’ perception may also involve *othering* of the participants or subject of a film.

In reflecting on being an outsider and someone making a film on people from a different cultural background, there are two comments that I would like to consider. The first is by anthropologists James Clifford and George Marcus in *Writing Culture* (1986), the second is a comment by filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha relating to her film *Reassemblage* (1982) made with and about African women.

**Comment 1:** In *Writing Culture* Clifford and Marcus refer to the ‘...practice of writing about, against and among cultures,’ (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 3).

**Comment 2:** Trinh Minh-ha stated of herself that: ‘she would “speak nearby” rather than “speak about” Africa’ (Nichols 2001: 125).

Both comments refer to the different ways that a researcher can write or talk about a culturally different other. I think that, in the case of this project, the statements can also be interpreted in terms of recording and presenting images of a culturally different other.

The main premise behind Clifford and Marcus’ statement is that there is more than one way to write (about people from a culture different to ones own), and that writing is not a neutral activity. Writing may no longer claim “...transparency of representation and immediacy of experience”, but that “literary procedures pervade any work of cultural representation...” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 2, 4 respectively). Metaphor, figuration and narrative are all referred to as examples of literary procedures.



This notion can be applied to the process of documenting and presenting images of people, although the applicable procedures would not be literary, but filmic. For example: narrative structure, composition, angle, timing, chiaroscuro and sound.

The opinion of the ceramists will be differently mediated in this project, as compared to written research, but mediated nonetheless. With a written work what is said and done by participants is mediated by the rewriting of the researcher. With a filmed project the participants can talk directly and be recorded, although this information will nonetheless be altered by the presence of the researcher and the camera, and again by the editing procedure. The filmmaker/researcher can give a voiceover as to their own opinion, or they can show their thoughts by implication in the way that the ceramists are filmed.

Regarding the representation of a cultural other, the Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha's film, *Reassemblage*, is a relevant source to utilize. This film delves into the idea of filming a cultural other, commenting on previously made ethnographic footage, and the effect of its representation of the other. Trinh Minh-ha's comment on her film *Reassemblage*, made in Africa and focusing on African women, underlines the idea of reflexivity. This idea of speaking nearby, rather than directly commenting on has been helpful to me as a researcher. Another way of describing this is to say that the subject (the ceramics and the ceramists) are approached in an indirect way, information is not demanded of them with the presumption that they will definitely provide it. Trinh Minh-ha's idea helped me understand a way around the problem of simply filming what I saw and saying what I thought about from a judgmental point of view. This has affected my

approach to the ceramists and ceramics: the ceramists cannot be asked to perform for the camera; regarding the ceramics: there are many contexts and ways of looking at them.

Both statements highlight the question of how you write about the cultural other. Regarding the researcher in the triangle of researcher, participants and audience, both Ann Gray and Bill Nichols state that the researcher needs to question their place, and where they locate themselves (Nichols 2001: 62, Gray 2003: 2). This location of self means deciding how the researcher places herself in relation to the subject (ceramics), participants (ceramists) and the audience. Where you place yourself in relation to others decides how you will write about/represent others.

Gray also states that the researcher should appear in the first person, and take responsibility for the work (Gray 2003: 60). This idea is confirmed by Barbash and Taylor who say that the filmmaker should be direct, tell the participants that you want to make a documentary and why (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 44, 46). The researcher needs to explain to the subjects that what they are doing is important, and that the film will give other people the chance to see and appreciate it, and that it is good to make records of culture. Michael Rabiger says that as the filmmaker you should show that 'you are there to learn from experts; that is your role, and that is what you should project', he also states that people will only let you film them if they feel a real interest from you, and that the film will show evidence of the relationship between the researchers and the participants (Rabiger 1998: 128, 191). This is realistic, as who could be expected to allow themselves to be filmed without an element of trust, as the process of filming can feel invasive and

exposing. Most viewers can tell the attitude of the filmmaker towards their subject and participants, the personality of the filmmaker is revealed by the film (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 50). Language skills are also an important tool, even if communication is only rudimentary (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 46).

*Othering* can also be avoided by breaking down the hierarchy between participants and researcher and making the project collaborative (Rabiger 1998: 128). The ceramists will already be collaborating by making the pots and allowing themselves to be filmed; but could give further input on seeing footage, and giving feedback. It is also possible to take a laptop to the participant's home, and show them footage in this way. Participants should be represented as individuals, not as archetypes of an exotic culture. Images that are common ground to all people, like families eating together, people talking to each other, and childcare can be included in the footage.

**Gender** also plays a role in representation. Trinh Minh-ha refers to films made by women being different to a films made by men, or about men. She states that they should not speak through the language of men, as a woman should not express herself through men's words or norms (Minh-ha 1989: 20), or be interpreted inside the pattern where the male is the norm (Minh-ha 1989: 101). A woman making a film about women should create something different to a man producing a film about women. I do not want this film to make any overt feminist statement, but throughout I want an underlying stream of thought to be that this is about something specific to women, and represented by a woman.

African women have been subjugated throughout history. Hardly anything has been written about African women that have not presented them as minor elements (Minh-ha 1989: 107). Third world women are not obliged to educate the viewers-of-the-other about themselves; the patriarchal pattern of men towards women should not be repeated in western to non-western woman interaction (Minh-ha 1989: 85, 86).

## **6.2. Representing the ceramics**

The various ways of visually representing vessels can bring different meanings to them. For example, a vessel can be pictured from different angles, lighting and settings. A vessel standing on its own in a cabinet in a gallery, with spotlighting, can have an iconic appearance, whereas if it is shown on the ground next to a hut, it can hold less or more value, depending on the viewer. In looking at images (of ceramics in this case), whether still or moving, Gillian Rose provides a summary of the aspects to be considered: composition, content, colour, spatial organization, light and expressive content. Aspects specific to moving images are mise-en-scene, montage, sound and narrative structure (Rose 2003: 53).

Comparing film to still images, the main difference is that in a single image the pot is never seen in the round, or from multiple viewpoints in a still image. It becomes a flattened two-dimensional object. With film it is possible to demonstrate more of the roundness and three-dimensionality of a vessel, as it can be shown from various angles and the camera can move around the vessel.

Rabiger refers to the subject in a mythical sense, saying that every community and family has its own icons reflecting belief, and that the filmmaker needs to find out what mythical role their subject has (Rabiger 1998: 45, 46), and I think that these ceramics can be looked at in this way. According to Berglund, Zulu beer vessels function in a symbolic way, for example the burnished, dark and shiny surface of the pots can be seen as a symbol of the type of place that the ancestors/shades like to dwell, which is somewhere dark and cool (Berglund 1976: 17).

## **7. Film-making methods**

According to Barbash and Taylor the following should happen prior to filming the main project: there should be initial fieldwork, the participants should be acquainted with the filmmaker, a budget is drawn up, and equipment and crew are arranged (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 281-288).

Research footage is where the production of a film should begin (Rabiger 1998: 131; Barbash and Taylor 1997: 78, 284). After the research footage the film should be planned regarding style and narrative structure to give an idea of the end product (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 78, 284).

Visual and verbal information will be collected while visiting the ceramists, including the Magwaza homestead where most of the older women work as ceramists, Azolinah

Mcube, and Penny Gumbi. Filming will utilize various cameras, tripods and microphones that are available in the CVA. The editing program is Avid.

Regarding crew, one cameraperson should be enough, if no adjustments to lighting and sound are required. This method would utilize the microphone on the camera, which has been used up to now with good results, and available lighting. If better sound is aimed for, an additional person and microphone are required. With one cameraperson lighting conditions will not be able to be adjusted, but natural light can be used for exterior work and reflector boards can be set up in dim interior conditions prior to shooting. A translator would be valuable during shooting, although if the participants understand what is required of them prior to shooting this will not be necessary. A translator will be necessary for subtitling during editing.

I have already shot some general footage at the Magwaza household, and I believe that it would be a mistake to pick out two or three ceramists of the family to work on the final project. It would be better to allow everyone that wants to, to make a vessel on camera. All of this footage will not be included in the final footage, but it will provide an interesting record of all the ceramists and their individual work. The extra time this will take is not problematic in the whole schedule of the project, as the editing will take many more hours than the shooting regardless of whether one or many ceramist are focused on during shooting.

### **The different modes of film: which choice for this film?**

Nichols, Barbash and Taylor, and Rabiger all discuss various different types of documentary films in their texts. There are six main modes or types of documentary film according to Nichols; these are poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative (Nichols 2001: 33, 34). Barbash and Taylor's text confirm four of these modes (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 19-31). I will only discuss aspects of three types of documentary film that are most relevant to this project. In addition to these three modes/styles, Rabiger discusses various modes of films, of which two relevant categories are described here (Rabiger 1998: 336, 337).

Poetic or impressionistic mode has a visual as opposed to a verbal emphasis (Nichols 2001: 33, 34, Barbash and Taylor 1997: 19-31). This mode could work for the areas of the project that concentrate on visual description, such as the production of the vessels. There are some areas where there is a visual emphasis, but a further verbal explanation will make the situation more clear, for example, the area on decoration of the vessels, as the patterns of decoration and the blackening are linked to a verbal knowledge; what the patterns signify is most easily explained verbally. So the poetic mode is useful for explaining areas of the project where a visual description is sufficient, but may need to be accompanied by voiceover or subtitles in some cases.

Observational film is about trying to create a film as though the filmmaker was not there (the fly on the wall effect) (Nichols 2001: 33, 34). This is an idea to bear in mind during filming, but is impossible in actuality, as the participants will always react to the presence

of the camera. It has some appeal in that the idea of filming things as they would be without any outside influence is interesting, but seems objectionable in another way – that of expecting them to fulfill some viewers idea of being ‘natural’, to be so different as not to even react to the presence of the filmmaker as a presence.

Reflexivity is the opposite to observational, it is about focusing on the assumptions of filmmaking, and the effect of the filmmaker taking part in and influencing the film (Nichols 2001: 33, 34, Barbash and Taylor 1997: 19-31), that is, interacting with the participants of the film during the making of the film. This, like the observational method, has some good qualities, particularly the emphasis on self-awareness, but again could be taken too far. There could be too much interaction and suggestion from the filmmakers, distorting what is being captured on film.

Rabiger mentions two modes relevant to this project. They are the event centered film and the process film, which shows a chain of events making a significant process (Rabiger 1998: 336, 337). These types of film are a useful way of approaching the documenting of the process of making, decorating, burnishing and firing of *utshwala* vessels.

I have chosen poetic, observational and reflexive as three main modes with which to work for this film, because they serve the function of describing and emphasizing different aspects of the research. I will also use the idea of the process and the event



centred film. Aspects of each of these methods which be emphasized at different times, what is being filmed and how the ceramists are responding to the situation will determine the mode or combination of modes. Emphasis could be on visual description, verbal description, cultural description and relevance, or the lives of the participants.

## **8. Audience**

Comparing the possible audience of a written or visual work, the potential audience of a visual work is larger and more varied (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 1). An important element of the audience for this project is the participating ceramists themselves; they will be able to see the work in progress and the final work. This will be achieved by using the playback function on the lcd (liquid crystal display) screen of the camera, and showing the project during the editing phases, as well as the final product on a laptop screen. The potential audience for this film is people interested in either ceramics or Zulu culture.

There are a variety of interpretations possible for a film, by different types of audience (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 59). How images look is not the only issue, but how they are looked at and how the viewers positions themselves in relation to the work (Rose 2003: 11, 12). The audience can have previous expectations and ideas (Nichols 2001: 63), as well as cultural preconceptions, which will affect how they perceive what they are seeing (Pink 2001: 24).

Gillian Rose takes this further than the different people receiving and interpreting images differently, by claiming that visuals construct culture and social hierarchy, and mediate meaning (Rose 2003: 6, 10, 11). When discussing making meaning of images Rose refers to three sites as the production, the image and the audience. There are also different aspects like technological, compositional and social aspects that influence these sites (Rose 2003: 16).

Pink asks a question referring to research using a visual method, part of which is relevant to the aspect of the audience: she questions the appropriateness of the visual method to the question and to the subject, as well as what interpretation the visual will receive in the cross cultural context (Pink 2001: 33). It is relevant to try to assess how an audience that is culturally different to the ceramists will perceive their images in a film.

## **9. Ethics**

Representation and ethics are joint issues. One person representing their version of another person needs to be carefully think through how they are doing this, as well as how the audience will perceive the representation. Ethical behaviour on the part of the researcher includes considering the participants at all times, how the project impacts on their lives and ensuring that this impact is positive.

The main ethical issue when doing research involving people is informed consent. This is about ensuring that participants know what the research entails as they will have to live with the consequences of being filmed (Rabiger 1998: 357, 358).

Ethics are also not always clearly defined into areas of right and wrong (Dane 1990: 38). Barbash and Taylor concur with this by stating that ideas of right and wrong can differ culturally, including the idea of ownership of images and intellectual ideas (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 48, 53), and that right and wrong are culturally, contextually, personally, professionally relative (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 48). Pink refers to a hierarchy of ethical codes (Pink 2001: 37). The researcher needs to be aware that she should check that her idea of ethical behaviour is the same as that of the participants with whom they will be working, and make necessary adjustments.

All the texts refer to gift giving as problematic, because it changes power relations (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 63, 64). Nonetheless, I think that in the case of this project, gifts should be given in exchange for time and hospitality, and that it is unlikely that this will cause any problems between myself the researcher and the Magwazas.

## **B. Post-production considerations**

### **10. Interview**

During the planning stages of this project the possibility arose that an interview with the ceramists might be necessary after filming and editing to supplement the first edit with an additional audio track. The purpose of this interview would be to clarify some of the imagery appearing in the first edit. It would also function to provide a soundtrack where the ceramists were speaking for themselves, as opposed to the 'voice of God' technique commonly utilized in documentary. "Voice of God" is when an authoritative voice, belonging to an unseen person, narrates what is happening in a film (Nichols 2001: 13). The voice of the narrator is the loudest and most dominant part of the soundtrack, and mediates all the imagery in the film for the viewer, while diegetic sound is barely audible. It would be preferable for the ceramists to speak for themselves. The track would be in Zulu, and subtitles would appear in English.

After the first edit an additional reason became apparent as to why a supplementary soundtrack was necessary. The diegetic soundtrack consists of the ceramists having personal conversations with each other. This is problematic - when the ceramists viewed the film they were happy with the images, but unhappy about the soundtrack, as they thought it was strange that some of their private conversations were being repeated. The soundtrack is also unsatisfactory because it has been cut where the visuals have been cut, so consists of bits of conversations spliced together and does not make complete sense.

A 70-minute interview with the ceramists took place at Juliet Armstrong's home in Pietermaritzburg one year after the original footage was shot. I wrote questions that were translated into Zulu and presented by Nana Ngobese, a Zulu speaking woman. The interview was then translated back to English. When the questions and answers were translated back to English, it became apparent that some questions had been changed by the interviewer, although not to the extent that the essence of the interview had been changed. Still images from the original footage were used as discussion points during the interview. Three of the ceramists were present - Khulumeleni, Thandiwe and Shongaziphi Magwaza; as well as myself and Juliet Armstrong.

The conversation continued after the interview and various other issues were discussed, particularly Yeh Magwaza's upcoming *Umemulo*/21<sup>st</sup> birthday party.

Barbash and Taylor state that there are two main types of interview, structured and informal (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 341). The rapport between the interviewer and interviewee is influenced by various factors, including culture, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, age, class and personalities (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 343). Questions should be meaningful to the subject and the audience; language should be what the participants are used to and feel comfortable with (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 342, 354).

One of the main challenges facing interviewing for this project are power structures between the interviewer and interviewee, as well as gender issues. The possible problem with gender is that different answers may be given to the interviewer, depending on their

sex. Gender problems, in this case, can be overcome by sticking to women interviewers, as males interviewing Zulu women could produce social unevenness resulting in distorted replies. Other possible difficulties that may come up in an interview are language problems and cultural misunderstanding. Eye line is also important in interviewing; ideas vary with different cultures about being spoken down to or up to (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 346).

The interview was straightforward. The primary problem was technical – the equipment used to record was different to that which had been used to film and the quality of the sound is fairly poor. When the interview audio is inserted into the film, between the diegetic audio, the difference between the two is very clear and the result unsatisfactory.

In hindsight it would have been beneficial to occasionally discuss the procedures of creating the vessels with the ceramists while they were working during the original filming, as well as to clarify to the ceramists that sound as well as visuals were being recorded.

## **11. Information concerning the ceramics**

Three interesting points pertaining to ceramic production arose during either the filming or the interview or both.

The first was that the ceramists polished the fired pots with a stone. It is expected that unfired pots would be burnished with a stone, but unexpected that after blackening over a fire with a burning shoe sole and putting black shoe polish on with a brush, the pots are rubbed or burnished with a stone again.

Although many of the texts that I utilized give descriptions of the production of the ceramics, only two texts mention this practice. John Grossert referred to the treatment the pots received post firing: 'The smoke from the burning grass effectively blackened the surface. Finally, the pots were rubbed over, first with fat and a pebble, and then with gooseberry leaves to give the glossy black finish which is so esteemed by the Zulu' (Grossert 1978: 35). More recently, Kent Fowler in his article on Zulu ceramic use states that 'After the second firing, the blackened pots may be burnished with a piece of cloth, leather or a smooth pebble' (Fowler 2006: 109).

This extract from the interview accounts for the second polishing with a stone as a technique with a practical explanation.

47) N: Why do you use a stone to polish the pot again after firing?

M: To remove excess polish.

48) N: Is it a special stone?

M: No, we just get it from the river.

Secondly the interview also confirmed that the ceramists had not known how to make pots prior to joining the Magwaza homestead. They said that their mother in law taught them; and that her mother in law had previously taught her (Armstrong 1997: 8).

Many of the daughters of the present potters live in the homestead, but are not learning how to make pots. When I asked them why, the question was evaded or they said that the daughters had other work to do. It is possible that this skill is only handed on to daughters in law in the Magwaza homestead; in the interview this was referred to regarding this generation and the previous two generations.

Extract from interview:

41) N: How about your mothers? Did they make pots?

M: We did not know, we learnt here. I used to fetch wood for my mother in law when she was going to burn pots. Slowly I started to make *imbiza* (large brewing vessel), and sold it, and then pots for girls when they were getting married.

44) N: What did your mothers (in law) use to cover her pots to prevent them from drying out?



M: A cloth, and it would dry out, and she would throw it away. But they would wet cloths and cover the vessels for the whole night. Ngcongoshe taught them to make pots; she was our husband's granny. (alternative: our mother in law was taught by a granny of our husbands, (her mother in law) Ngcongoshe. This is a family thing).

The third point deals with whether vessels are polished with cow fat or shoe polish after firing. The vessels that were produced during the shooting of the film were all polished with shoe polish after firing. In previous research on post-firing treatments this polishing with shoe polish is referred to, as well as the use of fats and more specifically beef fat.

The quote from Grossert above simply refers to fats being used. Two quotes by Juliet Armstrong point to two different treatments being used depending on the intended market. In her paper *The tourist potters at Mtunzini* Juliet Armstrong noted '...these are not blackened with a second firing but rather polished with boot polish' (Armstrong 1998: 5). While in her paper on *The Magwaza Family – Potters of Distinction* Armstrong notes that vessels are '...subjected to a second, blackening firing. During this firing, the vessels are carbonized over a smoky fire of old thatch grass, tamboti wood, or an old rubber shoe sole producing a brilliant black sheen which is then rubbed with beef fat, after which the wares are made available to customers...these enhancements involve costly resources, such as extra fuel, as well as symbolically or culturally loaded processes and materials, and are therefore not used for the production of tourist wares' (Armstrong 1997: 9).

The discussion with the Magwaza's during the interview clarifies when either polish or fats are used. (Juliet Armstrong initiated the discussion regarding what types of fats are applied).

71) N: Is there a difference between the pots you keep at home and the ones you sell?

M: Yes.

72) N: What is the difference?

M: The ones kept at home are treated with fat. We apply fats when it has cooled down. Fats stick to the surface, and then we use a brush to make the pots shiny.

73) N: Which fats do you use?

M: We use cow fats.

74) N: Why use both polish and fats?

M: We don't use fats on the ones that *mhlungu* buys. We want to make it beautiful to show it to people far away. The pots with fats can make your hands dirty if you were to touch it.

75) N: How do the ones with fats differ?

M: The fats fade if you leave the pots in the sun. Even when the *mhlungu* like and wants to buy the pot, it makes them dirty and they don't buy it.

This clarifies that if a vessel is going to be functionally utilized by the Magwaza's or any of their local buyers it will be polished with cow fat, whereas if it is going to be used for decorative purposes it is polished with shoe-polish.

Regarding the purpose of smearing the functional vessels with cow fat, the probable reason behind this is to emphasize the link between the ancestors and the living by means of the ancestor's connection to the homestead cattle, as well as their participation in beer drinking rituals. Concerning the ancestor's link to the homestead cattle Berglund states that: "There is, according to Zulu thought-patterns, a close association between cattle and men". One of Berglund's informants refers to the shades/ancestors living in the gall bladders of the homestead cattle (Berglund 1976: 110).

Berglund refers to Zulu society being a community of the survivors and the ancestors - and that the two are closely tied together and interdependent. Between the shades and the living there is a ritual of communion (Berglund 1976: 197, 198). This communion is maintained through various means: "communion with the shades is maintained also through the means of cattle" (Berglund 1976: 199), "In Zulu society there is a communion with the shades through the medium of beer drinking" (Berglund 1976: 209).

Presumably smearing with the fat of cattle from the homestead on the beer vessels, which are left in the *umsamo* with beer in them as offerings to the shades, would strengthen the important bond between the living and the shades.

## **12. Representation and reflections on working with the Magwazas in hindsight**

### **12.1. Introduction**

The trip to the Magwazas to shoot footage took place in October 2004. Maxwell Mkhathini, as translator, accompanied me. The vessels were created over a period of four days: forming the vessels, decorating, burnishing and firing each took one day. Yeh, Khulumeleni's adult daughter, was present. She was the only other English speaker besides Max, and was of great assistance during the filming.

The concern of representing the ceramists differed among individuals. As regards representing the vessels themselves and their production, this was relatively uncomplicated.

The ceramists all responded differently to being filmed, and to seeing footage of themselves. Some of them were completely relaxed with the camera; others were uncomfortable which was evident from their body language. Some of them also clearly wanted to be filmed more than they were being, and made sure they were present whenever the camera was rolling. The implications of this are that, during my time filming, relationships between them may have been complicated.

The first day of filming was the hardest; there was some self-consciousness and discomfort with the camera. The participants gathered together specifically to be filmed - they would not usually all sit in one room and work together. By the second day most of the ceramists relaxed, and seemed to care less about the camera being focused on them.

The footage of the ceramists was shown to them at their home on laptop, and again to some of them at an exhibition of their work at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum (Port Elizabeth) - again they responded individually. Some were upset with the soundtrack, Thandiwe was proud of her image and work, while Shongaziphi and Khulumeleni appeared indifferent.

### **12.2. Representing the ceramists**

I will discuss representing the ceramists in relation to Pink's text (mentioned above in **Using Visuals in Research**), which states that certain ideas can be drawn on when using visuals in research, these ideas are 'a critical "postmodern" theoretical approach to subjectivity, experience, knowledge and representation, a reflexive approach... and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity' (Pink 2001: 2).

As discussed in the section on representation and reflexivity above, the primary challenge regarding representing the ceramists was to avoiding *othering*.

Locating myself in relation to the ceramists did happen, although was not obviously evident in the film. The main weakness of the film is that my presence as researcher is not clearly evident. My relationship with the ceramists is alluded to by the way that they interacted with the camera. In retrospect it may have been beneficial if I had appeared in the film, or at least spoken on the soundtrack.

Another option for the editing of the film would have been to create a personal journey or diary of my week spent in Mpabelane, with a voice over describing my time and experiences. This would have both positive and negative consequences. Positive aspects would be that my presence and opinions would be more clearly felt, negative consequences could be that the ceramists would be mediated by a culturally and racially different other - this could result in the viewers feeling separate from the ceramists, with the ceramists marginalized and not speaking for themselves. This effect could be marginalizing to the ceramists.

I stated above that elements of family life and interaction should be included, as a means of having common ground with viewers and so avoiding *othering*. Filming the ceramists and their families in this way was problematic. They were generally happy to have me film the pot production, but not anything else. This problem stemmed from the planning phases of this project, when I got permission from them to film the pot making, but didn't discuss wanting to film any other part of their lives. It was also difficult to walk around with the camera as the men of the homestead objected and this needed to be respected.

There were two main issues linked to gender. The men in the Magwaza family responded completely differently to the women and children in the presence of the camera. Consistently throughout the week the older men avoided being filmed, and stated that they did not want to be 'shot'.

Max Mkhathini, the translator, was with me most of the time during filming - he appears in some of the footage (he is the only man to appear in the footage). It is difficult to ascertain the influence that Max's presence had on the behaviour or responses of the Magwaza women, as there is nothing to compare it against. I do not believe that his presence skewed the behaviour of the ceramists in any significant way. The main reason for this may have been that he was much younger than the ceramists, and was treated as one of the young men of the household; for example, at night he was asked to sleep in the teenage boys hut. It is possible that the presence of an older man would have caused skewed behaviour on the part of the participants.

### **12.3. Representing the ceramics**

Various circumstances during filming influenced the appearance of the footage. The first matter is the use of a tripod. A tripod leads to smoother footage than handheld footage, but was problematic to use in these circumstances as the ceramists work while sitting on the ground. If the tripod had been used consistently throughout filming, the spatial organization would have the footage looking down on the ceramists. This is problematic visually, and could be interpreted as literally looking down on them. Thus I chose to do the majority of the camera-work handheld and on the same level as the ceramists. This

resulted in the footage being shaky at times, but was beneficial because of the angle it enabled me to shoot from, as well as allowing for more emphasis of the three dimensional nature of the work - as the camera moved around the work.

As opposed to the ceramists working alone or in small groups as they normally would, on the first day twelve of them gathered in Sindisiwe's house (the house where guest meals are normally served). Everyone created from one to three vessels. Despite being asked to create different sizes and types of vessels, the majority of vessels were of a similar size. This may have been due to time constraints and needing to have the vessels ready for firing in a few days.

The smallness of the room that the filming was done in on the first day (the day of forming the vessels) affected the angle of filming and composition of the frames. For example, standing back to get an establishing shot of everyone in the room at the same time was not possible; panning around the room counteracted this problem. A wide-angle lens would have been beneficial in these circumstances.

Lighting was also an issue; the light in the rooms where I was filming was not always ideal. I also worked for extended periods of time in some places, with lighting conditions changing over time. The position of the ceramist in the house also affected how well or badly the lighting worked for the footage of her. Thandiwe Magwaza sat right near the door, and worked in the light, which made the footage of her work better than that of some of the other ceramists.



On the second day the decorating of the ceramic vessels was undertaken, this comprised trimming the base of the pot, cutting the mouth, and adding a decorative band around the body of the vessel. This band consists of sgraffito work (scratching and cutting a design into the clay), adding *amasumpa* (adding little bumps of clay in an ordered pattern), or a combination of both *amasumpa* and sgraffito.

The participants commented that they could not see properly, as they normally decorated outside. I suggested that we move outside, but everyone stayed as they were. Some of the participants requested to be able to assist each other to make some of the guidelines for decorating, and stated that they normally would not do this, but as some of the older ceramists could not see properly this would be good idea. I responded that it would be satisfactory to do this, although in the end no-one did assist anyone else.

As discussed above, content, and expressive content was influenced by there being only one camera person (myself), as well as the ceramists perception that I was there to film them making pots and nothing else and the men's request that they not be filmed at all.

Regarding moving images, sound was discussed under the interview section of this paper. The narrative, which only focuses on ceramic production, would have been stronger with more emphasis on family life as was originally planned; the reason for this not being included was discussed above.

### **13. Conclusion**

Three types of documentary film making modes were discussed as being suitable to this project. Poetic or impressionistic, which emphasizes the visual as opposed to the verbal was used as inspiration for much of the footage. I believe some of the imagery speaks for itself. This approach appealed to some audiences but not all, as some people felt that more explanation was required.

The modes of observation and reflexivity stand in opposition to each other. Observational is about the filmmaker being as unobtrusive as possible, while reflexive is about the filmmaker acknowledging their own presence as part of the process. A mixture of both was used; in hindsight a stronger emphasis on the reflexive would have been preferable, as it would have provided structure and clarity about the process of filming.

Retrospectively if I could film the documentary again I would have ensured that I had done more test runs of the documentary before embarking on the main project. I would have been able to control certain awkwardnesses if I had run extensive test footage and short test interviews to ensure smooth running of the documentary. However, this was not possible due to financial restraints but is a good lesson learned for further projects.

These would have revealed weaknesses in the representation of the ceramists as well as in what equipment was being used and how it was being used – that is, a slower build up of the project, as failing to do these tests is what caused the main problems. The

soundtrack is the main technological weak point of this film, as the varying qualities of sound create confusion and was not my intention.

Representation became personal - I was the one physically standing there with the camera. At times I was uncomfortable with doing this project because of the implications of possibly creating something that would misrepresent the Magwazas. The final product is a partially successful, complex combination of representations. Representations were influenced by my relationship with the ceramists, how comfortable they were with the camera, how comfortable they were with each other and how confident they were of their potting skills. All these variables altered over the five days that I was with them.

Revisiting Pink's question about the appropriateness of the visual method in relation to fit to the research question, as well as fit to the technological and visual culture of the people involved. In answer to the first question documentary film had a good fit to documenting the production of these ceramics. The visual presentation of the vessels and their makers can be more precise in its description than text would be, particularly of the technical production of the vessels. Regarding documentary film in relation to the visual culture of the participants, there were various problem areas. The participants were not well acquainted with the process, which became problematic because they did not clearly understand that sound as well as images were being recorded - and discussed things which they did not want repeated in front of a recording camera. In addition to this none of the men of the household wanted to be shot. This was problematic because it partially

prevented the everyday life of the homestead from being filmed in an inclusive way, which was one of the original aims of the project.

In conclusion the visual method of documentary film was appropriate to representing the production of the ceramics. This is clearly shown in the film. Regarding representing the ceramists, the medium of documentary is partially appropriate - at times in the film they are successfully represented. At other times this visual method is unsuitable for representing the ceramists and their family and surroundings.

Subsequent to the filming of the Magwaza's producing their ceramic wares, I have filmed at their homestead again. Yeh Magwaza had her *Umemulo* (21st birthday party) in December 2006, and requested that it should be filmed. During this ceremony, which lasts a few days, I filmed and took photos of various events. This event was interesting, as the family was much clearer about what should be filmed - I was directed by them to film certain parts of the proceedings. It is interesting that at this occasion the Magwaza's had claimed the technology, which had been unfamiliar to them, for their own use.

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