
Two Stories about Art, Education, and Beauty in Twentieth-Century South Africa

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THIS IS A STORY WITHIN A STORY, and the first story ends like this: On Monday, September 15, 1980, Silverman Jara was stoned to death. Jara was a school principal in apartheid South Africa's Ciskei Bantustan; he was killed by his own students, apparently as he attempted to prevent them from destroying their school.¹ His was the fourth death resulting from the riots that had been roiling the region for fourteen days. The Ciskei's top official, Chief Minister Lennox Sebe, flew in by helicopter, and noted that such a thing had never happened before. "People must realize that we are no longer contending here with students but with terrorists who have no consideration for human life," he insisted. "I am convinced these children will kill their own parents." Thus did Sebe enlist Jara's death in the ongoing struggle for control over South African education under apartheid, a struggle that both activists and the government understood to be only a proxy for the real struggle between the state, its functionaries, and the masses of black South Africa. Jara was a principal, a teacher, and a casualty of war; he was a man who died in a moment of spectacular violence that much extant scholarship on twentieth-century South Africa makes legible and almost normal. Politicized (or in South African parlance, conscientized) students fought against the state and its functionaries throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These functionaries were most often the police or the military, but occasionally the struggle claimed teachers and administrators as casualties as well.² This was Silverman Jara's world.

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¹ Christina Jikelo, interview by the author, Cape Town, June 20, 2013.

² Silverman Jara file, excerpt from *The Natal Witness*, September 16, 1980, Killie Campbell Library,



FIGURE 1: Student-made swing at Ndaleni, early 1960s. Reproduced by permission of the Killie Campbell Archive, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa.

But so was this: Jara was 38 when he died. Seventeen years earlier, in 1963, he had applied for admission to the Department of Bantu Education's Arts and Crafts Teachers' Training Course at Ndaleni, Natal, about 550 kilometers away from his home in the Eastern Cape. In 1963 Jara was finishing his teachers' training certificate at the Healdtown Institution, a once-independent Methodist mission school where both Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe had studied, but which had come under government control following the passage of the Bantu Education Act in 1955. With

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa [hereafter KC], Ndaleni School [hereafter Ndaleni], Student Records [hereafter SR], no page number. For the well-known dynamics of the struggle against white supremacy in the schools, see, for example, Peter Kallaway, ed., *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg, 1984); Kallaway, ed., *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948–1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened* (Cape Town, 2002); Cynthia Kros, *The Seeds of Separate Development: Origins of Bantu Education* (Pretoria, 2010); Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940–1990* (Pietermaritzburg, 1999); Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *I Saw a Nightmare: Doing Violence to Memory—The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976* (New York, 2007); Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Athens, Ohio, 2010). Scholarship has recently recognized that schools—and especially student networks—are fruitful terrain for studies beyond the spectacle of popular politics. See, for example, Vukile Khumalo, “Ekukhanyeni Letter-Writers: A Historical Inquiry into Epistolary Network(s) and Political Imagination in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa,” in Karin Barber, ed., *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, Ind., 2006), 113–142; and Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (Pietermaritzburg, 2013).

his application to Ndaleni, Jara was applying for an additional year of specialty training and a higher-class appointment within the bureaucracy of the apartheid state. That was perhaps circumstantial, however; more apposite was that Jara was an artist. From Healdtown came the recommendation that he was “an intelligent, industrious student,” who excelled especially in “painting, lino cutting, clay modeling, various types of paper maché work, and also paper mosaics.” These were among the many methods that the Department of Bantu Education expected its specialty art teachers to perfect, and many students had similar experience. What recommended Jara in particular, however, was his “individual style as regards Art.”³

Jara was accepted and joined Ndaleni’s class for the term that began in February 1964. He traveled by rail to the school, which shared space with a Methodist mission station outside of Richmond in the Natal Midlands. He and his thirteen classmates from across the country stayed there for a year, ostensibly to learn the techniques necessary to teach the arts and crafts sections of the Bantu Education syllabus. They received training in the teaching of grass weaving, basket making, wood and clay work, and other subjects; they spent their mornings studying art history, a subject in which Jara excelled, finishing first in the class. They were exposed to art wherever possible, which for Jara’s class meant a trip to Giant’s Castle in the Drakensberg Mountains, hiking through cold weather to visit San cave paintings. “It was so cold that when one tried to talk the sound froze in one’s mouth,” Jara remembered. “We couldn’t hear each other except those who had matchsticks to melt their voices.”⁴ As future teachers, they spent time working with local schoolchildren to try out the teaching methods for which the apartheid state would later pay them. But they spent even more time developing their unique creative voice, which their own teachers insisted was the foundation of good art and good teaching. “You have the imagination” to create powerful work, one coaxed Jara, “and in your latest piece of sculpture there is a strong feeling.” She urged him to cultivate that vision—not to be too realistic, but to dig within himself, for “you will find greater success in portraying feeling.” Jara graduated at the end of 1964 and was appointed to teach at St. Matthew’s Training College back home in the Eastern Cape. He taught a variety of subjects, including arts and crafts, and did his own work on the side. He was lucky that his principal at St. Matthew’s believed in art and set aside scarce resources for materials; Jara found talent in students and recommended a number of them for admission to his alma mater.⁵ He continued to teach and create until he became a principal, and then he died.

Jara’s life and death is our first story. He was an art student who became an art teacher, one of a few hundred who passed through Ndaleni between the early 1950s and 1981. Sketched broadly, his is a story about black South African intellectual and creative life during the heyday of apartheid, which more or less coincided with the period between his arrival at Ndaleni and his death in 1980. It is not one of South African history’s well-known stories, but it is revealing in many ways, and it lays bare the complexity of the past that a new generation of historians have begun to face.

³ Principal, Healdtown, to Principal, Ndaleni Training College, n.d. [October 1963], KC, Ndaleni, SR, Silverman Jara, 1.

⁴ *Artira*, no. 9 (1964): 10.

⁵ Including Christina Jikelo, interview.

But the story that culminates in Silverman Jara's death is not the only story that should be told. The other is much less spectacular, but perhaps much more important. It involves a man named Jessie Muthige, who applied to Ndaleni a few years after Jara, came to campus, learned, returned home, and knew himself to be changed. Through Jessie Muthige, we can see the possibility of another story lingering behind the tragedy of Silverman Jara. Through Muthige, we can speculate about how Jara lived, before he died the sort of death that South African history knows so well.

LIVES SUCH AS JARA'S AND MUTHIGE'S were lives lived creatively under apartheid. Art students barely register in the narrative of the South African past; few remember Ndaleni in the story of South African art, let alone the history of South African ideas.⁶ And yet, in the voices of the students and teachers who went out from Ndaleni speaking a decidedly historic, and today archaic, language of race and creativity, we can see the contours of intellectual life under apartheid. Ndaleni was very much a product of apartheid; the school and its students made sense only within the world of Bantustans and ethnically delimited education that the National Party and its supporters created. Muthige and Jara lived entirely within that world—and by grasping what that meant, and how they strove to live fully there and then, Ndaleni offers a story that transcends apartheid, a chapter in the human quest for self-expression and meaning over and against the systems—and narratives—that restrain us. In Muthige's, Jara's, and others' efforts to do meaningful work with hands and minds, we see the strange prospect of beauty reaching out of the ugliness of time.

And time can be ugly. Jara died an ugly death, in a violent, conflicted place. Deaths such as his are so compelling that they exert tremendous power over our capacity to grasp life. He died the employee of a Bantustan, killed by the student vanguard, which means that until recently South African historiography—and, not incidentally, public memory—rendered lives like his in a particular way. Sebe enlisted Jara in this narrative: he hailed him as a victim of terrorists, whereas others might have seen him as a collaborator, deservedly killed by comrades. Irrespective of such contemporary and retrospective judgment, Jara's death fits neatly into the epistemological framework that presents South African history along the binary of good and evil, with tales only of apartheid and the struggle against it.⁷ Scholars have

⁶ Ndaleni merits a total of three pages in a recent multi-volume study of South African art history. See Elizabeth Rankin, "Creating Communities: Art Centres and Workshops and Their Influence on the South African Art Scene," in Lize Van Robbroeck, ed., *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, vol. 2: 1945–1976 (Johannesburg, 2011), 52–77, here 67–69. The most thorough account of Ndaleni is the catalogue to the 1999 Ndaleni retrospective at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, Juliette Leeb-du Toit, ed., *Ndaleni Art School: A Retrospective* (Pietermaritzburg, 1999).

⁷ For a critique of this, see Sello Mathabatha's comments in Christopher Saunders and Cynthia Kros, "Conversations with Historians," *South African Historical Journal* 51, no. 1 (2004): 1–23, here 1–2. Interestingly, Mathabatha cites the confessional apparatus of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as being at least partly responsible for this state of affairs. I will return to this question below. Others, including Suren Pillay, suggest that the notion of individuated good and evil emerged in the late 1970s and, especially with the rise of death squads and assassinations (on both sides), the 1980s. See Pillay, "Locations of Violence: Political Rationality and Death Squads in Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23, no. 3 (2005): 417–429. There are too many narratives of the struggle to list here. What is worth noting, however, is that even when it is not explicitly about apartheid and the struggle against it, South African historiography has tended to focus explicitly on the social, eco-

pushed back against this familiar rendering of the past. Rather than rush to judgment, Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders have called for “sober reflection” on what happened during apartheid’s rise and fall.⁸ Theirs is a plea for a new empiricism, a dispassionate, impartial scholarship to replace the stridently instrumental, overtly sympathetic history-making that paced the struggle.⁹ The time has come for a “post-anti-apartheid” historiography, Catherine Burns contends, which can account for the past in ways less beholden to the politics of bygone times.¹⁰ Where once “struggle” or its cognates—history from below, social history, resistance, and agency—reigned supreme, “complexity”—a skepticism regarding accepted binaries, a renewed focus on culture as a productive field—now holds forth.

The historian and political commentator Jacob Dlamini notes that “the master

conomic, and political conditions that promoted white supremacy from the nineteenth century on, often with the implicit or explicit suggestion that these conditions structured the nature of popular resistance or compliance as well. Notable and classic works include Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (Berkeley, Calif., 1979); Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870–1930* (New York, 1982); Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York, 1996); and Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Charlottesville, Va., 2001). An important recent reassessment of the scholarly consensus is Clifton Crais, *Poverty, War and Violence in South Africa* (Cambridge, 2011). Crais argues that the origins of South Africa’s mass immiseration go back to imperial conquest in the mid to late nineteenth century, rather than to the rise of the segregationist state. This puts the onus of responsibility (as it were) on the process of colonization, which is a more familiar argument elsewhere in colonial Africa, as in Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1990), especially the conclusion—although the idea of a total imperial break has been critically reexamined by Holly Hanson and others. Back in South Africa, although the scholarship is weighted toward the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, more historians have begun to write about apartheid. Collaborative multi-volume efforts such as Gwendolen M. Carter, Thomas Karis, Gail M. Gerhart, and (recently) Clive L. Glaser, eds., *From Protest to Challenge in South Africa*, and the state-sponsored South African Democracy Education Trust’s *Road to Democracy in South Africa* continue to narrate the history of the struggle. Important monographs include Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London, 1983); and Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences* (Oxford, 2011). General histories of apartheid include Dan O’Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948–1994* (Johannesburg, 1996), and Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (1991; repr., Oxford, 1997); while more focused monographs include Leslie Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts* (Bloomington, Ind., 2003); Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945–1959* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1999); Ineke van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville, Va., 2000); and my own *The Law and the Prophets*. These volumes are all about some aspect of state segregation and popular resistance, as is the large and better-read popular literature on the country’s history.

⁸ Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders, “Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa in Context,” in Sapire and Saunders, eds., *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives* (Cape Town, 2013), 1–31, here 1.

⁹ For a decidedly less positivist and more critical take on the politics of the archive and the ongoing need to interrogate history-making in the present, see Arianna Lissoni, Jon Soske, and Natasha Erlank, “One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Struggle History after Apartheid,” in Lissoni, Soske, Erlank, et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg, 2012), 29–54. I will return to the problem of the archive below.

¹⁰ Catherine Burns, “A Useable Past: The Search for ‘History in Chords,’” in Hans Erik Stolten, ed., *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala, 2007), 351–362. Burns is careful to underline her use of the term “post-anti-apartheid” rather than “post-apartheid,” given how many of the long-dead system’s social conditions continue to bedevil contemporary South Africa. See Steven L. Robins, ed., *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid: Citizenship, Governance and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), among other critiques of the post-1994 dispensation.

narrative blinds us to a richness, a complexity of life among black South Africans, that not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy.”¹¹ In *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini challenges South African memory and scholarship to consider the richness of a past beyond binaries, to resist the teleology of national becoming, and instead to concede that “there are people for whom the present is not the land of milk and honey, the past not one vast desert of doom and gloom.” Complexity demands that we interrogate especially the composition of the “people,” the “faceless masses” of struggle “jargon,” and that we recognize that not all black South Africans experienced “apartheid [in] the same way and fought the same way against apartheid.”¹² Dlamini’s study is eloquent and feistily controversial and earned him great fame in South Africa. His argument is not exactly novel, however—*Native Nostalgia* is one among numerous memoirs and autobiographies by black South Africans, published both during and after apartheid, that self-consciously break from the struggle biography narrative and add texture and emotional depth to our understanding of the South African past.¹³

Silverman Jara’s death would seem to beg such a complex rendering of the past. He lived, learned, hiked, penned at least one bad joke, taught, and created before he died. The circumstances of his education at the Bantu Education institution Ndaleneni and his employment in the Ciskei Bantustan were just that—circumstantial. The context of his life was not necessarily who he was, and as Joan Scott and Frederick Cooper remind us, we ought to be careful not to grant interpolated categories—“Xhosa,” “African,” “black,” “collaborator”—too much power over his self-con-

¹¹ Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg, 2010), 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12, 18.

¹³ See, for example, Zakes Mda, *Sometimes There Is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (New York, 2012); Fred Khumalo, *Touch My Blood* (Johannesburg, 2011). Memoirs such as this frequently transgress onto the terrain of the struggle memoir, exemplified by Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom*, but in other respects they are in keeping with Njabulo Ndebele’s mid-1980s call for black South African writers to “rediscover the ordinary.” See Ndebele, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 143–157. For more on the debate that Ndebele’s call prompted, see David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (Pietermaritzburg, 2005). As noted above, Mda and others are heirs to a long tradition of black South African nonfiction writing, much of which powerfully critiques the flattening of the black South African experience to the struggle alone. See, for example, Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (New York, 1963); and especially Essop Patel, ed., *The World of Can Themba: Selected Writings of the Late Can Themba* (Johannesburg, 1985). For a trenchant critique of “intimate knowledge” and the practice of memory in South Africa, see Jon Soske, “Open Secrets, Off the Record: Audience, Intimate Knowledge, and the Crisis of the Post-Apartheid State,” *Historical Reflections* 38, no. 2 (2012): 55–70. It is far less common to find a monograph on some non-struggle aspect of twentieth-century South African history; Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976* (Portsmouth, N.H., 2000), and Anne Kelk Mager, *Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa* (Bloomington, Ind., 2010), are welcome exceptions. Other fields, notably anthropology and literature, are more practiced at recovering some aspect of everyday life in the twentieth century. See, for example, David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa’s Black City Music and Theater* (Chicago, 2008); and especially Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (New York, 2006). New scholarship elsewhere in Africa is providing a more sensitive accounting of twentieth-century politics by considering especially how the dynamics of cultural and intellectual production colluded with state policies to produce new political and social forms across the postcolonial era. See especially Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham, N.C., 2011); Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, Ind., 2011); James R. Brennan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens, Ohio, 2012); Nate Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night: Popular Music and Social Change in Urban Ghana* (Bloomington, Ind., 2013); and Michael McGovern, *Unmasking the State: Making Guinea Modern* (Chicago, 2012).

scious life.¹⁴ Indeed, South Africanist scholarship has begun to reassess old categories, including apparatuses of the apartheid state such as the Bantustans themselves. Historians have considered the ways in which chiefs and other officials attempted to find a way to work within the system to fashion a more complete picture of life at the coalface of Bantustan bureaucracies. To call chiefs negotiating the terms of state betterment programs and radio announcers transmitting government edicts collaborators is to paint too broadly; this new scholarship picks up on the calls by Cooper, Benjamin Lawrance, Richard L. Roberts, and others to consider the ways in which colonialism and apartheid demand histories more sensitive to the contours of the day-to-day negotiations that marked the past.¹⁵ This was the world in which Jara lived—and compelling new work also encourages us to reconsider whether his death might be better understood as somehow contributing not to the telos of apartheid's end, but instead to the tautological “tragedy” of its death throes.¹⁶

¹⁴ My thinking here is influenced by writings about identity formation, notably Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–797; and Frederick Cooper with Rogers Brubaker, “Identity,” in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005), 59–90. Both Scott and Cooper contend that “identities” should be seen almost as narratives, unfolding across time, rather than as completed, closed processes, which are typically retrospective rather than historical. For South Africa historiography, Paul S. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948* (Cambridge, 2010), insists that we begin with these social processes of becoming rather than apply now- or once-current political identifications to the past. I will return to this issue below.

¹⁵ See, for example, Jill Kelly, “‘Only the Fourth Chief’: Conflict, Land and Chiefly Authority in Twentieth Century KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2012); Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, “‘You Are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation’: Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity and Listenership, 1960–1994,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 575–594. Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, Wis., 2006). See also Clifton Crais on agricultural specialists in *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power, and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (Cambridge, 2002); and Sean Redding on tax collection in *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Power, and Rebellion in South Africa, 1880–1963* (Athens, Ohio, 2006). For case studies of so-called “middle-people” in the Union (and early apartheid) era, see Colin Bundy, “A Voice in the Big House: The Career of Headman Enoch Mamba,” *Journal of African History* 22, no. 4 (1981): 531–550; and Paul la Hausse, “So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal,” in Philip Bonner, Peter Delius, and Deborah Posel, eds., *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993), 195–228. African policemen and soldiers are other well-studied intermediaries. See Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C., 2006); Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1999); and David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester, 1991). For South Africa, see Keith Shear, “Chiefs or Modern Bureaucrats? Managing Black Police in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 54, no. 2 (2012): 251–274. Frederick Cooper is among those credited with moving the literature beyond the simple oppression/resistance binary that characterized much earlier Africanist histories of colonialism; see his “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1516–1545.

¹⁶ For examples of this new scholarship, see Laura Evans, “South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of ‘Decolonisation’: Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands,” *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 117–137; and Lekgoathi, “‘You Are Listening to Radio Lebowa.’” One of the main thrusts of revision has been to consider which elements of Bantustan political life were redeemable, if any. Healthcare and culture have emerged as two favorites; for the former, see Anne Digby, “‘The Bandwagon of Golden Opportunities’? Healthcare in South Africa's Bantustan Periphery,” *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 4 (2012): 827–851; and Fraser G. McNeill, “Rural Reggae: The Politics of Performance in the Former ‘Homeland’ of Venda,” *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 81–95. Notably, the schools remain an area that resists revision, and, one imagines, will continue to do so as long as the stink of Bantu Education clings to that particular past. For an iteration of the past as present-day politics when assessing the South African education system, see the recent debate between

All of which is to say that new scholarship offers us a choice to think differently about Silverman Jara, to be open to the complexity of his experience, the fine-grained, everyday negotiations of satisfaction and struggle that doubtless marked his life. If we desire, we can offer a new context for his actions in defense of his school, and spur a new accounting of the past. Yet what would be the benefits of establishing such a new context? Who would it satisfy? Or, to put it another way, on whose terms would it satisfy? Our own, beholden as they are to the categories and dynamics we assign to the past? Or Jara's sense of his own life in time?¹⁷ The historical discipline has its own ways of knowing and its own politics; not least of these is the conviction that through narration we might make a positive accounting of the past.¹⁸ But as many scholars have noted, narration is a dubious project, involving as it does the interests of the many intervening moments and politics between then and now. New historiography has opened up many new prospects on the South African past. From the Bantustans, for example, we are learning a good deal about the ongoing construction of ethnicity, which has proved more stubborn than previous generations of scholars assumed that it would.¹⁹ This literature thus teaches us valuable lessons for our own time—but what does it teach us about historicity, about the art of living in a particular past? How might we attempt to render the past differently, less neatly, and thus learn more from someone like Jara?

The historian Shula Marks has noted that our discipline's enthusiasm for context and cause often renders us insensitive to the personal lives of our subjects. Rather than erecting new explanatory infrastructures, she suggests that we should begin from the vantage point of the subjects themselves. "The personal and the psychological need to be rethought and reworked," Marks writes.²⁰ It is not enough to revisit

Hermann Giliomee and Martin Prew: Giliomee, "Education in SA: Is Verwoerd to Blame?," <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=323686&sn=Marketingweb+detail>; Prew, "Sorry, but Verwoerd and His ilk Are to Blame!," <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=325298&sn=Marketingweb+detail>; Giliomee, "Reconsidering Verwoerd and Bantu Education," <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=326297&sn=Detail&pid=71616>. An important exception is Crain Soudien, "Teachers' Responses to the Introduction of Apartheid Education," in Kallaway, *The History of Education under Apartheid*, 211–223. The term "tragedy" comes from Dlamini's keynote speech at the 2011 South African Historical Society Conference; Jacob Dlamini, "After the Romance, Tragedy? Rethinking South Africa's National Liberation Struggle," cited in Sapire and Saunders, "Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa in Context," 2. Jon Soske considers the self-consuming violence of the 1980s in "The Family Romance of the South African Revolution" (unpublished ms.).

¹⁷ Ciraj Rassool has offered an eloquent critique of the sort of social biography that emerged in South Africa in the 1990s, exemplified by Van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine*. See Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa" (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2004), especially pt. 1.

¹⁸ For a compelling critique of the discipline, see Premesh Lalu, "When Was South African History Ever Postcolonial?," *Kronos* 34, no. 1 (2008): 267–281. As long ago as the late 1980s, Jane Starfield suggested that nonconventional historical sources such as the aforementioned memoirs and autobiographies might offer vital new correctives to the limits of the archive. See Starfield, "'Not Quite History': The Autobiographies of H. Selby Msimang and R.V. Selope Thema and the Writing of South African History," *Social Dynamics* 14, no. 2 (1988): 16–35.

¹⁹ Lekgoathi, "'You Are Listening to Radio Lebowa,'" 577–578.

²⁰ Shula Marks, "Changing History, Changing Histories: Separations and Connections in the Lives of South African Women," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2000): 94–106, here 105. Like Starfield, here Marks called for a "psychological turn"—or at least a psycho-biographical turn—in South African historiography. Mark Gevisser's celebrated biography of former South African president Thabo Mbeki seemingly responded to this. See Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg,

the Bantustans instrumentally, to provide explanations for tribalism's enduring appeal in post-apartheid South Africa.²¹ It is not enough to suggest that the vantage point of the present changes how we view the Bantustan past.²² Rather, in keeping with Marks's suggestion, we might embrace Joan Scott's definition of history as the "ever-unfinished act of elucidation," not the generator of new epistemological regimes capable of exerting their power over the past.²³

WITH THESE IDEAS IN MIND, how might we reconsider Silverman Jara? It is here where the second story, that of Jessie Muthige, comes in. So much of what we think of as black intellectual life under apartheid is focused on where thinkers were positioned vis-à-vis the problem of the system's end, not on the actual conditions of thought while they were within its grasp.²⁴ Apartheid was a system to be colluded with or overcome, to be sure, but it was also a reality to be lived with—and the spectacle of its overcoming too often crowds other stories of living with it from the stage. Muthige's story does not animate the same well-known narratives as Jara's, and therefore it allows us to consider how Jara might have lived. Five years after Jara left Ndaleni, Muthige applied to the program, in order to train to teach art in the schools of his native Venda. "I have a special interest in Arts and Craft for the sake of leading my own Venda nation," he wrote, "since there's at present not a single Venda to revive the art and skill of our forefathers."²⁵ He was accepted in late 1969 and, leaving his family behind, traveled by train to Natal for the 1970 academic term. When he returned home for the winter vacation that June, he posted a quick note to his art teacher. It seems that Ndaleni had taught him something rather different from how best to revive the art of the Venda nation. "The Arts and Crafts course has really changed my way of life . . . I see things in a different way." His sense of possibility, and faith in his own capacities, was transformed; he was "proud because my friends seem to see something new in me. They are sometimes so jealous they promise to apply for next year."²⁶

The time between Muthige's application to Ndaleni and his return home in mid-winter presents a prospect as compelling as Jara's encounter with his students, only on a different scale. Before his application, Muthige was already conversant in the language of the state and the system—he claimed to be a Venda, a member of an ethnic community, a Bantustan citizen who wanted to deepen his engagement with that identity. Yet once he returned home, his sense of self was no longer what it had been (if indeed his being Venda had been vital beforehand for reasons beyond his

2007). Marks's psychological turn has been critiqued for reifying the neoliberal individual subject, who has gained great cultural purchase in South Africa after apartheid, without probing the politics of intimacy and community that belie the isolation of the psyche. See below.

²¹ J. Michael Williams, *Chieftaincy, the State, and Democracy: Political Legitimacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Bloomington, Ind., 2009).

²² McNeill, "Rural Reggae." Bhekisizwe Peterson offered a critique of this in a panel discussion on the art of Ebrahim and Omar Badsha presented at the University of the Witwatersrand, July 20, 2010.

²³ Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, N.C., 2011), 4.

²⁴ My own *The Law and the Prophets* is notably guilty of this.

²⁵ Muthige, application, KC, Ndaleni, SR, undated [1969], 1.

²⁶ Muthige to Lorna Peirson, June 30, 1970, *ibid.*, 1, 2.



FIGURE 2: Jessie Muthige in 1969. Reproduced by permission of the Killie Campbell Archive, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa.

application to be further implicated in Bantu Education). The world through his eyes did not look the same. Who he knew himself to be had changed—and, vitally, he knew this because his friends saw “something new” in him. Jessie Muthige the man in time and space—the knowing person, the subject of history—was transformed.

This transformation took place at Ndaleni, a school dedicated to the training of African arts and crafts teachers, where aspirant Africans learned the tasks determined by the Bantu Education syllabus.²⁷ But as Muthige reveals, other work was done there as well. Critics have noted the coincidence of South Africa’s national “liberation” and the global victory of neoliberalism. To scholars such as Steven Rob-

²⁷ Some Ndaleni graduates took that training and became successful artists in their own right. It is through them that most people know anything about the school. Ndaleni alumni Selby Mvusi and Dan Rakgoathe are among the handful of critically successful black painters and sculptors about whom art historians have begun to write, most notably in the four-volume study *Visual Century*. For Mvusi, see Elza Miles, *Current of Africa: The Art of Selby Mvusi* (Johannesburg, 1996); for Rakgoathe, see Donvé Langhan, *The Unfolding Man: The Life and Art of Dan Rakgoathe* (Cape Town, 2000). Miles is currently working on a biography of Mvusi, which will include a substantial account of his years at Ndaleni. This is not the place to offer a wider accounting of the extensive literature on black South African visual artists, of which *Visual Century* is the latest and most comprehensive example. It is worth noting, however, the ways in which such collections and studies such as John Peffer’s justly renowned *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis, 2009) share with the apartheid state the conviction that as black artists, individual creators approached their canvas, wood, or stone with a set of predictable concerns: to be political, or not; to be modern, or traditional. Who they were thought to be determines how we understand their work. In other words, artists do not live in these studios; instead, they inhabit social categories, and thus scholarly examinations tend to “naturalize” rather than effectively “analyze” what happened when they found the time to create (Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 791–792). As will become apparent, I am after something different here.

ins, the story of post-apartheid South Africa is one of collective struggle and suffering having yielded to the limitations of the individual subject, bounded by individual bodies, each having been granted a vote and civil rights, but little more.²⁸ Bounded bodies stand at a distance from each other and the society in which they live, which has important effects for the sorts of stories we tell about the past.²⁹ While studies such as Dlamini's offer emotional texture and depth—subjectivity—to the past, too often the complexity they offer is little more than the claim that one person's memory is different from and more valid than another's. Thinking perhaps of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's thoroughly Protestant model of confession and personal accounting in and about the past, Jean and John Comaroff note that in contemporary South Africa, history has become "privatized and partisan"; it has become a "possession," something that individual subjects are able to recall with clarity, instrumentally to stake present-day claims.³⁰ This is the liberal, Whiggish model of history, wherein each individual is the subject of his or her own grand narrative.

Yet that is not how Muthige lived those few months in 1970. He was his own person, who brought a set of expectations and experiences to Ndalen. The work that he did there on his own self transformed who he knew himself to be and how others knew him. They—his friends—"see something new in me."³¹ The Comaroffs' critique of personhood in current-day South Africa comes from their efforts to theorize from the African experience. The notion of the dialogic self is central to this project, which in turn builds on a larger scholarship on notions of personhood other than the fiction of the "unmediated" post-Enlightenment, European-derived individual. African historians muster overwhelming evidence of the social productive of selfhood, at the interstices of individuals' experiences, expectations, and talents and society's use for the same. "The person was a constant work in progress," the Comaroffs explain, "engaged . . . in a praxis of self-construction in the world."³² Their case study comes from work among the Southern Tswana; case studies from elsewhere on the continent reinforce the notion that in the African past, personhood was an ongoing and invariably social ontological state, as Muthige knew well. People are more than their minds—they are constituted of their minds, their bodies, their senses, and the social and ecological space in which they live. They become known by what they do, and they know themselves by the work they do in the world.³³ Muthige eventually re-

²⁸ Steven L. Robins, *From Revolution to Rights in South Africa: Social Movements, NGOs and Popular Politics after Apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg, 2008).

²⁹ Scholars of African healing, witchcraft, and politics have had better success in unpacking African notions of personhood than in yielding to the fictive ideal of the post-Enlightenment individual. For southern Africa, see, for example, Karen E. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820–1948* (Athens, Ohio, 2008); Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago, 2005); David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Athens, Ohio, 2012); and Harry G. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago, 2005). Much of the work problematizing the individual in South Africa has been influenced by Michel Foucault; see Alexander Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body* (New York, 1998); and Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1991).

³⁰ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, Colo., 2012), 36.

³¹ Muthige to Peirson.

³² Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 53, 55.

³³ On talent, work, and reputation in the deep African past, see Kathryn M. de Luna, "Hunting Reputations: Talent, Individuals, and Community in Precolonial South Central Africa," *Journal of Af-*

turned home to teach arts and crafts in the Venda schools, as Jara had done in the Ciskei. The contexts of these two men's lives reveal that they were many things: Africans, members of so-called tribal communities, caught up in the categories and structures demanded by context. But Muthige's brief missives reveal that he knew differently, that from deep within apartheid he was becoming, not that he simply, inevitably was.³⁴

The work of self-making was ongoing under apartheid, in ways beholden neither to the state nor to its opposition, even as individuals such as Muthige and Jara were deeply implicated in the structures of their time and place. That is precisely the point. In her study of the self-making correspondence of the early-twentieth-century healer Louise Mvemve, Catherine Burns discusses letters as a sort of micro-infrastructure, "girders" laid between a self and others. Where other scholars have shown the hegemonic effects of writing, especially in English, Mvemve's life shows instead how individuals embraced the opportunities history presented to them, in the service of their "complex, situational and unfolding sense of self."³⁵ So too did later generations of black South Africans embrace the opportunities presented to them under apartheid, such as Ndaleni, where they sought to build a community of like-minded selves capable of expressing something unique to their being-in-the-world.

For Ndaleni students, art—or often "Art"—was the medium with which they constructed those durable selves. They and their instructors drew on prominent mid-twentieth-century art theorists such as John Dewey, who argued that art production revealed the quintessentially human experience of unique talent operating within, through, and against the limitations of society and the material world.³⁶ "Agency," writes Joan Scott, "is not the innate property of an abstract individual," but a historical quality, "the attribute of subjects who are defined by—subjected to—discourses that bring them into being as both subordinate and capable of action."³⁷ So it is with art. For Godfrey Lienhardt, art is the voice of a soloist within the choir; for Ingrid Monson, it is a Coltrane riff against the backdrop of the rhythm section.³⁸ For Silverman Jara, Jessie Muthige, and other Ndaleni graduates, art was the cul-

rican History 53, no. 3 (2012): 279–299. De Luna's work builds on Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga's mid-1990s intervention "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History* 36, no. 1 (1995): 91–120. For the power that inhered in knowledge, see Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charlottesville, Va., 2010).

³⁴ Godfrey Lienhardt, "Self: Public, Private—Some African Representations," in Michael Carrithers, Stephen Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge, 1985), 141–155, here 152. For another analysis of "becoming" as an African political philosophy—expressed especially in art—see Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson and the Idea of Negritude* (London, 2011).

³⁵ Catherine Burns, "The Letters of Louisa Mvemve," in Barber, *Africa's Hidden Histories*, 78–112, here 90. Mvemve's "girders" function similarly to what Rassool describes as the ongoing "productions" of life history, revealed especially through writing; "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," 12.

³⁶ See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1934).

³⁷ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 141.

³⁸ Lienhardt, "Self," 145; Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York, 2010), 294–296. For Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Forster, it is talent—activity—set within the context and limitations of an artists' workshop. See Kasfir and Forster, "Introduction," in Kasfir and Forster, eds., *African Art and Agency in the Workshop* (Bloomington, Ind., 2013), 1–23, here 4.

tivation of self-expression within, through, and against the manifold limitations of Bantu Education and apartheid. Like Mvemve's letters, art and education were girders, the infrastructure that connected their selves to the rest of the community, and through that connection made both more secure. Their lives were profoundly limited by apartheid, but through the social experience of art they found a way to live.

John Dewey thought art tremendously important, because the act of creating is a discrete experience—it has a beginning and an end; it involves an individual's creative faculties and material realities and engages the perceptive powers of the audience. Art is *an* experience, set apart from the ongoing, undifferentiated experience of regular life, and as an experience, art provokes an aesthetic response—an appraisal, a quest for meaning, an assessment.³⁹ We are all individual subjects who are also subject to various regimes beyond our control, and we each lay girders to help us navigate our experiences. Apartheid was such an experience. The system existed in abstract political fact, but it was also known aesthetically, intuited in the senses, through sound, image, and language. The aesthetics of state power and popular resistance are well known.⁴⁰ The aesthetics of interpersonal infrastructure, on the other hand, are elusive, hidden, and often strange to see. Take, for example, the infrastructure of suspicion that prompted fears of witchcraft, feelings of suspicion, and a sense of danger, all of which thrived in Bantustan communities, as Isak Niehaus reveals. Niehaus argues that witchcraft beliefs were wholly logical within the Bantustan experience—with the blight, poverty, co-opted authority, and overdetermined cultural distinctiveness that the system implied. These conditions prompted what Niehaus calls an “encapsulating effect,” which helped to shape the sense that rural South Africans could make of their lives.⁴¹ Other scholars have advanced similar arguments that draw our attention to apartheid not as something struggled against, but as a distinct, limited historical experience with which people lived, the terrain on which they struggled to build their selves.⁴²

To us, the language of witchcraft might make little sense. We stand apart from the experience that Niehaus describes. Appeals to Bantustan authority for access and legitimacy, described by Noah Tamarkin and others, sound similarly odd to our ears. So too do teachers who died for their Bantu Education schools, applicants who were changed by their Bantu Education experience, and friends who promised to apply next year. To paraphrase Joan Scott, the infrastructure of those lives, based on the aesthetics of the apartheid experience, the sense-making potential of that moment, is a past carried into the present—but not entirely.⁴³ Ndaleni was enormously important in the lives of those who trained there and who carried its lessons down from

³⁹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, chap. 3.

⁴⁰ In South Africa, see, for example, Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*; Jennifer Beningsfeld, *The Frightened Land: Land, Landscape, Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2006); and Diana Wylie, *Art and Revolution: The Life and Death of Thami Mnyele, South African Artist* (Charlottesville, Va., 2008).

⁴¹ Isak Niehaus, “Witchcraft and the South African Bantustans: Evidence from Bushbuckridge,” *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 41–58, here 58.

⁴² See, for example, Noah Tamarkin's wonderfully rich account of the Lemba Cultural Association's attempts to be granted recognition, and thus Bantustan authority, during the 1970s. Tamarkin, “Religion and Race, Recognition as Democracy: Lemba ‘Black Jews’ in South Africa,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 637 (2011): 148–165.

⁴³ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 89.



FIGURE 3: “Monster,” by Silverman Jara, June 2013. Photo by the author.

the hill outside of Richmond into the rest of apartheid society. Yet nobody talks about it anymore—the time in which the Ndaleni experience made sense has long since passed. It has left an “echo,” however, a distortion in time—voices that do not say exactly what we expect to hear and whose sense we struggle to discern.⁴⁴

ALL ECHOES BEGIN SOMEWHERE. In Ndaleni’s case, one beginning was in the early twentieth century, with the gathering consensus that Africans ought to work with their hands in school. At the turn of the twentieth century, “handwork” featured prominently in global debates about the position of the black student. Some insisted that colonial schooling ought to be qualitatively the same as European; others insisted that this should not and would never be so.⁴⁵ From the turn of the century until the eve of World War II, educational theorists across Africa and elsewhere began to reevaluate whether the European-derived colonial education system was appropriate to the needs of the African child. This came first under the aegis of “industrial education,” a system that Richard Elphick glosses as “education for life,” which was based on the conviction that African students would eventually assume positions as

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁵ Kenneth King, *Pan-Africanism and Education: A Study of Race Philanthropy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa* (Oxford, 1971). See also the reception of these debates in colonial Zanzibar in Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*.

skilled laborers and craftspeople in an industrial economy.⁴⁶ Over time, however, the justification for a “differentiated” education system shifted, away from education for life and toward education for difference in itself. By the end of World War II, education for difference was justification enough for African students to be made to work with their hands in schools, which in turn prompted Jessie Muthige to apply to Ndaleni to preserve the traditions of his Venda nation.

It was commonplace for colonial officials in early-twentieth-century South Africa to preach the importance of “industry” and “handwork” in the schools, much as Booker T. Washington and others taught about the value of so-called “industrial education” in the post-emancipation American South.⁴⁷ By the 1920s, industrial education *cum* handwork was *de rigueur* in many South African schools for Africans, where many came to see it as a solution to the problem of black economic insecurity. Beginning in Natal in the immediate post-World War I period, and gradually extending across the Union, African primary schools granted an hour or so a day for students to work with their hands, producing items for display and sale. Parents frequently complained that their children were learning something qualitatively different than were white children, but teachers explained that industrial education at a young age would “save them from going up and down the streets looking for jobs” when they left school.⁴⁸

The teacher just quoted taught in the Natal provincial schools, which emerged in the interwar years as the proving ground for industrial education in South Africa. This was due largely to the legacy of Charles Loram, the inspector of native education in Natal in the years immediately following World War I. Like many other white South African educationists, Loram held a doctorate in education from Teachers College in New York, where he had studied with John Dewey and Paul Monroe—the latter of whom had coined the term “adapted education” to describe the idea of racially differentiated education—during the 1910s.⁴⁹ Like Monroe, Loram applauded missionaries for bringing European education to Africa, but he insisted that

⁴⁶ Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville, Va., 2012), 182–190.

⁴⁷ For the important legacies of Booker T. Washington in colonial Africa, see especially Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, N.J., 2012). The American influence in Union-era South Africa has been considered by a number of scholars, including Richard W. Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa: Historical Dimensions of Engagement and Disengagement* (New York, 1990); and Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, Ohio, 2012).

⁴⁸ A. B. Zunga, “Native Crafts—An Occupation,” *Native Teacher’s Journal* 9, no. 4 (1930): 213–215. In his pedagogical theory, John Dewey used the term “occupation” to mean much more than simply “a job.” “Occupation” signified that education should be contextual—each task makes sense because of how it fits into the student’s broader social world, and this needs to be apparent to the students as they learn. It is unclear to what extent Zunga was drawing on this more theoretical meaning. For more, see Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958* (Boston, 1986), 69–70.

⁴⁹ For South Africans at Teachers College, see Brahm David Fleisch, “The Teachers College Club: American Educational Discourse and the Origins of Bantu Education in South Africa, 1914–1951” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995). See also Kros, *The Seeds of Separate Development*. Charles Loram was a student of both Monroe’s and Dewey’s at Teachers College and published his thesis in 1917 as *The Education of the South African Native* (London, 1917). Notable dissents to the idea of adapted education came from A. Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush: A Critical Study of the Theory and Practice of Native Education in Africa* (London, 1929); and Edgar H. Brookes, *Native Education in South Africa* (Pretoria, 1930). It ought to be noted that the former dissent came with more than a touch of racism and the derisive dismissal of African cultures.

the syllabus needed to be revised to fit the particular needs of the African student. His Teachers College thesis argued that industrial training at a young age would set students on the path toward a career, and he cited blacksmithing, boot making, carpentry, and farming as the most likely of these occupations. Loram envisioned a future in which African craftspeople would be vital within European-dominated South African society. He mandated the inclusion of time spent working with one's hands on the primary school syllabus to ensure that training for this future would begin as early as possible.⁵⁰

Loram's vision was attacked almost immediately. Missionaries dedicated to the premise of undifferentiated education declared it biased, and race theorists mocked its premise of one, integrated South African economy as hopelessly naïve.⁵¹ Afrikaans-speaking educationists and anthropologists were foremost among the latter critics. W. G. Eiselen, an anthropologist at Stellenbosch University, assailed the idea that Africans could be trained to assume positions within European society. Rather, "the duty of the native [is] . . . to become a better native, with ideals and a culture of his own."⁵² Theorists such as Eiselen instead promoted a model of native schooling that would preserve African cultural distinctiveness. As the famed anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued during a 1934 visit to South Africa, education was where African society could begin to reassert its traditions in the wake of colonial conquest and social transformation. In the schools, the African child should "be developed along lines which will not estrange him from things African or make it less easy for him to maintain his place in African society."⁵³

Thinkers such as Eiselen and Malinowski gradually won the debate. As the 1930s progressed, fewer theorists contended that Africans ought to work with their hands to prepare for their future in industrial society—yet "handwork" remained on the syllabus, and was increasingly justified in terms of its capacity to help Africans become better Africans.⁵⁴ National educational commissions during the late 1930s and into the 1940s supported this consensus. Eiselen organized the best-known of these,

⁵⁰ Elphick, *The Equality of Believers*, 189.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 190–191.

⁵² W. G. Eiselen, cited in Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power*, 118.

⁵³ Eiselen, cited in E. G. Malherbe, ed., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society: Report of the South Africa Education Conference Held in Cape Town and Johannesburg in July, 1934 under the Auspices of the New Education Fellowship* (Cape Town, 1937), 412.

⁵⁴ One crafts program that was able to remain financially viable (for a while) was the woodcarving program started by Sister Pauline at the Anglican Church's Grace Dieu Diocesan Training College, near Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal. From the 1920s through the 1930s, Grace Dieu carvers—including Ernest Mancoba and Job Kekana—produced naturalistic carvings, which were then sold to churches across the Union and elsewhere. See Guy Butler, *The Prophetic Nun: Sister Margaret CR, Sister Pauline CR, Sister Dorothy Raphael CSMV* (Johannesburg, 2000); and Elizabeth A. Morton, "Missions and Modern Art in Southern Africa" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2003). As Morton demonstrates, Sister Pauline's work at Grace Dieu was continued by Edward Paterson at Cyrene Mission in Southern Rhodesia. Paterson was an advocate for the educative potential of the arts, as well as for the preservation of southern African craft traditions. See Paterson, "The Bantu as Artist" (unpublished ms.), Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, AB 810 F. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the South African artist Bill Ainslie taught at Cyrene Mission, where he reconnected with Ndaleni alumnus Selby Mvusi, whom he had known when they were both students in Natal during the 1950s. Mvusi was a great influence on Ainslie, who subsequently returned to South Africa and helped to establish the Johannesburg Art Foundation, which was a major center for multiracial art practice in the 1970s and 1980s. For Ainslie and Mvusi, see Miles, *Current of Africa*; for the impact of the Johannesburg Art Foundation, see Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*; and Juliette Leeb-du Toit, ed., *Mmakgabo Mmapula Mmankgato Helen Sebidi* (Johannesburg, 2009).

which sat in the wake of the National Party's electoral victory in 1948, and resulted in the establishment of Bantu Education during the 1950s. All the while, African students in government-supported schools continued to spend an hour a day working with their hands. This is a vastly simplified history, but it helps us to grasp what Jessie Muthige was doing when he applied to Ndaleni in the name of the traditions of his Venda nation.

Following such a quickly sketched history, it would be easier to draw a straight line from turn-of-the-century colonial educational theory, through Loram's Natal, to Ndaleni. Yet to do so would be to overlook a parallel discourse that also called for African students to work with their hands in school. Ndaleni began art classes in the late 1940s. The program's originator and publicist was John Watt Grossert, the provincial organizer of arts and crafts in Natal, who was later assigned responsibility for the entire country under Bantu Education. Grossert turned to Anne Harrison, a British-born graduate of the Slade School of Art, to design Ndaleni's curriculum. For Harrison, the school's task was not to inculcate difference, but to incubate creativity in everyday life. She imagined Ndaleni to be continuous with interwar projects such as Bauhaus and earlier precedents like the English Arts and Crafts movement.⁵⁵ Harrison stayed at Ndaleni for only a year; two more teachers would come and go during the 1950s. Notwithstanding the turnover, the teachers at Ndaleni all claimed to be training students to think not ethnically, but creatively—to work with their hands as a way to beautify and deepen their experience of day-to-day life.

Malinowski had come to South Africa in 1934 to opine about African development “along African lines” as a participant in two months of meetings of the New Education Fellowship in Cape Town and Johannesburg. He was not the only luminary to visit the country at the time. The Carnegie Corporation was a great supporter of Charles Loram's work in South Africa and paid to send John Dewey to the conference; so too did Carnegie support the travels of Arthur Lismer, director of education at the Toronto Art Gallery, who brought with him a display of children's art from around the world. Lismer's lectures were a sensation, reportedly the best-attended of any of the talks at the conference.⁵⁶ His visit was such a success that he was invited back to South Africa in 1936 to undertake a grand tour. Grossert, of the Natal Education Department, later remembered Lismer's visit to his province in particular. Along with Loram, he credited Lismer for building the foundation of handwork in Natal's schools: “Lismer had grasped the fact which had eluded others before him that in the predominantly European atmosphere of the Bantu schools, the traditional Bantu crafts provided the most direct and valuable link with Bantu culture.” Grossert suggested that, like Malinowski and the others, Lismer advocated for craftwork as cultural preservation, which would in turn pay sociological dividends. Without crafts, “the end product of the school system would be a person whose family roots had been destroyed and for which no substitute had been provided.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Leeb-du Toit, *Ndaleni Art School*, 8. See also Harrison's memoir on her Ndaleni experiences, “What Is This Thing Called the Art?” (undated ms.).

⁵⁶ Angela Nairne Grigor, *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator* (Montreal, 2002), 120.

⁵⁷ John Watt Grossert, *Art Education and Zulu Crafts: A Critical Review of the Development of Art*

But Lismer was not limited to such concerns. Before he embarked on his first trip from Canada to South Africa, admirers gave him a copy of Dewey's recently published *Art as Experience*. Although not about schools per se, Dewey's work dwelt on the nature of creativity and aesthetic life as part of the overall project of developing full human potential. At the New Education Fellowship conference, Dewey spoke not about the arts, but about the need to cultivate human individuality in the schools. Lismer made the connection explicit. In his lectures, he reflected on this: "we are slowly emerging into a wider consciousness of the true function of Art. We are beginning to claim the privileges and opportunities that participation in the experience of art offers to all." He called for the "privileges and opportunities" to be extended especially to society's youngest members, because the young were best positioned to create freely. "Contemplating the drawings of young children (about seven to nine years) we get a glimpse into human aspirations," Lismer reflected. "They are fundamental in design and composition . . . but they are alive and expressive." No matter how "rough-hewn" and illegible a child's work appears to an adult, to that child it is "clear and . . . complete," a perfect work of imagination.⁵⁸

Lismer drew a clear connection between the world of children's art and success in the arts: "all great artists are great children who have carried their world of imaginative concept into adult life." It was the art teacher's responsibility to cultivate this free expression, to help students respond to beauty by opening a space for individual "self-expression and opportunities for the lighting by each of his own little lamp."⁵⁹ As to whom this applied, Lismer was clear: "there is an artist in every human being," and "children are the same the world over."⁶⁰ It is true that in 1936 he remarked on the vitality of cultural traditions in the schools, and urged teachers to help to "restore confidence" in native craft.⁶¹ Yet to suggest, as Grossert did, that he judged handwork as important only inasmuch as it provided a "valuable link" to "Bantu culture" was to mistranslate his ideas. For Lismer, culture was the backdrop against which schools staged the drama of self-actualization; it was the beginning, not the end, of education. Lismer assigned a third pedagogical purpose to working with one's hands. No longer a job, or a means of inscribing difference, in the right schools and in the right hands, handwork *cum* arts and crafts *cum* art was about the cultivation of the self. He advised the Natal provincial education department to create the position of organizer of arts and crafts and to provide teachers with special training on the subject. Over the next decade, three different men would hold that position, culminating with Jack Grossert in 1948, and the apartheid government would subsequently expand the organizer's authority across the entire country. By then each province required African primary school students to work with their hands in school, and there was a pressing need for teachers trained to teach the syllabus.

and *Crafts Education in Bantu Schools in Natal, with Particular Reference to the Period 1948–1962* (Pietermaritzburg, 1968), 142.

⁵⁸ Arthur Lismer, cited in Malherbe, *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society*, 155, 158.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 158–159.

⁶¹ Grigor, *Arthur Lismer*, 135.

Ndalení accepted its first art students in 1951. Jara attended in 1964, Muthige in 1970; and hundreds of others attended over the course of the school's existence.⁶²

After 1955, the course came under the authority of the Department of Bantu Education, and it ran at the same site until 1981. Ndalení was not intended to produce artists, but to teach teachers how best to implement the Bantu Education syllabus, which was the culmination and perfection of the post-World War I idea of adapted education. As is well known, Bantu Education was an unabashedly segregationist platform, based on the conviction that African ("Bantu") and European cultures were qualitatively different and forever incommensurable, and that African students needed to be taught accordingly. "The curriculum . . . envisages a system of education which is based on the circumstances of the community and aims to satisfy the needs of that community," Minister of Bantu Administration Hendrik Verwoerd explained in 1954. It was "self-evident" that "handicrafts, singing and rhythm must come into their own" in the Bantu schools; these were traditional Bantu activities, well suited to an education that envisioned students' future only within Bantu society. This was the part that Ndalení was intended to play.⁶³ Traditional Bantu activities such as crafts were vital, wrote G. R. Dent, Natal inspector of schools in 1954, so that Africans might "develop a new culture of their own, based on traditional Bantu culture, and adopting those sections of other cultures which they find acceptable."⁶⁴

Grossert was Ndalení's publicist. Having earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Natal (where he wrote a thesis about "traditional" Hindu architecture in South Africa), he published frequently in educational journals, on subjects such as the founding of Ndalení and the development of the arts and crafts syllabus in African schools.⁶⁵ He traveled and gave talks to justify the government's continued patronage of the arts. "Art is a form of expression common among all races of mankind," he suggested, but in South Africa, native crafts were dying out. Rather than allow this tragedy, "it is the policy in Native education to encourage the practice of traditional crafts in the primary schools." Without intervention, a definitive break was pending; "within the next generation many of the traditional crafts will be almost as foreign to the urban Africans as to Europeans and therefore, while their appreciation of beauty and technical skill in craftwork still flows strongly, it must be directed into fresh channels."⁶⁶ Only from the past could anything worthwhile come to the present.

To government teachers thus fell a grave responsibility. Enoch Shezi, a teacher at the Fannin Government Native School in Natal, urged his peers to foster more "art appreciation" in their schools, not just within handwork but wherever possible. Art appreciation was how "we can preserve our natural African feeling for beauty and love of Nature." Africans were a culture apart from Europeans; "like other races

⁶² Leeb-du Toit, *Ndalení Art School*, 5; excerpt from the *Natal Daily News*, December 5, 1974, KC, Ndalení, Scrapbook 3, no page number.

⁶³ Hendrik Verwoerd, *Bantu Education: Policy for the Immediate Future* (Pretoria, 1954), 17, 24.

⁶⁴ G. R. Dent, "Bantu Culture," *Native Teachers' Journal* 34, no. 1 (1954): 23–27, here 24. With this issue, Loram's *Native Teachers' Journal* was officially renamed *Bantu Teachers' Journal*.

⁶⁵ Grossert's work is apparently still consulted by art historians interested in the decorative traditions of South Africa's Asian community (Catherine Burns, pers. comm., June 10, 2013).

⁶⁶ J. W. Grossert, "Bantu Art," KC, JW Grossert Collection, KCM 25523, 1, 3.

we should retain our typical African art,” he explained, and this meant teaching students to appreciate “their own people’s works of art, however old-fashioned these at times might appear to be.” Only in this way could African art move forward, with students leading the way by creating “their own masterpieces of art which will be equal to those of any other race.”⁶⁷

The idea that art training could preserve African culture persisted at Ndaleni. The application process was rudimentary, typically just the applicant’s school record and a short recommendation from a teacher—sometimes an arts and crafts teacher, but just as often not. Students would occasionally add an extra line or two to justify their application, and some of them evidently thought that ideas like Dent’s, Grossert’s, and Shezi’s were what Ndaleni wanted to hear. While a student at Ndaleni in the early 1950s, for example, Selby Mvusi produced a cover for an educational circular that showed a uniformed student working at a lathe while his ancestors watched over him—including a distant ancestor wearing an *inkatha*, a grass coil worn like a crown.⁶⁸ The idea persisted. Edwin Nyatlo, for example, wanted to study art “so that the traditions of our people must be kept ali[v]e” in the schools.⁶⁹ Jessie Muthige’s application read similarly—but after he had spent time on campus, his understanding of what art was for had been transformed.

Even though Ndaleni’s founders and organizers had justified it by referring to the precepts of adapted education, Muthige and others soon realized that art education there was more about fostering a sense of insight and vision than about cultural revival. Indeed, the idea that art was about training insightful, creative people had always been a part of Ndaleni’s development. Grossert was an unabashed admirer of Lismar; not surprisingly, his own writings demonstrated the vitality of the Canadian’s ideas. “Our confidence in art education,” he wrote in 1955, is that it “is the most essential element in any system of education.” Within “the human child lies potential physical and mental achievements which will contribute materially to the evolution of our culture.” His language here was inclusive—“our culture”—at a time when his day-to-day contact (as he put it) was with African students in apartheid’s schools. There, “we must endeavour to see education as a whole . . . education is much more than a process of dressing up children in a suit of accepted basic knowledge as uniform and dull as the clothes of orphans in an institution.” In spite of the logics of Bantu Education, art education was not just about predictability and replication of type; instead, it “cultivates the spontaneous creative efforts of children

⁶⁷ Enoch Shezi, “Art Appreciation in School,” *Native Teachers’ Journal* 32 no. 1 (1952): 20–22, here 21, 22. Such discourse was not limited to South Africa. The idea of a racially appropriate “genius” was a touchstone of Negritude political and cultural philosophies from the 1930s until the 1960s. See Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor’s Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (Durham, N.C., 2004); and Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*. This was frequently a multiracial endeavor, as the scholarship on art training and aesthetics in the Belgian Congo suggests. See Sabine Cornelis and Jean-Luc Vellut, “First Movements in the Belgian Congo,” in N’Goné Fall and Jean Loup Pivin, eds., *An Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century* (Paris, 2002).

⁶⁸ Published on the cover of *Native Teachers’ Journal* 32, no. 3 (1953). Mvusi’s later work suggests that he did not remain in the preservationist camp; within a few years he moved in a decidedly more abstract direction, and by the end of his life he had begun to focus on industrial and modern design. See the Mvusi file in the Johannesburg Art Gallery Archives, FUBA Collection, for more.

⁶⁹ Nyatlo, application, KC, Ndaleni, SR, undated [1971], 1.

of all ages.”⁷⁰ Shezi knew this as well. Keep criticism of student work to a minimum, he advised; “more individuality [is] fostered” that way. “It is only through encouragement of our pupils’ individualities in creative work” that the preservation of anything authentically “African” could take place.⁷¹

This, then, was Ndaleni’s central tension. Students came there to learn how to teach a particular type of student, those the government called “Bantu,” and for whom it had designed an appropriate education system. Arts and crafts were to reinforce the primacy of type; yet at Ndaleni, the students who would be teachers encountered a vision of art education that was first and foremost about individual expression. Their texts were adapted from classics of the field: Herbert Read’s *Education through Art*, for example, which, Grossert contended, was based on “the democratic respect for individual potentialities and the belief that it is the responsibility of educationists to nurture and develop the unique character of each pupil attending school.”⁷² They read un-race-conscious generalists such as Viktor Lowenfeld, on whose *Creativity and Mental Growth* Ndaleni’s longest-serving teacher, Lorna Peirson, based her own book, *Art in the Classroom*, which Bantu Education art teachers carried with them into the schools (and which was reprinted, unchanged, twenty-nine times between the 1970s and the 1990s).⁷³ While at Ndaleni, they learned and practiced pedagogical methods, but they also studied art history and spent hours and hours doing their own work. Art education was about “the joy of the beauty that all can possess for the effort to find and see it,” reflected Hamlet Hobe (class of 1960).⁷⁴ Ben Keva began to teach arts and crafts at Mount Arthur Junior School in the Cape in 1966, and quickly found himself overwhelmed at the thought of needing to translate what he had learned into lessons. Peirson calmed him. “I would start with one lecture where I would try to make it clear why art is taught in schools,” she advised, “i.e., to develop the natural capacity for self expression.” Art was about encouraging the “thinking required from the children when they are to make something,” which in turn “develops their personalities and leads to development of . . . imagination.”⁷⁵

REFLECTION, CREATIVITY, VISION—THESE made a person human, and that was education’s goal. George Kulati was an Ndaleni student in the early 1960s. He liked to listen to the sound of “mallets in the workshop,” because the hammering was a human sound. It mattered only that the hammerers were creating “one of the most pleasant activities which a man can embark upon.” Kulati paid little mind to what they were actually making. Ndaleni educational theory held that creativity was the point; the completed object was only the end of that joyful process. What was he, an artist, like? “I [am] nothing but a mad fellow who derives great pleasure from

⁷⁰ J. W. Grossert, “We Must Convince Educationists,” KC, JW Grossert Collection, KCM 25527, October 29, 1955, 2.

⁷¹ Shezi, “Art Appreciation in School,” 21, 22.

⁷² J. W. Grossert, “The Universal Philosophy of Education through Art,” KC, JW Grossert Collection, KCM 25545, n.p.

⁷³ Lorna Peirson, interview by the author, Howick, South Africa, December 13, 2011.

⁷⁴ Hamlet Hobe, “The Value and Meaning of Education through Art,” *Bantu Education Journal*, November 1962, 458–459, here 459.

⁷⁵ Lorna Peirson to Ben Keva, KC, Ndaleni, SR, February 15, 1966, 1.



FIGURE 4: Ndaleni students with their teacher, Peter Bell, outside the painting room, ca. 1960. Reproduced by permission of the Killie Campbell Archive, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa.

knocking a block of wood . . . who thinks that he has conquered the world when he has done a painting . . . Art is essential to me.” Kulati thought himself “mad” because of his intense inward-directed focus, and the satisfaction that he derived from following his urges. But he comforted himself—Ndaleni was full of such madmen, as indeed the world was full of such madness. To be an artist was to tap into a stream of human history, “art [that] has been there for ages and still will be there till the end of the world.” His art education allowed him to place himself in that stream—to listen to an Elvis record to its end, for example, and understand that “even now though the music has stopped I can still hear it, for it is prolonged by the knocking sound of the mallets and axes, yes, I can even hear the swooshing of a brush.” Such glorious madness was everywhere, if you knew how to see it: “Presley has been singing and John here next to me is painting.”⁷⁶

Appropriately, many Ndalen-trained teachers explained themselves through the language of vision. “I thank the Indaleni Art School for having opened my eyes,” wrote Benedict Nkhi. “I am now able to observe and appreciate beauty.”⁷⁷ Others were even more lyrical: “I had eyes but I couldn’t see with them, I had ears but I couldn’t hear with them but through you, you made me see and realize the things that are near me you made me hear the things that passes around me.”⁷⁸ This correspondent credited his teachers for imparting this vision; others reflected that vision had to be achieved on one’s own. Ndalen was isolated, but close enough to Pieter-

⁷⁶ George Kulati, “’Tis Music to My Ear,” *Artra*, no. 9 (1964): 2.

⁷⁷ Benedict Nkhi to Lorna Peirson, KC, Ndalen, SR, March 2, 1973, 1.

⁷⁸ Patrick Xaba to Craig Lancaster, *ibid.*, March 14, 1978, 2.

maritzburg and Durban for students to travel there to visit galleries and catch the latest trends. The “Art South Africa—Today” exhibit at the Durban Art Gallery was an annual highlight. The 1965 show contained many abstract works, over which the students puzzled. “The funny thing was that if you were two or more looking at a certain picture, both of you might see different pictures in that one abstract,” one noted. This forced students to think about what they themselves saw, and to speculate as to what the artist might have seen. “I feel not ashamed to point out that . . . the first glance at the pictures evoked no concept at all,” the unnamed author continued. She undertook a “thorough and careful observation,” until her eyes adjusted, and she saw “a concept.” The students had arrived skeptical of abstraction, but, having learned to see, “we were so interested in abstracts that we each chose which one we regarded as the best.” To see was the achievement of an individual aesthetic, to appreciate how “life would be impossible if we all had the same way of thinking out things.”⁷⁹

Artists were not all the same. Against Bantu Education typology, against the nested language of tribe, ethnicity, and race, art education at Ndaleni was a profoundly subjective experience. Daphne Biyela lived in a crowded township and was charged with teaching a class of 240 students. It frustrated her greatly. “All I want is material, time and to be left alone,” she complained. Biyela craved the calm of Ndaleni, the space to explore, to “sit down and do my work quietly.”⁸⁰ Cecilia Nququ studied at Ndaleni in 1965; it is unclear whether she taught art after returning home to Fort Beaufort, but it is certain that her vision remained: “art is still with me,” she exulted. “I recognized it when making a flower garden at home [and in] how I arranged the things inside the house.”⁸¹ Art is “flowing in my veins,” Joseph Maimane averred. Because of it, “I know where to place my feet and where to throw my eyes and where to listen . . . I am full of confidence.”⁸² Although separated by decades, continents, and politics, these testimonies confirmed that Dewey and Lismar were right. Some Ndaleni students had talent, to be sure. Some wanted to be artists. But for many more, what they gained was a gift: a gift of vision, which history had bequeathed to them. Through teaching, they tried to pass that gift along.

The last was an arduous task: under Bantu Education, there were simply too many students, too little material, too little appreciation. Alice Kepu reported on the failings of her fellow teachers, “who did not attend the Art course [and who] discourage children” by laughing “when sculpture is displayed.”⁸³ Francis Malinga’s colleagues might not have mocked his students, but they definitely did not understand how art education worked. “The principal and his staff [are] more interest[ed] in selling beautiful, financially valuable and very realistic articles,” Malinga wrote to Peirson, and they urged his students to copy from more accomplished examples. Whereas his colleagues wanted works that would win prizes at local competitions and bring renown to the school, Malinga wanted the students to develop themselves. He protested, “work should be more expressive than impressive.” Malinga’s was a common

⁷⁹ “A Trip to Durban,” *Artra*, no. 11 (1965): 3.

⁸⁰ Daphne Biyela to Lorna Peirson and Lancaster, KC, Ndaleni, SR, March 18, 1979, 2.

⁸¹ Cecilia Nququ quoted in *Artra*, no. 13 (1966): 11.

⁸² Joseph Maimane to Lorna Peirson, KC, Ndaleni, SR, April 7, 1976, 1.

⁸³ Alice Kepu to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, April 24, 1973, 1.

lament: “what can an art teacher do when faced with a problem of uninterested and unwilling staff members?” Away from Ndaleni, not everyone could see.⁸⁴

But some did. A year after Malinga complained that his principal and the rest of the staff did not get it, he was transferred to a new school. The principal there was an “art lover,” and Malinga could barely contain his excitement. On “what must an art teacher concentrate . . . when given a chance like this?” he asked Peirson. Once enthused, teachers saw potential artists everywhere. Vivian Bopape’s daughter seemed “the best future artist with her frequent meaningful scribbles on the walls, floors or wherever she sees a blank space.”⁸⁵ Samuel Hobyane saw an artist in his son, and noted that his daughter, “Glory, is very much interested in Art and she draws wonderful circles representing heads and eyes and sticks for legs and arms.”⁸⁶ Benedict Nkhi sent one of his daughter’s drawings for Peirson to critique.⁸⁷ Esther Ratlou talked and talked to her sister about what it really meant to see Pietermaritzburg’s Edwardian city hall, and took her there to share that vision.⁸⁸ Most were teachers and looked to their students for signs of progress. Many were rewarded. Elijah Zwane went reluctantly into teaching; he had imagined himself an artist first. By 1971, he had left Natal for a position outside of Lydenberg, in the Eastern Transvaal; there he grew into the job. He traversed the region, following rumors of “precious natural wood,” abundant and suitable for carving, and introduced students to the joys of creative work. As he grew busier, he wrote less, but in one letter he enclosed a photograph: a class of boys in their school uniforms squinting against the sun, beaming as they worked wood outside their Bantu Education school.⁸⁹

SENTIMENTS SUCH AS THESE make perfect sense within the frame of our second story, that of Jessie Muthige. But with the image of Zwane’s students in mind, it is now time to break that frame and to remember the wider context that brought Silverman Jara running to defend his school. What, for example, might the Ndaleni archives have to tell us about resistance? How would the students reflect the 1960 Sharpeville massacre and the subsequent State of Emergency? As teachers, where would they stand after the student protests and uprisings that began in Soweto on June 16, 1976? Zwane discussed his students’ interest in art on March 20, 1961, almost exactly one year to the day after Sharpeville; yet the anniversary did not appear to be on his mind.⁹⁰ Other teachers reflected only rarely on what had taken place in and around their schools. Joseph Maimane pursued his love for art amid Soweto’s turmoil, doubtless dodging marches and skirmishes while traveling to Johannesburg to attend talks and visit the art gallery at Joubert Park. He did not comment on events.⁹¹ Others did, in tellingly unpredictable ways. Mercy Ghu was from Orlando West, where the

⁸⁴ Francis Malinga to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, March 29, 1967, 1.

⁸⁵ Vivian Bopape to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, undated, 1.

⁸⁶ Samuel Hobyane to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, January 18, 1972, 2.

⁸⁷ Benedict Nkhi to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, n.d. [1973].

⁸⁸ Esther Ratlou to Lancaster and Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, October 26, 1978, 1.

⁸⁹ Elijah Zwane to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, October 21, 1971, 1. Notably, they were practicing how to build a “traditional” Zulu beehive hut.

⁹⁰ Elijah Zwane to Peter Bell, *ibid.*, March 20, 1961, 1–2.

⁹¹ Joseph Maimane to Lancaster, *ibid.*, September 29, 1976, 1.



FIGURE 5: Elijah Zwane's students, 1971. Reproduced by permission of the Killie Campbell Archive, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa.

June 16th protests began. She had come highly recommended to Ndaleni, left loving art, and soon found her passion in teaching. Her students' "imagination is fairly wide when it comes to clay or paper maché . . . They are not at all inhibited!"⁹² Listening to them chatter while they worked, she was transported back to Ndaleni—like Kulati, to the "sound of the hammer and chisel in the free, open air."⁹³ June 16th shook her. "We have had such a restless and frightening time," she told Peirson, "one is unable to think straight." By September 1976, attendance stagnated at below 50 percent and the music was gone. She apologized for having so little to say: "I am going through one of those times in life when everything seems to have come to a standstill."⁹⁴

For Ghu, June 16th was intensely personal, not because she suffered directly, or because she was inflamed by the politics of the moment or outraged by what had taken place. Or maybe she was all of these things, yet chose not to reflect that in her letters to her art teacher. The archive is limited: newspaper clippings, and thousands of letters, mostly incoming, destined for the eyes of an art teacher, and some for eventual publication in the student newsletter that helped to tie this community together. It is an archive of like-minded people, an "epistolary network," infrastructure laid between selves, on which writers, readers, and correspondents attempted to build a community.⁹⁵ The archive produces echoes, but also silences. Scott reminds us about the historian's power and limitations within the archive; it and we collude

⁹² Mercy Ghu to Lorna Peirson, *ibid.*, October 5, 1970, 2–3.

⁹³ Ghu to Peirson, *ibid.*, July 15, 1971, 1.

⁹⁴ Ghu to Peirson, *ibid.*, September 20, 1976, 1–2.

⁹⁵ Khumalo, "Ekukhanyeni Letter-Writers."

“to determine what counts as knowledge in”—and about—“a particular period.”⁹⁶ There are many possible pasts, and historians always choose from among their sources, testing evidence like fruit at the market. What are its blemishes? Is it an exemplary representative of its type? Ghu did not comment about many things, but she still speaks to us. In her own voice, with her own pen, she bemoaned the quiet in her classroom at a time of unrest, excitement, and tremendous, epoch-shaping possibility. She wanted her students to return; she longed to hear the song of their hammers and chisels, which was her song, her gift. Ghu wanted desperately to be an artist, and her students were her art. As South Africa’s political freedom drew closer, an art teacher lamented: “I wish everything could come to normal.”⁹⁷

What would it mean to hear this lamentation and accept its logic? The historian André du Toit suggests that as a discipline, history is lamenting its own loss of relevance in the wake of the South African struggle’s unsatisfying conclusion and the nation’s truncated interest in the past. What, he asks, has history still to teach?⁹⁸ We could attempt to create a context in which sentiments like Ghu’s made sense—to reconstruct the world that led Jara, inevitably, to defend the school that was his studio against his students. But what would be the lesson there? To offer such a simple causal narrative would be to make Jara time’s victim, rather than the artist he was—a person within society, a subject subjected to time, as we all are, with talent and the potential to transcend historically constructed limits.⁹⁹ To learn from such an artist, historians would do well to consider the lessons of art.

Ndalení’s sculptors were particularly hard-pressed to find blocks of wood large enough to be chiseled and shaped. One of the most reliable sources was the South African Railways, which gave teachers old railway slippers that had been replaced during maintenance work on the line.¹⁰⁰ Leslie Cindi was a sculptor, although he rarely had material for his students, let alone himself. One time he got his hands on a slipper. He worked on it after school for two weeks, until he finished a sculpture, which he described to his art teacher. “It is called ‘S’bongimpilo,’ which means, ‘we are grateful for life,’” he told her. “The wood used is slipper wood.” Slipper wood was hardwood, but past its prime (which is why it was available in the first place). Yet Cindi found beauty in its flaws. “The cracks on its side form such beautiful horizontal lines and they given depth to the feeling of my subject.” He reveled in his creation; he would not try to sell it, he continued, because it was his “treasure.”¹⁰¹

History inheres in the forms that artists produce, and as such, works of art are not pure acts of the imagination—they are dialogues, constituted of the interplay between person and object, emotion, insight, and material reality. Ndalení graduates taught in Bantu Education schools. They lived apartheid. The state, its educationists, and their racist ideologies were their reality and limited the form of their lives. So they chiseled that reality and tried to make something beautiful of it. From the

⁹⁶ Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 142.

⁹⁷ Julius Gambu to Lancaster, KC, Ndalení, SR, June 18, 1978, 2.

⁹⁸ André du Toit, “The Owl of Minerva and the Ironic Fate of the Progressive Praxis of Radical Historiography in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Kronos*, no. 36 (2010): 252–265.

⁹⁹ On subjectivation in contemporary Africa, see Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago, 2009), especially the introduction.

¹⁰⁰ The cover of *Arttra* 13 (1966) showed a student walking under the heavy burden of a railway slipper, which he was presumably on his way to carve. In the United States, we call these “railroad ties.”

¹⁰¹ Leslie Cindi to Lorna Peirson, KC, Ndalení, SR, March 6, 1974, 2.

vantage point of the present, it is self-evident that their lives were not what we would want them to have been. They were poor and disenfranchised. Apartheid and the past constrained them in so many ways and on so many levels, down to how they knew themselves and what they imagined was possible. History reveals this, and we know that story well. But history must be careful with Ndaleni and its graduates, because to dwell on such cold, objective facts—to reduce them to being history’s victims—is to deny them the dialogue with reality that constituted the art of their lives. Before he died, Jara taught art and recommended students to his alma mater; Jessie Muthige knew that he had changed; Leslie Cindi put chisel to wood and created a treasure. His work took place far from the limelight of South African popular memory. It was the work of an artist practicing his art away from the glare of his country’s art history. Such art is free from the narratives we typically assign to the past, free from the retrospective ordering of events that we fashion into South African history. It is an art that challenges us to look anew at the past and to be unsettled by the beauty that was there.

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