Daniel Magaziner
Department of History
Yale University
PO Box 208324
New Haven CT 06520

daniel.magaziner@yale.edu

WISER, 10 June 2013

"Two Stories About Art, Education and Beauty in 20th Century South Africa"

This 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. His was the fourth death resulting from the riots that had roiled the region over the past 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 into 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, a man who died in a moment of spectacular violence, but also in a way that much extant scholarship on 20th century South Africa makes legible and almost normal. Politicized (or in South African parlance, conscientized) students fought against the state and its functionaries across the 1970s and 1980s. These functionaries were most often the police or the military, but occasionally the struggle counted teachers and administrators as casualties as well. [1] This was Silverman Jara's world.

But so was this. Jara was 38 when he died. Seventeen years earlier, in 1963, he had applied to be admitted to the Department of Bantu Education's Arts and Crafts Teacher's Training Course at Ndaleni, Natal, about 550 kilometers away from his home in the Eastern Cape. In 1963 Jara was finishing his Teacher's Training Certificate at the Healdtown Institution, a once independent Wesleyan 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 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 Jara was "an intelligent, industrious student," who excelled especially in "painting, lino cutting, clay modeling, various types of paper mache 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

[1] Excerpt from The Natal Witness, 16 September 1980, KC – Ndaleni - Student records (Silverman Jara), 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: Ravan Press, 1984; Peter Kallaway, ed. *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948 – 1994*, Cape Town: Pearson Education Limited, 2002; Cynthia Kros, *The Seeds of Separate Development*, Pretoria: UNISA, 2010, Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999; Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *I Saw A Nightmare,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 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, "Ekhukhanyeni Letter Writing," in *Africa's Hidden Histories* [ ] and Meghan Healy Clancy, *A World of Their Own: African Women's Education,* University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013.

particular, however, was his "individual style as regards Art."[2]

He was accepted and joined Ndaleni's class for the term that began in January 1964. Jara travelled by rail to the school, which shared space with a Wesleyan 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, 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."[3] 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 the state's local agents insisted was the foundation of good art and good teaching. "You have the imagination" to create powerful work, Jara's art teacher coaxed him, "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. Jara was lucky that his principal at St. Matthew's believed in art and set aside scarce resources for materials; he found talent in students and recommended a number for admission to his alma mater. He continued to teach and create until he became a principal, and then he died.

Jara's is this essay's 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 Jara's 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 lays bare the complexity of the past that a new generation of historians has begun to face. But Silverman Jara's is only the first of the stories this essay wants to tell; the other is much less spectacular. I will tell it first through the example of 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 Muthige, we can see the possibility of another story lingering behind the tragedy of Silverman Jara. Through Muthige, we can see speculate about how Silverman Jara lived, before he died the sort of death that South African history knows to well. Where lives like Jara's and Muthige's intersect our capacity for narration, we can learn about the limits of thinking in and across time. Their lives lived creatively under apartheid transcend apartheid, in non-instrumental, non-predictive and surprising ways. These stories about Ndaleni and its students barely register in the grand narrative of the South African past; few remember the school in the

---

[2] Principal, Healdtown to Principal, Ndaleni Training College, undated [Oct 1963], KC – Ndaleni – Student records – Silverman Jara,1.
[3] *Arttra*, No. 9, September 1964, 10.

story of South African art, let alone the history of South African ideas.[4] And yet, in the voices of students and teachers who went out from Ndaleni speaking a decidedly historic, and today, archaic, language of race, ethnicity, and creativity, we see sketched the contours of intellectual life under apartheid. In Muthige, Jara 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 like 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. Chief Minister Sebe enlisted Jara into 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 an epistemological framework that presents South African history along the binary of good and evil, with tales only of apartheid and the struggle against it.[5] Scholars have recently begun to push back against this all too familiar rendering of the past. Rather than rush to judgment, Christopher Saunders and

---

[4] Ndaleni earns a total of three pages in the recent multi-volume study of South African art history. See Elizabeth Rankin, "Creating Communities," *Visual Century,* Vol. 2, ed. Lize Van Robbroeck, 67 – 69. The most thorough account of Ndaleni is the catalogue to the 1999 Ndaleni retrospective at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, Juliette Leeb Dutoit, ed. *The Ndaleni Art School,* [ ].

[5] For a critique of this, see Sello Mathabatha's comments in Cynthis Kros and Chris Saunders, "Conversations with Historians," [ ], 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), in the 1980s. See Pillay [ ]. There are too many narratives of the struggle to list here. What is worth noting, however, is that even when not explicitly about apartheid and the struggle against it, South African historiography has tended to focus explicitly on the social, economic and political conditions that promoted white supremacy from the 19th 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: University of California Press, 1979; Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa*, New York: Longman, 1982; Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine,* New York: Hill and Wang, 1996; Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach,* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001. An important recent reassessment of the scholarly consensus is Clifton Crais, *Poverty, War and Violence in South Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Crais argues that the origins of South Africa's mass immiseration go back to imperial conquest in the mid/late 19th century, rather than in 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 Rainforest*, (esp. the conclusion) – although this the idea of a total imperial break has been critically reexamined by Holly Hanson and others. Back in South Africa, although the weight of the scholarship is on the 19th and early 20th century, more historians have begun to write about apartheid. Collaborative multi-volume efforts like Gwendolyn Carter, Tom Karis, Gail Gerhart and (recently) Clive Glaser's *From Protest to Challenge in South Africa* and the state-sponsored South African Democracy Educational Trust's *Road to Democracy in South Africa* contibuw ro narrate the history of the struggle. Important monographs include Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa* and his recent, *Sharpeville*. General histories of apartheid include Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years* and Deborah Posel, *Making of Apartheid, 1948 – 1961*, while more focused monographs include Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, *Apartheid's Festival*, Anne Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan*, Ineke Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams* 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.

Hilary Saunders have noted that, it is "surely time for sober reflection" on what happened during apartheid's rise and fall.[6] They call for dispassionate, impartial historical to replace the stridently instrumental, overtly sympathetic history-making that paced the struggle. The time has come for an "post-anti-apartheid" historiography, Catherine Burns contends, which can account for the past in ways less beholden to the politics of bygone times.[7] Where once 'struggle' reigned supreme, 'complexity' now holds forth.

The historian and political commentator Jacob Dlamini notes that the "the master 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."[8] 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 interrogating especially the composition of the "people," the "faceless masses" of struggle "jargon" and to recognize that not all black South Africans experienced "apartheid [in] the same way and fought the same way against apartheid."[9] Dlamini's work finds common cause in numerous memoirs by black South Africans, who self-consciously break from the struggle biography narrative and add especially day-to-day life and emotional depth to our understanding of the South African past.[10]

Jara's life and 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 Ndaleni 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 reify the categories – 'Xhosa,' 'African,' 'black', 'collaborator' –

---

[6] Christopher Saunders and Hilary Sapire, "Introduction," *[ ]*, 1.

[7] Burns, [ ]. Burns is careful to underline her use of the term "post-anti-apartheid," not post-apartheid, given how many of the long-dead system's social conditions continue to bedevil contemporary South Africa. See Robbins, *Limits to Liberation After Apartheid,* among other critiques of the post-1994 dispensation.

[8] Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia,* [ ], 19.

[9] Ibid., 12, 18.

[10] See for example, Zakes Mda, *Sometimes There Is a Void,* [ ], Fred Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, [ ]. Memoirs like 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," *The Journal of Southern African Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 2, 1986. For more on the debate Ndebele's call prompted, see David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity,* [ ]. 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,* Vol. 38, No. 2, 2012. It is far less common to find a monograph on some non-struggle aspect of 20th century South African history; Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto* and Anne Mager, *Beer, Sociability and Masculinity in South Africa* are welcome exceptions. Other fields, notably anthroplogy and literature are more practiced at recovering some aspect of everyday life in the 20th century. See, for example, David Coplan, *In Township Tonight!* and, especially, Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond.* New scholarship elsewhere in Africa is providing a more sensitive accounting of 20th century politics by considering especially how the dynamics of cultural and intellectual production colluded with state policies to new political and social forms across the post-colonial era. See especially Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States,* Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones,* [ ], James Brennan, *Taifa,* Nate Plageman, *Hi-Life Saturday Night* and Michael McGovern, *Unmasking the State.*

with which power explains his life.[11] Indeed, in recent days 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[12]; this new scholarship picks up on the calls by Cooper, Lawrance, 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.[13] This was the world in which Jara lived[14] –and compelling new work also encourages us to reconsider whether his death might be better understood not as somehow contributing to the telos of apartheid's end, but instead to the tautological "tragedy" of its death-throes.[15]

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

---

[11] My thinking here is influenced by writings about identity formation, notably that of Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," and Frederick Cooper (with Rogers Brubaker), "Identity," in *Colonialism in Question.* Both Scott and Cooper contend that 'identities' be seen almost as narratives, unfolding across time, rather than as completed, closed processes, which are typically retrospective rather than historical. In South Africa historiography, Paul Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400 – 1948*, insists that we begin with these social processes of becoming rather than now or once current political identifications back onto the past. I will return this issue below.

[12] See, for example, Jill Kelly, "'Only the Fourth Chief': Conflict, Land and Chiefly Authority in 20th century KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," PhD, Michigan State University, 2012; Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, "You are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation [ ].

[13] Benjamin Lawrance et al, eds. *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*. See also Clifton Crais on agricultural specialists in *The Politics of Evil*, Sean Redding on tax collection in *Sorcery and Sovereignty***.** 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" and Paul La Hausse, "So Who Was Elias Kuzwayo? Nationalism, Collaboration and the Picaresque in Natal." African policemen and soldiers are other well-studied intermediaries. See Gregory Mann, *Native Sons*, Tim Parsons, *The African Rank and File* and David Anderson and David Killingray, eds. *Policing the Empire*. For South Africa, see Keith Shear, "Chiefs or Modern Bureaucrats? Managing Black Police in Early 20th Century South Africa." 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 African Colonial History."

[14] For examples of this new scholarship, see Laura Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation," [ ]and Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, "You are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation," [ ]. 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 Digby, "The Bandwagon of Golden Opportunity," and Mcneill, "Rural Reggae." Notably, the schools remain an area that resists revision, and, one imagine, 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 Herman Giliomee and Martin Prew on politicsweb.co.za. Giliomee's initial piece: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=323686&sn=Marketingweb+detail, Prew's response, http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=325298&sn=Marketingweb+detail, and Giliomee's rejoinder, 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," *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948 – 1994.*

[15] The term "tragedy" come from Dlamini's keynote speech at the South African Historical Society, 2011; cited in Sapire and Saunders, op. cit., 2. For the self-consuming violence of the 1980s, Jon Soske, "The Family Romance of the South African Revolution," unpublished mss.

grained, everyday negotiations of satisfaction and struggle that doubtlessly 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, put 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 Silverman Jara's sense of his own life in time? The historical discipline has its own ways of knowing and politics; not least of these is the conviction that through narration we might make a positive accounting of the past.[16] 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 stubborn prevalence of ethnicity, which has proved more stubborn than previous generations of scholars assumed that it would.[17] 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 render the past differently, less neatly, and thus learn more from someone like Jara, who climbed a mountain, taught, and died?

In her recent reassessment of South Africanist scholarship, the historian Shula Marks notes 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 beginning from the vantage point of the subjects themselves. "The personal and the psychological need to be rethought and reworked," Marks writes.[18] It is not enough to revisit the Bantustans instrumentally, to provide explanations for tribalism's enduring appeal in post-apartheid South Africa.[19] It is not enough to read the vantage point of the loudly self-expressive present back onto the Bantustan past, in search of "entertainers" who defied scholarship's long-held truism that in South Africa, politics and art were one.[20] Rather, in keeping with Marks' 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.[21]

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 whilst within its grasp.[22] 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. Muthige's is simpler: five years after Jara left Ndaleni, he 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

---

[16] For a compelling critique of the discipline, Premesh Lalu, "When was South African History Ever Post-Colonial?" *Kronos,* Vol. 34, No. 1, 2008.
[17] Lekgoathi, "You Are Listening," 577 – 578.
[18] Shula Marks, *Changing History, Changing Histories*, [ ], 105.
[19] J. Michael Williams, *Chieftaincy, The State and Democracy: Political Legitimacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa* [ ].
[20] Fraser McNeill, "Rural Reggae: The Politics of Performance if the Former 'Homeland' of Venda," [ ].
[21] Joan Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 4.
[22] My own *The Law and the Prophets* is notably guilty of this.

there's at present not a single Venda to revive the art and skill of our foregathers."[23] He was accepted in late 1969 and, leaving his family behind, travelled 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 than 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."[24]

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-in-waiting – who wanted to deepen his engagement with that identity. Yet upon returning 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 application to be further implicated in Bantu Education). He 'saw things in a different way;' the world through Jessie Muthige's 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.[25] But as Jessie Muthige reveals, other work was done there as well. Recent days have seen a burgeoning critique of the relationship of South Africa's national 'liberation' with the global victory of neo-liberalism. To scholars like Steven Robbins the story of post-apartheid South Africa is that of collective struggle and suffering having yielded to the limitations of the individual subject, bounded by their individual

---

[23] Muthige, application, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, undated [1969], 1.

[24] Muthige to Peirson, 30 June 70, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 1, 2.

[25] 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 recent four volume study *Visual Century: South African Art in Context* (2011), and elsewhere. For Mvusi, see Elza Miles, *Current of Africa: The Art of Selby Mvusi* ; for Rakgoathe, see Donve Langham, *The Unfolding Man: The Art of Dan Rakgoathe*. Miles is currently working on a biography of Selby Mvusi, which will include a substantial account of his years at Ndaleni. The school itself has been the subject of only one small catalogue, which accompanied a 1999 retrospective exhibition at Pietermaritzburg's Tatham Gallery. The exhibition was curated, and the catalogue edited by, Juliette Leeb-Dutoit, *Ndaleni Art School: A Retrospective.* Elizabeth Rankin has also written about Ndaleni, in her *Images of Wood* and in "Creating Communities," *Visual Century,* Vol. 2. The latter essay, with three pages on Ndaleni, constitutes the most extensive scholarly writing about the school to date. 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 collections like *Visual Century* and studies like John Peffer's justly renowned A*rt and the End of Apartheid* [ ] 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 studies; 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, "Evidence of Experience," 791 – 2). As will become apparent, I am after something different here.

bodies, each having been granted a vote and civil rights, but little more.[26] 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.[27] I have already noted how studies like Dlamini's offer emotional texture and depth – subjectivity – to the past; too often, however, the complexity these offer is little more than the claim that one person's memory is different 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 Comaroff note that in contemporary South Africa, history has become "privatized and partisan," it has become a "possession," that which individual subjects are able to recall with clarity, instrumentally to stake present-day claims. This is the liberal, Whiggish model of history, wherein each individual is the subject of his own grand narrative.[28]

Yet that is not how Jessie Muthige lived those few months in 1970. He was his own person, who brought a set of expectations and experiences to Ndaleni. 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.' The Comaroffs' critique of personhood in current-day South Africa comes from their efforts to theorize from the African experience. The notion of 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 individual's 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."[29] 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 Jessie Muthige knew well. People are more than their minds - they are constituted of their mind, their bodies, their senses, 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.[30] Muthige eventually returned home to teach arts and crafts in the Venda schools, as Jara had done in the Ciskei. The contexts of their 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,

---

[26] Steven Robbins, *From Revolution to Rights in South Africa,* University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008.

[27] Scholars of African healing, witchcraft, and politics have had better success unpacking African notions of personhood rather than yielding to the fictive ideal of the post-enlightenment individual. For Southern Africa, see, for example, Karen Flint, *Healing Traditions* [ ], Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa,* David Gordon, *Invisible Agents,* [ ], Harry West, *Kupilikula.* Much of the work problematizing the individual in South Africa has been influenced by Michel Foucault; see Andrew Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power* and Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills* [ ].

[28] It is somewhat beyond the purview of this essay, but it is worth noting that J.M. Coetzee's multi-volume fictionalized memoir – recently concluded – is this practice perfected. Indeed, much of Coetzee's oeuvre since *Disgrace* is evidence of the author's particularly well-developed sense of self.

[29] Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory From the South*, 53, 55.

[30] On talent, work and reputation in the deep African past, see Kathryn De Luna, "Hunting Reputations: Talent, Individuals and Community in Pre-Colonial South Central Africa." De Luna's work is building off of Guyer and Belinga's mid-1990s intervention, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge," *Journal of African History,* [ ]. For the power that inhered in knowledge, see Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze,* [ ].

not that he simply, inevitably was.[31]

The work of self-making was ongoing under apartheid, in ways beholden neither to the state nor its opposition, even as individuals like 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 20th century healer, Louise Mvemve, Catherine Burns discusses letters as a sort of micro-infrastructure, "girders" laid between a self and others. Mvemve's is an instructive case. Where previously 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."[32] 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 –artists, capable of expressing something unique to their being-in-the-world.

This article is not about their art; in what follows, I do not proffer any arguments about the objects Ndaleni graduates and their students produced. Yet Ndaleni was an art school, and its archive reveals that Ndaleni students were convinced that art – or, often 'Art' capitalized – was vital to the construction of their durable selves. They and their instructors drew on prominent mid-20th century art theorists like 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.[33] "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."[34] So it is with art. For Godfrey Lienhardt, art is the voice of a soloist within the choir; for Ingrid Monson, a Coltrane riff against the backdrop of the rhythm section.[35] For Ndaleni graduates like Silverman Jara and Jessie Muthige, art was the cultivation of individual 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 end, it involves an individual's creative faculties, their material realities and engages the perceptive powers of their 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

---

[31] Godfey Lienhart, "Self: Public, Private. Some African Representations," in *The Category of the Person,* 152. For another analysis of 'becoming' as an African political philosophy – expressed especially in art – see Souleymane Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Benson and the Idea of Negritude,* London: Seagull, 2011.
[32] Burns, "The Letters of Louisa Mvemve," *Africa's Hidden Histories,* ed. Karin Barber, [ ], 90.
[33] See John Dewey, *Art as Experience,* [ ].
[34] Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 141.
[35] Godfey Lienhart, op. cit, 145; Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds,* [ ]. For Sidney Kasfir and Till Forster, it is talent – activity – set within the context and limitations of an artists' workshop. "Introduction," *African Art and Agency in the Workshop,* [ ], 4.

assessment.[36] We are all individual subjects who are also subject to various regimes beyond our control, and we each lay girders to help us navigate the terrain of our experiences. Dlamini reminds us that 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, language. The aesthetics of state power and popular resistance are well known.[37] 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 senses 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 over-determined cultural distinctiveness that the system implied.[38] These conditions prompted what Niehaus calls an "encapsulating effect," that helped to shape the sense rural South Africans could make of their lives.[39] Other scholars have advanced similar arguments which draw our attention not to apartheid as struggled against, but apartheid as a distinct, limited historical experience, with which people lived, the terrain on which they struggled to build their selves.[40]

To us, the language of witchcraft might make little sense. We stand apart from that experience that Niehaus describes. Appeals to Bantustan authority for access and legitimacy, described by 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 those 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.[41] Ndaleni was enormously important in the lives of those who trained there and who carried its lessons down from 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 passed. This, then, is an essay written in pursuit of an "echo," a distortion, voices that do not say exactly what we expect to hear and whose sense we struggle to discern.[42]

****

All echoes begin somewhere. In Ndaleni's case, one beginning was in the early 20th century, with the gathering consensus that Africans ought to work with their hands in school. At the turn of the 20th century 'hand work' 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

---

[36] Dewey, *Art as Experience,* Ch. 3.
[37] In South Africa, see, for example, Leslie Witz, *Apartheid's Festival,* Jenifer Beningfeld, *The Frightened Land* and Diana Wylie, *Art and Revolution.*
[38] Fn witchcraft literature, healing literature, his unbounded personhood article
[39] Isak Niehaus, "Witchcraft and the South African Bantustans," [ ], 58.
[40] 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.
[41] Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History,* 89.
[42] Ibid., 52.

be so.[43] From the turn of the 20th century until the eve of World War Two, 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 Richard Elphick glosses as "education for life" – which was based on the conviction that African students would eventually assume positions as skilled laborers and craftspeople in an industrial economy. Over time, however, the justification for a "differentiated" education system shifted, away from education for life and towards 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 20th 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.[44] By the 1920s, industrial education cum handwork was *de riguer* 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 white children, but teachers explained that industrial education at a young age "will save them [children] from going up and down the streets looking for jobs" when they left school.[45]

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 – who had coined the term 'adapted education' to describe this new, ostensibly scientific method – during the

---

[43] Kenneth King, *Pan-Africanism and Education*. See also the reception of these debates in colonial Zanzibar in Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones*.

[44] For the important legacies of Booker T. Washington in colonial Africa, see especially Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, German Colonial Africa and the Globalization of the New South*. The American influence in Union-era South Africa has been considered by a number of scholars, including Richard Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa*, and recently in Robert Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa*.

[45] Zunga, "Native Crafts – An Occupation," NTJ Vol 9, No 4, July 30, 213 – 214. 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 Kliebard, 69 – 70.

1910s.[46] Like Monroe, Loram applauded missionaries for bringing the European education to Africa, but he insisted that the syllabus needed to be revised to the fit the particular needs of the African student. Loram's Teachers' College thesis argued that industrial training at a young age would set students on the path towards a career, and he cited blacksmithing, boot making, carpentry and farming as the most likely of these. Loram envisioned a future in which African craftspeople would be vital within European dominated South African society. He mandated time spent working with ones hands on the primary school syllabus to ensure that training for this future began as early as possible.[47]

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.[48] Afrikaans speaking educationists and anthropologists were foremost among the latter the critics. WG Eiselen of 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."[49] Theorists like Eiselen instead promoted a model of native schooling that would preserve African cultural distinctiveness. As the famed anthropologist Bronislav 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 Africa or make it less easy for him to maintain his place in African society."[50]

Thinkers like 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 'hand work' remained on the syllabus, and was increasingly justified in terms of its capacity to help African become better

---

[46] For South Africans at Teachers' College, see Brahm Fleish, "The Teachers' College Club: American Educational Discourse and the Origins of Bantu Education in South Africa, 1914 – 1951." See also Kros, *Seeds of Separate Development.* Charles Loram (below) 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*. Notable dissents to the idea of adapted education came from Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush: A Critical Study of the Theory and Practice of Native Education in Africa* (1929) and Edgar Brookes, *Native Education in South Africa* (1930).

[47] Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers,* [ ], 189.

[48] Ibid., 190 – 191. See also Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush,* [ ] and Edgar Brookes, *Native Education in South Africa.*

[49] Eiselen cited in Alexander Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power,* [ ], 118.

[50] Eiselen, NEF Report, 412.

Africans. [51] National educational studies during the late 1930s and into the 1940s supported this consensus. Stellenbosch anthropologist Eiselen organized the best known of these, 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 one hour per day working with their hands, as the reasons they did shifted beneath them. 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.

Having so quickly sketched this history, it would be easier to draw a straight line from turn of the century colonial educational theory, Loram's Natal, and Ndaleni. Yet to do so would be to overlook a parallel discourse that also demanded that students work with their hands in school. Ndaleni began classes in 1952. The program's originator and publicist was Jack 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 teach the first class of students. 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 like Bauhaus and the English Art and Crafts Movement.[52] Harrison only stayed at Ndaleni for a year, and two more teachers would come and go before decade's end. Notwithstanding the turnover, all the teaches at Ndaleni claimed to be training students not to think ethnically, but creatively – to work with their hands to beautify day-to-day life, in keeping with this other legacy of the early 20th century, education for life.[53]

In 1934 Malinowski had come to South Africa to opine about African development 'along African lines' as a participant in two months of meetings of the New Educational 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 child art from around the world. Lismer's

---

[51] 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 teachers' training college at Grace Dieu, 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* and Elizabeth A. Morton, "Missions and Modern Art in Southern Africa," PhD., 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 mss., Univesity of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers, HP 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 alum Selby Mvusi, who 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 multi-racial art practice in the 1970s and 1980s. For Ainslie and Mvusi, see Miles, *Current of Africa: The Art of Selby Mvusi*; for the impact of the Johannesburg Art Foundation, see Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* and Juliette Leeb-Dutoit, ed. *Taxi—014 Mmagkabo Mmapula Mmangkato Helen Sebidi*.

[52] Leeb Dutoit, *The Ndaleni Art School,* 8.

[53] Notably, Bauhaus and Arts and Crafts in turn drew on late 19th and early 20th century American experiences in 'practical,' creative education, as promoted by Dewey and others. See Kleinbord, [ ].

lectures were a sensation, reportedly the best attended of any of the talks at the conference.[54] Lismer's visit was such a success that he was invited back to South Africa; he returned 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 hand work 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."[55]

But Lismer was not limited to such concerns. Before embarking from Canada on his first trip 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 NEF conference, Dewey did not speak about the arts, but about the need to cultivate human individuality in the schools. Lismer made the connection explicit. In his lectures, Lismer 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.[56]

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."[57] As to whom this applied, Lismer was clear: "there is an artist in every human being," and "children are the same the world over."[58] It is true that in 1936 Lismer visited Natal's African schools, remarked on the vitality of the cultural traditions that he saw there and claimed that his mission was in part to "restore confidence" in native craft.[59] Yet to claim, 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 played the drama of self-actualization. Like Dewey, Lismer assigned a third pedagogical purpose to working with ones hands. No longer a job, or a means of inscribing difference, in the right schools and in the right hands, hand work *cum* arts and crafts *cum* art

[54] Angela Grigor, *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator,* 120.
[55] Grossert, 142.
[56] Lismer, NEF Report, 155, 158.
[57] Ibid., 162.
[58] Ibid., 158 – 9.
[59] Grigor, *Arthur Lismer*, 135.

was about the cultivation of the self.

Upon visiting Natal in 1936, Lismer advised the 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 the former position, culminating with Jack Grossert in 1948, and the apartheid government's subsequent expansion of 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. Ndaleni accepted its first students in 1951; Silverman Jara attended in 1964; Jessie Muthige in 1970; and so too did hundreds more.

After 1955, the course came under the authority of the Department of Bantu Education, and it ran at the same site until 1981. Ndaleni was not intended to produce artists, but to teach teachers how best to instruct the Bantu Education syllabus, which was the culmination and perfection of the post-World War I idea of differentiated 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, incommensurable – forever – 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 Ndaleni was intended to play.[60] Traditional Bantu activities like 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."[61]

Organizer Grossert was Ndaleni's publicist. A PhD in Fine Arts from the University of Natal (where he wrote about 'traditional' Hindu architecture in South Africa), he published frequently in educational journals, on subjects like the founding of Ndaleni and the development of the arts and crafts syllabus in African schools. He travelled, 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."[62] Only from the old could come anything worthwhile to the new.

To government teachers thus fell a grave responsibility. Enoch Shezi, a teacher at Fannin Government Native School in Natal, urged his peers to foster more "art

---

[60] Verwoerd, *Bantu Education: Policy for the Immediate Future*, 17, 24.

[61] Dent, "Bantu Culture," NTJ Oct 54, 24. With this issue Loram's NTJ was officially renamed *Bantu Teachers Journal*. Discursive work of 'native' to 'Bantu' – promoting African independence, of a sort, by establishing an a priori relationship without Africa, without the mediation of European empire that created 'natives' as a social category where Empire was present.

[62] Grossert, "Bantu Art," KC - JW Grossert - File 1 - KCM 25523, 1, 3.

appreciation" in their schools, both within handwork and wherever else 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 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."[63]

The idea that art training was to preserve African culture persisted at Ndaleni. The application to Ndaleni 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 a line or two further to justify their application, and some of these evidently thought that ideas like these Dent's, Grossert's, and Shezi's were what Ndaleni wanted to hear. Selby Mvusi offered an early iteration of this – while a student at Ndaleni in the early 1950s, he produced a cover for an educational circular that showed a student working a lathe, while his ancestors watched over him – including a distant ancestor wearing an *inkatha,* a grass coil, worn like a crown.[64] The idea persisted. Edwin Nyatlo, for example, wanted to study art so as to "so that the traditions of our people must be kept alife [sic]" in the schools.[65] Jessie Muthige's application read similarly – but after spending 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 good, adapted education ideas, what Muthige and others soon realized was that art education there was more about fostering a sense of individual insight and vision, than about cultural revival. Indeed, the idea that art was about training insightful, creative individuals had always been a part of Ndaleni's development. Grossert was an unabashed admirer of Lismer; 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 of all ages."[66] 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'

---

[63] Shezi, "Art Appreciation in School," *NTJ* Vol 32 No 1, Oct 52, 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 Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow* and Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy.* This was frequently a multi-racial endeavor, as the scholarship on art training and aesthetics in the Belgian Congo suggests. See Sabine Cornelis's chapters in Cornelis et al, eds. *An Anthology of African Art: The 20th Century.*

[64] Published in *NTJ,* Vol. 32, No 3, April 53, cover. 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 was well-written on the subject of industrial and modern design. See the Mvusi file in the FUBA Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery Archives for more.

[65] Nyatlo, application, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, undated [1971], 1.

[66] Grossert, "We must convince educationists," KC - JW Grossert - File 1 - KCM 25527, 29 Oct 55, 2.

individualities in creative work" that the preservation of anything authentically 'African' could take place.[67]

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 about individual expression, above all. Their texts were adapted from classics of the field: 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."[68] They read un-race conscious generalists like Viktor Lowenfeld, whose *Creativity and Mental Growth* Ndaleni's longest serving teacher, Lorna Peirson, adapted into *Art in the Classroom*, a text which Bantu Education art teachers carried with them into the schools (and which was reprinted, unchanged, 29 times between the 1960s and the 1990s.)[69] While at Ndaleni they learned and practiced pedagogical methods, but 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.[70] 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."[71]

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 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

---

[67] Shezi, op. cit, 21, 22.
[68] Grossert, ""The Universal Philosophy of Education Through Art," KC - JW Grossert - File 1 - KCM 25545, no page numbers.
[69] Lorna Peirson, pers. comm., Dec 2011.
[70] Hobe, "The Value and Meaning of Education Through Art," *Bantu Education Journal*, Nov 62, 459.
[71] Peirson to Keva, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 15 Feb 66, 1.

you knew how to see it; "Presley has been singing and John here next to me is painting."[72]

Appropriately, many Ndaleni trained teachers explained themselves through the language of vision. "I thank the Indaleni Art School for having had opened my eyes," wrote Benedict Nkhi, "I am now able to observe and appreciate beauty."[73] 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."[74] This correspondent credited his teachers for imparting this vision; others reflected that vision had to be achieved on ones own. Ndaleni was isolated, but close enough to Pietermaritzburg and Durban for students to travel there to visit galleries and catch the latest trends. The "Art South Africa – Today" 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."[75]

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. 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 do her own work, to explore, to "sit down and do my work quietly."[76] 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."[77] 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 at [sic]. … I am full of confidence."[78] Although separated by decades, continents, and politics, these testimonies confirmed that Dewey and Lismer 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 for them to carry around in their pocket. 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"

---

[72] Kulati, "'Tis Music to my Ear," *Arttra* No. 9, Sept 1964, 2.
[73] Nkhi to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records – 2 March 73, 1.
[74] Xaba to Lancaster, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 14 March 78, 2.
[75] "A Trip to Durban," *Arttra*, No. 11, Oct 1965, 3.
[76] Biyela to Peirson and Lancaster, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 18 March 79, 2.
[77] Nququ in *Arttra*, No. 13, Oct 1966, 11.
[78] Maimane to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 7 April 76, 1.

by laughing, "when sculpture is displayed."[79] Francis Malinga's colleagues might not have mocked his students, but they definitely did not get how art education worked. "The principal and his staff is [sic] more interesting [sic] in selling beautiful, financially valuable and very realistic articles;" they thus 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 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.[80]

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."[81] 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."[82] Benedict Nkhi sent one his daughter's drawings for critique. Esther Ratlou talked and talked to her sister about what it meant really to see Pietermaritzburg's Edwardian City Hall, and took her there to share that vision.[83] 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: fourteen boys, in their school uniforms, squinting against the sun, beaming as they worked wood outside of their Bantu Education school.[84]

Sentiments like these make perfect sense within the frame of my second story, that of Jessie Muthige. But with the image of Elijah 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. When first I began to sift through the Ndaleni archives, I was looking for resistance, for reflections on the events my South African history training told me were relevant and meaningful. I obsessed over dates and locales; how would students reflect Sharpeville and the Emergency? As teachers, where would they stand after June 16th 1976? Elijah Zwane discussed his students' interest in art on 20 March 1961, almost exactly one year to the day after the Sharpeville massacre; the anniversary did not appear to be on his mind.[85] So too did some teachers reflect only rarely on what had transpired in and around their schools. Joseph Maimane pursued his love for art amidst Soweto's turmoil, doubtlessly dodging marches and skirmishes while traveling to

[79] Kepu to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 24 April 73, 1.
[80] Malinga to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 29 March 67, 1.
[81] Bopape to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, undated, 1.
[82] Hobyane to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 18 Jan 72, 2.
[83] Ratlou to Lancaster and Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 26 Oct 78, 1.
[84] Zwane to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 21 Oct 71, 1.
[85] Zwane to Bell, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 20 March 61, 1 – 2.

Johannesburg to attend talks and visit the Joubert Park gallery. He did not comment on events.[86] Others did, in tellingly unpredictable ways. Mercy Ghu was from Orlando West, where the 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!"[87] 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."[88] 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 below 50% 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."[89]

For Mercy Ghu, June 16th was intensely personal, not because she suffered directly, 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. Mine is a limited archive. Newspaper clippings, 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 a community of like-minded people, an "epistolary network," infrastructure laid between selves, on which writers, readers and correspondents attempted to build a community.[90] The archive produces echoes, but also silences. Scott reminds us about the historians power and limitations within the archive; it and we collude "to determine what counts as knowledge in" – and about – "a particular period."[91] 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? Mercy Ghu did not comment about many things. But 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. Mercy 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."[92]

What would it mean to hear this lamentation and accept its logic? In a recent review of the literature, the historian Andre Du Toit suggests that as a discipline history laments its own loss of relevance in the wake of the struggle's unsatisfying conclusion and the nation's truncated interest in the past. What, he asks, has history still to teach?[93] In a previous draft of this essay I attempted 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 who I think he was – a

---

[86] Maimane to Lancaster, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 29 Sept 76, 1.
[87] Ghu to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 5 Oct 70, 2 – 3.
[88] Ghu to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 15 July 71, 1.
[89] Ghu to Peirson, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 20 Sept 76, 1 – 2.
[90] Vukile Khumalo, "Ekhukhanyeni Letter Writing."
[91] Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History,* 142.
[92] Gambu to Lancaster, KC – Ndaleni – Student records, 18 June 78, 2.
[93] Andre Du Toit, "The Owl of Minerva and the Ironic Fate of the Progressive Praxis of Radical Historiography in Post-apartheid South Africa," *Kronos,* [ ]

person within society, a subject subjected to time, as we all are, with talent and the potential to transcend historically constructed limits.[94] This has been an essay in intellectual history, not art history, but in conclusion, we would do well to consider the lessons of art.

Ndaleni's sculptors were particularly hard pressed to find blocks of wood large enough to be chiseled and shaped. One of the most reliable solutions was the South African Railways, which gave teachers old railway slippers that had been replaced while maintaining the line.[95] Leslie Cindi felt himself a sculptor, although he rarely had material for his students, let alone himself. One time he got his hands on a slipper. He worked 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."[96]

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. Ndaleni graduates taught in Bantu Education schools. They lived apartheid. The state, its educationists and their racialist 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 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 their lives 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 used chisel on wood and created a treasure. This work took place far from the limelight of South African popular memory. It was the work of an artist practicing his art away 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.

---

[94] On subjectivation in contemporary Africa, see Ruth Marshall on Nigerian Pentecostalism, *Political Spiritualities*.

[95] The cover of *ARTTRA* 13, October 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.'

[96] Cindi to Peirson, March 6, 1974, 1 – 2.