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SIR HARRY SMITH AND HIS IMBONGI:  
LOCAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE EASTERN CAPE, 1952

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AFRICANA

SIR HARRY SMITH AND HIS IMBONGI: LOCAL AND  
NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE EASTERN CAPE, 1952

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On the 4th of January 1952, the "ruined Voortekker town [of Ohrigstad] in the North Eastern-Transvaal"<sup>1</sup> found itself cast on centre stage of South Africa's national past and present. It was from this town that D F Malan, the prime minister, signalled the start of the Van Riebeeck Festival by sending the first of a series of Mail Coaches on its way to Cape Town. The Van Riebeeck Festival, which was organised to mark the three hundredth anniversary of white settlement in South Africa, stood in marked contrast to the 1938 Voortrekker Eeufees and festivities surrounding the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in 1949. Instead of being a celebration of Afrikaner nationalism, the Van Riebeeck Festival "afforded the white ruling bloc with an opportunity to construct a dominant ideological discourse" of settler nationalism with Jan van Riebeeck, the "founding father" as the central icon.<sup>2</sup>

As the seven Mail Coaches left their respective starting points - Ohrigstad, Windhoek, Beit Bridge, Groblersdal, Sabie, Amsterdam and Umata - and "started rolling southwards", covering some 11 000 miles, local Van Riebeeck festivals were organised by the white population of the towns en route.<sup>3</sup> On Port Elizabeth's King's Beach there was a re-enactment of the landing of the 1820 settlers; in Grahamstown a float procession in the streets welcomed the coach 'Settlers' 'on its jolly, jolting way to Cape Town'; at the Border Rugby Union grounds in East London, more than 250 people acted in a pageant celebrating the founding of the town, with Lt Col John Baillie playing the part of his great grandfather 'who hoisted the British flag on Signal Hill and proclaimed the annexation of Port Rex'.<sup>4</sup> From Ohrigstad to Cape Town, "throughout the length and breadth of the country", a "goue

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<sup>1</sup>Port Elizabeth Evening Post, 8 Jan. 1952.

<sup>2</sup>C Rassool and L Witz, 'The 1952 Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa', *Journal of African History*, 34 (1993), p 460.

<sup>3</sup>Report of the Activities of the Mail Coach Organising Committee for the Van Riebeeck Festival, Thom Collection, University of Stellenbosch (hereafter, Thom [US], Box 49..

<sup>4</sup>Port Elizabeth Evening Post, 7 March 1952; *Eastern Province Herald*, 7 March 1952; *Kingswood College Magazine*, Grahamstown, (1952), 43; *East London Daily Dispatch* 23 Feb. 1952.

ketting van vriendskap en eenhied" [golden chain of unity and friendship] was to bind the country together through the Festival slogan, "We Build a Nation".<sup>5</sup> The organisers were so confident of the Festival "assuming a national character" that they were sure that "daar seker nie baie meer in ons land wees wat Ohrigstad ereens in Suid-Wes Afrika wil gaan soek nie" [there will not be many who will again go and search for Ohrigstad somewhere in South West Africa].<sup>6</sup>

But from the moment the journey of the Mail Coaches began, and the selected starting point was criticised for its Great Trek associations, the content of what was to be depicted in the Van Riebeeck celebrations was disputed.<sup>7</sup> Although the organisers of the events were concerned with historical accuracy, and used the "skills of historical professors" to authenticate "in every historical detail" the events that would be portrayed, what counted as 'national' history was deeply contested in different ways by the African National Congress, the Non-European Unity Movement, sections of the Afrikaans and English press, Anglo-American Corporation and the Chamber of Mines.<sup>8</sup> Discord was felt, and fearful voices were raised that the events depicted would turn into a "second Voortrekker Monument" of Afrikaner nationalism, that symbols of Afrikaner nationalism would be neglected and that blacks would be written out of South Africa's past. The result was that what was constituted as South Africa's national history in 1952 was a selection of "important events" within a negotiated past.<sup>9</sup>

The ordering of this negotiated past also had to take account of the discord of particular locales as each area was meant to make its contribution to the festivities. Here the concerns and questions of how a "composite representation of a few of the highlights of the early history ... of [localities] could also

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<sup>5</sup>Report of the Mail Coach Organising Committee; Speech of D F Malan, at start of Van Riebeeck Festival, 4 Jan. 1952, from Bloemrus Niewoudt, *Geskiedenis in Klank: Die Van Riebeeck Fees in Herenning Geroep*, 6 Apr. 1976, SABC Sound Archives, T 76/54.

<sup>6</sup>Speech of Dr A P van der Merwe, Chair of the Van Riebeeck Festival Committee, at the start of the Van Riebeeck Festival, 4 January 1952, from Bloemrus Niewoudt, *Geskiedenis in Klank*.

<sup>7</sup>*Port Elizabeth Evening Post*, 8 Jan. 1952; Report of the Mail Coach Organising Committee.

<sup>8</sup>See correspondence between JC Pauw, Organising Secretary Van Riebeeck Festival, and H Thom, as well as numerous letters between A Pohl and Thom, in which assistance on historical matters is requested and provided, Nov. 1950, Dec. 1950, July 1951, Jan. 1952, May 1952, Thom [US], Box 49.

<sup>9</sup>See Rassool and Witz, 'Constructing and Contesting' for an account of these conflicts over the meaning of a 'national past' and how the ordering of a negotiated past took place.

be depicted" emerged.<sup>10</sup> East London was requested by the organisers to participate in the Van Riebeeck Festival and to depict two of the 70 events in historical pageants in the streets of Cape Town on 3 and 4 April 1952: "The Statute of Westminster" and "The German Legionnaires Become Immigrants in 1857".<sup>11</sup> The East London City Council was not altogether happy with this request and motivated for a series of floats which expressed the foundations of the region as part of "South Africa's common history":

It would be led by a float representing the Brig 'Knysna' with John Bailie, the founder of East London, and Captain John Findlay on the bridge, a sailor in the shrouds taking soundings as the Knysna enters the Buffalo Mouth... This would be followed at a short distance by Sir Benjamin D'urban, his staff and Andries Stockenström with a small escort of mounted burghers. All would have to be mounted ... Next could come Sir Harry Smith and lady Juanna Smith with staff, preceded by an imbongi shouting Smith's praises and followed immediately by a small group of mounted native chiefs distinguished by karroses of leopard skin and blune crane feathers as head-dresses. Sir Harry Smith would be at the head of a body of Redcoated Soldiers .... This would be followed by a squad of German Legionnaires ... with Baron van Lingsengen and Sir George Grey and Staff mounted in the van. These would be followed by a group of "Lady Kennaway" girls who fraternise with the Legionnaires to the grave concern of a duenna who endeavours to control them.<sup>12</sup>

This "common history" of South Africa which the East London City Council wanted to portray made reference to founding and settlement, the "sailor in the shrouds" and the "Lady Kennaway girls". But the central focus of events and actions represented was a history of colonisation and conquest, a history where Harry Smith, as the paramount chief, had his praises sung by a native imbongi and Benjamin D'urban headed the burgher commando.

Not only would this assert a local and colonial history as part of a national history, but it would cost little in time, effort and money, to depict these "real historical characters" as they

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<sup>10</sup>Notes taken at a meeting held in the Council Chamber, East London, 12 October 1951, to establish an East London Van Riebeeck Festival Committee, Government Archives, Cape Depot (hereafter CD) 3 ELN, vol 1439, Ref 50/2059.

<sup>11</sup>Notes on meeting to establish East London Van Riebeeck Committee, 12 October 1951.

<sup>12</sup>Letter to pageant mistress, Anna Neethling Pohl from the Mayor of East London, E H Tiddy, 2 Aug. 1951, CD, 3 ELN vol 1439, Ref no 50/2059.

had already taken the stage at the Border Rugby Union grounds in 1948 during the city's centenary celebrations. The only additions required would be the costumes for "Sir Benjamin D'urban and Staff and the Native chiefs".<sup>13</sup>

This proposal from East London was somewhat at odds with the national history that the organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival had in mind. 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. A single event on 27 April 1837, the handing over of a bible by a representative of the settler population of Grahamstown to a leader of the Great Trek, which was considered by George Cory as evidence of "the lack of anything of the nature of racial feeling" between the Dutch and the British in the 1830s, was accorded the status of a national event in the "Peoples Pageant" in Cape Town. It became one of the events in the 70 episode history of South Africa.<sup>14</sup> The eight "Kaffir Wars" between 1779 and 1853, which "SOONER OR LATER you have to know about", and were continually highlighted in school texts (causes, consequences and causes again), on the other hand, were reduced in the pageant to "THE CLASH WITH THE BORDER TRIBES" typified by an "abandoned burnt-down [settler] homestead". They became an event without history, a "long story, which you can cut short" to insert into a settler past.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Letter to Pohl, 2 Aug. 1951.

<sup>14</sup>Rassool and Witz, 'Constructing and Contesting', p 458; G E Cory, *The Rise of South Africa*, vol 3, originally published London (1919), reprint, Cape Town, (1965), p 26.

<sup>15</sup>L Marquard and J Mervis, *Blame it on Van Riebeeck*, Cape Town (1952), p 28. This satirical history of South Africa, originally produced for the Van Riebeeck Festival, but which came out later in the year, also ridicules the way that the "Kaffir Wars" were depicted in South African history texts at the time. They list the "CAUSES of the Kaffir Wars" in their "proper order":

NUMBER OF WAR	CAUSES
First Kaffir War	The Kaffirs
Second " "	" "
Third " "	" "
etc " "	" "

They then provide a "log position at the end of the Kaffir Wars":

The organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival pageant were therefore somewhat taken aback by the suggestion from the East London City Council to constitute its participation in terms of colonial conquest rather than being placed in the context of the "convergence of the [settler] roads" in the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> If Van Riebeeck and Cape Town were a symbol, and spatial metaphor, through which the colonial past could be seen as a 'foreign country', the eastern Cape reminded the cultural brokers of the settler nation that its 'foreign country' was not the past. This could not be tolerated. The cultural location of modernity did not need a reminder and a visibility that it was constructing a narrative of the nation's modernity that contained - at its core - colonial racism.

Hurriedly a meeting of the pageant committee was convened and it was decided "from a national point of view the pageant would be unwisely affected" by "bringing in those episodes which were [not] of national importance". The anticipated foundations of a national history would be disturbed, Harry Smith's imbongi would add a jarring note and "the whole balance of the pageant" and the past would be "upset".<sup>17</sup>

But on 3 April 1952 the past was not upset and the East London float, the Statute of Westminster, paraded through the streets of Cape Town, taking its place alongside the other national events in South Africa's designated settler history. The disagreement which had arisen between the organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival pageant and the members of the East London City Council, however, had not merely been over the representation and

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	P	W	L	D	POSITION IN LEAGUE
Colonists	8	8			1
Kaffirs	8	-	8		2

This satire of the existing narrative highlights the crude, but at same time legitimating, imagery of colonial conquest which was pervasive in school history texts, such as W Skinner, *Geskiedenislesboek vir die Laer Skool*, Standaard V 2nd edition, Cape Town 1939 and D C R Clear, *Our Country: A Concise History of South Africa for Standard VI*, Cape Town, 1939?, and which the organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival decided not to call upon. It is also notably absent from the *Van Riebeeck Festival Pictorial Souvenir*, Cape Town (1952), that was distributed to schools at the time.

<sup>16</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival, Official Festival Programme, Cape Town (1952), pp 120-122.

<sup>17</sup>Letter to Mayor of East London, E H Tiddy, from A Pohl, 22 Aug. 1951, 3 ELN vol 1439, Ref 50/2059, CD.

content of South Africa's national past. It was also about the definition of race in South Africa, how the nation was constituted, the demarcation of race within the nation and the assignment of space to all. These were all apparent in the different ways in which local communities participated (or did not participate) in the journey of settler history between January and April 1952 when the Mail Coaches brought "History and pageantry ... together".<sup>18</sup>

#### Race, space and nation in the "golden age".

In April 1952 Cape Town was constituted as the founding city of the settler nation, where Jan van Riebeeck (Andre Huguonet) "planted and hoisted a flag" and "took possession of the land".<sup>19</sup> This arrival from the sea into "Africa Dark and Unknown" was paralleled by the repossession (or reposition) of the land through the convergence at the "Port of Africa" of the seven Mail Coaches which had travelled through more than 60 major towns and cities, covering "feitlik elke deel van die land" [nearly every part of the country].<sup>20</sup> This latter journey to Cape Town in many senses was an attempt to recreate the "tradisie van groot en landwyse Afrikaanse volksfeeste" [tradition of large and countrywide Afrikaner folk festivals] of 1938 and 1949. Re-utilising similar Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging [Afrikaner Language and Cultural Society] structures as its organisational basis, it again drew upon what was defined by *Die Burger* as the "Afrikaanse feestegniek" of "trekke deur die hele land na 'n sentrale punt" [Afrikaner festival technique of treks throughout the country to a central point].<sup>21</sup> This technique, it was claimed, had "created so much interest that ... Australia studied this method of linking up festivals with a view to applying it during the Australian Commonwealth celebrations ...

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<sup>18</sup>See Rassool and Witz, 'Creating and Contesting', as well as L Witz, 'n Fees vir Die Oog: Looking in on the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival Fair in Cape Town', *South African Historical Journal*, 29 (1993), for an extensive account of other major events in the Festival, particularly the pageant and the fair in Cape Town. See also African Mirror No 647, National Film Archives, Pretoria, FA 2511, Historical Background of Van Riebeeck Festival, 19 Nov. 1951.

<sup>19</sup>Rassool and Witz, "Creating and Contesting", p 459. Andre Huguonet played the role of Jan van Riebeeck at the recreation of his landing at Grainger Bay on 5 April 1952.

<sup>20</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival Programme, pp 100, 88, 69; "Verkeerswee: Die Verhaal van 300 Jaar van Vervoer in Suid Afrika Tesame met 'n Geïllustreerde Kaart Aangebied deur die Administrasie van die Suid-Afrikaanse Spoorwee en Hawens by Gellentheid van die Van Riebeeck Fees", Miscellaneous programmes, diaries of events, catalogues of exhibitions, 1952, Library of Parliament, Cape Town.

<sup>21</sup>*Die Burger*, 9 Apr 1952.

[by] running canoes down Australia's main waterways".<sup>22</sup>

Yet, despite the organisational and symbolic continuities, the 1952 "trek" took on a very different character. The "fees van die Ossewatrek" [festival of the Ox-wagon trek] of 1938 very self-consciously traversed a "geskiedenispad van Suid-Afrika" [historical road of South Africa]. From Cape Town to "Simon van der Stel se dorp" [Simon van der Stel's village], from Swellendam's republics to Graaf Reinet where "Scheepers begrawe le" [where Scheepers is buried], from the Vrouemonument to Paardekraal, in a "eindlose tafereel" [endless tableaux] was "Afrikanergeskiedenis voor die Afrikaner uitgesprei" [Afrikaner history was distributed to the Afrikaner].<sup>23</sup> The "koetsfeeste" [coach festivals] of 1952, in contrast, not only reversed the order of the journey, with the endpoint Cape Town instead of Pretoria, but the Mail Coaches, the mediums of nationing, were symbols without history. Instead they evoked an almost nebulous "golden" "romantic" age, a "goeie ou tyd" [good old days] which was not likely to generate controversy over its historical representation.<sup>24</sup> Emphasis was placed upon the appearance and construction of the Mail Coaches, the type of wood used, and the craftwork required.<sup>25</sup> When the mailcoaches arrived in Cape Town on 31 March 1952 it was the blast of the bugles, the "vrolike perdespanne" [sprightly teams of horses], and the "appelblou skimmels" [dappled roans] which made a "man se hart lekker te laat voel" [a man's heart feel good].<sup>26</sup>

Instead of using History as the link between the "hart van die ... Drie-eeue-fees" [heart of the Tercentenary Festival] and the "afgeleenste uithoeke van Suid-Afrika" [remote corners of South Africa], the focus of the Mail Coaches was on the development of communication in making modern South Africa.<sup>27</sup> In the days when the Mail Coaches had traversed the country - and there was some uncertainty as to when this precisely was - the interior was "nog nie in kaart gebring nie" [not yet on a map].<sup>28</sup> It was the History of white settlement which was seen as having brought

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<sup>22</sup>Letter from J Pauw, Organising Secretary Van Riebeeck Festival to Mayor of East London, 28 Jun. 1951, General Purposes Committee Report Book, East London City Council, File 50/1756.

<sup>23</sup>Die Burger Voortrekkermonument-Byvoegsel, 10 Oct. 1949.

<sup>24</sup>"Verkeerswee: Die Verhaal van Vervoer"; Die Burger, 1 Apr. 1952.

<sup>25</sup>Van Riebeeckfees: Bou van die Poskoetse, 9/8/51, SABC sound Archives, 28 / 17-18 (51); Pretoria News, 18 Aug. 1951.

<sup>26</sup>Die Burger, 1 Mar 1952; Arrival of the Mail Coaches in Cape Town, SABC Sound Archives, 18/76-83 (52).

<sup>27</sup>Die Burger, 1 Apr. 1952.

<sup>28</sup>"Verkeerswee: Die verhaal van vervoer'.



people onto a map, a grid which was "able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there".<sup>29</sup> The Mail Coaches signified the process of the demarcation of boundaries in South Africa. In 1952, when South Africa's national road network was in the process of construction - with the "Road of South Africa", the N1, providing the "backbone" from which "ribs radiated" - the Mail Coaches, were seen to represent a bridge between "die eeu van die ossewa en die eeu van die masjien" (the century of the ox-wagon and the century of the machine).<sup>30</sup> They were signifiers of the era of 'modern' communication, the national roads, the modern harbours, the extended rail networks and the emergent air routes, all of which had mapped South Africa as a modern nation.

Here was a translation of the meaning of time (History) into the discourse of space, where modernity was being constituted spatially, through the "networks", "routes", "ribs", "roads" and "bridges". While the route of colonial history and conquest, glorified in the Great Trek celebrations of 1938, could be, and was spatially reversed, physical time could not. In the writing and staging of the modernity of settler nationalism what was required was a marked disturbance of temporality. In this "disturbance" the temporality of colonialism was re-directed and re-defined into the symbols of settler modernity, focussed back into a moment of timelessness and situated between 1952 and 1652.

In this disturbed, unruly time, race and racism found itself almost being outside history. Not only had it been silenced in the Peoples Pageant and written out of time, but the reversal and apparent randomness of the "golden age" of the Mail Coaches meant that race became constituted as 'pre-modern'. Before the settler nation there were two culturally defined "races" set atop the twin towers of the Union Buildings in Pretoria: English and Afrikaans.<sup>31</sup> With the the moment of the Van Riebeeck Festival these "two races" now virtually disappeared. The time of the modern nation, defined both within and by the Festival, founded a "European nation" which had always been there, and "to whom we owe our discovery". In this "European nation" the founder nations, France, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands were rediscovered and South Africa discovered. Van Riebeeck not only planted the flag of the Dutch East India Company at Grainger Bay in 1952, but he "took possession of the land" and of the nation.<sup>32</sup>

While the discourse of nation and people appeared to deny race, as it denied English and Afrikaner, the settler nation and

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<sup>29</sup>B Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London (1991), p 184.

<sup>30</sup>T V Bulpin, *Discovering South Africa*, Cape Town (1983), p 7; *Die Burger*, 1 Apr. 1952.

<sup>31</sup>*Sunday Times*, 15 May 1994.

<sup>32</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival, *Official Programme*, pp 99, 87.

settler nationalism remained "saturated with racial connotations".<sup>33</sup> The awkward "weld" of race<sup>34</sup> was, almost inversely, inscribed within the ideological matrices of national settler 'hopes', 'endeavours' and 'achievement', together with its concepts of a people and a national aspiration. Through "the will of Providence" the white South African nation became the bearer of the "torch of Western Civilisation to this southern corner of Africa". This "civilisation", which had "matured over 300 years", would, in return, "safeguard ... our national existence", with its "own way of life and its own mission".<sup>35</sup> The "non-European" - for that was exactly how "he" was defined against "us", the South African "European" nation - would, with the "help" of "Europeans", "find his place in the pattern of this new unity-in-diversity of the South African state ... his own legitimate sphere".<sup>36</sup> For the values of "*tradisievasheid*" [commitment to tradition], "*suiwer bloed*" [pure blood] and "*eiendomlikheid*" [ownness] to anchor the past the "very important role played by these [the Coloured and African] races could never be done full justice if it were interwoven" into the transported past.<sup>37</sup> They had to enter another history.

The general guidelines that were followed for "non-European" participation in the Van Riebeeck Festival were thus in terms of "special" events for those who were not part of the "new nation". These events were, on the one hand to display an essential "non-European" lifestyle: "tribal" structures, "natural" musical rhythms, craftwork and home industries. On the other hand there were clear guidelines to exhibit "die invloed van die Westerse-beskawing op die Nie-blankes" [the influence of Western civilisation on the Non-whites]. This involved replacing the superstitious with the rational - the "*verdwyning van toordery*" [disappearance of witchcraft] - the "*ou stamwette*" [old tribal laws] with "Western" forms of government, polygamy with "*huislike lewe*" [family life] and incessant "*stamoorloë*" [tribal wars] with

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<sup>33</sup>P Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, London (1987), p 56.

<sup>34</sup>B Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p 150.

<sup>35</sup>"Message from the Honourable Prime Minister", Van Riebeeck Festival Official Programme, p 7.

<sup>36</sup>W E G Louw, "We Build a Nation", Speech given at Humansdorp, 10 Mar. 1952, W E G Louw Collection, University of Stellenbosch (hereafter Louw [US]), 158.L.1.T. 12 (7).

<sup>37</sup>Reply to criticisms of the Pageant made at the meeting of the Cape Town Committee for the Van Riebeeck Festival (1952) held on Friday, 24th August, 1951, Louw [US], 158.KU.1. Va (12); *Die Transvaler se Van Riebeeck Bylaag*, 4 Apr. 1952. See Rassool and Witz, 'Constructing and Contesting', pp 458-9, for an account of how separate events were organised in Cape Town for those who did not constitute part of the 'new nation'.

"*Persoonlike Vryheid*" [Personal Freedom].<sup>38</sup> A visitor to the "Bantu pavilion" at the Van Riebeeck Festival fair in Cape Town, for instance, passed from the section showing Zulu "traditional tribal lives" - "handicraft ... potmaking, basket and bead work" - to the "Chiefs Kraal", through to the "courtyard of a native school" where "a native teacher handles his class", and ended up in a "modern six-roomed house" in the process of construction by the "Bantu pupils of state training institutes".<sup>39</sup> This is a narrative in which tribe becomes modern and race becomes nationed. Africa "the Dark and Unknown" - the first float in the People's Pageant - had, seventy floats later, awakened to "figures in white" symbolising the foundation of "intellectual and spiritual freedom of the enlightened individual", where the "non-European", now free from the "primitive shackling of the human soul" could be ranked on the list of prospective nation/s.<sup>40</sup>

### Different routes to the nations

The 417 daily journeys of the mailcoaches took them from town to town, where "great and impressive festivals" were organised by "all sections of the European population". The arrival of the Mail Coach would provide a "tangible copulative incentive" for a frenzy of local festivities. The coach would enter the town, the mayor would welcome it in front of the town hall and a local history written by 'local experts', schoolteachers and clergy, was presented to the "ritmeester" [journey master] for "conveyance" to Cape Town to be deposited in the South African library. A float procession and a local pageant organised on the day to coincide with the coach's arrival would take place. In the evening the town council would hold a banquet "in honour of the Mail Coach personnel" at which "the proverbial hospitality of our nation was strikingly evinced". All these festivals were "in harmony" with the central idea of "'South Africa after 300 years' and with the slogan 'We Build a Nation'". After spending the night, the coach, refreshed by the evenings proceedings, would proceed on its way, not to deliver the mail but to gather the nation and revitalise its local History.<sup>41</sup>

But while "keeping strictly to their itineraries" the journey of the Mail Coaches sometimes included "due consideration for the

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<sup>38</sup>Agenda of meeting of the Central Organising Committee, Van Riebeeck Festival, 29 Nov 1951, Thom [US], Box 49. See Rassool and Witz, 'Constructing and Contesting' and Witz, 'n Fees vir Die Oog' for an account of the various events that were planned for "non-Europeans" at the Van Riebeeck Festival in Cape Town.

<sup>39</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival Fair, Guide Book, p 59.

<sup>40</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival Programme, pp 100, 123.

<sup>41</sup>Report of the Activities of the Mail Coach Organising Committee, Thom [US], Box 49.

non-Europeans".<sup>42</sup> In some localities the coach would first make a short stop at "die lokasie" [the location] before 'progressing' to the white settlement. Typically, the radio commentator, described "Die naturelle" [the natives] thronging together to welcome the coach in "een groot swart massa" [one great mass]. The mayor delivered a brief address, the "bekende naturelle volkslied Sokiélolo Afrika" [famous native national song / anthem Sokiélolo Afrika] was sung and the coach moved on.<sup>43</sup>

In this way each locality, incorporating both the "location" and the "town", were enveloped by "white civilisation". What defined the locality's position and participation in this was how "events of great importance to the development of our Nation occurred here for the first time". Through the movement of the coaches across the South African landscape and its daily interruptions for festival performances and history collection, the nation was localized and the local was nationalised. "Just as Van Riebeeck was the First Settler in South Africa, so Grahamstown, the capital of the Eastern Province, and the historic centre of the 1820 Settlers, can show that many important men lived here." They too, were "Great South Africans".<sup>44</sup>

The daily progress of the coach also enabled the drawing of boundaries within the locality, separating out "the presence of the Native population" as "non-Europeans". The brief, almost hurried, passage through the "location" served to appropriate the space of the "native people" from that of colonial territory. In a powerful spatial reversal, the coach routinely emphasised that behind the perilous native frontier, where the "Kaffir Chief Makana" made his "treacherous attack on Grahamstown", lay the "'made' roads" and "events" of civilization.<sup>45</sup>

But getting the localities to partake of the nation and its history was not as easy as was originally envisaged. Twelve Mail Coaches were planned for, each to be financed by a local authority, with the Rembrandt Tobacco Corporation providing motor cars "painted in the Van Riebeeck colours" and covering "all expenses incurred in connection with the personnel ... en route". While the "great and esteemed help" of Rembrandt was forthcoming, the local authorities were not as willing to paint themselves as Van Riebeeck and spend £800 sponsoring a coach. In the end only seven mailcoaches were donated and many towns found themselves

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<sup>42</sup>Report of the Mail Coach Organising Committee.

<sup>43</sup>Poskoetsfees Graaf Reinet, 6/3/52, SABC Sound Archives, 28 (80-82) 52.

<sup>44</sup>"The Building of a Nation: Grahamstown's Contribution", Script of Performance by the Grahamstown Amateur Dramatic Society, Cory Library, Rhodes University, [hereafter Cory], MS 6442.

<sup>45</sup>Grocotts Daily Mail, 21 Feb. 1952; Script, "The Building of a Nation: Grahamstown's Contribution".

excluded from the itinerary and "off the [nation's] route".<sup>46</sup>

There were coaches from the Cape, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Germiston and Durban, all named after the respective towns which had provided the sponsorship. The eastern Cape, however, was particularly troublesome. Not only did the East London City Council want Sir Harry Smith and his imbongi in the People's Pageant in Cape Town, but there was little enthusiasm in the eastern Cape for grasping at the "geskiedkundige geleentheid" and riding the Mail Coaches out of the "mists" of time.<sup>47</sup> Not one town council between Port St Johns and Knysna was prepared to assume financial responsibility and it seemed, by mid-1951, that the eastern Cape would be "eliminated from the national festival". This was something the organisers claimed: "We cannot allow". From Idutywa to Blue Lillies, from Blaaukrantz to Witteklip, the chief organiser of the Van Riebeeck Festival called upon "the goodwill of the Eastern Cape communities".<sup>48</sup> Passing the hat around eventually enough money was raised and the eastern Cape coach was "borne" by city councils of Port Elizabeth, East London, King Williamstown, Umtata, Hankey, Port Beaufort, Mossel Bay, Humansdorp, Knysna and Komgha.<sup>49</sup>

Naming the coach required that its many parents arrive at an arrangement. There was no name that immediately sprung to mind that would encompass this mixed and contested heritage. The naming of the other coaches after a single town or city provided spatial landmarks of a 'nation's progress'. They flowed from the centres of urban and modern settlement to the place of founding, supressing regional, provincial, economic and historical

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<sup>46</sup>Report of the Activities of the Mail Coach Organising Committee.

<sup>47</sup>"Verkeerswee: Die verhaal van 300 Jaar van Vervoer"

<sup>48</sup>Minute 8489 of the General Purposes Committee, East London City Council, 19 Mar. 1951. The General Purpose Committee recommended to the Council that it resolves not to participate in the celebrations by providing a historic Mail Coach at an estimated cost of £800; Letter from the General Organising Secretary of the Van Riebeeck Festival to the Mayor of East London, 28 Jun. 1951, General Purposes Report Book, East London City Council, File 50/1756.

<sup>49</sup>Letter from the Mayor of Port Elizabeth to the Mayor of East London, 19 Jun. 1951, stating that his council has decided to donate £250 towards a stage coach and requesting East London Council to assist in raising the further £550, General Purpose Committee Report Book, East London City Council, File 50/1756; Minute 9474 General Purposes Committee, East London City Council, 12 July 1951. The Committee recommends to Council that it contribute £200 towards constructing a coach representing the eastern Cape; Report of the Activities of the Mail Coach Organising Committee.

faultlines in their processions across the country. In the case of the eastern Cape, however, the fractured and disputed historical marking of towns would have been underscored by naming the coach after a single town: the clashes over origins, traditions, boundaries and capitals. Some "regional name ... [had] to be devised".<sup>50</sup> Ultimately a name was found, one which reflected both a settlement on the historical patterns, and a fit with the national festival of 'founder nations'. On 14 February 1952 the coach "Settlers" departed from the "thriving town" of Umtata, hooves ringing on "its formed and macadamised streets", towards the past of Cape Town's "bright future."<sup>51</sup>

Skaduwee oor die groot feespad [Shadows over the great festival road]<sup>52</sup>

This Umatata, as conceived and given life by the Historic Committee of the Umtata Van Riebeeck Festival, aroused the imagination and

the feelings and aspirations of those pioneers of Umtata, through whose proud lot it fell to be the town's first "Fathers". [E]merging from the hut where the first meeting of the Municipal Council was held, they gazed over the expanse of veld and at the struggling, ugly village, and were filled with the ambition to turn the scattered native huts and unsightly wood and iron structures into a well-ordered town with ... up-to-date buildings.<sup>53</sup>

The "clean wide streets" of Umtata held great promise, "in retrospect and prospect", for the unfettered progress of the Settler coach. They provided the orderly centre to and from which routes radiated "to every district" in the 'Native Territory'.<sup>54</sup>

On board the mailcoach, scarcely able to believe the "metamorphosis that ha[d] actually taken place" were the male white founders and fathers of Umatata and the 'nation': E.J. Klette, "one of the pioneers of German stock", T.L. Kriel, "one of the first Afrikaner pioneers and leaders", W.T. Strachan, "The Peacemaker", R.V. Laverley, "one of the first inhabitants of the

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<sup>50</sup>Letter from the mayor of Port Elizabeth to the mayor of East London, 19 Jun. 1951, General Purposes Report Book, East London City Council, File 50/1756.

<sup>51</sup>Report of the Activities of the Mail Coach Organising Committee; *Umtata: Fragments of its history and growth*, Compiled by the History Committee of the Umtata Van Riebeeck Festival Committee (1952), p 9.

<sup>52</sup>*Die Burger*, 8 Mar. 1952.

<sup>53</sup>*Umtata: Fragments of its history and growth*, p9.

<sup>54</sup>*Umtata: Fragments of its history and growth*, pp 9, 8, 14.

Tembuland side of Umtata" and N. Quirk, "the driver of the first train to enter Umtata". Pride of place went to two chief magistrates (an interpreter and a secretary), who had ensured that the natives themselves brought an end to "the gross misrule of the chiefs" by annexing "the entire country". Capt Matthew S Blyth under whose "guidance the Fingos voluntarily taxed themselves" and Major Sir Henry G Elliot, "affectionately known by the Natives as Meja" (one wonders whether he had any imbongi?) provided this "bloodless" route to settler modernity. In its shadow came native modernity, re-routed through the Bunga and its detailed management of national development "in keeping with the stage ... which the native people, as a race, have attained".<sup>55</sup> The new founding fathers rode the coach out of town, while the non-European men edged towards it, without ever getting a ticket to ride.

Umtata's ordered past fitted in with what the organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival had laid down as the criteria for local celebrations. Local committees had been directed to devise their own programmes, "provided they adhere strictly to the theme of the Festival as set out in the memorandum which has been accepted as the basis of the celebrations".<sup>56</sup> There were guidelines for the local history which was to be produced for conveyance by the coach to Cape Town. It could not exceed fifty foolscap pages and had to contain:

- 1 Founding and early history
- 2 Development of local government
- 3 Religious, social, educational and cultural development, historic buildings, architecture, museums, art galleries, monuments, hospital services, etc.
- 4 Development of agriculture, commerce, industries and mining, railways, bridges, roads, irrigation schemes, etc.
- 5 Local heroes, battles, inventors and other local figures who became well-known, famous, or even notorious.<sup>57</sup>

In this way the organisers sought to ensure that the local history did not "degenerate into a dry summary of insignificant, purely local events".<sup>58</sup> To become significant, a local history had to be placed in the given national context of founding,

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<sup>55</sup>Umtata: Fragments of its history and growth, p9, illustrations 9, 11, pp 6, 7, 18.

<sup>56</sup>Memorandum on Van Riebeeck Festival Local Committees, attached to letter from Pauw, Organising Secretary Van Riebeeck Festival, to Mayor of East London, 28 Jun. 1951, General Purposes Committee Report, East London City Council, File 50/1756.

<sup>57</sup>Memorandum on Van Riebeeck Festival Local Committees

<sup>58</sup>Memorandum on Van Riebeeck Festival Local Committees.

development and famous local heroes. If it did not conform to these requirements then its past lost meaning and History.

But almost perversely history evaporated from the local festivals. While, on the one hand, the local festivals were conservative - to maintain white civilisation - they also looked towards an exclusively repetitive future in which the nation came to an 'end' and uncertainty was removed.<sup>59</sup> The narrative of the history that was required thus needed to extract a shared interpretation of the past. "Of certain pages in our annals ... little need be said in a work of this type, which is primarily concerned with the constructive growth of South Africa".<sup>60</sup> The local history which was left was a typology of virtues and vices, of great men and of a local public series of tableaux, each distinct from the other, but also all repeating the founding event. Umtata was so sure that it had secured its past within these categories that it was "destined to take a prominent place amongst the towns of South Africa." The future held out the promise of "progress, a bright commercial welfare, modernity and prosperity".<sup>61</sup>

Once Settlers departed from Umtata, on its daily journeys through parts of the eastern Cape and "*groot naturellegebiede*" [large native territories] to Cape Town, the ordering, clarity and definition that Umtata had formulated began to fade.<sup>62</sup> "*Skaduwee*" [shadows] began to fall over a "*groot stuk van die groot feespad waarlangs derdusinde mense uit alle dele van die land op Kaapstad gaan toesak*" [a large portion of the large festival road where thousands of people out of all parts of the land will converge on Cape Town].<sup>63</sup> As the coach moved towards Grahamstown there seemed to be little enthusiasm for "this great day" when the coach arrived and Van Riebeeck landed. Instead of "a busy metropolis teeming with bustling crowds, restless transport, towering buildings and smoking chimneys", Grahamstown, "the city of colleges and schools", found it difficult to take its "part in nation building".<sup>64</sup> The editor of *Grocott's Daily Mail* had to put in a special plea that this was "the only real [day] where all races stand an equal chance of paying tribute to those who

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<sup>59</sup>M Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass. (1988), p 186.

<sup>60</sup>V De Kock, *Ons Drie Eeue: Our Three Centuries*, Cape Town (1952), p 31.

<sup>61</sup>Umtata: *Fragments of its history and growth*, p15.

<sup>62</sup>Letter from A Snyman, Ritmeester on Routes 6 and 7 to the Secretary of the Native Affairs Dept, 3 Dec. 1951, NTS 9787/400 Part 1, Central Archives Depot, Pretoria

<sup>63</sup>*Die Burger*, 8 Mar. 1952.

<sup>64</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown, Grahamstown* (1952), p 34; *Grocott's Daily Mail*, 27 Feb. 1952.



have made the history of South Africa".<sup>65</sup>

The 'real problem' was that Grahamstown's history had come to an end in the 1840s with the closing of the frontier after Sir Harry Smith, that "swashbuckling cavalier" who had "retreated with Moore to Corunna [and] advanced with Wellington from Talavera to Waterloo", rode into town and "brought comfort to a worried people and disaster for a scheming chief".<sup>66</sup> According to D H Thomson, the senior History master at Kingswood college, and author of the history of Grahamstown written for the Van Riebeeck Festival, the "effecient and exuberant" Colonel Harry Smith displaced the Xhosa chief Hintsa from the "the steep and rocky hills where he sat in his tiger-skin kaross" and Grahamstown "set her house in order". With the Native chiefs now acknowledging that "the kraal of Grahamstown was too large to be attempted", the process of reconstruction and development began apace.<sup>67</sup> "Houses were rebuilt, rusty businesses locks removed and fields cultivated afresh". In this historic moment, "relieved of the burden of self-preservation" a new Grahamstown was born, the "City of Saints", the sleepy hollow, the "resting place of Rip Van Winkle".<sup>68</sup>

A future "younger generation of settlers", borne of the frontier, now took up the pen rather than the plough and the rifle. Under their guidance the history of the City of Saints, from 1840 to 1952, became an antiquarian curiosity, which was "interesting to observe". Mapped as the "western window" of the "most progressive town" on the frontier, the "enigma" of its future history followed the path of the new railway line which passed it by.<sup>69</sup>

To extricate itself from the "burden of this short history" and become part of the modern South African nation, the settlers of Grahamstown had to become "history's vassals" and take an oath of fealty to Jan van Riebeeck.<sup>70</sup> The "people who ... remember[ed] much of the olden days" had to be spoken to and events which had been passed down by "word of mouth" recorded. "Long forgotten lofts [and] attics" had to be ransacked and the "hundreds of old letters, books, cuttings from old papers" collected and deposited in the "safe" custody of the local historical centre, be it

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<sup>65</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 26 Feb. 1952.

<sup>66</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, pp 2, 27.

<sup>67</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, p15, 27.

<sup>68</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, pp. 27-28, 30, 1.

<sup>69</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grhamstown*, pp 30, 32, 24, 1.

<sup>70</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, Foreword; Grocott's Daily Mail, 4 Mar. 1952.

museum or library.<sup>71</sup> In this process the traditions "passed down to us by our fathers" would become modernised, but retain the essence of doing the "'right' thing". Modern Grahamstown would become part of the "tributary mode of [history] production", join the "country-wide celebration" and no longer be a "People without history".<sup>72</sup>

This collecting of history and its ordering would enable a mutation in the traditions of modernity. It would be "incorrect and dangerous to leave them where they are".<sup>73</sup> Harry Smith the "swashbuckling cavalier" who brought an end to the "depredations of the Ndlambis, Makanas and Hintsas" now became the "sturdy Sir Harry Smith on his proud steed", the man who united the "men and women", the "frontier Boer and British settler" of Grahamstown to fight "side by side".<sup>74</sup> From "calling a halt to the westward trek of the Natives", Grahamstown became the Athenian defender of civilisation, "education" and "achievement", playing a "vital role in the building of a strong, virile and enlightened nation".<sup>75</sup> Onto the tableaux of the past strode the 1820 settlers, the English Jan van Riebeecks, each with their own contribution to the building of the nation and its settler traditions. Grahamstown discovered a lengthy list of firsts. It was "the centre of the first telegraphic experiment" in South Africa, the "first town in South Africa" which applied to be part of the "first democratic institutions in South Africa" and become a municipality, where the first woollen cloth factory was established and where "the identification of the first South African diamond" occurred. And pride of place went to ... "CURTAIN UP. Pause for preliminary action. WATCH STAGE until Dr. Atherstone commences cutting" .... "the first surgical operation in South Africa performed under a general anaesthetic".<sup>76</sup>

To become modern Grahamstown also had to remodel itself so that it did not become a "stagnant hollow". What this entailed was

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<sup>71</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 4 Mar. 1952.

<sup>72</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 4 Mar. 1952. The other reference here is to Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History*, California.(1982).

<sup>73</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 4 Mar. 1952.

<sup>74</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, p 2; Grocott's Daily Mail, 29 Feb, 3 Mar. 1952.

<sup>75</sup>D H Thomson, *A Short History of Grahamstown*, p 2, 23, 30; Grocott's Daily Mail, 29 Feb, 3 Mar, 1952.

<sup>76</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 27 Feb. 1952; Script of Performance by Grahamstown Amateur Dramatic Society, 'The Building of a Nation: Grahamstown's Contribution', 29 Feb. 1952, MS 6442, Cory Library. This mutated tradition gained greater currency and definition in the 1960s with the establishment of the Settler Monument and the National Arts Festival.

"more imagination", the "establishment of secondary industries" and "creating regular employment" for the natives who "do not want to work".<sup>77</sup> Umtata had the "natural advantage" of being located in the centre of "revolutionary change" where an "abundance of cheap intelligent labour" was becoming "more susceptible to the civilising influence". This "pre-requisite of successful industry", was not found by the settlers of Grahamstown.<sup>78</sup> Its workforce, it decided, was neither industrious nor modern and preferred to "squat" in the location and "collect unemployment benefits". The residents of Fingo village, whose "forefathers had fought for the white cause ... in the Kaffir Wars", were causing a lot of trouble.<sup>79</sup> Outside the knowledge of the authorities, "natives from rural areas slip[ped] into the Fingo village", only to become known once they sought employment. To achieve greater control and management, concerted attempts were being made to "bring the Fingo village under the Urban Areas Act" and to make all "Native employees carry a Stupa - a 'Record of Service certificate'".<sup>80</sup>

The event of the Mail Coach's arrival in Grahamstown provided a different moment to elaborate upon this project of modernising and controlling the troublesome natives in Fingo village. At the top of Makana's Kop, the point from where "the treacherous attack on Grahamstown was made by the Kaffir Chief Makana", the coach would be welcomed by a mounted commando and escorted into town.<sup>81</sup> On the way the coach would stop at the "location" to ensure that "die naturelle ... aan die feesvierings deel ... neem" [the natives participated in the festivities]. This was a "geleenthied wat nie verby moet laat gaan word nie" [an opportunity that must not be allowed to go by].<sup>82</sup> The ritmeester's enthusiasm for this project, echoed by the Grahamstown Van Riebeeck Festival Committee, was somewhat dampened when the "leaders of the Natives and Coloureds" turned down the invitation to the "people". These leaders, lamented the Festival committee, had "denied their own people the opportunity to see a unique spectacle and themselves the chance to offer it a welcome". On the "fine, sunny day" when the coach found its way down Raglan Road to the city, there was no brief stopover in the "location" and the natives did not come out to render their national anthem, "Sokielolo Africa". It passed through onto the city's "main streets", "thronging" with

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<sup>77</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 17 Jan., 14 Jan, 9 Apr. 1952.

<sup>78</sup>Umtata: Fragments of Its History, pp 14-15.

<sup>79</sup>M Roux and M St Leger, Grahamstown: Fingo Village, Johannesburg (1971?), pp 2-3, 29.

<sup>80</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 9 Apr. 1952.

<sup>81</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 21 Feb. 1952.

<sup>82</sup>Letter from A Snyman, Ritmeester on Routes 6 and 7 to the Secretary of the Native Affairs Dept, 3 Dec. 1951, NTS 9787/400 Part 1, Central Archives Depot, Pretoria.

people. The event, however, was "somewhat spoiled for the European audience" when its spectacle in front of the City Hall was obstructed "by large numbers of Native and Coloured children". The "Europeans" had to vacate their seats which had been set aside for them "on either side of the dias". This was the only way that they could see, above the heads of the "children who crowded in the area in front of the onlookers", Settler's arrival.<sup>33</sup>

The encounter over race and nation which took place on the streets and "main roads" of Grahamstown, was paralleled in the hallowed halls of the "Oxford" of South Africa, Rhodes University. Whereas Grahamstown's 'founding fathers' were grappling with the form and nature of the tribute that they could offer Van Riebeeck, the "hypersensitive students of race relations" were weighing up how Van Riebeeck could promote the "the cause of national goodwill".<sup>34</sup> When the issue of Rhodes participation in the Van Riebeeck Festival had arisen in the previous year, a general student gathering had decided to boycott the celebrations, because they "showed a strong racial bias", "there was a perversion of the true historical facts" and it was a "criminal waste of money". The Festival, it was felt would "foster racial disharmony and stir up political strife".<sup>35</sup> The main problem, expressed by the Rhodes students, was that the "Africans original culture" would be portrayed as "primitive and savage" and that there was no depiction of "his development and acceptance of Western civilisation".<sup>36</sup> If this problem could be overcome, and the "racial bias handled with delicacy", then the students could participate and promote "racial" and "national goodwill".<sup>37</sup>

The "unwelcome publicity" of the "Big Rhodes Debate", led, a week later, to the hasty convening of another general student meeting

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<sup>33</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 3 Mar. 1952.

<sup>34</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 13 Aug. 1951.

<sup>35</sup>Eastern Province Herald, 11 Aug. 1951; Daily Dispatch, 11 Aug. 1951; Queenstown Daily Representative, 11 Aug. 1951; The Star, 10. Aug 1951. There was also, interestingly, some dissension over Cecil John Rhodes participation in the Festival. Not only was the Jameson Raid totally excluded from his "legacy" in the People's Pageant, (Rassol and Witz, 'Creating and Contesting', p 458), but there was also some dissatisfaction that there was "no talk of South Africans celebrating the anniversaries of Rhodes", S G Millin, 'Pioneers in Africa - Van Riebeeck and Rhodes', Optima, 11, 3, March 1952, p 29.

<sup>36</sup>Port Elizabeth Evening Post, 10 Aug, 11 Aug. 1951.

<sup>37</sup>Grocott's Daily Mail, 13 Aug. 1951.

on the issue.<sup>88</sup> After "about five thousand man-hours" and "probably the longest meeting" ever at Rhodes, the students decided by 190 votes to 53 (with 31 abstentions) that "multi-racial South Africa should speak and act in a spirit of widely embracing unity" and Rhodes should go to the Festival. It was, said the chairman of the meeting, "the first truly national festival in the history of South Africa". To show "what European civilisation has meant to the Native" it was suggested, by the students, that "the South African Native College, Fort Hare, be invited to take part in the celebrations".<sup>89</sup>

This decision about participation in the Van Riebeeck Festival, and showing the 'benefits of civilisation to the Natives', reflected, in many senses a decision taken earlier at the same meeting to adopt academic non-segregation. This meant "admission of non-Europeans to the University, but for higher education purposes only, and not as equals in the social sphere".<sup>90</sup> The editor of the *Grocott's Daily Mail* expressed the view that the adoption of academic non-segregation was

likely to be received with some reserve by most people in this part of the Eastern Cape. For it was in these parts that the conflict between black and white flared up most savagely in the last century, and it cannot be said that the decision of the students is quite in accord with the traditions and the present outlook of this area as a whole.<sup>91</sup>

While the students at Rhodes University were concerned that "the natives" should be allowed to imbibe the education that "Oxford" and Van Riebeeck could offer, those who cheered the Settlers coach down the main streets of Grahamstown doubted whether "any man has a right to walk in the higher places of our form of civilisation".<sup>92</sup>

If Umtata was moulding itself into Van Riebeeck's nation/s and Grahamstown was desperately seeking the nation/s, then the "capital of British Kaffraria", King William's Town, showed little interest in forfeiting its colonial status.<sup>93</sup> When it was

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<sup>88</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Rhodes University Senate, 30 Aug. 1951, MS 17504, Cory Library; *P E Evening Post*, 11 Aug 1951.

<sup>89</sup>*The Rhodoe*, 18 Aug. 1951.

<sup>90</sup>*Grocott's Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1951.

<sup>91</sup>*Grocott's Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1951.

<sup>92</sup>*Grocott's Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1951.

<sup>93</sup>*Souvenir of the visit of the Settlers Mail Coach to King William's Town*, 26 Feb. 1952.

suggested that it, along with other towns in the Border, should present "The German Legionaries" float at the People's Pageant in Cape Town there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the project. As a result the mayor announced that King William's Town had "reluctantly decided that it could not participate".<sup>4</sup> As well as this the local history which was produced was not of the type demanded by the organisers of the Van Riebeeck Festival. It was merely a 1911 souvenir production of The Coronation and Jubilee celebrations, with a few roneod pages included to show additional events up to 1952.

The history of King William's Town which was carried to Cape Town aboard Settlers was largely one of royal patronage and presence in the eastern Cape, of Prince Alfred galloping from tribe to tribe in his Royal Borough in 1860, amid wild yells of "'Bota Nkosi' (Welcome Prince)", "son of our great Queen" and "Daars my Prins!" [There's my Prince!].<sup>5</sup> This framework was carried through into the roneod section of the work in which King William's Town was brought up to date:

#### 1949: A New Chief

At a gathering of the Ndhlambe section of the Gaika at Tshabo, the Chief Native Commissioner installed John Ngwenyuti Makinana as the new Ndhlambe Chief. Around his neck John wore a medallion which was presented to his late father by King George VI in 1947. The stick which he carried was presented by the Prince of Wales [whose praises were sung by the great Xhosa oral poet, S. E. K. Mqhayi<sup>6</sup>] to his father in 1925. Three hundred natives, mostly clad in European dress, attended the ceremony. In customary fashion, and with great enthusiasm, the new Chief's praises were sung by the "Mbongi" or Chief's poet.<sup>7</sup>

This was affirming the colonial basis of the town, with the royal family as a metaphor for the continuous 'triumph' over the "barbarians" and the subsequent 'dressing' of the natives in

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<sup>4</sup>King William's Town Mercury, 27 Nov. 1951; Minutes of Meeting Convened by Mayor of East London to discuss "The German Legionaries" inclusion in the Historical Pageant in Cape Town, 23 Nov. 1951, CD, 3/ELN File no 1439, Ref 50/2059.

<sup>5</sup>Souvenir Settlers Mail Coach KWT, pp 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>J Opland, Xhosa Oral Poetry (1983), p 8.

<sup>7</sup>Souvenir Settlers Mail Coach KWT, roneod section, p 11.

"decent", praiseworthy "European clothing".<sup>98</sup>

Thus, on 26 February 1952, when Settlers bounded into town, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for Van Riebeeck, not the founder of the nation, but "The Man Who Founded S.A.'s First Colony at the Age of 33". He was not the mere "instrument of policy" but its shaper, the 'man on the spot' who, as much as the British would have done and later did, left "no stone unturned to ensure the healthy development of the colony".<sup>99</sup> On the coach's arrival at the Victoria Grounds a pageant by schools recalled South Africa's history in a "series of graphic tableaux", the highlight of which was "The Kaffir Wars (19th Century)" performed by Excelsior School. In this dramatisation

a dozen British Redcoats in their brilliant uniforms faced an equal number of black warriors with weapons poised for action. In a brief moment of action, one soldier fell "dead" on each side .... Afterwards, the "black" warriors caused a diversion on the grounds when they pursued some Native spectators with their mock spears.<sup>100</sup>

The road to the modern nation "of cars, trains and aeroplanes" had been diverted by white warriors in black masks.<sup>101</sup> But as much as Sir Harry Smith had done in Grahamstown, and Major Elliot in the Transkei, "the tumult was quickly quelled".<sup>102</sup>

#### Sir Harry Smith's Town

Down the Buffalo River, at the terminal of "a chain of forts" on the road to King William's Town was the "fighting port" of the frontier, Port Rex.<sup>103</sup> Re-born and baptised London by Sir Harry Smith KCB, "The Hero of Aliwal", on Christmas Day, 1847, and christened East London the following year, it foresook its natural parents in British Kaffraria to become part of the Cape Colony.<sup>104</sup> A little over one hundred years later, at the "close

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<sup>98</sup>Souvenir Settlers Mail Coach KWT, pp 6-7. See J Comaroff, "The Empires Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject", paper presented at the South African and Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, 5 Oct. 1993.

<sup>99</sup>King William's Town Mercury, 26 Feb. 1952.

<sup>100</sup>King William's Town Mercury, 28 Feb. 1952.

<sup>101</sup>King William's Town Mercury, 28 Feb. 1952.

<sup>102</sup>King William's Town Mercury, 28 Feb. 1952.

<sup>103</sup>M H Taylor, A History of East London, East London (1952), p 5.

<sup>104</sup>D H Reader, The Black Man's Portion, Cape Town (1961) p 4.

of an industrially spent century", East London threw a lavish birthday party to celebrate, not its founding but its naming as part of the "workshop of the world".<sup>105</sup> Over 100 Years "of municipal development" the garrison had progressed into a town and then a city, which had become a modern commercial centre through the "busy cranes" of its "British port" and on "the back of a sheep".<sup>106</sup>

This process of modernisation, through municipal and economic development between 1870 and 1948, was given History through backward linkages with Britain and the colonial frontier, "a new Era in which the old spirit of the City will prevail", and would materialise in the "fighting port".<sup>107</sup> These "past accomplishments" were the basis for its "future prospects" and forward linkages into becoming part of the nation, "spreading East London's name and fame".<sup>108</sup> It had "local firms with national reputations" and while great men did not live here (as they did in Grahamstown), "nationally known products [are] made here".<sup>109</sup>

When Mayor Fox introduced East London to Van Riebeeck in 1952 he re-called its tradition of two great white races defending the eastern "frontier" of Western civilisation. It was this "human principle", derived from the colonial heritage of empire and appropriated by East London, that he wanted Van Riebeeck to convey to Cape Town. This endowment would demonstrate "one people" united in the face of the challenges which are confronting "our country" and the 'Western world', from the 'East'.<sup>110</sup> Van Riebeeck received this offering with some trepidation. He was pleased at the content of 'racial unity', but spurned the racial and civilising alibis for the frontier tradition.<sup>111</sup> Sir Harry Smith and his imbongi were not allowed to parade down Adderly Street.

While Fox, in the face of Van Riebeeck, was attempting to assert

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<sup>105</sup>Daily Dispatch East London Centenary Supplement, 1948, p 66.

<sup>106</sup>Centenary Supplement, pp 34, 4; East London Centenary Official Souvenir Brochure and Programme, East London (1948), p 154.

<sup>107</sup>Centenary Supplement, p 66.

<sup>108</sup>Centenary Programme, p 154; Centenary Supplement, p 42.

<sup>109</sup>Centenary Programme, p 154; Centenary Supplement, p 42.

<sup>110</sup>Taylor, *History of E.L.*, introductory message.

<sup>111</sup>The idea of modernity and its alibis comes from J and J Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and its Malcontents*, Chicago (1993), p xxx.



East London's place in the nation through its supposed frontier antecedents, it was still the frontiering of commerce that dominated East London's local public history in 1952. *The History of East London*, written by the school teacher, Mark Taylor, drew heavily upon the "profound and accurate" East London Centenary supplement of the *Daily Dispatch*, keeping to "the story" and providing the "glimpses of history".<sup>12</sup> In the distance there was the story of "East London and the tribes", followed by 'thick descriptions' of the home front of "Municipal Enterprises", "The Municipal Market", "Electricity", "Municipal Transport", "Fire Protection", concluding with "Cultural Growth" and "Industrial Progress". As in 1948, through municipal process and industrial development, East London was set for an expansion that would "compare with the boom periods experienced by the Rand and Port Elizabeth", and thereby make its contribution to the nation and become part of national economic history.<sup>13</sup>

When Settlers crossed the Nahoon bridge on 22 February 1952 and "clopped clopped" up Oxford Street, East London was still somewhat undecided over its mature parentage.<sup>14</sup> Was it still "Finding a Future! Forgetting the Past!"<sup>15</sup> As Councillor Robbie de Lange led the Eastern Province and Border Mail Coach into town and members of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) "barred" "Native students" from attending the pageant at the Border Rugby Union ground the answer to this question began to take shape.<sup>16</sup> Through defining a national future and finding a national past the nation began to settle in East London.

An important component of these nationing pressures on East London came from two seemingly disparate processes, the growth of younger generations of "South African" white workers and Africanist intellectuals. The young white workers in East London, rapidly positioned in skilled / supervisory roles during the Second World War, were increasingly drawn into a discourse of South African 'first' nationalism to maintain and assert their position against a 'British' 'craft tradition'. "Apprenticed without artisan control, skilled without craft" they "contested

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<sup>12</sup>The two key histories in the Centenary Supplement which Taylor drew upon were "The Story of East London: From The Buried Past to 1948" by B H Dodd, and "Glimpses of History: East London and the Eastern Cape Province" by Una Long. For a short biography of Taylor see W A Stevens, 'A Tribute to Mark Taylor', *The Coelacanth*, 10, 1, April 1972, pp 37-38.

<sup>13</sup>Taylor, *History of EL*, p 29.

<sup>14</sup>*Daily Dispatch*, 1 Mar. 1952;

<sup>15</sup>This was the publicity caption for *Westward the Women*, a "gripping, outdoor drama" on circuit at the time, starring Robert Taylor and Denise Darcel, *Cape Times*, 5 Mar. 1952.

<sup>16</sup>*Mayor's Minute*, 4 Sep. 1952, Municipality of the City of East London, p 36; *Daily Dispatch*, 26 Feb. 1952.

the narrative of the 'old country', its primordial nature, the inventiveness of its traditions of labour and the ... foundational representations of community". Similarly, the ANCYL's discourse of Africanism broke with the "conventions of the conservative patriachs and of the educated, cautious old guard" in the Locations of East London. This was reproduced in the parallel narrative of African nationalism, whereby women's local struggles over "beer-brewing, lodger's levies [and] registration of domestic service contracts", were recast into young male national terms, "defiant of authority" and asserting an "invented Africanist past and present, of which they were an integral part".<sup>117</sup> "Salvation of the African people would not come from foreign nations, but as a result of their own efforts - from themselves".<sup>118</sup>

When the Mail Coach arrived in town it was confronted by these "doubly politicized nationalisms of race".<sup>119</sup> Robbie de Lange, the "young East Londoner, who worked on the S.A. Railways", "with no special prospects" and who had come "a very long way from humble beginnings", led Van Riebeeck into town.<sup>120</sup> The young Miss K. Vitzthum, who took a group of students from the Duncan Village Teachers Training and Practical School to the pageant as part of "their training in civic responsibilities" was stopped by "young men brandishing sticks and claiming to be members of the African Youth League".<sup>121</sup> The arrival of the Mail Coach in East London was the moment of the young South 'African' men.

East London's participation in the People's Pageant in Cape Town responded to these contested images of its past. In keeping with its newly found settler tradition it started discovering its own group of settlers which would form part of the nation. Along with Berlin, Komgha, Stutterheim and Keiskamahoe, it presented "the German Soldier Immigrants" to the nation in Cape Town. These soldiers and immigrants had "come out to reinforce the white settlement" and "although about a thousand men were later sent to India", the organisers of this historic float were sure that the "immigrants left their mark on our way of life".<sup>122</sup> East London's other float was still a matter of deep dispute. Even though the directive had arrived from Cape Town to ban Sir Harry Smith and build the Statute of Westminster there was still a

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<sup>117</sup>G Minkley, 'Border Dialogues: Race, Class and Space in the Industrialisation of East London, circa 1902 - 1963', Ph D thesis, UCT, March 1994, pp 181-2, 179, 331, 325.

<sup>118</sup>Daily Dispatch, 5 Apr. 1952.

<sup>119</sup>Minkley, Border Dialogues, p 356.

<sup>120</sup>J P Shingler, *Women of East London, 1900 - 1979*, East London (1980), p 47.

<sup>121</sup>Daily Dispatch, 26 Feb. 1952; *The Torch*, 11 Mar. 1952.

<sup>122</sup>Van Riebeeck Festival Programme, p 113.

great deal of dissatisfaction.

Why has the Cape Town Festival Committee not invited us to send a float depicting the history of "British Kaffraria" rather than a political Statute which led to so much strife on the Border... A British Kaffrarian Float would have been appreciated; it would have provided an opportunity of fitting into the Pageant a representation of the progressive expansion and development of the frontier of the Cape Colony... I am of the opinion that if East London makes an effort to depict a political statute which turned South Africa into a sovereign independent State we shall be depicting something that reflects dishonour on the pioneers of British Kaffraria whose loyalty (European and non-European) was ever profound and sincere.<sup>123</sup>

The result was that, with Cape Town "passing the buck from West to East" and not showing East London's "real contribution to the building up of South Africa", the Statute of Westminster took on a decidedly different form from that envisaged by the "pageant mistress" Anna Neethling Pohl and her committee.<sup>124</sup> The East London float became the Commonwealth of Nations. It consisted of "a little sailing vessel manned by five young ladies of the City", "Miss Britannia", "Miss Canada", "Miss New Zealand", "Miss Australia" and "Miss South Africa".<sup>125</sup> From the "Frontier Land of Myth and Majesty" it was still a "lang pad Kaap toe" [long road to the Cape].<sup>126</sup>

#### Wowing the nation

On the afternoon of Monday 31 March 1952 the Mail Coaches finally reached the 'mother city'. The bugles sounded, the bells rang out, and at exactly 3.50 pm, "perfectly as planned", "in spite of detours", the Mail Coaches from all the different corners of the land entered the 50 000 seater Van Riebeeck stadium on Cape

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<sup>123</sup>Letter from A W Burton, Mc. to East London Twon Clerk, 27 Nov. 1951, CD, 3/ELN, vol 1439, Ref 50/2059.

<sup>124</sup>Letter from A W Burton, Mc. to East London Twon Clerk, 27 Nov. 1951, CD, 3/ELN, vol 1439, Ref 50/2059.

<sup>125</sup>E.L. Mayor's Minute, 1952, p 39.

<sup>126</sup>Reader's Digest Illustrated Guides to Southern Southern and Eastern Cape, including the Garden Route, Country and the Wild Coast, Cape Town (1983), p 46; Ons Nuus, no. 33, 5 Mar. 1952, 'East London Welcomes the Coach Settlers', National Film Archives, Pretoria.

Town's reclaimed foreshore, where "the city grew into the sea".<sup>127</sup> At the "unexcelled culmination of a long series of glorious episodes", there to welcome the men's nation home were their 'mothers and housewives' (the wives of cabinet ministers), dressed in 17th century Maria Van Riebeeck costumes.<sup>128</sup> In keeping with the 'Golden Age' of the Mail Coaches, "the nation's modern territoriality" was "turned into the archaic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism", and the guests were entertained to an old-fashioned garden party.<sup>129</sup>

In the Mail Coach processions across the country and through the towns, space had been found through history, sometimes invented, sometimes reshaped, marked out and emptied, figures drawn upon it and ways made through it.<sup>130</sup> In 'Settlers' time and space, Harry Smith's public domain began to shift its identity until he lost his imbonji and started to sing Van Riebeeck's praises. No longer on treacherous Makana's Kop, he too has journeyed south, "through streets where once every window had bristled with guns" to a "hero's" welcome at the 'African' settler national monument atop Gunfire Hill in Grahamstown.<sup>131</sup>

Carrying the narratives of carefully demarcated local histories to the centre and its archive of knowledge was not such an easy matter. Faultlines had to be suppressed, the founding event constantly repeated and episodes in history given a causal national connection. Key events - the 1820 settlers, the Great Trek and Van Riebeeck - had to be transported into local narratives of the common past. But these multiple enactments also

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<sup>127</sup>Report of Mail Coach Organising Committee; African Mirror, no 605, 31 January 1951, National Film Archives, Pretoria, FA 2477.

<sup>128</sup>Report of Mail Coach Organising Committee; Van Riebeeck Festival Programme, p 69. This was in keeping with a discourse of "South African womanhood" during the Van Riebeeck Festival. *The Women and Her Home*, the "first official journal for the housewife", published by the Dept of Agriculture, produced a special Maria van Riebeeck issue, with articles on such topics as "Round the tea table", "The costumes in the time of Van Riebeeck" and "Typical Dutch recipes", vol 4, no 39, 1952. In addition, a special cookbook of "truly South African dishes" which had been "handed down from generation to generation" but which "could still be used by the housewife" was produced for the Festival, E Barnard (ed) *Old Time Recipes*, Cape Town (1952), p 1.

<sup>129</sup>H K Bhabha, *The location of culture*, London (1994), p149; *Van Riebeeck Festival Programme*, p 69.

<sup>130</sup>Ozouf, *Festivals*, p 127.

<sup>131</sup>*Reader's Digest Illustrated Guides to Southern Africa: Southern and Eastern Cape, including the Garden Route, Settler Country and the Wild Coast*, Cape Town (1983), pp 40 - 42.

enabled the breaking down and relocating of contexts. In this sense local history became both a chronology - an accumulation of local events - and a series of tableaux, each distinct from the other, casting a shadow over the national pageant.

The 6th of April 1952 did not complete the job, it did not bring to birth the whole of the Settler nation at once.<sup>12</sup> But it did leave behind an altered locality, an altered memory and identity to the past as Settlers. The land of the racial frontier was changing to 'Settler Country', and the archivists started discovering "the contribution of British immigrants to the development of South Africa". They "built", "brought", "salvaged", "linked", "put up", "freed", "pioneered", "applied", "spread", "improved", and "produced" South Africa.<sup>13</sup>

I never knew that so many of our settlers  
did such interesting things. I wish we would  
see them all again.<sup>14</sup>

And we did, again, and again, over the next forty years in refined and re-defined forms, until History came to an end, democracy was born and an imbongi "wowed the nation" beneath the twin towers of the two Great Races.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>M Ozouf, *Festivals*, p 172.

<sup>13</sup>Lantern, Sep. 1980, vol XXIX, no 3, Special Edition: Partners in Progress, 1820 - 1980, p 1; see also H E Hockley, *The Settlers of 1820: A Brief History for Use in Schools*, Cape Town (1966).

<sup>14</sup>Script, "The Building of a Nation: Grhamatown's Contribution".

<sup>15</sup>Sunday Times, 15 May 1994.