

# Notes on the Origin of ‘the Chase’: Artefacts of an Indigenous Racing Tradition in Transkei<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Transkei, crowds would gather to watch whole herds of cattle charging over several kilometres in the popular sport of *uleqo*. This sport became untenable due to environmental conditions and colonial responses to those conditions. Horses replaced cattle in the racing tradition and *uleqo* was effectively relegated to a footnote in the history of the area. This article draws together the few remaining descriptions of *uleqo* in the Eastern Cape. It does so to ask two main questions: what can we learn about *uleqo*'s exclusion? And, what might including the remnants of *uleqo* offer? In answering these two questions this article will draw upon the idea of an ‘artefact’, which is simultaneously a remnant and a defect in an image. Here, ‘artefact’ is used also to refer to archival fragments, and to the distortions that ignoring them may have produced. By focusing on *uleqo*, it is argued, we can appreciate some neglected ways in which the people of the now-Eastern Cape altered their daily practices in response to the colonial project.

## Keywords

cattle racing, horse racing, Transkei, historiography, hunting, sport.

***Uleqo* [noun]: (isiXhosa) A cattle race – directly, ‘the chase’. From the verb, *-leqa*, ‘to chase.’**

During the latter half of the nineteenth century and the final days of their independence, Sarhili (1809-1892) was paramount chief of the Xhosa groups living in the area between the Sunday’s River valley and the Mbashe River. These groups had been fighting British expansion and settlement for at least a half-century prior to Sarhili’s paramouncy. At the time of his rise to power, some areas west of the Kei River were

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already British territory. By the time of his death there would be no independent Xhosa territories remaining. Sarhili had a friend named Nabileyo, ‘a wealthy owner of cattle,’<sup>2</sup> who lived near Teko. Nabileyo was a small man, with withered arms, and amongst his herd was an animal named Impuza’omtshayelo – ‘The Duiker’<sup>3</sup> of Mtshayelo’ – who was renowned in the area as a racing animal in *uleqo*: cattle racing.

Soga describes a cattle race involving Impuza’omtshayelo. With a distance of over thirty kilometres, it was set to begin at Ngaxakaxa (near Idutywa), pass by Ibeka, and finish at Teko. It was a long race, but it was also set to be particularly competitive because two other well-known enthusiasts, Nyoka and Pama, had entered their finest animals. Sarhili, on this occasion, wished to see his friend’s animal, Impuza’omtshayelo, run. The presence of Sarhili, such an important and powerful figure, only increased the excitement around the race. On the day, Sarhili and some of his councillors made their way to the top of a large hill called Ntabezulu (‘the Mountain of Heaven’), from where they could overlook Teko and the finishing point. In the distance, Sarhili could see dust rising into the air, for, although only one animal of a herd would be entered for these races, the whole herd would follow and charge across the landscape. As the herds moved closer, crowds shouted and whistled, cheering the animals on, while others rode alongside on horseback. It was at the head of the Mkonkoto Ridge that Nyoka’s prize possession fell down dead from exhaustion and Impuza’omtshayelo took the lead. But, as they approached Teko, he still faced fierce competition from the ox belonging to Pama until, all of a sudden, Pama’s animal also dropped dead, less than two kilometres from the finishing line. Nabileyo’s Impuza’omtshayelo came in a clear winner in the most prestigious and challenging race yet held and was commemorated for decades in a parable where a man ‘from which nature had withheld her physical powers, [came] to be honoured by the acclamations of the people and the congratulations of his beloved chief’.<sup>4</sup>

While there is no date attached to this story, we know that Sarhili technically became the paramount on the murder of his father, Hintsu, by British troops in 1835, and was leader until his death in 1892.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that, considering the prestige associated with Sarhili in the story, the events recounted occurred after his position was secured. This sets the story sometime from around the mid-1840s.<sup>6</sup> Between 1856 and 1858, Sarhili’s territories were heavily impacted by beliefs in the prophecies of Nongqawuse which encouraged the destruction of all cattle and crops to facilitate a supernatural intervention that would expel European settlers from the area and restore the land to indigenous hands.<sup>7</sup> The result was widespread famine and migration out of the so-called ‘reserve’ areas to seek work. Herds were decimated. Then over the course of the 1860s a large portion of the territory formerly under Sarhili’s control

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2 J. H. Soga, *The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1932), 371.

3 A small antelope.

4 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, 372.

5 J. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1981), 123-132.

6 Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 131.

7 J. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 87.

(including the area where the race described took place) was taken over by Mfengu groups relocated from the Cape Colony.<sup>8</sup> Taking all these details into consideration, we can speculate that this race occurred sometime between the late-1840s and the mid-1850s, but it is impossible to say for sure. What is important is that the race occurred during a period of unprecedented turmoil in the region. The processes which were set in motion at this time disrupted and permanently altered everyday life there. And yet, through it all, people continued to live this everyday life. In the midst of the disorder people still gathered and raced cattle.

Disruptions to everyday life took many forms in nineteenth century Transkei. It was a time of violent conquest and encroaching colonial boundaries; and subsequently an erosion of the political and social fabric of the area as bureaucratic tendrils extended, touched and retreated. This erosion was compounded by myriad ecological pressures, droughts and epizootics, and was made catastrophic by the colonial responses to them.

The racing of cattle – one of the many social casualties of the changes which occurred during the nineteenth century – appears to have been relegated to a minor footnote in history and few descriptions remain of the sport, despite its evident popularity. The sport's footnote status is what prompted my thinking around the fragments describing *uleqo*: they describe a sport which was lamented in its imminent 'extinction' and so was apparently significant to the people of nineteenth century Transkei, yet it remains 'extinct' in history and has been portrayed as historically insignificant by omission. What relegated this sport to the position of 'footnote'? And what can we learn from bringing it to the fore? We cannot reconstruct the sport in any detailed way – the material simply does not exist – but we can glean sufficient information from existent accounts to say what was lost and what remains. Here I try to think about and around these fragments. It represents a fractured picture pieced together as I thought my way through the question of *uleqo*, trying to find a way to make sense of my experiences of another sport, *umdyarho*, which will feature later in this story.

**Artefact 1. [noun.]: (English) An object of cultural or historical interest, usually understood as a fragmentary remnant gathered through an archaeological endeavour.**

The few sources that describe *uleqo* are all ethnographic works written at a time when *uleqo* was already in decline. That this apparently popular sport has been neglected suggests that there has been something other than play, games and sport to write about. As McGarry points out, sport has tended to be overshadowed by “larger” issues... [and] was rarely [a] primary ethnographic focus.<sup>9</sup> It was considered ‘an

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8 T. J. Stapleton, 'The expansion of a pseudo-ethnicity in the Eastern Cape: Reconsidering the Fingo 'exodus' of 1865', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 29, 2, 1996, 233-250.

9 K. McGarry, 'Sport in Transition: Emerging Trends on Cultural Change in the Anthropology of Sport', *Reviews in Anthropology*, 39, 3, 2010, 152.

inconsequential form of entertainment spectacle.<sup>10</sup> Ethnographers' emphases were not on these supposedly 'inconsequential' practices, despite these practices not being inconsequential to the participants. Only from the 1960s and 1970s did ethnographers begin to seriously study sport and games.<sup>11</sup> By that time, *uleqo* was already several decades gone. Perhaps, at the time, it was justifiable to see cattle racing as inconsequential in the light of the tumult that surrounded it. The chaotic process of incorporating the area into the British Empire meant that anyone at that time and place, or looking back on that time and place, would have their view of a sport like *uleqo* obscured by political and social upheavals. And this is not unreasonable: it was after all the political and social turmoil that made the area what it is today, not *uleqo*. If we must select what is 'most important', ethnographically and historically, at that time and place, *uleqo* would almost inevitably be a footnote. So *uleqo* is mentioned in passing in works on Transkei history, much of it in works on cattle in pre-colonial Transkei, although these references can mostly be traced back to three sources: Hunter Wilson's<sup>12</sup> *Reaction to Conquest* (1936),<sup>13</sup> her contemporary, J. H. Soga's<sup>14</sup> *Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* (1931),<sup>15</sup> and Tiyo Soga,<sup>16</sup> father of J. H. Soga, in his *isiXhosa* text *Intlalo kaXhosa* (1917).<sup>17</sup>

These three texts also form the basis of most of our knowledge of *uleqo*. Hunter Wilson briefly discusses *uleqo* while J. H. Soga devotes two sections of his book to *uleqo* – one under the section on Sport, and another related to the rites of *intonjane* which mark a transition from girlhood to womanhood. Tiyo Soga speaks about *uleqo* mainly in his section on weddings. Interestingly, Tiyo Soga uses a specific term, *iinkabi*, to describe the racing cattle. *Iinkabi* is a term used to describe 'working' cattle, and racing cattle are apparently (if we are to accept Tiyo Soga's understanding) similarly classified by their function as *iinkabi*. This fits with the way in which J. H. Soga speaks about racing cattle: racing cattle were specifically trained for the purpose of racing.<sup>18</sup> They were, like working cattle, defined functionally because they had a specific function which they had been taught to fulfil.

There remains little information on the racing of cattle itself, despite Soga's assertion that 'this sport occupied, in the estimation of the people, much the same position as horse racing does in England. So much so was this that several of the famous races and actors in them are, after at least seventy years, still in remembrance.'<sup>19</sup> *Uleqo* appears to have been a form of entertainment at social gatherings, and in some cases

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10 McGarry, 'Sport in Transition', 151.

11 Ibid., 152.

12 See A. Bank, 'The "Intimate Politics" of Fieldwork: Monica Hunter and Her African Assistants, Pondoland and the Eastern Cape, 1931–1932', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3, 2008, 557–574.

13 M. Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

14 See J. Davis, 'Family Trees: Roots and Branches – The Dynasty and Legacy of the Reverend Tiyo Soga', *Studies in World Christianity*, 21, 1, 2015, 20–37.

15 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*.

16 G.A. Duncan, 'Tiyo Soga (1829–1871) at the intersection of "universes in collision"', *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies*, 74, 1, 2018 (doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4862) and V. Bickford-Smith, 'African Nationalist or British Loyalist? The Complicated Case of Tiyo Soga', *History Workshop Journal*, 71, 2011, 75–97.

17 T. B. Soga, *Intlalo kaXhosa* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1917).

18 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, 221.

19 Ibid., 371.

was seen as the customarily correct form of entertainment. Both Sogas write that weddings were concluded with a cattle race. In *intonjane*, J. H. Soga describes long-distance races organised as the final day of the extensive *intonjane* period. The races described by J. H. Soga involved groups of cattle being taken to a distant starting point. While a number of cattle are in the racing herd, not all of the herd are ‘racing’. Only specific cattle in the herd are technically entered into the race even as they are accompanied by others. Each group of cattle has ‘runners’ – on foot and horseback – who travel alongside and guide the herd, passing along to the next group of runners in a sort of relay to drive the herd to the finishing point of a specified *inkundla*.<sup>20</sup> The races described by Tiyo Soga in *Intlalo kaXhosa*, particularly in relation to weddings, do not seem to be the long-distance races described by J. H. Soga. Given the likely difficulties attendant on arranging a long-distance race to coincide with the end of a wedding, we must presume that these races were over shorter distances.

There are also reports that cattle were mounted and ridden like horses, with hide saddles, by Khoi groups west of the area in which Soga writes. The practice, Swart argues, was taken up by the Xhosa.<sup>21</sup> Frederick I’Ons, the settler artist, gives us an indication of how cattle were ridden – a cord through the nose of the animal as reins, a hide saddle with cords attached to form stirrups – in one of his *Aquila Caricatures* series (1838)<sup>22</sup> attacking Stockenström’s ‘policy of appeasement’. Another sketched image can be found in Thomas Baines’ *Explorations in South-West Africa* (1864) with the caption ‘Namaqua Hunters, Walvisch Bay’.<sup>23</sup> The newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* carried an image on 31 March 1934 showing a similar tack on cattle being ridden in Bechuanaland ‘for the big ox race’.<sup>24</sup> The photograph, as the caricature and sketch, does not indicate whether the cattle were mounted during the race, but it does indicate that cattle *riding* was widespread – from the Cape to Bechuanaland – casting some doubt on the proposition that riding cattle was passed ‘from Khoi to Xhosa’.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that cattle racing involved riding the cattle in some forms of the sport (though this wasn’t the case in the descriptions of long-distance racing), but I cannot state with certainty that this was the case.

Hunter Wilson’s description of cattle racing (which she refers to as *ukugqutsha*)<sup>26</sup> is the most detailed we have, although, she admits, she never actually attended a cattle race. Her description differs from the Sogas’ accounts in some respects, the main difference being that the race is not technically a race at all. Cattle are selected from the herd because of appearance or speed and are driven through the *inkundla*

20 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, 221. The *inkundla* is, in this case, the central court in front of the main house in an *umzi*.

21 S. Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2010), 20. Coincidentally, Swart cites a volume that Hunter Wilson herself edited with Leonard Thompson to make this claim. See M. Wilson and L. Thompson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 166.

22 *Aquila Caricature No. 7*, Mendelssohn Collection, Parliamentary Library, 5948 07-LIB.

23 T. Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa; Being an Account of a Journey in the Years 1861 and 1862 from Walvisch Bay, on the Western Coast, to Lake Ngami and the Victoria Falls* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1864), 10.

24 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 14, 727 (31 March 1934), 6.

25 There is another document from the Botswana National Archives which indicates an ‘Ox Race’ being organised as a part of an agricultural show in 1930 (Botswana National Archives. 2072, no 15. Rev. J Reyneke, Mochudi to Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, Charles Rey, 7 October 1930. Appendix I.). These late events may well indicate the final bastion of cattle racing was Bechuanaland. How widespread the sport was, and how it was practised outside the Eastern Cape; questions of why it was practised in some places but not others, will all, unfortunately, have to wait for further research.

26 Meaning ‘to jump’.

separately. The expectation is to entertain, not to compete. Since only a few select cattle from each home are brought to a gathering in order to be displayed, there are no large herds. The disparity between her findings and J. H. Soga's was clearly an issue for Hunter Wilson who, in later editions of *Reaction to Conquest*, included a footnote on her description of cattle racing which said: 'So my Pondo informants insisted. Their evidence contradicts that given by Soga, op. ed., regarding Xhosa racing. As I never saw a cattle-race I cannot dogmatize.'<sup>27</sup>

In some cases, like the event described at the beginning of this article, people would specifically gather to race cattle. Even when gathering for another purpose, people would still bring cattle along to race them. It appears that sometimes *uleqo* was not a contest as we conventionally understand it. Furthermore, at times it was over long distances, at others, shorter distances. Yet the similarities between those cattle races that are and those that are not contests are so strong that we cannot divorce one from the other. Similarly with those over short or long distances. Each case seems to be about an exhibition of skill performed by cattle in a way or in a space that contributes to socialising.

Each also expresses the social status of participants and reinforces the way in which social positions were structured in the Eastern Cape at the time. *Uleqo* was performed 'for fun' while simultaneously serving a social function. To show off one's cattle was to exhibit one's status – it was to say 'look what I have'. In other words, there was at least some utilitarian basis to such events. In a manner akin to hunting – at once a sport and social event, as well as an economic practice – *uleqo* may have counted as a 'cattle show' of sorts.

In the absence of other evidence, we can only speculate on the reasons for the differences adumbrated above. Perhaps they refer to the practices of different communities, rooted in geographical difference. The areas around Idutywa that Soga refers to are quite open and flat when compared to the very hilly areas of Eastern Pondoland about which Hunter Wilson was writing. A long-distance race such as that described by J. H. Soga seems practically unfeasible for the running of cattle in Eastern Pondoland. An *inkabi* beast, while very impressive, is not the most light-footed creature. There would be a real danger of whole herds of beasts driving themselves off cliffs or down steep hillsides, with disastrous consequences.

What is outlined here, sadly, is almost the sum of our knowledge of how this sport was conducted, but Soga and Hunter both profess to know why it ended. 'In eastern Pondoland they are still sometimes held, but cattle which are dipped frequently have not the stamina to race, and dipping regulations make it impossible for cattle to be gathered from different districts,'<sup>28</sup> says Hunter; while Soga writes that 'the cattle-dipping regulations of the last two decades have practically put a stop to this sport, though occasionally sporadic efforts are made even now to revive it, but it is doomed to complete extinction in the near future.'<sup>29</sup>

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27 Ibid., 366-367.

28 Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 367.

29 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, 371.



Elsewhere in the text, Soga does attribute the sport's decline to other factors too. For example, he says:

Several things have combined to destroy this sport, for it is no longer indulged in to the extent that it was in former days. Chief among these are the weekly or bi-weekly dipping of the cattle by government orders, together with the restrictions often imposed with a view to prevent cattle of one location from moving into another without official sanction, for these are the days of cattle diseases. The large proportion also of the young Natives leaving behind only the old and feeble, or the very young, makes it practically impossible, under these new conditions and demands of life, to keep this exciting sport alive... There is no law or proclamation suppressing *u-leqo* [sic.], but the restrictions mentioned above, together with the demands of the Natives' new environment have practically the same effect on the sport.<sup>30</sup>

Both Soga and Hunter attribute the end of sports to colonial regulations. Not just of *uleqo*, but of hunting too. Soga, in particular, speaks about hunting in sporting terms. He describes *amaXhosa* as 'essentially a hunting people'.<sup>31</sup> He continues saying that:

In early times tribes lived largely by means of the proceeds of the chase, consequently, when through being overhunted, game became scarce in the vicinity of a tribe, the tribe left its primitive dwellings, and moved to new quarters where game abounded. In those remote times agriculture took a secondary place in the economic life of the people, hence it was in a particular sense a determining factor in tribal migrations. Hunting on the other hand was all-important.<sup>32</sup>

Soga's chapter on Economic Life<sup>33</sup> speaks extensively about agriculture and cattle, but does not mention hunting. The above quote is taken from his chapter on Sport. The quotation does not tell us that hunting was primarily an economic activity, rather the opposite. It tells us that agriculture, once secondary to hunting, became primary in economic life; that hunting was primarily a sport, and an economic activity second. 'And the Native indulged in this sport to the full',<sup>34</sup> he says, 'before the European placed restrictions on hunting'.<sup>35</sup>

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30 Soga, *The Ama-Xosa*, 222.

31 *Ibid.*, 376.

32 *Ibid.*, 376.

33 *Ibid.*, 379-414.

34 *Ibid.*, 377.

35 *Ibid.*

**Artefact 2. [noun.]: (English) A general term to describe a broad range of undesirable flaws or distortions in (usually digital) reproductions produced during capture or data processing.**

In the wake of the Mpondomise Rebellion of 1880, the colonial government began to assert control more aggressively over the Transkeian Territories. This included a series of proclamations that were implemented from 1887 to 1903 to preserve certain species of animals in the Transkeian forests through applying controls on hunting. Hunting in these forests played an important role in the economic lives of local residents, both as a source of subsistence and trade goods in the form of meat and skins, and as a protective measure to control animals that attacked livestock and ate crops outside the forests.<sup>36</sup> In Tropp's words, 'it was this interest in pursuing and protecting their livelihoods that most vividly and directly conflicted with colonial priorities and schemes of wildlife preservation.'<sup>37</sup>

This conflict was not limited to hunting. Colonial attempts at 'wildlife preservation' and protecting valuable timber resources meant livestock access to the forests was also limited. The direct threat to the livelihoods of people through this restriction of the Transkei forests by the colonial state was, as far as possible, resisted. Attempts by the colonial administration to enforce the laws simply led to greater and greater antagonism between forestry officials and local residents.

These two measures relating to access to the forests affected the lives of people in inevitable and tragic ways. The prohibition on livestock entering the forest reserves meant that access to streams, food and shelter during inclement weather (whether hot and dry or cold and wet) was removed. This exacerbated the effects of drought and losses during winters and storms, while affecting the overall health of herds. Large grazing areas outside the forests were made inaccessible by their inclusion within declared forest reserve areas, and even access to grazing outside of declared areas was affected because the paths from one pasture to another were often through the forest reserves.<sup>38</sup>

The prohibition on hunting not only prevented local groups from gaining access to foods and items of trade that they had previously acquired in the forest areas, but also meant that animal populations increased in those areas. Attacks on livestock by leopards and on crops by porcupine, bush pig and antelope increased, further weakening herds and the ability of residents to subsist in Transkei. Dogs were used for hunting but also for protection, acting as the homestead's security mechanism against human and animal threats. The policy of killing their dogs to prevent hunting left residents with no defence against the growing number of animals threatening their livestock and crops.<sup>39</sup>

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36 J. Tropp, 'Dogs, Poison and the Meaning of Colonial Intervention in the Transkei, South Africa,' *The Journal of African History*, 43, 3, 2002, 452-453.

37 Tropp, 'Dogs, Poison and Colonial Intervention,' 453.

38 J. Tropp, 'The Contested Nature of Colonial Landscapes: Historical Perspectives on Livestock and Environment in the Transkei,' *Kronos*, 30, 2004, 120-121.

39 Tropp, 'Dogs, Poison and Colonial Intervention,' 461.



With subsistence already made far more difficult by colonial law and policy, Transkei was struck by a series of ecological disasters. The most important of these was the rinderpest epidemic, which effectively destroyed the cattle in Transkei in 1896 and 1897. It occurred alongside a series of droughts in the last half of that decade.<sup>40</sup> By 1904, the same year that rinderpest was finally eliminated from South Africa, another epizootic was entering the country: East Coast Fever.<sup>41</sup> In order to prevent a repeat of the enormous destruction wrought by the rinderpest, dipping tanks were built in Transkei from 1906 but did little to stop the East Coast Fever from entering the territory from Natal in 1911. The Stock Diseases Act of 1911 was extended to Transkei in 1912.<sup>42</sup> In this act weekly dipping at the stockowners' expense became compulsory and severe transport restrictions were imposed, making it very difficult to move cattle. The result was a higher financial burden for dipping and a collapse in the price of cattle.<sup>43</sup>

The cumulative effect of these various catastrophes on the people of Transkei reached a breaking point in 1912, which was yet another year of drought. The collision of environmental pressures and the administrative measures put in place across Transkei resulted in an extremely difficult situation for residents. Festering distrust led to a complete breakdown in the relationship between residents and government. This was expressed in both overt and more subtle ways. Between November 1914 and 1916 troops were sent into several northern inland districts to quell dissent centred on the dipping regulations.<sup>44</sup> In people's attempts to access grazing land, innovative methods of dissent emerged as well as adaptations to land management practices in certain areas. Prior to colonial measures restricting movements of cattle and people, many groups migrated towards better grazing areas in dry seasons or times of drought.<sup>45</sup> Now, in the words of District Forest Officer A. G. Potter, writing in 1908, 'the stock "belonging" to natives living adjacent to the forest reserves increases miraculously during the winter months ... a man who may not have a fowl in the summer will possess great flocks and herds when the forest-grazing is sought after'.<sup>46</sup>

In the above description, Bundy's 'We don't want your rain...' offers insight into the effects of dipping (to which Hunter Wilson and J. H. Soga attribute the *uleqo* death-blow). Tropp's work – on dogs and hunting, and cattle and grazing lands, respectively – offers us insights into the end of hunting and how colonial regulations affected the movement of cattle (another reason mentioned by Soga and Hunter Wilson as contributing to *uleqo*'s demise).

Tropp's approach, in his own words, offered 'fresh perspectives on state-peasant environmental relations',<sup>47</sup> where previous work had tended to 'reflect state domina-

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40 P. Phoofofo, 'Zafa! Kwahlwa! Kwasa!: African Responses to the Rinderpest Epizootic in the Transkeian Territories, 1897-8', *Kronos*, 30, 2004, 100-101.

41 C. Bundy, "'We don't want your rain, we won't dip': Popular Opposition, Collaboration and Social Control in the Anti-dipping Movement, c. 1908-16", in W. Beinart, and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987), 195.

42 Bundy, "'We don't want your rain'", 195.

43 *Ibid.*, 196.

44 *Ibid.*, 191-221.

45 Peires, *The House of Phalo*, 14-15.

46 Tropp, 'Contested Colonial Landscapes', 122.

47 *Ibid.*, 119.

tion and definitions of resources ... more than those of African historical actors themselves.<sup>48</sup> Several valuable insights were gained from Tropp's repositioning of 'African historical actors'. Most notable is the way his analysis of environmental laws manages to show the impact of colonialism on everyday experience in Transkei. He manages to highlight that people aimed to improve their conditions on a day-to-day basis, not only by combatting the State in grander coordinated ways (as had been done by Beinart and Bundy). What Tropp does, viewed as a part of the historiographical tradition stretching from Beinart and Bundy, is, to paraphrase Swart, 'continuing the process of inclusion'<sup>49</sup> of different forms of resistance. He continues a 'process ... in the subtle shifting of vision, an ocular expansion that allows the creature [- in this case, micro-resistance and everyday life -] on the edge of vision into the disciplinary line of sight'.<sup>50</sup> So Tropp's work brings hitherto neglected elements into focus in this 'ocular expansion', but his focus keeps some aspects of life obscured. In particular, it obscures sport. The meaning of hunting beyond its role as an economic activity remains hidden, as does *uleqo*. And the direction in which the historiography on the Transkei 'shifted its vision' prolonged the obscurity of indigenous sports like *uleqo*.

Consider that J. H. Soga's account of hunting, which Tropp uses for information on dogs and hunting,<sup>51</sup> is not contained in the chapter in *Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* dealing with economic life, but in the preceding chapter on sport – the same chapter which contains descriptions of long-distance *uleqo*. Sport is not mentioned even as the chapters from which he discusses aspects of 'pursuing and maintaining of livelihoods' are contained in the chapter on sport. Tropp does mention in passing some of the functions of hunting beyond livelihoods, referring to its role in 'male socialisation' and 'ritual life',<sup>52</sup> but the fleeting way they are mentioned puts them as far-secondary concerns. The focus on livelihoods inadvertently keeps some of the meaning in the activities Tropp discusses hidden; it keeps the loss of a social activity like hunting-as-sport and *uleqo* hidden.

This does not detract from Tropp's contribution, but it is an artefact in the sense of a 'flaw' or 'distortion' produced during 'data processing'. The meaning of the activity as a sport remained obscured even where the material in which Soga discusses sport is directly addressed. This 'flaw' or 'distortion' cannot be understood in exactly the same way as the transmission of an image; for example, it is not meant in the sense of an 'error'. Soga is used for a specific purpose by Tropp – to assess how African agents pursued and maintained livelihoods in light of colonial environmental regulations – which forecloses understanding of an additional meaning in these activities, an additional meaning that is made clear by Soga and obscured by Tropp. Tropp's articles are an example of a case where we find an explanation for the destruction of indigenous sport, and a discussion of a sport (hunting), but without any mention of sport itself. And, so, his work provides a convenient springboard to an inquiry into

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48 Tropp, 'Contested Colonial Landscapes', 137.

49 Swart, *Riding High*, 10.

50 Ibid..

51 See Tropp, 'Dogs, Poison and Colonial Intervention'.

52 Tropp, 'Dogs, Poison and Colonial Intervention', 452-453.

why indigenous sport (and, so, *ulego*) has remained marginal in historical study. But what, specifically, is perpetuated here that has prolonged the exclusion of indigenous sport in historical accounts? One possible answer is that this is the residue of past developments within South Africa's social history: agency and oppression.

Social historians in South Africa 'were not', as Hyslop put it, 'telling stories framed within the dominant oppositional grand narratives of domination and resistance'.<sup>53</sup> While not framed with 'grand narratives', much of South African social history of the 1990s and 2000s did still draw from 'broadly leftist'<sup>54</sup> themes. The social history of the Eastern Cape was a political project, or, as Swart more subtly put it, the historians 'ha[d] faith in the possible political relevance of their work'.<sup>55</sup> The political themes that emerged in the social history of the 1980s and 1990s were carried through into new historiographical trends as social historians set about diversifying and reinvigorating the historiography after apartheid. One direction that the discipline took was into environmental history, which Grundlingh et. al. described as partly emerging from a 'reaction against the more extreme reifications of the "textual turn" within the discipline',<sup>56</sup> a move towards 'nature' and ecology as a way to claw back a form of concrete material subject that the so-called 'textual turn' seemed to reject.<sup>57</sup> This left History's new forms with residue of past foci.

Amongst these past foci is 'agency'. Swart points to this in her discussion on the 'animal turn' in South African historiography, describing social and environmental history as 'both aspir[ing] to offer a corrective line that emphasised African agency in the face of European conquest and capitalist exploitation'<sup>58</sup> and which 'sought not only examples of oppression, but agency, exercised by the ecological and social communities'.<sup>59</sup> In this 'seeking' of 'examples of oppression [and] agency', foci involving different forms of resistance came to the fore. Resistance emphasises the *active* process against oppression and therefore highlights both agency and oppression simultaneously. Hence 'resistance' became a major theme in the history of the area and in studies of colonialism more generally.

In the 1980s, Beinart and Bundy in *Hidden Struggles* documented overt, collective acts of resistance and moved some way towards the goal of restoring agency to African political actors in the Eastern Cape. Later, Tropp explored less overt forms of resistance and showed how African actors resisted the environmental regulations without the mass and extraordinary social action present in, for example, the anti-dipping movement. Again, this partly served to help 'prove' agency to the audience. The emphasis on agency was in order to establish that people have it – particularly, to prove that *Africans* have it. But that people have agency is self-evident, and the idea that agency needs to be emphasised implies a centring of colonial thought in the

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53 J. Hyslop, 'South African Social History and the New Non-Fiction', *Safundi*, 13, 1-2, 2012, 6.

54 Hyslop, 'South African Social History', 6.

55 Swart, *Riding High*, 7.

56 A. Grundlingh, C. Saunders, S. Swart, and H. Phillips, 'Environment, Heritage, Resistance, and Health: New Historiographical Directions' in R. Ross, A. Kelk Mager, and B. Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa (Vol. 2)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 601.

57 Grundlingh et al., 'Environment, Heritage, Resistance, Health', 601.

58 Swart, *Riding High*, 8.

59 *Ibid.*, 7.

writing of history. The emphasis shows a colonial trace, even as the likes of Beinart and Bundy, and Tropp, highlight resistance in a move towards *decolonising* the history which denied agency to African historical agents and masked oppression.

This 'corrective line' was necessary, but it still tacitly made agency visible through the African historical agents' relationship to the colonial state. It can be seen again in what is considered 'resistance'. In each case Tropp highlights, an act of resistance is an act directly against colonial oppression. Resistance here is interpreted as African resistance to the colonial state. The emphasis on these sorts of resistance, ironically, obscures other some forms of resistance: resistance by adapting and carrying on, resistance by living your life as you want in the face of upheaval and conquest, resilience as resistance.<sup>60</sup>

The priorities of the discipline, even as it was taking steps to remove or counteract colonial ideas, often tacitly centred those colonial ideas – whether by centring the rejection of African agency in the work to 'prove' agency, or centring the colonial state in the work to show how people tried to take control of their own lives in the face of conquest. And when the colonial was centred in history, *uleqo* could not find its way out of being a mere footnote. These trends in history were necessary; they were productive, but they could not see *uleqo*. As Soga said 'there [was] no law or proclamation suppressing *u-leqo*'<sup>61</sup> which meant the emphasis on resistance to the colonial state prolonged *uleqo*'s obscurity. The priorities of the history of Transkei allowed *uleqo* to remain hidden.

Former priorities of the discipline foreclosed certain readings of sport, or social organisation, or the colonial encounter. Amongst the foreclosed was *uleqo*. The respective shifts from Beinart and Bundy to Tropp, from macro- to micro-resistances, and from social to environmental history show a deepening of our understanding of the socio-environmental history of the Transkei. These perspectives obscured *uleqo*, but by consciously including and considering *uleqo* we are able to find a new direction to take the socio-environmental history of Transkei, continuing our 'ocular expansion'. Highlighting *uleqo* is an offer to continue the 'use of source material to tackle the previously neglected'<sup>62</sup> in socio-environmental history through its inclusion. It may, for example, provide us with a good illustration of the strong and complex nexus of specificities on which people acted. The inclusion of sport may offer us an understanding of the effects of colonial regulations in ways that have until now been underappreciated.

Viewed in light of Tropp's work on the 'state-peasant environmental relations', the manner in which *uleqo* ended can be appreciated to some extent. But we are not able to appreciate the depth of frustrations felt by residents of Transkei towards the colonial government. By shifting our focus to ask how 'peasants' saw these

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60 The sorts of resistances referred to here were not completely neglected. See for example C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1988), C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996) or N. Jacobs, *Environment, Power and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

61 Soga, *Ama-Xosa*, 222.

62 Swart, *Riding High*, 6.

activities – by including the *uleqo* artefacts – not in terms of ‘socialisation’ or ‘ritual’, but as an enjoyable pursuit, we have to recognise the indignity they must have suffered as a result of having their favourite sports effectively cancelled. Again, bearing in mind the categorisation of hunting as primarily a sport, before being an economic activity, I would propose that we do not underestimate the importance of these social aspects and the effect their disruption may have had. After all, the activity presumed to be primarily economic by historians (hunting) was considered socially important enough to be included by a Xhosa insider as first and foremost a sport. The state simultaneously removed what was not only an economic resource but also a major source of enjoyment and socialising. The sheer inter-connectedness of aspects of life is hard to recognise and record. When one condition changes it may send ripples across various areas of life. And, to state my point clearly, sport, it seems, was not frivolous – evidenced by Tropp in how people responded to hunting regulations – but was a site of resistance. What Tropp provides us with in his papers is a hint that it was the end of a sport, possibly more than an economic activity, which was resisted. Maybe what we see by including the artefacts of *uleqo* is that we have underestimated the importance of sport in the pre-colonial Eastern Cape.

A better understanding of the socio-environmental conditions does complicate Hunter Wilson and Soga’s emphasis on the effects of regulation on sports, though we must accept that Hunter Wilson and Soga, who were writing at the time when *uleqo* finally disappeared, accurately reported the prevailing belief that environmental regulations were the death-blow to *uleqo*. It is impossible to know to what extent *uleqo* was negatively affected, not by the regulations, but by the conditions that gave rise to those regulations. But, as with hunting, *uleqo* became a site of resistance to the colonial imposition. Hunting prohibitions were resisted in direct confrontation with the colonial state and forestry officials, but *uleqo*’s end was resisted by transforming it into a new form that persists to this day and is more popular than ever.

***Umdyarho* [noun.]: (*isiXhosa*) A horse race – directly ‘the chase’. From the Afrikaans noun, *jaagtog*, ‘a chase’.**

Soga was right, in a sense, when he lamented that cattle racing was ‘doomed to extinction in the near future’. *Uleqo* never did recover and, instead, assumed its footnote position. Hunter Wilson saw the direction the sport would take, observing that ‘the galloping of horses through the *inkundla* is to some extent taking the place of cattle-racing’.<sup>63</sup> Horses replaced cattle in the racing culture. This is evident in the history of a sport currently popular in the former bantustans of the Eastern Cape: *umdyarho*.

I will argue here that with a change from one species to another, *uleqo* was transformed. Like *uleqo* was, it is immensely popular in the Eastern Cape, but is also found elsewhere to varying extents (particularly in former-bantustans). Major races occur in KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. Some small clubs can be found in Eswatini, and in

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63 Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 367.

the Mpumalanga and Free State Provinces. Moreover, its growth in popularity over the last decade or so has attracted significant attention within the Eastern Cape. This resulted in government taking notice and attempting to leverage the sport for development. But even *umdyarho* took over a century of continuous practice before being given scholarly attention, the first report being written about it only in 2013.<sup>64</sup> And it was in the course of producing that report that I began what became four years of fieldwork into *umdyarho* in the Eastern Cape. The descriptions of *umdyarho* below are drawn from that work.

Two styles predominate in *umdyarho* – *umphalo* and *umhambo*. Race days, which occur on almost all weekends and every public holiday, usually consist of eight races, four *umhambo* and four *umphalo*, alternating between *umphalo* and *umhambo* races. Each race of the day increases in distance and age category of horse. *Umphalo* is a galloping race, often on younger horses with younger boys as jockeys, whereas *umhambo* usually involves older horses with adult men as jockeys. *Umhambo* is a specific gait, an alternating ‘tripple’ considered a ‘traditional’ style of boer riding.<sup>65</sup> In *umhambo* races, if a horse breaks into a gallop (breaking the *umhambo* gait) it is disqualified.

From the mid-2000s to the present, greater facilitation and coordination of races in the Eastern Cape has led to an increasing homogeneity in the rules and styles of *umdyarho*. Hence the development of the alternating eight-race format. Despite this, there is still a long-standing division evident in the preferences for and popularity of the different styles of racing. In the eastern areas, *umhambo* holds the most prestige, while in the western areas the most popular style is *umphalo* (on both thoroughbred and mixed-breed horses). The preferences for different styles appear to be loosely split along a north/south line through Idutywa, where, interestingly, a third less common but still popular style of racing exists. This is *umkhwelo*: a long-distance racing style which occurs only a few times annually, and usually in the areas just to the south and west of Idutywa.

*Umhambo*, in line with Hunter Wilson’s description of *ukugqutsha* (*uleqo*), emphasises style; that is, the appearance of the animal as it races is important, not simply its speed. While it is true that *umhambo* is now a race in the proper sense – the *umhambo* horse needs only maintain the style while it crosses the finish line first – this is fairly recent. *Umhambo* became a test of speed only in the mid-1970s, prior to which competitive racing consisted only of *umphalo*. In the eastern areas there was a lot of out-of-contest performance riding in *umhambo* style that did not occur as frequently in the west. *Umhambo* is a display style of riding which featured prior to its incorporation into races as ‘curtain raisers’ and ‘floor sweepers’. It is about showing off your horse and its gait, and your prowess as a rider, in much the way that Hunter Wilson characterised cattle-racing.

The area in which Hunter Wilson was writing about cattle racing is the area in which *umhambo* predominated, and when the two are compared they reveal

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64 ‘Status of Traditional Horse Racing (THR) in the Eastern Cape’, Final Report, ECGBB-12/13-RFQ-10.

65 Swart, ‘Race Politics’, 260.



striking similarities. Both emphasised entertainment and style, rather than speed. And in both cases, the races were conducted at social gatherings of all sorts and were not held as events in their own right. The word *umdyarho*, denoting a horse race, was apparently not found in Pondoland or the former territories of Griqualand East (incorporating the districts beyond Mthatha towards KwaZulu-Natal). People would not attend *umdyarho*; they would attend a celebration of another kind and would race horses there.

The implication is that in the eastern areas, *umhambo* came to replace the forms of *uleqo* which had been popular previously. There was also very little change in the form that races took, regardless of the animals participating. A similar pattern can be seen in the western region. The narratives of informants from the western and southern areas diverged from those of their northern and eastern counterparts by maintaining that people had regularly gathered specifically to race horses<sup>66</sup> for the duration of living memory, and that these races would be run at a gallop: *umphalo*. *Umhambo* was, until very recently, virtually non-existent in these areas.<sup>67</sup> This complements the Sogas' accounts of *uleqo*, where races were about who entered the *inkundla* first, meaning that the emphasis was on speed. *Umphalo* corresponds with Soga's descriptions of *uleqo*. From the little information we have on cattle racing, the district where Soga was writing was within the areas in which *umphalo* became popular, just as the areas of which Hunter Wilson wrote preferred *umhambo*. Furthermore, the long-distance race described by J. H. Soga occurred in the same area where we now find long-distance horse races.

The Sogas both speak about weddings finishing with a cattle race. In the course of fieldwork, I encountered frequent mention of horse races at 'traditional weddings'. Several informants insisted that one of the main occasions for horse racing now was weddings, with some going as far as to say that 'without horses there would be no weddings in our culture'.<sup>68</sup> In Tiyo Soga's description, horses are mentioned as being present at weddings but not as being raced. No mention is made of horse racing by either of the Sogas, barring J. H. Soga's observation that the position of cattle racing was similar to that held by horse racing in England. It seems probable that horse races, whether *umhambo* or *umphalo*, were incorporated into weddings in a way almost identical to the way in which cattle races are described by the Sogas and Hunter.

To state the point clearly, it appears as if horse racing did not, in fact, begin with horses, and *umdyarho* predates the introduction of the animal it is most associated with. Horses were in the area alongside *uleqo* for a time without being incorporated into the sport. The areas where the *umhambo*, *umphalo* and *umkhwelo* styles of horse racing predominate, correlate geographically with the kinds of cattle racing that used to occur there. And practices which involved cattle racing as a part of the day's proceedings, such as weddings, replaced the cattle race with a horse race. *Uleqo* did not just disappear, but was transformed into *umdyarho*.

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66 Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 367.

67 See 'Status of Traditional Horse Racing (THR) in the Eastern Cape', Final Report, ECGBB-12/13-RFQ-10.

68 Drawn from notes by the author made during a Stakeholder Meeting to provide feedback on the findings contained in 'Status of Traditional Horse Racing (THR) in the Eastern Cape', ECGBB-12/13-RFQ-10, Whittlesea, Eastern Cape, 25 October 2013.

Horse racing did not supersede cattle racing. Horses were brought into an already existing cattle racing culture, with minimal alteration in the manner of performance. The geographical uniqueness of style was retained, and the social events that hosted races continued to do so (even for events at which cattle racing was considered customary). This was *uleqo* with a new species of animal. It was a transition from one species to another that occurred in order to continue this popular entertainment. *Umdyarho* developed as an adaptation to keep a sport alive.

Horses are not cattle. They are not understood the same way as cattle are. And when raced, they are ridden. Cattle may have been ridden but were often driven. Also, horses, while herd animals, are generally not kept in herds. The perception of horses and cattle are different. The function of horses and cattle are different. Horses, generally, are personal items in a way that cattle are not. The rider and horse act as one, and require mutual codes and language to facilitate working together seamlessly. Equestrianism in its best expression is a process of, to use the title of Mattfeld's book, 'becoming centaur'.<sup>69</sup> To drive cattle through the *inkundla* is to say 'look at what I have'; to ride a horse through the *inkundla* is to say 'look at what I am'. The change in species meant a change in the meaning and performance of the sport, but it should not detract from the origins of it. One sport transformed into another; it was not replaced by another.

**Artefact 3. [noun.]: (English) A spurious observation or result arising from preparatory or investigative procedures.**

Horses are primary used for riding (usually individually, but sometimes in teams as drawers of carts or wagons, for example) and so provide the rider with speed, strength and power that they would not otherwise have. While in some parts of the world horses are used as a foodstuff, this has never been a common practice in South Africa. Swart discusses this in relation to the Siege of Mafikeng where the treatment of horses as foodstuff was viewed negatively by Boer, British and African alike. Swart even uses the phrase to 'commit hippophagy', as one would 'commit' a crime,<sup>70</sup> and elsewhere makes reference to the Basotho saying '*ho ja pere*' ('eat the horse' – to do the forbidden).<sup>71</sup>

Horses also differ from many other species that have been incorporated into human society in that, as Schweitzer puts it, they are 'born wild and [are] domesticated by man'.<sup>72</sup> Horses need to be trained. Riding a horse requires horsemanship. European powers brought horses to the Cape, and horses soon found their way into the hands of African communities,<sup>73</sup> but Africans needed to know how to communi-

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69 M. Mattfeld, *Becoming Centaur: Eighteenth-Century Masculinity and English Horsemanship* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

70 S. Swart, "It Is As Bad To Be a Black Man's Animal As It Is To Be a Black Man" – The Politics of Species in Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 4, 2014, 701.

71 Swart, *Riding High*, 77.

72 R. Schweitzer, 'A Phenomenological Study of Dream Interpretation Among the Xhosa-Speaking People in Rural South Africa', *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 27, 1, 1996.

73 Swart, *Riding High*, 40.

cate with their new animals. African horsemanship was acquired, either directly or indirectly, through observation and adaptation of the European settler 'horse culture'. An example of this is the 'tripling' style of *umhambo*, a common riding style of Boer riders, which became popularly known as the 'proper' or culturally 'correct' style for adult men to ride and, later, race in the eastern parts of the former-Transkei (and KwaZulu-Natal). A particular style of riding horses accompanied the acquisition of horses.

Horses were also acquired by Africans at a time when European settlement was expanding and the people along that frontier of expansion would have had contact with the ubiquitous 'horse culture' of the settlers.<sup>74</sup> But the acquisition of horses and horsemanship by African groups in the Eastern Cape needn't have come directly from European contact. The horsemanship of the settlers overtook the imperial frontier as Griqua, Kora and other African frontier groups headed north on horseback to distance themselves from colonial authority.<sup>75</sup> It is possible that these so-called 'mixed' groups who drove the frontier from the Cape may be the origin of *umhambo* and, perhaps, even the word *umdyarho*. They spoke a mixture of indigenous languages and Dutch, and had guns and horses. *Umdyarho* has the same meaning as *uleqo* but is of Boer-language origins, possibly reflecting an early source of horses in the Transkei.

European horse racing and turf days followed closely on the establishment of settlements. Grahamstown, a major centre in the 'frontier' region during the time when the settler colonial project was deliberately encouraged by Britain, is a good example. By 1820, horse races were already being held there. By the 1840s the Albany Turf Club was well established and held three-day annual Albany Turf Club meetings. They involved several races held over one or two miles and 'always in two heats'.<sup>76</sup> A steeplechase<sup>77</sup> was included in 1840, 1849, 1850 and 1852. These events happened on 'the flats above the town',<sup>78</sup> presumably the site of the town's present industrial area and the Waainek prison. Similar events are known to have been held elsewhere by the 1850s, including in 'Bloemfontein, Burghersdorp, Cradock, Fort Beaufort, King William's Town, Quagga Flats, Sidbury and Uitenhage'.<sup>79</sup>

Considering the rapid uptake of horses by the Xhosa-speaking groups in the Eastern Cape,<sup>80</sup> and the popularity of horse racing amongst the settler population, encounters between the local people and horse racing – and transference of the associated skills – likely occurred early on. It is unlikely that this transference was limited purely to horsemanship, but to equestrianism more generally. Ideas on how to organise horse races and what a day of horse racing looks like were available to local people through their encounters with the settler racing traditions. This would have influenced how the transition from *uleqo* to *umdyarho* occurred and would have

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74 Swart, *Riding High*, 18-37.

75 *Ibid.*, 78.

76 R. T. McGeoch, 'The Reminiscences of Thomas Stubbs, 1820-1877' (MA thesis, Rhodes University, 1965), 19.

77 A distance race in which various obstacles such as ditches and hedges need to be navigated by the horse and rider.

78 McGeoch, 'Thomas Stubbs', 19-20.

79 Cited in McGeoch, 'Thomas Stubbs', ft. 4, 19, without reference to the source. If we consider the time of the 1850s and compare it to the dates that the sites named here were established (both Bloemfontein and Burghersdorp were founded only in 1846) the degree that the 'horse culture' was a ubiquitous part of the culture of the European settlers becomes evident.

80 Swart, *Riding High*, 79.

had an effect on the forms *umdyarho* took. If we exclude *ulego* from the narrative of *umdyarho*, it may appear – because some cultural acquisitions of horsemanship and equestrianism were made in the racing tradition (along with the horse) – that the *umdyarho* we see today is the European settler tradition carried forward into a new racing tradition by Africans. In that formulation, *umdyarho* would be seen as a derivative of European horse racing – of a European sport – brought by the settlers. Some of the histories of sport in South Africa provide guidance here and may assist in understanding where *umdyarho* can be located within the history of sport.

Odendaal describes how ‘Africans were introduced to Western sports, both on a formal and informal level, in a way correlative to their other activities. Informally, the Xhosa were interested spectators at the cricket matches and horse races that came to be staged in the new frontier towns that were springing up in the conquered African territories from the onset of such events in the 1850s.’<sup>81</sup> Cricket was introduced at mission schools as part of the civilising mission to ensure ‘profitable employment of leisure’,<sup>82</sup> and became very popular amongst indigenous Africans from these schools. During the decade from 1875-1885, and at the time of South Africa’s ‘mineral revolution’, there was a burgeoning of sports clubs of all varieties, as well as organised competitions. ‘Native’ cricket clubs and teams were a part of this growth, frequently beating white teams and producing players, in some cases, of exceptional standard.<sup>83</sup> Cricket ‘reflected not only the strong desire of the [African] elite to be assimilated into colonial life but also the opening up of class cleavages among Africans’, Odendaal writes, ‘in adopting British cultural values and seeking upward mobility in Cape society, the aspiring black petty bourgeoisie often distanced itself from the mass of Africans who remained within the traditional framework or were becoming proletarianised.’<sup>84</sup>

Cape liberalism was to fall in favour of racial segregation and the proletarianisation of Africans. While African elites in urban centres did establish cricket and tennis clubs, they did not survive the political and economic processes already under way. As Odendaal puts it, these sports ‘no longer reflected the material context and became more elitist in nature, going into decline instead of expanding, and exacerbating class difference.’<sup>85</sup> Other sports were to rise and become more popular, particularly boxing, athletics and, of course, soccer. Soccer, in keeping with the new ‘material context’, grew immensely in the 1930s. The Johannesburg Bantu Football Association, for example, was established in 1929, had 39 teams in 1930, a number that rose to 103 in 1935.<sup>86</sup> Requiring fewer resources than many sports, it served as an ‘arena of cultural autonomy and opportunity that relieved the lives of people deeply affected by the

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81 A. Odendaal, ‘South Africa’s Black Victorians: Sport, Race and Class in South Africa before Union’, *Collected Seminar Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, 38, 1990, 13. A more in-depth study of this history of cricket can be found in A. Odendaal, *The Story of an African Game: Black Cricketers and the Unmasking of One of South Africa’s Greatest Myths, 1850-2003* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2003).

82 Odendaal, ‘South Africa’s Black Victorians’, 15.

83 *Ibid.*, 16.

84 *Ibid.*, 18.

85 *Ibid.*, 23.

86 P. C. Alegi, ‘Playing to the Gallery? Sport, Cultural Performance, and Social Identity in South Africa, 1920s-1945’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 1, 2002, 22.

drudgery of underemployment and the painful constraints of institutional racism.<sup>87</sup> From this burgeoning popularity, ‘vernacular modes’ of play developed, ‘crowning football the king of black sport before the advent of apartheid in 1948’.<sup>88</sup>

There are strong parallels between the development of the settler horse racing industry and the development of cricket. Both were initially focused on the frontier towns and followed the settler advance into the interior. Both horse racing and cricket were popular events for settlers and indigenous African spectators alike. Both were heavily affected by the racial segregation and proletarianisation of Africans in the early years of the twentieth century. Viewed as a European sport like cricket, *umdyarho* might appear as a simple ‘vernacular mode’ (as seen in soccer) of settler horse racing. And *umdyarho* might, when viewed from a certain angle and with certain allowances made, seem to mimic the history of cricket.

Though the work conducted on *umdyarho* is limited, the kind of narrative outlined above is simply a more detailed version of the popular version kept in the public mind, particularly in the (predominantly white) equestrian community. One author who has written on *umdyarho* is Swart, who pioneered the historiography on horses in South Africa. Swart describes *umdyarho* as a ‘robust hybrid of various imported traditions combined with local agency and vernacular adaptations’.<sup>89</sup> In her essay, *Race Politics*, she suggests that the development of *umdyarho* was connected to the exclusion of Africans from the settler horse industry. In doing so the approach treats *umdyarho* as if it is a European sport akin to cricket or soccer. This, when you do not include the evidence of *uleqo*, is a common-sense interpretation. When you take the evidence of *uleqo* into account, the story of *umdyarho* changes substantially.

The story of *umdyarho* without *uleqo* can fit very neatly into the ‘standard’ historiography of sport. Beginning in the 1960s, histories of sport began to be produced in earnest.<sup>90</sup> While initially largely limited to North America and Europe, there is a large body of work being produced on sport in Africa and Asia.<sup>91</sup> In South Africa these are often political histories – some examples can be found in the work of Odendaal,<sup>92</sup> Alegi,<sup>93</sup> Grundlingh,<sup>94</sup> and Fleming<sup>95</sup> – looking at the history of colonial sports. Histories of indigenous sports have tended to be neglected. Internationally, some indigenous sports have been addressed – lacrosse,<sup>96</sup> surfing,<sup>97</sup> capoeira<sup>98</sup> – but these cases tend to be sports which became popular and professionalised amongst ‘Western’ participants and practitioners.

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87 Alegi, ‘Playing to the Gallery?’, 26.

88 Ibid..

89 Swart, ‘Race Politics’, 260.

90 R. Holt, ‘Historians and the History of Sport’, *Sport in History*, 34, 1, 2014, 1.

91 See, for example, R. Sen, *Nation at Play: A History of Sport in India* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2016).

92 A. Odendaal, *The Story of an African Game*.

93 P. C. Alegi, *Laduma!: Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa, from its Origins to 2010* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).

94 A. Grundlingh, ‘From Redemption to Recidivism? Rugby and Change in South Africa during the 1995 Rugby World Cup and its Aftermath’, *Sporting Traditions*, 14, 2, 1998, 67-86. And A. Grundlingh, ‘Playing for Power? Rugby, Afrikaner Nationalism and Masculinity in South Africa, c. 1900-70’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11, 3, 1994, 408-430.

95 T. Fleming, “Now the African Reigns Supreme”: The Rise of African Boxing on the Witwatersrand, 1924-1959’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 28, 1, 2011, 47-62.

96 D. M. Fisher, *Lacrosse: A History of the Game* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011).

97 S. Laderman, *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

98 M. R. Assunção, *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art* (London: Routledge, 2005).

It appears that historians have tended to relegate indigenous sports to the realm of ethnography rather than history. And while there are exceptions – the ‘Mesoamerican ballgame’,<sup>99</sup> cockfighting,<sup>100</sup> *buzkashi*<sup>101</sup> – they, as I mentioned early in this article, seem to have taken on a secondary significance. In Southern Africa, one notable exception is stick-fighting,<sup>102</sup> but even that seems to be viewed as a metaphor for the ‘significant’ ethnographic theme of war.

Hunting and *uleqo* and, until very recently, *umdyarho*, too, have received no attention. The overwhelming emphasis on ‘western’ sports in the historiography, and the relegation of indigenous sports to ethnography (where they have tended to be treated as ‘socialisation’, ‘ritual’ and other ‘important’ disciplinary concerns) creates a conventional reading of the history of sport in South Africa, in which the tendency is to see sport as a colonial import (by omitting indigenous sports). The tendency is extended to sports hitherto neglected in the discipline without questioning this narrative form: we see *umdyarho* (an indigenous sport) as a colonial import too.

This is not an indictment on historians, but rather a highlighting of the effects of the marginalisation of certain evidence and what sorts of narratives that marginalisation can create. To an extent, more like soccer than cricket, *umdyarho* fitted with the recreations and the material context of Africans in the twentieth century Transkei. While soccer became popular in the urban areas as a result of proletarianisation and racial segregation, *umdyarho* became popular in rural areas. Like cricket, horse racing was a sport that came with European settlers, but it was never introduced and encouraged in the same way that cricket was. Importantly, and collapsing the idea of parallels between the history of cricket and that of *umdyarho*, *umdyarho* is not used to distinguish *from* African tradition, but rather became emblematic *of* African tradition. The settler horse racing tradition fitted with cricket as emblematic of Europe – it was ‘the sport of kings’ – but the rural races came to be seen as diametrically opposed to European-ness, whiteness and elitism.

The neglect of artefacts of *uleqo* perpetuates another kind of artefact in the narratives around *umdyarho*: it inadvertently perpetuates the myth of the promethean settler in South African historiography. It is that promethean settler who, in the colonial conception, brought ‘history’ in 1652; who brought ‘modern technology’ and knowledge; who brought ‘civilisation’. We see it described by Swart in the case of Moshoeshoe’s first horse:

There is anecdotal suggestion that the first horses were brought to the area by the Prussian botanist Zydenstecker (Seidenstecher) in 1829 or 1830. This has commonalities with the origin myth of knowledge shared by the

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99 V. L. Scarborough and D. R. Wilcox (eds.), *The Mesoamerican Ballgame* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991)

100 C. Geertz, ‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’, *Daedalus*, 101, 1, 1972, 1–37.

101 G. Whitney Azoy, *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

102 Particularly B. Carton and R. Morrell, ‘Zulu Masculinities, Warrior Culture and Stick Fighting: Reassessing Male Violence and Virtue in South Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38, 1, 2012, 31–53. And B. Carton and R. Morrell, ‘Competitive Combat, Warrior Bodies, and Zulu Sport: The Gender Relations of Stick Fighting in South Africa, 1800–1930’, J. Nauright, A. G. Cobley and D. K. Wiggins (eds.), *Beyond CLR James: Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity in Sport* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014), 125–143.



promethean figure of a white man, familiar from the mythography of the Zulu chief Dingiswayo's acquisition of a gun and a horse from the whites. It is more likely that Moshoeshoe received his first horse from Moorosi, head of the neighbouring Baputhi, in 1829.<sup>103</sup>

The marginalisation of *uleqo* extends and perpetuates the idea of settler-as-Prometheus: it brings about a narrative which says the sport, introduced by Europeans, becomes *umdyarho* through an act of Black resistance (agency) following exclusion (oppression).

If we are to see *umdyarho* as a derivation from the settler racing tradition, as we sensibly would without including *uleqo*, then we are – as in the history of cricket – seeing the source of *umdyarho* as coming from the African petty bourgeoisie. Cricket, as mentioned above, was a symbolic way in which the African petty bourgeoisie (in which early African intellectuals such as the Sogas or Sol Plaatje would fall) may show aspiration to European 'civility' while distancing themselves from (though not necessarily rejecting) the 'Africans who remained within the traditional framework'.<sup>104</sup>

If we are to see *umdyarho* as a sport drawn from a desire to be involved in European horse racing – a desire, certainly, some Africans had – then we are hard pressed to see *umdyarho* in terms of an expression of affinity or aspiration; of the African petty bourgeoisie attempt to embrace the imperial culture and assume the position of fully fledged liberal subjects. And, if I am to follow through on this narrative's trajectory, this attempt to embrace the imperial culture was halted by the failure of liberalism, driving the sport underground where it was determinedly continued away from prying white eyes. In this framing, the story of *umdyarho* becomes a lamentation. It says that once racism prevented any chance of 'true' assimilation, unguided now by the hand of Europe, Africans failed to replicate the settler sport, but instead created a traditionalised version of it, *de facto* placed 'in contrast to' the 'pure' sport of kings as a 'people's version' of it. *Umdyarho* becomes a case of failed assimilation.

Horses are symbolically about exercising control and long have been.<sup>105</sup> They are born wild and become domestic.<sup>106</sup> They are powerful and require power on the part of the rider to control and so fit the enlightenment dichotomy of passion and reason, of civilising. Horses encapsulate the liberal tradition as near-beasts which through discipline are made civilised. Horse racing is, in that sense, a good metaphor for assimilation which is easily transplanted to all equestrian pursuits. It is *haute bourgeois* and European. Horsemanship and horse sports are the epitome of what the civilising mission sought: to, ideally, shape the subject into the form of the European upper-classes, to move people 'born wild' to become 'domesticated'. The symbolism of horses creates a temptation to see horse racing by Africans in those assimilationist terms.

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103 Swart, *Riding High*, 83.

104 Odendaal, 'South Africa's Black Victorians', 23.

105 Swart, *Riding High*, 11.

106 Schweitzer, 'Dream Interpretation'.

The inclusion of *uleqo* artefacts shows that *umdyarho* is not a failed assimilation to be lamented. It shows that an artefact – a spurious observation – of the liberal tradition (embodied in the civilising mission) is perpetuated. This artefact may even make it appear as if there is no reason to even seek further evidence outside of horse racing. It is ‘common sense’ to presume the evidence does not exist because a perfectly coherent and intelligible narrative can be built without including *uleqo*. However, taking *uleqo* into account, the picture ceases to be the above description, illustrating that the oppressed did not adopt a European sport, but rather sought ‘an arena of cultural autonomy and opportunity’ (as occurred with soccer) in an indigenous sport.

## Conclusion

The archival artefacts of *uleqo* provide us with evidence of a thriving pre-colonial racing sport. Furthermore, when viewed alongside more recent evidence of the history of *umdyarho*, we can see that *uleqo* did not face ‘extinction’ but transformation. A transition from racing cattle to racing horses was embraced to continue a long-held form of social entertainment.

There are two main questions addressed here: what can we learn about *uleqo*’s exclusion? And, with the remnants of *uleqo* taken into account, what new direction can it take us in? In other words, what changes when we include *uleqo* in our picture of the history of the Eastern Cape? This is done by contrasting the works written using the sources available on *uleqo* and *umdyarho* to the history linking the two forms. With regard to *uleqo*, none of these secondary texts using the source material of the Sogas and Hunter Wilson focus on *uleqo*. This brings about a first observation, namely, that *uleqo* was considered inconsequential by contemporary documenters and historical scholars writing of that time. It is also telling that two of the three accounts are written by cultural ‘insiders’ while only one account by a European ethnographer considers the sport worth mentioning. This, itself, hints that settler and European observers erroneously selected what was of importance.

From looking at the artefacts of *uleqo* we are brought to another sport: hunting. Hunting has been addressed, but it has been addressed as a facet of livelihood and subsistence, not as a sport. The same applies to the dipping regulations or restrictions on the movements of cattle. Indigenous sports have occupied a marginal position in history. From the historiography of sports, we can see an overwhelming emphasis on the sports of Europe and North America. The exceptions to this are sports where uptake amongst European and settler populations was high. Other indigenous sports seem to have been held as the purview of ethnographers. But ethnographers, too, have historically seen little importance in indigenous sports except when they were connected to another ethnographic focal point considered of greater importance. The neglect of archival artefacts (remnants, fragments) has produced a corresponding historiographical artefact (a reproduced distortion) which relegated indigenous sports to the margins.

Using the work of Beinart and Bundy, and Tropp, we can appreciate how these sports ended, but we still don’t actually see the sports. Tropp writes from the academic

tradition of socio-environmental history, and, in that tradition, retains and deepens a focus on agency and resistance. In doing so he continues a historiographical lineage dating through Beinart and Bundy's *Hidden Struggles*. *Hidden Struggles* itself drew from the historiographical lineage by attempting to undo the lack of historical agency evident in the writing of African history. Yet an appreciation of the activities affecting, not only livelihoods and subsistence, but sports, too, can tell us something more about both agency and resistance. By shifting our focus and including these activities as primarily sports, we can better appreciate the indignity suffered by the people of Transkei in having their favourite sports effectively cancelled. From this we can deepen our understanding of the nexus of specificities which motivated their resistance to these colonial policies and provide illustration of the resilience and adaptability of practices in the face of social change. The examination of *uleqo* artefacts, then, may provide productive new directions to take the socio-environmental history of the Eastern Cape of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

An examination of the *uleqo* artefacts might also provide new direction for other historical investigation. This can be seen in the history of *umdyarho*. There an artefact in the third sense is formed. By neglecting the artefacts of *uleqo*, the 'spurious observation' – an observation that appears to be, but is not, valid – is made that *umdyarho* is of settler origin, thereby perpetuating the promethean settler myth that has often been found in South African history. This promethean settler narrative form is an artefact (an undesirable flaw that is reproduced) of the civiliser theme perpetuated in settler colonial histories. In Odendaal's words: 'These myths need to be countered because not only have black people a long, indeed remarkable, sporting history but the development of South African sport has always been closely influenced by wider political and economic factors.'<sup>107</sup> The inclusion of *uleqo* in the story of *umdyarho* contributes to addressing the marginal position of indigenous sports in South African history.

The story of *uleqo*'s transformation into *umdyarho* may open a productive route to explore animal histories. Many historians who draw from the formerly, and still residually, Eurocentric discipline, have adopted a more Afrocentric perspective of the historiography, while others have chosen to try writing history from the perspective of the non-human actor, as Swart does with the horse. If we are able to see the history of *umdyarho* as a transition primarily from one species to another – from cattle to horses – we have a window into how a change in species may influence the sport's performance and, through this, contribute to the field of animal histories too. We may learn something about how both cattle and horses have been understood by contrasting *uleqo* and *umdyarho*.

In the course of asking why *uleqo* became and remained a footnote, I have highlighted a number of possible artefacts in the sense of 'undesirable' or 'spurious' elements which push *uleqo* (and other indigenous sports) to the margins of history. In each of these cases of artefacts, one can find a residue of colonial or Eurocentric

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107 Odendaal, 'South Africa's Black Victorians', 13.

thought upon which the discipline of history in South Africa was built. In highlighting these artefacts, I do not undermine the importance of these approaches or themes discussed here, whether an emphasis on resistance to oppression, or the approaches taken in writing social, environmental or animal histories. Neither do I wish to criticise the work done by sports historians and ethnographers. Rather, I wish to offer *uleqo* as an illustration of a heading one might take to continue along new paths previously cut by these fields and approaches.

In this example of the 'origins of the chase', lingering Eurocentric and colonial elements are highlighted in consideration of an underappreciated fragment of the Eastern Cape's past. By drawing on this fragment we might be pointed in a new direction through which we can continue moving away from the Eurocentric and colonial traditions upon which historical study in the academy was founded. Like the transition from *uleqo* to *umdyarho*, a small change may create something new. The artefacts of *uleqo*, in all the senses of the word used here, draw our attention to the relationship to imperial power and offer a small example of moving beyond that relationship which has dominated the historical understanding of the Eastern Cape. In that sense it is an offer to find our bearings in the 'Eastern Colony' – *iMpuma-Koloni* – and acknowledge it as a landscape over which we might continue our own disciplinary 'chase', perhaps, even, allowing that other cape to say 'look at what I am'.