

THE "NEW" SOUTH AFRICA AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN MAP

Elri Liebenberg
Department of Geography
University of South Africa
PRETORIA 0001, South Africa
Fax (27 12) 429 3221

In a semiotic sense every map is a cultural document from which can be discovered the underlying values, attributes, and principles which form the basis of the society that produces it. As such it is a powerful visual commentary portraying much of the social, political, cultural and spiritual processes operating in the superstructure of society.

On 27 May 1994 the Republic of South Africa changed, relatively peacefully, from an apartheid state characterised by minority white rule, racial segregation and political discrimination into a democratic system of government committed to achieving equality between men and women and people of all races. New legislation has brought about new geographical patterns and instead of the "old" South Africa with four provinces, four independent Black Homelands, five self-governing Black states and two official languages, the "new" South Africa boasts nine provinces, eleven official languages and a rapidly changing population distribution pattern due to accelerated urbanisation.

This paper briefly traces the evolution of the South African map as a social document from distinctly different cultural periods to its present form. It refers to the manifestations of apartheid visible on the existing official map and investigates the effect that the recently changed political, cultural and social dispensation might have on the map itself. Apart from the fact that the newly created geographical entities will alter the face of the map, the idea is put forth that certain design characteristics of the official map series will have to change in order to make the South African map less "Eurocentric" and therefore more intelligible to the politically dominant Black society.