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Unfinished Bodies: The Figurative Object in Southeast Africa, 1860–1920

A dissertation presented

by

Theresa Elizabeth Sims

to

The Department of History of Art and Architecture

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
History of Art and Architecture

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Dissertation Advisor: Professor Suzanne Preston Blier Theresa Elizabeth Sims

Unfinished Bodies: The Figurative Object in Southeast Africa, 1860–1920

Abstract

The incomplete body is a persistent motif in carved works from nineteenth-century South Africa. Prior to this period, images of the human form were rare in Nguni visual cultures along the southeast African coast, but they began to proliferate in the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet despite this new enthusiasm for representing the body's form, many figures sculpted in the round are partial, fragmented, or otherwise distorted. Proceeding from this contradiction, my dissertation investigates what it meant for the human form to become a subject of visual representation in this time and place.

Through a series of case studies, I situate figurative objects within their broader cultural landscape: an environment that was both newly flooded with pictorial media, and deeply preoccupied with anxieties about the body's cultural meaning and its physical vulnerability. These uncertainties were the product of various historical forces, which included a volatile atmosphere of heightened colonial intervention, Christian missionary activity, rapid economic change, and war. At the same time, the increasingly accessible media of photography and print enabled the body's image to be manipulated and estranged from its subject in new ways. I argue that anthropomorphic objects must be understood in light of these conditions, as material sites where the status and meaning of the human body were in the process of being negotiated, undermined, and remade.

Each chapter traces a different motif of fragmentary anthropomorphism. Chapter One examines carved staffs that incorporate representations of human heads. Chapter Two looks at the motif of functional objects carved in the form of headless female bodies. Chapter Three analyzes the strange corporeality that characterizes a class of elaborate wooden vessels. Chapter Four describes relationships between violence and figurative representation in objects made to commemorate war. Through these case studies, I offer a new interpretation of nineteenth-century objects carved in the round. I show how the emergence of figurative representation was inextricably linked to broader cultural histories of the body in this region and era.

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for Florence Treat,

ugogo omangalisayo

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Introduction

The incomplete body is a persistent motif in carved works from nineteenth-century South Africa. Prior to this period, images of the human form were rare in Nguni visual cultures along the southeast African coast,[1] but they began to proliferate in the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only did this era see the spread of pictorial media via missionaries and traders, and the rise of photography. In addition, many skillfully carved objects originating from this period appear to be growing body parts. Spoons of wood and bone morph into faceless bodies. Anatomical terms like "breasts" (*amabele*) and "warts" (*amasumpa*) name the surface features of wooden vessels, which resemble female torsos. Staffs and clubs culminate in sculpted heads.

My dissertation addresses this latter category of figurative objects in the round, many of which were destined for sale on the tourist market. It focuses broadly on the years between 1860 and 1920, and the region that runs along the east coast of what is now South Africa. In particular, this study seeks to illuminate a contradiction. In the late nineteenth century, figurative imagery entered the visual repertoire of this region to an unprecedented degree. Yet despite this new enthusiasm for representing the body's form, many figures sculpted in the round are partial, fragmented, or otherwise distorted. Collections of southern African art from this period are full of objects that strain towards anthropomorphism, but do not always arrive at "full" representations of complete bodies.

I examine here recurring figurative tropes of the unfinished body, in its various manifestations. I situate anthropomorphic objects within a cultural landscape that was both

[1] See Sandra Klopper, "The Art of Traditionalists in Zululand-Natal," in *Catalogue: Ten Years of Collecting (1979-1989): Standard Bank Foundation Collection of African Art, and Selected Works from the University Ethnological Museum Collection*, ed. David Hammond-Tooke and Anitra Nettleton (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, Art Galleries, 1989), 34-5. Also see Anitra Nettleton's argument in her article "History and the Myth of Zulu Sculpture," *African Arts*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (May 1988): 48-51, 86-87.

newly flooded with pictorial media, and deeply preoccupied with anxieties about the body's cultural meaning and its physical vulnerability. These uncertainties were the product of various historical forces, which included a volatile atmosphere of rapid economic change, heightened colonial intervention, Christian missionary activity, and war. At the same time, the increasingly accessible media of photography and print enabled the body's image to be manipulated and estranged from its subject in new ways. I argue that anthropomorphic objects must be understood in light of these conditions, as material sites where the status and meaning of the human body were in the process of being negotiated, undermined, and remade.

The geographic region along the southeast African coast, on which I focus, includes areas stretching from the Fish River in the south towards Delagoa Bay in the north (**Figure i.1**). I focus primarily on works made by artists from Nguni groups, who were the historical predecessors of modern-day Zulu and Xhosa people. Unlike some ethnic groups further inland, Nguni people who lived along this coastal region had no significant traditions of figurative representation prior to the period in question.[2] Nguni people were historically pastoral groups, who, despite being politically divided between different chiefdoms, shared important cultural practices and spoke mutually-intelligible languages from the same family. In some cases, my discussion expands to include neighboring ethnic groups such as the Tsonga and Sotho, with whom Nguni societies had a history of interaction. In the final chapter, I also consider how indigenous sensibilities towards figuration seeped into works created by European newcomers to the region.

[2] Some groups, such as Venda and Tsonga people in the Transvaal, did have longer histories of creating figurative art forms, mainly for use in initiation, divination, and other religious contexts. See Nettleton, "History and the Myth of Zulu Sculpture," 48-9. Even in these societies, however, such images of the human body were not necessarily a ubiquitous feature of the everyday world, but would have been encountered in very specific, circumscribed contexts.

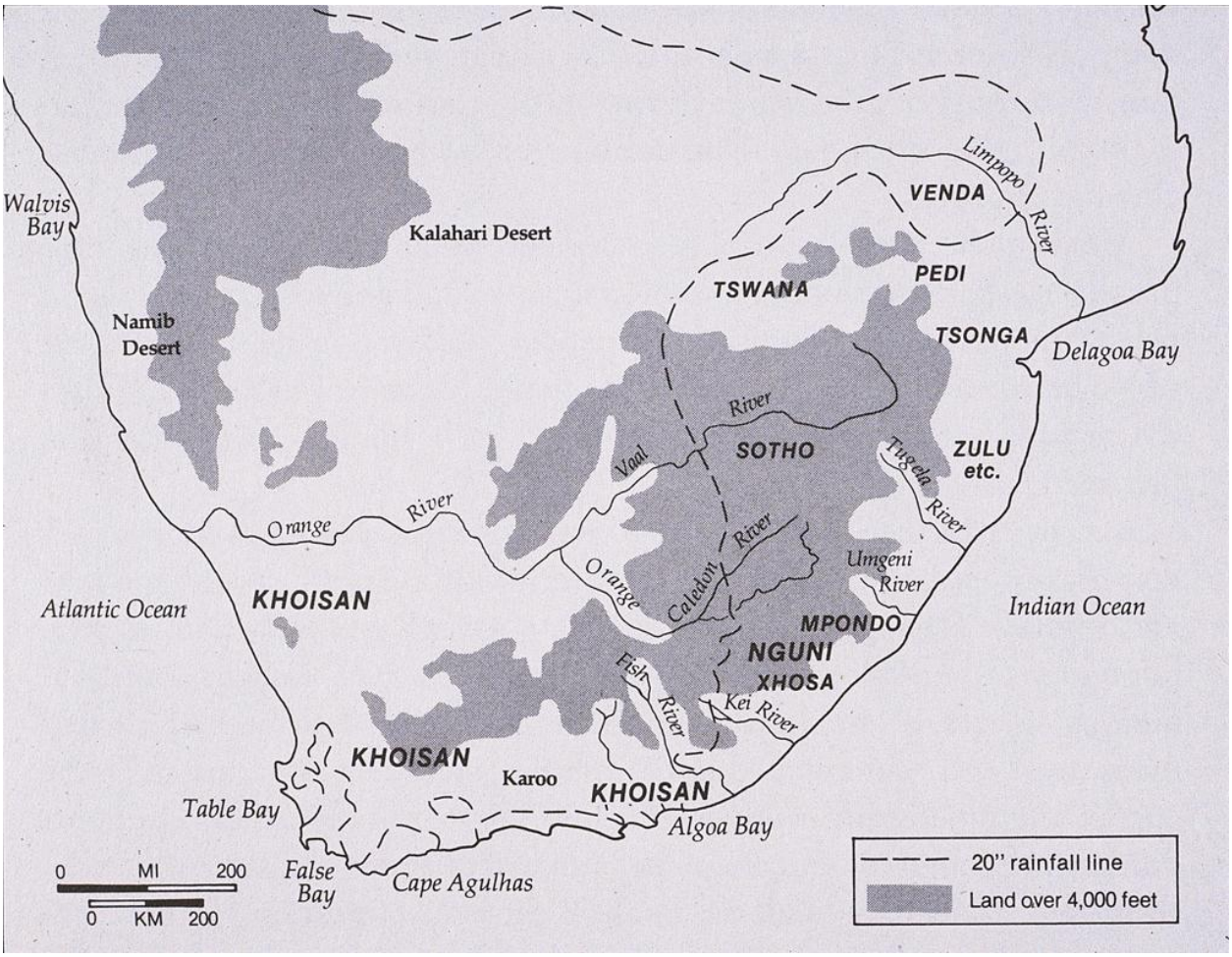


Figure i.1. Map of southern Africa before the colonial era.
Source: Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 3.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw significant upheavals in southern Africa. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Zulu kingdom's expansion shook up the region, as the Zulu engaged in violent conflicts with neighboring polities. These events, referred to by historians as the *mfecane*, set off waves of internal migration, as various populations fled north or south. As the century progressed, European groups also increasingly asserted themselves in the eastern half of what is now South Africa. Since the seventeenth century, the Dutch had controlled the area that is now the Western Cape, but had not ventured beyond the Fish River. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, this changed. First, a series of frontier wars broke out between the Xhosa and various groups of Europeans. These conflicts would go on for decades. After Britain assumed control of the Cape Colony in the early nineteenth century, groups of Dutch-Afrikaans farmers migrated even further east, forming several small states in the northeast known as the Boer Republics. The British also took an increasing interest in acquiring eastern territories. They took control of Natal in 1843, annexed Basutoland in 1868, and asserted their control over further areas through wars with the Zulu (1879) and the Boer Republics (1899-1902). A map from 1885 (**Figure i.2**) shows many of the important territories and political units that are referenced throughout my discussion.

In 1867, diamonds were found in Kimberly, followed by massive discoveries of gold along the Witwatersrand in 1886. These events were significant for the region in two major ways. First, the discoveries intensified existing conflicts over control of land and resources, as the prospect of great mineral wealth drastically raised the stakes. This ultimately contributed to the consolidation of the entire region under British rule by the early decades of the twentieth century. Second, the so-called Mineral Revolution was a catalyst for rapid industrialization, which in turn brought about the development of large-scale systems of migrant labor. These

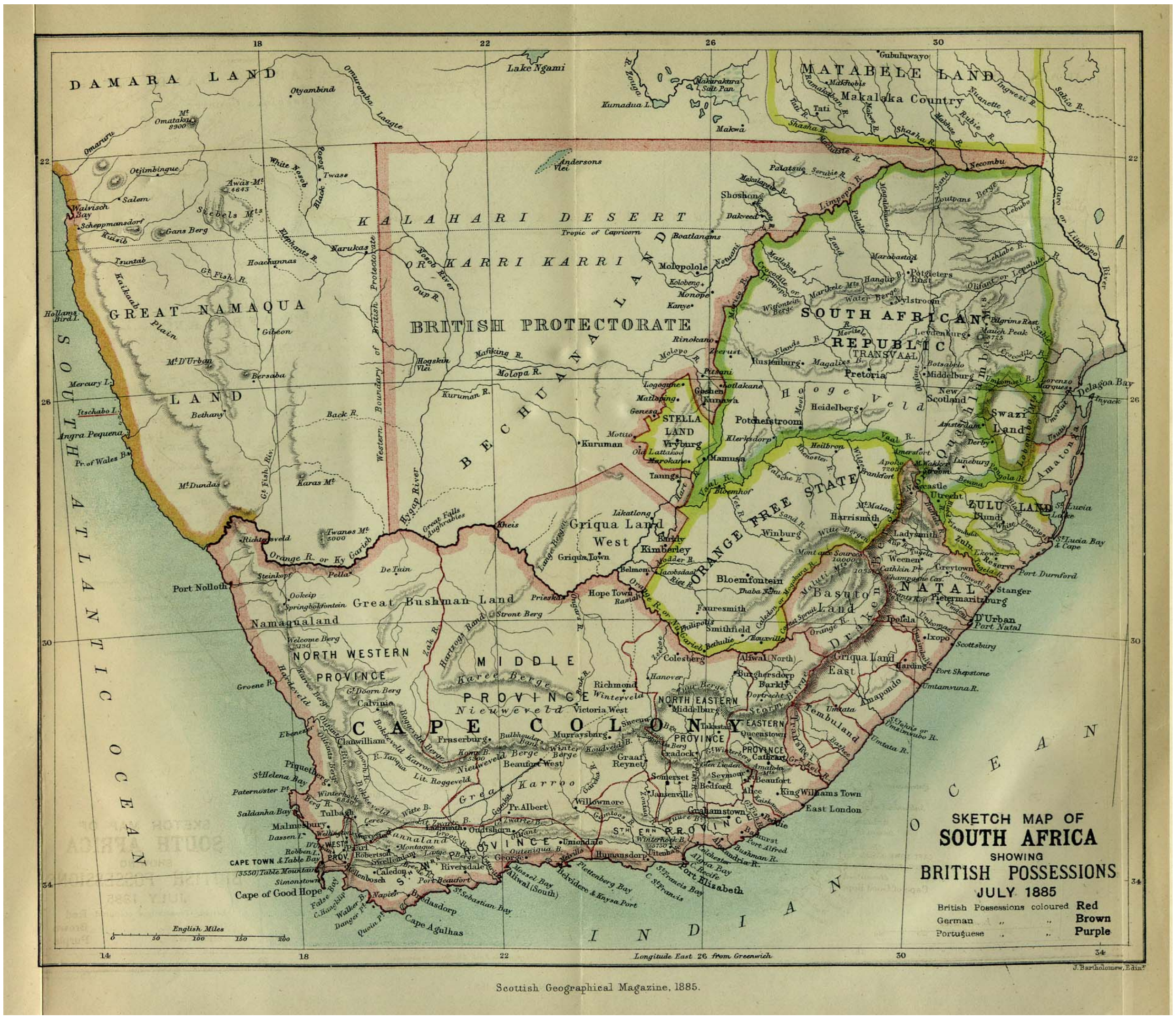


Figure i.2. "Sketch Map of South Africa showing British Possessions July 1885" from the Scottish Geographical Magazine. Published by the Scottish Geographical Society and edited by Hugh A. Webster and Arthur Silva White. Volume I, 1885. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas.
Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas.

events would have far-reaching implications for the social and economic lives of people throughout this region.

In this context, the notion of the "body as image" intersects with several domains of historical development that implicated the human body in important ways. First, the years in question were a period when the body's cultural meaning had become profoundly unsettled. That is, at the same time that carvers began giving limbs and heads to functional objects, colonial legislation sought to police Africans' bodies through strictures on clothing, habitation, and movement. Missionary and colonial interventions made the body a site where intense conflict over cultural values could be played out through even the most mundane choices about comportment or attire. The same goes for material culture associated with the body, as Jean and John Comaroff have demonstrated in the case of clothing.[3] Objects as seemingly straightforward as a chair, a headrest, or a coat, could become newly imagined when travel across cultural boundaries opened them up to new forms and uses.

Economic change was a second factor that significantly reframed the body during this era. Trade was an important mode of cross-cultural interaction during the colonial period, and would significantly alter the kinds of body-related material culture to which many people had access. Furthermore, the development of a cash economy positioned the body itself – and specifically its labor – as a kind of commodity. Figurative imagery could similarly position the body's visual form as a commodity. As Tamar Garb has elsewhere shown, these two modes of "body as commodity" could and often did converge in the realm of visual production.[4] This idea

[3] See the chapter titled "Fashioning the Colonial Subject: The Empire's Old Clothes," in Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1997), 218-275.

[4] Garb draws attention to the bodily labor that went into creating photographs, which in turn provided a medium through which the body's image could be bought and sold. See Tamar Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus: Kimberly and

that the body could be doubly sold, through both labor and imagery, is highly relevant to figurative objects in the round. Many of the skillfully-carved objects considered here would themselves circulate as cross-cultural commodities on the curio market.

Finally, there was the body's physical vulnerability. Physical violence was a pervasive threat, as attested by the string of wars that punctuated the nineteenth century from the Cape to Rhodesia. No less important was the rise of an extractive and brutal economy, which fed on mineral wealth and the work of many bodies. The body's security could be threatened by the sudden violence of armed conflicts, or it could be drained by the slow violence of emergent labor systems.

Scholarly Context

Carved works from southern Africa are a relatively recent subject of art historical study. Unlike the masking and sculptural traditions of West and Central Africa, which captured the attention of European modernists in the early twentieth century, southern African carvings were initially excluded from scholarly and connoisseurial "canons" of African art. Instead, such objects first appeared in scholarly writings from the realms of anthropology and history. In the first half of the twentieth century, writers like Henri Junod, Eileen Jensen Krige, and A.T. Bryant analyzed the practical and symbolic roles of objects within larger systems of material culture and domestic spatial organization.[5]

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the Case of the Cartes de Visite," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 58.

[5] See, for instance, Henri Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillian & Co., Ltd., 1927); Eileen Jensen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936); and A.T. Bryant, *The Zulu People, As They Were Before the White Man Came* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1949).

As early as the 1930s, the South African Museum began publishing a set of object-based studies that would also be foundational for scholarship on the carving traditions of this region. Encyclopedic in format, these writings often focus on a single medium, material, or genre of object. Their authors use formal analysis to establish typologies of objects based on function and ethnic origin. These studies lay out a wealth of highly detailed information about methods and materials that go into making objects, their conventional uses, regional variations, and relevant indigenous terminology. They do not engage significantly with the historical dimensions or development of carving practices. Instead, they position objects as a means for ethnological comparison between different South African cultures.[6]

In the 1980s, Anitra Nettleton was the first scholar to truly bring southern African objects into art historical discourse. Her early writing on Shona and Venda woodcarving laid the groundwork for subsequent art historical engagement with this region's indigenous arts.[7] Her work also initiated important methodological discussions. For instance, she has analyzed how historical collecting practices led to widespread misattribution of nineteenth-century objects.[8] She has also drawn attention to the difficulty of reconciling southern African art forms with conventional art historical canons and categories.[9] Sandra Klopper's slightly later work was similarly groundbreaking. Klopper wrote the first comprehensive art historical study of Zulu

[6] See the early works of Ella Margaret Shaw, such as "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (1938): 277-301; and later publications by Patricia Davison and Lindsay Hooper, such as Davison, "Some Nguni Crafts: The Uses of Horn, Bone and Ivory," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (1976): 79-155; and Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts, Part 3: Woodcarving," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 70, Part 3 (1981): 157-312.

[7] Anitra Nettleton, "The Traditional Figurative Woodcarving of the Shona and Venda," (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1984).

[8] See Nettleton, "History and the Myth of Zulu Sculpture." *African Arts*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (May 1988): 48-51, 86-87.

[9] See Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity: Gendering 'Master' Pieces of Nineteenth-Century South African Indigenous Arts," *Visual Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012): 221-236.

arts. Her dissertation and subsequent publications identified major genres of Zulu artistic production and mined archival sources, such as the James Stuart papers, in order to construct historical accounts of their development from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth century.[10] On the topic of nineteenth-century carvings from the eastern coastal region, Klopper and Nettleton remain the most prolific and significant writers to date. However, important scholarly and curatorial contributions to this field of study have also been made by Patricia Davison, Rayda Becker, Gary Van Wyk, and Karel Nel.

In the last several decades, art historians have examined southern African carvings from various angles. A number of studies have addressed relationships between art and ethnic identities, and debated the merits and drawbacks of regional approaches to art history versus those that focus on single ethnic groups.[11] A second major area of focus has been to trace and understand the implications of objects' mobility via the art market, collecting practices, and the colonial encounter.[12] Another important theme that has emerged – which is particularly relevant here – is that of relationships between artworks and the human body. Various studies and exhibitions have emphasized the tactile, quotidian and personal qualities of finely-carved

[10] See Sandra Klopper, "The Art of Zulu-Speakers in Northern Natal-Zululand: An Investigation of the History of Beadwork, Carving and Dress from Shaka to Inkatha," (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1993).

[11] Scholars have come down on different sides of this issue. One article that explicates many of the problems arising from an overly-rigid focus on ethnic attribution is Klopper's " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings: The Brenthurst Collection and the Art of South-East Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991), 80-103. In contrast, David Riep has more recently argued against regional approaches that obscure differences between cultures. He argues for the importance of visual arts as a means of constructing and differentiating South Sotho identity from that of neighboring groups. See Riep, "Seeing Sesotho: Art, History, and the Visual Language of South Sotho Identity," *Southern African Humanities*, Vol. 25 (November 2013): 217-44.

[12] See Nettleton's article "Tradition, Authenticity and Tourist Sculpture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity*, pp. 32-57. Klopper has traced how collecting practices and the art market have led to the discursive mobility of southern African objects in her article "From Adornment to Artefact to Art: Historical Perspectives on South-East African Beadwork," in *South-East African Beadwork, 1850-1910*, ed. Michael Stevenson and Michael Graham-Stewart (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 2000), 9-43. Also see Catherine Elliott's forthcoming dissertation project focused on the British Museum's collections from southern Africa.

functional objects like headrests, snuffboxes, or staffs.[13] In an adjacent area of study, others have examined local modes of body adornment as embodied art forms, yielding insights that are critical for thinking about relationships between art and the body in southern Africa.[14]

My project's intended contribution to this field is to specifically address the implications of anthropomorphism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century objects. In the Nguni visual cultures that are my focus here, the emergence of figurative imagery is an issue that has yet to be systematically explored. As I have suggested above, this thematic focus provides an opportunity to interrogate how practices of figurative representation relate to larger cultural histories of the body in this region and period. Conversely, this move also allows room to reconsider the role of visual and tactile forms in producing such broader cultural changes.

Examining figurative representation in this context also draws attention to the local significance of figuration – an art historical category whose meaning is often taken for granted. In contrast to figurative art forms, the abstract aesthetics of Zulu and Xhosa art traditions have long been a topic of art historical interest, and are perhaps the most common way of characterizing these visual cultures.[15] In his writing on Zulu and Xhosa beadwork patterns, Gary Van Wyk warns that readings of these art forms should not be overdetermined by the meanings

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[13] See, for example, the catalog for Constantine Petridis's exhibition titled *The Art of Daily Life: Portable Objects from Southeast Africa* (Cleveland and Milan: Cleveland Museum of Art and 5 Continents, 2011); or Anitra Nettleton's *African Dream Machines: Style, Identity and Meaning of African Headrests* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007).

[14] See the catalog for Emma Bedford's exhibition *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1993). Another exhibition that revisited the theme of body adornment as art was Gemma Rodrigues and Anitra Nettleton's 2013 show titled *Powerful Bodies: Zulu Arts of Personal Adornment* at the UCLA Fowler Museum.

[15] One of the earliest exhibitions of Zulu art in the United States was titled *The Geometric Vision*. See Michael Conner and Diane Pelrine, *The Geometric Vision: Arts of the Zulu* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Galleries, Department of Creative Arts, African Studies Program, Indiana University, 1983).

that abstraction carries in Western art traditions.[16] A similar argument might be made for examining this region's figurative arts in a way that defamiliarizes the idea of anthropomorphism.[17]

Finally, a thematic focus on figuration allows me to integrate the insights of scholars who have investigated local histories of pictorial media, such as prints and photographs. Their insights have rarely been brought to bear on three-dimensional objects, but are nonetheless relevant.[18] Pictorial media introduced new modes of imaging the body, and became widespread in this region during the nineteenth century.[19] Furthermore, the odd, distorted, and fragmented anthropomorphisms of many objects considered here find an unexpected but striking formal parallel in the ways that a photograph, for instance, can scale down, truncate, or multiply the human form. While it falls slightly afield of my geographical scope, Paul Landau's study of early reactions to missionary images in Bechuanaland provides one model for considering figurative imagery as a new phenomenon.[20] Christoph Rippe's recent studies of missionary photography in colonial Natal also offer relevant insights about indigenous responses to

[16] Gary Van Wyk, "Illuminated Signs: Style and Meaning in the Beadwork of the Xhosa- and Zulu-Speaking Peoples," *African Arts*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 2003): 12.

[17] For an Africa-focused discussion about how to reconcile concepts of "image" and "representation" with local visual cultures, see Paul Landau's "An Amazing Distance: People and Pictures in Africa," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-40.

[18] Stephen Sprague's classic article on Yoruba photography in West Africa offers a compelling model for examining photography's relationship to existing local art forms and aesthetics. See Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," *African Arts*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Nov. 1978): 52-59, 107.

[19] While the appearance of printed and painted images in southern Africa has yet to be systematically studied, for an account of early photographic practices in this region during the nineteenth century, see Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield, *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginnings to the End of 1870* (Cape Town: T. McNally, 1970).

[20] Paul Landau, "The Illumination of Christ in the Kalahari Desert," *Representations*, No. 45 (Winter 1994): 26-40.

photographic imagery in the early twentieth century.[21] Work by Tamar Garb and Hlonipha Mokoena demonstrates how the rise of pictorial media endowed images of the body with increasing significance as sites for visualizing individual and group identities. Their observations suggest that figurative images had begun to play a generative role in producing the bodies and identities that they purportedly represented.[22]

Methodology and Organization

In 2014, I set out to research how early photographic practices in South Africa intersected with existing Zulu art forms and aesthetics. But upon my arrival in Durban, I ran into trouble. Instead of making steady progress, I got lost in the archives. I struggled with the breadth of my topic. Worse, I found myself swimming in historical photographs, many of which were conceptually interesting but visually underwhelming. These initial problems led me to reevaluate my exclusive focus on the single medium of photography, and I began to consider artworks in a wider range of media. As I did so, I found myself revisiting one of my original research questions, which concerned the local significance of figurative imagery as a new form of visual experience in the nineteenth century. In this way, the false start of photography gave me an unexpected angle from which to approach the objects discussed here.

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[21] See Christoph Rippe, " 'Histrionic Zulus' – Photographic Heterotopias at the Catholic Mission Mariannhill in Natal," *Safundi: Journal of South African and American Studies*, Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3 (2014): 179-196; and Rippe, "The Missionary, the Diviner, and the Chief: Distributed Personhood and the Photographic Archive of the Mariannhill Mission," in *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies*, ed. Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 39-58.

[22] See Tamar Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus"; and Hlonipha Mokoena, "'Being Zulu': A History in Portraits," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 104-112.

The present study draws upon various forms of evidence to propose a new narrative about anthropomorphic objects and their place in history. For historians of African art, missing, thin, or questionable data pose a significant challenge, and this project is no exception. For many objects, it is impossible to nail down coordinates of authorship, date, and local origin beyond a reasonable doubt. For these reasons, I would characterize my argument here as a circumstantial case. My overall aim has been to understand how these peculiar sculpted forms of partial bodies might have evoked meaning within their historical and cultural surroundings. To do so, I have looked for moments and patterns of convergence between disparate bodies of evidence. These include object-based formal analysis, photographic archives, period sources, and language, as well the insights of art historians, anthropologists, and cultural historians. Collectively, these diverse sources depict an atmosphere of profound ambivalence towards the human body during this era – an ambivalence which was vividly articulated through various visual and embodied means.

I cannot overstate the importance of form as a foundational element of my narrative here. In survey classes, students learn that objects are the "primary sources" of art history. This adage becomes even more true when dealing with objects and cultures whose histories are difficult to trace through written sources. Objects may be associated with records that are vague, incorrect, or nonexistent, but their materiality and their visual forms can still serve as a basis for historical inquiry.[23] The label of "formalism" can sometimes carry negative connotations in art history, as

[23] One important precedent, which demonstrates the possibilities of such an approach, can be found in the work of Robert Farris Thompson. Though at times controversial, Thompson's willingness to make informed guesses and speculative leaps, based on formal affinities, helped to define the very idea of the Black Atlantic as a unit of cultural analysis. In doing so, he drew attention to previously unacknowledged African contributions to New World aesthetic forms. In the case of enslaved Africans and their descendants, his scholarship shows how valuable visual and material sources can be as one basis for reconstructing histories of people whose perspectives were rarely written down. See Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).

an approach that de-politicizes and de-historicizes its objects of study. However, here I would characterize my attention to form as an instance of "strategic formalism," borrowing the phrase from Darby English.[24] For English, close looking means momentarily letting go of assumptions about what kind of narrative one is supposed to write about a particular object. Doing so, he argues, creates space and freedom to perceive new interpretive possibilities.[25]

In my previous attempts to write about the works discussed here, there are two modes of writing about nineteenth-century objects that I have struggled to move beyond. First, there are texts like the South African Museum publications mentioned earlier,[26] which are rooted in anthropological traditions and methodologies. Such scholarship pays nuanced attention to objects' significance within their specific cultures of origin, but significantly neglects their historicity. Johannes Fabian has famously criticized this mode of scholarly writing for failing to acknowledge the participation or existence in history of people and cultures outside the West.[27] When many of the available sources are written in this manner, it is challenging to write about nineteenth-century artworks in a way that feels truly historical.

Second, global meta-narratives of colonialism exert their own gravitational pull. Post-colonial scholarship and theory are absolutely prerequisites for the study of colonial art. They give us the tools to understand the violence and the drastically unequal relations of power that characterized the world in which these artworks originated. They also sharpen our attention to

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[24] Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 31-2.

[25] Ibid. My approach here is also very much influenced by Jennifer Roberts's arguments for the value of sustained, immersive looking, as articulated in her article "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine*, November–December 2013, http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience (accessed April 9, 2017).

[26] See footnote 6.

[27] See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

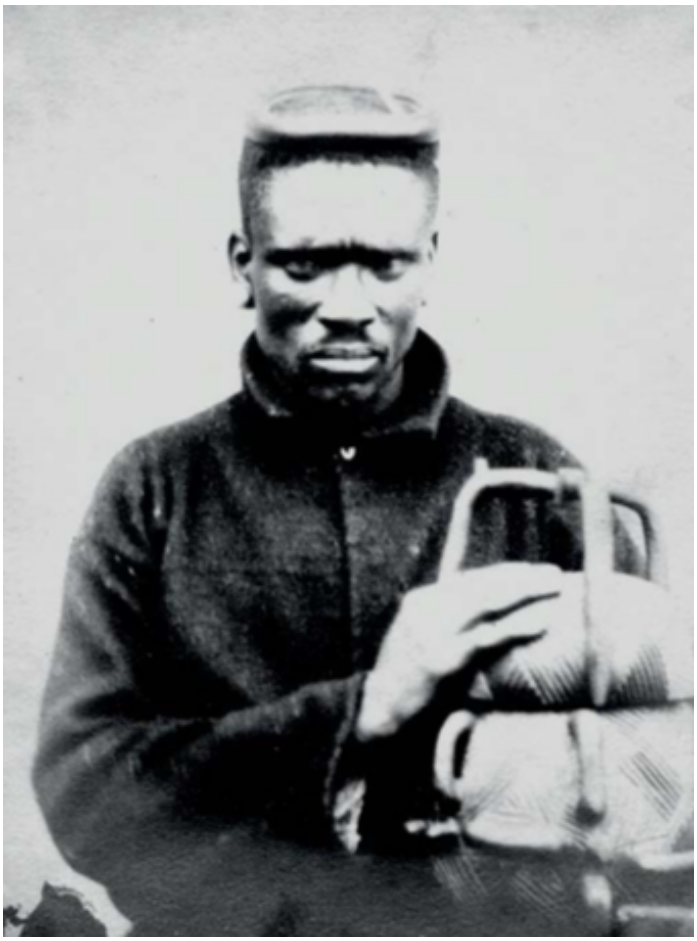


Figure i.3. Robert James Mann. "Unodabula, the wood-carver." Photograph. 1860s. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Source: Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin, "Maker, Material and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, Vol. 7 (2013): 19.

systematic suppression of subaltern perspectives in the historical record. Indeed, these factors are the reason why most of the objects illustrated here cannot be credited to their individual creators by name. Only one object (**Figure 3.10**) is associated with a known African carver, Unodabula (**Figure i.3**),[28] and this single name only underscores how many more remain

[28] Little is known about Unodabula beyond his name and the fact that he worked in colonial Natal. See Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin, "Maker, Material and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, Vol. 7 (2013): 21.

unacknowledged. However, a limitation of post-colonial approaches to art history is their tendency to interpret objects one-dimensionally, in terms of the binary dynamic of oppression and resistance. This type of narrative cannot fully describe the range of ways in which artworks create meaning, any more than it can represent the multidimensionality of lived experience.[29]

Going against the grain of these existing narrative paradigms can feel like swimming against a current. In this case, it was granular attention to form that enabled me to incorporate the important insights generated by these types of narratives, while also moving beyond them.

The chapters of this dissertation trace four different motifs of fragmentary anthropomorphism. Collectively, these case studies illuminate various facets of the same overarching question: what did it mean for the human form to become a subject of visual representation in this time and place?

Chapter One examines carved staffs from Natal that incorporate representations of human heads. Such staffs were conventionally elements of male personal adornment. Accordingly, this chapter looks at the relationship between the body's representation and its beautification. I consider how practices of visually representing the body had the potential to complicate the body's status as an aesthetic object in its own right. I also examine moments of convergence and slippage between the idea of the body as a form to be ornamented, and the body's form *as* an ornamental motif.

[29] My thinking here is informed by Santu Mofokeng's critique of South African "struggle photographs" from the 1980s. Many documentary images were created during this era to support the fight against apartheid. However, despite their association with progressive political goals, Mofokeng perceived that these images did a certain violence to the black people represented therein, by portraying them solely as participants in the struggle or as victims, rather than as complex individuals. See Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, ed. Pascal Martin Saint-Léon, N'Goné Fall, Frédérique Chapuis et. al. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 68-75.

Chapter Two looks at the motif of functional objects carved in the form of headless female bodies. Many of the objects considered in this chapter not only look like partial bodies, but also potentially act like bodies. I examine the implications of representing the body's functionality in addition to its outward appearance. The first part of this chapter looks at headless domestic objects from Zululand and Natal, in order to tease out how images of the female form intersected with anxieties about labor during a time of rapid economic change. The second part of this chapter examines figurative pipes from the borderlands between Basutoland and the Cape. These objects were likely made for sale as curios. This section considers how representation of the body's visual form was called upon to replace more conventional modes of tactile engagement.

Chapter Three analyzes the bizarre and ambiguous corporeality of a group of carved wooden vessels from Natal. Zulu carvers began creating these lidded vessels for European patrons in the 1860s. In this chapter, I link the apparent free-play of vague, distorted bodily forms that characterize these oversized containers to broader cultural uncertainty and curiosity about difference. I argue that in the case of these vessels, the body's form provided a figurative terrain through which imaginative engagements with difference, novelty, and foreign-ness could be materially expressed.

Chapter Four traces relationships between violence and figurative representation during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The focal points of my analysis are a pair of commemorative objects related to two major conflicts that marked these decades: a set of carved horns and a painted tunic, which commemorate the Anglo-Zulu War and the Boer War, respectively. Not only do these objects enlist the body as a visual sign to memorialize violent events. They also retain tactile links to the body, which figures as a fragmentary corporeal

presence. Through a close reading and comparison of these objects, I describe some of the mutual entanglements that existed between violence and figurative representation in this region and era. I consider the body's instrumentality as a means for envisioning, internalizing, and normalizing violence; understandings of representation *as* an act of violence; the body as a ground on which violence unfolds; and representations of violence as an intimate corporeal experience.

Chapter One

Figurative Staffs and Heads:
The Body as Site and Subject of Representation



Figure 1.1. Unknown photographer. Photograph of a Zulu man with figurative staff and shield. 1860s. Natal, South Africa. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Source: Killie Campbell Africana Library.

In a photograph from colonial Natal, taken during the 1860s, two heads appear (**Figure 1.1**). The first belongs to the man, who stands in near profile against a blank white backdrop. The second head emerges from the top of a slender wooden stick, which the man holds aloft at an angle. Its oblong features – deeply shaded eyes, long nose, flat line of a mouth – stare straight out of the picture plane, unlike its human counterpart, whose gaze extends somewhere beyond the left edge of the frame.

This photograph offers a succinct reminder of how figurative imagery can at once make animate bodies into objects, while molding inanimate material into lifelike forms. The camera

freezes the man, with the likely goal of representing a "native type". Meanwhile, wood is in the process of resolving itself, head first, into human form.

As an image within an image, the figurative staff hinges between two possible modes of relating body and representation. In addition to being a partial representation *of* the human body, the staff is just as much a physical attribute that functions as a part of the man's personal presentation. As such, it could almost be considered an extension of his physical self. The staff thus posits the body simultaneously as a site and a subject of representation.

This motif – a plain staff surmounted by the sculpted form of a human head – is one that recurs in southeast Africa during the latter half of the nineteenth century[30] (**Figure 1.2**). Iterations of this form can be found across a broad area, from as far south as Natal, as far east as Mozambique, and as far north as Rhodesia or even Malawi (**Figure 1.3**). In keeping with our starting point, Natal will form the epicenter of my discussion in this chapter, with some attention also paid to the adjacent region of Zululand.[31] By blurring the line between the body's adornment and its image, figurative staffs raise questions about the body's status as an aesthetic object. As such, they draw attention to ways in which figurative representation emerged in this region in relation to other forms of aesthetic intervention, which were practiced upon the body itself.

Museums and collectors have habitually assumed that figurative staffs from Natal were the work of Zulu carvers. However, this attribution is potentially misleading. For one thing, the

[30] Although precise dates and provenance are unavailable for many of these objects, Henri Junod cites one instance of this motif appearing on a figurative staff from the Transvaal, which he believed to date back to as early as 1850. See Henri Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1927), 133-4.

[31] These combined areas roughly correspond to the present-day province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The southern part of this area, Natal, was a British colony from 1843 onward. The Zulu kingdom occupied the northern part of this area until 1879, when this territory was incorporated into Natal.



Figure 1.2. Unknown carver, possibly Zulu. Club. Wood. 19th century. 26 ¾ x 3¼ x 3¼ inches. Detroit Institute of Arts.
Source: Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 1.3. Ngoni carver. Knobkerrie club with human head. Wood and bone. Before 1905. Acquired near Fort Mlangene, Malawi. 19 x 3 x 4 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

concept of "Zulu" as an ethnic category was not as fully formed or as self-evident in the nineteenth century as it is today.[32] In the nineteenth century, the coastal regions of Natal and Zululand were home to a number of Nguni-speaking groups, of which the Zulu were just one.[33] Anitra Nettleton has also shown how a disproportionate number of southern African objects have been misidentified as Zulu or Shona, based on the fact that these ethnic groups were the most familiar to European collectors.[34] For these reasons, some scholars have recently used the more cautious attribution of "North Nguni," which could potentially refer to Nguni groups from Natal, Zululand, or those living further north in what is now Swaziland.[35]

Furthermore, Sandra Klopper has compellingly argued that many figurative staffs were likely the work of Tsonga-speaking[36] migrants, who arrived in Natal from Mozambique or the

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[32] Historian Shula Marks has argued that the notion of a unitary "Zulu" ethnic identity is more of a twentieth century construction than a nineteenth century reality. She points out that many people who self-identified as Zulu in the twentieth century were descendants of nineteenth-century predecessors who would not have identified this way. See Shula Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy, and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (London and Berkeley: Currey and University of California Press, 1989), 217. For a more in-depth discussion about how the term "Zulu" is a problematic attribution for nineteenth-century objects, see Sandra Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings: The Brenthurst Collection and the Art of South-East Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991), 80-98.

[33] The term "Nguni" broadly refers to a group of culturally- and linguistically- related ethnic groups living in the eastern part of present-day South Africa, as well as in Swaziland and parts of Zimbabwe. See *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Nguni," accessed June 18, 2016, http://academic.eb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/EBchecked/topic/413591/Nguni.

[34] Anitra Nettleton, "History and the Myth of Zulu Sculpture," *African Arts*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (May 1988): 48.

[35] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 82. This term is in contradistinction to the term "South Nguni," which refers to Nguni-speakers (especially Xhosa-speakers) living further south in what is now the Eastern Cape.

[36] The term "Tsonga" refers to various culturally related groups in southern Mozambique, northeastern South Africa, and parts of Zimbabwe and Swaziland. See *Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Tsonga," accessed June 18, 2016, http://academic.eb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/EBchecked/topic/607808/Tsonga. Various scholars have argued that this term is problematic for many of the same reasons that "Zulu" is. In tracing the emergence of Tsonga ethnic identity in the early twentieth century, Patrick Harries demonstrates how this category was in many ways a product of European attempts to categorize African cultures, rather than a pre-existing reality; see Harries, "The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa," *African Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 346 (Jan. 1988): 25-52; and Harries, "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, 82-117. For a more recent discussion of these issues from an art historical perspective, see Rayda Becker, "The

Transvaal during the second half of the nineteenth century.[37] In this chapter, my aim is not to argue for any definitive ethnic origin of this motif. Instead, I wish to examine how such objects would have signified within the relatively localized context of Natal. In doing so, it is helpful to acknowledge the potentially heterogeneous cultural repertoires that informed their origins and reception.

For art historical purposes, a significant difference between the Tsonga, and Nguni groups like the Zulu, was that some Tsonga communities had histories of producing figurative sculptures prior to the period in question.[38] Tsonga carvers in the Transvaal created freestanding figures for didactic use during initiations (**Figure 1.4**), for other ceremonial purposes, and in some cases for architectural function as guardian figures.[39] Klopper and Nettleton have both observed stylistic continuities between figurative staffs from Natal, and freestanding objects made by Tsonga-speakers in the eastern Transvaal.[40] Because little is known about the individual artists, it is not clear whether Tsonga carvers in Natal belonged to groups that had

Hlengwe/Tsonga People of Zimbabwe," in *Legacies of Stone: Zimbabwe Past and Present*, Vol. 1, ed. William Dewey and Els De Palmenaer (Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1997), 179-192.

[37] Sandra Klopper, "Kings, Commoners and Foreigners: Artistic Production and the Consumption of Art in the Southeast African Region," in *The Art of Southeast Africa: From the Conru Collection* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2002), 45-6.

[38] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tsonga-speaking groups in the Transvaal produced freestanding figurative sculptures, although those living in southern Mozambique did not. See Anitra Nettleton, "In Search of a Tsonga Style: Figurative and Abstract Woodcarving," in *Dungamanzi/Stirring Waters: Tsonga and Shangaan Art from Southern Africa*, ed. Nessa Leibhammer (Johannesburg: Wits University Press and Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2007), 123.

[39] Ibid., 125.

[40] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 96; and Nettleton, "In Search of a Tsonga Style," 126.



Figure 1.4. Tsonga carver. Pair of initiation figures. Wood and cotton textile. 19th century. 22 inches and 21 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

these figurative art traditions.[41] Either way, a factor that distinguishes the figurative staffs from these freestanding art forms is their use of anthropomorphic form in an ornamental capacity.

Tsonga carvers working in nineteenth-century Natal turned their considerable skills towards the creation of objects for Zulu or European patrons.[42] These sources of patronage drove the elaboration of both figurative and abstract types of staffs. Historically, there was already a precedent for the exchange of staffs between Tsonga carvers and Zulu recipients.

[41] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 96-7.

[42] Nettleton, "In Search of a Tsonga Style," 126.

Some Tsonga groups to the north of the Zulu kingdom, who fell within its sphere of influence in the nineteenth century, sent finely-carved staffs to Zululand as part of the tribute that they were obliged to pay.[43]

Europeans in Natal provided another new outlet for Tsonga carvers' abilities. Klopper suggests that the tastes of European patrons were likely an important impetus for the creation of increasingly elaborate, and explicitly figurative carvings.[44] These included staffs depicting fuller figures, as well as more complex compositions that combined human forms with zoomorphic imagery. One set of male and female figures (**Figures 1.5 and 1.6**), appear to grow out of a pair of staffs from the legs up, arms glued to their sides in a posture not unlike that of the male and female initiation figures illustrated above (**Figure 1.4**). Another staff is surmounted by the sinuous form of a baboon, which stands on the heads of two human figures, partially represented from the waist up (**Figures 1.7 and 1.8**). This latter object may have been the work of a Tsonga carver to whom Klopper refers as the Baboon Master, based on his frequent choice of subject matter. This artist was active in the vicinity of Pietermaritzburg, and produced numerous works of this kind during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although their names are unknown, Klopper has identified several other individuals, through analysis of carving styles, who produced both figurative staffs and freestanding figures for a tourist market in the same area and time period.[45]

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[43] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 96.

[44] Ibid. In his conversations with Muhlati, a skilled Tsonga carver who lived near Lourenço Marques (the present-day city of Maputo, Mozambique) in the early twentieth century, Junod also noted that when Muhlati created some of his more elaborate and innovative carvings, he was motivated by the potential profits that could be made from selling these objects to European patrons. One such work was a large sculpture of a panther attacking an Englishman. It featured an ingeniously-devised detachable tail, which was intended to make the object more easily portable in case its buyer wished to take it back to Europe. See Junod, 134-5.

[45] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 93.



Figure 1.5. Unknown carver. Staff with male figure. Wood. 19th or early 20th century. 18 ½ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 1.6. Unknown carver. Staff with female figure. Wood. 19th or early 20th century. 17 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 1.7 (detail, left) and Figure 1.8 (right). Baboon Master. Figurative staff. Wood. 19th century. 47 ½ inches. Cleveland Museum of Art.
Source: Cleveland Museum of Art.





Figure 1.9 (left) and Figure 1.10 (right). Unknown carver. Staff with snuff vessel. Wood. 19th or early 20th century. 41 ¾ x 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In this context, anthropomorphic form provided one avenue for carvers to show off their skills. However, figurative motifs were not the only forms that facilitated conspicuous displays of carving ability. Many abstract staffs from the same region and period do so by other means. For instance, one staff features a snuffbox attached to its top by means of a chain-link carved from wood (**Figure 1.9 and Figure 1.10**). This chain-link form appears in many Tsonga carvings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially as an element that connects pairs of objects like snuff boxes (**Figure 1.11**) or headrests (**Figure 1.12**). In the early twentieth century, Junod noted that Tsonga carvers sometimes created chains of this kind on a

gigantic scale, "some with links of six inches in length, the whole attaining to a length of many yards."[46] Junod also indicates that the purpose of this chain-link form was to demonstrate virtuoso carving skill. He explains, "[t]he special point to be noted in this 'objet d'art' is that it has been carved from a single piece of wood and the artist had to make no mistake from the very beginning; a single slip of the knife would have broken the whole chain and made it useless."[47] Comparison with nonfigurative staffs thus underscores how many figurative staffs, especially those destined for the tourist market, positioned bodily forms as ornamental elements and manifestations of skill.

The tourist market was one critical factor in the development of anthropomorphic staff forms. However, a European taste for figurative imagery does not fully explain why so many figurative carvings were created as elements of staffs, rather than as freestanding works. In fact, in many instances, European collectors cut figures from the tops of carved staffs to make them into discrete artworks.[48] In order to understand why staffs specifically emerged and persisted as common sites of representation, we must also look to the associations they carried in local indigenous visual cultures in Natal.

Unlike the Tsonga, Nguni people along the southeast African coast did not have any significant history of figurative representation prior to the mid-nineteenth century. However, their visual repertoires did include a wide variety of finely-carved sticks, staffs and clubs, which served various purposes.[49] Broadly speaking, many of these objects might be categorized as

[46] Junod, 130.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Klopper, "Kings, Commoners, and Foreigners," 39.

[49] For a sense of the wide variety of categories that existed, see Klopper's discussion of Zulu and Xhosa terminology for distinguishing between different types of staffs and clubs, in "Kings, Commoners and Foreigners," 42.



Figure 1.11. Tsonga carver. Pair of snuffboxes joined by a chain. Wood. Late 19th or early 20th century. 17 ½ x 1 ¾ x 1 ¾ inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figure 1.12. Tsonga carver. Double headrest with snuffboxes. Wood. Late 19th or early 20th century. $5\frac{7}{8}$ x 29 ½ x $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Princeton Art Museum.
Source: Princeton Art Museum.



Figure 1.13. Unknown carver, southeast Africa. Knobkerrie. Wood. 19th or early 20th century. 26 ¾ x 2 ½ x 3 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figure 1.14. Zulu or Nguni carver. Club (*iwisa*). Wood. 19th or early 20th century. 26 x 3 ¼ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

weapons, prestige objects, walking sticks, or dance staffs.[50] It was not uncommon for staffs to be multifunctional;[51] for instance, chiefly staffs often doubled as walking sticks, and some short staffs used to beat time during dances were formally similar to implements used for hunting or fighting.[52]

[50] Lindsay Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts, Part 3: Woodcarving," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 70, Part 3 (1981): 251.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 251, 254.



Figure 1.15. Allen Francis Gardiner. "Dingarn [*sic*] in his ordinary & dancing dress." Lithograph illustration from *Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country in South Africa*. 1836.
Source: Princeton University Library.

Some figurative objects present clear formal relationships to specific types of nonfigurative staffs. For example, the staff cited above, which is now in the Detroit Institute of Arts (**Figure 1.2**), resembles a type of club known as *iwisa* [pl. *amawisa*] in Zulu, or in English as a knobkerrie.[53] Knobkerries are characterized by a relatively short shaft, topped by a large, heavy bulb. The Detroit staff is almost identical, in both dimensions and shape, to one such object that is now in the British Museum (**Figure 1.13**), and another, more elaborate version held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (**Figure 1.14**). It even shares a profile with the two nonfigurative examples, whose heads similarly emerge off-center from their shafts.

[53] David Penney, Mary Nooter Roberts, and Helen Shannon, "Staff," in *African Masterworks in the Detroit Institute of Arts* (Washington, D.C. and London: Detroit Institute of Arts and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 166.

To understand why this type of club would culminate in an anthropomorphic image, we might invert our focus, and consider how knobkerries appear in pictorial representations of bodies from the nineteenth century – which they frequently do. In 1836, the English missionary Allen Francis Gardiner published an illustration of the Zulu king Dingane, dressed in a trio of different outfits (**Figure 1.15**). Two of these ensembles feature staffs. The leftmost Dingane leans upon a long, thin walking stick, while another on the right holds up a shorter knobkerrie, whose head curls over to one side.

Later in the nineteenth century, knobkerries were also common elements in studio photographs depicting African men, both in Natal, and more broadly throughout the eastern part of South Africa. Like the earlier print, studio photographs privilege the display of bodies, clothing, adornment, and gesture. This was clearly the motive behind one turn-of-the-century photograph taken at Mariannhill in southern Natal (**Figure 1.16**).[54] The photograph depicts a young man wearing an elaborate coiffure and a spectacular array of beadwork items. Much like the man in **Figure 1.1**, he holds a small cowhide shield in his left hand, and raises a flat-headed club in his right, echoing a gesture also seen in the print of Dingane (**Figure 1.15**). A lengthy German caption describes his hairstyle and lists his various beaded accessories, leaving no doubt as to the purpose of the image.

Knobkerries are likewise a staple element in photographs of African policemen, which can be found in great numbers from the 1860s onwards (**Figure 1.17**). In one such image, visual emphasis foregrounds the sitter and his uniform, in much the same way that the previous

[54] For further discussion of photographic production at the Mariannhill mission, see Christoph Rippe, " 'Histrionic Zulus' – Photographic Heterotopias at the Catholic Mission Mariannhill in Natal," *Safundi: Journal of South African and American Studies*, Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3 (2014): 179-196; and Rippe, "The Missionary, the Diviner, and the Chief: Distributed Personhood and the Photographic Archive of the Mariannhill Mission," in *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies*, ed. Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 39-58.



Figure 1.16. German photographer from Mariannhill Mission, Natal. Photograph of a young man. Circa 1896. 4 x 5 ¾ inches. Pitt-Rivers Museum.
Source: Pitt-Rivers Museum.



Figure 1.17. Unknown photographer, South Africa. Photograph inscribed "Native Police." Late 19th century. Walther Collection.
Source: Tamar Garb, ed., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 117.

photograph displays the sitter's beaded adornments. As a pictorial element, the short club appears as a sartorial attribute, in a way that exceeds its potential functionality as an implement of law and order. Both of these photographs, and others like them, position knobkerries within the realm of clothing and body adornment.

Knobkerries even appear in representations where the body's adornment is otherwise minimal. In one *carte de visite*, a seated man holds a round-headed club, whose thick stem rests against the crook of his elbow (**Figure 1.18**). In this photograph, a limited number of contents



Figure 1.18. Unknown photographer, South Africa. Carte de visite depicting an unknown sitter. Circa 1860-1880. 3 x 2 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

generate a wealth of subtle details to draw the eye. There is the soft explosion of a fur headdress, the matte gleam of light hitting the planes of face and chest, and the single, deliberate index finger pointing to opposite wrist. The composition's implied lines disclose its careful construction; the man's three-quarter gaze draws an angle, paralleled in triplicate below by his right arm, his staff, and even his left knuckles, which, illuminated, form a string of bright dots. In an image as spare and deliberate as this one, the knobkerrie's inclusion only underlines its significance as a component of bodily presentation.

A similar argument might be made about the male figure on one of the staffs cited earlier (**Figure 1.5**). In one small hand, he clutches a small *iwisa*, which is represented in shallow

relief. The unknown carver's compositional choices do not leave room for many extraneous attributes: he represents the man's body as if it is confined within the staff's contours. Yet the knobkerrie was evidently important enough to be included, even within these greatly constricted parameters.

Images like these not only indicate the ubiquity of staffs as elements of personal presentation and extensions of the body. They also force us to recognize the body's importance as an actual site of art for the Zulu and their neighbors. The lush layers of beaded textiles, worn by the man in the Mariannhill photograph (**Figure 1.16**), make this point especially clear. Like figurative staffs, elaborate beadwork fabrics and ornaments were an aesthetic form that flourished in southeast Africa during the late nineteenth century, when glass beads became widely available due to trade.[55]

In writing about beaded art forms, Nettleton has described such works as objects that aesthetically transform the body of the person wearing them. She comments that "objects made with extraordinary care, both in relation to their appearance and in relation to how they would feel on the body, serve the body in the first instance."[56] In this way, she concludes that "beadwork items turn every body into a work of art."[57] Nettleton also draws a parallel between the appearance and purpose of beadwork objects, and those of body modification practices like keloid scars, which were also practiced in this region.[58] In this way, she suggests that beaded

[55] Carol Kaufmann, "The Bead Rush: Development of the Nineteenth-Century Bead Trade from Cape Town to King William's Town," in *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape*, ed. Emma Bedford (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1993), 48.

[56] Anitra Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity: Gendering 'Master' Pieces of Nineteenth-Century South African Indigenous arts," *Visual Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012): 232.

[57] Ibid., 233.

[58] Ibid., 232.

adornments are not so much artworks for their own sake, as they are objects that extend and accentuate the body as a prime focus of the aesthetic. They are a means to beautification, rather than an end in themselves.

Nettleton's argument about beadwork pushes back against Western art historical approaches, which often situate objects as ends in and of themselves.[59] Other Africanist art historians have advanced similar arguments for considering the body itself as an aesthetic object. For instance, Herbert Cole has argued that practices of body adornment deserve to be studied as the primary visual art form of some East African pastoral communities, for whom the category of discrete art objects was not historically relevant.[60] In a slightly later volume on practices of body modification, Arnold Rubin similarly argues that more systematic art historical attention should be paid to aesthetic interventions that alter the human body.[61]

Other scholars have shown the extent to which figurative art forms in various parts of Africa are intertwined with practices of body beautification and adornment. George Nelson Preston has illuminated how stylistic features of Akan funerary sculptures derive from widespread practices of literally molding infants' heads into an ideal shape.[62] Elsewhere in West Africa, Stephen Sprague and Tobias Wendl have similarly demonstrated the extent to which

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[59] Western boundaries about what constitutes "the art object" have often proved inadequate to fully describe African art traditions. A classic example of this problem would be the way in which masks from West and Central Africa first entered Western art historical discourse in the early twentieth century. While initially received and analyzed as discrete objects, scholars have since emphasized how many of these objects are in fact partial elements of much larger ritual and performative contexts.

[60] Herbert Cole, "Vital Arts of Northern Kenya," *African Arts*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter 1974): 12-23, 82.

[61] Arnold Rubin, "Introduction," in *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988), 17. Also see Enid Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33 (2004): 319-344.

[62] George Nelson Preston, "People Making Portraits Making People: Living Icons of the Akan," *African Arts*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July 1990): 70-76, 104.



Figure 1.19. Robert James Mann (?). Portrait of unknown man wearing *isicoco*. Photograph. 1860s. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Source: Killie Campbell Africana Library.

pictorial imagery, figurative art forms in the round, and local aesthetic ideals of physical beauty and comportment have mutually influenced one another.[63]

Along these lines, nineteenth-century figurative staffs from Natal do not simply borrow their overall forms from local repertoires of body adornment. Many of them also figuratively refer to another domain of embodied aesthetics, namely that of hair.[64] Many of the heads depicted on staffs wear a headring hairstyle, known in Zulu as *isicoco* [pl. *izicoco*] (**Figure 1.19**).

[63] See Stephen Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," *African Arts*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (November 1978): 52-59, 107; and Tobias Wendl, "Entangled Traditions: Photography and the History of Media in Southern Ghana," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 39 (Spring 2001): 78-101.

[64] For further discussions of hair as an aesthetic medium in various parts of Africa, see Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman, eds., *Hair in African Art and Culture* (New York and Munich: Museum for African Art and Prestel, 2000); and Mary Jo Arnoldi and Christine Mullen Kreamer, eds., *Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995).

Isicoco originated as a way for Zulu men to indicate that they were married.[65] However it was also a mobile motif that travelled and was adopted by members of neighboring groups for a variety of other purposes.[66] Creating and maintaining this hairstyle was a time-consuming and laborious process, which required the skilled work of a specialist.[67] Generally, this process began with sewing a ring of fiber and sinew into a man's hair on the crown of his head.[68] This would then be covered with a sticky sealant distilled from natural materials,[69] to which charcoal was added to blacken it.[70] Once the ring hardened, it was polished to a shine, and hair shaved off inside and around the ring.[71] As hair grew, *izicoco* had to be periodically cut off and replaced.[72]

Izicoco were only one form of male coiffure that formed sites of artistry. Throughout the nineteenth century, young, unmarried men in southern Natal created new kinds of elaborate coiffures, which took hairstyling to a truly sculptural level.[73] Such hairstyles appear in two of the photographs cited earlier (**Figures 1.1 and 1.16**). Like *izicoco*, their swooping points and spiraling ridges required considerable time, skill, and work to create and maintain. Practices of

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[65] Eileen Jensen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1965), 118.

[66] Nettleton, "History and the Myth of Zulu Sculpture," 49-50.

[67] Joseph Shooter, *The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country* (London: E. Stanford, 1857), 6.

[68] Krige, 373.

[69] A.T. Bryant describes this resinous material as deriving from plants, while Franz Mayr describes it as the secretion of a bush-dwelling insect. See A.T. Bryant, *The Zulu People, As They Were Before the White Man Came* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1949): 141-2; and Franz Mayr, "Language of Colours amongst the Zulus Expressed by Their Bead-Work Ornaments; And Some General Notes on Their Personal Adornments and Clothing," *Annals of the Natal Museum*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (March 1907): 160.

[70] Shooter, 6.

[71] Bryant, 143.

[72] Shooter, 6.

[73] For an overview of such hairstyling practices, see Sandra Klopper's article " 'Zulu Dandies': The History and Significance of Extravagant Hairstyling of Young Men from Colonial Natal," *Jacana: Journal for African Culture and New Approaches*, Vol. 1 (2010): 30-40.

early studio photography in Natal may have also reinforced a connection between the domains of hairstyling and pictorial imagery of the body. Multiple scholars have observed that African coiffures were a subject of particular interest and visual emphasis for a number of colonial photographers.[74]

In a few instances, staffs go as far as to combine pictorial representations of *izicoco* with references to the actual work of hairstyling. One such object, now in the British Museum, fuses the form of a figurative staff with that of a headrest, which was a necessary implement for protecting an intricate hairstyle while sleeping (**Figures 1.20 and 1.21**).

In this way, figurative staffs display a multilayered slippage between the idea of the body as something to be ornamented, and the idea of bodily form as something ornamental. We have also seen how the head could be important as a site of artistic intervention, and as a way of marking certain aspects of social identity. However, yet to be considered is the way that a staff depicting the head would amplify the body when in use. When this type of partial figural form combines with a staff's conventional function as an extension of a living body, the resulting image is that of a male body with multiple heads (**Figure 1.1**). Some staffs even more explicitly manifest this idea of a proliferation of heads. From the stem of one wooden staff, not one, but four, heads grow in different directions (**Figure 1.22**). What does it mean for the male body to be figuratively amplified in this way?

This image of a multi-headed body might possibly be understood in light of staffs' and clubs' historical association with status and authority. Throughout this region, finely carved

[74] Klopper, " 'Zulu Dandies'," 30-31. Jeff Guy also suggests as much in his study of Robert Mann's photography; see Guy, "Imifanekiso: An Introduction to the Portrait Photography of Dr. R.J. Mann," *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Vol. 15, Nos. 2-3 (2014): 162-3.



Figure 1.20. Tsonga carver. Figurative staff with headrest. Wood. 19th or 20th century. 6 x 24 ¼ x 3 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figures 1.21 (different view of the same object illustrated in **Figure 1.20**). Tsonga carver. Figurative staff with headrest. Wood. 19th or 20th century. 6 x 24 ¼ x 3 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figure 1.22. North Nguni carver. Figurative staff. Wood. 19th century. Conru Collection.
Source: Sandra Klopper, Karel Nel, and Kevin Conru, *The Art of Southeast Africa: From the Conru Collection* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2002), 57.

wooden staffs were widely mobilized as material emblems of chiefly authority.[75] This connotation adds another meaningful dimension to the form of a head as the top of a staff. In Zulu, the term *inhloko*, which can refer to the physical head, or to a leader, shares a stem with *isihloko*, which indicates the "point of a sharp or tapering object."[76] In this way, certain figurative staff forms literalize this trio of associations. The image of a body with extra heads

[75] Sandra Klopper, "Staff," in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, 209.

[76] G.R. Dent and C.L.S. Nyembezi, *Scholar's Zulu Dictionary*, 3rd edition (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2004), 376.

might then be read as an amplification of executive function and status. Staffs' role as emblems of patriarchal authority also suggests one reason why the male head in particular was so frequently repeated as a partial anthropomorphic motif.

However, throughout the nineteenth century, structures of male authority in Natal were in transition. Colonial implementation of indirect rule relied upon superficial continuities in indigenous agents and institutions of authority. However, in practice it significantly altered these structures.[77] Historians have also noted how economic change created tensions that fueled generational conflicts between older and younger men. For instance, younger men's access to cash, through their participation in wage labor, altered power dynamics in households by undermining the authority of older patriarchs.[78] Ironically, it seems that the head began to be increasingly and explicitly figured at exactly the moment when its meaning was becoming destabilized.

As this chapter demonstrates, anthropomorphic staffs from colonial Natal reveal a close relationship between figurative representation, object, and the domain of body adornment. Tracing this relationship through various media reveals numerous points of interpenetration. The proliferation of heads atop staffs is complemented by these objects' ubiquitous presence in pictorial images that depict male bodies. This relationship is also evident from images-within-images, such as the figurative staff pictured in a photograph (**Figure 1.1**) or the carved staff figure that not only grows out of a wooden stem, but also holds a staff in his incised hand

[77] See John Lambert, "Chiefship in Early Colonial Natal, 1843-1879," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1995), 269-285.

[78] See Benedict Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

(**Figure 1.5**). Such circular relationships undermine the idea of the sculpted body image as an autonomous end in itself. Instead, they suggest an entanglement between the ornamented body and bodily form as ornament.

Chapter Two

Headless Bodies:
Femininity, Functional Objects, and Partial Anthropomorphism



Figure 2.1. Zulu carver. Figurative spoon. Wood. Early 20th century. 22 inches. Musée du Quai Branly. Source: N'Goné Fall and Jean Loup Pivin, eds., *Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), 51.

This chapter turns to a second trope of partial anthropomorphism, which appeared in various parts of southeast Africa around the turn of the century. Functional objects, carved in the shape of headless female bodies, invert the formal logic of the plain staff surmounted by a male head. This motif appears across various types of objects carved in the round, including some iconic works. One such object is a celebrated spoon, now in the Musée du Quai Branly, which is attributed to a Zulu carver (**Figure 2.1**). Its finely detailed body culminates in the disproportionately large, concave void of a missing face. Another elegant manifestation of this form is a long, slender pipe made by a South Sotho or Xhosa carver (**Figure 2.2**). If similar objects are any indication, it probably once had a detachable stopper carved in the form of a female head[79] (**Figure 2.3**).

Why would the explicit figural motif of a headless female body have emerged at this time? At first glance, the bluntness of such truncated forms makes them seemingly assimilable to various existing narratives about the predicament of African women under colonialism. Historical writing often depicts African women as having been caught between different patriarchal systems – African and European colonial – which were vying to control the important resource of female labor.[80] Historians and anthropologists have also emphasized how broad social and economic changes, brought about by colonial interventions and the rise of migrant labor, placed unprecedented demands on women during this time. These developments strained conventional family structures and burdened women with increased responsibilities in domestic

[79] E.M. Shaw, "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (1938): 297-8.

[80] Cherryl Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town and London: D. Phillip and J. Currey, 1990), 1. Anne McClintock also asserts that this conflict was a recurring preoccupation in the sphere of colonial culture. See her chapter titled "The White Family of Man: Colonial Discourse and the Reinvention of Patriarchy," in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 232-258.



Figure 2.2. South Sotho or South Nguni carver. Figurative pipe. Wood. Early 20th century. 14 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 5 ½ inches. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.
Source: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

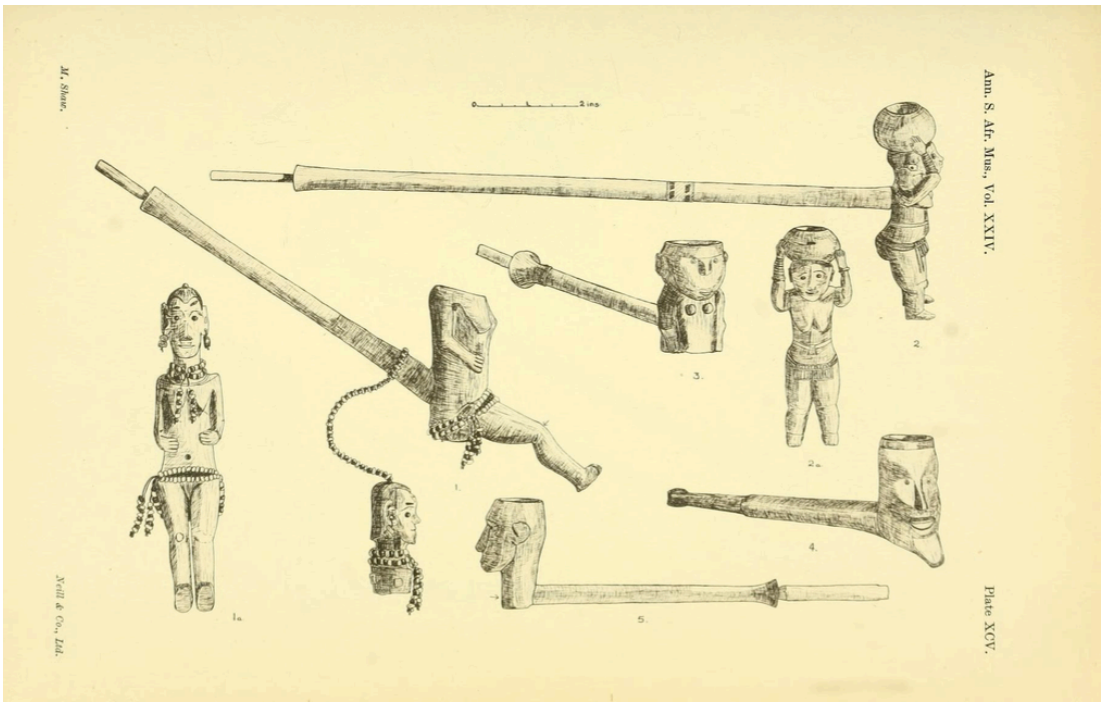


Figure 2.3. Illustration showing figurative pipe forms.
Source: E.M. Shaw, "Native pipes and smoking in South Africa," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (1938): Plate XCV.



Figure 2.4. Unknown photographer. *Carte de visite* depicting unknown woman. Albumen print. South Africa, 1870s. 2 ¼ x 3 ½ inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

and agricultural spheres.[81] The implied violence of the headless motif might also invite comparison with the contemporaneous objectification of black female bodies through practices of colonial photography that were globally employed (**Figure 2.4**).[82]

However, in other ways, headless objects also exceed these interpretations. Like the figurative staffs examined in Chapter One, their significance is more than the sum of their representational content. Rather, their meaning lies in the combination of corporeal forms that they represent, and the specific types of objects upon which they appear. These objects do not just visually represent bodies. In their actual or potential functionality, they also have the capacity to act like bodies in certain ways. As such, they offer an unexplored angle from which to understand what was at stake in representing the female body during the early twentieth century. Proceeding from the Quai Branly spoon and the Smithsonian pipe, in this chapter I examine iterations of the headless motif in two parts of southeast Africa. I focus first on domestic objects from Zululand and Natal. In the second part of the chapter, the figurative pipe takes us further south to the borderlands between the Transkei and Basutoland.

The Quai Branly spoon (**Figure 2.1**) is an unusual, possibly even a unique object.[83] It stands almost two feet tall. Its handle takes the form of a slender, elongated female body,

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[81] See Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1983): 139-171.

[82] See Barbara Thompson, ed., *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (Hanover, NH and Seattle: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and University of Washington Press, 2008). For a discussion on the afterlives of colonial photographs of black women from South Africa, and the ethical implications of their continued reproduction, see Okwui Enwezor's article "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*, No. 40 (Autumn 1997): 21-40.

[83] Sandra Klopper has criticized the eagerness of art historians and curators to frame this object as a "Zulu masterpiece", calling attention to its thin provenance record and tenuous stylistic relationship to other known objects. See Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings: The Brenthurst Collection and the Art of South-East Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art*



Figure 2.5. Zulu carver. Spoon. Wood. Mid-19th century. 17 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figure 2.6. Zulu carver. Spoon. Wood. Early 20th century. 12 inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

interrupted by pointy breasts and a large pair of round buttocks. Finely etched into its surface are a navel, a pubic triangle, and rectangular panels of scarification marks on the figure's back and lower thighs. Its figurative content sets it apart from other spoons, or *izinkezo* [sing. *ukhezo*], which are more often carved with abstract motifs (**Figures 2.5 and 2.6**).

(Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991), 84-5. One possible factor behind this spoon's celebrity may lie in its formal resemblance to another set of "canonical" African art works from the other end of the continent: figurative spoons made by Dan carvers in Liberia. These spoons have elaborately carved handles, which most often take the form of female heads, but sometimes reverse this focus to depict lower bodies. See Eberhard Fischer and Hans Himmelheber, *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa* (Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 1984), 122-133.

However, it is in some ways appropriate for the female body to appear in the form of a spoon. On one level, spoons were quotidian personal objects; each member of a household had his or her own spoon with which to eat from shared dishes.[84] However, spoons were also conventionally exchanged as part of marriage practices. A new wife was not supposed to eat meat or milk in her new household until her father's family had given a goat to her husband's family. At the same time as this goat changed hands, so did a wooden spoon, which she would subsequently use to share in meals.[85] Spoons exchanged in this manner were tied to particular women, such that they were often returned to a married woman's family of origin upon her death.[86]

Spoons' implication in marriage practices likens them to another class of domestic objects, namely, headrests. Headrests were not only exchanged in marriage, but were also sometimes carved implicitly or explicitly in the form of headless bodies. However, in Zulu-speaking areas, overtly figurative headrests most often take the shape of bodies that are not human, but bovine (**Figure 2.7**). Given their place in cycles of marriage-related gift giving, this subject matter is understandable. Historically, Zulu weddings, like those of neighboring Nguni groups, involved a number of gift exchanges, of which the most important was a transfer of cattle (*ilobolo*) from the husband's to the bride's family.[87] Like spoons, head rests were exchanged in

[84] Lindsay Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts, Part 3: Woodcarving," *Annals of the South African Museum*, Vol. 70, Part 3 (1981): 231.

[85] Lindsay Hooper, "Domestic Arts: Carved Wooden Objects in the Home," in *Zulu Treasures: Of Kings & Commoners: A Celebration of the Material Culture of the Zulu People* (Ulundi and Durban: KwaZulu Cultural Museum and the Local History Museums, 1996), 78.

[86] Rayda Becker, "Spoon or Ladle," in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, ed. Tom Phillips (Munich and New York: Prestel), 220.

[87] W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Cattle Symbolism in Zulu Culture," in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carton et al. (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 65.



Figure 2.7. North Nguni carver (probably Zulu). Headrest. Wood. 19th century. Conru Collection. Source: Sandra Klopper, Karel Nel, and Kevin Conru, *The Art of Southeast Africa: From the Conru Collection* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2002), 145.



Figure 2.8. Zulu carver. Headrest with *amasumpa* motif. Wood. 19th century. British Museum. Source: British Museum.

the opposite direction. A bride would bring a pair of newly-carved headrests, for herself and her husband to use, when she went to live with her husband's family.[88]

Some headrests also make ambiguous reference to the female body through their use of surface patterns that resemble female scarification marks[89] (**Figure 2.8**). This carved motif, which consists of panels of small, raised squares, is known as *amasumpa*, or "warts".[90] The woman depicted in the *carte de visite* above has a panel of such markings faintly visible on the right side of her back (**Figure 2.4**). The Quai Branly spoon likewise contains a representation of such scarifications, in the hatched rectangular panels depicted on the figure's thighs and back (**Figure 2.1**). Zulu men sometimes applied the same textured patterns to the bodies of their cattle, "by lifting and tying the skin into nodules."[91] This design also frequently appears on the surfaces of various types of domestic containers, including milk pails, meat dishes, and ceramic beer vessels.

The distribution of this graphic motif resonates with larger cultural associations between cattle and women, by virtue of their exchange in marriage. Historically, the Zulu were pastoralists, for whom cattle were both a major source of subsistence, and the primary means by which families measured their wealth.[92] The importance of cattle was expressed spatially in the layout of typical homesteads [*imizi*, sing. *umuzi*], which consisted of a ring of houses built

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[88] Anitra Nettleton, "Personal Objects and the Desire for Individuation: The Pethica Collection," in *The Art of Southern Africa: The Terence Pethica Collection*, ed. Sandra Klopper (Milan: 5 Continents, 2007), 16.

[89] Anitra Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity: Gendering 'Master' Pieces of Nineteenth-Century South African Indigenous Arts," *Visual Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012): 223-4.

[90] Klopper, " 'Zulu' Headrests and Figurative Carvings," 84.

[91] William Dewey, *Sleeping Beauties: The Jerome L. Joss Collection of African Headrests at UCLA* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1993), 82.

[92] Hammond-Tooke, 62-3.

around a central cattle byre.[93] Although gendered divisions of space and labor precluded women from direct contact with cattle,[94] it was nonetheless female mobility between households which enabled their acquisition.

However, by the early twentieth century, the institution of marriage was under serious pressure. In 1849, the colonial government of Natal had established a "hut tax" on African households. Since Zulu marriages were historically polygamous, these taxes were based on the number of wives, and thus by extension the number of houses in a homestead.[95] Similar tax obligations would be imposed later in Zululand, following its incorporation into the Colony of Natal after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

Throughout the colonial period, African access to land was also shrinking, as the colonial government set aside a small percentage of land, which it designated as African "locations", and legally reserved the rest for white ownership.[96] These developments undermined the self-sufficiency of Zulu homesteads, and forced increasing numbers of Zulu men from Natal and Zululand into the migrant labor economy.[97]

On top of all this, in 1896 and 1897, a deadly epidemic of bovine disease, known as rinderpest, struck most of southern and eastern Africa, wiping out as much as ninety percent of African cattle herds.[98] Given the economic importance of cattle and their role in bridewealth

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[93] Jeff Guy, "Colonial Transformations and the Home," in *Ekhaya: The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal*, ed. Meghan Healy-Clancy and Jason Hickel (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 24-5.

[94] Hooper, "Domestic Arts," 74.

[95] Guy, "Colonial Transformations and the Home," 38.

[96] Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 97.

[97] Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation, and Apartheid* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 45-6.

[98] Thompson, L., 123.

payments, this catastrophe had somber implications for household economies, not to mention marriage practices. Thus, increasingly explicit representations of both cattle and women on carved objects seem to have appeared during an era when the structures that gave these objects their meaning were being shaken.

Many of these trends would also continue later into the twentieth century. Sandra Klopper has described how more recent visual practices in Zululand similarly responded to these pressures through an emphasis on the female form. Specifically, she describes the importance of married women's dress as a visual site for affirming marital relations in rural areas. Although her analysis deals with a significantly later period, many of the processes she describes had their roots at the turn of the century or even earlier. In a 1987 essay about the dress of rural Zulu women, Klopper tackles the question of "why, despite radical economic and political transformations, some of the present conventions of female dress have remained virtually unchanged since Shakan times."[99] She observes that historically, wearing specific forms of attire was one of numerous ways in which wives demonstrated deference to their husbands and in-laws. Other ways in which a married women conveyed such respect, or *hlonipha*, included avoiding meat and milk upon her first arrival in the household; avoiding certain areas of the homestead such as the cattle byre, which were associated with the ancestors of her husband's family; and observing conventions of polite speech in the presence of her husband and his relations.[100]

[99] Sandra Klopper, "You Need Only One Bull to Cover Fifty Cows: Zulu Women and 'Traditional' Dress," (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, African Studies Institute, 1987), 1.

[100] Ibid., 5.

However, Klopper argues that as the twentieth century wore on, many of these behavioral conventions were rendered meaningless by the increasing impoverishment of rural Zulu communities, and by the prolonged absences of rural men, for whom migrant labor had become the only viable form of livelihood. She notes that by the second half of the twentieth century, there were "often no grazing land, no cattle byres, and no cattle [in rural communities]. Moreover, there is no need for language avoidances in a person's absence."[101] Dress, however, was the one coordinate of *hlonipha* observance that could be most readily continued, even in such altered circumstances.[102] As much as male migrancy imposed increasing demands upon women's labor, Klopper's analysis indicates how the female body, as a visual form, was simultaneously called upon to do various kinds of symbolic work, which had previously been fulfilled by other means.

One point of Klopper's findings, which is particularly relevant to the headless motif, is her implication that the body specifically, as opposed to the head, was especially important as a site for visually marking and stabilizing gender relations in traditionalist households. Klopper draws a contrast between historical changes in clothing and those of married women's coiffures, which, at the turn of the century, were also an important embodied means of representing women's marital status. Specifically, Klopper notes that although clothing forms stayed remarkably constant over more than a century, female hairstyles for denoting married status changed significantly over time.[103] This apparent need, for the body specifically to remain

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 1.



Figure 2.9. Zulu carver. *Ithunga* (milk pail). Wood. 19th or 20th century. Conru Collection.
Source: Source: Sandra Klopper, Karel Nel, and Kevin Conru, *The Art of Southeast Africa: From the Conru Collection* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2002), 145.

visually stable, suggests one possible parallel with headless objects, which emphasize bodily form at the expense of the head.

Similar issues related to the rise of migrant labor are also relevant to the genre of wood objects on which the headless motif most frequently appears: milking pails, or *amathunga* [sing. *ithunga*] (**Figure 2.9**). *Amathunga* often feature lugs, which are described in Zulu as *amabele*, or "breasts." Some *amathunga*, like the one illustrated here, are also decorated with panels of the *amasumpa* motif.

Unlike spoons or headrests, *amathunga* were neither handled by women, nor were they exchanged in marriage. Instead, they were carved or commissioned by male heads of households, for men to use while milking cows.[104] In contrast to objects like headrests, whose regular use dwindled as the twentieth century progressed, milk pails continued to be widely commissioned and owned.[105] Klopper interprets the continuing use of *amathunga* in light of male migrants' attempts to assert authority over their wives in spite of extended absences from home. In light of *hlonipha* restrictions on wives' consumption of meat and milk, milk vessels could be interpreted as a material reminder of male control over women's bodies.[106] However, this formal equation between female bodies and milk vessels might just as easily evoke women's

[104] Sandra Klopper, "The Art of Traditionalists in Zululand-Natal," in *Catalogue: Ten Years of Collecting (1979-1989): Standard Bank Foundation Collection of African Art, University Art Galleries Collection of African Art, and Selected Works from the University Ethnological Collection*, ed. David Hammond-Tooke and Anitra Nettleton (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, 1989), 36-7.

[105] Ibid., 37.

[106] Ibid.

responsibility for the well-being of their families, and their increasing control of resources within the domestic sphere in situations of prolonged male absence.[107]

Especially significant in this context is the way that *amathunga* represent the female body in terms of what it is capable of doing, and not simply its external appearance. As a site of representation, it is not clear whether the figurative *ithunga* would be more appropriately regarded as a body in the form of a vessel, or a vessel in the form of a body. The fact that it specifically takes the form of a torso and stomach emphasizes how its function as a vessel is predicated on its interiority. In this way, it simultaneously evokes the embodied processes of pregnancy, lactation, and consumption.[108] Notwithstanding the possible violent implications of the missing head, *amathunga* nonetheless differ from pictorial images like the *carte de visite* cited above (**Figure 2.4**), by representing the female body as an active agent, and not simply an object of vision. This particular materialization of feminine form, as something that can perform work, and create and sustain life, strikes a particular chord with its historical moment, when the image of the working female body had become highly charged in new ways.

Like the Quai Branly spoon, the precise origins of the headless female pipe (**Figure 2.2**) are uncertain. Scholars and collectors have alternately attributed pipes of this kind to South Sotho or Xhosa makers.[109] In his writing on Sotho art, David Riep argues on stylistic grounds

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[107] For analysis of earlier analogies between milk and power in the Zulu cultural imaginary, see Paul Bjerk's article "They Poured Themselves into the Milk: Zulu Political Philosophy under Shaka," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2006): 1-19.

[108] This interpretive ambiguity finds a parallel in the Zulu term *isisu*, which blurs the line between reference to the stomach and to actual pregnancy.

[109] The pipe in **Figure 2.2**, now in the Smithsonian, is attributed to either a "South Sotho" or "South Nguni" carver. Another, held by the South African Museum and illustrated in **Figure 2.3**, is listed as having originated from Basutoland (see Shaw, "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," 297-8), as are three similar pipes in the Johannesburg Art Gallery (see David Riep, "House of the Crocodile: South Sotho Art and History in Southern



Figure 2.10. Xhosa carver. Pipe (*Inqawa*). Wood and metal. Late 19th century. 4 ¼ x 1 ½ x 10 ½ inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

that this particular figurative pipe form "simply do[es] not fall within the visual bounds of what one would expect from a Basotho pipe."[110] He also points out that a number of figurative pipes were originally collected along the border between Basutoland and the Eastern Cape, and notes their formal similarity to specific pipe forms which were widely made and used by Xhosa people in the Cape (**Figure 2.10**).[111] On a slightly different note, Nettleton raises the possibility that particular carving styles, motifs, and types of objects may have also been mobile across cultural

Africa," (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2011), 518, 597). Another pipe of this kind, held by the British Museum, is attributed to a Xhosa (Gcaleka) maker (registration number Af1905,-.63.a-b).

[110] Riep, "House of the Crocodile," 518.

[111] Ibid.

boundaries.[112] However, regardless of their makers' ethnicities, the form of the headless female pipe carries implications that were potentially meaningful on either side of the borderlands between Sotho and Xhosa communities.

The figurative pipe presents a contrast to the vessels discussed earlier, which were made to hold various kinds of consumable substances. Unlike milk pails or spoons, the pipe is a vessel through which tobacco smoke can pass. The female torso forms the bowl of the pipe. The figure's legs also appear to be one with the pipe, extending outward at an angle that continues the line of the stem. This object's implied functionality conjures a disquieting image of smoke puffing from the miniature body's headless opening. In order for the pipe to be functional, the head-shaped stopper would have to be removed. If objects like *izinkezo* or *amathunga* conjure acts of consumption or gestation, the form of the pipe conjures the act of smoking, and by extension, the even more fundamental act of breathing.

In both the Eastern Cape and Basutoland, pipes were made by male carvers, but were used by both men and women for smoking tobacco.[113] At the turn of the century, tobacco use – whether through smoking or snuff-taking – was ubiquitously ingrained in the cultural life of this region. Sharing tobacco was very often a prelude to quotidian social interactions; it also functioned as a gateway to various kinds of spiritual experiences.[114] Tobacco's mental and sensorial effects likely informed its frequent use in marking various kinds of transitions. People regarded its stimulant effects as a way of clearing the mind, and sharpening one's concentration

[112] Anitra Nettleton, "Personal Objects and the Desire for Individuation," 20. Another example of this would be the widespread representation of *izicoco* (headrings), on objects made by people who were not Zulu.

[113] Karel Nel, "Tobacco Pipe," in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, ed. Tom Phillips (Munich and New York: Prestel), 211.

[114] Ann Wanless, "Public Pleasures: Smoking and Snuff-Taking in Southern Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity*, 128-131; also see Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts," 188.



Figure 2.11. Xhosa artist(s). Tobacco pipe with beaded adornments. Wood, metal, beads, fiber. Early 20th century. 7 ¾ x 2 ½ x ¾ inches. Pitt-Rivers Museum.
Source: Pitt-Rivers Museum.

and acuity.[115] In this context, the removal and replacement of the head-shaped stopper (**Figure 2.3**), which the act of smoking would necessitate, actually aligns with the idea of tobacco use as a practice that refreshed a person's mental state.

However, even pipes that did not have any figurative elements were nonetheless handled and described in ways that anthropomorphized them. For example, in Xhosa, the word *intsila*, which refers to residual oils left in a pipe after smoking, also refers to "dirt, as on an unwashed human body"[116] – almost as if to characterize the pipe itself as a living body that gets dirty. Other words could also sometimes double to describe both pipe features and human anatomy. The term *umbilini*, meaning the inside a cavity, might be used to describe a pipe bowl with a large capacity, or the capacious belly of a large person.[117] This turn of phrase is very much consistent with the form of the Smithsonian pipe, whose bowl literally *is* the figure's belly.

[115] Wanless, 131.

[116] Albert Kropf, *A Kafir-English Dictionary* (Stutterheim, South Africa: Lovedale Mission Press, 1915), 293.

[117] Ibid., 36.

Another parallel between pipes and the human body is to be found in their adornment with beadwork (*ubuhlalu*). As discussed in Chapter One, beaded art forms revolved primarily around the function of body adornment. Not only are extant examples of female figurative pipes often "dressed" with beadwork adornments, like the one in the South African Museum, which wears a pair of beaded earrings, a necklace, and a girdle (**Figure 2.3**).[118] Even the long stems of some non-figurative Xhosa pipes are likewise swathed in beaded adornments (**Figure 2.11**).

These kinds of implied anthropomorphism probably stem from the fact that pipes conventionally functioned as physical extensions of the people who used them. In Xhosa culture, pipes were personal possessions, exclusively used by one owner, with whom they would be buried.[119] Shaw also notes that the mouthpiece of a pipe (known in Xhosa as *ingcaphe*, pl. *izingcaphe*) was a particularly sensitive part of the object, which was taboo for anyone other than its owner to handle. She explains that this was "because, coming as it does in direct contact with his mouth, it is thought to contain something of his spiritual essence, and would therefore be dangerous if it fell into the hands of an enemy."[120] Riep similarly notes that in Basotho culture, "one's 'essence' [*seriti*] can be transferred to inanimate objects through various means, such as prolonged physical contact, or the transfer of bodily fluids."[121] As personal objects for everyday use, pipes clearly fit this description. Hooper also observes that some Xhosa pipe bowls were individually sized based on the thumbs of their intended owners,[122] since a user would need to

[118] Shaw, "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," 298.

[119] Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts," 188.

[120] Shaw, "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," 286-7. Regional taboos regarding individual body matter (such as saliva and body dirt) will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

[121] David Riep, "Hot Women! South Sotho Female Arts in Context," *African Arts*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Autumn 2014), footnote 6, p. 38-9.

[122] Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts," 187.

frequently insert his or her thumb into the bowl, in order to fill it with tobacco. In light of pipes' status as extensions of their users' bodies, the figurative pipe's detachable head-shaped stopper becomes somewhat less alarming. If such a pipe was ever in use, the absent miniature head would literally be replaced by the living, breathing head of the smoking person.

Both the contour and dimensions of the Smithsonian pipe are similar to those of pipes used by Xhosa women, which had longer stems and taller, narrower bowls than pipes used by men.[123] Considering its resemblance to objects known to have been used by women, the figurative pipe's representation of female form could be interpreted as a reference to a hypothetical user. The way that smoke could have passed in and out of the sculpted body mirrors the way in which it would have passed in and out of a user's living body, during the act of smoking. As a representation, the pipe, like Zulu *amathunga*, posits the female body as something more than just an object for visual consumption. Its tactile qualities also frame the female body as a site of embodied experience and subjectivity.

If the figurative pipe form potentially refers to female sensorial experience, then this is very much in line with Colin Murray's observations about Basotho idioms that metaphorically equate smoking with sex. Murray notes in Sotho language "the common reference of the word for tobacco (*kwae*) to penis, such that there is constant potential ambiguity in ordinary speech."[124] Accordingly, talk about smoking could readily be mobilized for euphemistic purposes. For instance, Murray observes that "the request 'Make me smoke' may be used

[123] Hooper, "Some Nguni Crafts," 185.

[124] Colin Murray, "Sex, Smoking and the Shades: A Sotho Symbolic Idiom," in *Religion and Social Change in South Africa*, ed. Michael Whisson and Martin West (Cape Town and London: David Philip and Rex Collings, 1975), 58.

between consenting adults to conceal a sexual arrangement from children,"[125] and cites sayings such as "*Kwae* is a thing smoked in the night by women."[126] In some instances, Xhosa vocabulary also contains subtle analogies between pipes and human sexual anatomy; for instance, the possible usage of *ingcaphe*, the term for a pipe's mouthpiece, as a euphemistic reference to the urethra.[127]

However, figurative pipes also go beyond reference to the female body as a sensory being. The pipe's implicit potential for use by a woman also evokes her participation in social life, and certain formal details frame the represented body as that of a social actor. For example, the beaded adornments worn by many pipe figures refer to forms of beadwork worn by actual women, which inscribed women's bodies in specific, socially legible ways.[128] The figure's position also potentially resonates with regional ideas about acceptable female comportment and politeness. For instance, the way in which the figure's tapering legs extend, as if she is seated with closed legs, recalls some of Elizabeth Perrill's observations about appropriate female conduct in Zulu culture.[129] In her discussion of more recent practices, she describes specific sitting postures by which Zulu women can project an attitude of *hlonipha*, which she characterizes as a combination of politeness, respect, and dignity.[130] One of the postures that she describes is that of sitting with one's legs extended while taking care to keep them together at all

[125] Ibid., 60.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Kropf, 117.

[128] For an excellent analysis of the semiotic functions of Xhosa beadwork, see Gary Van Wyk's article "Illuminated Signs: Style and Meaning in the Beadwork of the Xhosa- and Zulu-Speaking Peoples," *African Arts*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 2003): 12-33, 93-94.

[129] The Zulu were neighbors of both the Xhosa and the Basotho.

[130] Elizabeth Perrill, "Contemporary Zulu Ceramics, 1960s–Present" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2008), 135-6.

times.[131] Along similar lines, Gary Van Wyk has elsewhere interpreted attributes of figurative- and semi-figurative objects from this region as evoking postures and gestures that relate to concepts of *hlonipha*. For instance, he writes that the heads of Zulu spoons "often [lean] forward in the decorous pose required by *hlonipha* customs of respect which women owe their in-laws."[132]

The female pipe form also acknowledges aspects of female spirituality. The ephemeral image of smoke issuing from the top of the female body, and its evocation of the act of breathing, suggest as much, considering that in isiXhosa, the idea of the soul is articulated through that of breath, *umphefumulo*.[133] The possible action of literally lighting a fire inside the core of a female body also resonates with some of Riep's arguments about female roles in Basotho culture. Riep draws an analogy with Robert Farris Thompson's model of opposing "hot" and "cool" aesthetics in African arts,[134] which equates "coolness" with balance, and "heat" with socially disruptive forces.[135] Specifically, Riep uses the concept of "heat" in order to articulate a paradox: that the potentially dangerous "hot" qualities, attributed to Basotho women, are also the means by which women are uniquely able "to directly address the most powerful esoteric forces in Sesotho society and assist in restoring equilibrium."[136] In this context, the act of lighting the pipe could be read as an activation of female spiritual power.

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[131] Ibid.

[132] Van Wyk, "Illuminated Signs," footnote 1, p. 93.

[133] Kropf, 327.

[134] See Robert Farris Thompson, "An Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Arts*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1973): 40-43, 64-67, 89-91.

[135] Riep, "Hot Women!", 24.

[136] Ibid., 26.

My analysis thus far has hinged on the pipe's potential to be activated by its user. Not only does its form evoke mobile, ephemeral imagery, like that of smoke wafting out from inside of a headless body. Its evident functionality also proposes various possible tactile engagements with the human body. However, its merger of functional and female forms takes on further significance in light of the fact that some of these headless pipes appear to have never been smoked, indicating that they may have been created for sale on the curio market.[137]

Here we encounter the same question prompted by certain figurative staffs in Chapter One: if some of the headless pipes were never functional – and perhaps never even intended to be functional – then why retain ostensibly functional forms at all? One possible answer might stem from a deeper understanding of the human body in terms of its functionality, rather than as a static visual object. We have seen how certain kinds of headless objects, which position bodily forms as sites of utility, function more like representations of the human body's capabilities, rather than simply its exterior surfaces.

In the case of feminized tobacco pipes, the body's visual representation also seems to act as a substitute for embodied experience, if more conventional forms of tactile engagement with the object were unlikely. We have seen how Xhosa nonfigurative pipes were in a sense "anthropomorphized" through their daily use, and intimate connections with living bodies. As such, one might argue that functional pipes did not *need* explicit figural attributes to announce their close relationship to their users' bodies, because this relation was being constantly enacted. The figurative form and detachable head so strongly hint at the sculpted body's potential animacy, should the pipe actually be lit. Ironically, though, such figural elaboration may in fact

[137] Shaw, "Native Pipes and Smoking in South Africa," 298; Riep, "House of the Crocodile," 519.

have fulfilled a compensatory role, in the absence of an indigenous user who might have physically engaged with the pipe in a conventional way.

A similar argument could be made about objects like the Zulu *amathunga*, whose corporeal attributes belie the conspicuous absences of certain living bodies. Essential aspects of milk vessels' meaning derived from their handling and use by men, as well as their relation to the actual cattle whose milk they were created to collect. However, during an era when men had already begun to disappear for long stretches, and cattle herds were already on the decline, it is the female figure that remains, figuratively, culturally, and materially.

Vessels carved as headless female bodies thus demonstrate how acts of representing the human form were tied to its embodied existence, and not just its visual appearance. This underlying logic informs the partial nature of these objects' anthropomorphism, which points toward their interdependent relationships with the bodies of their implied users. However, like the staffs in Chapter One, which confuse the ornamented body with the body-as-ornament, these headless vessels exude a sense of uncertainty about the relative importance of visual and tactile modes of sensory engagement. This tension is most clearly evident in instances where the visual articulation of corporeal form appears to encroach upon objects' more conventional tactile functionalities. Chapter Three will further explore this phenomenon, through its focus on a class of objects that even more emphatically express this tension between tactile function and visual form.

Chapter Three

Strange Bodies:
Corporeal Hyperbole and Difference in Nineteenth-Century Lidded Vessels



Figure 3.1. Zulu carver. Lidded vessel. Wood. Early 20th century. 13 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 13 inches. Yale University Art Gallery.
Source: Yale University Art Gallery.



Figure 3.2. Northern Nguni carver. Lidded vessel. Wood. 19th century. 23 x 15 x 15 inches. 15 lbs. Musée du Quai Branly.
Source: Musée du Quai Branly.



Figure 3.3. Zulu carver. Vessel. Wood. Early 20th century. 14 $\frac{11}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{11}{16}$ inches. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.
Source: Peabody Museum.



Figure 3.4. Northern Nguni carver. Lidded vessel. Wood. 19th century. 24 $\frac{13}{16}$ inches high. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This chapter examines a group of elaborately-carved wooden containers from colonial Natal. Zulu carvers began creating these objects for European patrons in the mid-nineteenth century.[138] These are big, chunky vessels with bulging bellies. They crouch low and emphatically upon three or four short legs. Often, their swelling forms are encircled by sets of twisting appendages. Their surfaces buzz with linear motifs created by panels of incised lines, variously oriented. Carved from a single block of wood,[139] their formal complexity is clearly calculated to impress. As a category of objects, they share certain characteristics in common: their dark-treated wood, linear surface patterning, and the basic form of an ovoid core balanced on several legs. Such common elements have led at least one art historian to suggest that they may originate from a single workshop, or even a single carver.[140] However, within these parameters, individual vessels demonstrate a wide and inventive range of formal elaboration and variation (**Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4**).

These objects are confusing, visually and otherwise. Their forms are organic and corporeal, but in a way that resists categorization. Unlike other objects considered in this dissertation, they are legible as neither human nor animal, and they have no clear gender. Their bulbous curves and bizarre limbs fall into a grey area that is neither fully functional nor explicitly representational.

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[138] Anitra Nettleton, "Lidded Vessel," in *Musée du Quai Branly: The Collection: Art from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas*, ed. Yves Le Fur (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 102. While these vessels have in some instances been attributed to Swazi carvers, Nettleton has demonstrated that this class of objects originated in Natal; see Anitra Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity: Gendering 'Master' Pieces of Nineteenth-Century South African Indigenous Arts," *Visual Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012): 225.

[139] Sandra Klopper, "Lidded Vessel," in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, ed. Tom Phillips (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1999), 223.

[140] Ibid.

Their function is hazy. Scholars have alternately described them as milk vessels or as containers for storing tobacco, but most show no physical evidence of having ever contained either substance.[141] Despite these conjectural uses, they were most likely created as collectible commodities for a European market.[142] Some appeared or were even made specifically for display at European expositions in London and Paris during the 1860s.[143]

While this genre of containers was a new one for its time, Anitra Nettleton has suggested that the carvers who created them drew upon formal elements derived from two older classes of functional objects, namely snuff boxes and milk pails.[144] Her argument for these possible prototypes suggests one reason why the lidded vessels have persistently been associated with both milk and tobacco. It is possible to find many examples of both snuff and milk containers, which share various attributes with the larger, more elaborate vessels. As is evident from one horn snuff box from the mid- to late- nineteenth century (**Figure 3.5**), the massive lidded vessels incorporate similar linear surface patterning, as well as the shape of some snuff boxes. However, they do so at a greatly magnified scale. The large vessel (**Figure 3.2**), which now stands akimbo in the Musée du Quai Branly, is nearly ten times the size of the small snuff box (**Figure 3.5**). While many milk pails from the nineteenth century are closer in scale (**Figure 3.6**), their contours tend to be simpler, and their surface decoration less extensive than the lidded

[141] Ibid.

[142] In support of this point, Nettleton has observed that while many lidded vessels are to be found in European and American collections, these types of objects are virtually absent from ethnographic collections assembled in South Africa prior to the twentieth century; see Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity," 227.

[143] These were the 1862 International Exhibition in London and the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris; see Nettleton, "Lidded Vessel," 102.

[144] Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity," 225, 227.



Figure 3.5. Zulu carver. Snuff box. Horn. Mid- to late- 19th century. 2 ½ x 1 ½ inches. American Museum of Natural History, New York.
Source: American Museum of Natural History.



Figure 3.6. Zulu carver. Milk vessel (*Ithunga*). Wood. Late 19th or early 20th century. 17 x 6 x 5 ½ inches. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

containers, with their extraneous "arms" and sinuous appendages. If the carvers of the lidded vessels were indeed manipulating forms drawn from existing types of containers, then their efforts involved creative acts of distortion and exaggeration, as they dramatically scaled up these forms, elaborated upon them, and fused elements from previously distinct types of objects.

Given their status as objects of cross-cultural trade, the lidded vessels' peculiar formal qualities can arguably be linked to more abstract notions of otherness, curiosity, and movement across cultural boundaries. In this chapter, I specifically consider how these vessels' ambiguous and outlandish anthropomorphism relates to such broader ideas. I argue that their vague, distorted body-like forms are one manifestation of larger cultural currents, which positioned the body as a site where engagements with difference could be materially expressed. In nineteenth-century South Africa, the body's surface, its image, and its material environment were all sites of experimentation and conflict. To place the lidded vessels in perspective, I relate them to three contemporaneous areas where bodily form had become a site for negotiating ideas about difference. These are the domains of everyday material culture associated with the body; the body itself as a site of display or comportment; and pictorial images of the body.

As eccentric relatives to both milk pails and snuff boxes, the lidded vessels ostensibly belong to quotidian categories of domestic and personal objects, even if only at the far fringes. Both of these types of objects were defined by their everyday use, and their close tactile relationships to human bodies. In Zulu pastoral communities, milk pails were used daily by men to collect milk from cows. Their curvilinear contours, projections, and surface designs were not simply ornamental, but also served the practical purpose of preventing the milk pail from

slipping, as a user held it between his knees.[145] Snuff boxes were similarly embedded in the daily routines and social lives of their users, who generally carried these objects close or even wore them on their person.[146] The lidded vessels' ambiguous corporeal forms and indeterminate function thus become particularly meaningful when we consider the instability of everyday objects – particularly those associated with the body – in southern Africa during the nineteenth century.

Arjun Appadurai has described how the values and meanings of objects can shift when they move across cultural boundaries, commenting that "objects circulate in different *regimes of value* in space and time."[147] Appadurai uses this concept of "regimes of value" to articulate how the value and meaning of objects, rather than being absolute or intrinsic, are contingent upon specific social and historical circumstances in which they are implicated. Many of his examples concern objects traveling across great distances, as many of the lidded vessels eventually did.

However, in nineteenth-century southern Africa, objects did not even need to travel far to be subject to various systems of value, often simultaneously. This environment might be aptly described as a "contact zone," to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's term for a "[social space] where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power."[148] In the 1860s, the British colony of Natal, where the lidded vessels

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[145] Karel Nel, "Migratory Aesthetics: The Art of the Cattle Cultures of Southern Africa," in *The Art of Daily Life: Portable Objects from Southern Africa*, ed. Constantine Petridis (Cleveland and Milan: Cleveland Museum of Art and 5 Continents, 2011), 20.

[146] Ann Wanless, "Public Pleasures: Smoking and Snuff-Taking in Southern Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991), 127, 133.

[147] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.

[148] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 34.

originated, was just such a space. Within a small geographical area, newly-arrived Africans, displaced by upheavals in the Zulu kingdom to the north, coexisted with other Nguni-speakers with longer histories in this territory. Meanwhile, a small minority of white settlers were in the process of asserting their control over the colony's economy and the majority of its land. In 1860, indentured laborers began arriving from India to work on the region's sugar plantations; they would soon form another significant sector of the population.[149]

Similar processes of cultural convergence were underway in southeast Africa more broadly. Enclaves that had recently come under the control of British and Afrikaners, like the Natal colony, the Boer Republics, and parts of the Eastern Cape, existed in close proximity to independent African states, including the Tswana, Venda, Swazi, Zulu and Mpondo chiefdoms.[150] One consequence of this situation was that people from all groups were progressively exposed to foreign forms of material culture. In many of these contact zones, trade was one of the earliest nexuses of cross-cultural interaction.[151] African involvement in labor markets, as well as Christian missionary activity, were further factors that drove people's increasing interaction with objects and materials of heterogeneous origins.[152] In the realm of everyday material culture, such processes of cultural convergence found many tangible expressions.

One object that very literally embodies the idea of divergent "regimes of value" is a snuff box carved from horn by a now unknown Zulu carver. Its lid is devised from a silver coin that

[149] Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 97, 100.

[150] Ibid., 109.

[151] Ibid., 71.

[152] Ibid., 71, 75, 99-100.



Figure 3.7. Zulu carver. Snuff box. Ivory, horn, silver coin. Late 19th century. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.
Source: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

depicts Queen Victoria (**Figure 3.7**). Currency is an object whose overt investment with value, literally written on its surface, often seems unassailable. However, this container confronts us with the materiality of money, through its maker's choice to privilege the coin's form over its monetary value. The carver who made this vessel drew even more emphasis to the coin's pictorial content by reiterating the form of the crown in the dark inlay that runs around the neck of the container.[153] This formal play echoes, in three dimensions, the shape of the image that is imprinted on the surface of the coin. The inlaid "crown" sits atop the sphere of the vessel as Victoria's crown sits on her head.[154] Nevertheless, this choice does not permanently vacate the

[153] Sharon Patton, Bryna Freyer, and Migs Grove, "Snuff Container," in *Treasures 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2008), 100.

[154] Similar assimilations of coins to personal objects and body adornment, accompanied by formal play with imagery of the head, can be found elsewhere in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century southeast Africa. Anitra Nettleton

coin of its monetary value, so much as call attention to the simultaneous presence of other values, in this case its aesthetic and material properties.[155]

The snuff box is not unique in this respect. In nineteenth-century southern Africa, it was common for material objects to lay claim to an unstable assortment of potential meanings, which were both simultaneously present and contradictory. The result was that while certain everyday objects became visible, or functional – or useless – in new ways, the semiotic value of individual objects became somewhat unhinged and destabilized. Often functionality was at the heart of such uncertainties. The lidded vessels represent one good example, as fusions of forms drawn from useful objects, but transposed into new things that were apparently intended more for visual consumption than physical use.

If indigenous types of household objects were being creatively reimagined and modified to become collectible objects for European patrons, then the same could be said for many Western domestic forms when they entered southern Africa in ever-increasing numbers during the nineteenth century. One subset of objects that manifest this creativity is a group of nineteenth-century wooden chairs from the Natal colony and the Zulu kingdom (**Figures 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11**).

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discusses such a set of objects originating from the Eastern Cape, further south, in her recent article "Of Severed Heads and Snuff Boxes: 'Survivance' and Beaded Bodies in the Eastern Cape, 1897-1934," *African Arts*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2015): 22-33.

[155] For another example of simultaneous systems of value in southern Africa, which also concerns money, see Jean and John Comaroff's discussion of the interplay between currency and cattle as distinct systems of measuring wealth, which coexisted in nineteenth-century Tswana communities: Jean and John Comaroff, "Goodly Beasts, Beastly Goods: Cattle and Commodities in a South African Context," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1990): 195-216. David Graeber also addresses the historically widespread phenomenon of conflation between currency and objects of adornment in his article "Beads and Money: Notes Toward a Theory of Wealth and Power," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1996): 4-24.



Figure 3.8. Unknown carver. Chair which may have belonged to Cetewayo. Wood. 19th century. Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg.
Source: Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin, "Maker, Material and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, Vol. 7 (2013): 20.



Figure 3.9. Unknown carver. Chair which may have belonged to Dingane. Wood. 19th century. Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg.
Source: KwaZulu Cultural Museum, *Zulu Treasures: Of Kings and Commoners: A Celebration of the Material Culture of the Zulu People* (Ulundi and Durban: KwaZulu Cultural Museum and the Local History Museums, 1996), 59.

Two such chairs, shown here, may have passed through the possession of Zulu kings Dingane (r. 1828-1840) and Cetewayo (r. 1872-1879). One of these is thought to have been gifted to Cetewayo by a missionary in 1858 (**Figure 3.8**); a second may have belonged to the earlier ruler Dingane (**Figure 3.9**), although neither attribution is certain.[156] In the Zulu Kingdom, mentions of European-style chairs (both European-made objects and indigenously-

[156] Sandra Klopper, "Carvers, Kings and Thrones in Nineteenth Century Zululand," in *African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and W.D. Hammond-Tooke (Johannesburg: A.D. Donker, 1989), 49, 55-57.

made versions) appear in accounts dating at least as far back as the early nineteenth century.[157] However, in this context, they were inscribed as prestige items, rather than as everyday domestic furniture; woven mats were the more conventional objects on which to sit.[158] Only the king was permitted to own or sit in chairs, but he apparently did so very rarely.[159]

In keeping with these observations, the scoliotic curvature of Cetewayo's chair (**Figure 3.8**) does not appear particularly hospitable to a sitter. It seems even less so for Cetewayo, who was by all accounts an exceptionally large person. Elements of the chair supposedly belonging to Dingane (**Figure 3.9**) also suggest that its carver's interest in experimentation with foreign forms took precedence over the physical functionality of the finished object. Nineteenth-century British writing from Natal explicitly contrasts Western methods of building furniture, which favored joining together separate pieces of wood, with the indigenous approach of carving the entire article from a single block.[160] In this case, the thick lattice pattern of the seat back, laboriously rendered from a single piece, could be a formal imitation, in wood, of fibrous materials, which might be more conventionally woven together as caning on Victorian chairs.

Other chairs have been attributed to Zulu carvers working further south in Natal, on behalf of a mix of African and European patrons.[161] Some of these objects *were* no doubt functional pieces of furniture. However, others indicate that indigenous renditions of Western

[157] Ibid., 53, 58.

[158] Ibid., 65.

[159] Ibid., 51, 65.

[160] Robert Mann, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Natal Contribution to the International Exhibition of 1862* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1862), 17.

[161] Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin, "Maker, Material, and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, Vol. 7 (2013): 15.



Figure 3.10. Unknown carver (possibly Unodabula). Chair. Wood. Mid-19th century. British Museum. Source: Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin, "Maker, Material and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin*, Vol. 7 (2013): 16.



Figure 3.11. Unknown carver. Chair. Wood. 19th century. Museum Africa, Johannesburg. Source: KwaZulu Cultural Museum, *Zulu Treasures: Of Kings and Commoners: A Celebration of the Material Culture of the Zulu People* (Ulundi and Durban: KwaZulu Cultural Museum and the Local History Museums, 1996), 59.

objects may themselves have formed a sub-genre of souvenir objects that were being marketed to European patrons around this time. One such chair (**Figure 3.10**), now in the British museum, was displayed at the 1862 Exhibition in London, alongside other intricately carved wooden objects from Natal, which were specifically commissioned for that purpose.[162] In their report on this object, Catherine Elliott, Caroline Cartwright, and Philip Kevin emphasize its dubious functionality, observing that "[i]ts construction and inherent fragility make the chair more like a sculpture than an item of furniture."[163] The chair's questionable ability to actually bear the

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.



Figure 3.12. Zulu carver. Cup carved from stone. Steatite (soapstone). 19th century. British Museum. Source: British Museum.

weight of a body is underscored by the thin lines of its limbs and spines, and the fact that all four legs do not even rest on the ground all at the same time. Another relatively simple chair, now at Museum Africa in Johannesburg, appears similarly frail, its small seat perched atop three slender legs (**Figure 3.11**).

The British Museum chair is not the only object that was apparently created to illustrate indigenous craftsmanship applied to Western quotidian forms. In his inventory of objects from Natal at the 1862 Exhibition, Mann includes several works by African craftsmen, which he characterizes as "rude imitations of objects […] encountered among white men."[164] One of the objects that he mentions, now also at the British Museum, is a teacup carved from soapstone (**Figure 3.12**), whose panels of incised lines echo the surface treatments of lidded vessels and snuff containers discussed above.

[164] Mann, 22.

Questions of utility go deeper than simple novelty, however. They point toward ways in which "functional" quotidian objects fit into the everyday world. Daniel Miller has argued that the most mundane objects encountered in the course of everyday life can have the most profound impact upon structuring human identities, precisely because those objects are not always noticed. Miller comments that "[t]he less aware we are of [objects], the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge."[165] According to Miller, the unconscious structuring presence of everyday objects "implies that much of what we are exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us."[166] Furthermore, he suggests that the structures and spaces created by the most mundane objects play a role in defining larger categories of social identity. He argues, "We are brought up with the expectations characteristic of our particular social group largely through what we learn in our engagement with the relationships found between everyday things."[167] And he concludes that "these practical taxonomies, these orders of everyday life […] educate people into the normative orders and expectations of their society."[168]

Jean and John Comaroff have demonstrated how such concerns were at the heart of European missionary efforts to introduce Western models of domesticity among the Tswana during the nineteenth century. Their analysis highlights the importance of everyday objects in this process, because of the ways in which things like furniture and home goods might structure

[165] Daniel Miller, "Introduction," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2005), 5.

[166] Ibid., 5.

[167] Ibid., 6.

[168] Ibid.

everyday routines, modes of living, and family organization. Imported domestic goods facilitated the type of lifestyle that missionaries wished to promote among members of the church. Accordingly, "certain objects […] took on the moral weight of 'home': double divans and mattresses, closets, candles, and soap became privileged signs of respectability."[169] Scale and portability were a further factor that made such commodities potent as material agents of a particular lifestyle. The Comaroffs note that while Tswana people were slower to embrace European architectural forms, they enthusiastically acquired and experimented with smaller, more mobile domestic goods.[170] However, in many cases, even smaller objects eventually had an impact on their broader environment, for instance as larger furnishings like beds prompted builders to change how they chose to subdivide interior spaces.[171]

Such ripple effects did not only happen spatially, however. Quotidian objects like beds could also have concrete effects on a corporeal level. Like other tactile objects encountered in everyday life, furniture has the capacity to facilitate, regulate, and delimit various kinds of bodily practices.[172] For example, one might contrast beds, divans, and mattresses with headrests (**Figure 3.13**), which have a much longer history as part of indigenous sleeping practices throughout southern Africa. In Natal and Zululand, for instance, the older, more conventional manner of sleeping was on mats on the floor, often with the use of a head rest. Positioned under

[169] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 298.

[170] Ibid., 303.

[171] Ibid., 284.

[172] In his study of consumerism and toiletries in twentieth-century Zimbabwe, Timothy Burke similarly argues that products like soap or cosmetics are inescapably entangled with broader ideas about hygiene, bodily comportment, and other classes of quotidian objects, like clothing, which closely relate to the human body. See Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.





Figure 3.13 (left). Zulu carver. Head rest. Wood. 19th century. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

Figure 3.14 (right). J.E. Middlebrook. "A study in hairdressing." Photograph depicting the hairstyle of a married Zulu woman. 1870s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Photograph Study Collection.
Source: Virginia-Lee Webb, "Fact and Fiction: Nineteenth-Century Photographs of the Zulu," *African Arts*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan. 1992): 59.

one's head or neck, a headrest enabled its user to maintain a body position that would protect intricate hairstyles while sleeping.[173] Hair, in turn, played an important role in marking social status, as discussed in Chapter One with *izicoco*. Upon marrying, Zulu men and women adopted distinctive hair styles, which were complex and time-consuming to construct[174] (**Figure 3.14**). In contrast to the solid support of a head rest, the soft surfaces of beds and pillows, into which head and hair would sink, did not physically permit the maintenance of such hair styles. Furniture, in this way, could physically enforce Western ideas about appropriate self-

[173] Anitra Nettleton, *African Dream Machines: Style, Identity and Meaning of African Headrests* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 357.

[174] Mary Jo Arnoldi, "Crowning Glories: The Head and the Hair," in *Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head*, ed. Mary Jo Arnoldi and Christine Mullen Kreamer (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 55-56; Karel Nel, "Headrests and Hairpins: Signifying More than Status," in *Hair in African Art and Culture*, ed. Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman (New York and Munich: Museum for African Art and Prestel), 152.

presentation, which did not include coiffures of this kind. Hair's role as a visual indicator of marital status also indicates how European attempts to police Africans' personal presentation often had broader ramifications for basic social institutions like marriage.[175]

Comaroff and Comaroff make very similar arguments about the status of clothing as a material object with potential to shape or enforce specific modes of subjectivity. They detail how missionaries' emphatic promotion of Western dress "made the 'native' body a terrain on which the battle for selfhood was to be fought, on which personal identity was to be re-formed, re-placed, re-inhabited."[176] Clothing's importance in this regard stems from that of the body itself as a physical entity that is also socially legible. Jean Comaroff, for instance, has elsewhere described the body as the "primary mediator between the self and the sociocultural context."[177]

In situations of colonization and intercultural contact, Hildi Hendrickson argues that the body's signifying potential becomes even more highly charged. She comments that even "in the absence of spoken language, colonial encounters can be seen as a particular kind of semiotic event in which a visual language of bodily forms is especially critical."[178] Hendrickson emphasizes the body's visibility as "a signifier that is shared cross-culturally yet assigned contrasting, simultaneous meanings."[179] However, she acknowledges that while vision may

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[175] In his discussion of missionary albums compiled in Natal, Michael Godby has drawn attention to a recurring motif, which juxtaposes and contrasts photographs of traditional Zulu weddings with images of Christian weddings. See Michael Godby, "The Photograph Album of an Unknown American Missionary in Natal, c. 1930: The Good News and the Bad," *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (2009): 361-2.

[176] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2*, 220.

[177] Jean Comaroff, "Bodily Reform as Historical Practice: The Semantics of Resistance in Modern South Africa," *International Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 20 (1985): 541.

[178] Hildi Hendrickson, "Introduction," in *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Hildi Hendrickson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 15.

[179] Ibid.

render the body's form universally accessible, the simple fact of visibility cannot make the body legible in any universal or consistent way. The same polysemic qualities that make the body such a potent signifier also make it semantically fraught and a potential site of confusion and slippage.

In nineteenth-century Natal and elsewhere in southern Africa, this ambivalence certainly extended to clothing. For instance, although Western garments were ever more widely adopted by Africans during the nineteenth century, their usage proved much more complicated and variable than any simple binary distinction between "Western" and "indigenous" categories of dress might adequately express. Instead, writers like the Comaroffs describe a spectrum of approaches to Western clothing: "Some turned their backs on it entirely until they could do so no longer. Others put it on enthusiastically, and in a manner recognizably orthodox. But the most immediate and visible response – and for many decades, that of the great majority – was somewhere in between."[180] Their characterization of Tswana responses to Western clothing as a bell curve, with the majority "somewhere in between", rings true throughout the broader region as well.

In many cases, Africans selectively adopted imported commodities in ways that fit in with local tastes and aesthetic preferences. The nineteenth-century bead trade provides many examples of such appropriations. Although glass beads had a long history in southeastern Africa, the mid-nineteenth century marked a turning point, as the growing presence of European traders caused the market to be flooded with beads to an unprecedented degree.[181] Among Nguni

[180] Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2*, 241.

[181] Sandra Klopper, "From Adornment to Artefact to Art: Historical Perspectives on Southeast African Beadwork," in *South-East African Beadwork, 1850-1910*, ed. Michael Stevenson and Michael Graham-Stewart (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 2000), 25.



Figure 3.15. Xhosa or Mfengu artist. Collar (*Ingqosha*). Beads, fiber, buttons, leather. 19th or early 20th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

groups, this influx of beads allowed existing forms of beaded art – especially beaded textiles and body adornments – to flourish.[182] However, Nguni people were far from passive consumers. In the Eastern Cape, Xhosa buyers' preferences for certain sizes and colors of beads, and their purposeful buying based on such criteria, are well documented in nineteenth-century sources.[183] Gary Van Wyk has elsewhere described how color symbolism in Xhosa religious and ceremonial contexts informed their selection and usage of red and white beads. [184] He also discusses how the iridescent shine of mother-of-pearl buttons, obtained from European traders, evoked

[182] Carol Kaufmann, "The Bead Rush: Development of the Nineteenth-Century Bead Trade from Cape Town to King William's Town," in *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape*, ed. Emma Bedford (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1993), 48.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Gary Van Wyk, "Illuminated Signs: Style and Meaning in the Beadwork of the Xhosa- and Zulu-Speaking Peoples," *African Arts*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 2003): 16-19.

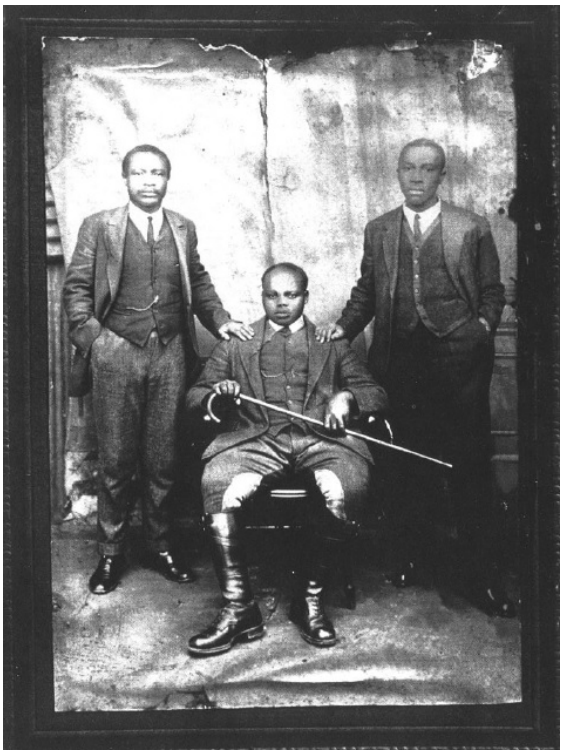


Figure 3.16. Unknown photographer. Photograph of Ezekiel Tokelo Nkole and his friends. Silver gelatin print. Johannesburg, 1900. Private collection. From Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950*. Source: Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, ed. N'Goné Fall et al. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 68-75.

otherworldly associations for Xhosa viewers.[185] Such connotations prompted Xhosa women to use large numbers of these buttons as ornamental elements of beaded jewelry and textiles (**Figure 3.15**), where "each gleaming iteration added power within an additive aesthetic."[186] Similarly, nineteenth-century Zulu buyers often favored types of beads that had historically been used to indicate high social status. One British traveler, who visited Zululand shortly after the fall of the Zulu kingdom, commented that when he and his companions traded beads with Zulu

[185] Ibid., 19.

[186] Ibid.

women, their customers were most interested in a specific type of red bead, whose use had previously been reserved for royal women.[187]

In other cases, Africans chose to deploy Western clothing and material culture in more orthodox ways for pragmatic reasons. Klopper suggests as much in her discussion about the motif of riding breeches, which appear in many photographic portraits of well-to-do black sitters taken around the turn of the century (**Figure 3.16**). She argues that African elites adopted sartorial indices of British gentility as a way of asserting their own status within colonial society, both in relation to other Africans and to Europeans.[188] Some of the images that she cites depict members of the Zulu royal family.[189] Other photographs, which originate from Kimberly and Johannesburg, depict members of a small black urban middle class, which had emerged in the late nineteenth century. John Peffer observes that this latter group of sitters, whose images were brought to light by Santu Mofokeng,[190] were "the first to adapt to and resist, with modern means, the colonial encroachment upon African lands and lives. They were the early founders of the movement that became the African National Congress, and it was they who had initiated the

[187] Walter Robert Ludlow, *Zululand and Cetewayo; Containing an Account of Zulu Customs, Manners, and Habits, After a Short Residence in Their Kraals, with Portrait of Cetewayo, and 28 Illustrations from Original Drawings* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1882), 78.

[188] Sandra Klopper, "Gentlemen at Leisure: Riding Breeches in the Photographic Portrait Images of Black South African Men," in *Art and the British Empire*, ed. Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 330-1.

[189] Klopper points out that in the Zulu kingdom, as in the British empire, the body, clothing, and adornment all played a major role in designating social status in ways that were both highly specific and strictly controlled – for instance, permission to wear certain materials was often limited to particular groups of people based on their level of association with the Zulu royal family. In this context, she comments that colonial uses of European clothing to differentiate social statuses, despite their ostensible differences from traditional modes of attire, would have resonated strongly with these older sensibilities. See Klopper, "Gentlemen at Leisure," 332.

[190] See Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, ed. Pascal Martin Saint Léon, N'Goné Fall, Frédérique Chapuis, et al. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 68-75.

struggle against racial discrimination even before apartheid."[191] In the 1860s, a similar class of mission-educated Africans was already forming in Natal. These people "adopted Western practices, taking English names, learning the English language, wearing imported clothes, buying land from white settlers, and absorbing Christian ideas of social and political justice."[192] Western clothing worn in a conventional way was thus one available means by which people could assert themselves and achieve social mobility within the bounds of colonial society.[193]

However, if Western clothing offered elites an embodied language for communicating or negotiating social status, many other Africans adopted Western garments in ways that turned this language on its head, and called its legibility into question. In his study of migrant labor in southern Africa, Patrick Harries cites incredulous commentaries, by European observers, concerning African migrants' uses of imported clothing and other objects. Harries writes that "[f]rock coats and especially waistcoats and smoking jackets were often worn without a shirt; hats and bonnets were popular, as were canes and umbrellas. Men who could not write or tell time bought pens and nickel and silver watches."[194] European writings from nineteenth-century southern Africa are full of similar descriptions, brimming with anxiety about the redefinition of everyday objects and garments whose function could no longer be taken for granted. These writers generally fail to acknowledge the wide range of motivations that informed Africans'

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[191] John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 278.

[192] Thompson, L., 99.

[193] Clothing offered similar possibilities for white people in the British empire. Helen Callaway has described how British colonial officials and bureaucrats, many of whom did not come from the uppermost classes in Britain, embraced the formal dress and social rituals of English elites, as a way of claiming higher social status to which they aspired. See Helen Callaway, "Dressing for Dinner in the Bush: Rituals of Self-Definition and British Imperial Authority," in *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*, ed. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher (New York: Berg, 1992), 235.

[194] Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 174.

sartorial choices during this era. However, their commentaries do clearly convey a sense that the meaning and proper usage of clothing and other quotidian objects were very much open to question. Similar observations could be made about European appropriations of indigenous types of objects and dress; for instance, as forms of body adornment, like beadwork (**Figure 3.15**), were collected as "artifacts",[195] or as tactile objects like head rests were displaced by beds, or re-inscribed as collectible objects for visual consumption.

Most of the examples that I have cited so far are drawn from existing classes of objects, whose previously stable meanings were called into question through circumstances of culture contact. One characteristic that distinguishes the lidded vessel genre from these others is the fact that it was actually a product of the mid-nineteenth century. As such, the odd multi-functionality of certain vessels seems particularly resonant with their larger cultural context, in which many objects were open to multiple, contradictory uses. One such vessel has two sets of legs (**Figure 3.17**). Like many of its fellows, its aubergine-shaped core sits on four legs, and tapers upward to culminate in a round lid. However, extending unexpectedly from the crown of the lid is another tripod formation of legs, on which the vessel could also stand if inverted. When read as a body-morphic form, and compared with other lidded vessels, this object resembles the bottom half of a body, distortedly reflected over a vertical mid-line, to become all legs and no head. Inverting the vessel to stand on its narrower, tripod side might undermine its ostensible function as a container, given the placement of the lid. However, the tripod still leaves open the possibility of multiple uses; there is no single orientation that is absolutely correct.

Nettleton makes similar observations about an idiosyncratic object consisting of three attached containers, which the British Museum catalogs as a vessel for sour milk (**Figure 3.18**).

[195] Klopper, "From Adornment to Artefact to Art," 9.



Figure 3.17. Zulu carver. Lidded vessel (milk pail). Wood. 19th century. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.



Figure 3.18. Zulu carver. Treble pot for sour milk. Wood. 19th century. British Museum.
Source: British Museum.

It cannot exactly be said to belong to the lidded vessel genre. However, it is nonetheless associated with the vessels by virtue of its surface treatment, its wildly unconventional form, and its links to other carved objects made for display at the 1862 International Exhibition. Because the cylindrical vessels on either side open in a different direction from the mouth of the central, conical one, Nettleton points out that it would have been functionally impossible for all three parts to be in use at the same time.[196] She attributes this multi-functionality, which clearly borders on non-functionality, to the carver's focus on creating an elaborate object to showcase highly skillful carving.[197] She also suggests that carvers working for a tourist market in some cases created objects whose deliberately bizarre forms were calculated to appeal to Westerners' curiosity about conspicuously alien forms of material culture.[198] However, an additional argument can be made that such inbuilt confusion about multiple functions, which cancel each other out, can be related to other examples we have seen, in which various mutually exclusive use-values coexist within a single object.

Nineteenth-century practices related to clothing, coiffure and comportment thus demonstrate how the body itself was a site where cultural difference and social categories were actively being negotiated. In this context, it should come as no surprise that pictorial images of the body from this era reveal many of the same tensions between hypervisibility and illegibility, over-abundance of meaning and resistance to categorization. In the 1860s, two-dimensional figurative imagery was still relatively new in many parts of southeast Africa. Prints and even a few painted images began to arrive with European missionaries and travelers during the first

[196] Nettleton, "In Pursuit of Virtuosity," 228.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid.

quarter of the nineteenth century. The slightly later appearance of photography studios, and the subsequent development of ever more accessible photographic technologies, in the mid- and late nineteenth century, further drove the integration of pictorial imagery into the everyday world.[199]

Scholarship on African art has habitually cordoned off discussions of two-dimensional pictorial media from studies of "traditional" media such as wood carving. However, I would argue that the categories of figuration and novelty both offer compelling reasons to draw more explicit connections between images, three-dimensional objects, and the influx of imported commodities that entered southern Africa in the nineteenth century. When indigenous vocabularies emerged for discussing figurative art, they did not distinguish between flat and dimensional imagery. In Zulu, for instance, the term *isithombe* came to indicate either, suggesting that in this cultural context, distinctions between different forms of figurative imagery held less importance than they do in Western art traditions.[200]

Furthermore, although they are rarely discussed in the same breath, photographs from the mid-nineteenth century share many of the formal qualities that distinguish the lidded vessels: distortion of anthropomorphic forms, play with changes in scale, and visual hyperbole. It is important to remember that photography was a novel medium, as much as the lidded vessels were a novel class of objects. Photography entered southern Africa alongside other kinds of material objects that acted upon bodies and redefined the visual coordinates of their social legibility. Replicable media like photography and print enabled the body to be manipulated and

[199] To date, the most detailed account of early photography in South Africa is Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield's *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginnings to the End of 1870* (Cape Town: T. McNally, 1970).

[200] My thinking here is very much indebted to Stephen Sprague's analysis of photography's relationship to older, indigenous art forms in twentieth-century Yoruba communities. See Stephen Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," *African Arts*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Nov. 1978): 52-59, 107.



Figure 3.19. Robert James Mann (?). Portrait of a Zulu man wearing a head ring (*isicoco*). Photograph. 1860s. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Source: Killie Campbell Africana Library.

estranged from its subject in unprecedented ways. Real bodies could now be scaled down, frozen in place, and multiplied, becoming mobile and possess-able in ways not previously possible. One could hold an entire body in hand, in the form of a *carte de visite*. Bodies could be truncated through pictorial conventions that only offered a partial view. The medallion format of one small photograph from 1860s Natal (**Figure 3.19**) could easily be likened to coins, another early class of imported objects upon which some people encountered figurative imagery for the first time.[201]

In her study of "native portraits" shot by studio photographers in 1870s Kimberly, Tamar Garb has demonstrated how such photographs provided a visual means of negotiating cultural difference through imaging the body. By "native portraits," Garb refers to "figural studies of

[201] Paul Landau, "An Amazing Distance: People and Pictures in Africa," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11-12.

anonymous Africans in 'traditional' guises."[202] She argues, "it was during the mid nineteenth century that the idea of a 'tribal' body as both photogenic and profitable emerged and it was then that the terms were set for consolidation of the image of the 'authentic native,' dressed in traditional garb."[203] Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, photographs from successive decades reveal the gradual emergence and solidification of recognizable figural types, such as the Zulu warrior (**Figures 3.20 and 3.21**). However, rather than documenting ethnic categories that already existed, Garb argues that photography was a site where these categories were in the process of being formed.

Nineteenth-century European attempts to use photography to construct human taxonomies are well-documented. Allan Sekula has famously explicated how photographs were used in the service of policing.[204] Elizabeth Edwards details photography's uses in the service of anthropology, where images were often mobilized to support pseudo-scientific theories of racial hierarchy.[205] In South Africa specifically, it is hard not to view nineteenth-century ethnic categories through the lens of twentieth-century apartheid, which used photography to obsessively police the boundaries of ethnic and racial categories whose fixity was presumed. However, present-day ethnic categories were much more fluid in the nineteenth century; concepts like "Zulu" or "Sotho" or "Xhosa" were still under construction.

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[202] Tamar Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus: Kimberly and the Case of the Cartes de Visite," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 56.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, Vol. 39 (Dec. 1986): 3-64.

[205] Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).



Figure 3.20. Gray Brothers. Photograph inscribed "Zulu / Young Warrior in fighting order, and in skin Kaross. Armed with hatchet and assegai". Carte de visite. 1870s. Walther Collection.
Source: Tamar Garb, ed., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 60.



Figure 3.21. Samuel Baylis Barnard. Photograph inscribed "Zulu kaffir." Albumen print. Late 19th century. Walther Collection.
Source: Tamar Garb, ed., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 151.

Accordingly, early photographic attempts to envision ethnic types were fairly messy. Virginia-Lee Webb has called attention to the elaborate staging that went into many images of "the Zulu" (**Figure 3.22**), as well as the extensive manipulation that finished photographs subsequently underwent as they were reproduced, circulated, and inscribed with text.[206] Garb similarly highlights the theatrical poses and imaginative props that went into creating "native portraits"; she also notes the extent to which conventions for depicting ethnically-defined

[206] Virginia-Lee Webb, "Fact and Fiction: Nineteenth-Century Photographs of the Zulu," *African Arts*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan. 1992): 50-59, 98-99.



Figure 3.22. Zulu men and women posing to be photographed by a monk from the German Trappist Mission. Mariannhill, Natal, South Africa. Albumen print. Circa 1896. Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford.
Source: Pitt-Rivers Museum.



Figure 3.23. J. Barnett & Co. "Young Xosa Woman in Costume; Wood Bowls and Gourd Container Nearby." Photograph. Late nineteenth century. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
Source: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

categories of people bled into other kinds of figural tropes, such as European models for depicting the female nude[207] (**Figure 3.23**).

But however spurious their origins, as figural types evolved over time, they began to have an inevitable effect upon the bodies and identities that they purportedly represented. Hlonipha Mokoena has recently argued that such imagery, which had become ubiquitous by the late nineteenth century, played a critical role in shaping larger ideas about Zulu ethnicity and identity. Mokoena asserts that Zulu people self-consciously mobilized visual stereotypes, and the idea of the "Zulu" body as spectacle, in the service of their own self-fashioning.[208] Images were not the only cultural arena in which attempts to categorize different types of people played a generative role in producing and reifying ethnic identities. For instance, a similar process was underway in the realm of language. In many cases, the impetus to strictly distinguish Xhosa from Zulu, for instance, or Tswana from Sotho, came from missionaries' efforts to compile dictionaries, as they sought to translate between local languages and English.[209]

Like photographs, objects could and did serve as visual indices for representing and categorizing difference in cross-cultural contexts. The lidded vessels' display at international exhibitions in London and Paris during the 1860s underscores this point. Annie Coombes argues that such contexts positioned art objects or "artifacts" as metonymical representations of whole cultures.[210] Displays of objects from around the world were spatially organized and

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[207] Garb, 61.

[208] Hlonipha Mokoena, "'Being Zulu': A History in Portraits," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 104-112.

[209] For an in-depth study of these issues with respect to isiXhosa and isiZulu, see Rachel Gilmour's *Grammars of Colonialism: Representing Languages in Colonial South Africa* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006).

[210] See Annie Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

compartmentalized based on their geographical origins, allowing visitors to physically move through a world (or an empire) in miniature. Objects were thus implicated in attempts to categorize African cultures, in a way that foreshadows Sidney Kasfir's more recent criticism of the "one tribe one style" paradigm in African art scholarship.[211]

Exhibition contexts sometimes conflated objects like the lidded vessels with actual bodies. Many exhibitions in Europe included live displays of colonized people, in addition to displays of objects. Anne Maxwell has written that such exhibits were one of the most popular attractions at world's fairs, and that they "drew massive crowds."[212] Maxwell also explicitly likens colonial photography to live exhibitions of this kind, by pointing out that both of these cultural forms sought to make sense of the foreign "using a language that was predominantly visual,"[213] and which, more specifically, was focused on displaying and visualizing the human body.

The exhibition context also brings up the issue of commodity status, which is relevant to most of the objects and images discussed in this chapter. International exhibitions were a venue for the spectacular display of products and riches from Europe's colonial holdings around the world. In many ways, their format was similar to that of the trade show. In writing about such exhibitions, Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn have observed that scholarship on art and nineteenth-century colonialism has generally emphasized figurative art forms, but paid less attention to

[211] Kasfir addresses this issue in her article titled "One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art," *History in Africa*, Vol. 11 (1984): 163-193.

[212] Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the Making of European Identities* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), 1.

[213] Ibid., 9.

functional objects and non-representational decorative arts in three dimensions.[214] However, they comment that "[t]here is a certain irony in this since the circulation of goods and the increase of trade was a primary underlying motivation for imperial expansion."[215] Arguably, the lidded vessels are objects that actually blur this binary distinction between figurative imagery and the decorative arts. However, Barringer and Flynn's commentary about trade also prompts us to recognize how commodity status encompasses both two-dimensional images and three-dimensional objects. While the lidded vessels were commodities specifically designed for exchange in a cross-cultural market, so too were the majority of studio images of "native" subjects produced in southern Africa during the same era.

In this regard, it is striking how both the lidded vessels and the photographs possess formal qualities that Nelson Graburn identifies as habitual characteristics of artworks created for tourist consumption in cross-cultural contexts. Graburn argues that "[t]he market itself is the most powerful source of formal and aesthetic innovation, often leading to changes in size, simplification, standardization, naturalism, grotesquery, novelty, and archaism."[216] Graburn also suggests that part of such objects' appeal is that they allow their buyers a sense of proximity to foreign cultures, in the absence of physical closeness (which may not actually be wanted).[217] This was certainly true of photographic forms like the *carte de visite*, which could be handled, arranged in personal albums, or written upon. The lidded vessels' identification as domestic

[214] Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, "Introduction," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 3.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Nelson Graburn, "Introduction," in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, ed. Nelson Graburn (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1978), 15.

[217] Ibid.

objects, however superficial, also hints at the possibility of a more tactile connection with the human body.

Nineteenth-century lidded vessels can thus be understood as occupying an intersection between several domains of culture. Their distorted anthropomorphism resonates with other nineteenth-century attempts to make sense of cultural difference through corporeal means, whether in the realm of everyday material culture, on the surface of the body itself, or through new technologies of imaging the body.

These vessels' corporeal aesthetics would prove to be long-lived. Many of their distinctive formal attributes would eventually find embodied expressions in a twentieth-century icon of tourist art in Durban: the figure of the ricksha puller (**Figure 3.24**). Rickshas first appeared in Durban in 1892. Though originally intended to serve as a functional mode of transportation, ricksha pullers' labors evolved to become a distinctive form of beachside tourist art.[218] Like the much earlier vessels, ricksha pullers' bodies were rendered at once spectacular and illegible by the baroque excess of their costumes. As invented figures, they do not fit into any category. Though human, aspects of their costumed appearance nonetheless verge on zoomorphism, like the multiple pairs of giant horns that crown their heads, and their peacock-like headdresses, and even the moniker *amahashi*, which likened them to horses. They also share with the lidded vessels a quality of amplified scale, as their massive costumes magnify their bodies, making them bigger, more expansive, and infinitely more ornate. In a way, it seems appropriate that the specific mode of outlandish anthropomorphism, which the lidded vessels so

[218] For a detailed account of the history of ricksha pullers in Durban, see Ros Posel's article "*Amahashi*: Durban's Ricksha Pullers," *Journal of Natal and Zulu history*, Vol. XIII (1990-91): 51-70. In Durban, ricksha pullers are still conspicuously present along the beach today.



Figure 3.24. Lynn Acutt. Postcard image of Durban ricksha pullers in costume. Photograph. Early 20th century. Author's collection.
Source: Author.

vividly channel, would eventually find its way back, to Natal and to the body itself, to coalesce in the embodied spectacle and performative labors of these men.

Chapter Four

Figuring Violence in the Late Nineteenth Century



Figure 4.1. Unknown artist (soldier). Tunic painted with scenes from the Anglo-Boer War. Black ink and paint on textile. Circa 1902. Museum Africa, Johannesburg.
Source: Karen Milbourne, *Earth Matters: Land as Material and Metaphor in the Arts of Africa* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution and Monacelli Press, 2013), 174.



Figure 4.2. Unknown Zulu carver. Cattle horns engraved with scenes from the Anglo-Zulu War. Nguni cattle horns, pigment. Circa 1881. South African National Gallery, Cape Town.
Source: Google Art Project.

Cattle horns and a tunic are the unlikely surfaces upon which war scenes unfold.

Densely-packed rows of soldiers spiral their way around the horns' exteriors (**Figure 4.2**). Stretched and wrapped around a convex surface, the bands of figures blur the line between image and surface pattern, dissolving at a distance into textured stripes. By contrast, the cloth silhouette of a torso acts more like a window (**Figure 4.1**). Its surface permits a viewer to peer into the somber depths of miniature landscapes, where vermillion-tinged vignettes depict episodes in a violent conflict.

These objects are relics of two wars that bracket the final decades of the nineteenth century in southeastern Africa. The carved horns commemorate the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. They belong to a small corpus of engraved cattle horns, which originate from the vicinity of

Newcastle, Natal in the early 1880s.[219] Many of these carved horns, including the ones pictured here, are thought to be the work of a single Zulu carver who sold them as curios,[220] although there is some evidence to suggest that multiple carvers were producing similar objects around the same time.[221] The tunic was painted circa 1902, by a soldier who fought in the Boer war.[222]

I begin with this juxtaposition because of the double way in which these objects enlist the body to represent violence. Two-dimensional figures, made of incised or painted lines, occupy the surfaces of objects which are themselves bodily fragments, real or imagined. This combination of visual and tactile reference to the body takes on heightened significance when we consider their context. The late nineteenth century was a volatile era in southeastern Africa. In its last several decades, a tense atmosphere of heightened colonial intervention was punctuated by a string of wars, rebellions, and violent territorial disputes. During these same years, previously aniconic visual cultures in this region were flooded with figurative images of the human body. Pictorial media rendered the body visible in unprecedented ways, at a time when it was subject to various threats of physical violence.

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[219] Carol Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo: Cattle Horn Engraved with Scenes from the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 (c. 1880)," in *Scratches on the Face: Antiquity and Contemporaneity in South African Works of Art from Iziko Museums of Cape Town*, ed. Hayden Proud (South Africa: Iziko Museums of Cape Town and UNISA Press, 2008), 27. Twenty-two extant figurative horns are currently known to art historians; Patricia Davison has identified six pairs of horns and ten single horns, which are dispersed throughout various museums and private collections in South Africa, Europe, and North America. See: Patricia Davison, "Visual Narratives of the Anglo-Zulu War: Cattle Horns Engraved by an Unknown African Artist," *Southern African Humanities*, Vol. 28 (October 2016): 100-101.

[220] Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27.

[221] In his discussion of five carved horns held by the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, Tim Maggs argues that at least one of these objects must have been carved by a different hand than the other four. He cites significant differences in figurative carving style, composition, and subject matter. See: Tim Maggs, "A Glimpse of Colonial Life Through Zulu Eyes: 19th Century Engraved Cattle Horns from Natal," *Natal Museum Journal of Humanities*, Volume 2 (November 1990): 145.

[222] Karen Milbourne, *Earth Matters: Land as Material and Metaphor in the Arts of Africa* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution and Monacelli Press, 2013), 173.

The figurative horns and painted tunic articulate this convergence of bodily visibility and vulnerability in highly literal ways. In this chapter, I read them as extreme iterations of broader cultural impulses to associate figurative representation with violence. As such, I believe that these objects can yield more insight about the visual culture of their time than their oddness and relative obscurity might initially suggest. My aim here is to describe some of the mutual entanglements that existed between violence and figurative representation in southern Africa during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Close reading and comparison of these objects provides an entry point for investigating these larger issues. I argue that figurative representation of the body was not only a key component in visually articulating violence. In addition, I show how various concepts of violence were instrumental for shaping notions of figurative representation during this time.

The engraved horns represent one of the earliest-known forays into two-dimensional pictorial representation on the part of Zulu carvers.[223] They were created just a few years after a British invasion brought about the demise of the Zulu kingdom, formerly the most powerful African state in the region.[224] Given their subject matter, the engraved compositions are surprisingly orderly and repetitive. Rows of linear figures formulaically depict British or Zulu soldiers. Even the dead are rendered schematically, like the trio of British soldiers who lie stiffly in identical body positions (**Figure 4.3**). Most of the horns depict few, if any, landscape

[223] Maggs, 143; see also: Elza Miles, *Land and Lives: A Story of Early Black Artists* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Johannesburg Art Gallery and Human & Rousseau, 1997), 11.

[224] Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 114; Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27.



Figure 4.3. Unknown carver. Detail of horn engraved with scenes from the Anglo-Zulu War. Nguni cattle horn, pigment. Early 1880s. Private collection.
Source: Wendy Moonan, "Horns of History," *Introspective Magazine*, August 3, 2015, http://www.1stdibs.com/introspective-magazine/jacaranda-tribal/ (accessed October 17, 2015).

elements aside from ribbon-like ground lines.[225] It is also difficult to extract a clear sense of narrative from the moving lines and clusters of variously-oriented figures.

War is thus represented through constellations of flat, linear bodies, visually coded to be legible as various social types. British soldiers, often the most numerous figures, are recognizable by their uniforms, depictions of which are fairly accurate.[226] Similarly, Zulu figures depicted on the horns are identified through certain conventional attributes and motifs. For example, on the same horn, two Zulu women appear in profile, carrying babies on their backs. This formula for representing the "Zulu mother" figure is one that appears as early as the 1860s (**Figure 4.4**). Even more specifically, however, the motif of *two* women standing in profile was a figural trope that persisted in commercially-produced images like *cartes de visite* and later postcards, as in one widely-disseminated example from the turn of the century[227] (**Figure 4.5**). Figures of Zulu soldiers are identifiable by their cowhide shields, which were stock attributes in pictorial representations of "Zulu warriors" from the late nineteenth century (**Figure 4.6**). Two later examples of generic "Zulu warrior" images from the turn of the century also show the extent to which formulaic, graphic poses were repeated from image to image as a further way of "standardizing" typical images of the body (**Figures 4.7 and 4.8**). In this respect,

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[225] A notable exception is one of the carved horns in the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, whose composition includes depictions of a church and other buildings. See Maggs, 146; and Miles, 12.

[226] One author has suggested that a British carver may have even been involved in producing some of the horns, based on the level of accuracy with which British military uniforms are depicted. See David Fox, "Zulu Art or Sailor's Scrimshaw? The Decorated 'Zulu' Horns of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879," *South African Military History Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2005): 138. However, Patricia Davison, who has done the most extensive research to date on the horns, disagrees with this theory, citing a lack of historical evidence; see Davison, "Visual Narratives of the Anglo-Zulu War," 84. As in previous chapters, here I will not attempt to prove whether the carver was Zulu or English. Instead, I wish to explicate how these objects' forms evoked meaning in relation to other contemporaneous visual forms of both African and European origins.

[227] Christraud Geary analyzes the origins of this particular image, and traces its subsequent circulation in her article titled "'Zulu Mothers' and Their Children Traveling Around the World: From Photograph to Picture Postcard," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013).



Figure 4.4. Gustav Fritsch. "Jeune mère." Photograph. Circa 1863-1866. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.
Source: Musée du Quai Branly.



Figure 4.5. Sallo, Epstein, & Co. "Zulu Mothers" postcard. Collotype on card stock. First decade of the 20th century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 4.6. Caney Brothers. "Ordinary and fighting dresses." Photograph on album page. South Africa, late nineteenth century.
Source: Tamar Garb, ed., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection*, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 115.



Figure 4.7. Sallo, Epstein, & Co. "A Zulu warrior" postcard. Collotype on card stock. Early 20th century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 4.8. Unknown photographer. "Zulu warrior." Photograph. 1898. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.
Source: Peabody Museum.

the repeating figures and gestures in the horn engravings seem aligned with contemporaneous pictorial conventions for representing typical figures in two dimensions.

Taken thus in isolation of their material supports, these engraved bodies do not provoke any immediate visceral response, so much as they ask to be read analytically. However, the tone shifts when we consider how imaging the human body could itself be considered an act of aggression in nineteenth-century southern Africa. In his writing on abstraction in Zulu and Xhosa artistic traditions, Gary Van Wyk characterizes both cultures as aniconic; he notes that in some places, taboos surrounding figurative imagery persisted several decades into the twentieth century.[228]

Even people who were more amenable to new forms of figurative imagery still spoke of them in terms conventionally used to describe sorcery. For instance, in his study of photography at the Catholic Mariannhill Mission in colonial Natal, Christoph Rippe notes that the monastery's photographer, Brother Aegidius, was often referred to in Zulu as *Matwebula*.[229] This name linked the photographer to the idea of enchantment via the verb *twebula*,[230] which, as Rippe observes, not only refers to acts of spiriting away, but could also denote physical actions of flaying or peeling.[231] This association of enchantment with the act of stripping matter from the

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[228] Gary Van Wyk, "Illuminated Signs: Style and Meaning in the Beadwork of the Xhosa- and Zulu-Speaking Peoples," *African Arts*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (August 2003): 14.

[229] Christoph Rippe, "The Missionary, the Diviner and the Chief: Distributed Personhood and the Photographic Archive of the Mariannhill Mission," in *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies*, ed. Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 48.

[230] The verb *thwebula* is still associated with photography in contemporary Zulu language; *umthwebuli wezithombe* (which could literally be translated as "enchanter of pictures") is a common term to denote a photographer.

[231] Rippe, "The Missionary, the Diviner, and the Chief," 48. Earlier Zulu-English dictionaries from the mid-nineteenth century tend to give more literal meanings for the verb *twebula* and its variants, with references to sorcery and enchantment becoming more explicit around the turn of the century. For example, in his 1872 lexicon, William Jafferd Davis offers the following definitions for *twebula*: "1. To tear the pieces of flesh off a hide which adheres to it after it is taken from the animal. 2. To strip bark from trees," William Jafferd Davis, *A Dictionary of the Kaffir Language: Including the Xosa and Zulu dialects. Part I. Kaffir-English* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1872), 227. However, John William Colenso's 1905 dictionary defines the same term, "[to] [s]pirit away or change

body's surface is far from incidental, however. It recalls Harriet Ngubane's more recent observations about the central role of body matter in Zulu beliefs about witchcraft. In one typical scenario, a sorcerer (*umthakathi*) might use materials like hair, sweat, or fingernails belonging to his intended victim, in order to more effectively target that person for some sort of bodily harm.[232] In this regard, it is significant that the same Brother Aegidius was sometimes called *umthakathi*[233] – the more common, and more negative word for denoting a witch. Such terminology thus positions likeness in a similar category to that of a dermal layer or a corporeal fragment.

Other cultures throughout the region likewise associated acts of picturing the body with the idea of physically removing one of its external layers. For this reason, photographs, prints, paintings, and even mirrors were initially received with misgiving. In their writing about nineteenth-century Tswana communities, Jean and John Comaroff observe that "late nineteenth century photographers were to find the Tswana reluctant subjects precisely because the snapshot seemed to separate a human being from his or her own image."[234] They note that this uneasiness also extended to mirrors, observing that "[c]ommon to both the transfixing mirror and the captivating lens […] was the power that glass might give to others to grasp a person's very essence."[235]

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by a sort of conjuring or magical process; change oneself or another into some animal, and back again, for good or evil purpose; a power for which the *amaTonga* are specially noted," John William Colenso, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 4th authorised edition, revised and enlarged (Natal: Vause, Slatter & Co., 1905), 633.

[232] Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1977): 32.

[233] Rippe, 48.

[234] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consiousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 188.

[235] Ibid.

Paul Landau also notes that in 1840s Bechuanaland, this type of alarm extended to likenesses in other two-dimensional media besides photography. He cites one anecdote from 1848, in which Tswana viewers described a pair of painted portraits as the "ghosts" or the "skins" of the subjects represented therein.[236] Pointing out that "the Tswana had never encountered a surface as a fragment of dimensional space,"[237] Landau observes that their natural response was to try and relate this unusual sight to something more familiar. He comments that "[r]ural southern Africans knew ghosts and skins but not Europeans' language of pictorial imagery."[238] However, the fact that the familiar point of reference for understanding pictorial imagery would be "ghosts" or "skins" suggests the extent to which the Tswana, too, associated pictorial imagery and likeness with death and the otherworldly.

This regional association between figurative imagery and bodily fragments like "skins" resonates with this artist's choice to carve images into pieces from an animal body. The shallow layer of tattoo-like carvings, wound around a twisting organic form, almost look as if they too could be peeled away. Multiple scholars have also observed how the horns evoke the morbid forms of colonial hunting trophies.[239] Their likely manner of display makes this association very clear[240] (**Figure 4.9**).

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[236] Henry Methuen, *Life in the Wilderness: Or, Wanderings in South Africa* (London: Richard Bentley, 1848), 101. I found this source by way of Paul Landau's analysis in his article "The Illumination of Christ in the Kalahari Desert," *Representations*, No. 45 (Winter, 1994): 31.

[237] Paul Landau, "An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 14.

[238] Landau, "The Illumination of Christ in the Kalahari Desert," 31.

[239] See Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27; and Davison, "Visual Narratives of the Anglo-Zulu War," 85.

[240] The horns shown here are attached to their original mounting; see Wendy Moonan, "Horns of History," *Introspective Magazine*, August 3, 2015, http://www.1stdibs.com/introspective-magazine/jacaranda-tribal/ (accessed



Figure 4.9. Unknown carver. Mounted pair of horns engraved with scenes from the Anglo-Zulu War. Nguni cattle horn, pigment. Early 1880s. Private collection.
Source: Wendy Moonan, "Horns of History," *Introspective Magazine*, August 3, 2015, http://www.1stdibs.com/introspective-magazine/jacaranda-tribal/ (accessed October 17, 2015).

Indigenous beliefs about the potentially violent nature of image-making thus find a parallel in colonial tropes that likened hunting and photography.[241] This conflation of vision and violence was succinctly articulated by the British author of an 1893 hunting memoir, who titled his book *Gun and Camera in Southern Africa*.[242] Such associations were not lost on African observers, either. One Zulu-English dictionary from the turn of the century describes people

October 17, 2015). Maggs also notes that the two intact pairs of horns in the Natal Museum are "fitted on their original horn cores and bosses" (Maggs, 143).

[241] James Ryan discusses the relationship between hunting and photography in his chapter titled "Hunting with the Camera," in *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See also: Paul Landau, "With Camera and Gun in Southern Africa: Inventing the Image of Bushmen, c. 1880 to 1935," in *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, ed. Pippa Skotnes (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 129-141.

[242] Henry Anderson Bryden, *Gun and Camera in Southern Africa: A Year of Wanderings in Bechuanaland, the Kalahari Desert, and the Lake River Country, Ngamiland, with Notes on Colonization, Natives, Natural History and Sport* (London: E. Stanford, 1893).

taken unawares by a photographer as an example to illustrate the verb *tshaqa*, meaning to "overpower by astonishment; take completely, entirely, at one swoop."[243] In her study of turn-of-the-century American expeditions in Africa, Donna Haraway has also drawn attention to parallels between photography and taxidermy, as media that facilitated the simultaneous subdual and display of spectacular prey.[244]

Unlike hunting trophies, the figurative horns originated from livestock, not wild animals. However, the material choice of cattle horn was potently charged with associations of its own. In more traditional Zulu pastoralist communities, cattle were the primary means by which people measured their wealth, to the extent that they could be (and were often) likened to currency.[245] Davison also points out that this material evokes spiritual references, since "horns of cattle that had been offered to the ancestors were often mounted for spiritual protection at the entrance to the cattle enclosure;"[246] she notes also that in more traditional Nguni communities, "there was a reluctance to slaughter [cattle] except for ceremonial purposes."[247] In addition to these connotations, several authors note a possible referential link between the shape of the horns and the two-pronged battle formation for which the Zulu military was known prior to British

[243] The full example reads, "*Behlezi bengazi'luto, kanti umlungu us'ebate tshaqa bonke, sebe izithombe*, they were sitting, knowing nothing (about it), whereas the white man had caught them all, they were already images, -- a photographer had snap-shotted them," Colenso, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 602.

[244] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 41-44.

[245] W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Cattle Symbolism in Zulu Culture," in *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present*, ed. Benedict Carlton et. al. (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 62-3.

[246] Davison, "Visual narratives of the Anglo-Zulu War," 85.

[247] Ibid.

conquest,[248] whereby they would "encircle the enemy and then, in close combat, […] cause havoc with short stabbing spears."[249]

This possible allusion to the Zulu army, configured in the format of a hunting trophy, is particularly meaningful given that many, if not all, of the figurative horns were created as curios for European patrons. Several extant horns are known to have passed through the hands of high-ranking officials in the Natal Colony, including the Secretary for Native Affairs, Sir Theophilius Shepstone.[250] Other known examples were commissioned for display in London at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886.[251] In her study of British representations of the 1879 war, Catherine Anderson observes that "Victorians understood Zulus to be the 'highest type' of barbarian – the most noble of savages – for they had proven themselves exceptionally formidable foes."[252] In this context, it is significant that at least one carver responsible for engraved horns was known specifically "for his depictions on cattle horns of the Battle of Isandhlwana."[253] This event took place early in the war, when a Zulu army descended upon a surprised British contingent of soldiers, killing nearly all of them, in an altercation that one historian describes as "the greatest disaster to British arms since the Crimean War."[254] Visual references to this event are oblique at best on most of the known horns, considering the neat rows of figures that

[248] See Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27; Maggs, 147; and Davison, "Visual Narratives of the Anglo-Zulu War," 85.

[249] Thompson, L., 84.

[250] Maggs, 144-5.

[251] Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27.

[252] Catherine Anderson, "Red Coats and Black Shields: Race and Masculinity in British Representations of the Anglo-Zulu War," *Critical Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2008): 6.

[253] Kaufmann, "KwaZulu Natal (Newcastle District) Uphondo Olubaziweyo," 27.

[254] Thompson, L., 124.

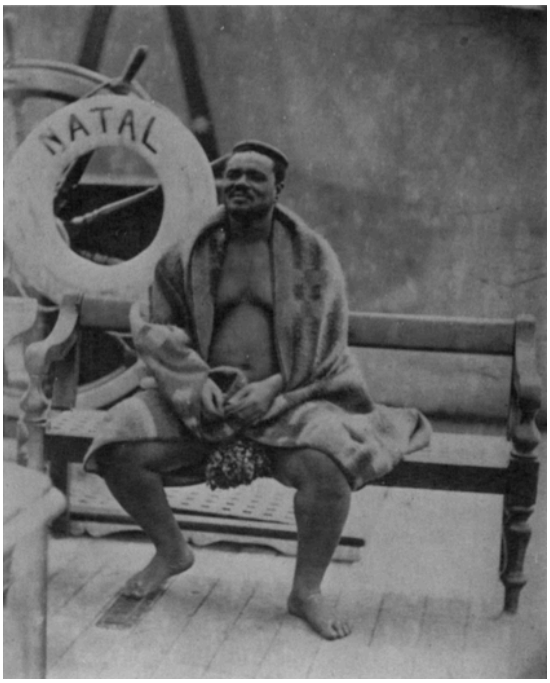


Figure 4.10. Crewes & Van Laun. "Cetywayo, King of the Zulus." Photograph taken on board the S.S. Natal on September 13, 1879. Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.
Source: Bridget Theron, "King Cetshwayo in Victorian England: A Cameo of Imperial Interaction," *Southern African Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2006): 66.



Figure 4.11. C.F. Crewes. "Cetywayo, taken at Oude-Moulen, South Africa." Albumen print. Circa 1880. George Eastman House.
Source: George Eastman House.

dominate many of the engraved compositions. However, this apparent interest on the part of British patrons does somewhat align with notions of the trophy as an object that commemorates having subdued a fearsome adversary.

A parallel logic was at work in another contemporaneous realm of figurative image production, where representations of a body were similarly intertwined with references to the war. I am here referring to images of the defeated Zulu ruler Cetewayo, which proliferated in the early 1880s. During the same years when carvers outside of Newcastle were engraving military scenes onto cattle horns, photographers and engravers from Cape Town to London were printing and disseminating images of the deposed king. One such photograph, shot in 1879, shows



Figure 4.12. Alexander Bassano. Cetshwayo ka Mpande. Bromide print. 1882. National Portrait Gallery, London.
Source: National Portrait Gallery.

Cetewayo on board a steamship upon his arrival in Cape Town, where he was initially sent into exile by British authorities (**Figure 4.10**). Another widely-circulated photograph was taken the following year at Oude Moulen, while he was still detained outside of Cape Town (**Figure 4.11**). Even more images of him appeared during and after his 1882 visit to London (**Figure 4.12**), where he met with Queen Victoria to negotiate his return to Zululand.[255] In writing about the king's appearance in London, Anderson has pointed out how British viewers were fixated on

[255] Bridget Theron offers a detailed reconstruction of Cetewayo's itinerary between the end of the war and his 1882 visit to London, in her article "King Cetshwayo in Victorian England: A Cameo of Imperial Interaction," *Southern African Historical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2006): 60-87.



Figure 4.13. J.A. Green. Oba Ovonramwen under arrest on board the British Protectorate yacht Ivy. Photograph. 1897. Manchester Museum, University of Manchester.
Source: Kaplan, Flora, "Fragile Legacy: Photographs as Documents in Recovering Political and Cultural History at the Royal Court of Benin," *History in Africa*, Vol. 18 (1991): 208.

images of Cetewayo as an "embodiment of native kingship,"[256] and this corpus of imagery accordingly enlists his body as a site where the vanquished Zulu could be symbolically visualized.[257]

Christraud Geary has observed that colonial-era portraits of African leaders by European photographers tend to cast their subjects in one of two roles, "either as major allies or as

[256] Anderson, "Red Coats and Black Shields," 24.

[257] Geary notes that this tendency to conflate the individual images of African rulers with entire ethnic groups was common during the colonial era. See: Christraud Geary, "Postcards from Africa by European and African Photographers and Sponsors," in *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*, ed. Christraud Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 159.

antagonists of the emerging colonial administrations,"[258] thereby catering to the expectations of European viewers. The sheer number of images of Cetewayo taken during his exile and imprisonment appear to follow this pattern, where the hyper-visibility of his likeness in this case was a consequence of his defeat. Motifs that appear in some of these images locate them within a larger corpus of representations, which depict defeated African leaders from elsewhere in the British empire. For example, the nautical photograph of Cetewayo on his way to exile (**Figure 4.10**), foreshadows images shot in 1897, which show the ruler of Benin after his kingdom's annexation by the British. Several photographs depict Oba Ovonramwen similarly situated on board the yacht *Ivy*, as a prisoner on his way to exile in Calabar (**Figure 4.13**).

Geary warns against reading such images simplistically, as having been created fully on the terms of European photographers. She draws attention to the fact that many portraits of African monarchs were the product of dialogical encounters, in which the sitters exercised considerable choice over how they presented themselves to the camera.[259] In keeping with these observations, Anderson calls attention to Cetewayo's purposeful sartorial choices on his 1882 trip to London. Although Victorians would have preferred to see him in "native" dress, Cetewayo chose to appear in public in Western clothing throughout his visit.[260] Anderson argues that this was a calculated choice, as Cetewayo "realized that his own authority would be more apparent to the British if they could recognize signs of power from their own sartorial vocabulary

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid. Geary demonstrates this point in her analysis of slightly later photographs of Bamum King Njoya in colonial Cameroon. See: Christraud Geary, *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902 – 1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 2003).

[260] Catherine Anderson, "A Zulu King in Victorian London: Race, Royalty and Imperialist Aesthetics in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Visual Resources*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2008): 307.

– in this case, the black frock coat and top hat of a gentleman."[261] These choices extended to his self-presentation in portraits taken during his journey, like the one shot by Alexander Bassano (**Figure 4.12**).

But here, as with the figurative horns, there is a discrepancy between the images' pictorial content and their physical existence in the world as objects. Cetewayo may have maintained control over how he presented himself in photographs. However, he had no control over what happened to his likeness once those images began to circulate, either as photographic copies, or translated into other media.

Consider, for example, one photographic print of Cetewayo on board ship, which ended up in an album (**Figure 4.14**). The album format is one that connotes collection, possession, and, once again, the idea of the souvenir. It also places a good measure of control over how the image is read in the hands of the person who owns or assembles the album, through choices like juxtaposition, sequencing, and written captions. Jeff Guy has observed as much in his discussion of an earlier photograph of Nongoza, a Zulu headman in colonial Natal, whose portrait was deliberately presented in a trivializing manner by some colonial albums.[262]

Similar points could be made about a later iteration of the 1880 Oude Moulen portrait. In 1882, Sir Leslie Ward translated this image into watercolor for Vanity Fair magazine (**Figure 4.15**). In an image which borders on caricature, the relatively dignified photograph is re-envisioned in alarming tones of salmon and mauve. Cetewayo's mouth has come open, with

[261] Ibid., 310.

[262] Jeff Guy, " 'A Paralysis of Perspective': Image and Text in the Creation of an African Chief," in *Art and the British Empire*, ed. Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 346.



Figure 4.14. G.T. Ferneyhough, Crewes & Van Laun, H.F. Gros, and unidentified photographers. Album page with photographs of Cetewayo and his family, Chief Sekhukhune, and unidentified sitters. Albumen prints mounted to album page. South Africa, last third of the nineteenth century. Walther Collection.
Source: Tamar Garb, ed., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive: African Photography from the Walther Collection* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 207.

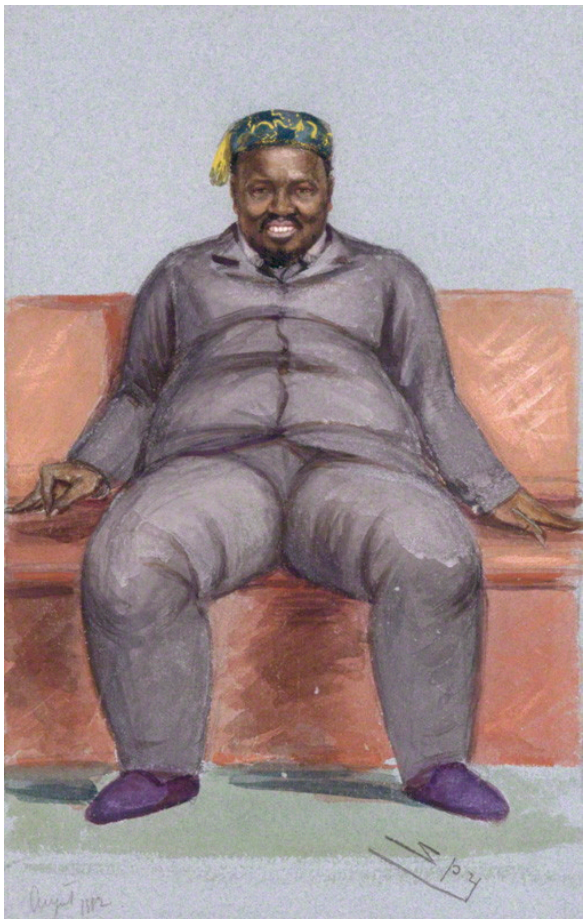


Figure 4.15. Sir Leslie Ward. Cetshwayo ka Mpande. Watercolor. Published in *Vanity Fair* August 26, 1882. National Portrait Gallery, London.
Source: National Portrait Gallery.

teeth bared in a grimace, while his massive thighs and gut threaten to burst the seams of his now-lilac suit.

Cetewayo's lack of control over the various "afterlives" of his own likeness brings us back to the idea of "splitting" people from their images, which characterized early southern African responses to pictorial media. These photographic examples demonstrate how, even in the case of a well-known ruler, replicable figurative media enabled likenesses to be circulated and altered beyond any individual's immediate control. This was even more true in the cases of

many now-anonymous people, whose images were mobilized to circulate as social or ethnic "types," for purposes over which they had no say.

The engraved horns suggest one possible relationship between figurative image and corporeal fragment. The tunic (**Figure 4.1**) takes these same elements in a somewhat different direction. Its painted compositions depict tense landscapes, which are sparsely populated. These eerily quiet scenes commemorate the Anglo-Boer War, which occurred between 1899 and 1902. During these years, British and Dutch/Afrikaans factions fought over territories that possessed huge deposits of mineral wealth in the form of diamonds and gold. Marked by sieges, guerrilla warfare, and scorched earth, this conflict was particularly hard on civilians.[263] Thousands of farms were burned. One panel of the tunic depicts such an event: a cloud of black smoke billows from the top of a small house, shot through with the angry glow of orange and red flames. Moments of direct confrontation are also notably absent from the painted scenes. Except for a pair of equestrians, who gallop across two panels near the top, most of the figures are immobile, alert to some invisible threat, isolated and exposed in the middle of a bare landscape.

This tension is in keeping with the ways in which many people experienced the war. The slow forces of hunger, disease, and dispossession ultimately did much more damage than the actual fighting.[264] Violence towards civilians became even more purposeful and pronounced towards the end of the conflict, when Afrikaner militias waged a guerrilla war in the Boer Republics. In response to stealth attacks on their infrastructure and supply lines, the British army

[263] Bill Nasson, "Civilians in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902," in *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Africa: From Slavery Days to Rwandan Genocide*, ed. John Laband (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007): 86.

[264] Ibid., 90-91

retaliated by burning crops and imprisoning thousands of civilians, many of whom would succumb to disease.[265] It is not surprising, then, that this war would produce a commemorative object like the tunic, which figures the body as a ground upon which act various forms of implied violence.

The tunic is not unique in this respect. Similar observations might be made about photographs of Afrikaner women and children, who were detained in British concentration camps during the late stages of the war (**Figure 4.16**). Michael Godby has described how humanitarians mobilized such images as evidence of the war's effects upon civilians.[266] In them, children's bodies appear as sites where the horrific effects of invisible violence – in the form of hunger and disease – can be visibly read. In an oblique reference to the same events, another panel of the tunic depicts a row of conical white tents, which resemble those shown in the photograph.

The tunic's visual emphasis on landscape is also consistent with the rural identity of Afrikaner militias. As guerillas, their effectiveness as an invisible threat was predicated on their knowledge of the landscape and their ability to blend into it. Of the Boer soldiers, Thompson observes, "Most of their men had been bred to the horse and rifle […] Expert horsemen and marksmen, they could live off the country."[267] He also notes that because they were defending their home territory, they were able to use detailed knowledge of the terrain to hold off the British army for as long as they did.[268] Jennifer Beningfield has also argued that closeness to and

[265] Thompson, L., 142-3.

[266] Michael Godby, "Confronting Horror: Emily Hobhouse and the Concentration Camp Photographs of the South African War," *Kronos*, No. 32 (November 2006): 37.

[267] Thompson, L., 142.

[268] Ibid.



Figure 4.16. Unknown photographer. "We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers our widows." Plate from Emily Hobhouse's *The brunt of the war*. 1901. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.
Source: Michael Godby, "Confronting Horror: Emily Hobhouse and the Concentration Camp Photographs of the South African War," *Kronos*, No. 32 (November 2006): 47.

knowledge of the land were central to Afrikaner self-conceptions. She observes that in times of conflict with other groups (be they African or British), these qualities were "used to argue for the natural right to the landscape."[269]

African figures are conspicuously absent from these scenes. Their invisibility here is in keeping with myths of "empty" or uninhabited land, which are staple elements in narratives of settler colonialism. This erasure also aligns with representations of the war as a conflict that was solely between white factions. Both British and Afrikaner accounts of the war tend to elide the role of Africans. However, historians have shown that Africans were heavily involved in

[269] Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land: Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

military operations on both sides, as combatants and as laborers.[270] African civilians also felt the effects of sieges and scorched earth tactics, and thousands were interned in concentration camps.[271] In some cases, African civilians were disproportionately affected by the war's material privations. This was the case in besieged towns, for instance in Mafeking, where "Europeans were shielded from any serious deprivation, as a conspicuously unequal distribution of siege rations saw blacks reduced to subsisting on forage oats, locusts, stray dogs, and horses."[272]

In many colonial representations, disavowals of any indigenous presence go hand in hand with motifs that attribute anthropomorphic qualities to the land itself. One such example is a map of an imaginary southern African landscape, an illustration from Henry Rider Haggard's 1885 adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines* (**Figure 4.17**). Anne McClintock has drawn attention to the anthropomorphic qualities of the map drawing. She points out that although this image ostensibly indicates the way to fictional diamond mines, "if the map is inverted, it reveals at once the diagram of a female body."[273] This reading is further supported by the author's explicit use of anatomical terms to name geographical formations, as he does for the twin mountains at the center of the composition. In a way, the tunic performs an inverse function to Haggard's anthropomorphic geography, by taking the partial form of a body and making it into a series of landscapes.

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[270] Thompson, L., 143.

[271] Ibid.

[272] Nasson, 91.

[273] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

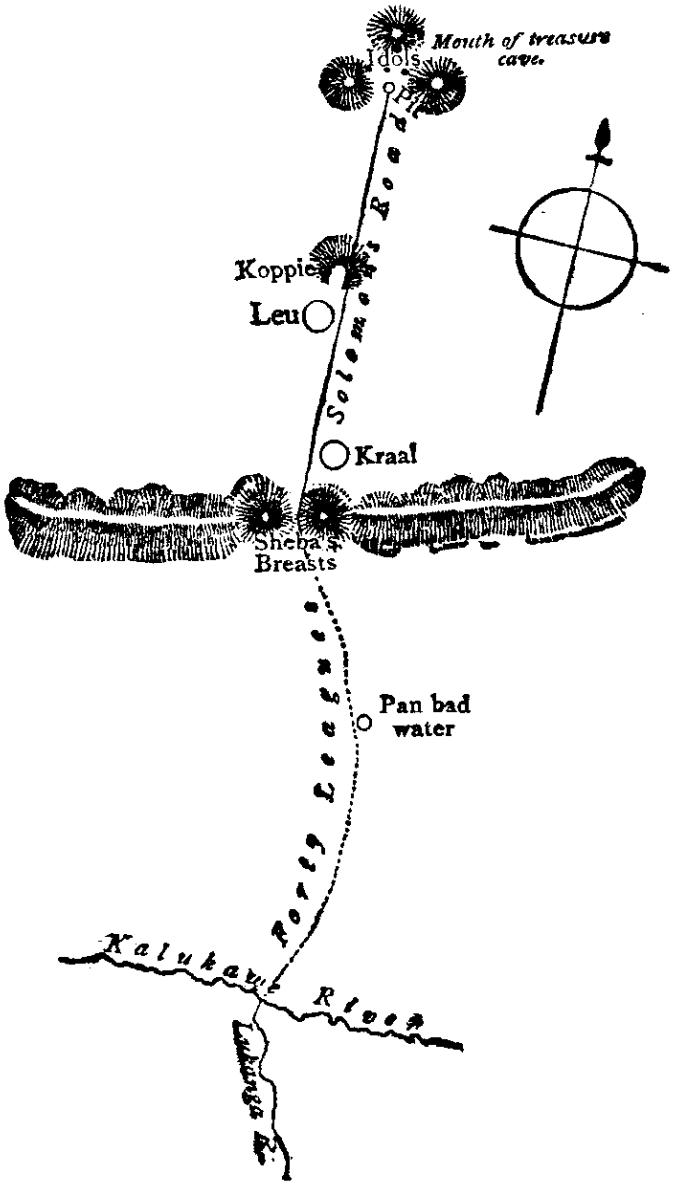


Figure 4.17. Henry Rider Haggard. "Sketch map of the route to King Solomon's Mines." 1885.
Source: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2.

Also significant is the tunic's representation of spatial depth. This object may not present a cohesive perspectival surface; while some of its panes are horizontally contiguous, many are not, and distinct scenes are also stacked in vertical registers. But most of the individual scenes invite the viewer to peer through into deep space, by such means as winding roads leading between cleft mountains, or shrinking diagonals of men on horseback.

Christopher Pinney has emphasized the metaphorical value of depth in colonial landscape representations. In his essay titled "Notes from the Surface of the Image," Pinney sets up an opposition between the formal qualities of surface and depth, in order to unpack some of their ideological baggage in colonial and post-colonial contexts. On one side of this opposition are "colonial" modes of image-making, which emphasize optical penetration into virtual spatial depth, by means of a window-like surface that is presumed transparent.[274] Pinney links perspectival modes of representation with vision that is invasive and controlling; for instance, he calls attention to the prominent role of photography in expeditionary and imperialist ventures on the part of nineteenth-century Europeans.[275] On the other side of this binary, Pinney describes post-colonial "vernacular" practices that resist or "creatively deform the geometrical spatializations of colonial worlds,"[276] through emphasis on the image's tactile and opaque surface.[277] Although his essay deals mostly with photography, Pinney asserts that many of his

[274] Christopher Pinney, "Notes From the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism, and Vernacular Modernism," in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 203.

[275] Ibid., 204-207.

[276] Ibid., 202.

[277] Ibid.

observations about the ideological values of surface and depth nevertheless apply to other media as well.[278]

The painted tunic would not fit neatly into either of Pinney's opposing categories. It does prompt the eye to pass through its surface into the depths of virtual space. However, the anthropomorphic surface complicates things. To examine these scenes, the eye must figuratively pierce through the chest, ribs, and abdomen of some absent person, subtly implicating the viewer in an aggressive act.

This idea of vision as something that could pierce the body is distinct from indigenous models discussed earlier, which figure image-making more as a process of physical detachment. However, the notion of piercing does elsewhere converge with vision in vernacular language. In one moment of linguistic slippage, for instance, the Zulu term *inhlamvu*, which refers to the pupil of the eye, is also used to indicate a bullet from a gun.[279] We have already seen how the gun and the camera were imaginatively associated during this era. Moreover, on a literal level, Landau observes that "in the 1880s, the way travelling photographers thought about cameras, and the

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[278] Ibid., 208.

[279] In some early Zulu-English dictionaries, these meanings are attached to the same root *–hlamvu*, but associated with different noun classes. However, others associate both meanings with the same form, *inhlamvu*. For example, in Jacob Ludwig Döhne's dictionary from 1857, "pupil" falls under his definition for *inhlamvu*, which he gives as "1. The apple or ball, applied to the eye, *as*: inhlamvu yeso, i.e.: the pupil of the eye; -- 2. *Figuratively*: the honey-bird, which is regarded as the eye-ball, making the people see where the honey is." Jacob Ludwig Döhne, *A Zulu-Kafir Dictionary: Etymologically Explained, with Copious Illustrations and Examples, Preceded by an Introduction on the Zulu-Kafir Language* (Cape Town: G. J. Pike's printing office, 1857), 125. However, he includes "bullet" under the definition for the similar but distinct form *uhlamvu*, whose literal definition is "a mass or substance that bursts, buds, or shoots from an organic body, an organic substance" (Ibid), but also includes "A ball or bullet, *as*: uhlamvu lwesibamu, i.e.: the ball of a gun, regarded as a production of the gun, or as shooting from it" (Ibid). In their dictionaries from 1872 and 1905 (respectively), William Jafferd Davis and John William Colenso include both definitions under their entries for the form *inhlamvu*. Davis's definition, which explicitly uses the image of a gun as a point of reference to denote scale, reads: "anything round in shape not larger than a musket-bullet. Hence, a berry, kernel, bead, bullet; also the apple of the eye." William Jafferd Davis, *A Dictionary of the Kaffir Language: Including the Xosa and Zulu Dialects. Part I. Kaffir-English* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1872), 75. See also: John William Colenso, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 4th authorised edition, revised and enlarged (Natal: Vause, Slatter & Co., 1905), 211-12.

way they made use of them, drew heavily on the use of firearms."[280] This parallel, between the camera's mechanical eye and the muzzle of a gun, is further echoed by the capacity for the term *inhlamvu yeso* (pupil of the eye) to be figuratively interpreted as "bullet of the eye."

If the linguistic image of the bullet evokes the piercing or intrusive quality of vision, then its material form draws attention even more strongly to associations between violence, bodily intimacy, and the everyday in this period. During the turn of the century years in which the tunic was likely painted, Africans across the region began to incorporate empty rifle cartridges into various forms of personal adornment (**Figures 4.18, 4.19, 4.20**). This widespread trend extended at least as far south as Natal, and as far north as Rhodesia.[281] Objects like the snuff containers and waistbelt pictured here were made to be literally worn on the body, or carried close to it. These were everyday objects, embedded in everyday practices of tobacco consumption and personal presentation.[282] Because of their physical proximity to the body, and constant handling by their owners, these were also highly personal objects. Over time, they would have accumulated residual traces of exactly the kinds of body dirt that were believed useful to witches.

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[280] Landau, "With Camera and Gun in Southern Africa," 133.

[281] The snuffbox in **Figure 4.18**, now at the Peabody Museum, was purchased in Natal shortly before the Boer War, according to its donor, who also describes this type of object as "very common." See: Letter from H.R.P. Cochran to Professor J.W. Putnam, May 21 1905, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; and List of goods received by the Peabody Museum from H.R.P. Cochran, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. A 1904 text published by Dudley Kidd not only mentions widespread use of cartridges as material for snuffboxes several times, but also contains an image of a Swazi woman wearing one on her person. See: Dudley Kidd, *The Essential Kafir* (London: A. and C. Black, 1904), Plate 61. Further north, William Dewey and George Mvenge also note that for Shona people in what was then Southern Rhodesia, "[a]round the turn of the century it was fashionable to hold snuff in old cartridge cases"; see William Dewey and George Mvenge, "Useful Objects or Religious Masterpieces? The Art of the Shona," in *Legacies of Stone: Zimbabwe Past and Present*, ed. William Dewey (Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1997), 202.

[282] Ann Wanless offers a detailed discussion of nineteenth-century snuff containers and spoons, and the practices for which they were used, in her article "Public Pleasures: Smoking and Snuff-Taking in Southern Africa," in *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991): 126-143.



Figure 4.18. Zulu artist. Snuffbox. Brass cartridge, glass beads, cork. Before 1899. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.
Source: Peabody Museum.



Figure 4.19. Zulu artist. Two snuff boxes with stoppers that double as snuff spoons. Date unknown. Bone, horn, and brass cartridges. Calverton Collection.
Source: Alex Zaloumis, *Zulu Tribal Art* (Cape Town: AmaZulu, 2000).



Figure 4.20. Shona artist. Waistbelt with cartridge and ivory snuff containers and sweat scrapers. Date unknown. Fiber, beads, ivory, tin, cartridges. British Museum.
Source: William Dewey and George Mvenge, "Useful Objects or Religious Masterpieces? The Art of the Shona," in *Legacies of Stone: Zimbabwe Past and Present*, ed. William Dewey (Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1997), 193-214.

As an object that was once part of a garment, the tunic is not so different from something like a repurposed shell casing, in the way that it combines visual reference to violence with an intimate tactile relationship to a real body.

Returning finally to our starting point, this pairing of the carved horns and painted tunic thus suggests a variety of ways in which figural representations could become enmeshed with concepts of physical violence. Figurative imagery might be likened to dead skin, or to the lifeless forms of hunting trophies. The body's form could become a terrain on which violence manifests, or vision could be imagined as a physically intrusive act. Such multiplicity exposes the range of beliefs which were operative in nineteenth-century southern Africa, regarding the relation between violence, representation, and the human body. The horns and tunic are material sites where such concepts coexisted and merged, despite their disparate cultural origins. Above all, these eccentric forms allow us to de-familiarize figurative practices, and thus to better locate the significance of picturing the body during the turbulent era from which they emerged.

Epilogue



Figure 5.1. Tsonga, Shangaan, or Zulu carver. Staff with shoe. Wood. 19th century. 43 x 1 x 4 ½ inches. Cantor Center for the Arts, Stanford University.
Source: Cantor Center for the Arts.

A shoe grows upside-down from the top of a staff, sole pointing up towards the sky (**Figure 5.1**). Here, captured in wood by an adventurous carver, are manifest many of the tensions that characterize figurative objects from this era. As in many of the works examined throughout this dissertation, explicit figural form coincides with dubious function and meaning. This whimsical depiction of a lone foot reminds us that staffs may be used for walking. Yet, at a

mere three and a half feet in height, this one cannot be of much assistance in that respect. And while the finial form of a shoe transforms the staff into a representation of a leg, it also turns this anatomical form on its head. This object doubly refers to the body's adornment. It does so figuratively, through the carefully-rendered two-tone shoe. And it does so materially through the form of the staff, which conventionally belongs within the realm of male body adornment. The image of a shoe demonstrates the same fascination with imported commodities and foreign forms that distinguishes objects like the lidded vessels. And one cannot help but consider the violent overtones that this form might possibly evoke. A representation of a disembodied limb, it blurs the line between humor and the macabre.

By tracing such issues through a variety of nineteenth-century objects from South Africa, this study shows how emergent forms of figurative art were intimately tied to larger transformations in the body's cultural meaning during the colonial era. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various historical forces destabilized the body's significance and radically altered its material environment. Important among these were the development of a cash economy, European colonial expansion and Christian missionary activity, and frequent outbreaks of war. Case studies presented in the preceding chapters demonstrate how anxieties and uncertainties about the body's status, which resulted from these developments, often find material expression in representations of the body from this period.

Chapter One examines carved staffs that culminate in representations of human heads. In this chapter, I show how figurative imagery complicated the body's status as an aesthetic object in its own right. In Chapter Two, I argue that objects created in the form of headless female bodies manifest broader anxieties about female labor during a time of drastic economic change. I also suggest that in some instances, representation of the body's visual form was called upon to

replace older modes of tactile engagement with objects. Chapter Three analyzes the strange corporeal qualities that characterize a group of elaborate lidded vessels from Natal. I argue that their vague, distorted, body-like forms are one manifestation of larger cultural currents, which positioned the body as a site where engagements with difference could be materially expressed. Chapter Four describes some of the mutual entanglements that existed between violence and figurative representation in this region and era. I consider the body's instrumentality as a means for envisioning, internalizing and normalizing violence; understandings of representation *as* an act of violence; and representations of the body as a ground upon which violence unfolds.

This project is the first to address the figurative turn in objects of Nguni sculpture from the nineteenth century. As such, my dissertation suggests several broader implications for the field of African art, and for art history more generally. First, examining figurative imagery in this specific historical and regional context draws attention to the local significance of figuration – an art historical category whose meaning is often taken for granted. If art history is truly a global discipline, as it claims to be, then it is important to complicate its conventional categories in this way.[283] With regard to figuration's emergence in Nguni visual cultures, several important themes have emerged throughout the preceding chapters. In Chapters One, Two, and Three, we have seen how explicit representation of bodily form will often appear on an object at precisely the moment when that object's meaning comes into question.[284] Chapters Two and Three draw

[283] Irene Winter has eloquently argued for the importance of explicating how Western art historical categories succeed and fail to describe artworks from elsewhere in the world. See Irene Winter, "Defining 'Aesthetics' for Non-Western Studies: The Case of Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, ed. Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3-28.; and Winter, "What/When is a Portrait? Royal Images of the Ancient Near East," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 153, No. 3 (September 2009): 254-270. Tom Cummins's book *Toasts with the Inca* offers a compelling model for examining figuration's significance within a localized context; see Cummins, *Toasts with the Inca: Andean Abstraction and Colonial Images on Quero Vessels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

[284] I thank Tom Cummins for helping me to articulate this idea.

particular attention to the way in which the development of figurative imagery was closely tied to that of commodification. And we have seen how, even as images of the body became ubiquitous, early associations between figurative imagery and violence subtly persisted in the cultural imaginary of this region – whether through the truncated forms of partial bodies that appear again and again on objects of nineteenth-century sculpture; or through analogies between likenesses, bodily fragments, and sorcery, which find formal and linguistic expression in a variety of ways.

Second, this project complicates habitual distinctions between ethnically-defined visual forms in studies of nineteenth-century colonial art. My categorical focus on figuration draws attention to unacknowledged connections and analogies between "traditional" African media, such as woodcarving and beadwork, and "European" pictorial media like photography and print. Despite their disparate cultural origins, I have shown how sculpted and pictorial representations of bodies often engaged similar issues, and were products of the same economic forces and local conditions. It is true that nineteenth-century southern Africa was a diverse environment, which was often fraught with the difficulties of cross-cultural translation and misunderstanding. However, the case studies presented here nonetheless suggest the extent to which shared visual cultures did exist. For instance, Chapter One describes transmissions of form in both directions between Tsonga and Zulu artists; Chapter Two explicates how figurative pipe forms could have evoked meaning for both Sotho and Xhosa viewers; and Chapter Four shows how concepts of vision and violence, of both European and African origin, coalesced within commemorative objects like the carved horns and painted tunic.

Lastly, this study demonstrates how the emergence of figurative art cannot be simplistically understood as a product of European colonial influence upon an African context.

On the contrary, it shows how this art historical development was, in fact, a product of heterogeneous sources, and how it was inextricably linked to larger histories of the body in nineteenth-century South Africa. In doing so, it also creates space to reassess the importance of visual and tactile forms, like those considered here, in producing such broader cultural changes.

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