Health, hospital(ity) and hegemony: Artistic agencies of two women weavers at Ceza, 1962

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ABSTRACT

Art history has yet to accord recognition to two women for their pivotal roles at a small tapestry-weaving project at Ceza Mission Hospital in rural South Africa in 1962. As I argue below, it was largely the agencies of Allina Ndebele from rural KwaZulu-Natal and Ulla Gowenius from Sweden that laid the groundwork for what would later evolve into a renowned tapestry centre at Rorke's Drift. Although representations depicted Ceza as idyllic, the women pursued this venture in what was a coercive environment, in which a rural black community was marginalised not merely by disease, but forms of power that included racial oppression, doctrine, patriarchy, social convention and biomedicine.

This account recovers details of Ndebele and Gowenius's inventive interactions and accords subjectivity to convalescent weavers disenfranchised by modalities of social control, in turn disrupting homogenising notions of this pedagogic milieu as a duality of empowered trainers and those directed by them. Exposing the conditions in which the project was fostered, I situate the venture in a context of mid-century Swedish philanthropy, interrogating previous representations of Ceza as an outcome of benign modernity and the project as the fruits of foreign expertise.

Keywords: Ceza, weaving, Allina Ndebele, Ulla Gowenius.

Published by

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Original research

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2617-3255/2023/n37a3

> *I experienced the little mission station as an island of civilisation in the middle of the wilderness. A fixed point in the existence of panic-stricken creatures shackled by superstition. A settlement where the doors are open to everyone* – Berta Hansson c.1953

In the mid-century Swedish imaginary, Ceza Mission Hospital was a haven of Christian humanism and modern medicine in a perplexing African wilderness. As Berta Hansson's description suggests, Swedish writings tended to depict this remote outpost of the Church of Sweden Mission (CSM) in rural South Africa as a source of inspiration. Literary moderns were attracted to Africa in pursuit of beauty, meaning and a sense of the 'self' considered lost in European culture, as Raoul Granqvist (1990:65) observes in his interrogation of travel writings of the day. This is equally true of Hansson's travel companion, the writer Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt, who informed readers in the feminist journal, *Fogelstadförbundet*, that Ceza resembled 'the first day of creation' (Björkman-Goldschmidt 1953:2). Her photograph of a partially-clad black woman scything grass under a bower of palm branches constructed Ceza as an African Eden (Figure 1).

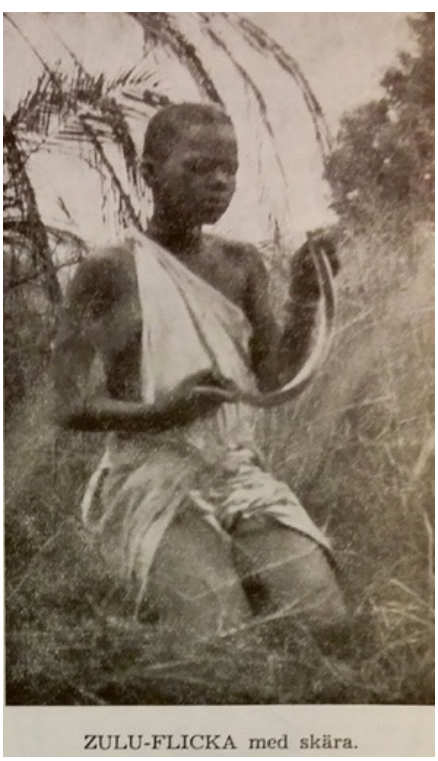

FIGURE Nº 1

Photograph of a woman at Ceza titled *Zulu-flicka med skara* ('Zulu girl with scythe'). Reproduction from E. Björkman-Goldschmidt, *Brev* (Letter), *Fogelstadförbundet* 10 (2), May 1953, p.2.

The romantic terms in which these two recipients of missionary hospitality represented this settlement obscure what was, in reality, a fraught environment. Situated in a neglected part of KwaZulu-Natal declared a "reserve"[1] in which those classified "Zulu"[2] were forced to live, the region was devastated not merely by the trauma of racial oppression but by malnutrition and tuberculosis (TB). In an era before efficacious treatment for the latter was available, recovering patients would endure extended periods of listlessness and depression. A community of long-term convalescents had thus grown around the hospital and its small church (Figure 2).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Ceza Mission Hospital, c.1950s. Cover image from M. Adolfsson and A. Berntsson. *Ceza – A round about way to the goal: three decades of medical missionary work in South Africa*, 1984. Uppsala: self-published.

It was at this troubled place that, as an outcome of Hansson's sojourn here, a young Swedish couple, Peder and Ulla Gowenius, embarked on a weaving project in 1962, which would lead to the well-known Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, a year later.[3] Despite the acknowledgement art history has since accorded them, the latter remains an indistinct figure, her contribution at Ceza (and other centres they would co-found) invariably suppressed by the expediency of generalisation. This might also have been because her husband tended to be their spokesperson, and because she was inclined to represent their venture as an outcome of his brilliance. As she once told me, 'Peder was in charge of the inspiration' (U. Gowenius 1999/2/13).

Likewise underestimated in the history is the impact of another woman at Ceza, Allina Mukuthu Khumalo (later Ndebele), and the extent to which the Gowenius

couple would depend on her ingenuities (Figures 3a and 3b). she has enjoyed some recognition, this is generally for tapestries she wove only later in life. Furthermore, little is known of the hospital convalescents who, from their beds or on the hospital grounds, wove non-figurative and figurative works, some of which would be exhibited to large audiences in Stockholm. As Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1991:9-10) point out, scholarship has been inclined to narrate the multifaceted dimensions of social circumstances in the missionary milieu in narrow antithetical terms, portraying European "civilisers" and their subjects with limited variation or individuality. Even acclaimed South African art histories written in a post-colonial context tend to be misleading. In observing how practices by black artists gained momentum largely from mission opportunities in the twentieth century, Van Robbroeck (2006:131), for example, restates that the Swedish art/craft venture was 'founded by Swedish Lutheran missionaries'. By such means creative subjects have been constructed even in critical writings as a duality of indoctrinators and the objects of their redirection.

FIGURE **Nº 3a**

Allina Mukuthu Khumalo (later Ndebele) at Ceza, 1962. Photo courtesy of Peder Gowenius. Power, Gender and Community Art Archive, University of Johannesburg (PGCAA).

FIGURE **Nº 3b**

Ulla Gowenius warping a table loom with Allina Ndebele at Ceza, 1962. Photo courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

Charting a route through the social challenges of this hospital context, I show that the Ceza project cannot be explained through such norms of discourse. Rather, this unlikely venture was due to the inventive and interactive agencies of two women in the face of a devastating epidemic and forms of social power; not only apartheid but patriarchy and biomedical practices. Considering notions of craft-based therapy in the 1960s, I reveal how Ndebele and Gowenius evolved new weaving methodologies for those who spent months at the hospital compound. Furthermore, in situating this history at the intersection of disease, race, belief and gender, I broach a detailed reading that seeks to retrieve subjectivities, however incomplete, of those at the margins of society, disenfranchised by multiple modalities of social control.

My reading of women's ingenuities is informed by a previously unknown collection of letters written either by Ulla Gowenius, or the Goweniuses together.[4] To this I bring oral sources, including discussions with Ndebele over nearly 20 years, in which she shared detail on the imageries and subjectivities of the deeply marginalised weavers they taught. Such informal sources can invest histories with density and texture, soliciting what Geertz (1973:3) has theorised in the context of social relations as 'thick description'. Nevertheless, I recognise that the

topography of interpretation has its limits, especially some 60 years after events, and that my background inevitably removes me from this milieu. I cannot therefore speak about the experiences and understandings of the Subjects in this history, but merely *in proximity to* them, in the knowledge that others would negotiate their subjectivities differently.[5]

Starting out at Ceza

In 1961 the Goweniuses were hired by a group of philanthropists Hansson assembled in Stockholm, Svenska kommittén för stöd åt afrikanskt konsthantverk (The Swedish Committee for the Support of African Art and Craft), to survey so-called *äkta* (authentic) craft styles believed doomed to extinction in Southern Africa. The couple was tasked to assess the feasibility of 'reviving' some of them, especially loom weaving which, as Hansson and the Committee erroneously believed, had been universally practiced in ancient times (Höjer 1962:358). As their chairperson, Signe Höjer, imagined, preservation of craft practices would help counteract the transfer of western social systems to African countries whose vernacular styles were under threat.

The essentialising assumption that 'Africans [had] a distinctly decorative disposition' was cited in Sweden as a promise of future success in articles such as 'Helsingborgska till Sydafrika för att lära utt hemslöjdsindustri' (Helsingborgian to South Africa to develop a handcraft industry) (unidentified newspaper clipping, 1961). Unusually, however, this article focused on Ulla Gowenius, rather than the Goweniuses as a couple. Among her credentials for this ground-breaking task, it stated, was her artistic aptitude as a child and subsequent weaving training. That her grandfather's brother was a renowned artist, Carl Kylberg, was deemed a further recommendation. She was also reported to have spent the summer of 1961 learning basket weaving on a Swedish farm (Alving 1961:30-34,37-38). Remarkably, these achievements were thought sufficient for the historic task of what prominent writer Barbro Alving (1961) and others referred to as 'rescuing' craft practices on the African subcontinent.

Although the Goweniuses were initially contracted to survey local art/craft and make recommendations for a future training course, once in South Africa they decided to launch an interim experiment that might benefit marginalised women in the Zululand "reserve". During a visit to Ceza on 30 December, it was arranged with the Hospital Superintendent, Märta Adolfsson, that they would teach 'useful knowledge' like weaving to tubercular patients who, it was envisaged, would then take these skills home, returning later with articles for sale (U. Gowenius 1999/2/13).

Here they met Allina Ndebele, who in 1961 had embarked on nursing training, one of the few avenues of further study available to black women in apartheid South Africa. Born into impoverished circumstances near Swart Mfolozi in Zululand in 1939, she had managed to complete her schooling at Maria Ratschitz Catholic Mission near Wasbank. The rather improbable meeting between her and the Goweniuses seems to have taken place when she was assigned to them as an interpreter for their visit (U. and P. Gowenius 1961/11/21). When Ndedele was seconded to them in the new year, she would become personally involved in their work.

Inventive agencies

The Swedish Committee's notion of craft "rescue" was born from the conviction that Sweden had saved its own craft "traditions" through its *hemslöjdsrörelsen* (Swedish handcraft movement), rescuing peasant communities from poverty and instilling pride in inherited practices. The women now believed they could do the same in South Africa. In hailing this prospect, the popular Swedish thought leader Barbro Alving (1961:30) fretted in an article, 'Nu ska negerkonsten bli äkta' (Now Negro art will become genuine), that the old knowledge of Africans would be forgotten if they were simply 'thrown like a javelin towards the future'.

Albeit that Committee members self-identified as anti-apartheid socialists, it seems not to have struck them that reviving craft styles in Africa might be a reifying concept that does violence to cultural dynamism by seeking to contain it. In his dialectical model of cultural decolonisation in 1959 anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon (1959:[Sp]) had recently condemned hegemonic agendas in the West as a 'throwback to the laws of inertia'. However, it would only be around 1970 that Swedes would interrogate the project in South Africa in the light of anti-colonial discourses.[6]

Although the Committee seems to have been unaware of such critical conversations associated with culture, once in South Africa the Goweniuses decided against pursuing "native craft" technologies. Instead they settled on loom weaving, which seemed an ideologically 'neutral' medium that local people did not associate with the regime's totalitarian apartheid policy. Moreover, Gowenius was a specialist in textile practice.

She soon rejected the weaving initiatives already established by missionaries and philanthropists in South Africa as unsustainable. The problem, she wrote to her mother Birgit Kylberg, was that these benefactors had donated unwieldly floor looms and spinning wheels that were impossible for the local women they tried to help accommodate in their small homes.[7] On the other hand, knitting, which required

only the simplest of equipment, enjoyed local popularity (U. Gowenius, 1961/12/ First Advent). Based on this finding, she embarked on a quest for a cheap, portable form of loom and a simple means of spinning wool.

Rather than seeking advice from Konstfack art school in Stockholm, where she had worked on large, semi-automated looms, Ulla appealed to Sweden's museum of cultural history, Nordiska, for information on what were considered "primitive" hand-held spindles. However, when this did not yield information fast enough, she fashioned substitutes from bamboo sticks weighted with clay to stop the wool raveling up during the spinning process, receiving guidance on this obsolete technology by correspondence with her mother (U. and P. Gowenius 1961/12/18) (Figures 4a and 4b). Kylberg also advised on the design of carding brushes with which the raw wool could be teased out prior to spinning.

FIGURE **Nº 4a**

Ulla teaching women at Ceza to spin, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

FIGURE **Nº 4b**

Ulla teaching women at Ceza to spin, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

On a visit to a textile museum in Hamburg before their departure from Europe, Ulla reportedly saw simple back-strap looms used in rural regions of South America and the Middle East (Alving 1961:30). Adapting this design to circumstances, she sketched a plan for her projected apparatus in a letter to her mother. This shows a strap for tying the loom around the weaver's waist, a 'front stick' on which the newly-woven section is rolled, 'cross sticks' that maintained the separation of the two sets of warp threads, a heddle frame that raised and lowered them alternately, and finally, the far end of the warp (U. Gowenius 1962/2/1) (Figures 5a and 5b). Made from lightweight bamboo, this versatile loom could be suspended between a weaver's waist to a fixed structure, such as a bedstead, fencepost or drainpipe.

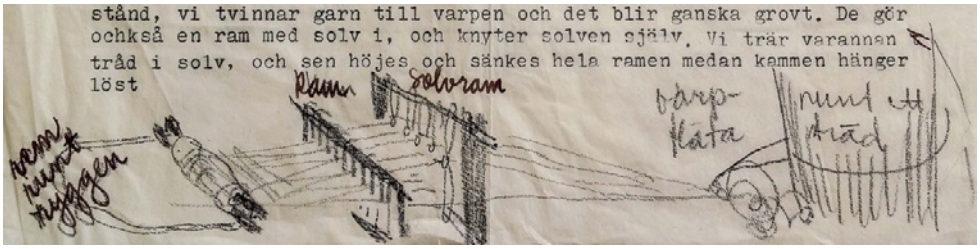

FIGURE **Nº 5a**

Ulla Gowenius. Diagram of a back-strap loom in Ulla Gowenius's letter to Birgit Kylberg, Ceza, 1 February 1962. Photo: Philippa Hobbs. PGCAA.

FIGURE **Nº 5b**

Unknown man weaving on a back-strap loom suspended from his waist to a hospital bed, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

As Gowenius considered locally-manufactured wool 'weak and ugly', she resolved to make her own (U. and P. Gowenius 1961/12/18). However, she discovered that, even if most homesteads kept the local species of sheep, *isiklabhu imvu*, people were unaware that their wool could be spun and woven (Ndebele 15/3/2017). Their plan was to teach women in nearby homes to do this, then to buy the spun product back from them for use in the wards (U. and P. Gowenius 1961/12/18). Soon Ndebele not only facilitated visits to local homesteads but took to sheering sheep (Figure 6).

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Allina Ndebele shearing sheep near Ceza, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

The couple inevitably found the challenges 'rather tough' (U. and P. Gowenius 1962/1/16). As Gowenius observed, there was plenty of opportunity for misunderstanding. She recounted the story of a missionary wife who asked for wool from three or four sheep. To the woman's horror, villagers brought the sheep slaughtered and skinned (U. Gowenius 1962/12/18). However, Ndebele was also drawn into demonstrating hand-spinning to patients and helping them thread the small looms the Goweniuses and some convalescents were making. This painstaking 'warping' process required numeracy skills, which few local people had, so she counted the strands on their behalf, following which they threaded alternate strands

through the eyes of the string heddles in the heddle frames (Ndebele 2018/4/18 and 2018/5/1).[8]

Given the barriers of language and culture they faced, the Goweniuses decided to encourage visual motifs local people were familiar with. *Izithebe*, the grass mats women had woven for decades, suggested themselves as an 'easy point of reference', that might help weavers adjust to the new technology (U. Gowenius 1999/5/17) (Figure 7). When rhomboids and triangles were introduced the visual possibilities increased exponentially (Figure 8). However, the production of diagonals and independent shapes called for further skills, as they are built from discontinuous weft strands that do not span the full width of the warp, only each shape, and therefore have to be interlocked on each side. Yet despite their lack of numeracy, Ndebele remembers, weavers were adept at approximating distances between motifs and from the middle of the work outwards.

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Unknown weaver. Patterned *izithebe*. (Date unknown). Grass. 36 x 34 cm. Private collection, Uppsala, Sweden. Photo: Philippa Hobbs.

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Women weaving on back-strap looms, 1962. The loom at the far end shows how a shed is formed as the frame is lifted. Diagonal axes in a design necessitated complex progressions of shorter or longer passes of the weft, creating 'stepped' profiles along the edges of shapes. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

To help the patients grasp the technical concepts associated with loom weaving, she went on to evolve a lexicon of isiZulu weaving terms, with which she could convey Ulla Gowenius's broken-English instructions to others. Thus, 'Lay the warp' was '*Bala iwarp*', and 'Put the warp onto the loom', became '*Beka iwarp kwiloom*' (U. Gowenius 1962). Within a fortnight, around 20 patients were at the looms each morning (U. and P. Gowenius 1962/2/1). Most of their early weavings were laterally-striped scarves or runners in shades of undyed white, grey, fawn, brown and black. Larger products could be made by joining the woven strips longitudinally.

While helping patients develop these skills, Ndebele herself embarked on a tapestry in her leisure time, maintaining a small lead over their rate of learning – and 'practicing my independence', as she since said in reference to her eventual career (Ndebele 2018/3/27).[9] Unlike the formal repeat patterns their grandmothers had woven in *izithebe*, Ndebele conceived *Ceza Hill* as an informal geometry, in which vee-shapes on an ochre ground denote rhythms in the landscape (Figure 9). At intervals these are intersected by darker verticals representing trees.[10] In these intricate passages she found a means of expressing artistic virtuosity; as she pointed out to me, elongated forms are easily constructed when their lengths lie with the direction of the weft. But because they were placed perpendicular to it, many short cross strands were required to build their height, each interlocked with that on either side.

FIGURE **Nº 9**

Allina Ndebele. *Ceza Hill*. (1962). Karakul tapestry (section). 185 x 135 cm. Whereabouts unknown. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

The extending warp

When Berta Hansson unpacked a consignment of Ceza weavings in Stockholm that April, she found among them a 'small fine gobelin'[11] (U. Gowenius 1999/5/17). This was probably *The Red Lion*, a figurative tapestry woven from hand-spun merino wool by a woman with a spine disease, recorded only as "Alfina" (U. Gowenius 1999/5/17)[12] (Figure 10). By now Gowenius had devised an upright tapestry loom, which offered greater scale and a perpendicular view of the evolving image. This development accompanied the expanding ambitions of the weavers themselves. A photograph of Alfina at work shows part of what may be *The Red Lion* below the geometric piece she weaves (Figures 11a and 11b). A lengthy warp was required to accommodate this succession of tapestries. But there is a poignancy in this, as its extended length also anticipated the prospect of long-term hospitalisation.

FIGURE **Nº 10**

Alfina. *The Red Lion*. (1962). Merino-wool tapestry. 30 x 50 cm. Whereabouts unknown. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA

FIGURE **Nº 11a**

Alfina working on a geometric tapestry, with a completed work visible below, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

FIGURE **Nº 11b**

Alfina. Geometric design (1962). Karakul tapestry. Dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

Alfina's thinly-spun weft was considered unviable for sale, however, as it had taken too long to complete. Thick strands of karakul,[13] which would nevertheless compress obligingly for detailed work, would be preferable. As surviving photographs show, a young girl recorded only as "Olpha", who Gowenius referred to as 'the most accomplished', subsequently made *Cattle and Tickbirds* with strands of karakul she spun herself (U. Gowenius, [Sa]) (Figure 12a). Gowenius showed her how to interlock the first animal into the adjacent weft, then handed the task to Ndebele, who helped her with the second (Ndebele 2017/3/15). Compounding the technical challenges of *Cattle and Tickbirds* was the range of colours, which necessitated frequent joining of different strands. The series of red and orange tints reveal the nuancing in the dye process Peder Gowenius had taken over from his wife,[14] hinting at the intricate approach they would pursue in their future ventures. In the light of their dwindling funds, which had reduced the two Swedes to eating the local staple, *mielie pap* (maize-meal porridge), to survive, re-using the dye for steadily softer shades was a welcome saving.

Chronically ill and barely more than a girl, Olpha was one of the most enthusiastic weavers who, Peder Gowenius recalls, was particularly 'uplifted' by her accomplishment (P. Gowenius 2/6/17). Considered an extraordinary achievement, this modest tapestry would be reproduced in the popular Swedish weekly, *Vi* (Jannes 1962:13) (Figure 12b). Such experiences persuaded the couple that, as they put it to Kylberg, occupational therapy (OT) was essential at Ceza and not a 'pastime' (U. and P. Gowenius 1962/3/7). However, knowledge of OT was rather scant here. Adolfsson had rather vaguely informed them that it served to occupy the mind (P. Gowenius 1999/5/21). In the light of the ensuing project, it was fortuitous that Adolfsson did not realise that craft-based activities in Sweden were in the process of replacement with neurology, kinesiology and other para-scientific practices

FIGURE **Nº 12a**

Olpha weaving *Cattle and Tickbirds* (not actual title). 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

advocated by the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (see, for example, Kielhofner 1983:5). Perversely, Ceza would be a felicitous location for the craft venture, as long-term convalescence allowed patients time to develop interest and aptitude, and to make a number of works over this experimental period. Peder Gowenius remembers how their enthusiasm even prevented young girls like Olpha from taking their prescribed rest (P. Gowenius 2016/6/2).

FIGURE **Nº 12b**

Olpha. *Cattle and Tickbirds* (1962). Karakul tapestry. Dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Photo: Harry Dittmer. Reproduction from E. Jannes, '*Svenska sländor – afrikanska kor*' (Swedish spindles – African cattle), *Vi*, 24 November 1962, p.13. PGCAA.

That April Gowenius initiated dressmaking in the maternity ward while Ndebele took over the weaving operations (U. Gowenius 1/4/62). By July the numbers of weavers had doubled (P. Gowenius 1963/4/18) (Figure 13). In reality, Gowenius has insisted, the Ceza project was launched through Ndebele's communication skills, technical expertise, and inspiring enthusiasm. Her success provided the two Swedes with insight on how their venture could be developed in the future; they now realised that training women such as Ndebele as hospital therapists would be a more relevant objective than the Committee's original quest to salvage pre-industrial craft technologies (U. Gowenius 1999/2/13).

FIGURE **Nº 13**

View of weavers, with a geometric design by 'Alfina' under construction, 1962. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

Frontiers of power

Ndebele and Gowenius's inventive agencies might suggest they negotiated the Ceza environment with ease, but the social topography of this hospital community in an apartheid "reserve" was not *easily* navigated. Peder Gowenius remembers that 'every black person was suspicious of a white person', and that he struggled to escape the feeling of being an 'intruder' (P. Gowenius 2017/4/26). The effects of racial oppression were pervasive. He describes how a traumatised patient had to be sedated after leaping onto his bed, believing himself under attack by a group of white men (P. Gowenius 2016/6/2). Signs of neglect engineered by apartheid policy were evident too. As the couple wrote to Kylberg on 30 December, 'Ceza is

pretty. Less pretty are the children, swollen from malnourishment'.

Quite apart from the shock of witnessing large-scale suffering, the Goweniuses were dismayed at the hierarchisation of the hospital community itself, even if Swedish staff believed otherwise. At a missionary conference, for example, Adolfsson announced a sense of 'oneness' at the hospital (Adolfsson 1960/11/24). The 'civilised' haven that had impressed Björkman-Goldschmidt and Hansson was an enclave in which unqualified nurses like Ndebele were treated by their qualified black superiors 'as nothing', as Peder Gowenius put it (P. Gowenius 2016/6/2). Swedish staff kept to themselves, while black nurses did likewise. However, it was a given that the Swedes were a 'class above the others'.[15] Describing how such attitudes had been passed down the generations of missionary families, he observed to me that '[i]n many ways the missions were not part of the world really [because] they were isolated' (P. Gowenius 2017/4/23).

The institutionalised prejudices women faced at Ceza were almost certainly intensified by the isolation of this hamlet. In understanding some of the oppressive experiences of women in this regime of segregation, we need to consider them in the context of the simultaneity of intersecting forms of marginalisation, a notion mobilised by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). Modalities of social differentiation are constructed on the basis of, for example, race and gender. In the case of Ceza, belief was a further avenue of prejudice local people had to contend with.

Modes of entitlement enjoyed by Swedish personnel at Ceza also favoured their visitors. Although apartheid policy permitted few white South Africans to visit the Zululand reserve, mission staff could issue discretionary permits to their travelling guests, many of them Swedes who preferred to stay at Ceza en route to the coast, thus minimising their contact with white South Africans, whose racism was intolerable (Björkman-Goldschmidt 1953:2). Likewise, the Goweniuses were also able to stay in the Zululand reserve under the aegis of the Mission.

Despite the social barriers at Ceza, Gowenius is said to have reached local women quite effortlessly (P. Gowenius 2017/4/26). A letter from the couple to Höjer describes her teaching dressmaking in the maternity ward, talking, laughing and even crying with the patients long into the evenings (U. and P. Gowenius 1962/6/7). Ndebele herself had to navigate longstanding local taboos affecting women. In his study of medicinality at Ceza and other missionary hospitals, Radiboko Ntsimane describes how patriarchal codes of social behavior, or *ukuhlonipha*, which were grounded in inherited religio-cultural practices, required women to meet very particular expectations of men and the family ancestors (Ntsimane 2007:115). They also limited

the interaction of a young, unmarried woman like Ndebele with men. However, this did not dissuade her from teaching weaving to male patients. As she says of this transgression, in her enthusiasm she simply forgot about social convention (Ndebele 2018/4/30-2018/5/1) (Figure 14). One of the men who responded to the new opportunity was a tuberculosis sufferer remembered only as "Michael", who a surviving photograph captures laying a warp under her direction on a table loom (Figure 15). Ignoring conventions that associated fibre technologies with women, he excelled under Ndebele's tutelage. After being shown how to weave just one pass of the wool he himself had spun, he wove a jacket and a priest's stole (U. Gowenius [Sa]).

There may well have been another factor in Ndebele's ability to bridge social divides. As Ntsimane (2007:123) observes, the training nurses undertook at Ceza equipped them to enter a money economy; their financial independence in turn enabling them to challenge local patriarchy. Knowledge of western healthcare was thus a means of undercutting longstanding social norms to their advantage, even if their new-found status tended to alienate them from the communities they served. A signifier of knowledge, resources and power acquired through training, even a nurse's uniform was experienced as empowering.

FIGURE **Nº 14**

Ndebele teaching spinning in a ward at Ceza Mission Hospital. Ndebele and Gowenius overrode convention by putting male and female learner-patients into the same group. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius. PGCAA.

FIGURE Nº 15

Ndebele assisting Michael to warp a small table loom. Photo: Courtesy of Peder Gowenius, 1962. PGCAA.

Modernity and modes of dis/order

Although the concept of restoring *äkta* (genuine) craft technologies in southern Africa was lauded in Sweden, vernacular healing practices were not similarly honoured, and no such "rescue" enterprise was envisaged for them. As Peder Gowenius observes, missionaries simply 'swept away' inherited medicinal knowledge and practices (P. Gowenius 2016/2/5). Records of missionary meetings lend insight into hegemonic attitudes among hospital staff towards local forms of medicinality. Because modern healthcare and evangelisation were their twin imperatives, Adolfsson reminded her colleagues at a medical-mission convention, it was their duty to preach the Gospel in both words and deeds (Adolfsson 1960/11/24). She cited the time Jesus devoted to healing the sick and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) as precedents for their own provision of healing to others.

As this dual mandate was deemed as yet unfulfilled, the sending country continued to allocate resources for the provision of modern healthcare among *hedningar* (heathens), as Ceza missionaries denigratingly referred to unevangelised Africans. Axel-Ivar Berglund, a Ceza-born missionary and anthropologist, was troubled that Christianity had not yet proved the 'safeguard in life that it ought to have been',

and that many people still depended on treatment by the local *inyanga* (medicine-man) (Berglund 1960:2-6). He cited ongoing 'witchcraft and sorcery' as one of the biggest obstacles for christianisation in Zululand, where people took 'pride' at the notion of such practices becoming a 'religion'. Frustrated by the power of local medicine men, hospital staff such as Nurse Astrid Andersson (1962:276-278) despaired that, as *umtakati* (evil spirits) were believed the cause of disease, it was often these figures who decided whether a sufferer should go to hospital (Figure 16). Comments by Swedish travel writers in the same missionary journals were solicited to reinforce such perspectives. One was Höjer who, though a champion of liberal humanism, voiced her abhorrence at the 'superstition and disease' that confronted Swedish missionaries (Höjer 1954:10). Such accounts depict a relentless struggle against inherited forms of treatment, valorising the Mission as a frontier of modernity in the face of irrationality and fear among Africans left to their own devices. They undoubtedly also secured continuing support back home.

The Ceza weaving project would be represented as a Swedish achievement in both the press and articles such as Höjer's 'Den tidigaste Svenska u-landshjälpen – och den senaste' (The earliest Swedish development aid – and the most recent), in which she emphasised that Sweden had a 'special position in the world' in the sphere of craft (Höjer 1962:538). As their Committee Secretary, Holger Benettsson from the CSM, had informed them, the programme had done wonders for apathetic convalescents, who were recovering faster than doctors had expected (Höjer 1962:542). However, in instrumentalising their own ambitions and ideological agendas through the project's publicity, the Committee tended to erase Ndebele's

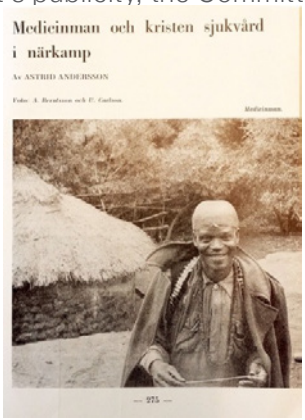
Medicinman och kristen sjukvård i närkamp

FIGURE **Nº 16**

View of Laduma Madela, 1962. Reproduction from *Utblick* 9, p. 275. A. Andersson, '*Medicinman och kristen sjukvård i närkamp*' (Medicine man and Christian healthcare in conflict). 9, p. 275. A vociferous traditionalist, Madela sought to establish a 'Zulu' belief system that included an elaborate version of the origin of life that would parallel the Bible. When the Goweniuses (together with Ndebele) visited this engaging figure, Ceza staff worried that they were encouraging Madela's unruly behaviour.

role, an omission since perpetuated also in South African art history. This oversight is unsurprising, in view of the many instances in which white women have been complicit in constructing silences on black women in their representations of them. It neatly illustrates what Hazel Carby (1982) would point out 20 years later in 'White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood', that black and Asian women have been unseen in discourses perpetuated by white women.

In funding the weaving project at Ceza, the Committee and its advocates seem not to have questioned the social impact of modern biomedicine at mission hospitals. When viewed through a post-colonial lens, Swedish presence at Ceza reproduced a mode of coloniality in which gender, social class, regionality and vernacular practices were dismissed, and where Subject communities were regarded as unwitting objects of developers' agendas, excluded from conversations on their own advancement. By such means, as Eriksson Baaz (1999:[Sp]) points out in the broader context of Scandinavian aid interventions, those targeted for 'development' were commonly expected to internalise western norms. By presupposing the universal relevance of western knowledge, programmes reproduce a subaltern "Third World" even as they attempt to rescue it. In the context of white-run training initiatives for black artists in South Africa, Van Robbroeck (2006:40) similarly argues that the universalising, yet exclusionary, agendas of humanism render it deeply complicit with racism.

Totalising attitudes at Ceza can be read in the context of Sweden's outward turn in the mid-twentieth century, which repositioned this peripheral power as an agent of global social reform (see Hobbs 2019:46-7). Social planners, Höjer among them, had restructured Sweden as a "welfare state", in which all aspects of life, including healthcare, schooling, labour, social security and retirement, were rationalised as a group of interacting functions.[16] Seemingly legitimised by "scientific" methodology, reformers believed this mode of social engineering was the key to general wellbeing. Even inherited craft technologies and other Swedish cultural practices could be accommodated in this functionalist form of modernity, as 'human factors' that could enhance citizens' lifestyles (Klein 2006:62-63). This modern dispensation was believed a new but inevitable stage of societal evolution. Planners therefore presumed Others could be brought to development in the way the western world had been. Having shaped holistic welfare solutions at home, Sweden recognised an opportunity to define itself a global role in what were termed *u-länder* (developing countries), where this form of advancement seemed to lag.[17] Because Sweden was untainted by prejudicial attitudes associated with colonialism, planners theorised, it was equipped to fulfil this imperative.[18] Notwithstanding the Committee's high-minded intentions for South Africa, other failures are discernable in their welfare discourses.

As Berg (2009:473) observes in the context of Signe Höjer, although developers might have espoused a notion of equal cooperation between donors and recipients, such partnership discourse tends to obscure power relationships between them. Moreover, welfare programmes are implicated even if established with altruistic intent, in that they necessarily inscribe inferiority on those they target.

Leaving Ceza

In mid-1962 the Goweniuses left Ceza and its constraints to establish a formal Art and Craft Advisors (ACA) course at Umpumulo (now Mapumulo) near Stanger in KwaZulu-Natal, for local women who could work as occupational therapists in mission hospitals. As their Committee's flow of funding had dwindled, Peder Gowenius reluctantly accepted an appointment as an unordained "missionary" with the CSM, his salary helping keep their project afloat. In choosing to accompany the Goweniuses as a student on the envisaged course, Ndebele relinquished the prospect of secure hospital employment for an uncertain career whose success depended on two cash-strapped art graduates from a distant country. When the couple duly initiated the ACA course, they modelled it partly on Ndebele's role at Ceza. She would also be the first to register as a student on this new programme. Some months later the course would find a permanent home further north at Rorke's Drift, where a weaving workshop was established to support it.

Ndebele's personal initiative would continue to be a feature of this and further ventures. When Gowenius was hospitalised with typhoid in late 1962 she would step in and teach her own classmates. Such was her success that, after receiving a scholarship to Steneby Folkshögskola in Dalsland, Sweden, where she studied a range of fibre technologies, she returned to Rorke's Drift in 1965 to take over the training of new weavers from Gowenius. Having introduced numbers of women to weave over the next 12 years, Ndebele initiated a tapestry venture of her own, Khumalo's Kraal Weaving Workshop, at Egazini village near Swart Mfolozi in early 1978, an unknown venture for a black woman in rural South Africa at the time. Here she taught weaving to local women and made a large body of pictorial works, eventually retiring in 2005. As Peder Gowenius (2016/5/31) sees it, by establishing a workshop of her own Ndebele 'took Rorke's Drift one step further'. The Goweniuses themselves would go on to apply their collective experiences at their new centres, Thabana li Mele Art and Craft Centre in Lesotho in 1968 and Oodi Weavers in Botswana in 1973. Thus, the original six-month interlude at Ceza, whose chief weaving pioneers were Ulla Gowenius and Allina Ndebele, would have a substantial impact on tapestry weaving in southern Africa.

Ndebele would eventually challenge evangelism and its totalising agendas. Despite her Christian schooling, training in western healthcare and subsequent work at Rorke's Drift, when she embarked on an independent career as a tapestry artist in late 1977 she increasingly embraced local understandings of healing in both her worldview and woven imagery.[19] Explaining her ambivalence of belief, as well as her regret at the demise of inherited knowledges, she portrays Jesus as something of a usurper who 'took over' the role of the family ancestors traditionally honoured as guides and protectors of the living (Ndebele 1998/1/16).

Conclusion

My reading of the pilot phase of what would become the renowned craft/art enterprise at Rorke's Drift challenges idyllic representations of a complex milieu, revealing how misleadingly Ceza was romanticised in the Swedish imagination. In reality, life at this remote mission outpost was proscribed by a bewilderment of social codes. Dealing with different forms of oppression at once, local women at Ceza endured complex modalities of oppression, as prejudicial attitudes interacted in the shaping of multiple dimensions of their experiences. At the margins of society Ndebele and, more particularly, convalescents such as Olpha and Alfina, faced multiple circumstances that rendered them without social status or, in the case of the latter, much prospect of survival. Yet it was the persistence of those reduced not only by patriarchy and race, but by their status as diseased and "heathen", that suggested a permanent art/craft project might be feasible in the future. Although fragmentary, my account has retrieved something of their identities and subjectivities.

Together with Gowenius, Ndebele found inventive, if not courageous, strategies to shape the embryonic project. In co-opting male patients into the weaving activities, she was prepared to undermine local norms to assert her expertise and secure personal advancement. Furthermore, the ambitions of "experts" in distant Sweden were redirected by her, a point the Goweniuses made in our first interview (U. and P. Gowenius 1999/5/15). Nor was the project invested with the artistic advantages of Gowenius's (male) ancestral bloodline, as the media absurdly anticipated. If anything, she and Ndebele solicited longstanding knowledges of senior women in their families to inform the craft-based therapy they were probing.

Perceiving Swedish missions to be philanthropic organisations, the Committee in Stockholm was unaware how hierarchised these enclaves really were. It fell largely to the two women to mitigate the Committee's failures in policy and planning. Although the philanthropic initiative was lauded as an outcome of Swedish

exceptionalism, in reality the Goweniuses were unprepared and underfunded by an idealistic Committee to navigate apartheid South Africa in pursuit of an improbable objective. In identifying the CSM as a partner in their South African enterprise, these welfare-state philanthropists understood little of the social hierarchies, cultural conflicts and discriminatory attitudes that pervaded the mission field. Ironically, while they self-identified as champions of outward-looking modernity, the Committee took a fetishising interest in the securing of African art/craft "traditions", considering them immutable canons of artistry from which change implied deterioration. Yet there was no question of accommodating vernacular medicinality and other long-standing practices in the Ceza region. Control of medicinality during the Swedish missionary moment was taken as a *sine qua non*. Ironically, in their reordering agendas both the apartheid state and the welfare state were quintessentially modern centres of power that sought to deploy craft to advance deeply ideological agendas. If the apartheid regime's "native craft" policy of suppressing the advancement of black South Africans was hegemonic in its objectives, so too was the Swedish drive for recognition by "rescuing" old craft practices in Africa.

This account also disturbs, and at times inverts, the binary concepts with which missionary art/craft activities have often been narrated by South African art history, which construct trainer-trainee partnerships in simplistic terms as with and without agency respectively. As a result of Ndebele's instrumentality, for example, the young Swedish "developers" became learners themselves. In revealing how Swedish art/craft philanthropy and its discourses inscribed inferiority on a dispossessed community in a quest to better it, I have also exposed some of the diverging intentionalities and attitudes among the agents of authority themselves, namely the Committee, hospital staff, missionaries and the Goweniuses.

In dislodging the notion that the Ceza weaving intervention was a historic "catalyst" effected by visiting experts, this alternative reading shows how the improbable initiative at Ceza depended largely on the interactive agencies of two women whose lives were fashioned by different circumstances. In an exercise of interaction and adaptation, Gowenius and Ndebele evolved weaving methodologies that mitigated the plight of those who spent months at the hospital compound. Despite language barriers, they asserted their personal skills, trialed new solutions and developed a rapport with one another and those they guided. It was largely the inventive and interactive agencies of these two women that directed the project beyond a limiting revivalist operation and the hegemonic notions tethered to it.

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Notes

1. To enforce racial segregation, the Population Registration Act (No 30 of 1950) required that land be assigned to specific "race groups", namely "white", "black", "coloured" and "Indian".
2. In using the term "Zulu" I do not intend to promote a collectivising perception of a common history and identity in the KwaZulu-Natal region, but rather to reference a shared language.
3. Although some weaving initiatives had already been established for marginalised women in rural South Africa, the practice at Ceza was probably unique in that it was developed in a context of a health crisis that entailed long-term convalescence.
4. Most of this correspondence is in the Gowenius collection. However, some letters are in the Power, Gender and Community Art Archive at University of Johannesburg (PGCAA).
5. This essay is derived in part from a chapter in my PhD thesis, 'Ideology, imagery and female agency in tapestry at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, during the Swedish period 1961-1976' (2019).
6. For an account of this emerging critique in Sweden, see Hobbs (2019:202-204).
7. Used in the weaving of textiles, a loom holds a set of warp threads taut in order to facilitate the interlacing of weft strands at right angles to them.
8. When lifted upwards, the heddles elevate one set of threads, leaving the alternate threads behind. The weft strand is fed through the resulting opening, or "shed" between the two sets of threads. When the frame is released an opposite shed is created for the return pass of the weft, and so on.
9. The earliest reference to her tapestries in their financial ledger is on 10 March 1962, followed by a black and yellow work, undoubtedly *Ceza Hill*, on 18 June. The whereabouts of this and other figurative Ceza tapestries are now obscure.
10. Weavers' works were priced according to size. As a small work, Ndebele's *Ceza Hill* was valued at 80 cents, for example.
11. Derived from the Gobelin school of tapestry in Paris, this term generally describes a tapestry made on a vertical loom. On the improvised upright looms at Ceza, the heddle strings were tied to a heddle stick towards the top, which can be drawn and released in order to produce alternate sheds. But, as Ndebele demonstrated to me, for intricate work small sheds could be formed with the fingers.
12. The Old Norse origin of the name "Alfina" suggests how deeply Swedish culture had impacted this community.
13. Lustrous and readily spun, karakul is made from a breed of sheep that originated in Asia.
14. Apart from helping Gowenius source materials and build equipment, her husband introduced

other processes, including painting and linocut printing, to some of the male convalescents, most notably Azaria Mbatha.

15. As minutes of that period show, medical-mission meetings were attended almost entirely by Swedish staff, with no representation of the nursing body or local community leaders.

16. Höjer had worked with representatives from missionary societies on Sweden's Government Bill No. 100:1962, promulgated during the Goweniuses' sojourn at Ceza, which provided for its international development cooperation and aid.

17. Political scientists promoted the Swedish welfare state as a triumph of both individual rights and universality. One of the most persuasive advocates was Marquis Childs, whose acclaimed publication, *Sweden: the Middle Way* (1936), promoted a concept of the "Swedish model" as a point of departure for global post-war modernisation.

18. Unlike some other European powers, Sweden's colonial interests had been 'limited' to Saint-Barthélemy in the Caribbean and a slave-trading fort on the West African coast. However, Sweden was arguably complicit through its alliances with colonial powers and slave trading in the Atlantic, including in Cape Town.

19. One such tapestry is the large *Ngakamatshi and his Muti Magics* (sic) (1998). For a reading of this work see Hobbs and Leibhammer (2011:16-17).

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