



## **FLUX: Design Education in a Changing World**

### ***DEFSA International Design Education Conference 2007***

Kate Wells PhD  
Acting Head of Department  
  
PO Box 1334  
Department of Graphic Design  
City Campus  
Durban University of Technology  
  
Email: [katew@dut.ac.za](mailto:katew@dut.ac.za)

# **Talk the Talk: How Rural Craftswomen mediate Social Agency through Traditional Doll Making practice in KwaZulu-Natal**

## **Abstract**

*In her paper Kate Wells will discuss some of the pertinent theories, methodologies and evaluation modes which underpinned her research with a small group of rural traditional craftswomen from KwaZulu-Natal. Most of the craftswomen in the Siyazama project have attempted to circumvent some of the prescribed societal and cultural requisites with regard to respectable behaviour for Zulu women: in the midst of the current dangerous AIDS epidemic in South Africa. Kate's PhD Social Anthropology (University of KwaZulu-Natal) research project, completed in 2007, examined in detail the impact of hlonipha, a Zulu word meaning 'avoidances and taboos' which is also the code of conduct to which most rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal subscribe. Her paper will show how the traditional craftswomen employed their own inherent traditional medium of expression; beaded cloth doll and tableau making, to exercise their rights as women, and to 'speak' openly on sensitive, traumatic and taboo topics.*

*The project, through linking visual communication with health education, has for the past decade led to enhancing and building a link between visual communication and anthropology which has led to cultural affirmation, confidence building and a degree of economic empowerment on behalf of the craftswomen and their rural families and communities. She will show how this intervention has provided a reliable and effective method of messaging on AIDS.*

*The paper will also detail the crucial imperative of an understanding of gender and power relations in rural KwaZulu-Natal as this can provide a more culturally sensitive basis for designing and implementing meaningful developmental approaches which will ultimately empower women to have greater control over their lives, physically and financially.*

*The Siyazama (Zulu for 'we are trying') Project beaded collection, which has been collected and archived since 1999, contains numerous artifacts which provide three dimensional evidence of the prevalence of rape in rural communities, opinions on virginity testing, the role of the isangoma (Zulu for traditional healers) and the serious, life-threatening dilemma facing the makoti (Zulu for married woman) in an era of AIDS. The paper will be showcasing and discussing some of these issues in detail.*

*In closing she will briefly discuss the role of the project for the future and how it, in 2007, has been implemented more widely as a developmental art and health strategy with rural craftspeople in Uganda, East Africa.*

## **Key Words**

*AIDS, gender, visual communication, anthropology, traditional beadwork, rural craftswomen*

## **Introduction**

Throughout my PhD Social Anthropology study it was always my intention to represent the actual voices and the lived experiences of the rural traditional craftswomen who formed the central core of my HIV/AIDS and rural crafts intervention: the *Siyazama* Project. In the project, due to the urgency and danger of HIV/AIDS infection, it was also of prime importance to get the rural women to talk and to understand through whatever means necessary.

It was their expert traditional beaded cloth doll making skill which provided us with the pathway forward in the midst of Southern Africa's swirling HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Importantly, in my paper, I would like to reflect on and examine some of the theoretical frameworks which ran beneath the surface of my PhD study. In my attempt to develop an appropriate model to guide my study, I will be discussing how a range of human-centered developmental, cultural and feminist theories were interrogated and drawn upon. I deemed this to be necessary due to the pragmatic and multi-disciplinary nature of my work.

Throughout this decade of work there were also certain practical methodologies and evaluation techniques which guided the processes. These theories and practices tended to explain the linkage between the role of visual communication and the creative art activities in the project whilst making a special link with anthropology and ethnography. This in turn built the epistemological emic constructs within which the study was lodged.

Further to this I will explain how these theoretical frameworks dictated my role, as project leader, researcher and scholar, and the various positions which I adopted and adapted to, for the purposes of this study.

In conclusion of my paper I will reflect on a number of beaded artworks produced by the *Siyazama* women as examples of how they used their traditional expertise to talk, to comment, to warn, on matters which were often deemed too private and too taboo to mention verbally. Finally I will briefly comment on a current programme collaborative which links three universities and the principles inherent in the *Siyazama* Project. The intention of this new research programme is to see if the methodologies in the project can be used amongst other rural craftswomen groups in Uganda, East Africa.

## **Theoretical frameworks**

There is a general concurrence amongst most developmental researchers that rural women in South Africa continue to play subservient roles in their patriarchally ordered homesteads, villages and communities (Serote, Mager and Budlender 2001; Barker 2003). Paradoxically, and in the case of the *Siyazama* producers, they are often the only breadwinner in the family due to their beadwork activities; yet they also have the

full-time job of care-giver and homemaker. To this end theorists argue that for development to truly benefit rural women, the power relations in the development process must be critically examined. Serote et al (2001:157) claim that “a gendered approach to development hinges on an understanding of power relations. Key is the belief that if development strategies are to make a difference to individual lives, and to women’s lives in particular, they need to take into account the ways in which power relations are gendered. This means that development strategies need to address the gender power relations operating in the households, other institutions, different spheres of government, and society as a whole.”

Serote (2001:155) makes the point that “to date there was, and is, no single feminist theory which talks of development ... and consequently gender practitioners in South Africa, as elsewhere, very often draw on more than one approach.” Whilst the *Siyazama* Project’s principal overarching aim has been to prevent rural traditional craftswomen from KwaZulu-Natal from becoming HIV infected, this particular research process has brought about a significant awareness of the complex positions of men and women in rural situations.

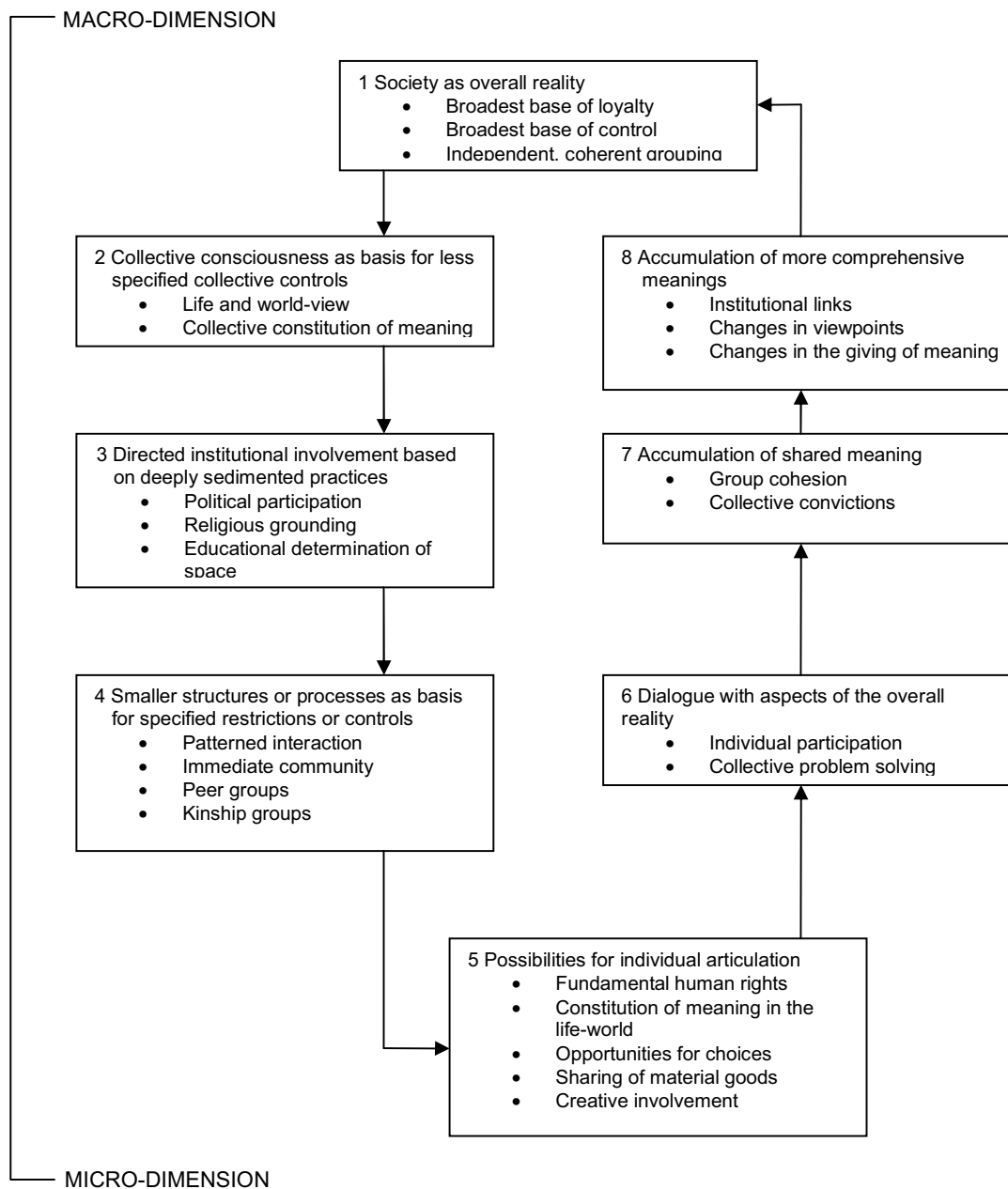
Although South Africa, in 2007, defines itself as a non-racial and non-sexist society, the government has nonetheless conceded that rural women are disadvantaged by both patriarchal and traditional controls. Regional political tensions, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, are preventing the government from dismantling this institutional patriarchal system. Walker (as cited in Serote 2001:169) sets out the contradiction starkly “in short, the South African Government has failed rural women: gender must be integrated into transformation strategies and ‘tradition’ is not gender neutral.” She believes that for a women’s movement to represent rural women, its starting point must be to adopt a concept of tradition as dynamic and constantly changing, and an understanding that tradition is never pure or pristine, but complex and malleable. She goes on to suggest that African societies have a responsibility for the well-being of all members of society, now as much as in the past. The critical issue according to Walker (2001:171) is “to examine exactly what well-being means in a gendered way, to women and men in different contexts at specific moments.”

Since the 1960s, interest in developmental micro-processes within social reality has come a long way and approaches such as social phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology, as well as reflexive, humanistic, dialectic, and existential societies have gained increasing momentum. These approaches are all characterized by a focus on the micro-processes composing social reality; a micro-foundation for development thinking. They all emphasize what people do, say and think in the actual everyday sequence of events and experiences; thereby dealing with the interactions and expressions of meaning underlying the macro-appearance of social reality (Coetzee 2001).

Roxborough (as cited in Coetzee 2001) defines development as traditionally an increase in ability to control transformation of the social structure. This theory assumes

that it is possible to move from a situation of restriction or dependency to one of self-sufficiency. Yet Coetzee (2001:120) maintains that contemporary development literature indicates that this traditional approach has not produced significant insight into processes of change. Its major shortcoming is that it does not deal adequately with the deeper dimensions of underdevelopment. From this perspective, I believe that development efforts should attempt to be based on the assumption that all people value respect and wish to be treated as worthy individuals.

However, Coetzee (2001) believes that if the ultimate goal of development is well-being, it follows that the only way in which self-reliant, endogenous development can be attained is to work with the assumption that the beneficiaries of development will also have to be its contributors. He further claims that the micro-sociological perspective takes cognizance of the only observable reality in the constitution of social reality. I have found Coetzee's ideas useful when examining the experiences of women. The following diagram is an attempt by Coetzee (2001) to illustrate the various dimensions of the developmental process.



**Figure 1 Dimensions for development: micro-foundations for macro-process**  
 Ref: Coetzee J. (2001:136) *Development Theory, Policy, and Practice: A micro-foundation for development thinking*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press

In development “restoration of meaning as a reaction to an experience of meaninglessness starts on the micro-level. Such restoration of meaning can lead to movement (as seen in Figure 1 above) with accompanying momentum when it is propagated by significant groups.” (Coetzee 2001:137).

Graaff (2001:184) made three significant points when trying to make sense of the impasse experienced by development theories to date in his text *Reconsidering Theory and Metatheory in Development Studies*. They were summed up as follows: firstly, micro-theoretical research will be substantially impoverished if it ignores intended or unintended macro-factors, either at the regional or national level; secondly, it can be extremely difficult to disentangle structure from action, and thirdly, relationships of power are always the product of negotiation between the parties involved. When considering that HIV/AIDS is the most serious recent health threat to reach KwaZulu-Natal, this research will support his recommendation that developmental research should focus much more on detailed and concrete micro-situations and the social relationships that bind these together. Health is a necessary requirement when considering any form of human upliftment with a long term vision in place. Good health and well-being no doubt impacts on and influences social development.

Based on an evolving theory and current research in the field of arts and health, it is posited that health and well-being may be improved through creative activities and art making can be considered to be therapeutic (White 2005). In the educational workshops of the *Siyazama* Project, the focus has been to provide a mechanism to promote and cascade health information, develop structures and channels for marketing and producing crafts, as well as to encourage and promote a culture of arts and health thinking. It has been through this process of reification and reflexivity that new knowledge has been constructed and utilised.

### **Art as anthropology**

Antony Gormley, British anthropologist and sculptor (as cited in Schneider 2006:9) claims that his work is created to produce a place of feeling. He argues that “the whole history of man since the Enlightenment is one of control: of the world understood as an object out there, of vision requiring distance which promotes knowledge.” He suggests parallels with Alfred Gell’s (1998) theoretical thinking on the discussion of the efficacy of artworks, and his work has much to offer anthropology practice in terms of understanding the image and its effects. Gormley’s famous ‘Angel of the North’ sculpture in Gateshead, England, is well known for its overarching and imposing presence which does not fail to evoke feelings, both loving and loathing, from the viewer. It is an excellent example of Schneider’s “crossing borders” (2006:2) theme which has led to the development of new practices that draw on both disciplines.

Gormley writes that his greatest thrill, once the ‘Angel of the North’ was completed, was to see how quickly the image was appropriated, and how many made much meaning of this sculpture. Alfred Gell (1998) proposes that this type of work, as a way of inciting thought, embodies thinking as a theoretical basis for an anthropological engagement with art. In a critique by Bowden (2004) on Gell’s art and agency theory, he asserts that Gell described this theory as ‘indexes’ (i.e. artworks) that ‘motivate’ (i.e. prompt) ‘patients’ (i.e. viewers) to make abductions (i.e. inferences) about ‘social agency’ a term Gell coined, and is well known for. Bowden (2004:2) asserts that, according to Gell, any social context in which an artwork mediates social agency constitutes an ‘art nexus’,

and within each nexus four explanations need to be distinguished. These can be classified as the following:

1. The 'index': the artwork (or other material entity) which 'motivate/s abductive inferences, cognitive interpretations, etc.'
2. The 'artist'; the person (or other intentional being, such as a divinity) to whom is 'ascribed, by abduction, causal responsibility for the existence and characteristics of the index'
3. The patient or 'recipient': 'those in relation to whom, by abduction, indexes are considered to exert agency, or who exert agency via the index', and
4. The 'prototypes': 'entities held, by abduction, to be represented in the index, often by virtue of visual resemblance, but not necessarily.'

It is this methodology which Gell makes use of "to express the way in which the different terms in an art nexus can exercise greater or lesser agency according to context." (Bowden 2004:2)

Gell's contribution to anthropology has relevance to my work, and his theory of visual art that focuses on the social context of art production, circulation and reception, can be identified through the work of the rural women in the *Siyazama* Project. As an anthropological theory, and extracted from a description of his ground breaking work *Art and Agency* (1998) within the nexus of social relations involving works of art, his work suggests that in certain contexts, art objects substitute for persons and thus mediate social agency.

Another methodological approach that was drawn upon for the purposes of my study was that of Kuchler (2006). Kuchler (2006:86) believes that it is thanks to Gell's work that we can no longer "bypass the cognitive purchase of artefactual form as a problem to be dealt with by the tools of symbolic anthropology, but must see it as an incremental part of the process of objectification." Further to this she suggests that his work can be classified as a theory of art which "considers art objects as persons and in line with the 'proptotypical' anthropological theory, as a series of problems to do with ostensibly peculiar relationships between persons and 'things' which somehow 'appear as' or do duty as, persons." (2006:86)

The ethnographic analysis in my study focused on the accumulated data and instruments which were used to document the responses, verbal and visual, of the rural women who participated in the *Siyazama* Project. Acknowledging what Geertz (1973:6) famously described as "thick descriptions" of "the multiplicity of complex conceptual structures", an attempt was made to provide for both descriptive and interpretive data; descriptive, because detail is so crucial, and interpretive, because the researcher must determine the significance of what one observes without gathering broad, statistical information. When Geertz discussed work by Gilbert Ryle, he noted: "Analysis is sorting out the structures of signification – what Ryle called established codes and determining their social ground and import." (cited in Geertz 1973:6). The theoretical explanation of ethnography, as indicated by Barker (2003:25) is an empirical and theoretical approach



inherited from anthropology that seeks detailed holistic description and analysis of “lived experience” culture based on intensive fieldwork.

The process that launched the *Siyazama* Project began with a series of workshops which dealt with information on HIV/AIDS, educational awareness and how to avoid becoming infected. This was undertaken in 1999 in collaboration with a team of environmental health workers from the Durban City Environmental Health Department, who had been trained, in turn, by the National Association of People Living with AIDS (NAPWA) through the AIDS Training and Information Centre (ATIC).

Prior to this launch, in April 1999, I had attended a UNESCO funded design programme titled: ‘Artists in Development and Creativity Workshop’ in Kampala, Uganda. Led by Prof. Jackie Guille this unique programme was hosted by Makerere University in Kampala. Following on from my discussions in Uganda I came back with the firm opinion that the *Siyazama* workshops would always include dance, drama and music. This cross-disciplinary approach, according to my Ugandan informants, had been formally applied into the Ugandan AIDS interventionist strategies and most felt it had worked and had benefited people in talking openly about their illness. Bangladesh has used similar means of assisting in their AIDS instruction. Based on this, a group called Kuyasa Devoted Artists from Durban was commissioned to perform at each of the early workshops.

Bearing in mind this was almost a decade ago I will always remember the environmental health team who opened their AIDS instructional programme with the phrase ‘do not be offended by frankness’. In this initial ‘breaking of the silence’ programme discussions centered around the immediate rural environments with issues such as pollution, unsafe water disposal and the mitigation of water transmitted disease such as the diarrhoea-type diseases like cholera.

The early discussions tended to focus mainly on the role of the traditional healer *isangoma* and the herbalist *inyanga*, both highly esteemed healers in the lives of the rural women. Pricking the skin with porcupine quills and cutting with razor blades, to insert *imuthi*, a local word that roughly translates as ‘medicine’, is common practice in healing methods. For this reason the environmental health team advised the women to take their own razor blades when being treated by the *isangoma* but warned them to avoid, at all costs, the porcupine treatment. This form of prohibitive treatment could well be passaging, if not HIV, then a host of other infectious ailments which might flow between patients.

When, at the close of the first session, several of the women remarked that they were, indeed, now worried to have sex and this included with their husbands and partners, it was clear that relationship dynamics were viewed as problematic. Evidence of this did, in fact, emerge almost immediately.

I was fully aware, at this very early stage in the workshops and based on evidence of aggressive reactions, that further anger on the part of male partners might well be

fuelled by the project. It was for the personal safety of the women that from this point onwards there was talk about being considerate, understanding and respectful of each other. This highly respectful approach came naturally to the women who are imbued with the *hlonipha* code of behaviour, which they claim to practise currently, most readily and most visibly, in their own rural domains. Yet in the *Siyazama* project workshops held on campus at the DUT there was an easing off and a noticeably more relaxed environment. The women could voice their opinions and objections most strongly and vehemently if they wished. A strong sisterhood developed. But on returning home they took on another facade and that was of dutiful women subservient to men and respectful at all times of her elders and in-laws.

Whilst the overall aim of my study was to analyse the “lived experience” of the rural women beadworkers of the *Siyazama* Project I also, through a reflective and qualitative study, sought to determine whether a culturally familiar code of communication had been conceived, revived, modernized and transmitted effectively. The broad range of impressions and expressions imparted from the rural women and their work was studied, recorded and documented.

In accordance with the methodology an attempt was made to describe and analyze a specific *Siyazama* Collection - amounting to almost 70 beaded artifacts - which was viewed as a three-dimensional archive that accounted for and illuminated some the current concerns and life dilemmas facing the craftswomen. This analysis provided the study with an account of changing perspectives and changing positions on behalf of the rural women who, in some cases, ‘rewrote’ and embellished the stories describing their artworks.

Procedures to collect and produce data included participant observation in the workshops as well as numerous on-site visits to the rural homesteads, semi-structured focus group interviewing, one-on-one interviews and analysis of structured questionnaires.

When writing about the difference that a particular project may have made in the lives of the participants, the use of the word ‘impact’ in situations where there is no compelling evidence of change or that the intervention caused that change, is problematic. In the most egregious cases, one will hear claims that ‘that programme really had impact’, based solely on the perception that the programme was well-liked or that it reached a large audience, especially if a celebrity were associated with it. In the absence of evidence, this is mere speculation. Evaluation purists also object to claims of impact when the desired change may have occurred, but the study design can not rule out other factors that may have contributed to that change. Often the challenge of programme evaluation of any kind is the tradeoff between methodological rigour and ownership of the process by those responsible for the programme.

For these reasons three types of programme evaluation techniques were implemented in the initial *Siyazama* Project evaluation, beginning with formative, then process and finally summative evaluation techniques. Formative evaluation determined who was

most affected by the problem of avoiding HIV/AIDS infection and attempted to identify the needs of specific subgroups like partners, the elderly and children. It also attempted to ascertain existing indigenous knowledges, beliefs and attitudes. It attempted to determine levels of access to services, information, social support and other health and societal resources. Further to this it attempted to understand barriers to action, and finally it attempted to determine appropriate communication habits, preferences, dreams and hopes for the future. The source of data was varied. Questionnaires from previous workshops and primary data collection from the participant audience were scrutinized. Additionally, data was recorded which detailed opinions, fears, beliefs, and other key factors that impinge on the sex and HIV/AIDS interface.

Process evaluation served two important functions in the initial study. Firstly, it provided a plethora of satisfactory information, necessary to satisfy research and project evaluation as well as benefiting the participants in the study. In this case it gave the women of *Siyazama* an opportunity to voice opinions, to reflect and to discuss issues pertinent to their lives as well as to the study. In other words it enabled the women to feel confident that the programme was progressing as well as expected. Secondly, this process evaluation provided important documentation of what activities took place in the lifetime of the project. With this in mind an attempt was made to gauge opinions on quality of service delivery, access, and reach as the women had all been involved in a previous research undertaking in *Siyazama* which had been conducted in terms of the 'multiplier effect', a term coined and espoused by developmental specialists.

Finally, the summative evaluation component measured the extent to which the programme made a difference in the lives of the rural women. Research for this study was an attempt to fill in the detail of that difference and describe some particularities of the art and anthropology interface of the *Siyazama* Project.

### **My role**

Anthropologists, including Moore (1996), argue that attention must be paid to ensure, when discussing situated knowledges, that one must be careful not to slip too easily into an unthought-of dialectic of opposition which is the negativity of difference. Both Moore and Mudimbe (1996) warn that the failing of anthropology is that it begins by measuring the distance from the same to the other, and what must be avoided is any tendency to construct African knowledge(s) as simple reversals of Euro-American ones. Indigenization of knowledge(s), while potentially powerfully creative for individuals and collectivities within specific contexts runs the risk of defining certain kinds of knowledge as absolutely local, without comparative scope or wider application. Therefore Richards (as cited in Moore, 1996:6) claims that it is imperative that anthropology should recognize that local knowledge, including local technical knowledge, can be part of a set of knowledges properly pertaining to political economy and the social sciences, and can be comparative in scope, as well as international in outlook. Moore claims that "we are now no longer looking for ontological categories, but for interwoven patterns; what was once systematic is now mobile" (1996:9)

Throughout my study I was mindful of these critical perspectives, and I attempted to maintain a largely emic epistemological construct in the quest to get to the nature of the range of problems affecting, and of concern to, the rural craftswomen. The validation of this emic knowledge as a cultural characteristic of the rural women was claimed through a close and lengthy relationship which spanned more than a decade. I empathetically and intuitively persevered and probed to seek to understand more about their lives, their lifestyles and their expert beadwork abilities.

Recognizing early on in my work that a new way of learning, informing, impressing and expressing would have to be employed to make a substantial imprint, I used my facilitative role to embody a creative environment within which the rural women could feel supportive and creative. Berglund's (1976) classic ethnographic work talks of the importance of listening and observing, a practice that I have applied in my work with the women of the *Siyazama* Project. Work of this nature also required a great effort to probe deeply and a great tenacity. I purposely avoided playing a decision making role in the creative explorations on behalf of the women in the project. Instead I attempted to create a safe, interesting, informative, colourful and culturally resonant environment which challenged and nurtured creativity. As a visual communicator who has worked in the field of graphic design for two decades, this practice, I believe, provided the women with the space to explore issues around HIV and AIDS within the realm of their own magico-medical belief system and gave them the courage to express their thoughts and question some of the most private aspects of their lives.

This approach translated into a colourful and welcoming space imbued with caring and empathy. Glass beads, fabrics and accessorizing materials were piled enticingly onto the tables. This colourful environment, in turn, fuelled creative interactionism and debate which was supported by local musicians, singers, theatrical students and dancers. Each performance, often with the notion of AIDS at its heart, added a new and fresh dynamic to the learning experience. The walls were adorned with rich imagery of beadwork, both historical and contemporary.

The visual communication aspect was heightened by the inclusion of projected images featuring large scale pictorial slides of previous *Siyazama* events as well as images of the craft producers working in the workshops. The participants were fascinated by these images of themselves. Nutritious and healthy food, including fresh fruit and fruit juices, was always a priority. Invited guests were welcomed by all and these often included visiting professors, anthropologists, donors, design researchers, medical doctors, inyangas and staff from local marketing outlets. Although chairs were always provided many of the rural participants often opted to sit on the floor on reed mats.

Singularly important in affirming cultural identity was the regular attendance of a local Durban *isangoma* who began each of the workshop meetings with prayers to the ancestor's *amadlozi* and the burning of *imphepho* (*Helichrysum Miconiaefolium*), a dry and very aromatic plant used in divination and connection with the ancestors. She would crouch down on a reed mat on the floor, burn the small stack of *imphepho*, and chanting quietly in Zulu, would circle the full group of participants. Each participant

would both inhale and blow the sweet smelling smoke. According to the renowned Zulu ethnographer Berglund (1976:114) his informants claim that “*imphepho* gives us a remembering mind. We do not easily forget. It is given to us by the shades (ancestors) so that we may not forget anything.”



Figure 2

**Title: Unsafe Sex**

**Craft Genre:** Beaded cloth sculpture

**Creator:** Gabi Gabi Nzama

**Area of residence:** Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 1999

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 1 (1999/2000) Beaded cloth doll and jewellery workshops on HIV/AIDS education and awareness

**Materials:** Glass beads, fabric, thread, wooden base.

**Colours:** Black, red and white

**Size:** 16cms x 10cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** Gabi Gabi tells the story as such: “The man knows that he has AIDS, and has not told his partner. He is not practicing safe sex since he is not using a condom, and thus is knowingly infecting her with AIDS.”

The use of black, white and red beads is typical of this regional style, as is the accessorizing of multi-coloured linear stranded loops of the small glass beads. The two figures, each with tightly bound encircled strands of beadwork at the waistline, are tightly intertwined sexually, physically and emotionally. On closer inspection the intimate details of the male genitalia are vividly evident.

To Gabi Gabi this is a personal reflection of her own life and how she avoided becoming an AIDS victim through the timely death of her husband, who was a practicing *isangoma*. This tableau reflects “where everything began. My husband had an affair. He was sleeping with his mistress in my own house.” Although he had AIDS he did not tell anybody. According to her, she was “given a second chance” after his passing, when his brother who wanted to have her as his rightful wife, also died from AIDS soon afterwards.

This most unusual and explicit tableau that was presented to me in the early stages of the *Siyazama* workshop schedules certainly defined for all participants the reality of the serious and life threatening problems which most rural women face in KwaZulu-Natal: in a time of HIV/AIDS.



**Figure 3**

**Title:** Virginity Testing

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Tableau

**Creator:** Beauty Ndlovu

**Area of residence:** Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 1999

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 1 (1999/2000) Beaded cloth doll and jewellery workshops on HIV/AIDS education and awareness

**Materials:** Glass beads, fabric, cotton thread, wooden base.

**Colours:** Multi-coloured

**Size:** 20cms x 11 cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** According to Beauty Ndlovu the story is such: "Mothers are checking girls to see if they are still virgins. They realize that, in a rural community, if you are a virgin, you are safe from AIDS."

The three figures, comprising a young girl, her mother and the virginity 'testor', are all made from tightly bound rolls of fabric. Arranged on a flat base these forms are accessorized with colourful beadwork appropriate to their age set, ranking and region of residence. The young girl is lying spread eagled on the ground, her legs wide apart, with the 'testor' leaning over to check her virginity status. Her vagina is clearly indicated by a red fabric slit peeping through the outer fabric covering. The 'testor' is checking to see if her hymen is intact as the mother waits expectantly. She is hoping to get good news.

Beauty has made several versions of this tableau and believes that this type of tradition and its revival could benefit the young Zulu population (1). Virginity is highly prized among the Zulu (Wells 2004: 85) and most of the *Siyazama* project craftswomen claim to adhere to its rituals and customs (2).

**Notes:**

1. For more contextualizing information on virginity testing and the implications thereof with the South African rape statistics being unceremoniously the highest in the world, see the work of Leclerc-Madlala Leclerc-Madlala, S. 2002. *On the virgin cleansing myth: Gendered bodies, AIDS and ethnomedicine*, African Journal of AIDS Research (pp1:87-95). South Africa.
2. See Wells, Sienaert, and Conolly 2004. *The Siyazama Project: A Traditional Beadwork and AIDS Intervention Program*, Design Issues, 20(2 Spring):73-89



**Figure 4**

**Title:** Isangoma

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Doll

**Creator:** Lobolile Ximba

**Area of residence:** Muden, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 1999

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 1 (1999/2001) Beaded cloth doll and jewellery workshops on HIV/AIDS education

**Materials:** Glass beads, thread, fabric, grass mat, seeds, goats tail tuft, wool.

**Colours:** Multi-coloured

**Size:** 17cms X 10cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** According to Lobolile the story of this tableau is such "The *isangoma* is telling the patients that they are HIV positive. She is telling them the truth and not just saying they are ill because they have been targeted or

bewitched by bad spells put on them by others. Some *isangomas* say people are ill because of bewitching, but this one is telling the truth.”

The beadwork is simple yet heralds complex geometry, encompassing the AIDS red ribbon logo, which is embedded into the conical form of the doll. The *isangoma*'s hairpiece *nqothela* depicts not only her unmarried status but shows that she has a boyfriend and is likely to be betrothed. She is sitting on a small grass mat *isicqephu*.

This *isangoma* tableau depicts a kneeling *isangoma* actively holding her black switch *ishoba lengoma* as if in dignified communion with the *amadlosi* ancestors. Berglund (1976:184) explains that the *ishoba lengoma* is often made from the tail of a slaughtered goat or cow sacrificed for ritual celebrations. Claiming that they “ought to be wholly black or wholly white”, it is the amount of white beads attached which provides the switch with its individuality. White beads are part of the *isangoma*'s initiation and these are generally added over a period of years. White is always associated with the colour of the shades (*amadlosi*) and therefore white beads will “show up’ well against the black tail hairs. Berglund's respondents claimed that there is no meaning difference between a white switch and a black switch as long as “they are uniform.”

When I asked my *isangoma* respondent Agnes Xaba (personal communication 26 May 2006) what the difference is, in her opinion, between black and white tufts of hair in the switch she claimed that there is indeed a powerful difference. The pure black switch which she referred to as being “hard and strong” is specifically for “talking straight to the *amadlosi*.” She emphasized the *hardness* of this switch by gesticulating, pointing to the ground and clasping her hands together. With this switch there is no God or Jesus to talk to “first.” She explained how different the white switch is. As a she personally uses the white switch she told of how she can speak directly to both Jesus and the *amadlosi* simultaneously. She also explained how she keeps her white switch under her arm for warmth especially when she is “talking to Jesus.” It is important to keep the white switch warm and comforted. As far as beadwork on the switch is concerned she offered that “any colour” of beads are acceptable but she later made of point of mentioning black, white and red colour beads as mandatory colours.



**Figure 5**

**Title:** Isangoma doll

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Doll

**Creator:** Lobolile Ximba

**Area of residence:** Muden, KwaZulu-Natal



**Date:** 1999

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 1 (1999/2001) Beaded cloth doll and jewellery workshops on HIV/AIDS education

**Materials:** Glass beads, thread, fabric, goats skin, seed beads, snake bones, small gourd *iselwa*

**Colours:** Traditional Msinga colour system *isishunka* (1)

**Size:** 14cms x 8cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** According to Lobolile this tableau depicts the following: "The *isangoma* is reading the bones for a patient. Unfortunately the *isangoma* sees evidence of AIDS in the bones and tells the patient the truth."

When asked to explain the *isangoma* accessories Lobolile responded with "as for the *isangoma* the only difference is that she wears a different skirt especially for *izangoma*'s called *unomndindi*." She went on to report that "*isangoma*'s throw the bones to communicate with the *amadlosi* and mix *imuthi* for their patients. This practice is termed *iqobongo*. The novice *isangoma*'s, those who are in training, are called *itwasa*."

The prolific use of the grey seed beads *imfibinga* is testimony to the constant communication through dreams to the *amadlosi*. As this is the prime role of the *isangoma* these beads are heralded as "helping the ancestors to come quickly in dreams." In other words they powerfully assist with getting the *amadlosi* into quick communication. If, for example, one does not dream then these beads will help. The *isangoma* often wears them crossed over the chest. A further benefit of the *imfibinga* is their ability to assist with teething problems. They are worn during pregnancy around the "middle" to ward off later problems with teething. They are also helpful to "strengthen the baby in the womb."

**NOTES:**

1. Jolles, in his publication *Traditional Zulu Beadwork of the Msinga Area African Arts* 1993 (January) 42-53 describes four of the 'old style' beadwork colour schemes that were used by the Msinga craftswomen. *Isishunka* as a scheme can be recognized to include specific seven colours, and according to his article, he classifies this scheme as "one of the most complex" (1993:44)



**Figure 6**

**Title:** Rape at the Hands of a Healer

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Tableau

**Creator:** Gabi Gabi Nzama

**Area of residence:** Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 2004

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 8 (2004) Rape and HIV/AIDS awareness. Tableau in Museum of World Culture Collection in Gothenburg, Sweden

**Materials:** Glass beads, fabric, thread, razor blade, wooden base

**Colours:** Pink

**Size:** 25cms x 25cms square

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothlal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** Gabi Gabi tells the story of this all pink tableau as such: "The young girl goes to the *isangoma* as she has a sexually transmitted disease STD which needs treatment. The *isangoma* with blade in hand and erect penis leans towards her pretending to help her, but instead he rapes her."

This square tableau is completely dressed up in only pink beads and fabric. Gabi Gabi has used an unusual square format for this tableau and the geometry of her beadwork adds a new dimension. This accessorizing provides a seductive ambiance which belies the violence of the activity. Both male and female have enlarged mouths and are clearly screaming out. The *izangoma* looms threateningly over the patient, who cowers subserviently. A small fully beaded chicken sits to one side on the ground, in payment for the treatment.

It is beautifully constructed and artfully accessorized yet it is a most disturbing tableau which talks of her recent life experiences which have included spousal infidelity, deceit and malpractice.

This artwork is in the permanent collection at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden.



**Figure 7**

**Title:** Rape of Children

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Tableau

**Creator:** Celani Njoyeza

**Area of residence:** Nuyaswa, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 2005

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 8 (2004/5) Rape and HIV/AIDS Awareness workshops and development of the Sweden collection

**Materials:** Glass beads, fabric, wooden dowels, wooden base

**Colours:** Primarily blue

**Size:** 26cms x 26cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** Celani is very concerned about the dangerous and prevalent practice of child rape in South Africa. She claims that there are people who believe that if they have sex with a child that it will cure them of AIDS. In her rural area this is much concern on behalf of all mothers who need to constantly guard and warn their children against this type of molestation.

Celani has used mainly tones and shades of bright blue to get her point across. She has embellished the figures of the children with shiny colourful beadwork.



**Figure 8**

**Title:** Couple in Bed

**Craft Genre:** Beaded Cloth Tableau

**Creator:** Gabi Gabi Nzama

**Area of residence:** Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal

**Date:** 2004

**Workshop/Subject:** WORKSHOP 8 (2004/5) Rape and HIV/AIDS Awareness workshops and development of the Sweden collection. Tableau in Museum of World Culture Collection in Gothenburg, Sweden

**Materials:** Glass beads, thread, fabric, wool, wooden base

**Colours:** Blue and maroon

**Size:** 27cms x 18cms

**Photographer:** Cindy Mothilal

**Language:** English/Zulu

**Description/Story:** According to Gabi Gabi Nzama the story of this tableau is: "The married couple is in bed having sex. The man has not told his wife that he is HIV positive but is pretending that everything is normal."

Gabi Gabi has created an explicitly sexual tableau, in which she has used only shades of blue beads and fabric contrasted with open and closed diamonds of maroon beadwork. The notion of normality is vivid as the bed décor resembles the sort of linen most might proudly wish to own. She has shaped the sexual genitalia of both the male and the female using fabric and beadwork. Her use of the mix of blue beads in linear stands across the headboard of the bed gives credence to the regional beadwork style of her home area in Ndwedwe.

This tableau is rich in symbolism and meaning and once again, displays her expert fine attention to detail in her artwork. Her preoccupation with sexual deceit and the threat of becoming HIV infected is a predominant and recurring theme in her work, as this is an aspect of her life which needs to be spoken about.

This artwork is in the permanent collection at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden.

## Conclusion

Through the use of a multi-layered and multi-disciplinary theoretical and methodological approach, the *Siyazama* Project was an attempt to build new epistemological constructs. The urgency of the AIDS pandemic called for an inventive way to link the women's expert craft skills to their health needs. In the process of exploring ways to make this link, new methods, findings and ideas were generated. The result, as is documented in some of the artifacts above, is a visual and metaphorical account of some of the most pressing contemporary issues affecting their lives and lifestyles. This type of project showed its strength in providing new pathways for talk and discussion on a range of extremely personal and sensitive issues. For rural KwaZulu-Natal women, who are often silenced through cultural and traditional practices, this talking proved not only imperative when confronting the fear of AIDS infection but the project also provided the most welcome financial return necessary for making decisions which might ultimately save lives.

For the future the England and Africa Partnership (EAP) programme which was launched in January 2007 and links three Universities namely the Durban University of Technology (DUT) with Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda and the University of Northumbria, Newcastle, United Kingdom is currently well underway. Inherent in this partnership is the sharing of ideas under the *Siyazama* project methodologies and seeing if the principles can, indeed, be imparted to other rural craftswomen elsewhere in the world. To this end we are working with three groups of rural craftswomen from around Kampala district in Uganda, East Africa.

A special event including an exhibition of artifacts, produced by *Siyazama* and the Ugandan groups, and a colloquium is planned for February 2008 when the findings of the partnership will be presented at the University of Northumbria, Newcastle, United Kingdom.

## References

- Berglund, A. 1976. *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*, Uppsala: Indiana University Press
- Barker, C. 2003. *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice*, London: Sage Publications
- Bowden, R. 2004, June. *A Critique of Alfred Gell on Art and Agency*. *Oceania*, pp.1-8 [Article, selected articles online]. Retrieved February 22, 2006 <http://www.findarticles.com>
- Brottem, B. and Lang, A. 1973. *Zulu Beadwork*, African Studies Centre, Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Bryant, A.T. 1949. *The Zulu People*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter
- Callaway, H. 1970. *The Religious System of the Amazulu – Africana Collectanea Vol XXXV*, Cape Town: Struik Publishers

- Cameron, E. 2005. *Witness to AIDS*, Paarl: Tafelberg.
- Chan, L. and Donovan, R. 2005. South-East Asian HIV/AIDS: Dangerous Bodies and public moralities. In Foller, M and Thorn, H. (Eds). *No Name Fever: AIDS in the Age of Globalization* (pp. 117-145). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur
- Coetzee, J. Graaf, J. Hendricks, F. and Wood, G. (Eds). (2001). *Development – Theory, Policy, and Practice: A micro-foundation for development thinking*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- Dagan, E. 1990. *African Dolls for Play and Music*, Toronto: Galarie Amrad African Arts
- Geertz, C. 1976. *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books Inc
- Gell, A. 1998. *Art and Agency, An Anthropological Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Gormley, A. 1998. *Making An Angel*, London: Booth-Clibborn
- Graaff, J. 2001. *Reconsidering Theory and Metatheory in Development Studies*. In J. Coetzee et al (Eds), *Development Theory, Policy and Practice*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- Grossert, J. W. 1963. *Zulu Bead Love Letters: Princess Magogo talking of bead colours and meanings*, Art and Craft in Education, v2.
- Jolles, F. 1994. Contemporary Zulu Dolls from KwaLatha, *African Arts*: Los Angeles: African Arts UCLA
- Klopper, S. 1992. *The Art of Zulu Speakers in Northern Natal-Zululand. An Investigation of the History of Beadwork, Carving and Dress from Shaka to Inkatha*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand
- Klopper, S. 1998. The Zulu. In P. Magubane (Ed), *Vanishing Cultures of South Africa*, Cape Town: Struik Publishers
- Krige, E. 1936. *The Social System of the Zulu's*, London: Longmans Green
- Kuchler, S. 2006. Reflections on Art and Agency: Knot sculpture between Mathematics and Art. In A. Schneider and C. Wright (Eds), *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, London: Berg
- Leclerc-Madlala, S. 2002. On the virgin cleansing myth: gendered bodies, AIDS and ethnomedicine, *African Journal of AIDS Research*:87-95
- Mayr, Franz. 1906. Language of Colours amongst the Zulus expressed by their Bead-work Ornament; and some General Notes on their Personal Adornments and Clothing. In E. Warren (Ed), *Annals of the Natal Government Museum*. London: Adlard and Son
- Moore, H. (Ed) 1996. *The Future of Anthropological Knowledge*, London: Routledge
- Moore, H. 1988. *Feminism and Anthropology*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Prozesky, H. and Mouton, J. 2001. The Participatory Research Paradigm. In J. Coetzee et al (Eds), *Development Theory, Policy, and Practice* (pp. 537-551). Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- Raum, O. 1973. *The Social Functions of Avoidances and taboos among the Zulu*, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter

- Rossi, P., Lipsey, M., and Freeman, H. 2004. *A Systematic Approach*. 7th edition: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Schneider, A. and Wright, C. (Eds). 2006. *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg Publishers
- Schneider, A. 2006. Appropriations. In A. Schneider and C. Wright (Eds), *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (pp. 29-51), Oxford: Berg Publishers
- Schoeman, H. S. 1971. *Beadwork in the Cultural Tradition of the Zulu*, Part two. Cape Town: Lantern
- Serote, P. et al. 2001. Gender and Development. In J. Coetzee et al (Eds), *Development Theory, Policy, and Practice* (pp. 155-173). Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- Wells, K., Conolly, J. and Sienaert, E. 2004. The *Siyazama* Project: A traditional Beadwork and AIDS Intervention Program. In M. Sauthoff and I. Sutherland (Eds), *Design Issues*, XX(2):73-89. Chicago: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press
- White, M. 2006. *Establishing Common Ground in Community-based Arts in Health*, *Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*, 126(3):120-125

## KATE WELLS PhD



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT GRAPHIC DESIGN  
DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

DIRECTOR of the Siyazama Project [www.siyazamaproject.co.za](http://www.siyazamaproject.co.za)  
Email: [katew@dut.ac.za](mailto:katew@dut.ac.za) (W) [crystal@telkomsa.net](mailto:crystal@telkomsa.net) (H)

### EDUCATION

PhD Social Anthropology (UKZN) 2007

### POSITIONS

**1973 – 1988** Various positions in graphic and textile design / U.K. and S.A.

**1989 – 2000** Lecturer in Graphic and Textile Design / ML Sultan Technikon, Durban.

**2000 – 2006** Senior Lecturer in the Department of Graphic Design, DUT

**2007** Head of Department (Acting)

### HONOURS / PERSONAL

**2000** 'Women of the Year' Shoprite and SABC 3 award –nominated finalist in Arts and Culture.

**2005** Amnesty International. International Honours Roll, contribution to Women's Human Rights

### HONOURS / SIYAZAMA PROJECT

**2000 - 2004** Winner of three FNB Vita Craft awards for outstanding craft.

**2004** Winner of the Brett Kebble Award for outstanding craft

### RECENT PUBLICATIONS

2007 Chapter in Book

Title: "Women, Trauma and Empowerment in Post-Authoritarian states"

2004 Peer-reviewed article

Design Issues Journal

(USA) Joint publication with Dr Joan Conolly and Prof. Edgard Sienaert on the *Siyazama* Project.

### RESEARCH + PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

2007 Work in collaboration with England and Africa Partnership (EAP) linking Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, the University of Newcastle, UK, and the Durban University of

Technology, SA. *Siyazama* Project methodologies to be employed in rural Uganda (DfID funded R1.5m)

2005 *Siyazama* Project exhibited at Michigan State University Museum, in Sweden at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg and at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Quebec

2005 Ackerman Foundation funding recipient to build *Siyazama* Project business (R100, 000)