



**FROM HUBERTA, THE COELACANTH AND SETTLER PASTS TO MANDELA, SOUTH END  
AND HINTSA'S WHIP: CONTAINING THE FRONTIER IN THE MUSEUMS OF THE  
EASTERN CAPE**

By

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**Abstract**

This paper is an analysis of the changes that have taken place in displays in some museums in the Eastern Cape since, at least, 1990. It takes as its starting point the concept of a museum as a site of containment. In one sense this refers to the oft-cited definition of a museum as a place that acquires, maintains and displays a series of objects. At another level the notion of containment refers to the politics of representation within the museum setting, which define the “boundaries for interpretive openness” and limit “the unpredictability of exhibitions” (Kratz, 2002: 213). The museums of the Eastern Cape from about the 1950s contained two dominant features: an emphasis on natural features of the region and a history of settlement from Europe, with collections and displays of settler objects such as “costumes, crockery, glassware, and silver... portraits and paintings” (Barry, 1961: 222). The local inhabitants of the region were placed in the ethnological section of the museums and were displayed as bearers of tradition, tribe and craft. These ethnological sections, together with the “zoological, botanical, mineralogical”, were taken together and cast as part of the natural worlds, that “which the Europeans were confronted here” (Fransen, 1969: 5), while European settlement and its artifacts were made into the history of the region. In this history of settling nature, any semblance of a frontier of conflict between settlers and the local inhabitants was almost entirely absent from display.

With political changes in South Africa in the 1990s, museums have become important signifiers in the unfolding of a discourse of a newly re-discovered heritage. By drawing upon notions of the museum as a domain of public education and citizenship, museums are seen to hold the potential to “form a new public and inscribe it in new relations of sight and vision” (Bennett, 1995: 73). The national government committed substantial resources to establishing new national museums, local and provincial authorities gave museums under their control an overhaul, reconstituting them as institutions which collected,

documented and exhibited social histories of their locality, independent museums with very limited financial support from the government emerged, and the central government facilitated the amalgamation of some of the older museums into flagship institutions. Museums in the Eastern Cape reflect these broad national trends, with some of the older museums establishing new displays and new local and national museums being established in the area. Most notably a new history was inscribed in these museum spaces, a history of colonialism, apartheid and resistance. Yet, this is a history that anticipates the commonality of a post-apartheid nation, and works towards forging a collective past that would be aligned with the present and the anticipated “never-ending” future (Bennett, 1995: 148). Presented as a national inheritance and labelled as heritage, this past is to be utilised as “a powerful agent for cultural identity, reconciliation and nation-building” (ACTAG, 1995: 55). The implications for museums in the Eastern Cape, both old and new, is that within a common post-apartheid future, their histories remain settled and the frontier of conflict tightly contained.

This paper is an analysis of the changes that have taken place in displays in some museums in the Eastern Cape since, at least, 1990. It takes as its starting point the concept of a museum as a site of containment. In one sense this refers to the oft-cited definition of a museum as a place that acquires, maintains and displays a series of objects. At another level the notion of containment refers to the politics of representation within the museum setting, which define the “boundaries for interpretive openness” and limit “the unpredictability of exhibitions” (Kratz, 2002: 213). The museums of the Eastern Cape from about the 1950s contained two dominant features: an emphasis on natural features of the region and a history of settlement from Europe, with collections and displays of settler objects such as “costumes, crockery, glassware, and silver... portraits and paintings” (Barry, 1961: 222). The local inhabitants of the region were placed in the ethnological section of the museums and were displayed as bearers of tradition, tribe and craft. These ethnological sections, together with the “zoological, botanical, mineralogical”, were taken together and cast as part of the natural worlds, that “which the Europeans were confronted here” (Fransen, 1969: 5), while European settlement and its artifacts were made into the history of the region. In this history of settling nature, any semblance of a frontier of conflict between settlers and the local inhabitants was almost entirely absent from display.

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With political changes in South Africa in the 1990s, museums have become important signifiers in the unfolding of a discourse of a newly re-discovered national heritage<sup>1</sup>. By drawing upon notions of the museum as a domain of public education and citizenship, museums are seen by the post-apartheid state to hold the potential to “form a new public and inscribe it in new relations of sight and vision”. The national government has committed substantial resources to establishing new national museums – Freedom Park, Robben Island and Nelson Mandela museums – while new provincial authorities have given some attention to museums under their control, largely attempting to reconstitute them as institutions that collect, document and exhibit histories of colonialism, apartheid and resistance in their respective regions. The latter trend has been particularly evident in the province that has been established and named as “Eastern Cape”. Although operating on a very limited budget – the Eastern Cape government spends between 15 and 16 million rands annually on its provincial and district museums – some museums in the province are attempting to recast their displays. The old Settlers Memorial Museum in Grahamstown, renamed the Historical Museum, has produced an exhibition entitled “Contact and Conflict: The Eastern Cape, 1780-1910”. The Kaffrarian museum in King William’s Town was renamed the Amathole Museum, and opened its new history display, “Across the Frontier”, in the Daines wing in March 2002. In the previous year a travelling exhibition that tells a history of Robben Island as a political prison from the 1960s through to the 1990s was launched at this museum (coinciding with the announcement of a Eastern Cape liberation struggle tour called “Wings of the Dove”), before commencing its journey through museums in the province. By June 2003 it had reached the Port Elizabeth Museum (Bayworld). A special Eastern Cape museum magazine for schools, funded by the Directorate of Museums and Heritage Resources in the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, was launched in September 2001 and given the name *Umjelo*, a water furrow, which symbolises knowledge. The first edition contained histories of Nxele “the first political prisoner ever on Robben Island”, the Battle of Grahamstown in 1819, when “vast numbers of Xhosa warriors” attacked “the British garrison”, and the Bulhoek “tragedy” of May 1921 when the police killed “at least 183” members of a group of people who “refused a government order to move from the land on which they were waiting for the end of the world to come”. The primary objective of these new exhibitions and publications, which claim to recover and present “the rich heritage history of the Eastern Cape”, is to make museums in the province “a vibrant testament to a living history”, thereby assisting them to become more accessible to communities “from townships and neighbouring villages”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73; Mike van Graan and Tammy Ballantyne, *The South African Handbook on Arts and Culture 2002-2003* (Cape Town: David Philip, 23002), 84; Janette Bennett, “The dove trail”, *Sunday Times Online*, 18 November 2001,

But there is a possible tension between these histories that the Eastern Cape museums seek to present and a history that anticipates the commonality of a post-apartheid nation. In the latter the work of history is to forge a collective past that would be aligned with the present and the anticipated “never-ending” national future. Presented as a national inheritance and labelled as heritage, this past was presented, in a major report for the national Department of Arts Culture Science and Technology, as one to be utilised as “a powerful agent for cultural identity, reconciliation and nation-building”.<sup>3</sup> This common post-apartheid future and past, built around notions of racial reconciliation, does not sit easily with the “heritage history” objectives of museums in the Eastern Cape. In order to connect with local histories these museums are presenting themselves as spaces that revive and contain histories of conflict on the colonial frontier and during the struggles against apartheid. This paper suggests that those provincial museums in the Eastern Cape formerly designated as “Natural History” and now popularly called the four “big” ones – the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, the Amathole Museum in King William’s Town, the East London Museum and the Port Elizabeth Museum (Bayworld) - attempt to cope with this potential discord by containing the frontier in the dual sense of inclusion and restraint. The frontier is represented in these new exhibitions as a site where history is racially balanced, conflicts are largely represented in terms of military strategies and manoeuvres, these hostilities denote a past which is to be overcome and it is the displays and collections of plants and animals which come to symbolise a common cultural heritage. This collective inheritance, where the frontier remains contained, is no more evident than in the campaign of Eastern Cape natural history museums to save the fish commonly known as the Eastern Cape Rocky. The fish has the “scientific name”, “*Sandelia bainsii*”, this appellation being derived from Sandile, “the great Xhosa chief” who was a “central figure in the War of the Axe (1846-47) and the War of Mlanjeni (1850-1853)” and Andrew Geddes Bain, the “road-builder, geologist, explorer, trader, soldier, writer and artist”, who came to South Africa in 1816 and was “known as the father of South African geology”.<sup>4</sup> To situate these museum renovations on the Eastern Cape colonial frontier in the 1990s this paper first takes a step back to examine some of the elements that went into constructing the “frontiers of knowledge” that these museums “subscribe[d] to”<sup>5</sup> in settler pasts from about the 1920s. It then looks at some of the new exhibitions and ends with a brief encounter with the Eastern Cape Rocky.

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<http://www.suntimes.co.za/2001/11/18/lifestyle/life02.asp>, accessed 31 July 2003; Hayley van Breda, ‘History Revived in the Daines Wing!’, *Imvubu: Amathole Museum Newsletter*, vol 14, no 1, (April 2002), 3; *Umjelo: Eastern Cape Museum’s Magazine*, vol 1, (September 2001), 1, 2, 22, 28, 30; Janette Bennett, ‘Museums bring history alive’, *The Teacher/M&G Media*, Johannesburg, December 2001, [www.teacher.co.za/200112/museums.html](http://www.teacher.co.za/200112/museums.html), accessed 20 July 2003. The Robben Island exhibition is produced by Faaborg Prison Museum and Maria Rytler. It was funded by the Danish Foreign Ministry and the Royal Danish Embassy in Pretoria and handed over to the Robben Island Museum in 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, *The Birth*, 148; *Report of the Arts and Culture Task Group, presented to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology*. Pretoria, 1995: 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Umjelo*, vol 1, (September 2001), 2, 4; *Umjelo*, vol 2, (May 2002), 22; Notes from “Spotlight on the Eastern Cape Rocky” display at the East London Museum, 6 June 2003. I am grateful to Premesh Lalu for discussions on this idea of museums as sites of containment.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Swanepoel, ‘Preface’ to Brian M. Randles, *A History of the Kaffrarian Museum (King William’s Town: Kaffrarian Museum, 1984)*, iv.

## Huberta and the Coelacanth in settler pasts

In 1970 the Department of Nature Conservation of the Cape Provincial Administration published a brochure outlining the collections, staff, displays and activities of the museums that fell under its authority. The museums were classified in the brochure as either “Natural History” or “Cultural History”, with no explicit criteria of how these categories were determined.<sup>6</sup> A year earlier a guide-book, compiled by the South African Museums Association, indicated that the category of natural, referred to “the vast and exciting zoological, botanical, mineralogical and ethnological material with which the Europeans were confronted here”, while cultural referred to the “‘sub-culture’ ... of its European population”.<sup>7</sup> The Cape Provincial museums which were bracketed together as “Natural History” were, with one exception, geographically located within a 350 kilometer stretch of what became, in the 1990s, the Eastern Cape province of South Africa: the East London Museum, the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, the Kaffrarian Museum in King William’s Town and the Port Elizabeth Museum.<sup>8</sup> These museums largely collected and displayed a variety of animal and plant species. Most prominent amongst these were two specimens: the “fossil fish”, *Latimera chalumnae*, the coelacanth caught in 1938 off the Chalumna River mouth, brought to the East London Museum under the auspices of Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer and displayed in its entrance hall as a “living fossil”; Huberta, the wandering hippopotamus “which achieved fame during the years 1928 to 1931 for her epic journey along the coast from Zululand to the vicinity of King William’s Town” before being shot (by a group of farmers), skinned and stuffed (by museum staff in King William’s Town and London) and “enshrined at the entrance of the old Natural History building” of the Kaffrarian Museum.<sup>9</sup>

Yet these “natural history” museums collect and display more than plant and animal life. Not only do they exhibit and bring together human cultures and histories (as will be explained later) but also their natural history collections are “historically, geographically and socially constituted”. Their very naturalness is “culturally constructed and sustained”, in the process reproducing and legitimizing certain ideas about society.<sup>10</sup> Clifford’s point that collections have a tendency to “suppress their own historical, economic and political processes of production”<sup>11</sup> is no more evident than in natural history museums where displays are regarded as specimens, given “common” and/or “scientific” names, and situated in exhibits that claim to reproduce the natural surrounds and/or an associated field of research and/or environmental awareness.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Nature Conservation, *Provincial Museums of the Cape Province*, (Cape Town: Department of Nature Conservation of the Provincial Administration of the Cape of Good Hope, circa 1970).

<sup>7</sup> H Fransen, (compiler). *Guide to the Museums of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: South African Museums Association, 1969), 5

<sup>8</sup> The one provincial “natural history” museum outside this region was the Alexander McGregor Museum in Kimberley.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Nature Conservation, *Provincial Museums*, 3, 13; ‘The Coelacanth: A Short History of its Discovery’, (East London Museum brochure, no date), 1; Amathole Museum, ‘Huberta: The World’s Most Famous Hippo’, (King William’s Town: Amathole Museum pamphlet, no date).

<sup>10</sup> Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London: Sage, 1998), 15.

<sup>11</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and, Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 229.

How the plants and animals were acquired and the cultural meanings that are associated with them finds little place in natural history museums.<sup>12</sup>

But, there are moments when the processes of the cultural production, almost inadvertently, appear and questions of the cultural history of naturalness begin to emerge. In the Natural History Building of the Amathole (formerly Kaffrarian) Museum, where Huberta is proudly displayed, there is a large stuffed buffalo with a notice “Do Not Touch Wolsack”. At Wolsack’s feet there is a photograph entitled “Wolsack and the Hunting Party”. The photo shows a group of hunters (six men) gathered around the body of Wolsack. One is informed in the caption that the photo was taken by Frank Pym, the first curator of the Kaffrarian Museum. Who were these hunters? What about the other animals in the hall? How were they acquired? What was the purpose of this collection? And how is Huberta related to this collection?

The individuals associated with Huberta’s acquisition by the Kaffrarian museum were the director from 1921 to 1949, Captain Guy Chester Shortridge, and his assistant, Nicholas Arends. A pamphlet produced by the Amathole Museum recounts how they “took possession” of Huberta.

The day after hearing the news of the shooting at the Keiskamma River, he (Shortridge) and his assistant, Nicholas Arends took a taxi to the scene. They persuaded a number of local farmers to help in the skinning of the rapidly deteriorating carcass, and finished the task by 11 pm on the 24<sup>th</sup> April. The next day the hide and skull were taken to King William’s Town by bus. While Nicholas Arends laboured at cleaning the remains, curious onlookers trampled the museum’s garden and surrounding fence. Sympathy cards and donations for Huberta’s mounting poured in.<sup>13</sup>

Arends relates in his memoirs how he removed the flesh, shaved the hide, boiled, bleached and cleaned the skull, and then dried the skin in preparation for the “late lamentable Huberta” to be stuffed and mounted in London. Once Huberta was returned to South Africa she was displayed at the Durban and East London Museums and the Rand Easter Show before becoming a permanent display at the Kaffrarian Museum in 1932. “Possession is nine points of the law”, relates Arends, “and we were determined to keep her, and keep her we did”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The exception here may of course be the dinosaurs where the process of the find is sometimes elaborately presented. Yet even in this case it nearly always reproduces the scientist as a discoverer of a reality, with little recognition of the “cultural and social forces” that drive scientific work. W J T Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281.

<sup>13</sup> Amathole Museum, ‘Huberta: The World’s Most Famous Hippo’, (King William’s Town: Amathole Museum pamphlet, no date).

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas P. Arends and L.M.D. Stopforth, *Trapping Safaris* (Cape Town: Nasou, 1967), 56.

In almost all stories about Huberta the Kaffrarian museum and its employees – Shortridge and Arends – appear as those who saved Huberta for science and posterity by “salvaging the hide”<sup>15</sup>, while the farmers who shot her appear as the guilty parties who killed Huberta out of ignorance. In *Huberta’s Story* written by Cicely van Straten, Shortridge is depicted as “murderously angered” by the killing of Huberta. She writes that “this remarkable creature wild creature symbolised for him (Shortridge) all of that great wild that he loved and served”. Arends is similarly livid about the shooting of Huberta. “‘They shot several times,’ he muttered. ‘Small shots in the head. It’s the two rifle shots that killed her ... Idiots!’”<sup>16</sup> What is not so apparent in these stories is that Shortridge and Arends were involved, almost on an annual basis, on expeditions to collect/hunt for mammals. With development of the category of natural history in the nineteenth century the classification of animals “meant collection, and collection meant killing”.<sup>17</sup> Landau points out that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, imperial hunts for game on a grand scale had been drastically reduced as animal populations were decimated. Although the activity of hunting remained firmly in place, it was increasingly framed in a discourse of serving the interests of museums, classification and science. This was no more apparent than in an exhibition in 1932 in the British Museum of Natural History entitled “Game Animals of Empire”. Classified according to the colonies and dominions where they were collected, the animals on exhibition were presented as being “threatened with extermination” because of agriculture and “commercial exploitation” and not hunting.<sup>18</sup> Shortridge who collected for the Kaffrarian Museum as well as for the British and American Museums of Natural History had acquired many of these “animals of Empire”. Field Marshall Allenby described Shortridge as “as a sportsman ... as well as a naturalist”. In an obituary which appeared in *Nature* in 1949 it was maintained that Shortridge went on 13 collecting expeditions, collecting some 25 000 species.<sup>19</sup> Many of these expeditions were to present day Namibia, where the colonial administration gave free game and shooting permits, information about the distribution of animals and made nearly all the transport arrangements. Their assistance was so invaluable that Shortridge recommended to the British Museum of Natural History that new species be named after several of these individuals. These collecting/hunting expeditions were the highlight of Shortridge’s life and in his correspondence with the British Museum of Natural History he expressed the feeling of “gloom” when an expedition came to an end. “I came back from my trips feeling about 25 years old”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Educational Services”, *Kaffrarian Museum Annual Report, 1990-91* (King William’s Town: Kaffrarian Museum, 1991), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Cicely van Straten, *Huberta’s Journey* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1988), 138-9. The Kaffrarian Museum receives royalties on this book as the story is developed from a core text that the museum provided the author with. *Kaffrarian Museum Annual Report, 1990-91*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and collectors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Landau, “Hunting with gun and camera: a commentary” in Wolfram Hartman, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera* (Cape Town, UCT Press, 1998), 153.

<sup>19</sup> F. M. Allenby, Foreword to G. C. Shortridge, *The Mammals of South-West Africa*, vol 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1934); *Nature*, 9 April 1949, vol 163: 556-7; W.T. Calman, Preface to J.G. Dollman, *Game Animals of the Empire, Special Guide Number 1* (London: British Museum of Natural History, 1932). The term “sportsman”, as it is used here, refers to hunting as a sport.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Third Percy Sladen and Kaffrarian Museum Expedition, “Ovamboland”, 7 July – 9 December 1924, British Museum of Natural History (BMNH), DF 232/26; Letter from G C Shortridge to Olfield Thomas, BMNH, 7 January 1926 BMNH DF 232/27; Letter from G C Shortridge to Oldfield Thomas, 3 June 1925, BMNH DF 232/26.

Despite all these expeditions there was one mammal that had not been acquired: a hippopotamus. Shortridge was determined to set this right. This was one of the major objectives of 1929 expedition to the Okavango and Western Caprivi. First a hippopotamus was shot for the British Museum and then another for the Kaffrarian Museum. Shortridge's assistant and constant companion, Nicholas Arends, describes the killing of the second hippopotamus at length in his book *Trapping Safaris*:<sup>21</sup>

... before I even had time to take aim, the hideous and rather fearsome creature emerged from the reeds no more than five yards away from me.... As I was standing in a ten-foot deep donga, formed by the passage of countless hippos through many centuries perhaps, there was nowhere to escape to except forward – in the direction from which the hippo was charging. I raised my rifle blindly and fired, praying as I did do. The bullet went home and the hippo dropped dead no more than three feet away from me, rolling over on its side in the mud and slush.

Arends then goes on to describe how he “began to take measurements, standing waist-deep in the slush; the length of the body, the circumference of the neck, the shoulders and the abdomen, the height at the shoulder”. He then began to skin the hippo. “I felt like a doctor performing an abdominal operation on a kitchen table with a patient lying on his stomach.” The skin was then taken back to camp. In addition they “took some meat and eight gallons of pure white dripping”. In the evening they feasted on the hippo meat. “I had my first taste of hippo's saddle and steak, and very appetizing it was too”.<sup>22</sup>

The contrast with stories of Huberta is marked. In the story of the Okavango expedition the hippopotamus appears as a dangerous animal. Although given the same skinning as Huberta, this (unnamed) hippopotamus is not regarded as a creature to be mourned. Indeed, by the time Hubert had been killed he had almost become a human and his travels had acquired epic proportions. His wanderings were cast in the same narrative of the daring colonial adventurer (or hunter?) on a “lone trek”, confronting the dangers of a modernizing ‘primitive’ Africa, ultimately seeking the solace and solitude of nature. For some he was seen to follow in the “paths of the pioneer traders Fynn and Farewell from Zululand to the Cape, that golden road of river and forest where Farewell was murdered by tribesmen”, while for others he followed in the tracks of Dick King who rode Durban to Grahamstown in 1842 to seek military assistance to

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<sup>21</sup> Arends says that Shortridge was “like a father” to him. “In between trips” writes Arends “I lived at his home. We had breakfast together, had lengthy discussions by the light of the flickering camp fire, and took long walks in the veld during the day-time. His wisdom, experience, and sympathetic understanding gave direction to my life and work”. The discussions which they had, according to Arends, were sometimes very serious, “about future expeditions, the various facets of mammal collecting, birds, botanical specimens, mineral deposits, stone implements, ethnographical specimens, reptiles, marine biology.” Then there were lighter moments, “when we could laugh together like two school boys.” Arends describes Shortridge as “a fearless man” and that he (Arends) always made it his “business to see to it that a loaded firearm was always within reach of his camp bed, especially when we were trekking through dangerous country”. Arends and Stopforth, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Arends and Stopforth, 31-2.

relieve the port of its occupation by trekboer forces. And then, upon his death, it was discovered that Hubert was not male and she became Huberta, “the national animal heroine of South Africa”.<sup>23</sup> In her death Huberta took on at least two forms. In the collections of the Kaffrarian museum she partly became a specimen that provided evidence “to the wandering and migratory tendencies of hippopotamus”.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, the killing of Huberta became cast as a moral story of nature needing to be saved, and her story was explicitly linked, and placed alongside, a narrative of the emergence of national parks (and later of the need for environmental awareness). At the same time as the natural history museum, with its hunting/collecting expeditions, was presented as saving animals for scientific study, the game reserve with roads, comfortable bungalows, grocery stores, and petrol depots (all offered along with “native service” which was “provided free to hirers of guest houses”) was presented, as a living museum to wild-life and nature. Unlike the ‘ignorant’ farmers who killed Huberta (and indeed were establishing cattle-ranches in game parks) and the “natives” who “staged hunts regularly in the sanctuary”, it was the tourists, with their cameras, who were presented as embodying the characteristics of “ardent game-protectionists”.<sup>25</sup>

The “saviours” of Huberta for the museum, Shortridge and Arends, went on several more collecting/hunting expeditions in the following years, traveling through the Northern Cape, Malawi and Zambia to add specimens to museum collections in South Africa, Britain and the United States. They saw their work as contributing to a much larger scientific endeavour. Arends describes himself as a “true naturalist” who found “immense satisfaction in seeing specimens trapped by him on display and preserved for posterity”.<sup>26</sup> He went on to use the knowledge he had gained as a trapper to secure an appointment, in 1960, as a technical assistant in the Zoology Department of the newly established University of the Western Cape. He also entered the separatist realm of “coloured politics”, taking a seat in the Union Council for Coloured Affairs and becoming national secretary of the Republican Coloured People’s Party.<sup>27</sup> Shortridge, meanwhile, used the information he gathered on his Namibia expeditions to publish a two-volume directory entitled “Mammals of South-West Africa” which attempted to give “as complete and reliable” an “account of each mammal ... as possible”.<sup>28</sup> His career, however, came to a

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<sup>23</sup> Hedley. A. Chilvers, *Huberta Goes South* (South Africa: Central News agency, circa 1932), title page, 19, 53-74 (Chapter IV “On the Dick King Trail”), 17.

<sup>24</sup> Shortridge, *The Mammals of South-West Africa*, 650.

<sup>25</sup> C. Selwyn Stokes, “The National Parks of South Africa”, in Hedley. A. Chilvers, *Huberta Goes South* (South Africa: Central News agency, circa 1932), 157-8, 126-7.

<sup>26</sup> Arends, *Trapping*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Randles, *Kaffrarian Museum*, 34. The Union Council for Coloured Affairs (UCCA) was part of the package that was contained in the Separate Representation of Voters Act of 1956 that removed people who were racially classified as “coloured” from the common voters roll. The UCCA. was to “advise the government on matters of concern specifically to Coloureds, in liaison with a Minister of Coloured Affairs and a Coloured Affairs Department”. The Unity Movement referred to the UCCA as a “pus-blown sore on the body politics of the oppressed”. See Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A history of South African ‘Coloured’ politics* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987), 269-70.

<sup>28</sup> Shortridge, *The Mammals*, xi.

tragic end in January 1949 when he was found dead in his laboratory in the museum. “The inquest into his death recorded a verdict of death by strychnine poisoning, self-administered”.<sup>29</sup>

As with Huberta, the coelacanth displays in the East London Museum inadvertently reveal some of the cultural and political history that can be associated with the collection and presentation of natural history. The first present-day encounter with a coelacanth in the East London Museum is with one that is mounted a stone plinth, in a dive-bombing type position. Almost appearing as a sculpture (it is not contained within a display cabinet) the fish is named as ‘The Pik Botha coelacanth’. Named after the long-serving National Party Minister of Foreign Affairs, who attempted to promote and defend an increasingly isolated apartheid South Africa to the international world, the coelacanth was one of the many that the government of the Comoros Islands handed out to visiting dignitaries (in this case Pik Botha) to curry favour and investment.<sup>30</sup> This display is merely a foretaste of what is to come.

There is an entire hall in the East London museum devoted to coelacanths, proudly proclaimed by the museum as “the most famous fish in the world” which was “saved for science by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer”. Displayed here is the “type specimen” *Latimeria chalumnae*, a time line showing the temporal location of the coelacanth in the evolution of species, a collection of coelacanth paraphernalia and a recreated living environment (together with fishing nets) of *Latimeria chalumnae*. A display of how the “prehistoric fish” was discovered and taken to the East London Museum includes a model of the head of Enoch Elias, “who accompanied Miss Latimer to the harbour to fetch the fish” in 1938. The head was modeled by Courtenay-Latimer. On display, Elias faces “Miss. M. Courtenay Latimer” who is described as the “Director of this museum from 1931 to 1973” who was “awarded an honorary doctorate by Rhodes university in 1971 for her services to science”. The fish was sent in 1940 to the South African Museum to be mounted by James Drury. In a distinctive display, showing the process of molding and casting, Drury is presented to visitors of the museum as “the finest taxidermist in the country and whose most famous work at that museum was the plaster models of the bushmen”. There is no discussion over the ways that Drury’s work on human ‘living fossils’ at the museum was deeply imbricated in notions of racial science. Another special presentation is the story of the discovery of the second coelacanth in the Comoros Islands. Named *Malania anjouanae*, the appellation was derived from the National Party Prime Minister, D. F. Malan, who gave permission for a South African air force Dakota to be used to recover the coelacanth and introduced the legislative system and apparatus of apartheid.<sup>31</sup> It is little wonder then that

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<sup>29</sup> Randles, *Kaffrarian Museum*, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Samantha Weinberg, *A Fish Caught in Time: The Search for the Coelacanth* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 139.

<sup>31</sup> “The most famous fish in the world”, postcard (East London: East London Museum, 2000); Visit to East London Museum, 6 June 2003; Weinberg, *A Fish*, 70-2. The naming of Courtenay-Latimer with a title “Miss” and Elias without a title (he is labeled as Enoch) reflects common museum practice in South Africa of different ways of naming black and white staff, that was evident at least up until the 1970s. In the Department of Nature Conservation brochure, *Provincial Museums of the Cape Province*, the professional and technical staff of these museums were listed, named and titled. For example, Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, Director, East London Museum; Miss G Green, Typist, Albany Museum; Mr A Hall, Senior Technical Assistant, Kaffrarian Museum; H. J. Deacon, BSc., M.A., Deputy Director, Albany Museum; .Dr G S Saayman, Animal Behaviourist, Port Elizabeth Museum. There was a

at a workshop titled “Beyond Restitution – Exploring Hidden Heritages”, hosted by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at Rhodes University in East London, to discuss the possibility of establishing a community museum in East London, one of the slogans that was taken up was that communities had been oppressed far too long by the coelacanth.<sup>32</sup>

Connections between coelacanth research and presentation in museums and the cultural workings of apartheid, and earlier of racial science, still require far more investigation. What is apparent though is that museums in the eastern Cape prided themselves on their physical anthropology research and collections. The Port Elizabeth Museum sent much of its collection of human remains to the University of the Witwatersrand “for specialist study”. Here, under the direction of Raymond Dart, skulls were studied for defining physical characteristics and placed within racial types. W.Kohler of the Anatomy Department studied one collection. He concluded that the skulls he studied showed “evidence of appreciable antiquity”. They were seen to represent

a fundamentally Bushman physical type, differing somewhat in detail from that found in the Zitzikama caves. Other skulls, apparently of more recent date ... show the Bushman type diluted by a subordinate element which appears to be the South African Negro (the type represented by the modern Bantu-speaking peoples).<sup>33</sup>

Prior to being sent to the University of the Witwatersrand several of these skulls were displayed in the Port Elizabeth Museum. An official guide to the museum, published in 1920, invited students of ethnology to take particular note of the top shelf in the center case of room 10, where “there is a large series of skulls of Bushmen, Hottentots and Kafirs, with casts of the skulls and skullcaps of cave men who lived in remotely ancient times”. These human remains were displayed in the ethnological gallery together with archaeological finds of tools and hunting implements, examples of “native” “arts and crafts” and “full-size reproductions of Bushman paintings”. Framing the gallery, at either end, were two display cases containing animals that could not be accommodated in other areas of the museum.<sup>34</sup>

Local inhabitants of the region were also placed in the ethnological sections of the other natural history museums of the eastern Cape. They were displayed as bearers of tradition, tribe and craft. The East London Museum prided itself on its “Bantu habitat displays”, where visitors were “able to view our Bantu

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special category labeled “Non-White” or “Bantu” staff. With a few exceptions this category of staff were not named but numbered: seven in East London, thirteen in Grahamstown, four in King William’s Town. Those in this category that were named, Burton Mashalaba, Enos Xotyeni and Victor Shumane, laboratory and ethnological assistants at the East London and Albany Museums, were given first names and no titles.

<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Ciraj Rassool for this information. See report on the workshop at [www.ru.ac.za/institutes/iser/research/heritages/Workshop.htm](http://www.ru.ac.za/institutes/iser/research/heritages/Workshop.htm), accessed 28 July 2003.

<sup>33</sup> L. H. Wells, “The Port Elizabeth Museum and South African Physical Anthropology”, *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, vol 11, no 14 (June 1942): 349-351.

<sup>34</sup> M. Lazarus (compiler), *Port Elizabeth: Official Museum Guide* (Port Elizabeth: Port Elizabeth Museum, 1920), 28-30.

in their natural settings, as they lived before the European influence affected their lives”.<sup>35</sup> In Grahamstown the Natural History Museum, featured “the traditional life of the amaXhosa” and a series of “Bantu wood-carvings, ornaments, clothing, and utensils”.<sup>36</sup> The Kaffrarian Museum was very proud of its ethnological collection – which included bracelets belonging to Chief Sandile, who was killed in the Frontier War of 1877-78 - and the government suggested in 1939 that it become officially designated as the “ethnological center for Kaffraria and the Transkei”. Many years later, in 1978, the museum appointed a social anthropologist, under whose auspices the ethnological collection was placed in a more secure storage environment, and a new Xhosa gallery was developed. Opened in 1982 by Jeff Peires, “the well-known Xhosa historian from Rhodes University”, the gallery design included a “scale model of a nineteenth century Xhosa homestead featuring the old style ‘bee-hive’ hut”.<sup>37</sup> The second phase of this gallery, a Contemporary Anthropology Hall, displaying “socio-cultural change among Xhosa-speaking peoples of the Ciskei during the 20<sup>th</sup> century” was opened in July 1984, to coincide with the centenary celebrations of the Kaffrarian Museum.<sup>38</sup>

From the 1950s these museums began to incorporate, on a large scale, a history of settlement from Europe. One major imperative of the apartheid state was to establish a sense of legitimacy among people who racially designated themselves as white, and were in the process of becoming classified as such. A sense of a white identity and history, based on European founding and the iconic figures of Jan and Maria van Riebeeck, was promoted as the basis of a national settler past. One way of sustaining this white national settler identity was to identify a series of activities that were marked as signalling the advent of “progress” in South Africa. Thus, at the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, the reason for Van Riebeeck’s arrival in 1652 was proclaimed, by the organisers of the commemoration, to be based upon a “scientific” response of dealing with problem of scurvy need to obtain a ready supply of Vitamin C for sailors and traders who plied the routes from Europe to the east in the seventeenth century. This then led to “scientific work”, the establishment of institutions and “the growth of modern civilization”.<sup>39</sup>

In addition each component of this broader (white) nation was also encouraged to establish and promote its own set of founders. In the eastern Cape, this was translated into the German settlers of the 1850s and the English who arrived in the 1820s.<sup>40</sup> The latter were depicted as people who had “achieved distinction” as “pioneers, hunters [including Dick King], explorers, traders, builders of roads and ports, founders of

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<sup>35</sup> Department of Nature Conservation, *Provincial Museums*, 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Madeleen Welman, *Museums of Grahamstown* (Grahamstown, nd), 2; T. H. Barry, “The Albany Museum, Grahamstown”, *Lantern*, X, 3, (March 1961), 225.

<sup>37</sup> Randles, *Kaffrarian Museum*, 51-52; 122-3; 129; 136; 140.

<sup>38</sup> “Director’s Report: Past - Present – Future”, *Kaffrarian Museum Centenary Year, Annual Report 1984-5* (King William’s Town: Kaffrarian Museum, 1985), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Executive Committee Hall of Science, *Science Serves South Africa* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Festival, 1952), v.

<sup>40</sup> This is discussed at length in Leslie Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), ch 5. See also Gary Minkley and Leslie Witz, ‘Sir Harry Smith and his imbongi: Local and national identities in the eastern Cape, 1952’, paper presented at the History Workshop Conference, University of Witwatersrand, 1994.

towns and ... industry".<sup>41</sup> The Settlers Memorial Museum in Grahamstown, which formed part of the Albany museum complex, opened in 1965, displaying the 1820 settlers as bearers of "their cultural traditions throughout South Africa". Large German settler displays, in East London and King William's Town, emphasized rural life, the use of farming implements and "customs and tradition".<sup>42</sup> The Kaffrarian Museum, which in 1943 had expressed grave reservations about establishing a historical section – its board had passed a resolution "stating that the Mammal Collection of the Museum be the chief and most important section of the Museum and that the future policy would be to preserve and improve it" – had by 1950 established a special historical section for display. One of the most significant history exhibitions was held in the museum in 1958 to coincide with the centenary commemorations of the arrival of German settlers.<sup>43</sup> The foreword to a special brochure produced for the commemoration situated these German settlers in a lineage starting with Van Riebeeck and culminating in apartheid South Africa:

It is the story which begins with Jan van Riebeeck and continues to our day and generation and reveals that throughout the history of South Africa there has been a continuous influx of Germans, who sooner or later have coalesced with the other groups they found here. Dutch, German and French, British and then German again together formed the people who proudly call themselves South Africans.<sup>44</sup>

Cultural history - at times merely referred to as "history" - as derived from Europe, was literally coming "into" its "own"<sup>45</sup> in the natural history museums of the eastern Cape.

In this history of settlement, the fronting of race found itself almost being outside of history. Not only were races defined as components of the South African 'European nation' - with French, British, Germany and Dutch ancestry – but colonial conflict between components of the settler population and the local inhabitants was substantially reduced. "The sense of a commonality to be achieved was one based on settlers and settlement, which hardly encountered blacks even if it was cast in terms of conquest and colonisation."<sup>46</sup> Settler displays in eastern Cape museums were of "tools and household equipment" (in the Port Elizabeth Museum), "costumes ... antique furniture, china, crockery, glassware, and silver" (in Grahamstown), "dress, domestic utensils [and] toys" (in East London) and "period costumes ... household items, obsolete vehicles and agricultural implements" (in King William's Town).<sup>47</sup> To show a common South African European ancestry the Settlers Memorial Museum went even further to display

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<sup>41</sup> H. E. Hockly, *The Settlers of 1820: A Brief History for use in Schools* (Cape Town: Juta and Co, 1966), 56.

<sup>42</sup> Notes from displays at the Albany, East London and Amathole (former Kaffrarian) Museum, 4-6 June 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Randles, *Kaffrarian Museum*, 54, 78.

<sup>44</sup> E. L. G. Schnell, "Foreword" to J.F. Schwär and B.E. Pape, *Germans in Kaffraria 1858-1958* (German Settlers Centenary, 1958?), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Fransen, *Guide to the Museums*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Minkley and Witz, 'Harry Smith', 5.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Nature Conservation, *Provincial Museums*, 4-16.

copper kettles as an example of “the fusion of the Cape Dutch and 1820 Settler cultures”.<sup>48</sup> When conflict with the local inhabitants was portrayed at all it tended to be through a narrative of ‘military tradition’, with the focus on British colonial uniforms, fortifications and guns. If this ‘military tradition’ had enabled the settling of nature in the eastern Cape, then the museums of “settler country” contained its animals and local inhabitants as collections and exhibits of natural history and ethnology. The settlers, themselves, were portrayed as the bearer of culture, dress, progress and modernity.

### **Natural history museums in frontier country**

In this, the first edition of *Umjelo*, we will be opening a tiny crack to look into the East London and Amathole Museums where you will find, among many other things, the most famous fossil fish in the world, the best-travelled hippo known to man and two footprints which are said to be 200 000 years old.<sup>49</sup> Little appears to have altered in the natural history museums of the Eastern Cape since the demise of apartheid and advent of universal adult suffrage. Huberta and the coelacanth remain the key icons, the settler (English and German) and ‘traditional’ Xhosa displays are largely in place and a map of the eastern Cape in the East London Museum depicts two of the bantustans created by the architects of grand apartheid, Ciskei and Transkei, as independent national entities.

Yet this appearance of negligible change may be deceptive. Travelling by car from Port Elizabeth to Grahamstown in 2003 road-side signs with the insignia of a canon begin to appear indicating that one is now entering “Frontier Country”. Upon closer inspection of the publicity material one discovers that this is one of a series of routes that is marked out for tourists to follow in the province that styles itself as a place “that can call Nelson Mandela its own”. At the heart of reconstituted “Frontier Country” in the province of “Madiba Action” is Grahamstown, now presented as the place where “Khoi, Xhosa, Boer and British people met and left their mark”. The Egazini Memorial, marking the battle of April 1819 when Makana attacked Grahamstown, and the associated art and craft project, is a significant feature of this route. King William’s Town, on the very edge of Frontier Country, is publicised as having changed from a “garrison town” to a “bustling metropole”. East London, although it is on the Sunshine Coast, presents itself to tourists as being “steeped in Xhosa and Settler history”, while tours of Port Elizabeth, also on the same route, claim to “incorporate some aspects of Settler History as well as the impact of the apartheid era on the city”. The towns of “settler country” have been recast as “frontier towns” and the area into “a region that saw no less than nine frontier wars”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Department of Nature Conservation, *Provincial Museums*, 9-10.

<sup>49</sup> *Umjelo*, vol 1 (September 2001), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Traci Mackie (ed), *Eastern Cape Madiba Action* (Port Elizabeth: Yithethe Publishing Company in association with Eastern Cape Tourism Board, 2002), 11; *Your Travel Companion to South Africa’s Eastern Cape* (George: Your Travel Companion, 2003), 73, 68, 62, 36; Makana Municipality, “What to do in Grahamstown” (pamphlet), Makana Tourism, 2003; Grahamstown Makana Tattler, vol 3, no 4 (May 2003), 3.

The “big four” museums seem to have followed a similar trajectory to one that can be identified in the tourism publicity for the province. “Contact and Conflict” in the History Museum in Grahamstown, relates how “contact amongst the people of the Eastern Cape led to conflict and conquest, which in turn contributed to the making of modern South Africa”. “Across the Frontier” at the Amathole Museum addresses visitors who enter the museum with the statement that “the ‘frontier’ is not only physical but cultural: it encapsulates both body and soul”. The East London museum uses sport to depict the “uniting of a once divided community” in its exhibition, “Playing the game”. The temporary exhibition space on the upper gallery of the Port Elizabeth Museum has been the space for displays that are explicitly targeted at “redressing past imbalances”. In 2000/1 the exhibition in this space was one of Red Location in Port Elizabeth. This exhibition contained a series of photographs that documented township life, a replica of a shack interior (covered with newspaper and magazine wallpaper and containing a kitchen cupboard, a table, a few utensils and a very short inhabitant) and the model submitted by the architect who won the prize for designing the proposed apartheid museum in the township. The following year the exhibition entitled “Triumph over Adversity” focused on “the hopes, fears and achievements of the disabled”.<sup>51</sup> The Robben Island exhibition, which opened in May 2003 tells, through photographs and text a story of the island, primarily as a history of apartheid repression, followed by resistance carried out by the ANC, all along a trajectory that traces a biography of Nelson Mandela. Histories of colonial and apartheid conflict therefore appear to have become the very essence of new history displays in Eastern Cape museums.

This frontier of knowledge in apartheid and colonial pasts is nonetheless almost stripped of its brutal and difficult struggle histories and is cast, by and large, as a series of cultural encounters that lead to an almost inevitable triumph of multicultural South Africa. There are different ways that this is presented. In the temporary Robben Island exhibition, which was on display beneath a suspended dolphin and closely watched from afar by the head of a large dinosaur in the Port Elizabeth Museum, it is Nelson Mandela who is the vehicle for this almost seamless narrative. The panels are labeled as chapters in Mandela’s life: Tribal advisor to attorney; Fit for a fight (this is about Mandela’s career as a boxer); Defiance as a weapon; Married to the struggle; the Black Pimpernel; Rivonia Trial; Picture Ban; Experiences from the Prison. Then, even though it is a Robben Island exhibition, it needs to track Mandela’s life so the panels are labeled: Pollsmoor Prison; Isolated In Pollsmoor; Freedom; President of South Africa. This exhibition also includes a re-creation of one of Mandela’s cells on Robben Island. To complement these panels there is a set of photographs from the UWC/Robben Island Museum/Mayibuye Archive showing the reunion on Robben Island of ex-political prisoners in February 1995, a memorial cloth signed by the ex-prisoners

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<sup>51</sup> *Bayworld Annual Report 2000-2001* (Port Elizabeth: Bayworld, 2001), 14, 25; *Bayworld Annual Report 2001-2002* (Port Elizabeth: Bayworld, 2002), 16; Visit to Port Elizabeth Museum, 5 July 2001. The architect Joe Noero won the prize for his design of the museum in Red Location in 1999. However, since then the project has been stalled by a series of negotiations. In 2003 it was announced that the envisaged R22 million project, based on his design, would begin with the construction of a Freedom Struggle Museum and by restoring some of the old red iron houses. “New cultural attraction on the cards for PE (11/4/2003)”, iBhayi.com, the official website of the tourism authority of Nelson Mandela Bay, [www.iBhayi.com](http://www.iBhayi.com) accessed 29 July 2003; Jimmy Matyu, “Mayor kicks off Red Location museum project”, *Herald Online*, 2 April 2003, [www.eherald.co.za/herald/2003/04/02/news/n21\\_02042003.htm](http://www.eherald.co.za/herald/2003/04/02/news/n21_02042003.htm), accessed 29 July 2003.

and sketches by Bob Heath of Robben Island veterans, made at a meeting of veterans at the Amathole museum when this exhibition was on display there. What this overwhelming image of Mandela as Robben Island does is that, at best, it presents one organization, and at worst, makes one individual, as the bearer of liberation. It is almost as if 'his' personal ability to be reconciled with 'his' oppressors, in spite of the most bitter experiences in prison, that enable the "Triumph of Victory" and the multicultural 'rainbow nation'.<sup>52</sup>

It is evident that there was some difficulty in the Eastern Cape with this overwhelming image of Robben Island through the eyes of Mandela and the ANC. Alongside the exhibition a very small photo-biography has been added-on about the lives of Steve Biko, John Nyati Pokela and Robert Sobukwe. The "add-on" is very sparse and almost bereft of information about political struggles. There are, for instance, two photographs dealing with Biko, one of them a full-length portrait, the other of his family taken in 1977. Accompanying these photographs is a little bit of text about Zamempilo clinic in Zinyoka township, outside King William's Town. There is almost nothing about Biko's politics and his death is not even mentioned. The PAC has a little bit more. It is presented through a four line biography of John Nyati Pokela (one photograph) - whom we are informed, was a member of the central committee of the PAC, spent 13 years on Robben Island and led the PAC in exile - and a photographic essay of the PAC leader Robert Sobukwe. All these images appear as though they were hastily assembled and they do little to disrupt the biographical dominant narrative of Mandela as Robben Island – from the tribe, to resister, prison, president and the "triumph of victory".

The Historical Museum in Grahamstown uses the device of history as a balance to present its version of the colonial frontier. The spatial location of the major exhibits in the museum represents this need to maintain equilibrium. On the right, as one enters, is the unreconstructed 1820 settlers exhibition. In the hall, amidst portraits of the settlers, household artifacts, and a bust of the settler's main spokesperson, Robert Godlonton, the large central text explains that one of the difficulties the settlers faced was "the incursions of Xhosa cattle-raiders from across the Great Fish River". Such an explanation would most certainly not fit in with the history that is presented in the gallery on the left-hand side where the new exhibition, "Contact and Conflict", is presented. Many of the didactic boards are labeled with the names of Xhosa paramounts and, in the exhibition, a large amount of space is devoted to telling about the dispossession of Xhosa land and cattle by British settlers and colonial forces. One of the most striking set of images is a set of paintings by Hilary Graham entitled "The tragic death of Hintsisa". In the first panel, Hintsisa appears to be showing Harry Smith where the cattle that Maqoma had allegedly taken from the

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<sup>52</sup> Visit to Port Elizabeth Museum, 4 June 2003; Noel Solani has shown that there are several instances when Nelson Mandela showed a great deal of intransigence and little sign of reconciliation. He argues that this image of Mandela as the reconciler was one that was developed by the ANC in the 1990s. See Noel Solani, "The saint of the Struggle: Deconstructing the Mandela Myth", *Kronos*. no. 26 (August 2000), 42-55. For a more extensive and lengthier genealogy of the processes of "Mandelaisation" see Ciraj Rassool, "The Individual, Biography and Resistance in South African Public History", South African and Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, 7 October 1997.

settlers were to be found. The second panel is one that portrays the scene of a murder, where Hintsisa is shot and killed by the British. In the final panel we see the mutilation of Hintsisa's body by the British soldiers.<sup>53</sup> There is no holding back here. This triptych depicts a rapacious British army deliberately and brutally killing Hintsisa and removing parts of his body as a war trophy.

For all its depictions of the colonial brutality "Contact and Conflict", as the title suggests, relies very heavily on notions of cultural differences as the explanatory device. Thus a great deal of space is given to displaying items that supposedly depict British and, even more, Xhosa cultures. For instance there is a display case containing Xhosa fighting spears. Opposite is one showing a British military uniform. Presumably to show a Xhosa tradition there is a model of a bare-breasted woman, adorned with beads, wearing a skirt and a headdress. She stands in front of a cabinet of artifacts entitled "transitional beadwork". Another cabinet shows items associated with "Xhosa, kings, chiefs and warriors". The text explains the use and purposes of all these items. Interspersed among the panels on the walls of the exhibition are paintings of British settlers. Although, in the introductory panel, the viewer is informed that the exhibition "relies mostly on quotes, pictures and objects to tell a story" and that these form a "stepping stone" for individual interpretations, what is presented is largely a lesson in cultural misunderstandings arising out of contact. The items that dominate act as a corrective explanation of Xhosa cultures and tend to obscure the violence and materiality of the colonial encounter.<sup>54</sup>

The East London Museum altered very little in the 1990s, as is evident by the old eastern Cape map that is on display. The only evidence of change are the exhibition "Playing the Game", which deals with the histories of different sports in the region (it shows prominent sportspeople from the Border, the role of the region in the anti-apartheid sports movement and later how sporting associations became integrated) and a large panel at the top of the stairwell leading down from the Border Gallery entitled "Cultural heritage of the Eastern Cape" (it displays short biographies of writers and composers such as Tiyo Soga, S E K Mqhayi, Siphon Ncamashe, Enoch Sontonga and A.C.Jordan). The Robben Island temporary exhibition also spent some time in East London before moving on to Port Elizabeth. In the permanent Border Gallery of the museum a history of the region is exhibited. Through a series of display cases, events on the frontier are related largely through a colonial perspective. Here, where the emphasis is on almost heroic military encounters, British guns and uniforms are displayed, there is an exhibit on the forts of the frontier wars, and the medals earned in battle are on show. This almost replicates the tourist marketing of "frontier country" as a place of canons, forts, graves, battlefields and "soldiers on horseback galloping along pristine beaches". What is added to these "awe-inspiring tales of brave men" that are told for

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<sup>53</sup> "Pictures as evidence", *The Phoenix: Magazine of the Albany Museum*, vol 8, no 1 (1995), 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> Visit to Albany Museum, 4 June 2003.

tourists is the Xhosa who “boldly took on their enemy with guerilla war tactics”. Xhosa “warriors” thus bring a racial balance into a history of men.<sup>55</sup>

Arguably the most visible change in the “natural history” museums of the Eastern Cape has been in King William’s Town at the “home of Huberta”. The name of the museum was altered, in 1999, from the Kaffrarian to the Amathole. The former name was considered to be “insulting and offensive” by members of the local community, while the latter, named after a mountain range, invoked the area where “Xhosas resisted the advance of colonialism in the nineteenth century”.<sup>56</sup> Other than the name change, the displays began to alter as well. This was not only motivated by political transformation. On 14 April 2000 “a man who was freed from prison that same day” broke into the Xhosa gallery. The museum’s newsletter reported that

he caused extensive and unnecessary damage to the gallery, which contains one of our prize exhibitions at our museum. He climbed into the back of the Frontier War display and seized an old firearm, a “Brown Bess”. That he then used as a weapon of destruction, going from one display to the next, leaving his mark, either by breaking the glass or damaging it with a rifle butt.

Following this break-in the museum repaired the damage, refurbished the gallery and also changed some of the displays. Most notably it replaced a “Republic of Ciskei” exhibition with one on the “National Anthem” that gives a brief biography of its composer, Enoch Sontonga, and displays a portrait of him alongside the words and music of *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica*.<sup>57</sup> These changes, taken together with the decision of the museum in 2002 to provide a space for an Eastern Cape tour run by liberation struggle veterans, “Wings of the Dove”<sup>58</sup>, were signs of an alignment with the cultural policies of the new national state.

The new history exhibition in the Amathole Museum, which opened in March 2002, is one that brings a local history (of King William’s Town) into a broader future-past of a South African national heritage constituted by cultural diversity. It emerges from a consultation process involving community meetings, street polls, a survey and a workshop with museum professionals to establish how to reconceptualise the “predominantly colonial” history display and “show the history of other communities, the complete community”.<sup>59</sup> Its title, “Across the frontier”, suggests multiple meanings. Taken literally it could refer to

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<sup>55</sup> “Playing the game”, *Umjelo* vol 1 (September 2001), 8; *Grahamstown Makana Tattler*, vol 3, no 4 (May 2003), 3. For a critique of the public presentation of military history through battlefields and the ways that “blacks” are being “added-on” to these representations see Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, “No end of a [history] lesson: Preparations for the Anglo-Boer War Centenary Commemoration”, *South African Historical Journal*, 41, (November 1999), 370-387.

<sup>56</sup> “New name for King’s Kaffrarian Museum”, *Dispatch Online*, 26 January 1999, accessed 27 April 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Hayley van Breda, “Xhosa Gallery Upgrade: Negative Brings Positive”, *Imvubu*, Amathole Museum Newsletter, (August 2000), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Janette Bennett, “The dove trail”.

<sup>59</sup> “History Revamped”, *Dispatch Online*, 4 August 2000, accessed

the spatial location of King William's Town which, in new tourist depictions of the Eastern Cape is presented on the very edge of "frontier country". One suspects though that this was not the intention. The text below the title, when entering the Daine's Gallery, claims that the frontier is a cultural phenomena, encapsulating "both body and soul", perhaps suggesting that the exhibition will open up new histories and ask sets of questions and seek answers that take one across frontiers of knowledge. It also leads one into a past where the exhibition may depict the frontier as a site of multiculturalism and diversity. Opening of the exhibition, the historian, Paul Maylam, commended the displays for concentrating "more on culture and lifestyle than on military conflict". The danger here is that, in using this cultural contact framework the colonisation of the Eastern Cape may be rendered as a set of multicultural encounters that lead to a predetermined future as a region where people today "celebrate their diversity as they push new frontiers of development and understanding".<sup>60</sup>

One reading of "Across the Frontier" is that it negotiates between presenting colonization as embodying, on the one hand, racial violence and dispossession, and on the other, what Maylam referred to as "exchange" and "acculturation". Surrounding the Victorian-type gallery, with its "rich turquoise" walls and pillars of "blue with gold trimmings" are six display cabinets, most of them containing artifacts from the museum's collection chosen to reflect a cultural aspect of life in the nineteenth century King William's Town: "Pastimes and Pleasure"; "Dress: The Silent Language"; "Health Healing"; "Divine Worship". It is important to note that these cultural activities are, on the whole, not depicted as essentialised and fixed, although there are moments when they are placed within the realms of tradition. Two of the cabinets do not fit into the cultural life category: "Ilizwe Lifile: The Land is Dead" uses military accoutrement to tell about colonial conquest; "History Prehistory" shows how archaeology is used as evidence to determine the lives of earlier inhabitants of the region as well as about colonial wars. Other features of the exhibition are: a large satellite image where places that are referred to on the exhibition can be located; a touch-screen computer display showing magic lantern images; two pillars containing visuals and texts about colonial wars and economies; and a series of very large panels, taking up almost half of one side of the room, on the "Cattle-killing movement of 1856-57". The latter gives a detailed textual explanation (emphasizing the millenarian aspect of the movement), shows images of some of the central actors and discusses the consequences. The overwhelming impression in the exhibition is that social history (objects of 'ordinary lives') has become the mechanism to show cultural diversity<sup>61</sup> and the exhibition was reported in the press in precisely these terms:

Elegant Xhosa smoking pipes fashioned from bullocks' horns lie alongside delicate ping-pong bats, African miracle potions next to violent-looking dentistry sets, and

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<sup>60</sup> "Paul Maylam's Address at the Opening of the New History Exhibition, Amathole Museum, 23 March 2002", *Imvubu*, April 2002; *Your Travel Companion to South Africa's Eastern Cape*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> I am grateful to Premesh Lalu for this point.

stories about German Print (amaJamani) are displayed with Victorian underwear and photographs of stiffly-corseted Xhosa nannies.<sup>62</sup>

There are elements here of the borrowing that Maylam referred to, but also a distinctiveness that emphasizes tradition. The history hall in the Amathole Museum reads back present-day multicultural concerns into the nineteenth century and presents a King William's Town where the colonial frontier, although always apparent, is largely contained in the categories, classifications and artifacts of a "cross-cultural perspective".<sup>63</sup>

This exhibition is only part of a larger history project. In part two, the focus will be on the twentieth century and it is anticipated that the figure of Steve Biko "one of the most important sons" of King William's Town will feature strongly.<sup>64</sup> What else will be contained in the twentieth century display remains open to speculation but one of the unstated issues in all the discussions is the future of the Xhosa gallery. How is it to be configured in the Amathole museum where history is no longer merely settler history? Although the curator of anthropology is deeply involved in researching and writing for the historical displays, the following adapted words, which were written in respect of the McGregor Museum In Kimberley, seem to be as appropriate for the Amathole Museum in King William's Town:

The museum remains characterised by a classificatory system in which the exhibitionary and ethnographic work of the Gallery is considered to be separate from the historical activities in the Museum.<sup>65</sup>

Is there still a place for a separate ethnically designated gallery in a museum that boldly asserts that it is taking one "across the frontier"?

### **Huberta, the Coelacanth and *Sandelia bainsii* on the post-apartheid frontier.**

If the frontier is contained in the big 'four' museums of the Eastern Cape by weaving a tale of conflict together with "interaction of peoples and values" all leading to a South Africa "in all its modern complexity"<sup>66</sup> (with its unfortunate, unintentional intonations of successive South African governments in the past defending the racial policies of the country as being "misjudged" and "not easy to understand"<sup>67</sup>) then it is through natural history in museums, as a symbol of national heritage, that a collective

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<sup>62</sup> Justine Gerardy, "Exhibit depicts life in King in 1800s", *Dispatch Online*, 26 March 2002, accessed 30 May 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Hayley van Breda, "History Revived", 3.

<sup>64</sup> "Paul Maylam's Address".

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Witz, Ciraj Rassool and Gary Minkley, "The Boer War, Museums and Ratanga Junction, The Wildest Place in Africa: Public History in South Africa in the 1990s", unpublished paper presented at Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Basel, (10 February 2000), 15.

<sup>66</sup> "Amathole Museum", pamphlet (King William's Town, Amathole Museum, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> I. K. Smuts, "Foreword" to Janie A. Malherbe, *Complex Country: South Africa* (London: Longman Green, 1944), 5.

inheritance is affirmed. In a guest editorial to the second edition of *Umjelo*, the poet, Mzi Mahola, who had worked at the Port Elizabeth Museum for 25 years as a technical assistant and later as an educator, contrasted the knowledge which was imparted through communities with the education to be gained in a museum:

I felt sad that information about birds such as dikkopies, hadedas and owls was biased negative and destructive. They are associated with sorcery. I was pained to think of what happened to tortoises when there were wild fires. Do they babble inside their shells, unable to run or cry? Or do they roast and become like termite hills? Some communities even hunt and kill them for their shells under the superstition that they will bring fertility to their animals. I wished that I could stand on the highest mountain and shout at those who did not know about these animals to visit a museum to learn more about them so as to be their spokespersons and to write about them, for them.<sup>68</sup>

Here the community is the place of “sorcery”, destruction, ignorance and “superstition”, while the museum is portrayed as the bearer of correct knowledge.

Although this may be an exaggerated contrast between different arenas of knowledge production (community and museum) there is no doubt that museums of the Eastern Cape are representing themselves as sites whose natural history collections and displays convey a new common national identity. Huberta as a multicultural creature, embodying beliefs about death and ancestors in Hindu, Zulu and Xhosa societies, has been stressed in the museum and though recent publications.<sup>69</sup> At the same time her scientific status has been re-asserted, when she was moved for the first time in 67 years and displayed at SciFest 99 in Grahamstown, an initiative that sought to make science “accessible”, explore its relationship to “everyday activities” and break down “popular misconceptions”. Ironically, in what was called “promoting a ‘culture’ of science”, the festival virtually ignored a cultural history of science.<sup>70</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> Mzi Mahola, “Guest editorial”, *Umjelo*, vol 2 (May 2002), 1.

<sup>69</sup> Ingrid Salgado, “Tourist towns wage war over Huberta the hippo”, *Sunday Times Online*, 7 November 1999, <http://www.suntimes.co.za/1999/11/07/news/news06.htm>, accessed 31 July 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Amathole Museum, “Huberta”; Brian Wilmot, “SASOL SciFest: Promoting a ‘culture’ of science in South Africa in a Festive Way”, *South African Museums Association Bulletin*, 25, 2 (March 2001), 63-4. At the South African Museums Association Conference held in Heidelberg in April 1999 there was considerable discussion over this lacuna, with delegates challenging the way that science had been presented without dealing with its cultural history. As for Huberta, soon after the science festival, where over 5000 visitors had gazed at her, there were attempts by tourism associations in Richards Bay and St Lucia in Kwazulu-Natal to repatriate her, claiming that this area was her indigenous home and that her real name was Dukuduku. The Amathole Museum defended their possession on the basis of the investment they had put into keeping Huberta and that she had moved away from Kwazulu/Natal to the Eastern Cape on her own volition. After a brief spat, during which time the tourism authorities in Kwazulu/Natal threatened to kidnap Huberta, a compromise of a Huberta tourism heritage trail was reached and the hippopotamus was to remain in King William’s Town as a “prized creature”. See Ingrid Salgado, “Tourist towns”; Ingrid Salgado, “Ceasefire declared in hippo war”, *Sunday Times Online*, 21 November 1999, <http://www.suntimes.co.za/1999/11/21/news/news36.htm>, accessed 31 July 2003; Denver Donian, “Huberta belongs to us says King museum”, *Dispatch Online*, 9 November 1999, <http://www.dispatch.co.za/1999/11/09/easterncape/BELONGS.HTM>, accessed 31 July 2003.

coelacanth, the central symbol of the East London Museum, has been reconfigured as an African fish and the South African Coelacanth Conservation and Genome programme presents itself as a key driving force of “the African renewal initiative NEPAD”. Along with “the Southern skies and oceans, Antarctica, the Cradle of Humankind, and the Cape floral kingdom”, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology has asserted that the coelacanth is part of “our heritage” and “our future” on “the endless frontiers of scientific endeavour.”<sup>71</sup>

But it is through the campaign to save the Eastern Cape Rocky that the frontier is contained in more than in any other species. Upon entering the East London Museum in 2003 one’s first encounter is not with the coelacanth but with *Sandelia bainsii*. There are also Eastern Cape Rocky displays in the Albany and Amathole Museums. In all the material publicizing this campaign it is its indigeneity that is stressed. This is part of a broader project to discourage the stocking of rivers with alien species, such as trout, for commercial reasons. The latter are presented as “invasive” aliens that are being introduced by “ecoterrorists”. Amongst these “ecoterrorists” are groups who are labeled the “flyfisherman fraternities” who in the past “used their influence and political astuteness to the advantage of their sport, casting the green thing, and economic important in the face of any threats to their beloved pastime”. In “a new political climate”, suggested Roger Smith, sector manager of Bavianskloof Wilderness Area, the scales had to be balanced by “addressing things like poverty, and socio-economic upliftment in a sustainable manner” by “going the environmental route” and “addressing broader issues like exotic fish”.<sup>72</sup> The Eastern Cape Rocky campaign takes on the alien species debate. In the Amathole Museum it was decided to place the Eastern Cape Rocky adjacent to an upgraded display of trout and carp, which are all presented as “alien freshwater fish” that have a “negative impact ... in our local rivers”. The campaign also uses the protection of a local species as the basis of an environmental project, where the aim is to establish community awareness and involvement in protecting freshwater ecosystems. *Sandelia bainsii* is not only presented as an African fish, but one that asserts a very localized identity as a “true” Eastern Cape fish, only occurring “in short sections of six river systems, Kowie, Koonap and Kat tributaries of Great Fish, and Keiskamma, Gulu, Buffalo, Nahoon River systems”. In this presentation of the Eastern Cape Rocky, the uniqueness to the region, as the basis of ownership and protection by local communities, is stressed. The specific fish and the aquatic environment, more generally, are therefore claimed as belonging to all.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Guy Rogers, “Another piece in the coelacanth puzzle”, *Herald Online*, 27 May 2002, [http://www.epherald.co.za/herald/2002/05/27/news/n04\\_27052002.htm](http://www.epherald.co.za/herald/2002/05/27/news/n04_27052002.htm), accessed 1 August 2003; Budget Speech of the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr. B. S. Ngubane M.P, National Assembly, 24th May 2002, [http://www.dac.gov.za/news/speeches/2002\\_05\\_24.htm](http://www.dac.gov.za/news/speeches/2002_05_24.htm), accessed 1 August 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Jim Cambray, “Biodeversity: Alien trout, and the So what attitude”, article submitted to *Mail and Guardian*, 22 April 1997; Letter to Mario Cesare, Olifants River Game Reserve, Hoedspruit, from Roger Smith, Sector Manager Bavianskloof Wilderness Area, 23 October 1997, [www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/m&g.html](http://www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/m&g.html), accessed 31 July 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Hayley van Breda, “Alien Fish – a threat to EC Rivers”, *Imvubu*, vol 15, no 1 (April 2003), 2; “WWF-SA project: Eastern Cape Rocky: Creating Community Awareness to Save the Endangered *Sandelia bainsii*”, <http://www.ru.ac.za/affiliates/am/wwf/wwf.htm>, accessed 2 August 2003.

The naming of the Eastern Cape Rocky as *Sandelia bainsii* contributes to its image as a cross-cultural community fish. Named in 1860 by Count Castlenau, the derivation of the name is an important part of the display of the fish in the “natural history” museums of the Eastern Cape. In the East London museum, the Amathole Museum newsletter, the project website and *Umjelo*, short biographical sketches of Sandile and Andrew Geddes Bain are presented. Sandile appears as a “great Xhosa chief” and a warrior, while Bain, is represented as a road-builder, geologist and, most importantly, a discoverer. What is not mentioned, in relation to the latter persona, is that he was portrayed in 1820 Settler history as one of the most “famous” of the “big-game hunters” in southern Africa, who, together with John Burnet Biddulph, was described as having reached “the farthest northwards yet reached by any white man”. The name of the fish brings together not only a local, indigenous historical figure who fought against the colonial forces with a colonial persona, but it also draws Xhosa history into the realm of science and discovery. Through the museum, localised identities with the environment and science thus become the way that will enable “people to change their attitudes”, “learn about living as well as extinct animals” and develop “the richness of this country’s heritage”.<sup>74</sup>

### **Containing the frontier?**

In the ‘big four’ museums of the Eastern Cape at the beginning of June 2003. Port Elizabeth: A display of European exploration, discovery and settlement in the history hall, Xhosa beadwork, culture and ethnographic photographs by A.M Duggan Cronin in the Xhosa Gallery; Grahamstown: The 1820 settlers exhibition. Settlers are described as “travellers and traders, teachers and missionaries, artisans and administrators”. King William’s Town: The German Settler Exhibition includes dresses, household items, farming implements, showing how they made “this dangerous, foreign country their new motherland” and “established themselves as a prominent culture and major force in the ...Border region”. One display case titled “The disruption of German settlements”, explains to viewers that

By 1886, the land possessed by descendants of the German settlers was expropriated to facilitate the consolidation of the Ciskei in terms of the South African government’s apartheid policy.

In the Xhosa Gallery are displays of the Frontier Wars 1779-1878, Xhosa traditional religion and economic and social life in the contemporary Eastern Cape. East London: A costume gallery featuring settings in East London homes from the late nineteenth century through to the 1930s, a German settler

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<sup>74</sup> “WWF-SA project: Eastern Cape Rocky”; ‘Spotlight on the Eastern Cape Rocky’ East London Museum; “New cape Rocky Display”, *Invubu*, 14, 2 (August 2002); “Red alert: endangered species”, *Umjelo*, vol 2, May 2002, 20-3; Hockly, *The Settlers*, 53-4; Mahola, “Guest editorial”. Thanks to Jim Cambrey, fresh-water ichthyologist at the Makana Biodiversity Centre, Albany Museum, for information about the Eastern Cape Rocky project and the naming of the species.

display, including a trudelwagen “with its tree-trunk wheels”. In the Border gallery are Southern Nguni beadwork displays, “Three Ages of [Xhosa] Dress” and a Xhosa “Roadside scene”.<sup>75</sup>

The settler displays, which emerged in the 1950s, are undoubtedly still a prominent feature in the former natural history museums of the Eastern Cape. There also remain separate exhibitions for cultures, histories and traditions that are designated ethnically as Xhosa. But, since the mid-1990s, history has undoubtedly been unsettled in these museums. “Contact and Conflict”, “Across the Frontier”, the traveling Robben Island exhibition, “Playing the Game” and the publication of *Umjelo*, all add-on to these museums histories of cultural heterogeneity. The presentations of natural history also incorporate elements of indigeneity, Africaness and projects that appeal to a broader community. The assertion by the director of the Amathole Museum that previously “there were a few photos of some black people but the emphasis was on King William's Town as a white town” and that “we've got out of that now” may certainly be applied to the histories depicted in the ‘big four’ museums of the Eastern Cape in 2003.<sup>76</sup>

Yet the process of containing, as incorporating a wider range of histories, has also been accompanied by one of containment, where these histories are limited so that they do not spill over into controversies about their depictions and exclusions. Classificatory divisions between history and culture (cast as ethnic tradition) remain in place. New exhibitions present pasts of cultural utility and exchange. Different perspectives are balanced against each other. A teleological past leads to a new multicultural South African society. Depictions of “frontier country” are added on to “settler pasts”. In museums across Eastern Cape frontiers the harshness and violence, associated with colonialism and apartheid, has been severely constrained in histories of contact and conflict and iconised in the project to protect *Sandelia bainsii* from becoming a “dinosaur”.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Visit to Eastern Cape museums, 4-6 June 2003; Yvette Ferguson, “The German Settler Exhibition: Post Mortem”, *Imvubu*, vol 4, no. 2, August 1992; “East London Museum”, pamphlet for visitors (East London: East London Museum, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Justine Gerardy, “Exhibit”.

<sup>77</sup> “From the editor”, *Umjelo*, vol 2 (May 2002), 2