

Decolonization and the Politics of Wildlife in Africa

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The establishment of European colonial rule on the African continent not only involved the colonization of nature, but essentially meant colonization through nature. But in how far did decolonization across Africa south of the Sahara equally affect the sphere of ecology and relationships between humans and wildlife? Have Africa's wild animals ever been decolonized? Discussing these questions in a historical and trans-disciplinary perspective was the aim of the international conference „Decolonization and the Politics of Wildlife in Africa“, which was funded by the German Research Foundation's programme „Point Sud“ and hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study (South Africa). In their introductory remarks, conveners BERNHARD GISSIBL (Mainz) and FELIX SCHÜRMAN (Kassel) elaborated on the challenges of developing a historically informed perspective on decolonization. They distinguished five levels of how this term might be usefully applied as an analytical category to the wildlife sector.

The opening panel addressed some of the conference's key issues in a long-term perspective, tracing developments from pre- to post-independence decades. Understanding the systematic exclusion of poor communities as a core path dependency of the various conservation paradigms applied in South Africa, ANNETTE HÜBSCHLE-FINCH (Cape Town) argued that conservation has never been pro-poor or pro-community development but unfairly privileged political or economic elites. Recent and allegedly inclusive approaches, such as trans-frontier parks, too continue to

exclude local communities from the economic benefits of conservation. This was, however, not only an effect of unequal historical power constellations, but also a consequence of unduly homogenizing and romantic notions of „community“, which urgently need redress and differentiation. KATIE MCKEOWN (Johannesburg) pointed out that the medium film significantly contributed to the emergence of a global conservationist interest in African wildlife. Tracing continuities and discontinuities within wildlife filmmaking in East Africa from the 1940s to the 1970s, she demonstrated how wildlife documentaries shifted their focus more and more to natural history and animal behaviour, increasingly neglecting humans and their relations to animals. STUART A. MARKS (Richmond / Bloemfontein) portrayed the wildlife resource management of the Valley Bisa in Zambia's central Luangwa Valley from the 1930s to the 1980s as a semi-autonomous blend of indigenous and state concerns. Considering the pervasive impact of vernacular cultural contexts on the Valley Bisa's 'lineage husbandry', he provoked discussions if decolonization affected local human ecologies of wildlife at all.

Concluding the first day with the opening keynote, JANE CARRUTHERS (Pretoria) presented the fascinatingly broad canvas of the environmental and colonial history of South Africa since the seventeenth century. Pointing out changing forms of statehood, rivalries between Anglo and Afrikaner settlers and a multiplicity of social relations, she complicated too easy notions of 'colonization' and 'decolonization'. To re-envision the relations between nature and culture, between environment and society, and between humans and nonhuman species, she encouraged to understand Africa also as a testing ground for adapting to the new global condition of the 'Anthropocene'.

The transnationalization of wildlife governance in post-independence decades took center stage in panel 2. Tracing the late-colonial and early-independence discourse of sustainable wildlife cropping, RAF DE BONT (Maastricht) exemplified how a small, international community of western scientists sought to balance conservation in Africa with

agricultural development. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these elite conservationists placed great hopes in wildlife meat production through controlled hunting and game ranching. Although many of their endeavors ended in disappointment, these efforts constitute not only an often-overlooked complement to policies of park-based preservation, but also a root of later policies of sustainable utilization. Providing examples from Kenya and Tanzania, DÖRTE LERP (Cologne) elaborated on the entanglements between conservation, tourism, and development. Having emerged during colonial rule, this nexus turned into a major stimulus after independence, when national and international actors alike expected wildlife tourism to be a one-size-fits-all solution for development as well as for conservation. The growing influence of the international tourism industry on Kenyan and Tanzanian policies during the 1960s and 1970s, however, created new dependencies. Drawing from the experiences of a distinguished career as the general manager of Table Mountain National Park, BRETT MYRDAL (Cape Town) analyzed the history of Cape Town's national park and its governance system. First called for in 1928 but only proclaimed seventy years later, Table Mountain National Park carries a legacy from apartheid as well as from a north-south political divide among the white ruling class that dates back as far as the Boer War. Only after 1994, when national parks were no longer seen as a symbol of Afrikaner nationalism, the idea of environmental justice could be incorporated into the governance of Table Mountain.

Panel 3 shed light on the transformation of human-animal relations in late-colonial and early-independence East Africa. CELESTE ALEXANDER (Princeton) outlined how researchers understood bush elephants in Tanzania's Serengeti-Mara ecosystem as destructive agents during early-independence years, but eventually appreciated them as a 'keystone species'. Moving through and generating shifting fields of relation, elephants resisted easy classification and straddled symbolic and material divides. Sketching the rivaling scientific conceptions and funding policies behind the making of the Serengeti

Research Institute, BERNHARD GISSIBL (Mainz) portrayed this institution as a microcosm of the big push of conservation in Tanzania during the 1960s. He interpreted the institute as a contact zone between various scientific disciplines of wildlife, between Western researchers and African research assistants, between Western donors and African politicians, and between the sciences, the politics, and the management of wildlife. Further, the panel was supposed to feature a presentation by PETER KAMAU (Nairobi), who, as a former Elephant Program Officer at the Kenya Wildlife Service, wanted to investigate the historical transformation of human-elephant relationships in Kenya's Tsavo region. Regrettably, Kamau was hindered from leaving the country owing to the political turmoil of Kenya's post-election crisis.

Panel 4 shifted the perspective to the question how decolonization affected individual wildlife species. Using the case of pygmy hippos in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast, STEPHANIE ZEHNLE (Essen-Duisburg) focused on a species inhabiting peripheral border regions where colonial states had only limited presence. After the independence of Liberia and Ivory Coast, a network formed by activists and researchers advocated for the protection of pygmy hippos. Since this network operated on a transnational scale, its relations with NGOs, forest rangers, and other actors pursuing a national or local agenda proved to be difficult. ESTHER MARIJNEN (Sheffield) took a closer look on post-independence gorilla tourism in the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in Virunga National Park. Under the conditions of ongoing violent crises, this conservation tourism is confined to a few highly securitized enclaves. The separation of tourists from resident populations, however, fosters the persistence of colonial narratives and imaginative geographies of 'gorilla land' and human-gorilla relations. Using examples from Tanganyika and Southern Rhodesia, FELIX SCHÜRMAN (Kassel) demonstrated how the invention and spread of the tranquilizer gun dynamized rhino conservation efforts in the years around 1960. The introduction of this technique coincided with transformations in the media landscape, and

the rhino relocation operations of these years rated among the first conservation measures to be arranged in anticipation of media impact.

In an afternoon lecture adjunct to this panel, MIEKE ROSCHER (Kassel) adopted the perspective of human-animal studies to systematically dissect various levels and meanings of animal agency in the context of wildlife encounters. Taking the famous 'man-eating' lions of Tsavo as a case study, Roscher argued for a multi-relational analysis that avoids abstract and homogenizing categorizations of animals and rather understands them as 'agents-in-the-world'.

Panel 5 brought together presentations emphasizing vernacular representations and practices of human-wildlife relations. Exploring characterizations of animals in the writings of D. O. Fagunwa, OLUWOLE COKER (Ile-Ife) argued that the Nigerian author's novels serve as a template for wildlife conservation, animal ethics, and biodiversity. As Fagunwa expounded the intricacies of human-animal relationships among Yoruba in the mid-twentieth century, he foregrounded the place of wildlife consciousness in indigenous epistemology. Using oral testimonies, written personal accounts, and archival sources, RICHARD MTISI (Decorah) examined the meaning of decolonization to rural people in Chilotlela, a Zimbabwean village sandwiched between the Mozambique/Zimbabwe border and Gonarezhou National Park. Given the traumatic experiences of colonial land alienation, eviction, and displacement, there is a common perception in Chilotlela that conservation areas constitute another 'land grab' and that the benefits of independence have not filtered down southeastern Zimbabwe. JULIE WEISKOPF (La Crosse) analyzed the transformation of the eastern reaches of Tanzania's Buha region after the attainment of independence. Based on archival sources and oral histories, she demonstrated how the local Ha people appropriated the language and key terminology of decolonization to counter state assertions to the Moyowosi game reserve with their own claims to the area as their ancestral heritage.

In this day's lecture, MAANO RAMUTSINDELA (Cape Town) took a critical look at the

recent popularity of trans-frontier or 'peace parks' across Southern Africa, questioning their capacity to actually address the long legacy of the Berlin conference, i.e. the coloniality of externally imposed borders. While acknowledging that the ecological interrelationships that have been invoked to rationalize trans-frontier parks have the capacity to rethink boundaries in African politics, Ramutsindela pointed to the unresolved issue of land claims to state that Peace Parks have actually served as justification for denying land reform. Therefore, they can only be understood as an instrument of decolonization for wildlife, not for people.

Panel 6 took a closer look to the controversial relationship between hunting and conservation. RICHARD MTISI focused on the often-neglected case of Portuguese imperial policies in late-colonial Mozambique to analyze their policies of permitting people's residence in many of the country's protected areas. Using archival records as well as oral testimonies, he revealed that Shangaan-speakers living inside such areas were subjected to hunting regulations that, although oftentimes lacking enforcement, were inimical to rural populations and created conflicts among them. ANNETTE A. LAROCCO (Boca Raton) examined Botswana's 2014 decision to end all hunting, subsistence and commercial, from the perspective of domestic politics related to development, identity, and the postcolonial state's engagement with the San population living in conservation-adjacent communities. The changes to the legality of subsistence hunting appear to have more to do with what a hunter symbolizes in postcolonial Botswana, than a stated conservation goal, whereas the impetus for the end to trophy hunting reflects an overarching trend in the global conservation movement towards an animal rights perspective. The panel should also have included a presentation by REUBEN M. MATHEKA (Njoro) on the roots of the nexus between recreational hunting and conservation in Kenya. Unfortunately, also his participation fell victim to the political crisis in post-election Kenya.

In this afternoon's lecture, DAN BROCKINGTON (Sheffield) reflected on the role of conservation NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa,

presenting two ways of analyzing their influential role in the politics of wildlife. After charting the instrumental role of NGOs in the neocolonial bolstering of fortress conservation after Tanzania's independence, he went on to present a sectoral approach that understands NGOs not as individual agents, but as interlinked collectives. Drawing upon material from a subcontinental-wide survey of conservation NGOs, Brockington revealed important qualifications regarding NGO's support of protected areas, their differentiated relationships towards states, as well as their changing and opportunist mobilization of various forms of capital and networks.

The seventh and final panel was dedicated to post-independence transformations of the politics of wildlife and the governance of conservation areas. JEFF SCHAUER (Las Vegas) analyzed the merger of Kenya's two wildlife agencies into a new Wildlife Management and Conservation Department in the mid-1970s. Whereas the influence of the World Bank on this decision highlights the significance of neo-colonial and neo-liberal influences, the power of global conservationists represents another version of infringement on state sovereignty. Exploring the nascent 'Greater uMfolozi Biodiversity Economy node' in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, ADRIAN NEL (Pietermaritzburg) discussed whether its purported community involvement and beneficiation represents a form of decolonization, or a further form of neoliberal biodiversity conservation. While black rhino protection through increased conservation territory may be feasible, the node itself may prove to be something of a white elephant when it comes to delivering on its other conservation and developmental aims. BAXTER TAVUYANAGO (Masvingo) scrutinized the impacts of the CAMPFIRE program on local communities adjoining Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park. While it brought about some marginal benefits to these Tsonga communities during the first decade of its implementation, the program remained largely a Western-driven project by elite animal conservationists that failed to empower indigenous people and to improve their life.

In a final keynote, SANDRA SWART (Stellenbosch) made the case for animal-sensitive

histories in and out of Africa. Charting the fascinating human history of baboons across Africa, Europe, and North America, she combined the semantic history of the species with its agency in historical situations, pointing out their key role as epistemological objects for the scientific clarification of human evolutionary nature. Revealing the changing human relationships to baboons and their culture, Swart convincingly argued not for an animal turn, but for the value of mainstreaming animals into historical narratives.

The conference was concluded by a round table discussion. Following short thought-pieces by JANE CARRUTHERS (Pretoria), MIEKE ROSCHER (Kassel), SANDRA SWART (Stellenbosch), and MAANO RAMUTSINDELA (Cape Town), the discussion addressed the key themes that emerged during the conference and called for a more complex interpretative framework that just continuity and change to understand decolonization. Further discussions centered around the possible place of wildlife conservation within a general history of Africa, the possible design of a decolonized conservation area, or the pitfalls of romanticizing 'indigenous knowledge' as counter project to colonial knowledge. While this was acknowledged, animal-sensitive histories still have a lot to learn from insights out of Africa such as Chinua Achebe's, who once famously claimed that, „until the lion has a historian of its own, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.“

Conference Overview:

Welcome & Introduction

Issa Fofana (Frankfurt am Main) / Bernhard Gißibl (Mainz) / Felix Schürmann (Kassel)

Panel 1: Exclusion, Media, Communities: Key Themes in Long Views

Chair: Raf de Bont (Maastricht)

Annette Hübschle-Finch (Cape Town): The Path Dependency of the Conservation Paradigm in Southern Africa: How Systematic Exclusion of Communities Facilitates Poaching and Wildlife Trafficking

Katie McKeown (Johannesburg): From Savage Splendor to Mysterious Castles of Clay: A Genealogy of Wildlife Filmmaking in East

Africa, 1949–1978

Stuart A. Marks (Richmond/Bloemfontein): 'Lineage Husbandry': Local Wildlife Management under a Colonial Protectorate in Northern Rhodesia and Zambia (1930–1980)

Opening Keynote

Jane Carruthers (Pretoria): Decolonization and the Politics of Wildlife in South Africa: Reflecting on Past and Present

Panel 2: Wildlife Governance between Endogenous and Exogenous Actors

Chair: Felix Schürmann (Kassel)

Raf de Bont (Maastricht): Eating Game: International Conservation and the Rebranding of African Wildlife, 1955–1965

Dörte Lerp (Cologne): Parks and Recreation: Wildlife Tourism to Kenya and Tanzania in the 1960s and 1970s

Brett Myrdal (Cape Town): A Political Ecology Perspective of Governance of the Table Mountain National Park, Cape Town, South Africa

Panel 3: Conceptualizing and Managing Wildlife in East African Decolonization

Chair: Daniel Brockington (Sheffield)

Celeste Alexander (Princeton): How Elephants Became a Keystone Species: Moral Jurisdictions of Human-Elephant Entanglement in Postcolonial Tanzania

Bernhard Gißibl (Mainz): Decolonization and the Sciences of Wildlife: The Making of the Serengeti Research Institute

Peter N. Kamau (Nairobi): Shifting Human-Elephant Relations and Landscape Transformation in Tsavo, Kenya

Panel 4: Species of Decolonization

Chair: Sandra Swart (Stellenbosch)

Stephanie Zehnle (Essen-Duisburg): West African Pygmy Hippos between International Zoological Enigma and National Icons

Esther Marijnen (Sheffield): Gorilla Tourism in a War Zone: The Commodification of War and the (Re-)Colonization of the Human-gorilla Encounter

Felix Schürmann (Kassel): The Impacts of the Tranquillizer Gun on Late-colonial and Early-independence Rhino Conservation Policies, 1955–1972

Invited Lecture

Mieke Roscher (Kassel): Animal Agency in Wildlife Encounters

Panel 5: Vernacular Representations and Practices

Chair: Maano Ramutsindela (Cape Town)

Oluwole Coker (Ile-Ife): Fagunwa's Weird Life as Wildlife Consciousness in African Creative Imagination

Richard Mtisi (Decorah): „They Must Use the Old Line“: Contested Memories of Decolonization in Chilotlela, Southeastern Zimbabwe

Julie Weiskopf (La Crosse): Mediating the Moyowosi: Game Scouts, Locals, and Tourists in Western Tanzania

Invited Lecture

Maano Ramutsindela (Cape Town): Decolonizing Borders through Peace Parks? Historical and Contemporary Evidence

Panel 6: The Great Debate: Hunting and Conservation

Chair: Bernhard Gißibl (Mainz)

Reuben M. Matheka (Njoro): Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation in Kenya, 1951–1977

Richard Mtisi (Decorah): The Portuguese Had no Elephant Policy? Contested Histories of Portuguese Conservation Policies in Mozambique, 1920–1975

Annette A. LaRocco (Boca Raton): „We've Stopped with this Killing“: The Hunting Ban and Postcolonial Shifts in Botswana's Wildlife Regime

Invited Lecture

Dan Brockington (Sheffield): Conservation in Africa and Conservation NGOs

Panel 7: Decolonizing Policies and Governance?

Chair: Jane Carruthers (Pretoria)

Jeff Schauer (Las Vegas): „Their Heart Abroad Obeying their Master's Voice“: Kenya's Wildlife Merger and Decolonization after Independence

Adrian Nel (Pietermaritzburg): Black Rhinos, White Elephant? - Greater iMfolozi Biodiversity Economy Node and Decolonised Conser-

vation?

Baxter Tavuyanago (Masvingo): Performance on Communities Bordering the Gonarezhou National Park in independent Zimbabwe

Concluding Keynote

Sandra Swart (Stellenbosch): The Lion's Historian: Writing Animal-sensitive Histories in Africa

Final Round Table

Jane Carruthers (Pretoria), Mieke Roscher (Kassel), Sandra Swart (Stellenbosch), Maano Ramutsindela (Cape Town)

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