Chapter 1

‘But where’s the bloody horse?’

Humans, Horses and Historiography

You praise the firm restraint with which they write –
I’m with you there, of course:
They use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where’s the bloody horse?
Roy Campbell (1901–57), ‘On some South African novelists’

In the dunes outside the Namibian town of Swakopmund on the south-west Atlantic coast there is a mass grave of horses dating back almost a century. Strong winds blow the desert sands, exposing and then concealing the weathered bones from time to time. Each skull has a bullet hole in the forehead. These are the remains of over 2,000 horses and mules destroyed in the summer of 1915 to halt the epidemic spread of virulent glanders among South African Defence Force animals.[1] Like the shifting desert sands, the historical record reveals and conceals the history of horses in southern Africa.

There is a strange concealment when historians write about the past.[2] It is the absence – perhaps forgivable – of the obvious. Horses have been too ubiquitous, in a way, to catch the historian’s eye. Perhaps it is the very centrality of animals to human lives that has previously rendered them invisible – at least invisible to scholars intent on mainstream history or the (aptly labelled) humanities more generally. Horses are absent from the official historical record in southern Africa, except when one detects their hoofprints in some battle, finds an allusion to the gallant exploits of a particular horse or the tragic slaughter of horses in war, or reads of them amalgamated in a much desired commodity on the

shifting colonial frontiers, the dyad of 'guns and horses'. Sometimes one hears a distant whinny in travellers' descriptions, in personal letters and in diaries.

Yet horses are everywhere in the primary sources. They were significant within the colonial economies of southern Africa. They occupied material and symbolic spaces, helping to buttress the shifting socio-political orders and looming large in rituals of social differentiation. It is widely accepted that horses played a significant role in human history (and, though less remarked, that humans played a pivotal role in horses' history). As Alfred Crosby has noted of the broad global processes of human settler invasions of new lands, human colonists came to the 'new worlds' not as individual immigrants, but 'as part of a grunting, lowing, neighing, crowing, chirping, snarling, buzzing, self-replicating and world-altering avalanche'.[3] Just as they had done in Europe, Asia, the Americas and North Africa, in southern Africa the equine colonisers who accompanied the human ones not only provided power and transportation, but also altered their new biophysical and social environments in a range of ways.[4] Although, as the chapters that follow will show, not as economically important as cattle, not as ecologically damaging as sheep, and not as familiar as dogs and cats in the domestic sphere, nevertheless the horse has played an inescapable role. In their three-and-a-half centuries in southern Africa horses have in fact managed to leave visible socio-political and economic tracks. Until the mid-twentieth century they were integral to civic functioning and public recreation. They were replaced by mechanised devices only after lively debate, staying significant in the high-end leisure sector; subsistence agriculture; the low-cost transport of goods in some urban locales and transport, e.g. in the Lesotho Highlands; and in the South African military and policing sectors. Until the present horses have remained elemental to certain public rituals of power, from military parades to intensely personal acts of healing in riding for the disabled. Since the late eighteenth century racehorses have remained a popular way for people to correlate inversely their hopes and their wages every week.

The 'animal turn'

A generation ago, in order to caricature the new social history, a historian wrote a satirical essay (under the pseudonym Charles Phineas) on 'Household pets and urban alienation' in which he declared that the history of pets remained too much the history of their owners, illuminating more about the owning than the

owned.[5] His words now resonate without irony, because – drawing eclectically on the fields of environmental history,[6] literary criticism, psychology, cultural geography, bioethics and anthropology – recent historiography is beginning to give greater emphasis to the importance of animal-centred research. Animals are roaming the groves of academe; they bark and paw at the doors of the ivory tower.

Historians have begun to open these doors a trifle. No longer is the mention of an animal-related topic likely to provoke 'surprise and amusement', as was the case 20 years ago.[7] Instead of being dismissed as simply a fad, the increasing inclusion of animals is gaining momentum as part of our social and political narratives, from the early movement of hunters and gatherers; through the grand narrative of domestication and agricultural transformation; to figuring allegorically and materially in religions, social rituals and literature.[8] Animal Studies is now a growing academic field. It has its own journals and is wide ranging in disciplinary terms, extending from, for example, anthropologies of human–animal interactions, animal geographies and the position of animals in the construction of identity to animals in popular culture.[9] Analysis is becoming progressively more diverse, including rural and urban locales and literary, cinematic and cyberspace arenas, and touching on themes like the commercial food chain, ecotourism and the construction of national identities. Some of the new historical scholarship on animals has been the work of historians (like Ritvo and Thomas); some the work of literary and cultural studies practitioners (like Fudge and Baker). Nevertheless, whether the 'animal turn' is manifested in eco-criticism or environmental history, or featured in the interdisciplinary domain of Animal Studies, it remains the case, as Ritvo has observed, that historical research provides much of the bedrock for more exclusively interpretive scholarship. To understand developments in the field to date, with particular focus on the discipline of history, we need to ask not only 'Why *animals*?', but also 'Why *now*?'

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Historians, like artists, often fall in love with their models. Lately, however, there has been a significant move away from old models towards embracing new forms, and concomitant new sources, in history writing in southern Africa. Certainly, the international green movement has effected change within academe, with scholars focusing on the history of science, technology and the

environment. Human practices now threaten animal worlds – indeed, the global environment – to such an extent that humans have now both an 'intellectual responsibility' and 'ethical duty' to consider animals closely.[10] Additionally, the twentieth century's ethological observations of animals as closer to humans than we have previously acknowledged leads towards a gradual rejection of the nature/culture distinction that has been a central part of C.P. Snow's 'two cultures', the distinction between social and natural sciences.[11]

Other theorists have argued that animals were never part of the twentieth century's modernist project – except, arguably, as commodities – and now, particularly coupled to the rise of the animal rights movement, increasing attention is being paid to animal topics by postmodernist scholars and activists (although these two groups are often at ideological odds).[12] As Jacobs deftly encapsulates it: 'modernists display confidence in humans' ability to control nature, while postmodernists are convinced that humans construct it.' (Of course, they are not idealists in the manner of the redoubtable Bishop Berkeley; they are not contending that nature has no reality outside human minds; rather, that our capacity to understand the 'nature' of nature is limited by the nature of the minds that do the understanding.) At their extremes, however, they sometimes obscure the view that natural or biophysical forces act on human history.[13]

Internationally, processes are at work that challenge received wisdom – secularisation, urbanisation, diminishing family bonds, the refashioning of societies through globalisation, migrations – all precipitating a reconsideration of existing mental hierarchies and certainties. Some experience these changes as increasing alienation; some search space for aliens and anthropomorphise earth's animals to find echoes of our own humanity in a time of disaffection and social dislocation. Perhaps humans simply do not want to be alone in the cosmos.

Quite aside from human loneliness is the issue of the manner in which humans may be joined by other creatures within the axis of scholarly scrutiny. Some scholars contend that animals themselves cannot be discussed, only their representations.[14] Others concur: Chamberlin notes that '"[h]orse" is not a horse. It is the word for horse'.[15] Another contention is that what humans think they have learnt about animals remains simply a reflection of their own cultural preoccupations; thus, for example, Jane Goodall's 'discoveries are as much about humans as about chimpanzees'.[16] Some histories of animals thus

have adopted a more poststructural, 'textual' or 'linguistic' approach to their subjects on the grounds that such histories are necessarily representational, composed of past documents written by humans about animals, which are then doubly reinterpreted by humans.[17] When writing about animals, for example, Berger contends that he speaks of nothing more real than human imaginings,[18] and Baker and others have contended that animals themselves cannot be scrutinised, only their depictions.[19] Thus the 'curb' and 'snaffle' (as Campbell puts it) of critical discourse analysis is much in evidence, but the physical animal is missing.

Certainly, historians can benefit from the close reading technique of literary critics, and the emphasis on the genealogy and ambiguity of language. Close reading reminds historians that elements of concern about 'wild animals' or 'feral' animals or 'pets' or 'sacred animals' or 'dangerous animals' are a product of language and rhetoric. These categories are debatable and contextual, but they are certainly constructed with words.[20] Historical approaches to animals reveal the contextual specificity of any particular human–animal relationship and how categories, including those of 'human' and 'animal', are neither inevitable nor universal, but are forged in particular contexts by actors with often conflicting interests.

Of course, symbolic or rhetorical uses of the animal should indubitably receive the same critical attention from a historian as the real beast. That said, social history is perfectly able to contain ideology and materiality, textual discourse, and corporeality without recourse to postmodernist theory, as the final chapter will explore. Indeed, ironically (given the contention by Rothfels and Berger), it may well have been in reaction to the extreme rarefaction of the 'textual turn' within the discipline of history that made some (other) historians yearn for the possibilities of solid corporeality offered by the 'animal turn'. In this view, 'nature', and animals in particular, have a tangibility lacking in 'literary theory'. Animals cannot be just another cultural construction, because they have literal viscerality. They undeniably exist in a way that sits uneasily with postmodern insistence on textual primacy and, as Dr Johnson once did, we can use them to say 'I refute it thus'.[21]

Horses could reasonably have received Johnson's boot (although, unlike the stone, they might have kicked back). Horses are breathing beasts; they exist and live historical lives and impact on their own world and on the world of humans socio-politically and economically. Ironically – considering the pseudonymous

Phineas's parody of the kind of social history associated with E.P. Thompson, noted earlier – social history is well able to deal with both the material role of horses and their symbolic uses. Indeed, social history recognises the importance of exploring the linkages between both ideological and economic aspects of human–animal relationships.[22] Masters of social history, like Eugene Genovese, Eric Hobsbawm, Keith Thomas, Thompson and Charles van Onselen, customarily manage both discourse and ideology as equally integral to their study as material conditions, without needing to 'shift paradigms'. Writing in the early 1990s, both Hobsbawm and Thompson, for example, explicitly singled out the environment as a significant issue.[23] From the outset, environmental history has been influenced by a radical approach forged by social history, i.e. the idea of exploring history 'from below', although the concluding chapter will discuss the snaffle and curbs placed on such an approach.

While animals are generally still looked at by scholars in the humanities and social sciences with the goal of achieving a better understanding of humans, some have moved away from narrowly anthropocentric approaches of the past that depicted animals as passive objects of human agency. Preceding studies allowed little room for the agency of animals (or, indeed, some groups of humans, like women and the working class, for example), and this will be explored in the closing chapter.[24]

Horses and hyphenated historians

Environmental history (which includes the historical side of Animal Studies) and the new social history emerged in chorus as definable fields of study. To some extent, both academic projects stemmed from socio-political movements gathering impetus during the 1960s and 1970s: reacting respectively to the concerns of the ecology/animal rights lobby and the civil rights/feminist campaigns. They share fertile grounds for cross-pollination. The 'grassroots movement' could be quite literal: both learnt from the Annales school in calling for the grand bio-geographical context and both exhibit an Annaliste-inspired ambition to explore a totalising history. They espouse the creative use of source materials to tackle the previously neglected, particularly ordinary people over elites and everyday life over sensational events. They can both evoke the human face, as opposed to the aridities of statecraft and administrative development. Research in both fields can reflect a new scholarly egalitarianism, although there

are limitations. They have both deployed particularity over generality, using case studies to examine larger issues. Both have faith in the possible political relevance of their work.[25]

The socio-environmental approach thus highlights new aspects of power, its sources and the motives behind its mobilisation. As Jacobs notes with wry irony, as both social and environmental historians claim to write 'from below', it is odd that they have not encountered each other more frequently.[26] While infrequent, their encounters have been significant. In 1972 Roderick Nash, an eminent pioneer in the field, commented: 'In a real sense environmental history fitted into the framework of New Left history. This would indeed be history "from the bottom up", except that here the exploited element would be the biota and the land itself.'[27] For social historians, 'the exploited element' is the human oppressed, those trampled underfoot, such as blacks, women, peasants and labourers. For environmental historians, it is that which is literally trampled underfoot: the small organisms, the soil, water and biophysical surroundings. Both approaches have sought not only examples of oppression, but agency, exercised by the ecological and social communities.

Animals can thus be seen as the latest beneficiaries of a 'democratising tendency' specifically within historical studies.[28] Some ethnographies now depict animals not merely as a vehicle with which to explore a particular human social facet. Anthropology thus offers a good model for other disciplines and historical writing has drawn on these perspectives. Nearly a half century ago Levi-Strauss urged anthropologists to acknowledge the ways in which animals afford humans an important conceptual resource (animals, he argued, are '*bonnes à penser*', things with which to think), while more materialist anthropology considered how animals serve as sources and products of power and inequality (so they are good not just to think 'with' but also 'about').[29]

More specifically to South Africa, the seductive but dangerous simplicity of environmental determinism in earlier works, as Beinart has observed, conceivably rendered later historians uncomfortable with incorporating environmental issues into explanations of human change.[30] This was exacerbated by disciplinary insularity and a lack of familiarity with 'science'.[31] Also, as Steyn and Wessels suggest, the increasing political isolation of South Africa meant that the impact of the international environmental revolution was minimised locally.[32] Apartheid was the enemy that animated the vigorous radical or social history school, and many of the most capable historians focused their research

on the deconstruction of racial consciousness and class formation. But the achievement of democracy in 1994 has allowed a growing historiographical diversity. Some of these approaches have been environmental, focusing on specific groups of people and their relations with the non-human living world, i.e. how communities related to the environment as they interacted with one another, emphasising issues of social power and identity. Thus, the end of apartheid has redirected some historians' attention to pastures new – literally in this case – prompting a 'move from red to green'.

Van Sittert has pointed out that environmental historical writing in South Africa is a 'broad church whose catechism has thus far defied the best efforts at scholarly synthesis', and certainly there are several divergent approaches to the subject matter.[33] For example, a pioneering intervention was made in 1932 by B.H. Dicke, writing on one of the first groups of Voortrekkers to trek, who were annihilated, purportedly by the Amatonga of the Makuleke and Mahlengwe clans.[34] But Dicke made the radical environmental argument that it was tsetse fly rather than the Amatonga that vanquished the trekkers.

Environmental themes have a long legacy in local historiography, with its roots in the strong agrarian social history of South Africa. Environmental history has run parallel with radical history because they both aspired to offer a corrective line that emphasised African agency in the face of European conquest and capitalist exploitation. This is clear in the writings of Beinart, Bundy, Delius, Keegan, Trapido and Van Onselen.[35] The radical or social history tradition made implicit use of the environment in explaining change over time, even though such writings were not self-classified as works of environmental history. Some historians consciously designate their work 'socio-environmental' history rather than purely 'environmental'.[36]

Hitherto, the label 'environmental' or 'socio-environmental' history has been preferred to the 'animal turn in history', which has not (yet) become a phrase in common parlance in South Africa. The term 'environmental' carries with it a portmanteau suggestion of social awareness, relevance and utility, and concomitant worthiness of state and institutional funding. In contrast, the adjective 'animal' in such a disciplinary concern appears the self-indulgent preserve of the feminine, middle class and white. (As one angrily amused reader of the *Mail & Guardian* put it: 'What is it with white people and animals?')[37]

Environmental history is more usually focused on the land than on animals per se.[38] The voices talking about the 'animal turn' in the southern African

social sciences, however, and within the historical guild in particular, are still very few. Most recent international scholarship is still almost entirely Western, Eurocentric or neo-Eurocentric – about animals in Europe or in its settler societies in North America and Australia, for example. Exceptions with regard to the developing world include work on the camel in Islamic society; a study of tigers in the Malay world; and of horses in the Indian Ocean world.[39] In the southern African context, wildlife has received a great deal of historiographic attention, following MacKenzie's analysis of British imperialism and its hunting network and, specific to South Africa, Carruthers' intervention, which corrected public myths on wildlife protection.[40] Animal pests and diseases have received perhaps the most historiographic attention.[41] Colonial science (in this case, specifically ideas about animal management) operated in interaction with a 'vernacular science' – a hybrid of indigenous African, local settler and metropolitan knowledge systems, as Beinart and Musselman suggest.[42] There has been some scrutiny of historical ecological changes, particularly in Van Sittert's and Beinart's work, and human–nature relations in literary texts.[43] Historians have shown that just as they had done in other parts of the world, animal and plant 'colonisers' transformed their new habitats – both biophysical and social – in various ways.[44] Jacobs, for example, has offered a brilliant societal analysis (or an exposé of the politics of 'class and grass') through the lens of the 'Great Donkey Massacre' of the 1980s in Bophuthatswana, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 8. In the broader continental context, horses have been discussed by Robin Law, who wrote a pioneering study of horses in West Africa;[45] by Fisher on horses in the Sudan;[46] by Jim Webb in a skilful analysis of the equine role in western Sahara and Senegambia;[47] and Legassick on horses and firearms in the Samorian army of the late nineteenth century.[48] Research that uses animals as a window into understanding human society has, for example, been developed by research into wildlife and on domesticated creatures of southern Africa, including some pony tales.[49]

How does one look at animals?

One now need no longer ask, as Berger did in 1980: 'Why look at animals?'[50] Now one asks: '*How* does one look at animals?' The 'animal turn' (like so many other 'turns') is not founded on any one method or approach; instead, it remains elusive and diverse in terms of its methodology and *raison d'ẽtre*, mirroring

the multiplicity of its object of study. It is defined more by its pluriform commitment to understanding animals within human society than by any one methodology or political agenda. Similarly, internationally, Animal Studies has meant different things to different people, and within the discipline there have been fissures and differences. Methodological and thematic ecumenism might be thought to satisfy everyone (except, as Peter Novick observed, in a very different context – those people who like short books).[51]

This book offers a history that tries to remain diverse in terms of its methodology, sources and ambitions. It also tries to speak to many audiences: those interested in animals and the past, certainly, but also those interested in southern Africa. Environmental change as the further fragmentation of history into sub-disciplines is not its intention. It was the fear of just such compartmentalisation and concomitant balkanisation that led Keith Thomas and E.P. Thompson to decline their support for the formation of the Social History Society in the 1970s because it was not another branch of history like 'postal history' or 'furniture history'; it was 'a way of doing any kind of history'.[52] Similarly, including other species in understanding the past may be just another 'way of doing history'. The animal turn encompasses a continuing process of inclusion, normalisation and gradual mainstream acceptance of the animal as subject, object and even agent. This process is already at work in the subtle shifting of vision, an ocular expansion that allows the creatures on the edge of vision into the disciplinary line of sight. In social history it happened first with workers, then with women, and now animals. The once invisible horse simply becomes visible.

The first aim of this book, therefore, is, on a very basic level, simply to scour the archives to try to find the 'bloody horse' – both the corporeal animal and the fictive beast – in order to reinsert the horse into the larger historical narrative. No guild historian has attempted a monograph devoted to horses in southern Africa.[53] Yet historically, horses existed, and they *mattered*.

Secondly, the book explores the material socio-economic effects and political ramifications of the introduction of horses as a non-native species. In some ways, it is simply an attempt to chronicle the effects of an inter-species relationship. The essays focus on key encounters between humans and horses and between different human groups over horses. In some ways, these stories are simply the adventures of a big, gentle herbivore and a small, rogue primate.

Thirdly, it considers the symbolic and ideological dimensions of this species

in relation to human society. Horses offer a particularly potent symbol, linked with power and ethnic iconography. Narratives of breed were constructed in which conceptions of human difference (class, race, national character) were projected onto the horses and they were then used as vehicles to promote a sense of self-respect (through wealth, class and ethnicity).

Fourthly, because a historian is always in conversation with other historians, this book addresses the idea of ecological imperialism in order to draw southern African environmental history into a wider global dialogue on socio-environmental historiographical issues. The book is part of that conversation and begins with the long relationship between humans and horses that extends back for millennia.

Herds and hordes

Horses and humans have shared a long history: as predator and prey, as master and slave, as war comrades, and as allies. The equestrian age, which lasted for 6,000 years, has only been over for two (human) generations in the West and is not over everywhere else on the planet.[54] In human eyes, horses have changed from being edible meat, a means of mobility, a fearsome method of conquest and a way of tilling the soil to providing a leisure activity and a medium of therapy.

The horses able to perform these shifting roles can be traced back to multi-toed, dog-sized creatures that inhabited both the New and the Old World. About 50 million years later they had evolved into *Pliohippus* in North America, and after another ten million years an identifiable 'horse' evolved. This Ice Age, New World horse became threatened in this environment and was saved, as a species, by a vast migration, a diaspora to Siberia across a land bridge in the Bering Strait – a bridge humans would use to go the other way.

The steppe region of Central Asia, extending north-west from the Great Wall of China to the mountains of Outer Mongolia, was probably where nomad horse breeding began and was the epicentre from which hordes of horsemen emerged. Horses were the last of the common animals to be domesticated, from perhaps as early as 4,000 BCE, probably as a side effect of hunting horses for their flesh. The notion of controlling the herds and their breeding appears to have originated in eastern Europe or the Crimea.[55] The history of horses in human culture can be traced back as far as 30,000 BCE, when horses were depicted in

Paleolithic cave paintings.[56] Domestication was not solely a biological, but also a cultural process that affected both the human domesticator and the animal domesticate. Horses had the traits, limited to only a few animals, to make them domesticable in the first place.[57] They were large enough to be useful, but small enough to be manageable. Most importantly, they were herd animals, sociable and used to living within a hierarchy that translated easily into a new hierarchy under human custodianship. They could breed in captivity and were neither too panicky nor too aggressive when confronted by humans. Thus, the intersection of natural history and human history provided a favourable environment for domestication.

In order to be domesticated, animals had to be incorporated into the social structure of a human community and become objects of ownership, purchase and barter. This was the basis of the Neolithic revolution, when a fundamental change in human societies occurred and groups of hunter-gatherers became farmers and pastoralists. There was probably a succession first from generalised hunting in the Palaeolithic period at the end of the last Ice Age to specialised hunting and following herds. This was followed by taking ownership of a herd, then controlled breeding and ultimately human selection for favoured characteristics.

Artefacts unambiguously associated with riding or traction date to the start of the second millennium BCE.[58] Evidence from mitochondrial DNA studies suggests that the domestication of horses occurred in multiple locations and at various times, in eastern Europe and the south-west Russian steppes in Central Asia; in western Europe; in Iberia; and in North Africa.[59] Widespread utilisation occurred principally through the transfer of technology for capturing, taming and rearing free-born horses caught in the wild. Accordingly, the transmission of technology (rather than the selective breeding of horses) may have been the key leading to their wide-ranging use.[60] It was, therefore, probably not herds of domesticated horses that spread over the expanse of the Old World, but rather the *knowledge* that made their domestication possible, and this was slow to be disseminated. Arguably, the expansion of ur-horsemanship was restricted by an elite because this technology contained the secret of a new kind of power.

Newly created equestrian classes and communities had access to entirely new ways of life predicated on this novel access to dominance, commanding both fresh access to resources and a new mindset. Horses certainly transformed warfare, initially in the steppes north of the Black Sea.[61] By the middle of the

second millennium BCE, horses were used to pull chariots – in Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia, and in China by the fourteenth century BCE.[62] The horse allowed travel overland from the Atlantic to the Pacific coastlines, facilitating connections between centres of civilisation.[63] Mobility offered a new dimension of power: a human who could defeat distance could also defeat other humans. The first 'horse whisperer' or noted equestrian expert, Xenophon, himself commented on the conjunction of martial heroism, horsemanship and social privilege in the fourth century BCE. This historical dynamic was observed by Aristotle, who contended that cavalry states tended to be oligarchies, because horses were necessarily restricted to a wealthy minority.[64] An individual on horseback was seldom a slave; indeed, there appears to be a correlation between horse owning and human owning.

Horses have themselves changed because of the relationship they have had with humans. They have changed as a species in shape, size, variety, geographic distribution and demographics. As a consequence of their mutualism with humans, the geographic range of horses altered entirely: their northern and southern limits were transfigured. Ultimately, there was no area entirely off limits to equine colonisation. (Shackleton even managed to take Siberian ponies to the Antarctic.) In the southern African context, as the subsequent chapters will explore, the equine interlopers of the region were not only instruments of change, but in transforming the human socio-political and mental landscapes, the horse itself was transformed.

Animal history offers a way to cross literal and figurative borders.[65] Methodologically, horses are good for crossing boundaries. That their range (and therefore their study) is not limited by national borders helps break the constraints of area studies, particularly those bounded by the national historical imagination. Animals, and indeed 'nature' itself, are difficult to contain within the boundaries of the nation state (although states tried to do so and cross-border traffic, legal and illegal, generated a mountain of useful paperwork for historians). Environmental, ecological and biological processes work on transregional, transcontinental and global scales, defying, as environmental historians Donald Worster and Alfred Crosby note, 'a narrow view of political boundaries and nationality'.[66] Environmental history can thus offer a very useful tactic for escaping over-reliance on the nation state paradigm. In this way, horses can help us reach the synovial histories in the fluid spaces between the bones of the nation state.

This study tries to expand the geographical scope by including the former Basutoland, now Lesotho. The horses of empire are bound together, connected by blood, history and styles of horsemanship. South-east Asia and southern Africa are linked together by a common equine heritage. As the following three chapters will show, the horse of the Dutch empire in South-east Asia – the Sumbawan, 'Javanese' or 'oriental' stock – underwent a partial exodus to the Cape; the stock then spread into Basutoland; and horses from both Basutoland and the Cape were relocated to Australia and India within the imperial network, before receiving a massive infusion of genes from Russia, North and South America, England, Ireland, Hungary, even Burma, and also – ironically – from India and Australia.[67]

Global corporations and the nation state, in its control of horses in times of peace and war, were major consumers and producers of horseflesh. War and trade are great diffusers of genotypes. Imperial and, later, colonial concerns also had unintended effects on trends in demography and disease – both animal and human. They influenced the way in which people conceived of elements of nature, such as horses. Equids were pivotal in the economies and societies of the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean and South China Sea, crucial in war, trade, transport and leisure. Of course, horses, like guns and other imports, were not transferred seamlessly to the periphery from the core or from other nodes in the network.[68] The local contexts had an impact on the technology itself, as the chapters that follow will show.[69]

As Chapter 2, 'The Reins of Power', explains, the equine flotsam of empire was marooned in a hostile Africa of disease, scant forage, poisonous plants and dangerous predators – both animal and human. Yet they helped their fellow (human) invaders survive and take control, playing a central role in socio-political processes in the early settlement of the Cape and the interior.

In southern Africa, the Americas and South-east Asia, colonists created new breeds of horses to suit their needs, both deliberately and inadvertently.[70] These horses could differ markedly from those of the metropole, and after a while could come to be identified with the particular colonial culture, facilitating differentiation from the metropole. After independence, horses were often one of the symbols utilised in the development of national pride and self-definition.[71] Chapter 3, 'Blood Horses', offers a broad chronological investigation into changing ideas of 'blood' and 'breed purity' in horse breeding in the Cape from the introduction of horses in the mid-seventeenth century

to the beginning of the twentieth century. The initial Dutch settler horse stock was set up with ponies from Sumbawa, and other working breeds were fused by the eighteenth century to form the hardy, utilitarian 'Cape Horse', which was exported to other parts of the global imperial network. The introduction of horse racing to southern Africa wrenched the breeding industry in a different direction, fostering the spread of English Thoroughbreds bred solely for speed and pedigree. The nineteenth-century wars of conquest and human migrations required the utilitarian Cape Horse, but the quality of these sturdy little horses was perceived to decline and various attempts were made to 'save' the breed. Breeding thus set up a fresh suite of debates in both state and popular arenas about the relationship between nurture and nature, ideas that both drew on and were then applied to notions surrounding race, class and gender.

However, attempts by settlers to cling to control of equine power were doomed. Horses were not a technology that could remain in the hands of just one community. Chapter 4, 'The Empire Rides Back', demonstrates how one indigenous group, under Moshoeshoe, came to wrest the technology free from the original group's grasp. Southern Sotho people scattered by the *lifaqane* were consolidated by Moshoeshoe within the territory that came to be known as Basutoland/Lesotho. From the time the Basotho first acquired horses from the 1830s, they deployed them variously in the processes of state building.

A major impetus towards mixing breeds and globalising phenotype came at the cusp of the twentieth century. Nothing globalises like an imperial war. In Chapter 5, 'The last of the old campaigners', the role of horses in the South African War (1899–1902) is considered. Aside from the human cost, the conflict exacted a heavy environmental toll, with massive animal mortality figures. The casualties suffered by these animals were on an enormous scale, contemporaneously understood as a form of 'holocaust'. The chapter analyses the reasons for such fatalities before discussing the human experience of equine mortality, in particular the civic memorialisation of the carnage and how combatants on both sides came to understand this intimate loss.

The immediate aftermath of this devastating war is discussed in Chapter 6: 'The Cinderella of the Livestock Industry', which begins with the devastated post-South African War rural economy and surveys the rise of the horse industry from the beginning of the twentieth century, when it seemed as if the horse era would last forever, to the 1940s, when its imminent end was palpable.

The horse industry had to recreate itself to survive. Thus, Chapter 7,

'High Horses', examines what happened to the horse trade after it began to cater to the high-end leisure market by focusing on an aspect of the growth of an Afrikaner bourgeoisie in the platteland through one of the 'things' they desired: a particular kind of horse. It explores the introduction of the exotic American Saddlebred horse from the United States to the agrarian sectors of the then Cape Province, Orange Free State and Transvaal, centred initially in the rural Karoo. The chapter analyses the elite – and, to an extent, internationalist – rhetorical space that these 'American' imports inhabited, by contrasting it with the self-consciously egalitarian and ethnically unifying discourse surrounding another horse used primarily by Afrikaans speakers, the Boerperd. The comparison between the supporters of American Saddlers and Boerperde, both factions within Afrikaans-speaking society, and an analysis of their quite different discourses reflect two ways of conceptualising identity, especially in the way they mobilised consumer hunger.

Thus, like the colonisers themselves, the equine 'invaders' were the instruments of extensive and long-term changes within both natural and social landscapes. The imperial exchange meant a reciprocal transformation. In abetting some humans in affecting change, the horse itself underwent a morphological transformation and its function within human society also altered significantly over time.

With the globalising spread of horses, the very sensory fabric of human life altered. The final chapter, 'The World the Horses Made', assesses the horse's impact on the human world of southern Africa from the mid-seventeenth century through an examination of the visceral – a way of offering a history that includes noise and smells. Secondly, the chapter debates the idea of historical agency of horses in human history. A debate is emerging over the issue of animal agency in historical processes, dealt with in Chapter 8, which explores the possibility of an animal-centred history. This is a tentative attempt to acknowledge the corporeality of animals and to argue that they have potentially their own history, entangled in that of humans to be sure, but their own nevertheless – as individuals, with memories and intentions and desires.[72]

'*Ukukhahlelwa yihashi esifubeni*'

A historian is '*ukukhahlelwa yihashi esifubeni*' – someone who has 'been kicked in the chest by a horse', i.e. a person who cannot keep secrets. The archives

have yielded a wealth of historical detail and oral history opens up and probes the narratives of memory. Interviewing eyewitnesses to reconstruct past events is combined with recording popular history remembered in anecdote, poem, proverb and song. We have already discussed changes within socio-environmental history that might permit a transformed understanding of the horse as historical actor. Irrespective of whether one accepts a measure of equine agency in the horse's historical role, it is still possible to engage with the horse as a flesh-and-*blood* object. The textual understanding generated by analysing the discourse around them (their owners, the archives, magazines, poetry, songs, stories and myths) is coupled with the physicality of fieldwork (touching horses, watching them move, watching them being ridden, watching them eat and, of course, watching them defecate). Almost two decades ago, the pioneering environmental historian, Donald Worster, called for environmental historians to get mud on their shoes.[73] In my line of work, you step in a lot more than that.