

CHAPTER 9

SEEING AN IMAGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA'S AFRICANA COLLECTION IN CONTEXT

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1 Introduction

Images have a tendency of not staying put for very long. They have a way of slipping out of the sight and grasp of those that attempt to (be)hold them. When images wander off, they sometimes can be found in far-off places with no direct reference to the locations from which they came. My interest in this chapter is in images from academic contexts that go for long walks. I am particularly interested in images that step out of academic texts because of the power that such images wield in visualising the contested long Southern African past.¹ With various ruptures and continuities, the Southern African past often is broken up into three moments, namely, the Khoisan complex; the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe estate; and the Nguni estate or Shakan period which saw the rise of the Zulu kingdom.² The last period is well documented, and historians know quite a lot about it. The visuality of the first two periods, materialised through rock paintings and the ruins of rock settlements distributed across Southern Africa, primarily is the concern of archaeologists.³

Visuality is understood here as a nineteenth century concept meaning the visualisation of history. It is claimed as central to the legitimisation of Western hegemony. Visuality according to this understanding includes not only the visual image but also the written text and all other apparatus

1 The 'long Southern African past' is a term that has been used to describe a distant past before the advent of European colonialism. This is a past about which not much is known, and which remains largely neglected due to its inaccessibility outside of the specialist discipline of archaeology. See C Hamilton & N Leibhammer (eds) *Tribing and untribing the archive: Identity and the material record in southern KwaZulu-Natal in the late independent and colonial periods* (2016); C Hamilton *The long Southern African past: Enfolded time and the challenges of archive* (2017).

2 Hamilton & Leibhammer (n 1).

3 As above.

– maps, paintings, drawings, stories, infrastructure, and even laws – that may be used to order the world through the mind’s eye. I use the terms ‘visualisation’ and ‘visuality’ following the work of visual cultural theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff.⁴ Mirzoeff understands visuality as significant to visual culture – as simultaneously a way of representing imperialism and of resisting it, in what Mirzoeff comes to theorise as countervisuality.

Mirzoeff insists and systematically shows that any analysis of visualisation and visuality should consider its multiple aspects as well as its peripheral terrain. He argues that it indeed is in small and peripheral activity on the outskirts of historical accounts that substantial complexes of order are challenged through countervisuality. In an attempt to create a framework to understand the visuality of the modern past, Mirzoeff identifies three ‘complexes of visuality’ across the modern world: plantation slavery (1660-1860); imperialism (1860-1945); and the present-day military-industrial complex (1945 to present). For Mirzoeff, modernity and the thought patterns or paths it produces come into being through a constant negotiation between visuality and countervisuality within these complexes.⁵

The subject of the chapter is Charlotte Firbank-King’s *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* (Figure 9.1) which currently hangs in the reception area of the University of Pretoria’s Africana collection.⁶ In a contemporary Southern African context hungry for countervisual moments in its own history, *Ethnic map* is seductive because of its emancipatory potential of addressing a disavowed African past. When first encountered, *Ethnic map* presents a vision of belonging and the right to space and mobility for black bodies in a little known-about past from which black bodies

4 See N Mirzoeff ‘On visuality’ (2006) 5 *Journal of Visual Culture* 53, N Mirzoeff *The right to look: A counterhistory of visuality* (2011); N Mirzoeff *How to see the world* (2016).

5 As above.

6 The African collection is a collection of rare books of interest to the Southern African continent. According to the University of Pretoria’s library website, ‘[t]he Africana collection consists of books in all disciplines limited to Africa south of the Sahara. Since 1980, the emphasis is on the Southern African region with a special interest in the material, published or unpublished, on Pretoria’ (Department of Library Services (2020)). Seen alongside contextual historical developments, Figure 9.1 – fittingly for where it is placed – addresses this gap by referencing images from the visual archive of Late Iron Age Settlements (LIAS). The image overtly displays what the published mission statement of the Africana collection describes in nonchalant terms, namely, a shift towards addressing gaps in the collection concerning black African contributions to cultural and social life, safeguarded by the collection as a cultural institution.

have historically systematically been excluded. Resembling a collage, it uses decontextualised images with authority to achieve this. As shown throughout the chapter, the artist went to great lengths to research the detail of the image. By meticulously drawing on known histories, the image acts as an authoritative visualisation of the past it presents.



Figure 9.1: Charlotte Firbank-King *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*, 1990. Digital Print of original Gouache on paper, 150 x 150cm. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

The chapter presents a post-apartheid reading of *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* by applying Mirzoeff's theoretical framework for understanding visibility across the modern world. In such a reading it becomes clear that the military-industrial complex in which Firbank-King's *Ethnic map*

of *Southern Africa* was created, and in which it still exists, differs from the imperial complex from which some of the source material for the image emanates. Moreover, both the military-industrial complex within which the image was created and the imperial complex, from which some of the source material for the image is drawn, are temporally distinct from the distant Southern African past Figure 9.1 attempts to visualise.

Through a close analysis, this chapter demonstrates that Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* postures as a visualisation of the Southern African long past. It uses iconic patterning to ascribe ethnicity and belonging. However, it is directly linked to colonial processes of tribalising and traditionalising Southern African societies.⁷ Thus, the space presented is an imaginary ideological one. It is neither an image of the year 1990, when it was created, nor of the distant pre-colonial – or 'long' – Southern African past it plays at representing. It is underpinned by colonial administrative reasoning and brings to light the desire, in colonial visuality, to distil political identity into a single visual code or print. This is something that is achieved later in the visuality of the military-industrial complex using fingerprints in biometric forms of identification in public administration.⁸ The chapter begins with a phenomenological description of this military-industrial complex, preceded by its analysis in the educational complex represented by the University of Pretoria and encapsulated in the artwork hanging at the Africana collection.

Figure 9.1 appears emancipatory, and only a closer look uncovers the contrary. Understanding Firbank-King's *Ethnic map* as making visible colonial administrative reasoning – as opposed to solely a representation of belonging and the right to space – exposes how visuality, following the downfall of apartheid in South Africa, struggles to dream Southern African history anew without slipping into colonial tropes and reasoning. The image also demonstrates how, if not reassessed appropriately, formative visualisations of the Southern African past are uncritically reproduced and circulated into new contexts.

The interpretation of Figure 9.1 given here is intricately tied to the environment in which *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* is experienced and

7 Hamilton & Leibhammer (n 1).

8 K Breckenridge *Biometric state: The global politics of identification and surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the present* (2014).

the body (my own) that experiences it. What was evident in my initial encounter with Firbank-King's *Ethnic map* was my own body and my own histories; first, the context in which Figure 9.1 hangs, and only then its apparent subject matter – a history of the people of Southern Africa. An embodied account of how to get to the image located in the main library at the University of Pretoria, through what I refer to as Pretoria's luscious educational complex fully engulfed by the military-industrial complex, interestingly illuminates this understanding.

In an embodied account of how to get to the image, I focus on myself as the viewer and the environment in which the image is experienced. I indulge the histories I bring to the image as well as those brought by the environment allowing those histories to shape my understanding. Thereafter, in a textual analysis, I ask who and what are being made visible in the image and what this means. By juxtaposing an embodied experience of Pretoria's academic block – fully engulfed by the military-industrial complex with a textual analysis of Figure 9.1 which I argue is underpinned by colonial administrative reasoning – the continuities between the two are made visible and broken. The meanings evoked by this illustration are thus shown as inextricably linked to the environment in which it hangs and the body that views it.

2 The grass at the University of Pretoria's gates

In 2021 the University of Pretoria, specifically the Mapungubwe Archive in collaboration with the Department of Library's Special Collections and Digital Scholarship Services, announced that due to multiple requests for access to the publication, a digitised copy of historian and archaeologist Leo Fouché's 1937 report,⁹ *Mapungubwe, ancient Bantu civilization on the Limpopo: Reports on excavations at Mapungubwe (Northern Transvaal) from February 1933 to June 1935* is now available online.¹⁰ Three years before

9 Leo Fouché was a South African historian. He was the first lecturer in history, political science and psychology to ever be appointed at the University of Pretoria in 1909. Fouché played a key role in the archaeological excavations of the Mapungubwe site from 1933 to 1935 (A Green *A day in the life at the University of Pretoria* 2021).

10 Mapungubwe: An ancient civilisations 1937 full report available now online (2021).

this announcement, I was one of many researchers that made a long journey to the University of Pretoria to access the physical copy. What is presented here is the long way around of getting to the report, it is a personal account of my own experience and observation; it represents my walking the University of Pretoria's main campus. Taking inspiration from Michel de Certeau,¹¹ the emphasis is on an embodied experience and the practice of everyday life.

I am at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, to conduct field research. As a former student of the University of Pretoria, I am well acquainted with the Merensky library at its main campus. As the current capital of post-apartheid South Africa, Pretoria has a potent geographic and urban history. Its streets are coloured by this history making its presence inescapable. The grass at the University of Pretoria is kept a lush green. This manicured look could fool unconscious visitors into believing that the present University and its histories were in perfect harmony. On the contrary, post-apartheid South African universities such as the University of Pretoria, as many of the country's other institutions, have undergone massive transformation processes in line with post-apartheid South African policies. The shift in visuality that comes with the fall of apartheid in recent years has pushed universities to reconsider the symbols and artworks on their campuses.¹² Walking around the University of Pretoria, I am aware of the discourse around its political charge. The visuality of colonial order laced within the natural world – turning luscious lawns into cultural objects – makes that order inescapable.¹³

Moving around Pretoria and Johannesburg can at times be a curation of movements between pockets of 'secure spaces'. This is visible in the number of keys and cards related to a particular constellation of activities. I have come to master my constellation and can pre-empt deviations. I know the difference between a car guard and a security guard; the security guard at the library gates; and the private guards that were added on campus at the height of the #Feesmustfall movement in a bid to tighten university security. I can tell an ordinary police officer apart from an officer from the metro police. My sense of alarm responds accordingly. In

11 M de Certeau *The practice of everyday life* (2011).

12 B Schmahmann *Picturing change: Curating visual culture at post-apartheid universities* (2013).

13 See JD Hunt *Denatured visions: Landscape and culture in the twentieth century* (2003).

the presence of these two security guards, I feel relaxed. Having studied at this campus, I know them well, and they know me. They have been the security guards at this library for many years. They are part of the life on campus and as non-threatening as all its other lives.

The eyes of the guards greet me with a phrase appropriate for such an encounter, *Methl'amaDala!*, 'Old-eyes!' for someone you have not seen in a long time. I return the exclamation and explain that I have been away. 'Germany!', they repeat in excitement. My eyes have travelled with theirs, and in seeing me, they now see all that I have seen. I am now a part of their story as they are a part of these pages. 'We're so happy that we too can go to those faraway places,' they agree as they release me from questioning. By the 'we' I know the guards to mean 'we' as black people on one level, and 'we' 'the people' on another.

I swipe my student card, presenting my identity to a set of glass turnstiles and walk into the library. I walk through the second set of turnstiles, in place to detect stolen books. One sign reads 'Quiet in the library please'; another tells me 'This is a surveillance zone', and I am being watched. I walk up to the Africana collection and arrive at an empty reception desk. While waiting for assistance, my eyes dart around the room. Hanging on the left of the reception desk is a large painting of what, at a distance, seems to be just a map of Southern Africa. Above it, four smaller works on paper of 'tribed' figures are framed behind glass. The Africana collection holds some rare books, including the one I am after. Only the receptionist I am waiting for has access to its shelves. She arrives and takes my request. Then, as she disappears into the collection, I return to the map to my left.

At this moment it is bizarre, even to me, that in post-apartheid South Africa, I should work so hard to excavate some understanding of the Southern African past. It is bizarre that a quest for this distant past should send me through so many policed gates. An access-controlled world that monitors an individual's movements from the monumental to the mundane; one which tells an inhabitant where to go and not to go is birthed by a colonial logic of control and the control of human capital in particular. Pretoria's academic block is fully engulfed by the military-industrial complex, underpinned by colonial administrative reasoning.

This reasoning is both continued and broken in the embodied experience of power I describe above. Colonial reasoning is made visible

by a gated and access-controlled world fortified by manicured lawns. It is broken in curious relationships with power exhibited in my interaction with the security guards at the Merensky library's gate. In this instance, the guards are the protectors of power, yet still see themselves and me (the policed) as 'the people'. 'We' black people, they insinuated or recognised, did not belong or have not belonged to this place. Such presences and interactions disrupt the clear order that colonial power attempts to establish by clearly designating space, embodied in the apartness of apartheid. The legacies of this apartness continue through Pretoria's and, indeed, the wider world's built environment and organisational structures. I see all of this in the gates that confront me, but at this moment I am intrigued and continue to be drawn in by a world in an image to my left (Figure 9.1).

The image in question is titled *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* and was painted by South African artist, Charlotte Firbank-King, in 1990. Interestingly, the poster is not part of the official UP art collection and it is unclear how the work ended up at the special collection.¹⁴ Although the original painting was not commissioned, it is the result of multiple inputs.¹⁵ Firbank-King explains that her intention with the original painting was to represent Southern Africa's 'indigenous tribes in the correct landscape with the correct animals'.¹⁶ Her source material drew from historical, anthropological and archaeological texts.¹⁷ To assist in explaining the subject matter of the painting, it is accompanied by an *Indication map* as well as an *Information booklet*. In an attempt to bolster the authority of *Ethnic map*, both provide descriptions of almost every detail of the map.

3 The world visualised in *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*

The Fouché book I am at the University of Pretoria's Africana collection to find – that brought me to the world visualised by the ethnic map hanging to my left – is related to my study about the visualisation of the Southern African past, with a particular interest in archaeological texts. The world in the image animates the contents of the pages I am waiting to open. In

14 E-mail from G de Kamper on 4 September 2021. De Kamper in 2021 is the curator of Collections at the University of Pretoria.

15 C Firbank-King *The ethnic map of Southern Africa: Information booklet* (1991) 1.

16 E-mail from C Firbank-King on 15 April 2021.

17 As above.

Ethnic map of Southern Africa, an archive of material culture comes to life as a topological map. The image shows Southern Africa and its wider ocean borders populated by many figures both on land and in its seas.

All across this image, 'tribal' figures are placed beside 'tribal' homesteads and fixed to particular geographic locations – that is, figures are represented in a manner that visually locates them as belonging to specific ethnic groups. Iconic patterns, symbolic of a cultivated identity, are fixed to a particular geographic location and used as a key in the claiming of visual space. In this way possession and belonging are claimed through visual codes. The dwelling space belongs to the figures around it, not only through proximity but also by means of iconic patterning and marks. These marks have become iconic in the process of 'tribing and untribing the archive'.¹⁸

The phrase 'tribing and untribing the archive' is adopted from historians Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer, to describe the processes in which societies encountered by Europeans in Southern Africa were marked out as tribal and traditional and sharply distinguished from modernity.¹⁹ Hamilton and Leibhammer challenge the ways in which some societies were denied a changing history and archive, and attributed with a timeless culture instead. The term understands the combination of tribe and tradition as continuing to tie modern South Africans to ideas about the region's remote past as primitive, timeless, and unchanging. By and large, knowledge or understanding of the past before European colonialism remains unstated, even denied, in the face of limited or narrowly-prescribed archives and resilient stereotypes. Hamilton and Leibhammer have encouraged the release of images and other materials from the trap of being looked at and understood only as tribal into settings that enable them to be used as resources for thinking critically about identity in the long past and the present.²⁰ My initial bodily encounter with *Ethnic map*, along with an acknowledgment and contemplation of the power exerted by the educational context in which the image is placed, moves towards applying the forward-looking strategy proposed by Hamilton and Leibhammer.

18 Hamilton & Leibhammer (n 1).

19 As above.

20 As above.

I turn now to the image itself. Whether it landed up on the walls of the Africana collection by chance or was intentionally curated in conversation with the space in which it hangs, the consequences of its presence at the reception of this important collection direct its significance. Considered in the context of the space in which it hangs, this illustration makes visible a particular logic, an inherent structure – its continuities and ruptures.

Ethnic map is framed by snippets of design motifs that flow into one another: chevrons, crescents, circles, beaded pixel points, a giraffe, an eland, a shield, spears, handprints, combs, a headrest, and stylised figures on the hunt. By now, these motifs are iconic. Out of time and with no context or meaning, seemingly all that is left is the ‘Africanness’ of the images – a fictitious essence that connects them to an origin in Africa. The Africanness that frames this image works to Africanise its contents. Shapes jump out from one end of the map and move the eye towards the other. On the bottom right-hand corner an Africanised compass, woven together with intricate motifs, orientates the viewer. A beaded knobkerrie points south and the arrow of an iron spear-head north.

As a topological map of Southern Africa, *Ethnic map* presents an animation of the material culture associated with an ‘indigenous Southern African aesthetic’.²¹ It references an early genre of cartography typical of the age of exploration of which the maps often included drawings in its margins of notable elements related to them. While in earlier depictions of Africa, the interior was not well known and ‘tribed’ figures often waited patiently on the border, in *Ethnic map* such figures are meticulously and confidently located. In this way, the map unifies the large territory of Southern Africa but nevertheless insists on the uniqueness of the various ethnic tribes depicted. Thus, it links ethnicity to place, and fixes ethnicity in place.

In Southern Africa, where political identity is and has historically been linked to ethnic identity, the association between ethnicity and particular spaces directly speaks to contested questions of land and land rights.²² *Ethnic map* defines and fixes a staged political identity in the form of ethnicity. Drawing on ethnographic visual conventions, *Ethnic*

21 Hamilton & Leibhammer (n 1) 58.

22 M Buthelezi & D Skosana *Traditional leaders in a democracy: Resources, respect and resistance* (2019); M Mamdani *Define and rule: Native as political identity* (2012); B Cousins & C Walker (eds) *Land divided land restored* (2015).

map portrays Southern Africa as a patchwork of distinct ethnicities with clear features and distinct boundaries. As such, the painting silences the complex and often contested histories of ethnicity in Southern Africa even while claiming to do the opposite.²³ While Figure 9.1 visualises a well-categorised Southern Africa all at once, the history of that place and the development of ethnic identity into political identity progressed over centuries.²⁴

Not surprisingly, ethnicity is a contested term in this context. Archaeologist Thomas Huffman – who holds a prominent and controversial place in Southern African archaeology²⁵ – has described ethnicity as involving

the interplay between minorities and dominant groups within the same political system. The ethnic groups themselves consist of people who form a limited social and historical entity, distinct from other similar entities through such aspects as customs, beliefs and material culture.²⁶

Because Figure 9.1 primarily depicts the black peoples of Southern Africa, who under late colonial rule had a differentiated political system governed by customary or traditional law, Huffman's view, which defines ethnicity based on membership to the same political system, is relevant to this argument.

Anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff further complicate Huffman's idea, by highlighting ethnicity as socially engineered and used during apartheid. Moreover, the Comaroffs distinguish between 'ethnicity' and 'ethnicism'. In an analysis of the commodification of human identity in contemporary South Africa, they explain that '[e]thnicity refers here

23 Firbank-King (n 15).

24 P Landau *Popular politics in the history of South Africa 1400–1948* (2010).

25 Although Thomas Huffman is deeply engaged in formative interpretations of late iron age settlements, such as Mapungubwe, he has been accused of depending on problematic colonially-inscribed ethnography, inappropriate theoretical frameworks, and speculative positions. See PJ Lane *The use and abuse of ethnography in the study of the Southern African iron age* (1994) DN Beach *Reviewed work: Snakes and crocodiles: Power and symbolism in ancient Zimbabwe by Thomas N Huffman* (1997).

26 TN Huffman *Mapungubwe: Ancient African civilisation on the Limpopo* (2001) 28.

to membership in a culturally constituted “people”, one with customary ways and means that it takes to be distinctive and to which it is affectively attached; ethnicism alludes, negatively to “tribalism” ... as propagation of apartheid.²⁷

4 Visualising the Nguni estate or Shakan period

The development of ethnic identity into a political identity is a cornerstone in colonial administration. To facilitate the colonial administration of the mid-nineteenth century and later apartheid, ethnic units in Southern Africa were developed through various processes of tribing peoples and groups.²⁸ The definition of precise ethnic units would form a crucial part in a governing structure designed for races and ethnicities. This structure slowly tightened its grip over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It created and methodically perpetuated deeply-ingrained social, political and economic inequalities.²⁹ In the long list of racial laws that developed in Southern Africa from 1760 to the fall of apartheid, a few directly involve the legal definition of ethnic units.³⁰

In the technology of race used to administrate a growing Southern African population during this period, classification was determined according to physical appearance and social acceptability, including linguistic skills. Over time, curated racial and ethnic identities were developed and officiated into political identities by inscribing these into law.³¹ In the 1990s these very categories became the basis for post-apartheid claims to land rights, as illustrated in the surge in traditional

27 JL Comaroff & J Comaroff *Ethnicity, inc* (2009) 10.

28 See Buthlezi & Skosana (n 22); CC Crais *White supremacy and black resistance in pre-industrial South Africa: The making of the colonial order in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (1992); D Dyzenhaus *Hard cases in wicked legal systems South African law in the perspective of legal philosophy* (1991).

29 M Mamdani *Beyond settler and native as political identities: Overcoming the political legacy of colonialism* (2001); M Mamdani *Define and rule: Native as political identity* (2012); M Mamdani *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (2018).

30 The ‘Caledon Code’ of 1809 (B Lapping *Apartheid: A history* (1986) 36)); the ‘Kaffir Pass Act’ of 1857 (Crais (n 28) 212); ‘The Population Registration Act’ of 1950 (Dyzenhaus (n 28) 40).

31 Mamdani *Beyond settler* (n 29); Mamdani *Define and rule* (n 29); Mamdani *Citizen and subject* (n 29).

leadership claims alongside insistence on land rights and land restitution.³² Firbank-King's illustration visualises the right to land as claimed through visualised ethnicity. In using tribed bodies as visual tropes to claim belonging, the image turns ethnic identity into political identity. Distinct and distinguishable patterns and markers become critical differentiators of this identity. For those fluent in identifying the ethnographic units of Southern Africa, determining who is who in the map is an easy task. Tribal units are signified by dress code, hairstyles, building style and geographic location.

In *Ethnic map* the Xhosa figure with a baby on her back is placed on the south-east coast of the map (Figure 9.2). The Zulu figure holding a large shield is positioned in the east (Figure 9.3). The cloaked Sotho figure on horseback is placed up in the Drakensberg (Figure 9.4), and so on. The image visually fulfils the desires of one of the first racial and pass laws of Southern Africa, which ordered every member of the Khoikhoi community to have a fixed 'place of abode' and to obtain a pass in the event that any member wanted to move.³³ *Ethnic map* fixes bodies to their geographical place of abode in line with visualised ethnic identities. Using a similar logic of control to the logic used in pass systems, ethnic identity becomes the visual tool through which access to space is claimed.

A dwelling space may be considered as belonging to the tribe of a woman with a baby on her back, not only because of the proximity of that woman to that dwelling, but also through the recognition of named and catalogued patterns and marks (Figure 9.2). A plane of colour overlaid with horizontal lines gravitating toward its bottom appears on clothing, on flesh, and on the built environment (Figure 9.2). This pattern has become symbolic of and synonymous with the identity of the Xhosa people. A quick Google image search of 'Xhosa people' or 'Xhosa clothing' confirms this. Post-apartheid South Africa has been noted as coinciding with the commodification of human identity.³⁴ In this context, patterns marking identity have become iconic. The Comaroffs have described the economy linked to the practices of claiming belonging through an

32 Buthelezi & Skosana (n 22); Cousins & Walker (n 22).

33 W Dooling *The origins and aftermath of the Cape Colony's Hottentot Code of 1809* (2005).

34 Comaroff & Comaroff (n 27).



Figure 9.2: Woman and child: Detail of Charlotte Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

embracing of ethnicity as ‘the affective economy of belonging’.³⁵ This economy is popularly corroborated by Heritage Day celebrations in South Africa. On this day South Africans are encouraged to don their ‘traditional dress’ as an honouring of their heritage. Ethnic identity here is linked to an adornment of iconic pattern marking identity, a practice which, in an economy of belonging, inevitably replicates and refines the fixity and authority claimed by *Ethnic map*.

The research undertaken by Firbank-King is encapsulated by the *Indication map* and *Information booklet* which were originally designed to accompany the painting. The desire of the artist to present an authoritative ethnic map of Southern Africa using academic sources is made clear in the booklet’s introduction. According to this introduction:³⁶

The richest source of pictorial information was the Africana Museum (now the Museum of Africa) in Johannesburg. Charlotte got her information about Botswana from reading early explorers’ accounts, studying the early etchings, and building up a mental image of their dress ... the map does not just focus on the people of Southern Africa; it includes some of the flora and fauna ... When the map was completed, a number of academics were brought in to check the validity of Charlotte’s work; they could find no fault.

The desire of the artist to present an authoritative ethnic map of Southern Africa is closely linked to the fixity of identity which I argue is perpetuated by the image. Statements in the booklet, such as ‘the traditional Herero are depicted alongside the more modern Herero, whose dress was influenced by early German missionaries’, acknowledge the changing nature of culture. The booklet, however, also constantly contradicts this acknowledgment. For example, it states that ‘[s]ome of the costumes may be considered transitional, however cultures are not static objects. They respond and grow with new influences. Thus it is difficult to say exactly what is “traditional” and what is “transitional”’.³⁷ Such a statement, along with a verbalised intention to represent Southern Africa’s ‘indigenous tribes in the correct landscape with the correct animal’,³⁸ clearly attempts

35 As above.

36 Firbank-King (n 15) 1.

37 As above.

38 E-mail from C Firbank-King on 15 April 2021.



Figure 9.3: Man holding cow hide shield: Detail of Charlotte Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

to find the 'traditional' in the 'transitional' as opposed to embarrassing the permanent status of the latter.³⁹

The word 'pattern' appears three times in the *Information booklet* designed to accompany *Ethnic map*. Each time, 'pattern' and the idea of pattern are linked to identity. Describing Great Zimbabwe the booklet notes that

[t]he Temple consists of more than 900 000 fragments and it was probably the residence of the King. The chevron patterns of black and white fragments on the walls may be indicative of his importance.⁴⁰

Notes on the Sotho read 'Basotho blankets, while beautifully patterned, are also functional as the mountain kingdom is bitterly cold in winter'.⁴¹ Of the Tswana it is noted: 'The Tswana shield is hourglass shaped. The Tswana woman is wearing a marriage ceremony hairstyle ... Before it is fully set, patterns are drawn into it using a mielie (maize) stalk; it is then decorated with beads and topped with an ostrich plume.'⁴²

In other sections of the booklet, while the word 'pattern' is not explicitly used, it nevertheless is referred to in some way as a marker of identity. Of what is described as the 'Gcaleka (a Xhosa clan)' (Figure 9.2) it is noted:⁴³

The woman's white painted face indicates she is nursing a child. Her legs and arms are encased in brass and bead bangles. She wears a wide flared skirt made from coarse white cloth. The skirt is braided from hip to hem ... The choice of bead colours of this clan is very distinctive; turquoise, scarlet, navy and white. Older people replace scarlet with pink beads.

Seemingly never changing, the patterns visualised by Firbank-King are fixed in time. In the cases of Figures 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4, an iconic pattern is fixed to the south-east coast, the east coast, and the Drakensberg

39 As above.

40 Firbank-King (n 15) 11.

41 Firbank-King (n 15) 23.

42 Firbank-King (n 15) 24.

43 Firbank-King (n 15) 18.



Figure 9.4: Cloaked man on horseback: Detail of Charlotte Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

mountains of Southern Africa respectively. In this illustration, belonging is claimed by means of a graphic visual code.

Standing alone, Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* could be read as avoiding the complicated textured and coloured history of Southern Africa. It is devoid of the grapevines that populate the Western Cape of contemporary Southern Africa; of Jacaranda trees; and Indian myna birds so present in Pretoria. Based on a careful study of the image itself, the *Indication map* and *Information booklet* as well as from discussions with the artist, it is evident that 'indigenous' vegetation and animal life are prioritised. It is meticulous about the regional specificity of the fauna and flora it represents. African daisies flower in the Karoo; aloes grow along the south-east coast; baobabs around Zimbabwe; and flat-top acacias north of where Pretoria would be. Two blue crane birds – culturally significant to the Xhosa people – are pictured above the heads of the figures established as Xhosa.⁴⁴ By setting up a relationship between indigenous vegetation and wildlife in this way, the quality of 'indigenesness' and uniqueness assumed by these species is transferred onto the tribed figures and built environment around them so that their tribed state is also implied as indigenous, unique and natural.

5 Visualising the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe estate

As I already pointed out, *Ethnic map* represents three moments in the long Southern African past: the Khoisan complex; the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe estate; and the Nguni estate or Shakan period. It thus folds thousands of years neatly into one another with few or no overlaps in geographic space or physical movement.⁴⁵ Relying on the image alone,

44 Adrian Koopman explores a number of archival sources that point to the wearing of crane feathers as culturally significant to the Xhosa and Zulu culture. See A Koopman 'Isithwalandwe: The wearing of crane feathers' (2017) *Natalia* 47.

45 The length of the chapter does not allow me to discuss at great length the overlap in time presented by the image. However, there are two instances of this overlap that I would like to briefly point out here. At the top of the map, in the northern section of the Southern African landscape depicted, two men are pictured as either in battle or sparring. The men hold shields made of cow hide echoing the cow hides of the Zulu in the south. The placement of the group of men's bodies overlap unnamed stone wall ruins. This overlap points to the historical migration of Southern African peoples during the 'Shakan wars', also referred to as *iMfecane*.

what is implied is a version of the Southern African distant past devoid of movement, displacement or conflict.

A good example of this is the visualisation of the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe Estate. In the north-east of the *Ethnic map* lies the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe (Figure 9.5). The visualisation of the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe estate or, very broadly, the visualisation of Southern African late iron age settlements (LIAS) has multiple meanings and uses in contemporary Southern Africa. LIAS here refers to settlements 'discovered' in Southern Africa from the late nineteenth century onwards. Stone wall architecture has come to characterise such settlements. As ancient capitals, Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, in particular, symbolise past political power and pre-colonial African presence in Southern Africa. As a tool in nationalist rhetoric, such visuals are used to destabilise colonial power, and that of the apartheid state, particularly its hold on the writing and framing of Southern African history.⁴⁶

As the only explicit inclusion of the Mapungubwe and Zimbabwe Estate, the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe in Figure 9.5, by extension, becomes a metonym for the entire estate. The great enclosure here is pictured as overgrown and abandoned. An assemblage of scenes depicting battle, dance, and other social activity all happen around the stone-walled settlement. A body hovers uncomfortably above the enclosure, legs cut off, so as not to cause an overlap. The enclosure is devoid of bodies. By acknowledging the existence of Great Zimbabwe but showing this space as empty and overgrown in a visualisation of the long Southern African past, *Ethnic map* echoes the central ideas propagated by early archaeological excavation of Great Zimbabwe.

See J Wright *Beyond the 'Zulu aftermath': Migrations, identities, histories* (2006) and Khumalo-Seegelken *John Wright: iMfecane?* (1995), for an account of the making of the history of the 'Shakan wars'. In the *Indication map*, the two men are labelled 'Matabele'. See Firbank-King (n 15) 12. The 'Matabele' are currently referred to as the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Another group that was displaced by the 'Shakan wars' or *iMfecane* are the Shangan, who are described in the information booklet as 'a part of the Ndwandwe tribe governed by the Gasa family ... In 1819 they were conquered by Shaka and the chief Soshangane fled with his people into Mocambique. Here he founded a new tribe that became known after him as the Shangaans.' Firbank-King (n 15) 15.

46 AS Mlambo *Becoming Zimbabwe or becoming Zimbabwean: Identity, nationalism and state-building* (2013); T Mbeki *The African renaissance, South Africa and the world* (1998).



Figure 9.5: The Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe: Detail of Charlotte Firbank-King's *Ethnic map of Southern Africa*. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

Great Zimbabwe was the first LIAS to be excavated in Southern Africa.⁴⁷ Its early excavation was led by James Theodore Bent and documented in *The ruined cities of Mashonaland*.⁴⁸ The excavation of Great Zimbabwe laid the pretext to which all early LIAS archaeological findings lean on or against and form the basis for a war of Southern African visuality – or the visualisation of Southern African history – was spearheaded. Although the Zimbabwe ruins were widely accepted as being of African origin in the scientific community as early as 1914, a large number of the settler population, including the government of what then was Rhodesia, along

47 See JT Bent & RMW Swan *The ruined cities of Mashonaland: Being a record of excavation and exploration in 1891. With a chapter on the orientation and mensuration of the temples* (1892).

48 James Theodore Bent was an English explorer, archaeologist, and author of the *The ruined cities of Mashonaland* (1892) documenting the earliest known excavation of Great Zimbabwe.

with individuals in the scientific community, chose to perpetuate earlier findings claiming otherwise.⁴⁹ Archaeological findings such as Bent's rejecting a 'black race' as the builders of Great Zimbabwe justified the sanctioning of the black population around the ruins as subservient. Funded archaeological research alongside biblical legend had lasting value in the visual arena.⁵⁰

In early visualisations of Great Zimbabwe, the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe is primarily visualised as unidentified or in ruin, overgrown, and uninhabited. Such visualisations include John Speed's 1627 *Map of Africa* capturing 'Zimbaos', identified today as Great Zimbabwe;⁵¹ Karl Mauch's 1872 *Sketch of Great Zimbabwe*, recording the first-known documented sighting of Great Zimbabwe;⁵² and Theodore Bent's 1891 depiction of Great Zimbabwe made during the first excavation of a LIAS in Southern Africa.⁵³ The visualisation of Great Zimbabwe in ruin, overgrown and uninhabited continues well into the colonial era. It is only in the 1970s, with a shift in the politics towards and the anticipation of freedom from colonial rule, that archaeologists such as Peter Garlake begin to insist on reimagining Great Zimbabwe as inhabited by black bodies. This shift is best exhibited in the 1983 cover of Garlake's *Life at Great Zimbabwe*. Here Great Zimbabwe is reimagined as inhabited by a black people.⁵⁴

The omission of black bodies from inside the Great Enclosure in *Ethnic map* implies that black bodies do not belong in that space. In the language of image as a whole, they do not come from that space and thus cannot claim to belong to it. By all indications of the artist and literature connected to the image, this is contrary to what the image intended to do or how it was immediately received after the fall of apartheid.⁵⁵ This non-

49 PS Garlake *Great Zimbabwe: New aspects in archaeology* (1973); C Kloof *On two eras of African archaeology: Colonial and national* (1997).

50 As above.

51 Garlake (n 49) 94.

52 I Pikirayi *The Zimbabwe culture: Origins and decline of Southern Zambezi states* (2001) 2.

53 See Bent & Swan (n 47) 91.

54 PS Garlake *Life at Great Zimbabwe: devised and written by Peter Garlake; illustrated by Zimbabwe Cooperative Craft Workshop Ltd* (1983).

55 As previously stated, the *Ethnic map* was created in 1990 during the fall of apartheid. In this context it arguably exuded an enthusiasm about the rightfulness of black

belonging arguably has little to do with the intent of the image but is a slip in the archive. It arguably is a logic passed on from the source material it references. Small moments such as this expose the dangers in the uncritical reproduction of sources. Moreover, they expose how visibility, following the immediate downfall of apartheid in South Africa, struggled to dream Southern African history anew without slipping into colonial tropes and reasoning.

6 Conclusion

The omissions in the *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* and the way in which the image is presented overtly make clear its source material in some instances. In other instances the images on which it draws for its visualisation of the distant South African past are only slightly hinted at. Figure 9.1 represents the violence of colonial visual practices, which violence is inherited from the map's source material. As in the case of the older images, it references – those that tribe the peoples of Southern Africa and those that perpetuate LIAS such as Great Zimbabwe as built by ‘an outsider race’ – *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* becomes a weapon for authority. The space presented is an imaginary ideological one.

Figure 9.1 attempts to present a compartmentalised pre-colonial visualisation of Southern Africa where everything is in place as it should be. It encourages participants to piece this past back together. Identities in the map are presented authoritatively, as natural and naturally in place. Moreover, the image relies on colonially-inscribed ethnographies entangled with colonial administrative ideas about black bodies and their place in space to visualise a pre-colonial Southern Africa. Principles such as the development of ethnic identity into a political identity, the distillation of identity into a graphic pattern, the naturalisation of a linkage between ethnic and political identity, and the use of a distilled pattern of reference as a key to access space, are mastered in the colonial administration of Africa and other regions. This is the core subject of Figure 9.1.

bodies in the African context. In the early 1990s the South African government had a copy of the image hanging in every South African embassy around the world (e-mail from C Firbank-King on 15 April 2021).

It is important at this point to emphasise the fact that the analysis given in this chapter should neither be seen as criticism of the individual artist, nor should the analysis be understood as consciously motivating the making of Figure 9.1. The aim of the chapter was rather to examine how assemblages of images assist in propping up colonial constructs. What is ultimately highlighted in this context is that an artist's intention is not immune from the waves of centuries of oppressive visibility.

Retrospectively, where *Ethnic map* fails in reifying a precolonial past or a present with racial bodies at bay, it succeeds in reifying a set of principals underlying the arrangement of elements in the biometric forms of identification of the military-industrial complex it hangs in. On the surface, the image at the reception of the University of Pretoria's Africana collection claims a presentation of belonging and the right to space and mobility in the distant Southern African past. The image hangs as a celebration of a democratic South Africa where all of its cultures are celebrated and given a place under the sun. This is in line with the rhetoric of the era in which the shift towards addressing gaps in the Africana collection concerning black African contributions to cultural and social life took place. Far from merely celebrating the cultures of Southern Africa, however, the image highlights and is underpinned by the colonial administrative reasoning, which gave birth to apartheid and the contemporary military-industrial complex.

Although my interpretation of Figure 9.1, hanging in the reception area of the University of Pretoria's Africana collection, is the long way round of getting to the image, the acknowledgment of embodiment is an intervention integral to coming to this conclusion. The strategy links all understandings of the image to the viewing body, as well as the space in which the image is experienced. Although a viewer does eventually get to the image itself, the bodily encounter with the artwork (or getting to it) affects the way in which meanings are made and becomes inextricably linked to the meaning of the image itself. The context in which *Ethnic map of Southern Africa* hangs, the gates crossed to get to it, the body that encounters it, as well as the image itself all affect the way in which meanings are made. An approach that acknowledges this could usefully shed light on other similar images.

So inescapable is the modality of visibility produced by the image at the entrance of the Africana collection that it matters little what actually is inside the Fouché book documenting the first archaeological excavations

of Mapungubwe that brought me to the collection and, by coincidence, the image. What lives in the imagination of Southern Africans and the world at large are the images that the Fouché book and similar books produce and make space for. As exhibited by Firbank-King's *Ethnic map*, the images that appear in archaeological findings, particularly 'artistic impressions' projecting the past, travel to new unforeseeable contexts.

In some ways *Ethnic map of Southern Africa's* location at the reception area of the University of Pretoria's Africana collection acts as a symbol of this archive's reformation. Contrary to reformation from colonial prescriptions, however, the image tribes the Southern African past using a limited or narrowly-prescribed archive. The image primarily visualises the right to land as claimed through visualised ethnicity. Ironically embedded within the labyrinth spun by the military-industrial complex, the image sits quietly perched within the everydayness of a highly-manicured and surveyed complex of order at the University of Pretoria.

What is most curious about the image is the way in which it hides in plain sight. To contemporary Southern African viewers the image holds an emancipatory potential of addressing a disavowed African past. Only a closer look entraps a viewer and confronts them with a logic that is alive and well in the complex of order in which they find themselves. What contributes to giving the image the guise of freedom from an oppressive, exclusionary past is the seemingly explicit nature of the image. Black bodies are literally positioned in place. In the process of making meaning, the questioning of what the consequences of this placement in relation to the histories that the image presents comes only secondary, if at all.

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