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CREATING A SPORT HISTORICAL NARRATIVE THROUGH A 19th CENTURY 'AFRIKAANS' POEM

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ABSTRACT

A 19th century 'Afrikaans' poem, composed by Casparus Petrus Hoogenhout, was used as a case study on social and sport interactions between rural Afrikaners and non-white peasants in the Boland. It extends on previous work on the same poem. Essentially, the poem is a presentation of a 19th century Coloured farmworker, Jan Bantjies, who entered and won a horseracing event at the Green Point Common. Bantjies then squandered his winnings and succumbed to drunkenness. An historical narrative of horseracing in the Cape colony was reported. Throughout the text, racial stereotyping of the central figure, Jan Bantjies, was explored. However, no claim can be made to generalisations regarding racial attitudes in the 19th Century in the Boland, Western Cape, based on this poem.

***Keywords*:** 19th Century Wellington, South Africa; Afrikaans poetry; Coloured jockeys; Horseracing.

INTRODUCTION

This research is an extension to a growing body of literature that hones in exclusively on Black sport in South Africa (Archer & Bouillon, 1982; Blades, 1998; Booley, 1998; Allie, 2000; Desai, *et.al*., 2002; Mazwai, 2002; Khota, 2003; Odendaal, 2003; Alegi, 2004; Odendaal, 2012). More specifically, it brings a broader understanding to an already existing work, "The story of Jan Bantjies" (Cleophas, 2010:52-61). This was achieved by introducing a socio-linguistic perspective to the poem and a sport-historical theoretical framework. The undertaken research rested on a deconstructionist framework that implies "those who compile historical fiction admit that some of the content is true and some fictional and they leave the reader to decide which is which" (Booth, 2005:77). Meanings of poems are sought in cultural processes that are subjected to different interpretations (Booth, 2005:99). Deconstructionist sport historians regard fiction:

> … not as feigned elements, it is a way of knowing the past … as a way of disrupting dominant meanings and to rewrite the histories of subordinated and marginalised groups who are typically excluded from accounts of the past… The subjects may be fictional, but by introducing the experiences of a subaltern group hidden from elite history and by destabilizing the history of colonial texts, poses important questions about historical knowledge and historiography such as who writes history, and who is included and excluded from histories. (Booth, 2005:76, 78, 80)

Examples of inconsistent spelling in *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* (in which the poem appeared the first time) may lead modern readers to a conclusion that 19th century Afrikaans folk literature

was technically inept and thus useless for research. However, folk literature was extremely popular in its day. A literary critic, Johan Kannemeyer, stated that the poem, "Jan Bantjies, could have been read by over three thousand readers" (Kannemeyer, 1978:52). Even bad poems present readers with insights that may be ignored otherwise.

Sport historians should pay attention to these 'bad poems' because, as the academic, Robert Day, argued: "By examining sport poetry …, it may reveal new insight relative to the development of sport" (Day, 1979:63). Nienaber stated that these poems should not be judged on artistic merit but on the context of their time (Nienaber, 1940). One such poem is "Jan Bantjies" (Hoogenhout, 1879), which was written by a pioneer of 19th century Afrikaans, Casparus Petrus Hoogenhout. The poem sheds light on 19th century race relations in the rural Cape Colony, especially in the village of Wellington. It also provides readers with a roadmap to understanding social forces that determined sport participation of rural peasants in the mid- to late-19th century Wellington. By the 1870's, this rural village was affected by industrial changes and farm workers were exposed to new patterns of recreation, such as horseracing. Hoogenhout's poem exposes, in part, these changing recreational patterns.

In the poem, the protagonist (the farmer) is the narrator and an untrained jockey (Jan Bantjies) is the subject of description. When the farmer purchases an emaciated mare called Bles, Jan Bantjies realised her potential and convinced the farmer to enter "Bles" in a race at the Green Point Common, with him as the jockey. "Bles" was a *Kaapse perd* (Cape horse) or *Boerperd* (Boer horse) bred for purposes of riding, transport and commandos (Swart, 2010:32). Against all expectations, Jan Bantjies won the race and received five pounds in prize money. Bantjies was then lured away by a stable owner, but ended up on the streets of Cape Town as a drunkard. Written in ballad form, the poem provides insights into local horseracing at the time.

SOUTH AFRICAN HORSE RACING HISTORY

The first races of the African Turf Club is thought to have taken place on 18 September 1797 at the Green Point Common (Jafee, 1980:12). The club was reorganised in 1807 and, from 1814, it became known as the South African Turf Club. The Green Point Common with its rough surface was not suitable for horseracing and was used as grazing land for cattle, often while races were in progress. Race days were characterised by a "large concourse of people… where the better classes mix with those whose idea of happiness is swilling beer and indulging in rough play and where people could engage in the noble art of speculation" (*Cape Argus*, 1878a:3). According to the publication, *The South African Game*, 19th century Cape farmers (Archer & Bouillon, 1982:20) used Hottentots (a term used to refer to Khoikhoi people) as jockeys.

There is a possibility that the events described in "Jan Bantjies" are based on actual occurrences, since references to Van der Bijl and Melck appear on an 1878 programme sheet. The Van der Bijl family was involved with horses since 1800 and Melck was a well-known breeder. It is also a fact that jockeys were paid five pounds for the Breeder's Purse, Trial Stakes and Queen's Plate (National Library of South Africa, 1826-1882). Jan Bantjies would have competed in the Breeder's Purse, a race for Cape bred horses (Jafee, 1980:14). It is however uncertain if Jan Bantjies was a personal name, since colonists throughout the English empire had a propensity for assigning sobriquets to their workers (Mallet, 2002:75-76).

RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AND HORSERACING HISTORY

Although there was an absence of a national consciousness, a grouping of non-Whites, previously labelled 'Bastard' emerged as Coloured in the late 19th century (Cleophas, 2009:1,3). Richard van der Ross points out in his work, *Myths and attitudes*, that Coloured people in Cape society were often described as "unintelligent, irresponsible, slovenly and thriftless… heavy on drink, light on work and careless of firm family ties" (Van der Ross, 1979:2). In his doctoral dissertation, Gerhardus (Jakes) Gerwel analysed Coloured stereotyping in Afrikaner literature and indicated three categories: "*Jollie Hotnot*" (Jolly Coloured); "*Ek het maar net saam met die baas gekom*" (I just came with the master) and "*Die Kleurlinge is nog kinders*" (The Coloureds are still children) (Gerwel, 1979:108-219; 222-347; 349-399). Thus, Jan Bantjies was addressed in a derogatory manner: "*Sal Seur die merri ni laat loop?*" *Ek seg vir hom.* "*Loop slaap!*" ("Sir, won't you let the mare run?" I said to him. "Get lost!").

The poem, under investigation, slots into the last category as explained in Gerwel's concluding remarks of his dissertation:

> … there is consequent presentation (in selected texts) of Coloureds as a separate social category, characterised by deviant social behaviour patterns, a comical and pathetic shortcoming in the expression of imitated patterns, emotional bankruptcy or childlikeness. (Gerwel, 1979:405) [Translation by author]

Coloured persons involved with 19th century horseracing were depicted as "enthusiastic race goers, gamblers and spectators" and not active participants who contributed to the outcome of races (Jafee, 1980:12,16). They remained stereotyped as outsiders to the sport milieu and to date there is no evidence of a successful jockey who had ascended above a designated social class. As a result, Coloured people's involvement in horseracing has not received attention from sport historians. For this reason, the poem, Jan Bantjies, offers researchers a vista on a neglected area of South African sport history.

EXPLORING SYMBOLISM AND SPORT IN EARLY AFRIKAANS LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO C.P. HOOGENHOUT

In 1858, there was a revival of the Wynberg and Claremont Races and Sports on Easter Monday, where horse races were combined with running events, greasy pole climbing and other festival activities. The main feature of the event was the horseracing (Van der Merwe, 1987:37). Some sport researchers, claimed that these sports, because of its British origin, were approached cautiously by emerging Afrikaner leaders (Archer & Bouillon, 1982:28).

The poem "Jan Bantjies" appeared in the 7 June 1878 edition of *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* (*AP*) (*Afrikaanse Patriot*, 1878:91-92), the official organ of the 'Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners' (GRA) (loosely translated the Society of True Afrikaners) and later the 'Afrikanerbond' (AB) (Kannemeyer, 1978:52). In June, the *AP* expressed its opinion on race relations as follows: "The fundamental British politics of equality between White and Black is wrong" (*Afrikaanse Patriot*, 1878:1). In the first of two articles on the contribution of Hoogenhout in *Die Huisgenoot*, Petrus Nienaber argued that during the 19th Century, many Afrikaners considered

the patios of the Jan Bantjies class, 'Afrikaans', a 'kleurlingtaal' (Coloured language) that is unsuitable for 'civilised society' (Nienaber, 1940:23,65).

This research regarded a linguistic history of Afrikaner poetry as irrelevant, because it falls short of providing social meaning to sport experiences of the character, Jan Bantjies. Instead, it followed a path of devoting more attention to the speaker and his social-political environment (Esterhuyse, 1986:2). A justification for this approach was found in the work of J.C. Kannemeyer who asserted that most 'Afrikaans' poetry, in the period 1875 to 1900, dealt with South Africa, the struggle for recognition for Afrikaans, religion, life of the ordinary person, folklore and family life (Kannemeyer, 1978:58). The Afrikaans poet C.P. Hoogenhout lived and taught at the 'Groenberg' one-man school (about six miles outside the village of Wellington) in the Boven Vallei for forty years and was a central figure in the GRA, but was geographically isolated from his colleagues in Paarl (Nienaber & Verster, 1975:18). Although Hoogenhout's isolation may indicate that the poem, "Jan Bantjies", is a personal expression, it is unlikely that the *AP* would have published anything contrary to its views.

A historian, John Benyon, described Hoogenhout as 'patriarchal-conservative' unlike later generations of 'modern-nationalist' Afrikaners (Benyon, 1991:170). The slow lifestyle of many traditional rural communities was fertile ground for a patriarchal system. In 19th century South Africa, the patriarchal figure was a senior White male who had control over his nuclear family and non-White servants (Muller, 1974:59-60). This system is evidenced in an extract from a poem by Hoogenhout entitled: "Moeilikheid om liedjies te maak op 'n boereplaas" (The difficulty with composing songs on a 'Boer' farm) that is based on the 'tot' system (a system where farm workers were paid in the form of a daily measure of wine), as well as the strict discipline over the workers.

"Moeilikheid om liedjies te maak op 'n boerplaas"	*The difficulty with composing songs on a 'Boer' farm*
3	
"Die jong vraag of hy uit kan span	*The (servant) lad asks if he can stop now*
en hy voer kan krij.	*and have some animal feed*.
Ja-ja – Toe trek die deur mar an!	*Yes-yes – and close the door*!
Seg Ewa moet stil bly!"	*Tell Eva to be quiet*!
4	
"Daar had ek net die rymwoord klaa.	*I just about completed the rhyming.*
Maar nou is ek dit kwy.	*But now it's gone again.*
Ja, liedjies maak is baaing swaar.	*Yes, writing songs is very difficult.*
Hoor daar nou weer so 'n meid!"	*Just listen to that maid going on again!*
5.	
"Maar Ewa, stil tog! Hou jou mond!	*Hey Eva, be quiet now! Shut your mouth.*
Hoe kom moet jy so skré?	*Why do you have to yell like that?*
Ou seur, dis die verbrande hond.	*But Sir, it is that damn dog.*
Hy blaf mos ver die vé!"	*He is barking at the livestock again!*
6.	
"Né, di's onmo'entlik om te hou!"	*Now, this is impossible to bear*!
"Wie kan dan so sit en dink?"	*Who can think straight here?*

"Tok, tok…Wie is nou daar weer, vrou?"	*Knock, knock … who is it this time, woman?*
"Kan Jan syn dop kom skink?"	*May Jan come and pour his drink?*
7.	
Og ja, myn hartjie, basta pla!	*Oh yes my dear, stop bothering me now!*
Toe geef hom mar syn wyn!	*Just give the man his wine*!
Wag, daar kom weer een kleintjie kla.	*Wait, there is another little one coming to complain.*
Pa, Willie knyp ver myn."	*Dad, Willie is pinching me.*
8.	
"Mar, kinders, as ek op moet staan,	*Now children, if I have to get up,*
Dan kry jul almal seer!	*Then you all of you will get hurt*!
Dis moeilik om so vort te gaan.	*It is difficult to continue like this.*
Kom, nog een slag perbeer."	*Come and try just one more time.*
9	
Hoor daar nou weer, hoe raas so 'n klong!"	*Just listen again, to the racket that servant boy is making*!
Ou Baas, die kraal is oop!	*Old Master, the cattle pen is open.*
Baas Pieter is daar by die jong.	*Master Pieter is there with the young lad.*
Di vé het uitgeloop!"	*The cattle have left the pen*!
10	
"Hul's almal in die land, ou Baas!	*Old Boss, they are all in the pasture!*
Hoe kom die vé dan uit?"	*How did the cattle get out?*
So gaat dit op een boereplaas."	*This is what goes on at a farm.*
Ek moet myn lied maar sluit."	*Now I will just have to end my song.*

Hoogenhout (1876:93-94).

According to Dr. J.W. Postma, from the erstwhile Physical Education Department at Stellenbosch University, many farmers believed the 'tot' system could be justified scientifically. Postma used scientific research to show that farmers, who applied the 'tot' system, experienced an increase in the work performance of their labourers following the consumption of alcohol, provided they were habitual drinkers and the labour did not last longer than four hours after drinking (Postma, 1965:130). Punishment for alcohol abuse among the Coloured folk in the poem, "Jan Bantjies", is represented as a great responsibility that the farmer had to administer, "*Nou, soos dit met ons boere gaat…*" (Now, as it is with our farmers), referring to the drinking problems of their labourers, "*Is jy van more vroeg al dronk?*" (Are you drunk from early this morning?) and "*stil nou of jy kryg straf*" (Quiet, otherwise you will be punished). Underlying the teasing is the master-servant relationship with reference terms, such as "*Baas*" (Boss or Master), "*Myn Seurtji*" (Mister) en "*jong*" (servant).

Some authors emphasise Hoogenhout's concern for Coloured children in his works (Du Raan, 1975:48; Kannemeyer, 1978:62). Hoogenhout's attitude towards Coloured people could, however, be explained in the words of English headmaster, Edward Thring, who argued that "rich boys were expected to help the poor boys, less for the sake of the poor boy than for the good of the soul of the rich" (Norwood, 1929: 115). At the time in the Boland, Hoogenhout's conservative attitude was not unique to him since the pastor in Paarl abolished canteens and

intended to stop the planned railways to the village (Lady, 1973:86). Therefore, Hoogenhout's concern for the character, Jan Bantjies, may be interpreted as being patronising rather than genuine affection. More so, because the period of the "Jan Bantjies" poem was characterised by farmers expressing concern about the shortage of labour. In the 1870s, many workers sought employment on the expanding and more lucrative railway works in Wellington (*Cape Argus*, 1876:100).

Hoogenhout's approach to life was one of thrift and nobleness that included the Puritan prohibition, in the Protestant world, on excessive play and exercise (Siedentop, 1990:23). In his work, *Eerste Afrikaanse Printjies boeki vir soet kinders* (trans.: *First Afrikaans picture book for obedient children*), Hoogenhout lists and describes, "*skadelike dinge waarteen ons die kinders waarskuw*" (harmful elements we warn children about), "pipe smoking, drink, card games, billiards, boxing, dance, fashion and heresy" (Hoogenhout, 1879:21-30). He adopts a neutral stance in his presentation of the imperial game of "*kriket*" with its strong English civilising influence by indicating that "*dorpskinders baing gesien … en miskien gespeul wor oek; mar di wat ver af woon ken dit dalk ni*" (that town children often see … and maybe also play; but those who live far away may not know it) (Hoogenhout, 1879:38). Hunting with a rifle was also an Afrikaner pastime, but the English version was displayed in a satirical comic light, where the hunters wear 'top hats' and 'tail coats' (Hoogenhout, 1879:47).

A possible explanation for this neutrality is Hoogenhout's discourse on the term, "*beskawing*" (civilisation), "*Net so lelik as di olifant met syn kapstwels, net so lelik is di valse beskawing van teenswoordig. Net so bespottelik is 'n Afrikaner wat syn lands aard en taal en sede wil verwerp om 'n Engelsman of 'n Hollander te wees.*" (Just as ugly as the elephant with his boots; just as ugly is the present false civilisation; just as ridiculous is an Afrikaner who wants to reject his the nature of his country, language and values to be an Englishman or a Dutchman) (Hoogenhout, 1879: 44). Although "*kriket*" was a British sport, it could be viewed as influencing civilisation by forming part of a "movement toward a [English] universal ethic of conduct … within an environment that is as free as possible from inequality and domination" (Beamish, 2010: 12). The English poet, James Love, described the 'ecstatic' effect of this game in the poem, "Cricket: A heroic poem" as follows:

> Hail, Cricket! Glorious, manly British game!
> First of all Sports! Be first alike in Fame!
> To my fir'd Soul thy busy transports bring
> That I may feel thy Raptures, while I sing. (Birkett, 1955: 15).

Two features of 19th century British society were the transformation of games into codified sports and their organisation under governing bodies. To understand the nature of this change, it is useful to consider Matthew Arnold's attempt at 'scientific nomenclature' for the structure of 19th century society – Barbarians, Philistines and Populace. Arnold devoted his life to infusing "sweetness and light" into a society, which from top to bottom seemed to him to be lacking both. His nomenclature stated that 'Barbarians' were the upper class who has a kind of sweetness, but were seduced away from the light by power and pleasure. 'Philistines' were the middle class who produced their own team games and sport. The 'Populace' were the working class, "raw and half-developed", which by the mid-century was beginning to perplex Arnold and others, by marching where they like, meeting where they like, bawling what they like, and

breaking what they like. The 'Philistines', after some initial reluctance to embrace the 'Populace' in their sports, did at last welcome them, provided that the populace would conform to their etiquette and conduct of play (McIntosch, 1963:63-64).

Hoogenhout attempted to infuse 'sweetness and light' into Cape society in a similar manner in his book, *Eerste Afrikaanse Printjies boeki vir soet kinders*. Contrary to the "*skadelike dinge*" (harmful things), one finds the "*nuttige dinge waartoe ons di kinders opwek*" (useful things that we evoke in children, like "*leersaamheid*" (studious); "*opregtheid*" (sincerity); "*eengesindheid*" (harmoniousness); "*werksaamheid*" (industrious); "*lewendigheid*" (vitality); "*weldadigheid"* (benevolence); and "*ongeveindse vroomheid*" (genuine piety) (Hoogenhout, 1879:30-34). According to Hoogenhout, entertainment that does not honour God must be rejected outright, such as music and the "velocipede" (Hoogenhout, 1879:34, 36). It is significant that Hoogenhout repeats the poem "Jan Bantjies" in his *Eerste Afrikaanse Printjies Boeki Eerste Afrikaanse Printjies boeki* because it indicates that he attached special value to it. This time Hoogenhout used an illustration with a caption, "*een wat naas voor is lyk braaf na Jan Bantjies*" (one almost in front looks like Jan Bantjies). The poem is concluded with a remark: "*wat Oom Jan [Hoogenhout] toen geseg het, seg hy nou nog; hy's glad ni van gedagte verander ni*" (what uncle Jan [Hoogenhout] said then, he still says; he has not changed his mind at all).

There is a repeated rejection of the events of the Commoners where they "*skre en raas, dit vloek en sweer*" (shout and yell, they swear and curse) and conclude that "*'n resiesbaan is, regtig waar 'n Kweekplaas vir die Hel*" (A racecourse truly is no more than a breeding place of Hell) (Hoogenhout, 1879:24-27). In England, horseracing was similar in reality where "great crowds of ten and twenty thousand would assemble to watch, to trade and to gamble… under the control of the Jockey Club" (McIntosch, 1963:60). It should be mentioned that Hoogenhout's moral opposition to horseracing differs from that of some British parliamentarians, like Sir Lawson and Peter Taylor, who were quoted in the *Cape Argus* (1878:3) as referring to it as an "idle and pernicious pursuit". Although Hoogenhout's opposition also had a moral base, as does that of Lawson and Taylor, his work also addressed fears of Anglicisation of the rural Afrikaner due to the social and economic problems of 19th century British cultural expansion, including the sport of horseracing (Hoogenhout, 1880; Hoogenhout, 1881; Afrikaanse Studentebond, 1926).

It is also true that the management of organised horseracing was constitutionally and exclusively in the hands of privileged English colonists who consciously excluded other groups. The constitution of the South African Turf Club stated that, "The Turf Club management shall be open to the officers of the Navy and Army, the Gentlemen and respectable inhabitants of the Colony" (*Cape Argus*, 1878a:3). The Turf clubhouse was in the vicinity of present-day Adderley Street where dining took place at the Masonic Hotel and "excellent repast is furnished and sporting proclivities in the shape of lotteries is indulged with the usual amount of spirit during the meetings" (*Cape Argus*, 1878a:3). Sport, specifically horseracing was not ignored by the patriarchal Afrikaner figures. This is reflected in Hoogenhout's acceptance of cricket in, *Eerste Afrikaanse Printjies boeki,* and by the hesitant manner in which he allows Jan Bantjies to participate in horse races. Most Afrikaner opinion makers of the time could not ignore horseracing because the Colonial government sanctioned it and it was reported in *The Cape Argus* of 2 May 1878 that the governor "appeared to take great interest in several events

of the day" (*Cape Argus*, 1878b:3). Hoogenhout and similar-minded rural Afrikaners may have felt uncomfortable amidst these extravagances of the urban opulence. A concealed antipathy toward English society surfaced in the poem "Jan Bantjies" when an Englishman employed the Coloured character to race a modest mare against an English thoroughbred horse. Eventually, Jan Bantjies's greatest victory (winning the horse race) is overshadowed by his decline into a corrupt urban lifestyle that is in stark contrast to the stable rural patriarchal tradition.

CONCLUSION

The reader of the poem, "Jan Bantjies", gains insight into horseracing during the late 19th Century, the atmosphere at the Green Point Common, the use of farm workers as jockeys and the participation of local and imported horses. The value of this poem lies in exposing the attitudes of a rural farmer towards the sport participation of Coloured farmworkers during the 19th Century. Lastly, the poem, Jan Bantjies, coincided with a period in time where literature played an important role in reporting on sport. The poem therefore enables historians to create a social-historical account of sport practices in the emerging Afrikaans community, during the late 19th Century in the Boland, through the lens of C.P. Hoogenhout.

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