

DOGS AND DOGMA – A DISCUSSION OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN DOG ‘BREEDS’ AS A WINDOW INTO SOCIAL HISTORY. *South African Historical Journal*, 48 (2003).

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This paper is an engagement with the social role of the three Southern African dog ‘breeds’: the Rhodesian Ridgeback, the Boerboel and the Africanis dog. The discussion explores the current discourses, debates and marketing strategies surrounding the dogs, with particular emphasis on the recent attempts to reclassify the ‘kaffir dog’ as the ‘Africanis dog’.¹ Here dogs provide a lens into understanding human society and culture in southern Africa. Behind every dog breed we find an ethnography and a social history as well as a genealogy – its cultural, as well as its genetic, heritage. This paper opens up wider issues of class and race, in a context of the cultural heritage(s) of Southern Africa to disentangle the meanings of a layered social identity. ‘Scientific’ and community history, together with indigenous perceptions of ‘breeds’ are investigated through advertisements, breed organisations, interviews with breeders and through oral testimony from the communal lands of western Zimbabwe. Ostensibly neutral taxonomic classifications and breed descriptions provide a lens through which to view the economic and cultural trends. In the despised ‘Kaffir dog’s’ redemption as valuable ‘Africanis dog’, lie embedded ideas and metaphors central to the African Renaissance and heritage creation. In the discourse surrounding the Rhodesian Ridgeback and Boerboel, we find reflected a white ‘settler’ self-image, the embodiment of their preoccupations and anxieties. A

¹ The offensive term ‘Kaffir dog’ is often still used in certain communities – often shortened to ‘kd’.

dog is thus a bundle of fur, teeth, hereditary characteristics, social symbolism and cultural attributes. In essence, a dog is social history that can bark.

DOGS AND DOGMA – A DISCUSSION OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN DOG ‘BREEDS’ AS A WINDOW INTO SOCIAL HISTORY.

‘All knowledge, the totality of all questions and answers, is contained in the dog.’

Franz Kafka, ‘Investigations of a Dog’.

Dogs have been entangled in human lives, myths, illusions, and sentiments for at least the last ten to twelve thousand years.² The alliance between dogs and humans is the oldest among all the animals, and the relationship is so long that the story we think of as theirs is often our own. This paper is an attempt to extract a measure of their story and show how and why it has merged with ours in one particular context. It is an engagement with social role of the three Southern African dog ‘breeds’: the Rhodesian Ridgeback, the Boerboel and the Africanis dog.³ The discussion explores

My thanks to Malcolm Draper, Johan Gallant, Adrian Ryan, Albert Grundlingh, Sarah Duff, the unknown referees and Drifter Swart.

² It is generally accepted that dogs were domesticated during the hunter-gatherer period in human history, about 12 000 years ago and were well established by the time agricultural villages began to form, 6 000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent. See F.E. Zeuner, *A History of Domesticated Animals* (London, 1963); J. Clutton-Brock (ed.), *The Walking Larder – patterns of domestication, pastoralism and predation* (London, 1989) and L. Corbett, *The dingo in Australia and Asia* (Ithaca, 1995).

³ There are other locally developed types, like the variety developed by the South African Defence Force in the 1970s, which combined 60% bloodhound, 35% Doberman and 5% rottweiler. This was the forerunner of the so-called Bloemanweiler, a rottweiler-bloodhound mix, which has pockets of

the current discourses, debates and marketing strategies surrounding the dogs, with particular emphasis on the recent attempts to reclassify the ‘kaffir dog’ as the ‘Africanis dog’.⁴ Here dogs provide a lens into understanding human society and culture. Their very domestication was fundamentally a cultural act – like making tools or weapons – and their continued development and interaction with humans has entrenched them within our society. Dogs, like humans, are products of both biology and culture, yet it’s human culture that defines a dog’s condition, its status and its position.⁵ Behind every dog breed we find an ethnography and a social history as well as a genealogy – its cultural, as well as its genetic, heritage. This paper tracks the pawprints into the social history of Southern African society, opening up wider issues of identity.

In locating the flesh and blood dogs in a context of the cultural heritage(s) of Southern Africa and using them to explore the meanings of a layered social identity, one has also to be aware of taxonomy and political ecology, adopting an inter-disciplinary methodology. ‘Scientific’ and community history, together with indigenous perceptions of ‘breeds’ are investigated through advertisements, breed organisations, interviews with breeders and through oral testimony from in the communal lands of western Zimbabwe.

enthusiasts throughout South Africa. J. Boule, ‘SA dogs – our local heroes’, *Farmer’s Weekly*, 22 Feb. 2002.

⁴ ‘Kaffir dog’, an offensive term, is still used in some communities, and is often shortened to ‘KD’.

⁵ M. Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (New Haven, 1997), 30.

Good Breeding?

The idea that there is a miscellany of animals traveling under the sobriquet ‘dog’ and further that dog hierarchy and society offers a pattern for human status is articulated by Macbeth in his choleric reply to the First Murderer:

First Murderer: We are men, my liege.

Macbeth: Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men,

As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,

Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept

All by the name of dogs.

Macbeth, 3.1.90-94.

Parallels have long been drawn between human and canine society. Sir Philip Sidney noted in 1580: ‘greyhounds, Spaniels and Hounds; whereof the first might seem the Lords, the second the Gentlemen, and the last the Yeoman of dogs’.⁶ John Caius’s treatise *Of English Dogges* (published in Latin in 1570, *De Canibus Britannicis* translated in 1576) describes six main varieties of dogs: greyhounds, hounds, bird dogs, terriers, mastiffs, shepherd dogs – and emphasizes that each has its designated social role to play.⁷ The seventeenth century observer, William Penn (1644-1718), commented that ‘men are generally more careful of the breed of their horses and dogs than of their children.’⁸ It may be argued that our cultural investment and symbolism

⁶ Quoted in V. Woolf, *Flush: A Biography* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 9. See H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (Cambridge, 1987), 102 and K. Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir* (Berkeley, 1994), 67, 70, 83-4.

⁷ Quoted in M. Garber, *Dog Love* (London, 1996), 166.

⁸ W. Penn, *Reflexions and Maxims*, No. 85.

is particularly resonant in the dog, perhaps because they are so integral to human society. This is illustrated vividly by the killing of innumerable dachshunds (because of their German ‘origin’) during World War I in a frenzy of British jingoism and – perhaps because they were too useful to kill – the re-branding of German Shepherds as ‘Alsations’.⁹

Harriet Ritvo has shown that dog breeds and breeding were developed with a deep investment in ideas about race, quality, purity and progress. In 1873 the English Kennel Club founded in London, together with the first volume of its stud book – listing dogs exhibited since 1859. Ritvo notes that the members were by their own account ‘true sportsmen...who breed to win and to whom pecuniary questions are of no moment’.¹⁰ For Victorian society the elaborate divisions of dogs into breeds and classes and of individuals into precisely ranked hierarchies within these classes seemed to imitate and thus endorse the established, rigidly hierarchical social system represented by the human upper orders. Human class and dog class – *breeding*, as it were – were inextricably entwined.¹¹

⁹ Firstly, they were re-named ‘Alsatian Wolf Dogs’, the ‘Wolf Dog’ was subsequently dropped as it was considered pejorative.

¹⁰ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*.

¹¹ The idea of pedigree originally meant a line of ancestors, from the resemblance of a crane’s foot (Anglo-Norman *pie de grue*) to the lines on a genealogical chart.

This could be undermined, however, by market forces – for example an unusual trait might find popularity and be favoured over ‘lineage’.¹² Ritvo notes: ‘The prizewinning pedigreed dogs of the late nineteenth century seemed to symbolize simply the power to manipulate and the power to purchase – they were ultimately destabilizing emblems of status and rank as pure commodities.’ Kathleen Kete has highlighted this aggressive classification and manipulation, by throwing it into contrast with the French attitude to breeding, which was not taken seriously and was not linked to societal divisions. Physical traits were cavalierly regarded. Yet, if the shows regarded physical traits more lightly, the dog-care handbooks did not, they served to ‘construct’ the French breeds in the social imagination. The ‘moral’ qualities of the ‘breeds’ were outlined in a sketch or story – and it was the idea of the breed (and not its usage) that signified. Kete observes that ‘the identification of owner with pet was a function of image that the pet acquired, however arbitrarily that meaning came about.’¹³

The dog is the supreme example of that which can be achieved by genetic selection – no other species shows such variation in size, character, or range of activities expected of it. The western concept of dog ‘breeds’ dates back at least to Caius’s 1570 treatise *Of English Dogges*. As particular morphological characteristics became more clearly associated with the ability to perform various valued tasks, the ancestors of the present breeds appeared. As breeding for characteristics became more refined in

¹² Like the red dapple in dachshunds.

¹³ A Parisian poodle, for example, clothed and crimped, dressed in the colours and materials of its owner, its own hairdresser and rigorous diet was a *doppelgänger* for its mistress.

subsequent generations, the early breed specimens began to assume a particular type. Individual dogs began to resemble their more immediate ancestors more than they resembled distant ancestors. The inherited similarities – both behavioural and morphological – were limited only to characteristics that could be observed in a dog or its offspring. The first modern-style dog show was held in 1859 at Newcastle upon Tyne, limited to only two ‘breeds’. A much larger show took place at the Crystal Palace in 1870, which drew 975 entries after only three years by 1873. Today there are approximately 20 000 entries annually at Crufts, which exhibits 166 breeds.

The term ‘breed’ is hard to define. A ‘breed’ may be understood as animals that, through selection and breeding, have come to resemble one another and pass their traits uniformly to their offspring. A breed is smoothly defined as a Mendelian population in equilibrium differentiated from other breeds by genetic composition. All this means it that a breed is a population that complies to ancestry. So a ‘purebred’ animal belongs to an identifiable breed complying with prescribed traits – origin, appearance, and minimum breed standards. As Lush has contended, in *The Genetics of Populations*, the term is both elusive and subjective:

[a] breed is a group of domestic animals, termed such by common consent of the breeders, ... a term which arose among breeders of livestock, created one might say, for their own use, and no one is warranted in assigning to this word a scientific definition and in calling the breeders wrong when they deviate from the formulate definition.¹⁴

¹⁴ J.L. Lush, *The genetics of populations* (Mimeo, 1948); see ‘From Jay L. Lush to Genomics: Visions for Animal Breeding and Genetics’, May 1999, Iowa State University.

So the point at which a collection of animals becomes a ‘breed’ is a purely commercial decision – not a genetic event.

In the middle east, for example, there were only three kinds of dogs: salukis used to hunt gazelle, large herding dogs used by shepherds to guard against wolves and mongrels, which were scavengers in the cities. By contrast, in modern France there are seventeen breeds of shepherding or stock dogs alone.¹⁵ Rural Zulu communities recognize three types.¹⁶ The rural Ndebele-speakers of the Hwange region in Zimbabwe recognized a mixture of ‘breeds’. Interestingly there was no designation for animals resembling the ‘indigenous’ Africanis morphological type. These were dismissed generally as ‘just a dog’, often said with a deprecating laugh.¹⁷

Three ‘Breeds’ in search of an author

There are three Southern African dog ‘breeds’: the Rhodesian Ridgeback, the Boerboel and – more controversially – the ‘Canis Africanis’, previously dismissed as

¹⁵ For more on the development of dog breeds see Zeuner, *A History of Domesticated Animals*, 93.

¹⁶ A. Abacar, A. Chuntharpursat, J. Foley, J. Guzman, T. Hlatswako, D. Macfarlane, C. Mdzinga, R. Montsi, J. Mwaura, T. Ngcobo, K. Nsanzya, and A. Ramjatan, ‘Traditional Hunting with dogs – a contemporary issue in KwaZulu-Natal’ (MA thesis, Centre for Environment and Development, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1999).

¹⁷ S. Swart, ‘Limiting the impact of domestic dogs on African wild dogs, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe’ (MSC thesis, University of Oxford, 2001).

merely a 'kaffir dog' or 'a township special'.¹⁸ These latter dogs, predominately present in rural areas throughout Southern Africa, are argued to share traits – they are predominately smooth-coated, lightly built, with a slight forehead stop and pointed muzzle, large semi-pricked ears and a curled tail. Historically, these dogs have not been classified as a breed – unlike Rhodesian Ridgebacks or Boerboels, both lines arising in Africa but predominately developed within white settler society. Instead they have been considered pariah, and been labelled disparagingly as 'kaffir dogs', 'pi/pye-dogs', curs, or 'shenzi dogs' (from the Swahili meaning 'wild' or 'uncultivated').¹⁹

Recently there has been a re-investigation into the taxonomic status of these dogs. An argument has been made that they are not mongrel progeny of settler dogs, but derived from the Arabian wolf (*Canis lupus arabs*), from which Middle Eastern dogs were domesticated, arriving in southern Africa c.1 000 – 1 500 BC with Arab traders, Early Iron Age Bantu (Nguni-speakers) and/or Khoi pastoralists.²⁰ Skeletal remains indicate the presence of dogs on many Iron Age, and a few Stone Age, sites.²¹

¹⁸ South Africa's best loved dog, Jock of the Bushveld, was inadvertently shot mistaken for a 'kaffir dog', which the loyal Jock had already killed defending the chicken run. *Farmer's Weekly* recently ran an article asking 'What did Jock really look like?', *Farmer's Weekly*, 22 Feb. 2002.

¹⁹ So-called Nguni cattle have been recognised as a breed, but other animals – like 'Zulu fowl' – have not.

²⁰ R.M. Blench and K.C. MacDonald, *The Origins and Development of African Livestock; archaeology, genetics, linguistics and ethnography* (London, 2000).

²¹ Hall has hypothesized that early waves of western stream settlers introduced small spitz-type dogs – similar to the extant equatorial Basenji – and perhaps later Bantu-speakers brought the slender gazoid pariah/hound type typical of northern African regions.

Certainly there were dogs before western settlers. Early travellers to the Cape observed the presence of dogs. In 1595, Cornelis de Houtman observed that the Khoisan owned dogs.²² In 1861, Casalis noted that ‘the natives [Sotho] affirm that they have had dogs from time immemorial’. In 1497, Vasco Da Gama observed dogs owned by the San.²³ Between 1700 and 1800 inland travellers remarked on dogs owned by the groups they came across.²⁴ In 1811, Burchell described dogs belonging to a San group as ‘a small species, entirely white, with erect pointed ears’ and being ‘of a race perhaps peculiar to these tribes’.²⁵ Soga (1905) and Bryant (1967) provide ethnographies of the Xhosa and Zulu respectively, which offer the best description of indigenous dog types and their social roles.²⁶ Significantly, both ethnographers feared that these dogs were threatened with extinction.

²² R. Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck – Callers at South Africa from 1488 to 1652* (Cape Town, 1967), 17-8.

²³ E.C. Boonzaier, C.Malherbe, P. Berens and A. Smith, *Cape herders: a history of the Khoikhoi of southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1996), 54.

²⁴ S. Hall, ‘Indigenous domesticated dogs of southern Africa: an introduction’, in R.M. Blench and K.C. MacDonald, *The Origins and Development of African Livestock: archaeology, genetics, linguistics and ethnography* (London, 2000), 304.

²⁵ Burchill, 1811, quoted in Hall, ‘Indigenous domesticated dogs of southern Africa: an introduction’, 304.

²⁶ H. Soga, *The Ama-Xosa: life and customs* (London, 1905) and A.T. Bryant, *The Zulu people as they were before the white man came* (Pietermaritzburg, 1967). The Xhosa-speakers had four types: iTwina (which Soga wrote had largely disappeared), iBaku, Inqeqe and the iNgesi (the English greyhound). The Zulu-speakers owned the iSiqha (iSica), a hunting dog, and appear to distinguish between isimaku

Ideas around the Africanis dog are wrapped up in the ideology of reclaiming the indigenous, the autochthonous and building on indigenous knowledge systems. Such claims have been generated by post-colonial conditions and the perceived scorn of the first world for the third. ‘Indigenous knowledge’ claims autonomy and independence from ‘metropolitan knowledge’. It is, to use current South African and pan-African terminology, an attempt at ‘Renaissance’ – to recover ‘old’ ways of understanding and to restore ‘old’, lost or forgotten ways of doing and thinking. This has been promoted by South African President Thabo Mbeki’s belief in Africa’s ability to be ‘re-born’ and join the other nations of the world as an equal member. He has identified recovering indigenous knowledge and celebrating the indigenous as vital in completing the process of eliminating the colonial presence and mindset across Africa.²⁷

The Africanis dogs are increasingly argued to be part of the living heritage of African culture and are celebrated as ‘part of the African Renaissance’.²⁸ Hall calls them the

(smaller dog) and ubova (larger hunter). Malcolm Draper has suggested that the domestication of dogs by the San is particularly important as the only evidence of domestication/cultivation by a hunting and gathering culture (Draper, pers. comm.).

²⁷ See, for example, M.W. Makgoba (ed.), *African Renaissance: The New Struggle*. (Sandton, 1999); T. Mbeki, *Africa: The Time Has Come* (Cape Town, 1998) and Mulemfo, M. M. *Thabo Mbeki And The African Renaissance: The Emergence Of A New African Leadership* (Pretoria, 2000).

²⁸ Hall suggests that Africanis types might have high resistance to African tropical diseases and have lower protein requirements. Research into other domestic animals indigenous to an area has shown cases of locale-specific traits, like N’dama cattle from west Africa which have developed a resistance

embodiment of ‘a people’s history’ and urges that they be considered part of the African ‘cultural heritage’. Gallant calls them ‘our cultural and biological patrimony’.²⁹ They are beginning to be marketed as symbols of the value of the indigenous, simultaneously promoting and utilising the psycho-social self-esteem that is a key element of the African Renaissance. The Africanis breeders note:

The Africanis is the real African dog - shaped in Africa, for Africa. It is part of the cultural and biological heritage of Africa. In fact, its African heritage goes back 7000 years. Africanis is descended from the dogs pictured on Egyptian murals, the earliest record of the domestic dog in Africa being from the Nile delta, dated 4700 BC. Today, Africanis is found all over the Southern African subcontinent. It is known by various names, in different languages. That is why we use a universal name, canis [dog] of Africa – Africanis.

But is it a mongrel or dog of no definable type or breed?

Decidedly not! Africanis is the true dog of Africa. The type has been accurately defined, despite some variations in appearance. Africanis is the result of natural selection and physical and mental adaptation to environmental conditions. It has not been ‘selected’ or ‘bred’ for appearance. It is the dog for Africa. In traditional Southern African philosophy, the most important requirement for a dog is that it should be ‘wise’. For centuries, the fittest and cleverest dogs survived to give us one of the rare remaining natural dog races in the world.³⁰

to trypanosomiasis. As yet there are no studies of disease or parasite resistance specific to the ‘Africanis’.

²⁹ Johan Gallant, pers. comm.

³⁰ <http://www.sa-breeders.co.za/org/africanis/>

Africanis dogs are thus imagined and marketed as creatures of the blood and the soil, a dog uncannily linked to its terrain, part of its aboriginal and original landscape, and part of an African ‘traditional way of life’.³¹ The breed is however, marketed in modern western way on the internet (<http://www.sa-breeders.co.za/org/africanis/>) and in the global capitalist manner. Moreover, the rehabilitation of the ‘Kaffir dog’ appears to be a largely white exercise with no support from the black majority.³²

Curs and Currency

Hath a dog money?

The Merchant of Venice, 1.3.

Willis and others have commented on the massive capital invested in the dog breeding industry. Both breeders and resultant service industry benefit from the public’s enthusiasm for ‘purebred’ dogs, preferably ‘registered’ with the national Kennel Unions. There are several parallels to the South African context in other post-colonial situations, where dogs are used as socio-cultural vehicles, to promote a sense of self-respect, or – inversely – current cultural ideology is used to market formerly low-priced livestock. Dogs are used as signifiers in an attempt to boost post-colonial pride in indigenous identity. The singing dogs of New Guinea, Korean Jindo or Australian dingo (*Canis familiaris dingo*), for example, are increasingly argued to be ‘breeds’ in their own right. The dingo, for example, is currently celebrated as ‘part of the living

³¹ The dogs may still have a practical use; it has been suggested that puppies may be reared with ewes to discourage jackal and lynx. K.A. Ramsay, D.S. Reed, A.J. Bothma, J.M. Lepen, ‘Profitable and environmentally effective farming with early domesticated livestock in southern Africa’ Conservation of Early Domesticated Animals of Southern Africa, Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum, 1994.

³² See Johan Gallant, *Story of an African Dog* (University of Natal Press, 2002).

heritage of aboriginal culture and part of Australian history’. The Jindo of Korea has been described recently as ‘one of the Korean natural monuments’, around ‘from time unknown’. A Jindo Dog Breeding Management Center has been established to improve the breed.³³

Collectors are progressively more interested in the ‘primitive’ breeds – seen as more quintessentially canine than the refined European and British breeds. The ‘primitive’ breeds are discussed as useful generalists, independent, and relatively free of genetic problems caused by inbreeding and line breeding.

The heritage industry is linked to market forces and the economic motors behind the promotion of the Africanis dogs are powerful. An Africanis dog can cost up to R2000 (in contrast with the average price of a ‘mongrel’ in the rural areas, R15 or Z\$5-25).³⁴ To provide a comparative frame-work: a registered Ridgeback or Boerboel costs R1500 to R2000, and unregistered R500 – R800. Moreover, the Africanis Society of Southern Africa has been created to ‘conserve a natural dog. Not to “develop” the breed, or artificially “breed” dogs for selective characteristics.’ The society was launched in 1998 by Johan Gallant (promoter of the Siyakhula project since 1994) and Dr Udo Küsel (director of the National Cultural History Museum). It maintains a code of ethics, guidelines for breeding, regulations and a procedure for registration, and a register of inspected and approved Africanis dogs.

³³ C.G. Lee, Lee, J.I., Lee, C.Y., and Sun, S.S., ‘A review of the Jindo, Korean native dog’, *Asian-Australian Journal of Animal Sciences*, 13(3): 381-389.

³⁴ S. Swart, ‘Limiting the impact of domestic dogs on African wild dogs’.

Hair of the Dog

The society notes that '[a]dvanced DNA testing is standard' (which costs R135) and only registered dogs are recommended for breeding...'. The DNA test, done with either a hair or blood sample, sets the parameters for inclusion within the Africanis land race, rather than a narrow 'breed' profile. Membership costs R50 entry plus R50 per year and is a prerequisite for the ownership of a registered dog.

The Africanis society makes an interesting distinction between a 'breed' and a 'land race', into which latter category it is argued the Africanis belongs. A breed is argued to be purposefully selected to conform to certain standards, while a land race has evolved, with its standards decided on by environmental factors rather than human choice, allowing for a greater diversity in morphology. This means that the Kennel Union cannot admit the breed, which is accepted by the Africanis Society, whose aim is conserving the dogs and their utilitarian value rather than refining and setting cosmetic standards for the animals.³⁵

If one accepts the Africanis as a 'race', then the biggest threat to the Africanis' integrity stems from the African perception of the dogs' worthlessness. In the rural areas, where hunting (both for meat and for gambling) is increasingly popular, greyhounds (and other fixed 'breeds') are used for stud, diluting the 'purity' of the Africanis. Both my study of Ndebele communities in Zimbabwe and Hall's study in South Africa, indicate that black societies increasingly tend to prefer western breeds, regarding them as status symbols. Greyhounds in particular are favoured – there is

³⁵ J. Gallant, pers. comm.

even a Nguni-term for the cross-between a greyhound and an indigenous dog: ‘amabanzi’.³⁶

The Brown Paint Theory

There is, however, an argument against the pure Africanis as a distinguishable ‘breed’. Interbreeding with introduced breeds has been happening for about four centuries – probably longer. Casalis (1861) noted the widespread presence of free-ranging, self-supporting almost quasi-feral dogs among the Sotho. He noticed that by 1861 there was already a great morphological diversity: ‘[t]he smallest hamlet is infested with dogs of all sizes and colours’.³⁷ Travelers let their dogs mix with others. John Davy, for example, noted in 1598 that when his ship departed the ‘Mastive Dogge’ was left behind.³⁸ Similarly, Gordon observes the reserves were overrun with mongrel greyhounds in Namibia by 1917. ‘Butch’ Smuts’ photographs of dogs used in the early years of the twentieth century for hunting in the Kruger Park show a miscellany of breeds owned by black communities in remote rural areas.³⁹

Dogs, when left to breed on their own for a few generations, revert to a stereotypic form: stocky with a yellowish/buff coat, curly tail, short muzzle, small upright ears. If

³⁶ J. Gallant, pers. comm. Boule notes that a greyhound type, mainly in the Cape, is called ‘iBantsa’, *Farmer’s Weekly*, 22 Feb. 2002.

³⁷ Casalis, 1861, 176.

³⁸ Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck*, 20.

³⁹ G.L. Smuts, *Lion*, (Johannesburg, 1982).

the different ‘breeds’ are analogous to different to different colours of paint-mixing them in various quantities indiscriminately over time produces simply ‘brown paint’. This might explain the remarkable morphological similarity despite the geographic separation of the Australian dingo (or warrigal); the Mexican xoloitzcuintli (coated version)⁴⁰; Carolina dogs⁴¹, Korean Jindo; Philippine Aso; Indian pariah dog; Telomian dog of Malaysia and the ‘Africanis’ dog. Environmental factors select for the ‘pariah’ or ‘primitive’ morphology. It is arguable that they may represent something of what the ancestral dog may have resembled.

Molecular genetic tools have been used increasingly to dissect the evolutionary relationships of the canids – to understand the relationships of species within the Canidae, or dog family, and the genetic exchanges that occur between conspecific populations.⁴² But DNA fingerprinting does not allow scientists to identify dog ‘breeds’ or ‘types’.⁴³ Raymond Coppinger has stated there has not been discovered an incontrovertible genetic marker for breeds of dogs.⁴⁴ For the moment, the final

⁴⁰ C. Flamholtz, *A Celebration of Rare Breeds: Volume II* (Centreville, 1991).

⁴¹ Carolina dogs, promoted by Carolina Dog Club of America, are found in the swamps and woods of the Savannah River basin. Dubbed ‘old yeller’, they are dogs of a pariah type, and argued to be a direct descendant of the ancient pariah dogs that accompanied Asians across the Bering Straits land bridge.

⁴² Large hybrid zones do exist – the phenotype of the endangered American red wolf, for example, may be strongly influenced by hybridization with coyotes and gray wolves.

⁴³ Recently, for example, after attacks on humans made headlines, several US counties passed laws banning Pit Bulls. But the question arose: ‘what exactly IS a pitbull?’, as there is no ‘genetic’ test for being a pitbull.

diagnostic process requires papers like those lodged with kennel clubs, like the KUSA or AKC, or educated guesses based on a dog's morphology and behaviour.

This leads us to a broader issue on dog 'breeds' and their preservation. We have already seen that the concept of a 'breed' as a 'pure' race of dogs, each bearing characteristics unique to themselves, is a tradition less than two centuries old. By the second half of the nineteenth century, British breeders were writing breed standards and holding exhibitions. When a new 'breed' was proposed, the fanciers of that breed wrote the standard to fit the dogs they themselves owned. As the custom spread, prominent fanciers or breeders collected groups of dogs, described them in a standard, and decreed the 'discovery' of an 'ancient breed'. National or regional pride often dictated the minor differences that identified a dog as belonging to one country and not another. (As De la Cruz reminds one, only a serious fancier can easily identify the differences, for example, between show specimens of Kuvasz, Tatra, Chuvach, Akbash or Great Pyrenees dogs; the nomadic shepherd by whom these dogs were developed was unlikely to have strong feelings as long as the dog did the work required of her.)

When we talk of 'preserving' a breed, we are essentially talking about freezing one point in time – usually the time we ourselves first met our chosen breed. We try to preserve the dog of our imagination in the amber of breed standards and controlled breeding regimes. Changes in the direction we desire, we label 'refinement'; unwelcome changes we call 'degenerative'. Old notions of blood purity

⁴⁴ R. Coppinger, pers. comm.

invest these desires. It remains today perhaps one of the very few fora in which the pure ‘master race’ eugenics discourse is not discredited.

Big Brown Dogs – the Boerboel and Rhodesian Ridgeback

Various ‘Boer’ dogs have been mentioned from the nineteenth century. The traveller of Zambezia and Matabeleland, Frederick Barber noted, for example, ‘We had some very fine Boer dogs in the camp’ and remarked on ‘two splendid, powerful, plucky Boer dogs’.⁴⁵ The Boerboel, often dubbed the ‘Boer mastiff’, is a large ‘breed’ of dog developed in Southern Africa over the last few hundred years, specifically for homestead security and (white, usually Afrikaans) family protection.⁴⁶ Incorporating elements of a number of breeds, the Boerboel has been bred with the concerns of white settler protection in mind. Induna Boerboel breeders note:

The Boerboel has a long and illustrious history as one of the outstanding dogs of Africa. Whilst the most recent developments in the breed have been recorded as having taken place within Southern Africa over the last three hundred and fifty years, the typical characteristics of the breed are very similar to those demonstrated in contemporary pictures of Assyrian dogs of the period prior to 700 BC.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E.C. Tabler (ed.) *Zambezia and Matabeleland in the Seventies, The narrative of Frederick Hugh Barber (1875 and 1877-8) and The Journal of Richard Frewen (1877-8)* (London, 1960), 96, 99.

⁴⁶ Many people here in South Africa will mistakenly identify whole ranges of ‘big brown dogs’ as being boerboels; and Boerbul or Boerbull are common misnomers.

⁴⁷ <http://www.boerboelsa.co.za/hist.htm> Induna Boerboel.

The breeders note the efforts by Van Riebeeck, and the 1820s settlers to breed mastiffs and cross them with other European breeds – the *bullenbijter*, the English Bulldog, the Great Dane, the Saint Bernard and the Bull Terrier. In 1938 authenticated bull mastiffs were imported from Britain by De Beers to serve as guard dogs on the South African diamond mines of the time; the characteristics of these animals were ‘doubtless incorporated into the boerboel breed as we know it today’. The Boerboel is not yet fully recognised by KUSA, but is on their foundation stock registry. The South African Boerboel Breeders Association (SABT) laid down breed standards in 1983, and the first nationwide appraisal of dogs took place in 1990. Boerboel breeding in South Africa is overseen by a number of organisations, among them being the South African Boerboel Breeders' Association (SABT) and the Historical Boerboel of South Africa (HBSA). A third organisation is the Elite Boerboel Breeders' Association of Southern Africa (International) (EBBASA), which has more stringent entry and registration requirements than the other two associations and focuses more on international involvement. A detailed set of standards regulating the characteristics of the breed has been laid down by these Associations and all dogs which are registered with an association are required to undergo assessment in terms of these standards. It is a requirement that in order to be registered, a dog must achieve a minimum qualifying rating between 75% and 80%.⁴⁸ The Kennel Union of South Africa invited the SABT to introduce the Boerboel at the South African Championship in Pretoria. In 1995 the Boerboel was introduced to the international community at the World Dog Show in Brussels, Belgium.

⁴⁸ <http://www.boerboelsa.co.za/hist.htm>

The Rhodesian Ridgeback dates back to early in the sixteenth century when travellers observed a domesticated dog with the hair on his spine ‘turned forward’ in a ridge.⁴⁹⁵⁰ These local Cape dogs interbred with the mastiffs, bloodhounds and greyhounds (and others) imported with the waves of European settlers. In 1875, the missionary, Rev. Charles Helm, undertook a journey from his home in Swellendam to Rhodesia. He was accompanied by two of these dogs. While the Rev. Helm was in Rhodesia, Cornelis von Rooyen, the big-game hunter and early authority on the South African wildlife, borrowed the two dogs to take along on a hunt. Von Rooyen soon concluded that they possessed useful hunting qualities and thereupon pioneered the breeding of a pack of the species as hunters of big game for his own use. In 1922 the first Ridgeback Club was founded at a show in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, and a standard of points for the breed was set. This happened as follows: a local resident named Francis Barnes organised a meeting, at the second day of the Bulawayo Kennel Club Show to try to formulate a standard for the ‘lion dog’ – the selection criterion was the ridge. Ridged dogs of all shapes and sizes were brought by their owners, and there was much dissension as to how a ‘ridge back’ or ‘lion dog’ was to be defined. A witness, B.W. Durham, noted:

Owners were reluctant to come forward, each naturally thinking his the correct type. Finally a spectator with some knowledge of the breed [Durham himself, the only ‘all breeds’ judge in Rhodesia] took a dog and suggested that the size and configuration be adopted, then chose

⁴⁹ The only other known dog which has the peculiarity of such a ridge is found on the island of Phu Quoc in the Gulf of Siam.

⁵⁰ ‘Dogman’, *Guide to Dogdom in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1947).

another specimen for its head and neck, a third for legs and feet, and making use of some five different dogs, built up what he considered to be aimed at. A few days later Mr Barnes compiled the standard, a club was formed, Mr Barnes standard adopted...'.⁵¹

Following this, Ridgebacks were exhibited as novelties at an English dog show and presented as gifts to for British royal family. In 1924 the Ridgeback was also recognized by the South African Kennel Union as a distinct breed and the organization recognized its first registered dog.⁵² Today, the Rhodesian Ridgeback is one of the most popular dogs in South Africa and KUSA's symbol of the year in 2002.⁵³

The social constructions of the three different 'breeds'

Love – here the owners' love for their dogs – is composed at least partly of identification.⁵⁴ Owners' choice of dog reflects desires, anxieties and popular anthropomorphism – involving the projection of the psycho-social self upon the corporeal animals. Ostensibly matter-of-fact breed standards are couched in emotional idiom: the official American breed standard for the shar-pei, for example, is 'regal,

⁵¹ B.W. Durham, *South African Kennel Gazette*, December 1950.

⁵² Only two dogs were registered with the SAKU in that year, followed by four in 1925, and not less than eleven in 1926.

⁵³ *Animal Talk*, Nov. 2001, vol.7, no.11, 20.

⁵⁴ Garber, *Dog Love*, 166.

alert, intelligent, dignified, lordly, scowling, sober and snobbish'.⁵⁵ Moreover, Alan Beck in his 1973 study of free-ranging dogs in Baltimore, for example, revealed that many poverty-stricken inner city residents – who actually suffered the most from the stray dogs – nevertheless often sided with the dog against the municipal dog-catcher. They projected their distrust of authority and the white establishment onto the dogs, seeing them as fellow victims.⁵⁶ Similarly, such anthropomorphism and identification operates in the South African context. The dogs are thus marketed in very dissimilar ways, each occupying their own strategic niche in the public's imagination.

The Boerboel has a strong Afrikaans following, and was purportedly first promoted by the Herstigte Nasionale Party (Refounded National Party of South Africa), as a protector of white homes.⁵⁷ The HNP itself is proud of their late leader, Jaap Marais's knowledge of Boerboels. *The Afrikaner*, the HNP mouthpiece, notes: 'Ask [Marais] for example something about Boerboel-dogs and he could sit and write pages on it!'⁵⁸ It was marketed as 'the dog of our forefathers' and the local or indigenous dog's

⁵⁵ American Kennel Club 1992, quoted in J. Serpell (ed.) *The Domestic Dog, its evolution, behaviour and interactions with people* (Cambridge, 1995), 2.

⁵⁶ A. Beck, *The Ecology of Stray Dogs* (Baltimore, 1973).

⁵⁷ According to the *Mail and Guardian*, the hounds first surfaced during the early 1980s in *Farmers Weekly* advertisements, paid for by the extreme right-wing Herstigte Nasionale Party. The adverts flagged 'racist watchdogs' bred 'especially for South African circumstances'. *Mail and Guardian*, 27 June 1997. But it may be traced back to Johan de Jager of Utrecht (Kwa Zulu Natal) who started the breeding of the Boerboel in 1960.

⁵⁸ *Die Afrikaner*, 18 Aug. 2000.

influence was minimised, with a cursory mention. The Boerboel is perceived as a rugged self-sufficient 'settler dog'. Its 'European' or western heritage has been emphasised, linking it to the classical tradition. Thus it corresponds with 'settler ideology', which insists on its right to occupy its new home, but asserts a traditional link to Classical Western Civilisation. The United States Boerboel Association (USAB), African Boerboel Breeders, The South African Boerboel Breeders' Association, for example, traces the breed back to classical antiquity:

Long research has revealed that the ancestry of the Boerboel can be traced as far back as the time of Herodotus and to Tibet, Assiria and Babylon...Later Alexander the Great was responsible for spreading them to Europe.⁵⁹

Similarly, Stormberg Boerboel breeders note that Boerboels may be seen in a 'copy of a painting, Circa 1400, arrived with a typical Boerboel-like dog in the centre of a royal gathering in the court of King Charles'.⁶⁰

In a representative, indeed typical, advertisement, Induna Breeders contend: 'the development of the boerboel is therefore a true South African success story; today's boerboel is as ideal a home protection dog as were his or her ancestors'. The United States Boerboel Association (USBA), Baden Breeders, African Boerboel Breeders

⁵⁹ <http://home.yebo.co.za/~mcewendp/>; <http://members.aol.com/seacaps/history.html>;
<http://www.geocities.com/boerboelus/history.html>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.boerboele.co.za/>

note that the breed standard and breed organisations meant that ‘at last the dog of our forefathers was ready to be registered as a pure breed.’⁶¹

Our forefathers required the following from their Boerboel: During the day the dog must go to the veld with the children to guard the sheep...Tonight he should lie in front of the fire at home and protect the whole family against anything that may be lurking in the dark.⁶²

Both the South African Boerboel Breeders’ Association and Anasha Breeders note: ‘The Boerboel is South Africa's very own breed. Justifiably he takes his place with pride and is well known both in Southern Africa as well as overseas. This breed is as South African as Braaivleis and Biltong!’⁶³

Donna boerboel breeders maintain:

For thousands of South Africans ... who grew up with these dogs is it not just interesting but wonderful to know that the dog of the Great Trek who travelled with our ancestors, has had its name restored to its rightful glory.

⁶¹ <http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/boerboel.htm> also notes that ‘the development of the Boerboel can rightfully be described as a true South African success story’.

⁶² <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Acres/6554/>; <http://www.african-boerboel.co.za/character.html>;
<http://members.aol.com/seacaps/index.html>

⁶³ <http://www.swansea.demon.co.uk/anasha/history.htm>

In the beginning of the eighties, five men decided to rediscover the dog of the boer homestead and let it live again. The dog of our ancestors, living Africana, must be respected and bred to create our own breed that South Africa can be proud of.

In 1983, in a little sitting room of a schoolhouse in Senekal, next to the plains where the Trek passed through, the men came together, each a Boerboel lover. The great dream, to give our dog its rightful place among the dog races of the world, took form (*translated from Afrikaans*).⁶⁴

Critics of the Boerboel also have an ideological impetus. In ‘A trip around the bizarre world of apartheid's mad scientists’ Mungo Soggot and Eddie Koch, ask ‘[w]here else but in South Africa’ would ‘dog fanatics enthusiastically market a dog called a boerbul [sic]- an 80kg creature so ferocious that even foreign pitbull fan clubs were this week baying for a ban on the beast?’ They insist that these ‘these canine freaks’ are among the ‘fantastic creations of the apartheid regime, spawned by a symbiosis between science and white supremacy’ part of ‘conservative whites' mania for vicious and racist dogs, the population of which eliminates scores of (mainly black) South Africans every year’.⁶⁵

In a diametrically opposite marketing strategy, the Africanis dog is promoted and marketed as completely free of European breeds’ influence. The discourse is embedded in the language and thoughts of the African Renaissance – emphasising the dogs’ rootedness in traditional Nguni cultural practices, like hunting and masculinity

⁶⁴ <http://www.geocities.com/heartland/bluffs/4720/Dieboel.html>

⁶⁵ *Mail and Guardian*, 27 June 1997.

rituals. The African Renaissance stimulates interest in, and lends legitimacy to, endeavours to investigate and promote ‘heritage creation’ and ‘African agency and African pride’. The ongoing attempts to transform the ‘kaffir dog’ into the ‘Africanis dog’ draw heavily on the discourse of Afrocentricity: the dogs are advertised as autochthonous and ‘authentic’.⁶⁶ They are promoted as essentially more ‘canine’ than the ‘refined’, and therefore ‘soft’, European breeds, dubbed ‘still such real dogs’, and ‘so natural’ and ‘so intense’.⁶⁷



Illustration of the ‘traditional’ role of the Africanis (From the Africanis Society).

The Ridgeback provides a discursive bridge between the two, drawing on elements of each, and emphasising heavily its role in the natural environment. Its romantic origins as ‘lion dog’ are heavily emphasised.⁶⁸ It is marketed with a mixture of traits – its

⁶⁶ J. Gallant, pers. comm.

⁶⁷ J. Gallant, pers. comm.

⁶⁸ <http://indigo.ie/~dboyd/>; http://home.iprimus.com.au/milesy/new_page_2.htm; <http://www.arrf.net/info.htm>

affinity with the veld (as dogs originally intended to hunt lions; in most adverts the lion connection is heavily emphasised as above), its rugged fusion of indigenous and (British) settler breeds.⁶⁹ Several breeders and a breed association assert:

the settler needed a companion that would stay by him while he slept in the bush and that would be devoted to his wife and children. Out of necessity, therefore, these settlers developed, by selective breeding between dogs which they had brought with them from home countries and the half-wild ridged dog of the Hottentot tribes, a distinct breed of the African veldt, which has come to be known as the Rhodesian Ridgeback...Throughout all of the interbreeding and crossbreeding between these native dogs and those of the settlers, the ridge of the Hottentot dog was respected and retained.⁷⁰

The popular South African pet magazine *Animal Talk* dubbed it ‘the Hottentots’ Hunting Dog’.⁷¹ It notes that by crossing European breeds with ‘the indigenous African dogs, the settlers soon had a hardy ‘frontier’ dog:

⁶⁹ There is currently a project underway in the Kruger National Park to test and train ridgebacks in assisting game wardens, *Lion Dog Digest*, Rhodesian Ridgeback International Federation, November 2000.

⁷⁰ <http://www.deerridgerr.com/Breed/History.htm>; <http://www.arrowridge.com/index.htm>

⁷¹ *Animal Talk*, Nov 2001, vol.7, no.11.

These dogs, and their masters, shared all manner of adventures and dangers creating a civilized community in a savage and exciting land. Together they gradually moved northeastwards.⁷²

Although the rough, tough colonial is now a civilized member of the canine community, the Rhodesian Ridgeback still retains the virtues of its hardy ancestors, and wherever a handsome hound of character is required, be sure it will be there – a living reminder of veld and vlei.⁷³

Essentially, the Ridgeback is the ‘Johnny Clegg of dogs’ – safely white, but with a fashionable ethnic twist.⁷⁴

Conclusions

Changing human social needs provide the opportunity and impetus for the phenomenon of canine adaptive and enforced evolution. More than morphological changes are engendered with this social change. Ostensibly neutral taxonomic classifications and breed descriptions provide a lens through which to view the economic and cultural trends. A social history is built into the muscle and sinew of the dogs, and in the iconic representation and symbolism they carry. In the despised ‘Kaffir dog’s’ redemption as valuable ‘Africanis dog’, lie embedded ideas and metaphors central to the African Renaissance and heritage creation. In the discourse

⁷² *Animal Talk*, 21

⁷³ *Animal Talk*, 23. One website offers a selection of ‘authentic’ ‘African’ names for puppies: Dagga; Dashiki; Kimb; Juba; Masa; Shaka; Tahari; Zulu, (<http://www-hsc.usc.edu/~jjmurphy/RRnames.html>).

⁷⁴ The musician Johnny Clegg was born in England in the 1953, but he grew up first in Zimbabwe and Zambia, and later in South Africa. A chance encounter with a Zulu street guitarist led him to Zulu culture. He became so caught up in the culture and its music that he was eventually made an adopted son of a Zulu chief.

surrounding the Rhodesian Ridgeback and Boerboel, we find reflected a white ‘settler’ self-image, the embodiment of their preoccupations and anxieties. A dog is thus a bundle of fur, teeth, hereditary characteristics, social symbolism and cultural attributes. In essence, a dog is social history that can bark.

