

Southern African Horse History Programme

National Research Foundation Grant, 2003-2004 (Project No. : NRF4562)

I have received a two year grant from the NRF (Project No: NRF 4562) in support of this research. The principal research question is: How has the introduction of the horse, a non-native species, into the Southern Africa context impacted both on society and the environment over time? The broad project is an examination of the changing role, the mutable social symbolism, and the political and economic ramifications of the introduction of the horse into Southern Africa.

My methodology includes oral history. I have conducted two recent research trips to Lesotho, pursuing fieldwork on horse back in otherwise inaccessible areas.



This research is predicated on the idea that the human dialogue with the environment is arguably nowhere clearer than in an agroecological investigation of history. I trace the development of the breed of horse, the 'Basotho pony', exploring its anthropogenic and natural selection, attempts at colonial 'scientific' breed improvement, and the controversy surrounding its arguable extinction. Payne and Wilson (1999), among others, have urged the investigation into breed histories as vital in the preservation of endangered domesticated breeds. An analysis of gendered horse ownership in

southern Africa focuses a useful lens onto the current feminisation of equestrianism currently the dominant discourse in the west, particularly Anglophone countries. The questions answered by environmental history provide data for development strategies, particularly in liminal areas of fragile democracy, vulnerable livelihoods, which are environmentally precarious and under stress. The research contributes both in terms of fresh historical data and applied methodology. I draw on both my training as an historian and an environmentalist in this project. Its inter-disciplinary approach breaks boundaries in incorporating into history, for example, current genetic research on the phylogenetic development (the patterns of lineage branching produced by the evolutionary history of the organisms) of the horse because of both natural and artificial evolution. The introduction of equids into Sotho society is contextualised globally, with parallels drawn, for example, with the American Plains Indian and Mongolian horse culture.



This research may be seen as part of what has been termed the 'animal turn' in



the social sciences. Recent historiography is beginning to explore the importance of animals in human affairs and to find that they have their own histories independent and yet revealing of human history. This new turn has been inspired by the encounter with new theoretical ideas derived from social theory, cultural studies, feminism, post-colonial studies, and psychology. The 'animal turn' explores the spaces which animals occupy in human society

and the manner in which animal and human lives intersect, showing how diverse human factions construct a range of identities for themselves (and for others) in terms of animals. It is argued that attention should turn to the cultural meaning of non-humans in the histories, anthropologies, sociologies and geographies – the stories – of everyday life. Such codings and transformations become closely entangled in the identity politics of human groups, with animal images and metaphors deployed to reflect human societal strata – and vice versa. Equally the 'animal turn' in the social sciences requires explication and introduction to the South African context.



Research Outputs



"Riding High – horses, power and settler society, c.1654 – 1840", *Kronos*, vol. 29, Environmental History, Special Issue, November 2003.

Co-editing a book with Greg Bankoff, (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, Netherlands) with chapters by Peter Boomgaard, William Clarence-Smith and Bernice de Jong Boers, called "Breeds of Empire: The 'invention' of the horse in the Philippines and Southern Africa, 1500-1950."

"'Horses! Give me more horses!' – white settler society and the role of horses in the making of early modern South Africa" in Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds) *Kingdom of the Horse: The Culture of the Horse in the Early Modern World*, New York, Palgrave, forthcoming 2004.

"Horses! Give me more horses! – white settler identity, horses and the making of early modern South Africa." The second international conference of the European Society for Environmental History. Department of Social Geography and Regional Development (Charles University), Prague, Czech Republic, 3-7 September 2003

"'Race' horses – a discussion of horses and social dynamics in post-Apartheid Southern Africa." Colloquium on Performances of "Race" in postapartheid South African culture, iNCUDISA, University of Cape Town, 4-5 December 2003, to be included in edited collection and published as a book edited by Natasha Distiller.

"The Ride and Fall of the Cape Horse", Southern Africa: Yesterday and Today, Biennial Conference of SA Historical Society, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 29 June-1 July 2003.



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