

Human-Horse Relationships in Morocco: What Equids Can Tell Us About Society

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Abstract: In Morocco, the “animal-turn” in anthropology continues to emerge. Human-animal relationship research needs to be part of the post-colonial framework that incorporates human-animal relationships in discussion with all aspects of anthropology, and to move past Western categories that focus on animal rights and welfare, and other dichotomies in order to rethink, relate, and understand them as part of society. By looking through a multispecies lens, scholars can more readily understand humans’ interaction and incorporation of nature into their culture, rather than putting them into strict categories. For Moroccans practicing the folklore equestrian tradition of *tbourida*, or for those who keep and breed horses, and have working horses: horses have deeper meanings aside from hardworking megafauna. Horses are a hub for anthropological inquiry such as folklore, societal values and tensions, and economic drivers in North Africa. Using the example of Morocco, I discuss previous anthropological work that has regulated horses to the periphery, either by virtue of topic or circulation, how horses play a role in folklore, and then look at my own work on the equestrian spectacle of *tbourida*. I also examine horses as the nexus of kinship and horse-keeping prestige, and, finally, I discuss how it relates to horses as points of economic drivers in terms of horse racing and gambling, job provision, and tourism and international investment.

Keywords: Horses, *Tbourida*, Fantasia, Folklore, Animal Husbandry, Spectacle, Multispecies.

Beginning in 2002, when Amal, a young Moroccan woman first learned to ride, then as an unmarried *tbourida* (also known as *fantasia*) rider, and later as a leader, she borrowed many horses. But in 2010, when Amal agreed to marry Mehdi, as an engagement gift, he gave her a horse called Sharam Sheik, a four-year-old stallion with a glossy black coat. Mehdi had purchased Sharam Sheik for approximately 141,000 dirhams (about U.S. \$14,600). His price reflected his good breeding, official papers, training, body composition, and conformation. Mehdi had trained Sharam to rear on his hind legs – a trick Amal likes to demonstrate at festivals. Amal told me that after years of borrowing other *tbourida* riders’ horses, she was excited and proud to have her own horse. Amal also told me she knew Mehdi was the one to marry, because to be given a horse for *tbourida* as an engagement gift was a sign of being supported as a female rider in the male-dominated sport. Sharam is a six-foot tall Arab-Barb stallion. His shiny black coat creates a beautiful contrast to his four pinkish-white stockings (white hair growth in his coat) that come up to his knees. This pattern is called *qiṭār al-wād* in Arabic, or “a

horse who crossed the river,” as if a river had washed off the black dye on his legs. His face has a white blaze reaching lengthwise up to his ears, but it does not stretch wide out to his eyes. A small, pink flesh-mark covers both nostrils, which makes it prone to sun burn in the summer. His mane and tail hang long and wavy. “He looks like a war-horse,” she says. Amal quoted *ḥadīths* that prescribed black and white horses, especially ones that had at least three white legs and light lips, as being the best kinds of horses. Amal took great pains at festivals to help wash him, making sure his coat and legs were clean and resplendent.

Many of her male *tbourida* friends were excited for her and complimentary of this new horse, while others tried to tell her the horse was not good or too young, or that his stockings were ugly. She never spoke to those men again. Over the years, Amal has loaned Sharam Sheik to only trusted *tbourida* friends when she is not riding, because she told me she knows they will take care of him. In 2012, Sharam served as a horse model in the background of a kaftan photoshoot of Amal’s sister Nourelhouda, for *’Usra*, a Moroccan women’s magazine. In 2013, when Al Jazeera came to Morocco to do a TV report on Amal and her women’s troupe, the cameras focused in on Sharam as they interviewed Amal. Not long after the TV report aired, Amal told me she received a call from an Emirati who offered approximately 386,000 dirhams (about U.S. \$40,000) for Sharam Sheik. Even this large sum did not tempt Amal. Her reply was “He is never for sale. He will stay at home and Allah will take him,” meaning only his death will part Sharam from Amal.

To Amal, Sharam, the horse, carries many meanings. He was a gift (or an object) and source of pride. Over the course of four years asking her to describe her horse, he is a part of the family. She called him her “baby,” her “brother” and “king of the farm.” For Moroccans practicing the folklore equestrian tradition of *tbourida*, or for those who keep and breed horses, and have working horses, horses have deeper meanings aside from hardworking megafauna. Horses are a hub for anthropological inquiry such as folklore, societal values and tensions, and economic drivers in North Africa. Using the example of Morocco, I discuss previous work that has had horses on the periphery, either by virtue of topic or circulation, how horses play a role in folklore, looking at my own work on the equestrian spectacle of *tbourida*. I examine horses as the nexus of kinship and horse-keeping prestige, and, finally, how it relates to horses as points of economic drivers in terms of horse racing and gambling, job provision, and tourism and international investment.

Multispecies Lens

Within anthropology, theories regarding human-animal research have advanced from Lévi-Strauss' animals as "good to think with." These theories have slowly moved toward an understanding of human-animal intimacies and the reflection of human morals and values being put upon, enacted, and using animals in the locale, whether street, companion, or animals for husbandry.¹ Human-animal interactions in the Middle East and North Africa offer ways to "interrogate political structures" and demonstrate a wide range of relationships.² Anthropologists Kirksey and Helmreich discuss the shift into multispecies ethnography bringing animals into the "foreground" as "non-human others" in ethnographic accounts, rather than being passive objects.³

In Morocco, the "animal-turn" in anthropology continues to emerge.⁴ Human-animal relationship research needs to be part of the post-colonial framework that incorporates human-animal relationships in discussion with all aspects of anthropology, and to move past Western categories that focus on animal rights and welfare, and other dichotomies in order to rethink, relate, and understand them as part of society.⁵ By looking through a multispecies lens, scholars can more readily understand humans' interaction and incorporation of nature into their culture, rather than putting them into strict categories. I turn attention now to previous work and literature that demonstrates early mentions of horses and how these earlier works, both historically, and in the recent anthropological works, have demonstrated a continued fascination and attempts to describe horses within the Moroccan context.

Human-Horse Relationships in The Maghreb

Horsemanship and veterinary manuals are some of the earliest accounts demonstrating the human-animal relationship, especially in terms of training,

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 206; Radhika Govindrajana, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

2. Marjan Mashkour and Anahita Grisoni, "Introduction: Human-Animal Relationships in the Middle East," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 11, 1 (2016): vi.

3. S. Eben, Kirsey and Stefan Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, 4 (2010): 545, 554.

4. Diana K. Davis and Denys Frappier, "The Social Context of working Equines in the Urban Middle East: the example of the Fez Medina." *The Journal of North African Studies* 5, 4 (2000): 51-68; Jamal Hossaini-Hilali, *Des vétérinaire au Maroc sous le protectorat français* (Rabat: Adrar Edition, 2015); Juan M. Pleguezuelos, Mónica Feriche, José C. Brito, and Soumia Fahd, "Snake Charming and the Exploitation of Snakes in Morocco," *Oryx* (2016): 1-8; Jessica L. Tingle and Tahar Slimani, "Snake Charming in Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies* 22 4 (2017): 560-77; Daniel Bergin and Vincent Nijman, "An Assessment of Welfare Conditions in Wildlife Markets across Morocco," *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 22, 3 (2019): 279-88.

5. Mashkour and Grisoni, "Introduction: Human-Animal Relationships in the Middle East," vi.

raising, caring, and breeding of horses for war, pleasure, and prestige. The earliest of these manuals, *On Horsemanship*, stems from the Greek General Xenophon in 365BCE. Between this publication and the subsequent Mamluk historical accounts that appear in the 13th century, there are almost no surviving texts regarding horsemanship from the Mediterranean region. There are only material culture remains from the Numidians (early Amazigh kingdom that stretched from present-day Morocco to Libya) that were famous for their cavalry and were a primary resource that were traded, utilized in military campaigns, and accounted for in the regional census.⁶

During the Arab Conquest, the idea of *furūsiyya* (Islamic practice of horsemanship and chivalry), texts regarding *furūsiyya*, and early veterinary care spread into North Africa. The Arab tradition conveyed a great understanding through their manuscripts on horse keeping, farriers, and veterinary medicine. The Mamluk soldiers of the Sultanate in Egypt and the Levant from 1250-1517CE became important and influential cavalymen. Their equestrian traditions and tactics became an additional layer to the accretion of equestrian cultures in North Africa. Shihab Al-Sarraf, an historian and expert on *furūsiyya* literature, traces the manuscripts from the Abbasids in Iraq to the Mamluk Sultanate period in Cairo (1250-1517). The historical record is flush with treatises, thanks to the Mamluks' dedication to their horses and horsemanship. As much as Mamluks claimed they were more men of the sword than of the pen, they were prolific when it came to discussing the many intimate details of the skills of a farrier, veterinary work, military exercises, hippodromes, and famous masters of the art of *furūsiyya*. Mamluk court historians wrote detailed accounts about horsemanship, horse care, early veterinary techniques, and other cavalry tidbits. Scholars such as David Ayalon and Shihab al-Sarraf have sifted through the general texts and largely draw from two written by a Mamluk court historian Yusuf Ibn Taghribirdi – the son of one of the Mamluk commanders-in-chief. *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa al-Qāhira* and *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa al-mustawfi ba'd al-wāfi*. While other historians and biographers of Taghribirdi argue that his non-military history is inaccurate and he tends to boast about his own prowess in the military exercises, his descriptions (if not his skill) of *furūsiyya* can be trusted.⁷

Taghribirdi states that “*Furūsiyya* is something different from bravery and intrepidity, for the brave man would throw down his adversary by sheer courage, while the horseman is the one who handles his horse well in his

6. Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 34.

7. David Ayalon, “Notes on the *Furusiyya* Exercises and Games in the Mamluk Sultanate,” *Scripta Heirosolymitana* IX (1961): 34.

charge and in his retreat and who knows what he needs in matters pertaining to his horse and his arms and the arrangement of all this in a manner that he may follow the rules known and established among the people of this art.”⁸ Both Poliak’s and Taghribiridi’s definitions ring true with anyone who has raised, lived around, and ridden horses. Horsemanship is all encompassing and becomes an embodied practice through knowledge, writing, and experience. *Furūsiyya* is more about the knowledge and skill of working with horses, the accoutrement, and the games and exercises associated with it, rather than just bravery or courage as a knight. Other ways of referring to *furūsiyya* is *funūn al-furūsiyya* or *’anwā’ al-furūsiyya* – the art or branch of horsemanship or sometimes *’ilm* – the science discussed in military treatises. Once a Mamluk achieved a level of proficiency, he earned *kamālāt*, or accomplishments or perfection, or *faḍā’il* – possessing the virtues of a true horseman. However, today Mamluk *furūsiyya* literature, or treatises on horsemanship, remain largely unpublished and untranslated.⁹ Another surviving manuscript, *Kitāb al-Bayṭara*, a veterinary treatise focusing on horses from 1766 in Egypt, included an illustration with detailed labels presumed copied from an earlier Mamluk manuscript, and denotes ailments in gold leaf. These manuscripts were edited, adapted, and circulated throughout the Ottoman Empire and through exchange with the Moroccan kingdom for the next 500 years.

The next “texts” that would surface and circulate widely were the colonial manuscripts including travel narratives, colonial instruction manuals, memoirs, and Orientalist art that featured horses, horseback riding, and descriptions of *tbourida*. While North African countries prior to colonization did not experience a similar “invention” of sporting activities, there were early organizations and interest in recreational and sporting pursuits through numerous avenues. There was (and is currently still played) *maṭa*, an equestrian competition exclusive to the north of Morocco, and horse racing, as well as leisure activities such as chess, backgammon, and athletic competitions for strength and running oriented toward men. Moroccans used horses in sports and leisure such as for racing and hunting, but horses were still crucial for warfare and the military leading into World War I. *Tbourida* was employed as a military tactic and had not yet been reinvented as a sport, although it was also common to see public demonstrations of these skills in times of peace.

In the mid 1840s, as the French gained new territory in Algeria, Moroccan Sultans ‘Abd al-Rahman and Hassan I struggled to overhaul the

8. *Nudjum* translation by Ayalon.

9. Shihab Al-Sarraf, “Mamluk Furusiyyah Literature and Its Antecedents,” *Mamluk Studies Review* VIII, 1 (2004): 141-200.

military. Reforming the military was not an easy task, as it was made up of a combination of *gish* (Modern Standard: *jaysh*), or units of professional soldiers, and *na'iba*, the irregular tribal contingents. Moroccans were sent to Ottoman Turkey to train in modern methods of warfare, the *nizāmī* or “ordered” style.¹⁰ While Morocco had relied on their mounted cavalry for centuries, their defeat by the French at the Battle of Isly (near the village of Oujda) in 1844, and by the Spanish in Tetouan in 1860, required new strategies. The reformed Moroccan troops were drilled, dressed in uniforms, ranked, and began to carry the more modern British flintlock rifles. These rifles became the inspiration for the specially-made gunpowder rifles used in *tbourida* today.

When the French encountered *tbourida*, they appropriated the tactic in order to create an indigenous cavalry called the *Spahis* to serve as French auxiliary troops. Rosaldo discusses how Europeans used the knowledge they gathered about the lands and people of this area to increase their power, but also used these ethnographies as complete truths in describing how cultures “really were.”¹¹ Vogl agrees with Rosaldo and adds that “seemingly neutral, or innocent forms of description both reinforced and produced ideologies that justified the imperial project.”¹² This can be seen in European travel narratives’ description of *tbourida*. Edmondo de Amicis’ vivid description of *tbourida* from Tangier illustrates the excitement of a visually stimulating event, at the same time that it emphasizes its exotic and archaic elements:

“My curiosity impelled me to look everywhere at once, but a sudden scream of admiration from a group of women made me turn to the horsemen. There were twelve of them, all of tall stature, with pointed red caps, white mantles, and blue, orange, and red caftans, and among them was a youth (...) the son of the Governor of Rif (...). At first there was a slight hesitation and confusion, but in a moment the twelve horsemen formed but one solid serried line, and skimmed over the ground like a twelve-headed and many-colored monster devouring the way. Nailed to their saddles, with heads erect and white mantles streaming in the wind off their shoulders, riders lifted their rifles above their heads, and pressing them against their shoulders, discharged them all together with

10. Amira K. Bennison, “The “New Order” and Islamic Order: The Introduction of the Nizami Army in the Western Maghrib and Its Legitimation, 1830-1873,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004): 591-612.

11. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 32.

12. Mary B. Vogl, *Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography, (Re)Presentation* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 42.

a yell of triumph, and then vanished in a cloud of smoke and dust. A few moments afterwards, they slowly came back and in disorder – the horses covered with foam and blood, their riders bearing themselves proudly, and then they began again. At every new discharge, the Arab women, like ladies at a tourney, saluted them with a peculiar cry that is a rapid repetition of the monosyllable *Jū* (or in English *yū*) like a sort of joyous trill.”¹³

Thirty years later, Emily Keene, who married the Sharif of Ouazzane, made detailed notes of the horses and harness in her autobiography and records some changes in the spectacle. During one attempt to enter Fez, she encountered a *thourida*: “There was an escort of about twenty men, all well-mounted on gaudy saddles (...). Soon after starting, powder-play began on the road. According as the width of the path allows, so many horsemen form a line abreast, and at a given signal all start, holding a loaded gun high above their heads. The pace increases, the reins are loosened, the gun lowered, and all fire simultaneously. Then the reins are gathered up quickly, and the horses’ progress so quickly arrested that they are thrown almost on their haunches.”¹⁴ These descriptions, and others like them, formed the modern French and English understanding of the Maghrebian horseman, emphasizing as key the spontaneity of the act, but also the common occurrence of the spectacle. Almost every travel narrative, whether English or French, mentions the powder play.

One of the first ethnographic portrayals of Moroccan horsemen was published in 1858 by the French General Eugène Daumas, in *Les Chevaux du Sahara et les mœurs du desert* (*The Horses of the Sahara and the Ways of the Desert*). From 1835 to 1850, Daumas had been stationed in Algeria, eventually becoming the head of the Office of Arab Affairs in Oran. Daumas learned Arabic and was frequently on horseback, building rapport with local conscripted tribesmen. When the great Algerian resistance leader Emir Abd el Kader was captured in 1847, he was taken to France and treated as a captive dignitary with living quarters, access to books, and allowed to receive visitors.¹⁵ During Abd el Kader’s imprisonment, Daumas frequently questioned him to gather an understanding of horses and the importance of the horse in Algeria. In the preface, Daumas claims his writings “were of great help to the French cause, clearing up important problems in connection with

13. Edmondo de Amicis, *Morocco: its people and places* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co, 1882), 45-46.

14. Emily Keene, *My Life Story* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 103.

15. Nora Achrati, “Following the Leader: A History and Evolution of the Amir ‘Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jazairi as Symbol,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 12 (2007): 141.

war, trade, and government.”¹⁶ While his colonial motives were clear, he does make a point of assuring the reader that his goal was to understand the Arab horseman and the breeding of horses. Employing ethnographic techniques, he “wanted to learn, not from hearsay, but from personal observation; not from books, but from men.”¹⁷ He even goes so far as to say he did not gather the information from one person alone but from horsemen of a large tribe, many imprisoned with their leader the Emir, who possessed varying knowledge on the topic, and sought out rare documents in order to help him write his book. The last statement concludes with him declaring he attempts not to make any judgement good or bad, but instead he wrote an ethnographic account to record “this is what the Arabs do.” Daumas’ endeavor to describe what he sees and insights from the riders he interviewed sets his writings apart from the typical travel narratives that describe the “powder play” as something fantastical that happens without understanding its purpose.

A second book, *L’équitation arabe* by General Eduard Descoins, became the French manual for Arab horsemanship among future French officers.¹⁸ Sadly, his style lacks the rhetorical flourish of his predecessor General Daumas, although it nonetheless gives great insight to the principles of Arab equitation. Because French officers with experience riding *à la anglaise*, or English-style, could not effectively communicate with the riders who were riding in Arab-style harness (saddle and bridle), this book instructs riders to “speak the same language.”¹⁹ The English-style of riding that the French officers were accustomed to required constant balance and training for battle conditions. The Arab-style of riding utilized a saddle with a high front and back that enabled long hours in the saddle without constant need for balance, as well as a brace for impact when shooting from horseback. Both of these books resulted from intense military usage of horses and cavalry as part of the French conquest of Algeria launched in 1830, demonstrating that the traditions of horsemanship in the Maghreb persisted and influenced the colonizers.

Anthropologist Edward Westermarck produced the volumes of *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*,²⁰ which made references to animals as part of popular Islamic practices, but left them on the periphery of his research. During post-independence (1956 onward), a growing research interest in Morocco led

16. Eugène Daumas, *The Horses of the Sahara*. Translated by Sheila M. Ohlendorf. Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1971 [1858]), 3.

17. *Ibid.*, 4.

18. General Edouard Descoins, *L’équitation arabe* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1924).

19. General Edouard Descoins, *Arab Equitation: Its Principles its practices*, trans. Luck, James E. (Thorofare: Xlibris Corporation, 1924), 19.

20. Edouard Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 12 vols (New York: University Books, 1926).

anthropologists to the region, most notably Clifford Geertz and his students, with focus on social structures, Islam, and politics within the country. Little attention was paid to the animal husbandry practices except by geographers and other scholars who had interest in agricultural practices. Only Elizabeth Wernock Fernea devotes a few pages to the curiosity her son has in the horses at a local *bourida* festival outside of Marrakesh.²¹ Veterinarian and professor Jamal Hossaïni-Hilali, who has an interest in history, examines the obvious human-animal nexus of veterinary work during the French Protectorate and the establishment of American and British charitable veterinary facilities throughout the country.²²

Geographer and veterinarians Diana K. Davis and Dennis Frappier finally bring the importance of the human-animal relationship to the forefront of Maghreb studies through their work investigating the social context of working equids in Fez.²³ Through historical and current examination, the authors demonstrate the importance of these animals (horses, mules, and donkeys in this case) to the local economy, especially since the city was built to accommodate two donkeys loaded with packs passing each other in the street. The relationships, dependency, and importance of veterinary care to the animals' owners scratch the surface of inquiry as to how these human-animal interactions keep the *medina* of Fez alive in the 21st century.

All of these authors had specific purposes (often times colonial) or backgrounds for writing about horses, horsemanship, equine welfare, and veterinary work, but there is still room to push into the multispecies frontier to gain an understanding of Maghrebian culture and society. As anthropologists, we can use the multispecies lens to examine aspects such as equestrian folklore through *moussems* that feature *bourida* (or *fantasia*) and *maça*, and horse racing traditions that have become more commercialized. These events are highly important spaces of cultural identification and what it means to be Moroccan. Those who practice the equestrian arts are typically also a part of a familial history of raising horses. Others of the younger generations are getting involved in horse keeping and raising for the prestige. The examination of the human-horse relationship can lead to understanding of social-relations among humans in terms of kinship and gender. The economics of horse keeping are also a large part of understanding how the Moroccan government and people

21. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *A Street in Marrakech* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1975).

22. Jamal Hossaïni-Hilali, *Des vétérinaire au Maroc sous le protectorat français* (Rabat: Adrar Edition, 2015).

23. Davis and Frappier, "The Social Context of working Equines in the Urban Middle East."

monetize their heritage and culture for domestic and international tourism and leisure.

In the past 30 years, horse events, racing, and shows have grown from small local affairs to large international events drawing European contestants, as well as encouraging training, and schooling for Moroccans in farrier and blacksmithing, showing, grooming, and horse keeping. The Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture created *La Société Royale d'Encouragement du Cheval* (The Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Horse, henceforth SOREC) in 2003 to take over the horse racing industry, the organization and maintenance of the royal and government breeding farms, and the safeguarding of the Moroccan breeds. This organization is the driving force of the monetization of horse competitions and the creation of the largest horse-themed gathering in Africa, *Salon du Cheval*. I will address these thematic foci individually for their potential within an anthropological inquiry.

Folklore

While folklore takes on many meanings, the definition is broad and all-encompassing allowing for many avenues of inquiry in relation to horses. Folklore refers to expressive traditions common to a culture that is transmitted through the generations; the most commonly studied being folktales, oral history, proverbs, and jokes. It also includes material culture and performative works (that are classified as other than fine arts), leading to a better understanding of the significance these tales and items hold for a particular group of people. Like culture, it carries many definitions and debates, but as William Bascom notes, “folklore serves to sanction and validate religious, social, political and economic institutions and to play an important role as an educative device in their transmission from one generation to another, there can be no thorough analysis of any of these other parts of culture which does not give serious consideration to folklore.”²⁴ By focusing on proverbs, Islamic hadiths, folktales, and charms put on the horse, anthropologists can make inferences based on their importance in society at a given time. The ability to own horses, care for them, and use them in battle and now for competition, has changed over the centuries and these types of folklore offer glimpses into the changing human-horse relationship in Morocco. Overall, this is a large expectation for folklore, so I will discuss a few examples from my fieldwork focusing on the *moussems* or saint’s day festivals that feature a horse spectacle.

24. William R. Bascom, “Folklore and Anthropology,” in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 26.

Tbourida originates from traditions of Amazigh (or Berber) and Arab Bedouin warfare. In Morocco, the word *tbourida* derives from the Arabic word *baroud*, meaning gunpowder, and used in the phrase *la'ab al bārūd*, or gunpowder games.²⁵ In the pre-colonial Maghreb region (pre-1830), members of tribes performed or used *tbourida* for nomadic raids, which the French colonial authorities referred to as *razzias*, a deformation of the Algerian Arabic word for a raid, or *ghaziya*. *Tbourida*, in pre-colonial times, was a tribe or army's vanguard cavalry charge, with male riders on their horses galloping at their enemy and shooting in unison – a maneuver that became iconic throughout North Africa, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. *Tbourida* was also performed at rites of passage such as births, circumcisions, marriage, and for *moussems* – saint's day festivals – through the early twentieth century. As of 2019, the *tbourida* spectacle remains a male-dominated pastime and sport, but a few women participate in their own all-female troupes and some ride with male-teams.

Unlike *tbourida*, the horse *mousssem* of *Maṭa* takes place only once a year in May, in the rural village of Zniyed located east of Asilah. The rolling green hills are the field for the *mousssem* celebrating the spring and rebirth. Centuries ago, the Sufi saint Moulay Abdeslam traveled to the steppes of Asia and witnessed *buzkashi* being played. It is rumored that he brought it back to Morocco and mixed it with local customs for it to evolve to what it is today. At the festival, the tribes compete to capture a small female puppet from the reigning champion team. Riders gallop their Barb mares at break-neck speeds to compete in front of the local families and Moroccan spectators who have come for the festival. Like *tbourida*, this is predominantly an all-male event. Zohra, a lone woman, has earned the championship for her tribe multiple times, resulting in a changing attitude toward women participating in the festival. Only in the past eleven years has this *mousssem* received revival from a prominent family and financing from SOREC and the FRMSE. The SOREC-sponsored horse-racing gambling parlors also financially support the national *tbourida* competitions. The *Mata mousssem* now features a small market of cooperatives selling handicrafts, honey, and sweets, as well as a musical festival to draw more visitors to stay for the entire evening. However, for SOREC and FRMSE, this festival remains a low priority since the festival takes place always on the same week as the Week of the Horse in Rabat, which features more money, international competitors, and events held all in the same

25. Gwyneth Talley, "Tbourida: Performing Traditional Equestrianism as Heritage Tourism in Morocco," in *Equestrian Cultures in Global & Local Contexts*, eds. Miriam Adelman and Kirrilly Thompson (New York: Springer, 2017), 220.

place. This singular event offers much for anthropological inquiry in terms of the large scale traveling of horse traditions, horse rearing, an examination of gender roles, adaptation and revival of traditions for domestic tourism and economic benefit, and the safeguarding of cultural heritage. Understanding how cultures change and adapt is the crux upon which anthropology fastens itself.

One of the main issues up for debate on the participation of a particular team in a *moussem* rests on the ‘feel’ of the festival. Large festivals pay for nationally-recognized musical acts throughout the week, bring in handicraft vendors, and food stalls, and offer large exhibitions of horses and other skills. They festivals typically have money and sponsorship from the regional government, as well as SOREC and FRMSE. Festivals, like the Moussem Moulay Abdullah Amghar near the city of El-Jadida, were once the yearly meeting of the Doukkali tribes and celebrated the saint for which the village is named. Now the festival drives economic growth for the town, with the festival growing larger each year, requiring months of planning, policing forces to organize and protect exhibitors, and large amounts of money for the tickets to see various musical groups.

Female and male *tbourida* leaders confided to me how they choose which festivals their troupes attend. “I don’t go to SOREC-sponsored,” says one male leader (name omitted). “At those festivals it is all about money, and not about the atmosphere.” Another leader and historian of *tbourida* said it had to deal with corruption of the organization, “Originally, the judges scored the teams this way...(indicating the score sheet he showed me), but one leader talked to them and offered them money, and so the other teams were shuffled and those who go on to the next round of competitions were altered.” The SOREC and FRMSE excludes all-female troupes and female competitors for the Hassan II *Tbourida* trophy awarded at the Week of the Horse in Rabat. This relegates the female riders to the local festivals.

When I ask *tbourida* leaders to define the spectacle in the abstract, the common phrase is “*Tbourida* is *cha’bi*,” or of the people, a popular cultural phenomenon. Figures like Baa Thami and Baa Hayri appear at traditional festivals, pouring water over their heads, and breaking jars on the ground when a troupe completes an excellently synchronized discharge of the rifles. These male characters harken back to early judges of *tbourida*. Another common figure on the edge of the *tbourida* fields is the *gharab*, the water bearer, in their red costume, the bells and brass cups dangling down their torso, and the goat fur waterskin. This is a common symbol of Moroccan

folklore and dearly beloved by Moroccans and foreign tourists. A troupe of musicians wanders between the tents, offering sounds of the *lira* in concert with drums, the *qrāqeb* (castanets), and a female *shikhāt* (dancer). They create a convivial atmosphere and become a source of income for the poorer musical ensembles of the region. Other events that occur in tandem with rural festivals involve dog racing (‘Arbaoua), falconry (Moulay Abdullah), and musical ensembles large and small, along with a large market, food vending, and carnival rides. Another *tbourida* leader claimed the qualifying competitions lacked the feeling, characters, and other events mentioned above surrounding the equestrian spectacle. To this anthropologist, there are stark differences between the sterile, organized competitions, and the rural festivals. When discussing my observations with Dr. Jamal Hossaini-Hilali, who is a *tbourida* enthusiast as well as equine veterinarian, he suggested that the rural festivals are “bio” or organic–purer versions of what *tbourida* and local festivals should be, versus the organization and money-focused competitions. Horse competitions as folklore offer a tense and interesting debate over authenticity. Horse keeping, riding, and breeding practices also lead to deep rooted questions of societal values and tensions.

Relatedness

Many Moroccan anthropologists have focused their studies on kinship and relationships among Arab and Berber groups, understanding how relationships from childhood grow, change, and develop. Familial kinships have been proven to be fluid, but can also incorporate similar interests within families. When looking through the multispecies lens, anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan suggests that we “recognize that human pasts, presents, and futures are gathered with the pasts, presents, and futures of the multiplicity of nonhuman animals who share worlds with them.”²⁶ Instead of understanding animals as a symbolic metaphor for a society, horses should be considered as subjects with agency, intention, and capacity for emotion in shaping the relationships they have with humans.²⁷ Govindrajan’s work that examines caring for sacrificial animals in India, opens the door for humans and animals to share a relatedness.

With Clutton-Brock’s contention that “a domestic animal is a cultural artefact of human society,”²⁸ I encourage analysis of animals in the Maghreb as

26. Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies*, 4.

27. *Ibid.*, 6.

28. Juliet Clutton-Brock, “The unnatural world: Behavioral aspects of humans and animals in the process of domestication,” in *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*, eds. Aubrey Manning and James A. Serpell (London: Routledge, 1994), 28.

part of understanding human society. In his discussion of racehorses, Lévi-Strauss contended that horses “do not form part of human society either as subjects or objects (...) they are products of human industry and they are born and live as isolated individuals juxtaposed in stud farms devised for their own sake (...) they constitute the de-socialized condition of existence of private society.”²⁹ Through my fieldwork, I suggest the opposite: that horses in *tbourida* are both subjects and objects in particular contexts. They are neither the single result of human industry through breeding, buying and selling, nor are they always a subject or possess full agency over their lives. Rather, Moroccan riders and horses in *tbourida* are part of a system of deep engagement, interdependency, and ‘becoming with’ each other.³⁰

Amal’s relationship with her horse, previously mentioned above, demonstrates how horses have been incorporated into family, giving the horse a “relational” position labeled as baby, or brother, or king of the farm. These titles and growing relationships show an emergence of human-horse relationships that are more than working partners, objects upon which the household depends, or passive subjects that absorb meanings, rather than make meaning.

This is not a singular event. Families that are long time horse-raisers, typically keep their horses within the family, passing down generations of horse knowledge and bloodlines, creating close links between the horses and families. Other horse owners and *tbourida* riders described their relations that sustained their participation in *tbourida* as encompassing family and ancestors, as well as non-kin friends, and kin-relatedness with their own horses.³¹ When examining horses as economic drivers, we also see how familial ties to horse breeding and keeping become a powerful source of money.

Economic Drivers

Scholars discuss heritage policies as strategies for the promotion of traditions, whether they are marginal, neglected, or celebrated local treasures. Through the monetizing of *tbourida* competitions, the idea is to promote folklore that can work symbiotically with tourist development programs. *Tbourida* is a common spectacle shown on postcards, and if young riders can earn money through competitions or performing at one

29. Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 206.

30. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 16.

31. Rebecca Cassidy, *The Sport of Kings: Kinship, Class and Thoroughbred Breeding in Newmarket* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32; Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship at the Core: An Anthropology of Elmdon, a Village in North-west Essex in the Nineteen-sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), xxxi.

of the two dinner spectacle shows in Marrakesh, the folkloric performance remains visible.

In the Maghreb culture, horse keeping has been an ongoing prestigious endeavor. Only royalty, nobles, and those with elite-status could afford the costs of horses. Today, owning horses is a costly, family enterprise, but also focus has shifted to breeding lines. Papered horses that have been certified as purebred Arab, Arab-Barb, or Barb breeds offer a larger monetary reward for breeding, competing, and selling. During the colonial and post-colonial eras in Morocco, both the French Protectorate power and the monarchy took an interest in creating governmental horse farms for the military, and eventually breeding services were provided gratis for the public. However, there was a lack of clear bloodlines, documentation, and record keeping. It was not until the 1980s, when Princess Lalla Amina, sister of Hassan II, began a breeding program to meet the challenge of improving and keeping records of Moroccan horses.³² This program led to a renewed interest in keeping horses by the younger generations.

One example demonstrates the historical familial relationship to horses and the monetary relationship. When I interviewed Yassine, a young *tbourida* rider in his mid-20s, he told me that his family had many generations of men in the position of the local *sharif*. His grandfather had been a *sharif*, leading a troupe of *tbourida* riders in the 1960s and 1970s. After his grandfather died, his grandmother remained on the farm for many years. Yassine's father had moved to the city for work, while still keeping horses on the farm with hired help who lived nearby. After Yassine's older brother Reda married, he and his wife took over the farm from their grandmother to raise horses on a larger scale and to give their grandmother some respite from tending a large home. In March 2018, when I visited Reda and Yassine's horse breeding operation on the farm, they had one stallion, six mares, and several new foals. Yassine even joked to me that he had sold his car to buy a horse, demonstrating the literal and figurative cost of owning papered horses. He took two summers off from riding in *tbourida* to focus on the breeding and showing his Barb horses in the regional SOREC competitions. With his winnings, Yassine and his brother buy more horses to breed, sell, and trade to increase and improve their bloodstock, growing their name and reputation as quality Barb horse breeders.

32. Philippe Barbier de Préaudau et Jean-François Robinet, *Maroc: Les chevaux du Royaume* (Panayrac: Daniel Briand, 1990), 135.

Conclusion

On the micro-level, Amal Ahamri, Yassine, and his brother Reda, are examples of an overall shift in human-horse relationships in Morocco. Amal demonstrates an intimacy with her horse Sharam Sheik, not only as an object or gift from her husband, but as an animal that has been incorporated into her life as a relationship that she values. Yassine and Reda work and sacrifice to build their farm, and their interest in raising and breeding horses harkens back to their familial history with horses and *tbourida*, working for economic gain and prestige through these animals. On the macro-level, *tbourida* and other equestrian festivals and competitions showcase human-horse folk life and demonstrate current issues existing in a growing equestrian industry. They offer glimpses into tensions between human-horse relationships, folklore, tourism, and professional competitions. Between the micro and macro levels of looking at horses, Amal and Yassine demonstrate a relatedness with their horses, owning and raising horses, and the emphasis on familial ties to horses. In Morocco, when looking through the multispecies lens, horses are at the nexus of folklore, relatedness, and economy when examining horse festivals, horse breeding, and keeping.

As Sandra Swart notes of horses in South Africa, the horses not only “provide power and transportation, but also alter their biophysical and social environments in various ways.”³³ She suggests that historians and, as I argue, anthropologists examining horses help us explore history and anthropology “from below,” making horses the exploited elements who are an example of oppression and agency.³⁴ By examining horses through the historical writings and early ethnographic accounts that mention them, horses remain on the periphery of human society, without being understood as important factors to families, royalty, politicians, and colonial powers, but also their part in shaping cities, kingdoms, and the rural folk landscape. There are numerous and diverse directions to examine the human-horse relationship via gender roles and human attitudes toward their closeness with their horses, examining and advocating for horse and animal welfare programs within the country, looking at horses in tourism on a larger scale, and historical usage and disuse of horses throughout North African history. My examination of *tbourida* and other horse activities provides a small glimpse into the possibilities of what the multispecies lens can show us about human-animal relations.

33. Sandra Swart, “The World the Horses Made:” A South African Case Study of Writing Animals into Social History,” *International Review of Social History* 55, 2 (2010): 242.

34. Roderick Nash, “American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier,” *Pacific History Review* 41 (1972): 363.

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علاقات الإنسان بالحصان في المغرب: ماذا يمكن للخيول أن تخبرنا عنه بخصوص المجتمع

ملخص: يتواصل في المغرب ظهور ما يسمى "منعطف الحيوان" في حقل الأنثروبولوجيا. ويجب أن تكون الأبحاث في مواضيع العلاقات بين الإنسان والحيوان جزءاً من إطار ما بعد الاستعمار الذي يدمج العلاقات بين الإنسان والحيوان في المناقشة مع بقية جوانب الأنثروبولوجيا الأخرى، وأن يتخطى الفئات الغربية التي تركز على حقوق الحيوان ورفاهه، والانقسامات الأخرى من أجل إعادة التفكير وربطها وفهمها باعتبارها جزء من المجتمع. ومن خلال النظر عبر زوايا متعددة، يمكن للدارسين فهم تفاعل البشر وإدماج الطبيعة في ثقافتهم بسهولة أكبر، بدلاً من تصنيفها في فئات محددة بصرامة. وبالنسبة للمغاربة ممن يمارسون تقاليد الفروسية الفولكلورية في ما يسمى بالتبوريدة، أو غيرهم ممن يربون الخيول ويحافظون على وجودها، ولديهم خيول يستخدمونها في أعمالهم، تكتسي الخيول لديهم معاني أعمق تتجاوز هذه المستويات. وتعتبر الخيول موضع اهتمام مركزي للبحث الأنثروبولوجي مثل الفولكلور والقيم والتوترات المجتمعية والدوافع الاقتصادية في شمال إفريقيا. وباستخدام مثال المغرب، أناقش الأعمال الأنثروبولوجية السابقة التي وضعت الخيول في الهامش، إما بحكم الموضوع أو التداول، مع الإشارة إلى إسهام الخيول بدور فاعل في الفولكلور. كما ألقى نظرة على عملي الخاص المتعلق بمشهد الفروسية في التبوريدة. وهذا فضلاً عن اهتمامي بمعالجة موضوع الخيول باعتبارها صلة الوصل بين مكانة القرابة ورعاية الخيول. وناقشت أخيراً، كيفية ارتباط الخيول بتنشيط الحركة الاقتصادية، كما هو الحال مع سباقات الخيول ورهانات المقامرة، وما يرتبط بها من توفير للوظائف وفرص الشغل، فضلاً عن الإسهام في تنمية السياحة وتعزيز الاستثمارات الخارجية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: خيول، التبوريدة، الفنتازيا، فولكلور، تربية الحيوانات، مشهد، أصناف متعددة.

Relations homme-cheval au Maroc: Ce que les équidés peuvent nous dire sur la société

Résumé: Au Maroc, le “tournant animal” en anthropologie continue d’émerger. La recherche sur les relations homme-animal doit faire partie du cadre postcolonial qui intègre les relations homme-animal dans la discussion avec tous les aspects de l’anthropologie, et dépasser les catégories occidentales qui se concentrent sur les droits et le bien-être des animaux, et d’autres dichotomies afin de repenser, les relier et les comprendre comme faisant partie de la société. En regardant à travers une lentille multi-espèces, les chercheurs peuvent plus facilement comprendre l’interaction des humains et l’incorporation de la nature dans leur culture, plutôt que de les classer dans des catégories strictes. Pour les Marocains pratiquant la tradition équestre folklorique de la *tbourida*, ou pour ceux qui élèvent et gardent chez eux des chevaux, et ont des chevaux qu’ils utilisent dans leur travail: les chevaux ont des significations plus profondes en dehors de la mégafaune assidue. Les chevaux sont une plaque tournante pour la recherche anthropologique telle que le folklore, les valeurs et tensions sociétales, et les moteurs économiques en Afrique du Nord. En prenant l’exemple du Maroc, je discute des travaux anthropologiques antérieurs qui ont régulé les chevaux à la périphérie, soit en vertu du sujet ou de la circulation, comment les chevaux jouent un rôle dans le folklore, puis je regarde mon propre travail sur le spectacle équestre de la *tbourida*. J’examine également les chevaux en tant que lien entre la parenté et le prestige de l’élevage et, enfin, j’explique comment cela se rapporte aux chevaux en tant que moteurs économiques en termes de courses de chevaux et de jeux d’argent, de création d’emplois, de tourisme et d’investissement international.

Mots-clés: Chevaux, *tbourida*, fantasia, folklore, élevage, spectacle, multi-espèces.