WWF's Earth Hour Campaign: 'Global Village' or Eco-Imperialism?

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate **Date:** **October 18, 2019**

ABSTRACT

The rapid spread of digital information and communication technologies since the turn of the century has led to renewed debates about globalisation and the power of new media to connect users across national, political and cultural borders. Environmental campaigns like WWF's Earth Hour, which touts itself as "the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment," often adopt a utopian view of globalisation that celebrates what Marshall McLuhan termed the 'global village'. While this global ethos might be useful in engaging the publics in collective action, this article argues that the way Earth Hour and similar campaigns actively construct representations of a single global village overlooks the lived inequalities between and among peoples within this imagined community. This article explores this tension using a quantitative and qualitative mixed-methods approach that combines a semiotic analysis of the Earth Hour 2019 promotional video, social media analysis of the use of #Connect2Earth hashtag among South African Twitter users, and in-depth interviews with current and former WWF-South Africa employees. This strategic approach is designed to juxtapose socially constructed representations of Earth Hour with on-the-ground user engagement in South Africa, and then triangulating these findings with qualitative interviews. The dissertation aims to explore the research question: *In what ways does WWF's Earth Hour embody Marshall McLuhan's ideal 'global village' and in what ways might it engender a form of eco-imperialism?* This research question is operationalised through three subquestions: *What kind of environmentalism do global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour promote? How do audiences in South Africa engage with Earth Hour on social media? How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?* This research contributes to emerging scholarship, rooted in environmental justice and decolonial studies, that is critical of mainstream environmental movements not to discourage environmental consciousness but to ultimately reformulate it.

KEY WORDS

Globalisation; WWF; Earth Hour; Twitter; Network Society; First World Environmentalism; Eco-Imperialism; environmental communications

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Two weeks before the World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF, formerly World Wildlife Fund) Earth Hour campaign was scheduled to take place on March 30, 2019, South Africans were experiencing Stage 4 load-shedding, the most serious stage of electricity load reduction that calls for 4000 megawatts of electricity to be rotationally shed nationwide.[1] For most residents, that meant regularly scheduled power outages three times a day, with each outage lasting about two hours (up to four hours in some areas of Johannesburg). Eskom, the national electric public utility, claimed that load-shedding was necessary to balance the nation's electricity demands, but others, including a consortium of business and local organisations who recently filed a class action lawsuit against the utility,[2] alleged the utility had abused its power.

By the time Earth Hour approached encouraging residents to switch off the lights for the benefit of the environment, South Africans had already been conserving hours of electricity every day - whether willingly or unwillingly - for several weeks. Participating in Earth Hour on the heels of Stage 4 load-shedding prompted mixed responses from South Africans. One resident interviewed by SABC News stated: "No, I won't be participating purely because I think we've been through enough load shedding and we've done our part partially whether voluntarily or not but we've saved enough."[3] This raises an interesting perspective not only for South Africa but for other parts of the Global South that lack access to reliable electricity. If Earth Hour is marketed as "the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment…[that] unite(s) millions of people around the world," what, then, does that mean for not only those who do not participate, but for whom it does not make sense to participate?

[1] http://loadshedding.eskom.co.za/
[2] https://www.fin24.com/Economy/Eskom/sa-law-firm-plans-class-action-against-eskom-over-load-shedding-20190402
[3] http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/mixed-feelings-over-this-years-earth-hour/

This dissertation thus aims to explore the ways in which global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour use communication technologies and strategic narratives to push forth ideologies of uniting different publics into what Marshall McLuhan (1969) has dubbed a single 'global village' while simultaneously ignoring socioeconomic differences that exist among and within different nations, communities and peoples. Operating within the framework of globalisation and network theory, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach that is organised into three parts. First, an audio-visual semiotic analysis of WWF's official Earth Hour 2019 promotional video identifies particular themes that emerge from the campaign's branding as a global environmental movement and draws attention to how these messages (both visual and thematic) are carefully crafted. Second, a social media analysis of Twitter engagement with the Earth Hour official hashtag (#Connect2Earth) in South Africa revealed that despite the campaign's branding as an inclusive global movement, online engagement in South Africa appeared limited to one-way communication from organisers as opposed to a collaborative bottom-up or two-way dialogue. Third, these findings were triangulated with qualitative in-depth interviews with four 'elite' subjects who either currently or formerly worked for WWF-South Africa and have been involved with the Earth Hour campaign either locally or internationally.

Using these methods, this research aims to analyse the ways in which WWF attempts to brand its Earth Hour campaign as a *global* phenomenon. It evaluates the ways in which the campaign might invoke ideas of a 'global village' while simultaneously relying on communicative norms and images that perpetuate a Western-centric brand of environmentalism, and what implications such a campaign might have for those living outside of or on the outskirts of the village. This research makes an empirical contribution to the disciplines of media studies, environmental communication studies, and globalisation and decolonial thought, and captures the theoretical background required for further investigation into the subject.

i. Background

WWF's Earth Hour campaign started in 2007 as a simple lights-out event in Sydney, Australia where individuals, businesses and communities were encouraged to switch off lights for an hour

to not only conserve energy, but also to draw attention to environmental initiatives. The campaign was so successful that it was adopted by the wider network in various offices around the world, and has since grown to be what the nonprofit describes as "the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment, inspiring millions of people to take action for our planet and nature."[4] Iconic landmarks like the Eiffel Tower, Golden Gate Bridge and Sydney Opera House dim or switch their lights in annual observance of Earth Hour every year. The 2019 Earth Hour, which took place on March 30, saw the hashtags #EarthHour and #Connect2Earth trend in 26 countries, creating over 2 billion impressions in 188 countries and territories, according to the Earth Hour website. The campaign has become recognised as one of the most widely observed and popular environmental campaigns on an international level, which is why it was chosen as a case study for this research.

South Africa's local WWF chapter began participating in the Earth Hour campaign in 2009, beginning with online campaigns and petitions that call for more environmental awareness and action. WWF-South Africa began hosting events in 2017, with three events that initial year – a 5K 'Adventure Dash' at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens; a 'Sunshine Cinema' at the V&A Waterfront Amphitheatre; and a trail run at Danielsrust Game Farm in Gauteng.[5] WWF-South Africa also circulated a petition urging the nation's only public electric utility Eskom to invest in alternative renewable energy in an effort to curb reliance on coal energy that has been linked to climate change. In 2018 and 2019, two events were held in South Africa– a 5K 'Adventure Dash' at Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, sponsored by Virgin Active; and a similar event at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden in Johannesburg. Admission prices for both events were R180 per adult and R100 per child. The Cape Town event was hosted by local celebrity presenter Zoe Brown while the Johannesburg run was emceed by media personality ProVerb. South Africans saved about 554 megawatts of electricity during the one-hour period from 8:30pm to 9:30pm on Saturday, March 30, 2019.[6]

[4] https://www.earthhour.org/what-is-earth-hour

[5] https://www.wwf.org.za/?20542/Earth-Hour---The-Final-Countdown

[6] http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sa-saves-600mw-during-earth-hour/

ii. Research Objectives

This research aims to analyse the ways in which WWF brands its Earth Hour campaign as a global phenomenon. It evaluates the ways in which the campaign might invoke ideas of a 'global village' while simultaneously relying on communicative norms and images that perpetuate a Western-centric brand of environmentalism, and what implications such a campaign might have for those living outside of or on the outskirts of the village. The overarching research question this dissertation aims to explore is: *In what ways does WWF's Earth Hour embody Marshall McLuhan's ideal 'global village' and in what ways might it engender a form of eco-imperialism?*

The research question is operationalised through the following three sub-questions:

1. *What kind of environmentalism do global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour promote?*
2. *How do audiences in South Africa engage with Earth Hour on social media?*
3. *How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?*

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation explores environmental campaigns within a media studies framework. The theoretical framework begins with a discussion of the two prevailing views on globalised media - Marshall McLuhan's (1969) utopian view of the 'global village' and Manuel Castell's (2010) oppositional 'network society.' The chapter then applies these theoretical frameworks to environmental media specifically, exploring Anders Hansen's (2010) social constructionist perspective of environmental media and communications. The third section explores some of the inherent inequities within mainstream environmental campaigns, while the following two sections progress to a discussion of eco-imperialism and its relevance as to how WWF's Earth Hour is observed in South Africa. Lastly, this chapter concludes by situating this research within the wider body of literature on environmental communications, and looks towards a more comprehensive conceptual framework of environmental communication. While this research does not go so far as to argue that Earth Hour is an example of eco-imperialism, it does raise questions that encourage a more critical reading of seemingly benign environmental campaigns. This theoretical chapter draws upon established scholarship in mass communication and media studies, and in so doing applies a critical lens to global environmental campaigns and questions what is and is not considered to be environmental action.

i. Global media: The 'global village' vs cultural imperialism divide

Within the globalisation debate, two primary schools of thought have emerged in media studies. One perspective, pioneered by philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1969), adopts a utopian vision of a 'global village' in which communication technologies unify the world in a way that transcends physical, national, spatial and temporal borders. The rise of the Digital Age has brought about new ways to connect people of the world, no matter how far apart they might

be geographically. Proponents have touted the Internet's democratising potential to transcend borders and to connect people who are interested in similar topics, creating an online community or 'village' that could facilitate more democratic communications with the benefit of different perspectives from all around the world. This would, in theory, lead to the formation of new kinds of 'imagined communities,' a term that Benedict Anderson (1991) uses to describe national identity. Anderson views the nation as an 'imagined political community:'

> "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion… in fact, all communities larger than the primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined … It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991; 6-7).

This conceptualisation of a global village facilitated by communication technologies involves a "deep, horizontal comradeship" with imagined others in the same village that extends beyond geographic borders (Anderson, 1991). To apply this concept to a real-life example of how communication technologies can extend beyond national borders to include more voices in the discussion and thus imagined community, one can consider the #MeToo movement. What started as a phrase used on *Myspace* by American social activist and community organizer Tarana Burke ballooned to global proportions in October 2017 after actress Alyssa Milano used the hashtag in a Tweet to draw attention to sexual assault and harassment of women following accusations of predatory behavior by film producer Harvey Weinstein. The phrase was tweeted more than 200,000 times by the end of the day and would be used by millions of women and men in the months to come. Localised variations of the hashtag began to emerge, with #YoTambien in Spain and Latin America, #BalanceTonPorc in France, #quellavoltache in Italy and #RiceBunny

in China (the words rice and bunny in Mandarin mimics the sound of "Me Too").[7] In the year following Milano's initial tweet, #MeToo was used an average of 55,319 times per day on Twitter, in at least 85 countries. Nearly a third of those tweets were in languages other than English, with Afrikaans, Somali and Spanish appearing most frequently. While users in each nation contextualised the debate differently, the initial #MeToo hashtag arguably galvanised a global movement that transcended national and political, spatial and temporal borders in ways that would have been difficult before the Internet.

While this utopian view praises the globalised nature of ICTs for their perceived ability to give rise to new forms of community and global interconnectedness, other media scholars have been more critical of the phenomenon. Globalisation, particularly globalisation of communication, is characterised by a worldwide increase in interdependence, interactivity, interconnectedness and the virtually instantaneous exchange of information (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). However, theorists like Herbert Schiller (1998) and sociologist Manuel Castells (2010) have offered more dystopian views of globalisation.

> "While the media have become indeed globally interconnected, and programs and messages circulate in the global network, *we are not living in a global village, but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed*." (Castells, 2010; 370 emphasis in original)

Castells (2010) argues that globalisation facilitates mass production and homogenisation with disproportionate benefits for big business and wealthy individuals. Indeed, one can consider the income gap between the richest and poorest people in the world has only worsened since the rise and spread of the Internet over the past two decades. A *2014 United Nations Human Development Report* identified deep socioeconomic inequality trends – the highest 85 people in the world had a combined income greater than the total earnings of the poorest 3.5 billion people.

[7] https://www.devex.com/news/what-metoo-has-meant-around-the-world-93871

If globalisation has indeed brought us all closer together, how has this economic gap continued to widen?

Castells (2001) argues that the Internet is controlled by an elite group and that spatial inequalities exist in accessing the Internet (342). His conceptualisation of a "network society" imagines the network as a form of social organisation that resembles a set of interconnected nodes; there is no center (Castells, 2004). A network society, then, is "a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies" (2). In other words, the network society is one in which key social structure and activities are organised around electronically processed information networks. While technology is a critical component of the network society, it is also influenced by cultural, economic and political factors. Influences such as religion, cultural upbringing, political organisations and social status all shape how the network society is organised and structured. The distance between those who are connected within the network and those who are disconnected is infinite. This divide refers not only to access to communication technologies and/or Internet connection, but also to the knowledge or digital literacy in how to use these technologies (Selwyn, 2004). These gaps lead to a 'digital divide' between and among societies that can be debilitating in the same way the lack of electricity hindered the kind of progress developing nations could achieve during the Industrial Revolution (Castells, 2001; 156).

On the opposite end of the globalisation critique spectrum are scholars who argue that excessive exposure to media can also be problematic, as it could lead to a homogenisation of cultures. Cultural imperialism in this context refers to how the globalisation of communication results in imperial domination over traditional or local cultures, and critically, the intrusion of Western (largely American) culture and values such as consumerism (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). American media critic Herbert Schiller, who coined the term 'cultural imperialism' in 1992, argues that globalisation has facilitated the transnational spread of largely Western corporate-produced culture that "erodes the priceless idea of the public good and the vital principle of social accountability and the longtime dream of international community" (Schiller,

1998: 11). This critique harks back to fears of "coca-colonisation" (Klein, 2000: 131), or the mass spread of American culture and ideals pushed through not only the selling of popular U.S. products and brands such as Coca-Cola, but also the advertising campaigns that accompanied them.

Exploration into the political economies of these global monopolies, which originate primarily from developed nations in the West, is a critical component of the globalisation debate that exceeds the scope of this research project. Instead, this dissertation explores potential implications of the unequal spread of cultural ideas and values – what governments might call 'soft power'. Schiller (1998) and others argues that global monopolies are designed to spread not only their commercial products, but also cultural ones. This unchecked and unidirectional spread of Western values can threaten traditional cultures. As John Thompson (1995) argues, "the globalisation of communication has been driven by the pursuit of the commercial interests of large US-based transnational corporations, often acting in collaboration with Western (predominantly American) political and military interests (165)." He concludes that this process results in "a new form of dependency in which traditional cultures are destroyed through the intrusion of Western values" (165).

The cultural imperialist argument is further complicated by scholars like Henry Jenkins (2012), who argue that global media flows are *not* unidirectional. Drawing upon examples like Japanese anime, Bollywood films and Bhangra music, Jenkins (2012) argues that there have been instances where media products and cultural values are adopted by Americans. The idea of a singular "American" culture in itself deserves scrutiny and prolonged debate – after all, the deep-rooted ideology of America as a melting pot of different cultures presupposes that American culture is already influenced by a myriad of nationalities, cultures and ethnicities within this homogeneous identity. Further, just because a media text might have originated in the West, the cultural imperialist thesis ignores the complex processes of adaptation, appropriation, hybridisation and 'glocalization' that takes place in each locale. Cultural mixing and domination has been a part of civilization for centuries - even "traditional" cultures were not pristine or

isolated prior to the electronic invasion and the influx of American media (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). An emerging body of interdisciplinary scholarship aims to explore the complicated processes of hybridization (Nederveen-Pieterse, 2009), creolisation (Hannerz, 1987) and glocalization (Ritzer, 2007).

Using these debates surrounding globalised media as a point of departure, this article analyses the ways in which WWF attempts to brand its environmental campaign, Earth Hour, as a 'global' phenomenon. This dissertation explores the ways in which the campaign might invoke ideas of a 'global village' while simultaneously relying on communicative norms and images that perpetuate a Western-centric brand of environmentalism, and what implications such a campaign might have for those living on the outskirts of the village.

ii. Bridging the gap between media theory and environmental communication: The highly constructed nature of 'nature'

> There is little or nothing that is 'natural' or accidental about the processes by which we as publics come to learn about and understand environmental issues or problems – indeed, that the mere notion that the environment is an 'issue' or a 'problem' is itself the product of active rhetorical 'work' and construction in the public sphere. (Hansen, 2010: 7)

In the field of media studies, academic scholars often focus on journalism and news media. From Erving Goffman's (1974) idea of framing to Marshall McLuhan's famous adage "The medium is the message," there exists a significant body of academic work that expound upon how and what news is reported. News is not merely a mimesis of real life, but a refraction of the myriad social, political and cultural assumptions embedded within a society and interpellated onto a news audience. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall's seminal work on theories of representation (1997) have shaped the way media scholars understand the news today - that is, as a social construction.

News is seldom (if ever) unbiased, and moreover reflects a 'hierarchy of influences' (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) that affect not only what news is reported, but how. Empirical studies (Reese *et al*., 2001) have illustrated the existence of media bias in news reporting, and audiences today arguably take what they see on the news with a grain of salt.

This same critical approach is seldom applied in academia to environmental campaigns like WWF's Earth Hour, Save the Rhino, the School Strike 4 Climate or others. British scholar Anders Hansen explores what he describes as the 'highly constructed nature' of environmental communications, which includes targeted and strategic campaigns as well as broader coverage of environmental issues or problems in the news. In his book *Environment, Media and Communication* (2010), Hansen explores the social, political and cultural roles of environmental communication and media. Adopting a social constructionist approach, Hansen argues that environmental communication is about more than just imparting information - the process is highly political. He argues environmental communications are "crucially about power in society, the power to define our relationship with nature and the environment and the power to define what the 'problem' with the environment is, who is responsible and what course of action needs to be taken" (2010: 7). Similarly, German sociologist Klaus Eder (1996) notes that often it is "the methods of communicating environmental conditions and ideas, and not the state of deterioration itself, which explain...the emergence of a public discourse on the environment" (209). By looking at environmental crises through this lens, scholars analyse critically how politics can influence seemingly benign environmental messages.

If the images, narratives and messages that emerge from environmental campaigns are social constructions, who constructs them and for whom they are constructed (and who are excluded from this process altogether) become critical questions which this research project aims to investigate. Hansen references American sociologists Malcolm Spector and John Kitsuse, who defined social problems in their 1977 book *Constructing Social Problems* as "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions" (1977 reprinted in 2000: 75-76). The central focus for a theory of social problems

analyses the emergence, nature, and maintenance of claims-making and responding activities (Spector & Kitsuse, 2000). This framework suggests that (a) social problems only become such when someone starts making claims (in public) about them, and (b) the process through which these claims emerge, are publicised, elaborated and contested merits further study (Spector & Kitsuse, 2000).

The consensus amongst media scholars, particularly constructionist thinkers, appears to be that news, despite journalist credo, is seldom objective. Political economists argue that issues such as media ownership, government relations and/or institutional power are central to how news is reported and framed, while cultural theorists focus more on how social or cultural factors might influence news-making. The consensus appears to be that there is a *process* to news, that it is seldom entirely objective or unbiased. Using this theoretical framework as a point of departure, Hansen (2010) argues there are three main tasks when framing environmental issues as public or social problems. First, commanding attention, notably in the media; second, claiming legitimacy by ensuring that particular definitions and/or stance are received and presented as legitimate as opposed to 'extremist'; and third, invoking action either in the form of political, policy or legislative changes, or in the form of public opinion and behavioural changes (Hansen, 2010: 51).

Pressure groups like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF have been arguably quite effective in framing environmental concerns as public issues through these claims-making processes. In effect, these environmental groups have become claims-makers, which Hansen (2010) defines as "any individual, group, agency or institution involved in making claims about or promoting/sponsoring issues, problem definitions or debate in **public arenas**, such as the media" (185, bold in original). In this way, these pressure groups assume a similar role to mass media in that they have the power to frame public discourse surrounding these issues. However, as media scholars have noted, the media are not merely an open public arena or stage, but rather themselves a gatekeeper that both influence and are influenced by various political, social, economic and cultural factors.

This social constructionist perspective allows environmental and media scholars to apply the same critical lens to environmental campaigns as has been done to mainstream news media. Thus, the next section of this chapter aims to bridge the gap between environmental and media studies– namely, it applies a cultural imperialist critique (borrowed from critical media theorists) to environmental campaigns. As historian William Cronon (1996) argues, American media constructions of 'wilderness' and the campaign to preserve or protect wilderness can be read as a form of cultural imperialism. Using the 1970s *Save the Rainforest* campaign as an example, Cronon (1996) argues that Americans and Europeans, whom he calls 'First World environmentalists,' have (through media and environmental campaigns) prioritised the protection of rainforests over the livelihood of the indigenous peoples who have relied upon and cohabited these spaces for generations. He writes: "Third World countries face massive environmental problems and deep social conflicts, but these are not likely to be solved by a cultural myth that encourage us to 'preserve' peopleless landscapes that have not existed in such places for millennia. At its worst, as environmentalists are beginning to realise, exporting American notions of wilderness in this way can become an unthinking and self-defeating form of cultural imperialism" (Cronon, 1996: 18).

iii. Global environmentalism from a cultural imperialist perspective

The central paradox of global environmentalism, according to Indian historian and writer Ramachandra Guha (2000b), is that "the people who are the most vocal in defense of nature are the people who most actively destroy it" (367)."

> "As biologists have repeatedly reminded us, the present epoch is witness to an unprecedented attack on species and habitats. The most vital as well as the most glamorous of these species and habitats are found in the poorer countries of the South, such as Brazil, Ecuador, Kenya, Tanzania, Indonesia, and India. However, the movement for their conservation is fueled principally by processes originating in the richer countries of the North, such

> as Norway, Australia, Germany and, preeminently, the United States" (Guha, 2000b: 367).

In addition to policies governing animal conservation, the systematic displacement of waste from developed to developing countries further illustrates Guha's argument surrounding the disproportionate impacts certain countries have on the environment. Rich nations such as the United States, from where global environmental movements have largely emerged, have been shipping their plastic rubbish, recyclables and other waste to developing countries like China for decades.[8] China banned the import of plastic waste in January 2018 after years of being the world's dumping ground, but the shipment containers have simply been redirected further south, with Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines receiving much of the waste now.

Politicians have argued these policies are a boon to poorer communities where unemployment is rife, but the practice of shipping waste to poorer nations in the developing world create more problems from both anthropological and environmental perspectives. First, the people who end up handling plastic waste from developed nations are often ill-equipped to process these 'recyclable' materials; it is often easier and cheaper to incinerate the plastics or discard them in landfills rather than process them into reusable plastics. This results in more damage to the environment, as burning plastic waste releases toxic fumes into the atmosphere, and dumping plastic containers in landfills can cause toxins to leach into local waterways, ultimately poisoning the environment and people who live in the area. In addition, the fuel it takes to transport these materials across the world sustains increased carbon emissions that have been linked to global warming and climate change. Finally, unrecycled materials increase the demand for new plastics worldwide, thereby perpetuating a system of waste.

There is also a behavioural cost to this distancing of waste. As Helena Varkkey (2019) writes:

> "There is an old trope in the environmental stewardship debate between the developing and developed worlds: Rich countries will pressure poorer ones

[8] https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/29/opinions/by-exporting-trash-rich-countries-put-their-waste-out-of-sight-and-out-of-mind-varkkey/index.html

> to be more sustainable – to conserve forests, clean up their energy sources, and curb polluting industries – while developing countries will point out that their developed counterparts got rich by employing the same environmentally unfriendly methods they now denounce." (Varkkey, 2019: 1)

Scholars like Jennifer Clapp (2002) have explored how the global economy has enabled not only the geographical distancing between consumers and their waste, but also the mental distancing and how this process further encourages overconsumption. Paul Driessen furthers this argument in his book 'Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death' (2003), arguing that these attitudes represent a new form of imperialism that keep the developing world destitute for the benefit of the developed world. He argues that there exists a 'dark secret' of the ideological environmental movement – that is, "the movement imposes the views of mostly wealthy, comfortable Americans and Europeans on mostly poor, desperate Africans, Asians and Latin Americans" (Driessen, 2003: cover copy).

Yet, these considerations are seldom reflected in global environmental campaigns like WWF's Earth Hour. Real-world inequalities (both in capacity to act and in responsibility to take environmental action) are lost in overarching eco-friendly themes of 'one world, one planet.' This gap speaks to the 'highly constructed' nature of environmental campaigns and messaging, and how, as with news media, questions of power come into play.

Having established that environmental campaigns are socially constructed through complicated claims-making processes, the next section further explores the politics that affect how these environmental messages are crafted.

iv. Eco-imperialism in a globalised world?

Driessen (2003) defines eco-imperialism as the "forceful imposition of Western environmentalist views on developing countries" (2). He argues that like the European imperialists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, environmental groups and other 'eco-imperialists' keep developing countries destitute for the benefit of the developed world (Driessen, 2003: 2). By

advocating for the precautionary principle, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development, these groups legitimize their demands on government but often engender poverty and even death in less developed nations, Driessen (2003) argues.

While this research project does not go so far as to dub WWF's Earth Hour as wholly eco-imperialist, it does suggest a closer look at the most popular or prevalent environmental messages and campaigns, what Guha & Alier (2013) call 'First World' environmentalism. It is important to consider who has the power to craft these messages and how they do it. What political factors might affect what is or is not identified as a social/environmental problem that merit a local/global response? It is important to consider these questions within the duality that First World or mainstream environmentalists enjoy – they tout their own green efforts while simultaneously ignoring government-sanctioned practices in their home countries, like the shipping off of plastic waste, that nevertheless threaten the environment and livelihood of those in developing nations.

In some ways, environmentalism has been political from its onset. As Guha recounts in *Environmentalism: A Global History* (2000), the first ever 'international' environmental conference centered around the protection of wildlife in Africa and took place in London in 1900. "Characteristically for the times, there were no Africans present, the delegates to the meeting being the foreign ministers of the European colonial powers who then controlled the continent: France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and pre-eminently Great Britain" (Guha, 2000a: 45). These oversights – namely, the exclusion and ignorance of peoples who live closest to and depend most directly upon the resources in these conservation areas – have been echoed in the works of both Guha (2000a) and Cronon (1996), but more pointedly in debate about the rise of green militarisation. Green militarisation, which Lunstrum (2014) defines as the use of military and paramilitary personnel, training, technologies and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation efforts, has been an intensifying trend in national parks and game reserves in recent years. Lunstrum (2014) discusses this phenomenon specifically in relation to efforts against rhino poaching in Kruger National Park, but one need not look far to find similar

examples around the world. In March 2019, Buzzfeed News released a three-part series that exposed violent abuse by ecoguards and rangers funded by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).[9] Buzzfeed reported that rangers who were at least partially funded by WWF, had been accused of beating, torturing, sexually assaulting and killing people who lived near wildlife parks across Asia and Africa. Perhaps more disconcerting is that the investigation unearthed internal reports that suggest the international nonprofit had been made aware of these abuses but took no action. The Buzzfeed report has since led to subsequent investigations by both German and British governments and charity regulators.[10]

At Kruger National Park, the international call for a stop to rhino poaching (i.e. #SaveTheRhino campaign) has led to a stark increase in militarisation of rangers. As scholars (Duffy, 2014; Neumann, 2004) have argued, war has become a common model for biodiversity protection in Africa, where protected areas become spaces of violence in which human rights abuses and the use of deadly violence against humans in the name of wildlife conservation have become normalised. At Kruger, home to the world's largest population of rhino and consequently the most intense site of commercial rhino poaching, South African National Parks (SANParks) officials have adopted increasingly aggressive policies and technologies, including greater use of force, the use of private military companies, deployment of remote-controlled drones, and others (Lunstrum, 2014).

v. Conservation in South Africa: A complicated history

In South Africa, the origin and progress of conservation as a national priority necessitates a more complex debate that considers the historical context out of which it was borne. Duffy (2014) explores how colonial authorities criminalised subsistence hunting practices of local communities by restricting the use of snares and traps, redefining these tools on which African communities relied as cruel and unsporting. This served as a means of subjugating the indigenous population to Western rule - European settlers who had access to guns were allowed

[9] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tomwarren/wwf-world-wide-fund-nature-parks-torture-death
[10] https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/12178

to hunt freely; indeed, hunting for game assisted and subsidised British imperial expansion considerably in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Duffy, 2014). High-profile figures abroad such as Theodore Roosevelt were invited to come and participate in these African safaris, further validating the idea of hunting as "European sportsmanship" as oppositional to "African poaching." English and Dutch colonists identified with the land of Africa and its bountiful resources, but not with Africans themselves. They recognised a need to preserve the landscape, but not the people. Afrikaner politicians such as Paul Kruger and Jan Smuts called for the creation of national parks so that future generations could "see the veld 'just as the Voortrekkers saw it'" (Guha, 2000a: 46). As Guha (2000a) writes, "The white settler identified with the land but not with the men and women who had dwelt there long before their arrival. As the historians Jane Carruthers and Terence Ranger have pointed out, wildlife conservation cemented a union between the Dutch and the English in southern Africa, but it also consolidated, on the whole, white domination over the majority black population" (47).

These historical dynamics have influenced the way game reserves, wildlife conservation, and 'criminal' poaching are understood both in Africa and abroad. The idea of 'wildlife conservation' was in effect used as a guise to bar indigenous Africans from hunting and accessing lands located in these newly dubbed 'game reserves,' while European colonists (and other foreigners) continued to hunt game for sport (Duffy, 2014). The rhetoric justifying these practices claimed that it was the white man's burden to save these natural spaces from African despoliation (Guha, 2000a), despite the fact that it was European hunting in the early decades of colonialism that caused the most severe declines in African wildlife. As Guha (2000a) writes, "If there was indeed a 'crisis of African wildlife,' this crisis had been created by the white man's gun and rifle, not the native spear and sling shot" (47).

Guha's historical assessment of how wildlife conservation was once used as a means to advance racist, systemic oppression is still relevant in South Africa today. Scholars like Njabulo Ndebele (1999) have written extensively about how private game reserves continue to cater exclusively to white South Africans and foreign nationals, while displaced locals live in poverty pushed to the

outskirts of conservation areas like Kruger National Park. Further, as Duffy (2014) highlights, there are strong links between South Africa's military and private security providers, which facilitate the translation of military approaches and techniques to conservation. "Former soldiers from the Apartheid-era South African Defence Force (SADF) carved out a new niche in conservation. In many ways, the skills needed by rangers are similar to those possessed by military personnel, including survival skills, knowledge of weaponry and the ability to plan operations" (Duffy, 2014: 824).

Operating within the context of this complicated history through which the field of conservation in South Africa emerged before and since the end of Apartheid, the narratives surrounding conservation (and broader, environmentalism) in South Africa *should* reflect these sensitivities. Yet it would seem that the most popular environmental campaigns such as Save the Rhino or the more recent School Strike 4 Climate, in which thousands of school students in South Africa marched to call on government to act against climate change adopt, merely adopt international themes and slogans from abroad instead of contextualising them for a local South African audience. Save the Rhino, for instance, has largely been attributed to a nonprofit of the same name (Save the Rhino International) headquartered in London. The campaign messages spread by the nonprofit, though undoubtedly well-intentioned, rarely take into account the extreme socioeconomic inequalities in places like South Africa that create a 'need' for poaching. Similarly, the environmental action promoted by Earth Hour's switching off of the lights does not account for the lack of reliable electricity in South Africa and other countries in the Global South. Additionally, the events hosted by WWF-South Africa catered only toa small percentage of South Africans - those who could afford to take part. With more than half of the country's population living in poverty, the vast majority could not afford to pay (R180 adults, R100 children, plus transportation costs) to participate.

It is important to note that the aim of this research is certainly not to deter people from participating in global environmental campaigns - these campaigns have been instrumental in raising awareness both socially and politically to issues that threaten peoples' environments and

livelihoods. However, this research project does aim to encourage participants to ask the critical questions – Yes, save the rhinos, but at what cost (both environmental and human costs)? What does it mean to "act" against climate change? Why do we celebrate tree plantings and beach cleanups without consideration of the petrol it takes volunteers (who can afford the leisure time) to travel to these sites? What local considerations might have been overlooked in these global campaigns? What *kind* of environmentalism is being promoted, and by whom?

The distance between those crafting environmental messages and setting agenda and those on the ground who are most directly affected by such policies grows ever bigger in the age of globalisation, both in physical distance (i.e. shipping plastics across the Atlantic Ocean) and in cultural or ideological distance (i.e. saving the rhino at the expense of the indigenous hunter). It is this gap that this research aims to investigate.

vi. Towards a more comprehensive conceptual framework of environmental communications

The study of environmental communications is an emerging field in academic scholarship, and its development has varied greatly from country to country. In the United States, the field grew out of the work of a diverse group of communication scholars who used the tools of rhetorical criticism to study conflicts over wilderness, forests, farmlands, and endangered species as well as the rhetoric of environmental groups (Cox, 2006). Christine Oravec's 1981 study of the "sublime" in John Muir's appeals to preserve Yosemite Valley in the 19th century is considered by many to be the start of scholarship in what has since become the field of environmental communication (Oravec, 1981 in Cox, 2006). Over the last 40 years, the field has widened to investigate issues such as the construction of "ecological" images in mass-circulation magazines (Brown & Crable, 1973; Greenberg *et al*., 1989; Grunig, 1989); image production and management of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (Luke, 1987); and risk communication in DNA experiments (Waddell, 1990). Journalism scholars began a systematic study of the influence of media depictions of the environment on public attitudes (Anderson, 1997; Shanahan &

McComas, 1999). Journals, associations and institutes specifically dedicated to the field of environmental communications have emerged as a result of this growing field.

According to University of North Carolina Professor Robert Cox (2006), whose textbook is widely recognized as the first book to offer a comprehensive introduction to the growing field of environmental communication (Cox, 2006: cover copy), there are seven areas of study within environmental communications. These include (1) Environmental rhetoric and the social-symbolic "construction" of nature; (2) Public participation in environmental decision making; (3) Environmental collaboration and conflict resolution; (4) Media and environmental journalism; (5) Representations of nature in corporate advertising and popular culture; (6) Advocacy campaigns and message construction; and (7) Science and risk communication.

The scope of this dissertation overlaps with several of these areas of study, most notably (6) advocacy campaigns and message construction, (5) representations of nature in corporate advertising and popular culture, and (1) environmental rhetoric and the social-symbolic "construction of nature." This dissertation applies established theories that have emerged from these areas of study to WWF's Earth Hour campaign from the perspective of the Global South. This research builds upon the work of scholars like Dana Alston (1990), who among others criticised mainstream environmental movements in the United States for being "reluctant to address issues of equity and social justice, within the context of the environment" (23). Environmentalists in the United States in the 1980s failed to recognise the problems of urban residents and minority communities, who were often disproportionately affected by industrialisation due to their proximity to hazardous waste landfills, incinerators, agricultural pesticides and polluting factories (Cox, 2006). Residents and movement activists insisted that environmental justice referred to the basic right of all people to be free of poisons and other hazards. It has since evolved into a vision of democratic inclusion of people and communities in the decisions that affect their health and well-being (Cox, 2006: 49). This dissertation aims to extend the environmental justice framework from its inner-city American roots to a global scale, with particular focus on justice for those living in the Global South.

WWF's Earth Hour campaign serves as a useful case study because of its branding as "the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment" and its popularity among participants in several different countries. While there exists a small body of scholarship that focuses on Earth Hour as microblogging activism (Cheong & Lee, 2010) or as creative strategic communications (Sison, 2013), few published works analyse the campaign from the perspective of the Global South and through the critical lens of eco-imperialism. Perhaps because environmental communication as a field of academic study began largely in the United States and continued to grow in European institutions (Cox, 2006), few studies look at environmental communications from a non-Western perspective. This is the gap in the literature that this research aims to address by focusing largely on how South African citizens and employees of WWF-South Africa engage with Earth Hour. By using empirical evidence based on the experiences of those living in the Global South, this research aims to offer a perspective that differs from the Western one from which environmental media and communications has emerged.

This dissertation is informed by a body of literature that focuses on environmental justice in various contexts around the world, including William Cronon's *The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature;* Ramachandra Guha's *Environmentalism: A Global History;* and Joan Martinez-Alier's *The Environmentalism of the Poor (2003).* These scholars have highlighted the hypocrisy of mainstream environmentalism, the exclusion of non-Western communities in environmental claims-making processes, and the ways in which political ecologies affect how environmentalism is imagined. This dissertation applies this critical theoretical framework to WWF's Earth Hour campaign, one of the most popular environmental campaigns in the world. This dissertation thus aims to bridge the study of environmental communications (and broader media studies) with empirical data from the Global South to move towards a more comprehensive framework with which to study environmental communications within a global context.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

WWF's Earth Hour campaign was selected as the case study for this research because of two primary reasons - first, its popularity and branding as 'the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment'; second, its heavy focus on being international or global. The 2019 campaign boasted that more than 180 countries and territories took part; a WWF press release bore the headline "World Unites to Put Spotlight on Nature".[11] 'Being global' is a central theme to the campaign, and this research seeks to interrogate exactly what that means. Thus, the Earth Hour campaign is an exemplary case study both from an environmental perspective (what kind of environmentalism is promoted) and from a globalised media perspective (who controls these messages).

This research employs a mixed-methods approach that is comprised of three parts: an audio/visual semiotic analysis, a social media analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The first section is a qualitative semiotic analysis of the Earth Hour 2019 promotional video that features heavily on WWF websites and social media pages. This method aims to analyse what kinds of branding or messaging techniques WWF uses to promote its Earth Hour campaign. The second method used in this research is a social media analysis of the #Connect2Earth hashtag, which was the most widely used of three Earth Hour hashtags in South Africa during the 2019 Earth Hour observation. This method aims to analyse how WWF, corporate partners, community groups and members of the public engage with the campaign through the use of the official hashtag. To triangulate these findings, a third method of research is employed - semi-structured interviews with current and former WWF-South Africa employees, with each interview varying in length from 18 to 30 minutes.

The rationale behind each of these methodologies is further explained in the sections below.

[11] https://www.earthhour.org/press-releases/earth-hour-2019-world-unites-put-spotlight-nature

i. Audio/visual semiotic analysis of WWF Earth Hour promotional video

Semiotics refers to the study of signs and sign systems, and can be useful in decoding ideologies embedded within media products (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). Swiss linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure, who laid the foundation to semiotics as modern scholars understand it today, explained that a sign can be divided into two components: the signifier, which can be the sound, image, or word; and the signified, which is the concept or meaning the signifier represents (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). All signs can then be understood as sign systems, communicating not only images but meaning. Signs work on two levels of meaning - denotation (purely descriptive) and connotation (associations with certain feelings, beliefs, or ideas attached to the signifier). Connotations can work on an individual level or a cultural level (shared collectively among members of a particular culture). Meaning, as American scholar Arthur Berger (2017) points out, is largely subjective and subjected to different shared cultures. Due to the polysemic nature of sign systems, connotations are seldom the same from individual-to-individual or from culture-to-culture, but as long as they are shared by a significant number of people, they can be useful in analysing possible meanings of texts. Semiotic analysis reminds audiences that media does not offer mimetic reflections of reality, but rather reinterpretations and representations of *particular* realities (Fedorov, 2014).

The subject of analysis for this research is the official Earth Hour 2019 video, chosen because of both its prevalence and popularity. The 3-minute 15-second video was featured heavily on the Earth Hour website, WWF's main website and social media accounts in the lead up to this year's Earth Hour in March. In addition, it has received more than 136,000 views on YouTube at the time of this writing. The video was also the most tweeted video using the #Connect2Earth hashtag in the time period from March 29, 2019 through March 31, 2019. Having established the video as a central component of WWF's Earth Hour 2019 campaign, a semiotic analysis is useful in decoding the signs and sign systems embedded within the video and in shedding light on how this constructed media text functions strategically in branding the Earth Hour campaign.

ii. Social media analysis of #Connect2Earth hashtag among Twitter users in South Africa

Environmental movements have over the last decade increasingly used social networks as platforms to manage campaigns, promote various causes, facilitate fundraising efforts and recruit new members (Hemmi & Crowther, 2013). The interactive nature of these new communication technologies support and accelerate traditional campaign methods and practices. In the lead up to this year's Earth Hour, the #Connect2Earth hashtag appeared numerous times on the Earth Hour website, WWF and satellite offices' websites and affiliated social media accounts. At the 'Adventure Run' event held at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, emcees encouraged participants to use the hashtag on Twitter and other social media accounts.

Focusing on Twitter, a microblogging platform, is particularly useful for research purposes because the conversations are coordinated by hashtags, making tweets easy to search and track as networks (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). The microblogging platform launched in 2006 has since drawn hundreds of millions of users around the world, and is the third most popular social networking site in South Africa after Facebook and YouTube.[12] The latest South Africa Social Media Landscape 2019 report found that Twitter has approximately 8.3 million users in the country, with consistent growth over the past three years. Though the percentage of Twitter users represents less than half of the total 20 million Internet users in South Africa and an even smaller fraction of the 56.72 million people who live in the country, media scholars (Bosch, 2016; Gleason, 2013) have argued that Twitter can still resembles a public sphere in that it facilitates conversations that ultimately help shape public debate and mainstream news agendas. Writing within the context of her research on Twitter activism among youth in South Africa in the #RhodesMustFall movement, Bosch (2016) concedes that social networking sites like Twitter may "not always be truly liberatory, as they could reflect offline power structures and hierarchies" but ultimately "represent discursive arenas, even if they are micro-public spheres"

[12] https://www.iabsa.net/assets/Usedebbieiabsanet/Social_Media_Landscape_2019_report,_Executive_Summary.pdf

(4). Thus, Twitter is a platform of interest for academic research as it could represent 'micro-public spheres,' despite the digital divide that exists in South Africa.

Twitter is also useful for academic research due to the availability of analytic tools such as Mecodify, as used in this study, which enable researchers to easily gather tweets from a particular time period, as opposed to only real-time exchanges. It is important to note here that another social media platform, Instagram, would also be interesting to look at due to its rising popularity in South Africa, particularly among young people. However, there are considerable limitations with Instagram, which are explored in *Limits & Recommendations*. These include the lack of publicly available and easy-to-use analytic tools like Mecodify; Instagram's access limitations; and the visual nature of Instagram content. Because Instagram posts are typically visual (photos), critical analysis would require more subjective interpretation by the researcher.

Thus, Twitter was the chosen social media platform for this research, as it yields easy-to-access, useful insights into user engagement around a particular hashtag. Hashtags are brief keywords or abbreviations, prefixed by the symbol '#', that build networks and allow Twitter users (and non-users) to search for a specific subject regardless of if the tweets originate from established followers or unfamiliar users (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). These hashtags can thus link loosely connected groups of people to establish a new community of users, with those using the hashtag acting as a conduit between the new hashtag community and their own follower network (Bruns & Burgess, 2012).

In the weeks leading up to Earth Hour, WWF-South Africa promoted three hashtags on its website and social media accounts: #Connect2Earth, #EarthHourAdventure and #ForNatureForYou. #Connect2Earth appeared to be recognised as the 'official' hashtag - it featured on promotional material and merchandise not only in South Africa, but around the world and on the Earth Hour official website. The other two hashtags (#EarthHourAdventure and #ForNatureForYou) appeared to be limited to South Africa. While the localised nature of these two hashtags were promising in their potential to provide insights into South Africa-specific user

engagement, neither hashtag yielded enough data to create a big enough sample for meaningful analysis (#EarthHourAdventure yielded a total sample of 26 tweets from March 29 until March 31, while #ForNatureForYou produced only 21 tweets). The lack of engagement with these two hashtags, unique to South Africa's Earth Hour observations, is a crucial finding in and of itself; only the 'official' Earth Hour hashtag, #Connect2Earth, yielded a large enough sample for meaningful analysis.

Using the data analytics tool Mecodify, a search for all #Connect2Earth tweets from the time period starting March 29, 2019 and ending March 31, 2019 returned a total of 14,767 tweets. This time frame was selected to account for the various time zones across the world during which Earth Hour took place - the 72-hour period was all-encompassing to capture the data needed. This data set was filtered to tweets written in the English language, which further narrowed the data to 8,254 tweets. In order to hone in on how Twitter users in South Africa engaged with the hashtag, a third filter was applied that limited the scope of data to tweets from within South Africa, which resulted in a total of 83 tweets. This small sample of South Africa-specific data offers useful insights in this scope of research, which is further explored in the *Findings* section of this paper.

iii. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with WWF-South Africa employees

To triangulate the data gathered from the audio-visual content analysis and social media analysis portions of this research project, four qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with current and former employees from WWF-South Africa. Two of the interviewees currently work as part of the communications team in managerial roles at WWF-South Africa; one interviewee had worked in various capacities for WWF-South Africa for 10 years before starting her own conservation nonprofit; and one interviewee had worked in communications at WWF-South Africa for seven years before transferring to the WWF-International Office in the Netherlands, where she currently works.

Three of the interviews were conducted in person - one at a coffee shop in Muizenberg on May 28, 2019, and two at WWF-South Africa offices in Newlands on June 11, 2019. The fourth interview was conducted via the online web chat platform Zoom on July 19, 2019. All four interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the interviewees. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by five to seven open-ended questions, which aimed to shed light on different dimensions of the research questions. The aim was to gain insight into how interviewees viewed their role within the wider WWF-South Africa organisation, as well as WWF-South Africa's role in the wider WWF network. Examples of probing questions include:

- Tell me about your experience with the Earth Hour campaign.
- How much autonomy would you say you or your office has in implementing campaigns - specifically, the Earth Hour campaign?
- How do you adapt international campaigns for a local South African audience?
- What are the benefits of being part of a global brand like WWF? What are the drawbacks?
- How has social media changed environmental campaigns?

As a research method, qualitative interviews have been recognised by academic scholars as "the most direct, research-focused interaction between research and participant" (Kazmer & Xie, 2008: 258). Qualitative interviews often allow the researcher to delve deeper into respondents' experiences and 'life worlds' (Warren, 2002: 83). Several factors can affect the process of and outcomes from conducting qualitative interviews for research purposes - the time and space in which they are conducted, whether or not they are recorded, the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer, the technology through which they take place (i.e. in-person, over the telephone or online). These all require scrutiny and reflexivity on the part of the researcher when considering using qualitative interviews as a research method. As Fontana & Frey (2000) wrote, interviews are "negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place" (663).

The four interviews conducted for this research would be what David Richards (1996) calls 'elite' interviews, which focus on members of society who are considered experts in a specific field rather than individuals who represent the demographics of a specific subsection of a broader population. The primary objective of the interview portion of this research is to gain insights into the third research question: How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit their local audiences? This requires 'elite' respondents who have experience or are at least familiar with the process of implementing WWF's international campaigns on a local scale, particularly in South Africa. The interviews are conducted via the 'depth interview' technique outlined by Berger (1998), which investigate particular (and typically subjective) issues such as "hidden feelings or attitudes and beliefs of which a respondent may not be aware or that are only dimly in her consciousness" (55). This researcher opted for semi-structured interviews as "it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 88). A basic checklist of five to seven broad questions was kept to guide the interview along, though the interviewee had the freedom to speak as much or as little as he or she wished about a particular topic. As such, the format of each interview varies in both length and questions asked, as each subject had different time availability and areas of expertise (though most of the questions were broad enough for all four respondents to answer). While this flexibility gives the researcher and respondents room to explore areas of interest that arise, the fluid structure causes a lack of uniformity across the different interviews. Additionally, depth interviews are helpful in gathering data on subjective experiences, but responses are prone to bias, and opinions can change over time. Lastly, conducting interviews with only 'elite' subjects (three of whom are still employed by WWF) may create inherent bias - interviewees' responses may be influenced by the positions they hold at the organisation. Although the research is guided by a hypothesis, the primary objective of the qualitative depth interview portion is to better understand subjective practices of those who have first-hand knowledge and experience with implementing WWF's Earth Hour campaign in South Africa.

This study adhered to the principle of informed consent (Warren, 2002) and respondents were given an Ethics Form drafted by the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town either before or directly after the interview. The names and job titles of all four participants were anonymised to ensure that the interviewees could not be identified. Respondents were informed of their right to request anonymity in advance of each interview and given the opportunity to review and edit the full transcript of their respective interviews. All respondents were informed before the start of the interview that the conversation would be recorded; the recording device was visible during all interviews (except for the one conducted online via Zoom). The design of these ethical procedures was approved by the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town in advance of the data-gathering phase.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

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i. Audio/visual semiotic analysis of Earth Hour 2019 promotional video

The first portion of this research project aims to explore the research sub-question: *What kind of environmentalism or environmental action do global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour promote?* By unpacking the signs and symbols embedded within the 3-minute 15-second video, this research aims to decode the signs and symbols that are used to promote a particular kind of environmentalism. The semiotic analysis yielded the following four findings:

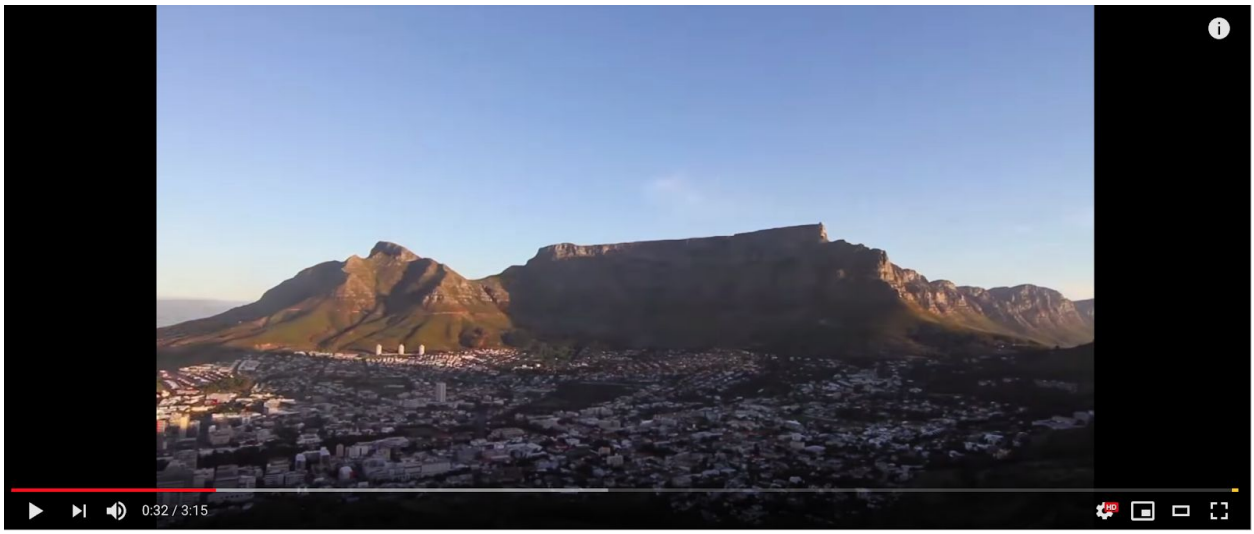
1. *There appears to be a focus on a global ethos: themes that celebrate collective action, "togetherness", and "one world" are a heavy undercurrent throughout the video.*
2. *Urban spaces such as cityscapes and tourist landmarks are heavily featured.*
3. *Not all countries are equally represented - Western culture is signified through the use of specific iconography.*
4. *Call to action promotes a particular kind of 'First World' or mainstream environmentalism.*

1. A global ethos that celebrates themes of unity and togetherness, indicative of the 'global village'

The video opens from a black screen set against melodic piano to a panning camera shot moving from right to left over a group of seemingly multicultural people lighting candles in the night. It then cuts to a sequence of scenes from various locations around the world - men dressed in Arabic thawbs lighting candles, a large group of children and teens of Asian descent holding candles and waving toward the camera, a single Caucasian girl holding a single lit candle. The exact locations in which the footage was shot is obscured and decipherable, which connotes the

feeling that it could be taking place anywhere in the world. The video then cuts to time-lapsed shots taken at a long range of a sequence of bustling cities, largely indistinguishable except for the occasional landmark (i.e. Sydney Opera House). The first diegetic sound the audience hears is the honking of cars, which interrupt the soft ballad that plays throughout the video. There is a quick transition to an almost still shot of the sun rising behind a landscape of trees, and then a time lapse of a view looking over Table Mountain and the central business district of Cape Town (Figure 1-1).

Figure 1-1



Source: YouTube

The sequence of cityscapes serves two functions: First, it employs images and scenery that Earth Hour's audience (largely urban dwellers who have reliable access to electricity) can identify with; and second, it aims to diminish the differences between these cities. Using the time lapse effect and quick cuts between the different cities creates an effect that blends each locale into a single sequence. This is not to say that the video makes claims that all of the cities featured are the same, per se, but that they face the same issues when it comes to climate change, environmental degradation, and presumably have the same responsibility to take action.

The first voice heard is UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres', who says: "Climate change is moving much faster than we are. Resources and ecosystems across the world are under assault."

During this monologue, the video shows footage of forests burning, oil spilling into the ocean, a polar bear standing on melting ice, plastics and other trash deep underwater. Just as the video cuts to an image of the Earth Hour logo and WWF panda projected onto what appears to be the side of a tent, Guterres says: “Earth Hour is an opportunity to show our resolve to change. Turning out the lights and turning up the pressure for a healthy planet.”

The use of the first person plural “we” connotes a feeling of unity, shared identity and thus shared responsibility. Additionally, the phrase: “Resources and ecosystems across the world are under assault” positions the collective ‘we’ as the protectors against that which is doing the ‘assaulting’ (ironically, our selves). Guterres goes on to say “Earth Hour is an opportunity to show *our* resolve to change.” This speaks to the shared responsibility that humans have to incite change for the betterment of the environment. This language implies that we as humans have equal rights, ability and responsibility to ensure a healthy planet.

The video then transitions into another sequence of scenes - people are seen and heard counting down in Chinese (Mandarin), Spanish, German and French. When the countdown gets to zero, the music swells to a dramatic climax as lights are switched off in various landmarks around the world including the Arc de Triomphe, Taipei 101, Christ the Redeemer, the Eiffel Tower, the Parthenon, the Sydney Opera House and others in a rapid-fire sequence of lights going dark in these various locales. A blue text box appears at the bottom left corner of the video that reads: “The World’s largest grassroots movement for the environment” (Figure 1-2).

Figure 1-2

Source: YouTube

The text box is shortly replaced with another that says "188 Countries and Territories" [observe Earth Hour]; and then "3.5 billion+ impressions for Earth Hour and Connect2Earth (Jan-Mar 2018)"; and lastly "Earth Hour and Connect2Earth trended in 33 countries."

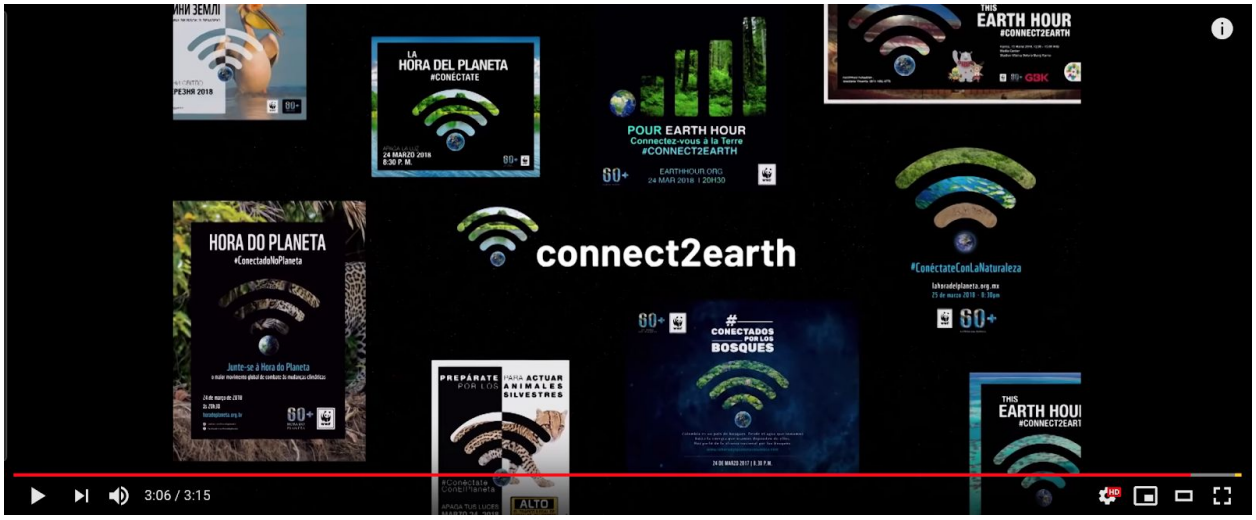
The countdown leading up to the switching off of lights and subsequent climax during which the lights are switched off creates a dramatic effect that seems to imply this - the switching off of lights in urban cities - is in itself the action needed. Of course, a more critical reading of the video reveals a call to other actions for the environment (though exactly *which* action remains unclear), but from a purely semiotic analysis perspective, the most important and dramatic moment in the video is when the lights are switched off. Having this be the focus of the video instills within viewers an idea that this action of switching off the lights, alone, is enough.

The text box is also instrumental in the construction of the 'global village' ethos. First, the text claims that Earth Hour is the *world's* largest grassroots movement for the environment. This language perpetuates the 'one world' narrative, which stresses that humans are all similar in that they are all inhabitants of a single planet Earth, thus overlooking the existing inequalities from population to population. As if to address this point, the next text box boasts 188 countries and territories participated in Earth Hour, with billions of 'impressions' on social media. These

statistics obfuscate exactly what it means to participate in Earth Hour, exactly how people engage with the campaign and unequal participation across the various countries and territories. By focusing on the sheer volume of "participation" figures across the world, this inclusion is a marketing strategy that self-establishes Earth Hour as an authority and global force.

The video ends with a sequence of diverse groups of people saying "Connect to Earth" in various accents and languages, with a voiceover urging viewers to share the messages on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google and other social media. The video draws to a close with a collage of Earth Hour campaign ads written in different languages (Figure 1-3), finally settling on a single ad with the words "This Earth Hour #Connect2Earth" written in English above the Earth Hour campaign logo, which is a WiFi symbol silhouetted against a backdrop of trees and blue skies with the bottommost portion of the symbol comprised of a tiny planet Earth.

Figure 1-3



Source: YouTube

The multilingualism embedded within this collection of Earth Hour advertisements - as well as elsewhere in the video- signifies cultural diversity and inclusivity - that Earth Hour is not restricted to any single language, nationality or ethnicity. This strategy paints the picture that Earth Hour is for everyone; Its target audience is broad and inclusive - in short, human. The words "world", "global", "together" and "connect" are repeated throughout the video, a

redundancy that reinforces the 'global village' ideology. These words appear in both text and spoken word, highlighting the importance of Earth Hour as a 'global movement'. The campaign itself is named *Earth* Hour, implying that it is relevant to the entire planet and its inhabitants. However, a more critical analysis (further developed in Parts II and III of this dissertation) suggests otherwise - Earth Hour is strategically targeted towards those living in urban city centres who have access to not only electricity, but also information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as social media.

2. Urban cosmopolitan spaces are prominently featured.

As obvious as it seems, the underlying assumption upon which the Earth Hour campaign has been built is that the places in which Earth Hour takes place have electricity. After all, it would be difficult to switch off the lights if there are no lights to begin with. But such is the reality for many communities in the developing world, including South Africa in the weeks leading up to this year's Earth Hour observation.

A 2012 study published in the American Economic Review revealed that night-time lights proved to be an excellent indicator of social wealth (Henderson et al., 2012). The study was based on satellite images taken of 188 countries between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s. The study revealed that the United States, Europe and Japan are among the most brightly lit by their cities, while the interiors of Africa, Asia, Australia and South America remain darker by comparison. With this in mind, the Earth Hour campaign by design requires access to reliable electricity - notably in business centres in urban cities of developed nations. This is not to say that nobody outside of this target audience can or does participate in the campaign, but it is important to note that contrary to the campaign's "one world" narrative, not everyone living in this world has the same access to electricity, an important distinction that the promotional video (and larger campaign) fails to address.

The landmarks featured in the video are also signifiers that suggest that the Earth Hour campaign is targeted towards urbanites. The Sydney Opera House in Australia, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Taipei 101 in Taiwan, the Golden Gate Bridge in America, Christ the Redeemer in Brazil, and the Parthenon in Greece are all featured in the video as landmarks that have participated in switching off the lights in observance of Earth Hour. These are all iconic and man-made landmarks located in developed urban centers in largely Western democratic societies. It might again seem common sense that these man-made landmarks would feature prominently in the campaign - after all, the effects of switching off lights at naturally occurring landmarks like the Grand Canyon or Table Mountain would hardly be as dramatic.[13] These landmarks can be recognized and identified by those with the global awareness (and privilege), supporting the claim that the Earth Hour campaign is not as inclusive as it boasts, and is largely targeted towards those living in urban city centers.

The irony is that those living in the developed world - particularly busy city centers and other urban areas - often have larger carbon footprints than those living in less developed, rural areas. To reiterate Guha's (2000b) argument, "the people who are the most vocal in defense of nature are the people who most actively destroy it" (367). If Earth Hour is indeed the world's largest grassroots movement *for the environment*, why does it so often exclude those living closest to it?

3. Not all countries are represented equally - Western influences more prevalent.

Nearly all of the spoken dialogue in the video is in English; whatever is not spoken in English is subtitled. Both of the on-camera interviews featured in the video - one with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the other with WWF International Executive Director of Communications & Marketing Sudhanshu Sarronwala - are spoken in English. With the exception of only a few short clips in which groups of people are counting down in other languages (e.g.. Mandarin and Spanish), nearly the entire video is spoken and written in English. Though the global ethos of the video features individuals and groups from multiethnic

[13] Table Mountain is included in the promotional video (Figure 1-1), but only for about three seconds. It is not included in the climatic sequence in which the landmarks go dark.

backgrounds on screen, the use of English as the only predominant language reinforces a hegemonic global order that privileges English-speaking (Western) countries.

The audio soundtrack that accompanies the video also reinforces the Western hegemonic order. The first thing audiences hear is the beginnings of a soft piano ballad and the voice of English pop star Ed Sheerhan as the video fades in from black. Sheerhan had originally written the song, "All of the Stars", for the 2014 American drama *The Fault in Our Stars.* One of the recurring refrains in the songs is: 'I can see the stars/ From America' with another lyric responding: 'Can you see the stars/ Over Amsterdam?' The choice to use a song written and sung by an English singer-songwriter, sung entirely in English with lyrics that reference only America and Europe expose an underlying bias toward the West, despite WWF's efforts to brand Earth Hour global ethos that celebrates people of the world as one. These details, however subtle, can nevertheless be read as signifiers of Western influence.

4. Call to action promotes a particular kind of 'First World' or mainstream environmentalism

About 1 minute 30 seconds into the video, Executive Director of Communications & Marketing for WWF International Sudhanshu Sarronwala speaks directly to the camera, and says: "Earth Hour is really about people. It's about the collective power of individuals participating in a global conversation and pressing for action. This year, we're asking people to connect to Earth to raise awareness and press for action around the loss of nature."

The video never specifies exactly which actions are needed to stop the loss of nature, but it does feature footage of established tropes that have been recognised in environmental communications: people planting trees, divers trying to replant coral, children picking up trash at a beach, people walking through a solar panel farm. The repeated use of these and similar images embodies what Hansen (2010) would call 'active rhetorical work' of environmental pressure groups that are instrumental in defining not only what the problems are when it comes to the environment, but also the solutions. As Hansen (2010 argues, "there is little or nothing that is

'natural' or accidental about the process by which we as publics come to learn about and understand environmental issues or problems - indeed, that the mere notion that the environment is an 'issue' or a problem' is itself the product of active rhetorical 'work' and construction in the public sphere" (7). The narrative of the Earth Hour video celebrates tree plantings and beach cleanups as the solution to sustained environmental degradation, but ignores the rampant consumerism that drives neoliberal society; the socioeconomic order that ensures poorer, rural communities bear a disproportionate burden from climate change and related disasters; the fact that developed countries - many of whose landmarks feature prominently in the Earth Hour video - ship their plastic waste to poorer countries for processing. As a further example of eco-imperialism, environmentalists were quick to denounce Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro for his lack of response to the fires in the Amazon, the world's largest tropical rainforest and the 'lungs of the world.' The far-right president rejected a $20 million pledge by G7 countries, suggesting the money be used to "reforest Europe" instead.[14] This response, while bullish, nevertheless raises an interesting question - why is the onus on Brazil to protect the lungs of the world whereas the developed world have long ago cleared their forests to make way for development? This supports the eco-imperialist argument that developed countries of the global North impose their environmental preferences and priorities on the poor, developing countries of the global South (Gonzalez, 2001). These self-critical perspectives are not typically addressed in global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour.

The environmental actions featured in the Earth Hour video promote a brand of mainstream environmentalism that ignores not only socioeconomic factors, but also environmental considerations. Yes, planting trees on remote hillsides might help absorb harmful carbon emissions, but what about the harmful carbon dioxide that is produced by the cars driven by the volunteers to get to the planting site? And what about those who might not have the time or means to participate in organised tree plantings or beach cleanups, but live in informal settlements that use minimal electricity and water - these, too, are a certain kind of environmental action/environmentalism. Those indigenous populations who have for generations

[14] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/27/amazon-fires-brazil-to-reject-20m-pledged-by-g7

lived closest to and relied on nature for subsistence living are also excluded from this brand of First-World environmentalism. Messages about environmental movements, particularly in globalised media, seldom address the "systematic relationship between the new, knowledge-based, global network economy, and the intensification of inequality, poverty and social exclusion throughout the world" (Castells, 2001: 157).

By selectively choosing which actions are deemed 'helpful' for the environment, media text such as the Earth Hour promotional video actively constructs the (often incomplete) picture of what environmentalism is. The video employs strategic visual and rhetorical symbols that aim to position Earth Hour as an inclusive, unified global movement, which further obfuscates what critics call the darker dystopian aspects of increased globalisation - the intensification of inequality, poverty and social exclusion. As Castells (2010) argues, "we are not living in a global village, but in customised cottages globally produced and locally distributed" (370).

The WWF Earth Hour video effectively promotes a form of collective identity that invokes ideology of a 'global village,' but overlooks existing inequalities from population to population with regard to access, influence and responsibility to preserve the environment.

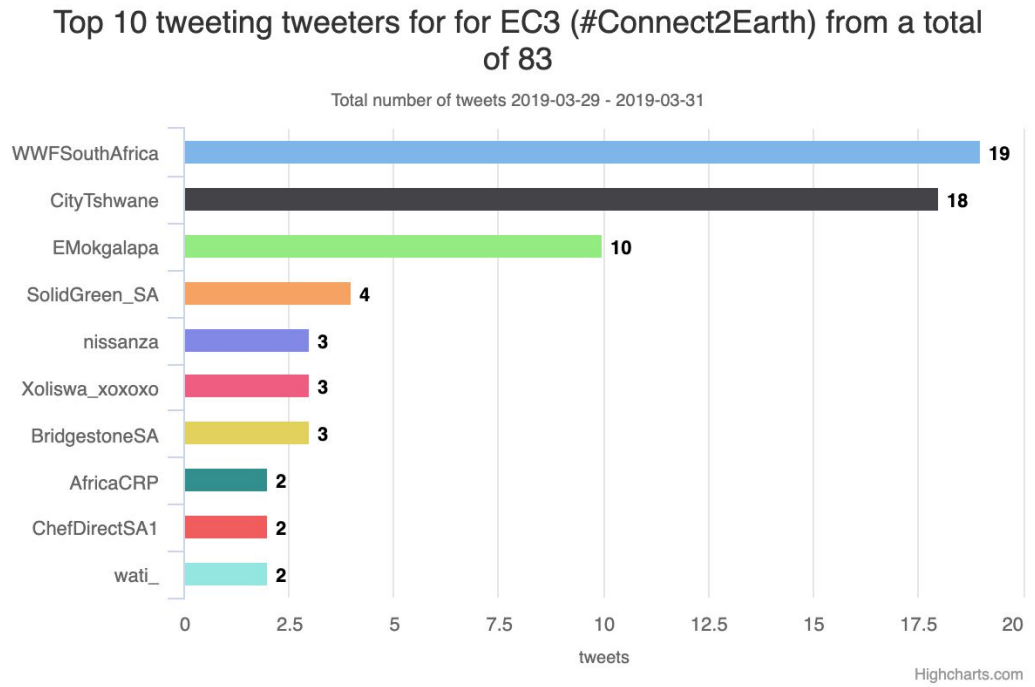
ii. Social media analysis of #Connect2Earth hashtag amongst Twitter users in South Africa

The second portion of this research project aims to explore the sub-question: *How do audiences in South Africa engage with Earth Hour on social media?* While the semiotic analysis of the official Earth Hour promotional video found evidence that would at least suggest WWF uses themes of 'togetherness' and 'one world' that harks back to McLuhan's ideals of a 'global village,' this portion of the project aims to test the validity of those claims by using social media engagement as a measure of looking closer at exactly *who* is taking part and *how* they are doing it. Using the framework outlined in the *Methodology* section of this paper, an analysis of South

Africa's #Connect2Earth engagement on Twitter during the 72-hour period from March 29 to March 31, 2019 yielded the following three findings (Figure 2-1):

1. *There appears to be little engagement with the #Connect2Earth hashtag amongst Twitter users in South Africa.*
2. *WWF-South Africa and Earth Hour allies dominate the conversation when it comes to #Connect2Earth using a unidirectional transmission model of communication as opposed to a two-way dialogue.*
3. *Two of the Top 10 tweeters in South Africa were automotive corporations.*

Figure 2-1



Source: MeCodify

1. There is little engagement with #Connect2Earth amongst South African Twitter users.

WWF-South Africa promoted three hashtags on its website and social media accounts in the lead-up to Earth Hour 2019: #Connect2Earth, #EarthHourAdventure and #ForNatureForYou. While #Connect2Earth was the official Earth Hour hashtag around the world, the latter two were specific to Earth Hour events happening in South Africa. In the 72-hour period from March 29 to March 31, only 26 tweets in South Africa used the #EarthHourAdventure hashtag, and only 21 tweets used the #ForNatureForYou. Among the three, #Connect2Earth saw the most usage amongst South Africa Twitter users, drawing a total 83 tweets.

When compared to the entire sample size of 14,767 #Connect2Earth tweets from around the world, South Africa represents less than 1% of total user engagement. In a country with about 8 million Twitter users, the lack of engagement with the #Connect2Earth hashtag and the other local hashtags suggests that South Africans are not engaging with the Earth Hour campaign, at least online. Countries with the highest number of #Connect2Earth tweets within the time period included the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Canada, Philippines and the United Arab Emirates. Nearly half (6,466 tweets or 44%) of the total sampled tweets did not include a location at all.

2. Top 3 #Connect2Earth tweeters in South Africa are WWF-South Africa, City of Tshwane and Tshwane Mayor; One-way transmission model of communication.

The WWF-South Africa official Twitter account used the #Connect2Earth hashtag the most (19 tweets) over the sampled time period. All 19 tweets mentioned the Adventure Dash at either Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town or Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden in Johannesburg. Nearly all the tweets were accompanied by photos or videos of event participants. Though many of the WWF-South Africa's tweets were retweeted or shared, there was very little feedback the other way around. WWF-South Africa's did not appear to be retweeting, sharing or engaging with posts from participants or other Twitter users. Instead, the Earth Hour content that was shared on WWF-South Africa's Twitter was mostly curated images of toddlers playing at the botanical gardens. In none of the 19 tweets were conservation, Eskom, or renewable energies

mentioned. Instead, the posts (Figure 2-2) featured pictures of smiling children and thanked event partners and corporate sponsors like Virgin Active (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2

Source: Twitter

These kinds of self-promotional posts embody a unidirectional mode of communication that is superficial at best, and at worst, distracting from the call for environmental action.

The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, which was in 2016 selected as South Africa's 'Earth Hour Capital' for the second year running,[15] was the Twitter account with the second most #Connect2Earth tweets, followed by the personal Twitter account of Tshwane Executive Mayor Stevens Mokgalapa. This data suggests that most of the tweets about Earth Hour in South Africa

[15] https://www.wwf.org.za/water/?17421/Tshwane-Earth-Hour-Capital-SA

originate from those already involved in the campaign, as opposed to a more decentralised digital public sphere where alternative conversations take place away from political or government influence.

While Earth Hour is marketed as a democratising campaign in which anyone and everyone can take place simply by switching off the lights, the conversation guided by the official Twitter hashtag #Connect2Earth appear to be dominated by WWF and its associates, not community users.

3. International auto brands use Earth Hour as a self-promotional tool.

Three of the top 10 #Connect2Earth tweeters in South Africa were Twitter accounts associated with international brands: nissanza (Nissan), BridgestoneSA (Bridgestone) and ChefDirectsSA1 (Chef Direct). It is the automotive corporations' involvement and appropriation of Earth Hour, via the #Connect2Earth hashtag, that is of interest for this research project. Nissan used the hashtag to align itself with values touted by the Earth Hour campaign (Figure 2-3):

Figure 2-3

Source: Twitter

The tweet reads: "Nissan supports and participates in #EarthHour. We hope it will stimulate many people around the globe to think about the environment and take positive action. #Connect2Earth." While Nissan is still a corporation whose business model relies predominantly on the sale of automobiles, the prevalence of which are among the leading causes of global warming and sustained climate change, these brands seem to have recognised the value in aligning themselves with environmental causes. Nissan has adopted a Nissan Green Program 2022[16] with a mission to reduce the environmental impact and resource consumption of its corporate operations and vehicles to a level that can be absorbed naturally by the Earth. The program outlines environmental initiatives the automotive brand intends to take moving forward - improving the fuel economy of its vehicles, developing electric cars, building more electric charging stations. Though these would be largely recognised as positive developments by mainstream environmentalists, these actions also serve to further Nissan's profit margin. The best thing Nissan can do to reduce its environmental impact is, arguably, to stop producing and selling so many vehicles, but doing so would fundamentally clash with Nissan's business model of selling cars. In the tweet, Nissan claims to "support" and "participate" in Earth Hour without ever defining *how* or *in what way*. Absent from this narrative is reflexivity in Nissan's role in the wider environmental debate as a manufacturer and contributor to climate change. Yet, the tweet conveys the car manufacturer's hope to inspire others to "think about the environment and take positive action," without ever clearly defining what kind of environmental action is needed. Despite this ambiguity, brands like Nissan see value in supporting and participating in Earth Hour, or at least being seen as doing so.

iii. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with WWF-South Africa employees

The primary objective of the qualitative interview portion of this research is to explore the third sub-question: *How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?* As outlined in the Methodology section (Chapter 3, subsection iii), four in-depth

[16] https://www.nissan-global.com/EN/SUSTAINABILITY/REPORT/ENVIRONMENTAL/POLICY/

interviews with former and current WWF-South Africa employees were conducted, each ranging from 18 to 30 minutes. The names and job titles of the interviewees have been anonymised pursuant to the ethics procedures outlined by the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town. Quotes are presented in condensed version, with certain naturalistic speech elements removed for brevity. Bold formatting is used to highlight particularly relevant statements. Identifying details have been redacted where necessary. For the purposes of discussing findings from the qualitative interview process, the interviewees are distinguished as follows:

- Interview #1: (20 min 45 sec) Currently employed by WWF-South Africa; managerial role in outreach communications. Interview conducted on June 11, 2019 in person at WWF-South Africa's offices in Newlands, audio recorded with permission.
- Interview #2: (30 min 13 sec) Currently employed by WWF-South Africa; managerial position in digital communications. Interview conducted on June 11, 2019 in person at WWF-South Africa's offices in Newlands, audio recorded with permission.
- Interview #3: (18 min 40 sec) Currently employed by WWF-International in the Netherlands; managerial position in corporate communications. Formerly worked at WWF-South Africa from 2008-2014. Interview conducted on July 19, 2019 via online chat platform zoom (audio only, no video). Audio recorded with permission.
- Interview #4: (20 min 05 sec) Formerly employed by WWF-South Africa from 2001 to 2009; held various roles in climate change and marine conservation programmes. Not directly involved with Earth Hour communications but active in other global campaigns. Left to start own conservation nonprofit in Cape Town. Interview conducted May 28, 2019 in person at a coffee shop at Muizenberg beach, audio recorded with permission.

The qualitative interviews yielded the following five findings:

1. *There is pressure from WWF International Offices to implement certain campaigns such as Earth Hour.*

2. *National offices like WWF-South Africa have at least some autonomy when deciding which international campaigns are implemented and how. This is not necessarily true for all WWF offices.*
3. *While Earth Hour started in Australia and became popular in Western countries first, there are instances when international campaigns have emerged from the Global South.*
4. *WWF-South Africa staff say there is room for compromise between International and the local office.*
5. *Social media has become a critical component of environmental campaigns, both globally and locally.*

1. There is pressure from WWF International Offices to implement certain campaigns like Earth Hour.

Earth Hour is one of if not the largest WWF campaign when it comes to reach and user engagement metrics. The 2019 campaign boasted that individuals, businesses and cities in 188 countries and territories worldwide participated in Earth Hour, with more than 2 billion impressions on social media.[17] National offices often adopt a more focused campaign within the larger Earth Hour - for example, South Africa in 2017 combined Earth Hour with a petition asking Eskom to invest in developing more renewable energy and lessen its dependence on coal (Interviews #1 and #2). This year, Earth Hour themes ranged from country to country to include sustainable lifestyles, plastic-free oceans, deforestation and water conservation.

Though Earth Hour campaigns vary from office to office, there is a certain level of pressure from the WWF International Office for WWF branches to participate, according to interviewees.

In response to question that asked whether there were certain limitations or restrictions within which WWF-South Africa was required to operate, Interviewee #2 said:

[17] https://www.earthhour.org/press-releases/earth-hour-2019-world-unites-put-spotlight-nature

> "I wouldn't say so, but there is certainly a certain amount of pressure to deliver an Earth Hour campaign from Global, they obviously have targets they're trying to attain, so it's really elevated or amplified by offices coming on board. And in the previous year, we actually didn't run a campaign, we just had the event and there was a bit of concern that we weren't supporting the cause..." (Interview #2)

Speaking more broadly about WWF as a brand in general, Interviewee #1 said "there are certain parameters that we need to follow, whether it's through brand guidelines, whether it's through messaging, whether it's through the things that we say, whether it's through our positions." Interview #1 explained that WWF as a global brand has particular positions that can sometimes be controversial in local contexts.

> "So we have global positions about certain issues, whether it's things like trophy hunting or big issues like that, and sometimes the way an American will see trophy hunting is very different from the way an African does, so there's a lot of compromise that needs to happen within a network for us to always be singing off the same song sheet, and that can cause a lot of tension." (Interview #1)

Interviewee #4, who no longer works for WWF, agreed that there was "definitely pressure" from International Offices to run certain campaigns locally in South Africa, but suggested that the process was more of a negotiated one:

> "There was definitely pressure from the global brand, but we always try to contextualise it and [WWF-South Africa CEO] Morné [du Plessis] was very adamant that that be taken into consideration. I feel that yes, WWF certainly did try and get the local messaging to match but often the representatives at WWF-South Africa, the staff themselves, would have limited insight because they were obviously of a certain sect of society and that's slowly changing too. The office is more representative from when I first started there in 2001." (Interview #4)

Interviewee #3, who had worked for WWF-South Africa before transferring to WWF International Headquarters in the Netherlands, said the International Office designs the framework for the campaign and makes resources available to local offices, "but offices at the end of the day have autonomy on how and if they implement them locally."

> "There's huge respect across the network that all of our offices are very different and there are different issues, so there is recognition that in some African countries, we can't really expect people to switch off the lights when there's hardly electricity in the country or there are rolling blackouts...South Africa could at some point decide that we actually don't want to run Earth Hour any more. **So offices are not forced to do anything, but obviously there is strength in us doing certain campaigns together just to leverage our global brand. But yes, there is autonomy, offices can have a say in what they want to do and how they want to do it.**" (Interview #3)

2. National offices like WWF-South Africa have at least some level of autonomy when it comes to which international campaigns they implement and how. This is not necessarily true for program offices that rely on WWF-International for funding.

As mentioned by multiple interviewees previously, national offices like WWF-South Africa do have a certain level of autonomy when it comes to deciding which campaigns to implement and how they are implemented. All four interviewees responded that the local office in South Africa had at least some control over how campaigns were rolled out. When asked: "How much autonomy do local offices like WWF-South Africa have when implementing global or international campaigns?" Interviewee #1 responded:

> "There is a tremendous amount of autonomy, so we're not restricted or limited by what International comes up with. They fully understand that there's a kind of 'Think Global but Act Local' in the way that the campaigns are implemented, so as long as there's a

> way to tap back in to demonstrate the impact, they're happy. So they won't prescribe a system, although of course if you want their assets, you still have access to it." (Interview #1)

Interviewee #1 explained that all WWF offices have access to content that WWF-International produces, such as marketing templates and social media strategies, which are particularly helpful for smaller offices who don't have the time or resources to develop their own campaigns "so you can use those templates or you can adapt them as much or as little as you'd like to suit your market" (Interview #1).

> "They'd prefer from an international point of view for you to use it as it is because you know, together stronger, and the more consistent that it is, like everything that you do in the brand and marketing world, the better. But they also have an understanding that people might want to change." (Interview #1)

Interviewee #1 went on to elaborate that the WWF-South Africa office has expended significant efforts and resources into researching their particular audience and its specific needs.

> "For many people, it's primarily experiencing immediate needs and social needs so we always have to look at social campaigns within that lens - how do the messages that we want to [get out] land? How do we need to come at it from an angle that people will see the relevance to their lives and not just think 'This is a nice idea but it's not relevant to my life' so we always have to think along the lines of the social-human dimension." (Interview #1)

In an effort to adapt the global Earth Hour campaign to South Africa-specific needs, in 2017 WWF-South Africa circulated an online petition calling for Eskom to reduce its reliance on coal by investing in renewable energies, thus creating "new, cleaner jobs" that help the local

workforce as well as the environment.[18] Interviewer #1 explained that at the time, climate change had been a trending topic of concern, and WWF-South Africa so the campaign as an opportunity to connect an idea as abstract as climate change with a clear, direct and tangible initiative which citizens could get behind.

Interviewee #2 agreed that WWF-South Africa had considerable flexibility when it came to how Earth Hour was implemented on a local level; however, he did note that there have been certain logistical concerns that are not always easy to work around.

> "Earth Hour has a very defined time in the year in which it happens, and sometimes that can be a little bit tricky in terms of competing needs. This year, for instance, in March we ran a campaign called Journey of Water, which is connecting urban water users to the source of their water, and that happened in March right before Earth Hour, so sometimes when you run these campaigns, they're also time-sensitive - the right time of the year based on weather, based on availability of your capacitors, and so there may be a bit of inflexibility. **You can't just move Earth Hour.**" (Interview #2)

Adding to the complexity of the issue of autonomy in local WWF offices, Interview #1 explained that national offices like WWF-South Africa, which are self-funded, have more control over which campaigns they run and how.

> "We are a national office which means that we are self-funded. However every single other African office apart from Kenya are program offices or POs that are funded by other countries, so they don't have that freedom, they have to do what their sponsored offices tell them to do. So there's a big difference...Being a national office means that we are self-funded, we don't take money from anybody, we raise our money 100% mostly through corporates and a little bit of individual contributions as well. **We raise our own**

[18] https://www.wwf.org.za/?20542/Earth-Hour---The-Final-Countdown

> **money, which gives us that national office [status] which gives us that autonomy, but it's not the same in every office**." (Interview #1)

Interviewee #3, who now works for WWF-International, insists that coming up with campaigns and marketing material is a collaborative process even before campaigns are implemented. Interviewee #3 explained that having hubs in various locations like Nairobi, the Netherlands, Singapore, etc. have made it easier for secretariat staff to connect with what's happening in various locales.

> "Communication staff meets regularly via conferencing or campaign staff, so it's not just [WWF-]International making decisions. There is a lot of collaboration and engagement across the network and we just don't design stuff at International and roll it out. There's normally a lot of engagement, collaboration and getting input from the offices because the campaigns will only succeed if local offices roll them out." (Interview #3)

3. While Earth Hour started in Australia and became popular in Western countries first, there are instances where international campaigns have emerged from the Global South.

Both Interviewees #1 and #2 touted the success of their #JourneyofWater campaign, which took place this year just a few weeks before Earth Hour. The campaign has run every second year since its inception in 2013, and took place this year in South Africa from March 11-13, 2019. This year, high-profile South African celebrities, Instagram influencers and volunteers trekked through the Boland Water Source Area which supplies water to 4 million people in Cape Town. The campaign encourages the broader public to follow along on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) in an effort to raise education about urban water sources and the importance of maintaining them.

Interviewee #2 said that this year, because the Journey of Water campaign took place so close to Earth Hour, the communications team at WWF-South Africa had to be strategic in how they

would dedicate their limited time and resources. Ultimately, more effort went into the planning and implementation of Journey of Water for a variety of reasons. First, water scarcity has been an important issue for Cape Town in particular since the late 2017 when dam levels hovered between 15 to 30 percent of total dam capacity. Mentions of a 'Day Zero'[19] in which municipal water supplies would be cut off fueled legitimate fears that the City of Cape Town would become the first major city in the world to potentially run out of water. Though Day Zero was avoided due to strong rainfall and reductions in water usage, the importance of conserving water has remained a strong theme for South Africans. Interviewee #2 said that in terms of campaign performance (as measured by social media engagement metrics), Journey of Water performed better amongst South African audiences than Earth Hour. In fact, the campaign has been so successful over the last six years that it has been adopted by other WWF offices around the world like in Zambia, Brazil and Malaysia.

> "Journey of Water was something that WWF-South Africa created, and the model was so successful for us that other offices in the network have decided to adopt it, so this is like a bottom-up approach...Water is such a fundamental resource, people connect with it so easily, whereas in the past with Earth Hour and the way it was constructed was around things like climate and energy. These things are a little bit abstract, especially climate change. It's not something you can easily see, except when you are in the middle of a drought like in Cape Town, or you are experiencing extreme weather events like in KZN [KwaZulu - Natal]. But the Journey of Water campaign has functioned so well that when we look at campaigns and where we want to place our emphasis, we look at what models work best here. So not to say the network will always have this choice or this challenge of having to choose between on or the other, but that is a factor. Considering our context, what's going to work best [since] we have limited resources. **We don't have resources to jump on every possible campaign that the network runs, we have to look at what makes sense in our context. Sometimes that can lead to a bit of disappointment,**

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/feb/03/day-zero-cape-town-turns-off-taps

> **because we have decided this year we have got to invest in Journey of Water**."
> (Interview #2)

4. WWF-South Africa staff say there is room for compromise between International and the local office.

It might be expected that Interviewee #3, who works for WWF-International, stressed that there is compromise and collaboration between the International offices and the local or national offices, but interestingly Interviewees #1 and #2, who currently work for WWF-South Africa, also agreed that there have been instances where compromise was needed and reached between the International and local office.

Interviewee #1 said that when it comes to balancing local concerns with international branding, "it's exactly that - it's always a balance." Interviewee #1 used a recent example from March 2019 when Buzzfeed released its investigative report about cruel human rights abuses perpetrated by WWF-funded rangers in various Asian and African locations. Interviewee #1 explained that the International office's position was a "total media blackout on social media, we don't say anything, we don't do anything." This was a problem for the South Africa office because the "crisis" occurred just two days before the Journey of Water was slated to begin.

> "My CEO had to get involved, so it ended up being CEO to CEO having to talk to each other and say, 'Listen, we've already spent this amount of money on this campaign, we have media coming, we have celebrities coming...we can't not have it or cancel it.'"
> (Interview #1)

The compromise they reached was that WWF-South Africa pulled back on their Twitter presence, since Twitter is the most popular platform for news article sharing and "that's where we were being attacked on most." Instead, they focused on promoting the Journey of Water campaign primarily on Instagram, which turned out to be a boon since many of the influencers

who took part are most active on Instagram. Once the 4-day Journey of Water ended, WWF-South Africa joined the other offices in the social media blackout. Interviewee #1 said:

> "You have to go for the path that is the least risky, and in a way you're not compromising your market, and every case is different and unique." (Interview #1)

When asked what are some of the cons or drawbacks of being a part of a global network like WWF, Interviewee #3 said that one of the challenges was that decision-making processes are often delayed precisely because of the collaborative nature of WWF campaigns and the diversity of its wide network. Interviewee #3 said:

> "For a lot of things to be done, you need to get input from different offices and sometimes that takes time and we don't always agree or have consensus, so decision-making processes are delayed and sometimes that can get a little frustrating. Sometimes we are one organisation but we are also different because offices have their own mandates and way of doing stuff so sometimes there can be confusion to the outside world when maybe we have different messages on the same topic or we're not aligned, so sometimes that is a challenge. But I think that should be expected because **we are still diverse even though we are one network so I think it's about trying to maintain a balance between autonomous offices and part of the wider network**." (Interview #3)

5. Social media has become a critical component of environmental campaigns, both globally and locally.

This finding speaks to a broader observation about the growing importance of social media in global environmental campaigns. Scholars like Hansen (2010) and Cox (2006) have highlighted the importance of digital and social media for "environmental pressure groups" like WWF in commanding attention, claiming legitimacy and invoking action (Hansen, 2010: 72). All four interviewees agreed that social media plays a pivotal role in environmental campaigns today,

with a focus on three primary platforms - Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Each of these three platforms have particular interfaces that make them more conducive to strategic purposes.

Instagram is the fastest growing social media platform in South Africa, with the third highest penetration rate behind LinkedIn and Facebook.[20] WWF-South Africa has capitalized on that popularity by launching their own Instagram account in 2017 (Interview #2). Since then, "we've seen rapid growth" in Instagram following to nearly 9,000 at the time of this writing. Interviewee #2 said that the visual potential (particularly the short- and long-form video format) have allowed WWF-South Africa to engage with its public in new and more interactive ways.

> "In terms of organic growth, we're seeing better pickup on Instagram than on some of our other channels. Twitter has been pretty slow-going, we have limited paid media budget so when we do spend, we have to look at where we want to grow our community based on where we're getting results. We haven't invested as much paid media budget on Twitter but we still do on Facebook and to some extent on Instagram, but it's been encouraging to su to see the purely organic growth on Instagram, I think it will continue to be a key platform for us." (Interview #2)

Interviewee #2 added that Instagram is also now the preferred platform for many celebrities and "influencers" who participate in WWF campaigns. All three other interviewees acknowledged the importance of social media as central to the work WWF does in the modern digital age. Interviewee #3 said social media is "super important" to the work that WWF does as a network, and social media metrics are closely analysed to measure engagement and impact. Interviewee #3 said WWF has more than 80 million followers on social media across its network.

> "It [Social media] has really changed the way we tell our story and how we engage with our supporters. It's super important, a lot of what we do and how we package our communications is specifically around social media and it's also important because now

[20] https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019

> we have two-way engagement with our supporters, which we never had before when we push content but don't know how it's received. Now the amazing thing is we push out something and instantly people can let us know how they feel about it and how they engage with it." (Interview #3)

WWF-South Africa has a team of four people who manage the nonprofit's digital platforms. Interviewee #2 explained that the digital communications team at WWF-South Africa has a specific target audience toward which campaigns and online communications are marketed toward: 19-35 year olds with a Living Standards Measure (LSM) of 6 and higher, "which means they are kind of on the cusp of middle class or into the middle class" (Interview #2). This target audience is comprised of typically young adults who are in school or preparing to enter the workplace or move into middle management, where they might have the economic means to someday become donors.

It would be remiss to not acknowledge for the purposes of this research the deep digital divide that exists in South Africa. According to the latest Global Digital 2019 report,[21] only 38% of South Africa's population is active on social media, which includes social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as messenger applications like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Thus, when measuring social media's market reach and audience impact, it is important to note that the majority of South Africans are not engaging on social media at all. While social media might provide a good indicator of success in target market metrics, the data reveals nothing about the sentiments of the broader population whom lack Internet connectivity or digital know-how to access these technologies and, by extension, these increasingly digital environmental campaigns.

[21] https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The first portion of this dissertation identifies a trope in WWF's Earth Hour campaign - that is, a *global* ethos. As discussed in Chapter 4, there exists an ideology throughout the Earth Hour promotional video that celebrates collective action, 'togetherness', multiculturalism and a 'one world' narrative. The various sign systems embedded within the video, such as the representation of people from various ethnicities, the use of different languages both spoken and visual, and the repetition of words like 'together', 'we', and 'connect', all serve to reinforce the global ethos (Chapter 4, Section i, Finding #1). This can be seen as an effective strategy in organising collective action - after all, it can be argued that a unified front that extends beyond geopolitical borders is necessary to combat a threat as all-encompassing or 'global' as climate change. However, what is lost within this seemingly benign 'global village' narrative are the cultural, political and economic differences that exist between nations, societies, communities and peoples. Not all populi are the same - each might have a different carbon footprint, each might experience the effects of climate change in varying degrees, each might have a different idea of what constitutes environmental action. With these differences in mind, the 'global village' narrative becomes further complicated when we consider who is in charge of this village, who determines what is good or bad environmental action, and who might be left out of the village. A semiotic analysis of the Earth Hour promotional video aims to offer insights into these critical questions by decoding the sign systems embedded in these campaigns. his research ultimately found that despite the campaign's global ethos, there is evidence of a distinctly Western cosmopolitan sensibility behind much of the video's imagery and ideology (Chapter 4, Section i, Findings #2 and #3).

Positioning these findings against Hansen's (2010) social constructionist approach to environmental media and communications outlined in Chapter 2, this research explores the political motivations of the global ethos.. To reiterate Hansen's argument, environmental

campaigns are "crucially about power in society, the power to define our relationship with nature and the environment and the power to define what the 'problem' with the environment is, who is responsible and what course of action needs to be taken" (Hansen, 2010: 7). As Spector and Kitsuse (1977) argue, social problems only become such when people or groups start making claims (in public) about them. The WWF Earth Hour promotional video embodies such a claims-making process because it constructs nature and peoples' relationship to it with its use of imagery, but more importantly it constructs what is accepted by the wider public as environmentalism and environmental action (Chapter 4, Section i, Finding #4).

Hansen (2010) outlines three main tasks when framing environmental issues as public or social policies: command attention, claim legitimacy, and invoke action (51). This dissertation argues the Earth Hour video does all three. First, it commands attention with its high production values and targeted social media campaign. The video is shot in high definition with beautiful land, aerial and underwater footage that all contribute to its production value. The video was shared on the official Earth Hour website as well as on WWF's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Second, the video (and by extension, campaign) claims legitimacy by labeling itself as not only a global movement but 'the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment'. This positioning serves two primary functions: First, WWF grants itself authority as a legitimate and popular movement not only locally or nationally, but globally; second and perhaps more dangerously, it obfuscates the politics involved in the process of constructing these messages, instead insisting the campaign is all-inclusive and democratic on a global scale. Whether or not the campaign as it exists today can be *truly* democratic would require further research beyond the scope of this dissertation; nevertheless, the obfuscation of the social, economic, political and cultural hierarchies that affect how these messages are produced and understood warrants critical attention. Lastly, the video ends with a call to action for people around the world to participate in Earth Hour by switching off the lights during the one-hour period. By promoting this as the environmental action to be taken, the video makes claims about what is considered to be environmental action.

The semiotic analysis of the WWF Earth Hour 2019 promotional video informs the first research objective of this dissertation: *What kind of environmentalism do global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour promote?* By decoding the audio and visual signs systems embedded within the short video, this research found that a particular brand of 'First World' or mainstream environmentalism is reinforced, which obscures lived differences in social, economic, political and cultural aspects of various populations. The campaign, as represented by the video, promotes a global ethos that celebrates a 'global village' narrative, though a more critical reading would argue the village is, if not itself predominantly Western, at least represented through a Western lens.

The second portion of this research aims to test the validity of the global ethos embodied by the WWF Earth Hour promotional video and wider Earth Hour campaign by looking more closely at how Twitter users in South Africa engaged with the official #Connect2Earth hashtag. Twitter as a site of academic study has been particularly useful because of its data mining capability, open-source policy and ability to track conversations between many users through the use of hashtags. Despite the deep digital divide that exists in countries like South Africa, these spaces can represent 'micro-public spheres' in which users can actively participate in public debate and inform public opinion (Bosch, 2016), though there are considerable limitations which are explored in the next chapter.

By analysing engagement with the #Connect2Earth hashtag (WWF's official Earth Hour campaign hashtag which was promoted both online and at the events) amongst Twitter users in South Africa, this research project found that there was very little social media engagement from the broader public. In the sampled time frame from March 29 to March 31, 2019, in which Earth Hour took place, only 83 tweets originating from South Africa used the #Connect2Earth hashtag. When compared to the entire sample size of 14,767 #Connect2Earth tweets from around the world, South Africa represents less than 1 per cent of total user engagement (Chapter 3, Section ii, Finding #1). Those who did engage with the hashtag appeared to be limited to those already involved with the campaign - largely, WWF-South Africa and its affiliates. The communication

was largely one-way promotion rather than two-way dialogue in which the broader public engaged in debate on a particular environmental issue (Chapter 3, Section ii, Finding #2). Furthermore, a closer textual analysis of the tweets revealed that corporate (or large-scale) businesses like Nissan and Bridgestone co-opted the hashtag to promote themselves and market the efforts they have made to become more green or environmentally conscious (Chapter 3, Section ii, Finding #3). These tweets ultimately belie the fact that the automotive industry continues to be one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

This portion of the dissertation aimed to inform the second research sub-question: *How do audiences in South Africa engage with Earth Hour on social media?* It is important to note that there are considerable limitations with this research method which are further explored in the next chapter, including a discussion of other popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram which may have seen more engagement amongst South African users. Nevertheless, Twitter engagement with the official #Connect2Earth hashtag in South Africa, or lack thereof, suggests that audiences in South Africa are not actively engaging with Earth Hour at the same level or with the same enthusiasm as seen in other countries (Chapter 4, Section ii, Finding #1). The lack of engagement among South Africans could be seen as an early indicator of Driessen's eco-imperialism critique, though certainly not a definitive one. Driessen (2003) argues that mainstream environmental movements "imposes the views of mostly wealthy, comfortable Americans and Europeans on mostly poor, desperate Africans, Asians and Latin Americans" (cover copy). Certainly Africans, Asians and Latin Americans are not monolithic societies upon which the West imposes itself. The reasons as to why more Twitter users in South Africa did not engage with the #Connect2Earth hashtag - whether or not it might be linked to the loadshedding in the weeks leading up to Earth Hour, or whether it might be due to the deep digital divide that exists in the country - would require further empirical research beyond the scope of this project. Still, this finding challenges the global ethos touted by the Earth Hour campaign that positions itself as 'the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment,' exposing that the world is not monolithic in either its participation nor its definition of what might be 'for the environment'.

The purpose of the third portion of this dissertation is to triangulate these findings through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews. By interviewing 'elite' subjects who have been directly involved with implementing WWF's international campaigns on a local level in South Africa, this research aims to gather subjective experiences to inform the third research sub-question: *How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?* Though they stemmed from a base set of five to seven questions, the interviews were loosely structured to allow interviewees to expand where they felt comfortable based on their specific areas of expertise. This research method produced both expected and unexpected findings. First, there is at least some degree of pressure from WWF International as a global brand for its 81 national and field offices around the world to participate in campaigns, particularly Earth Hour (Chapter 4, Section iii, Finding #1). This can be expected, all four interviewees expressed, as there is strength in numbers and participating in a campaign as 'global' as Earth Hour helps strengthen both the brand itself and the validity of those offices who participate. National offices like WWF-South Africa retain considerable autonomy when it comes to deciding which campaigns to implement and to what degree, and employees of both WWF International and WWF-South Africa insist that there is open communication and collaborative processes when it comes to developing campaigns and targeted messaging (Chapter 4, Section iii, Findings #2 and #4). An important caveat here that warrants further research would be to interview those who work for 'program offices' in Africa such as WWF Uganda which are not 100% self-funded and thus rely on WWF International for funding. A deeper look into this research may reveal considerable differences in how staff at program offices view their own autonomy when choosing which campaigns they implement and how they do so.

One particularly interesting finding from the qualitative interviews was that there have been instances when international WWF campaigns have emerged from the Global South (Chapter 3, Section iii, Finding #3). The example of the Journey of Water campaign (#JourneyofWater), which was started by WWF-South Africa in 2013 and has since been adopted by other WWF

offices around the world, can be seen as an example of "globalisation from below" (Portes, 2000) that diversifies cultural products which are disseminated on a global scale. This could be used to strengthen the argument that global environmental campaigns may not embody McLuhan's ideal global village now, but empirical examples like #JourneyofWater indicate that there might be a movement toward a more equal exchange of cultural ideas from other non-Western parts of the world. Though #JourneyofWater has not been adopted across the WWF network in the same way that Earth Hour has, the fact that it was started by the team at WWF-South Africa and adopted by other offices in other countries like Brazil, Zambia and Malaysia give weight to the argument that global environmental consciousness need not originate in the West. This is an important consideration in the wider project of de-Westernising, internationalising and decolonising media and communication studies.

Thus, the answer to the third research sub-question (*How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?)* is not so simple. It is multi-faceted and nuanced, with complex relationships in regards to autonomy, agency, control and bottom-up globalisation. It would be remiss to simply label WWF's Earth Hour as an instance of eco-imperialism, which Driessen (2003) defines as the "forceful imposition of Western environmentalist views on developing countries" (2). The truth of the matter is more complex than an oppositional dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed. National offices that are self-funded like WWF-South Africa do have considerable autonomy in deciding which campaigns they implement and how, though there are certain 'pressures' from the greater WWF brand. Whether program offices that are not self-funded in other areas of the Global South possess the same autonomy would warrant further research.

The overall research objective of this dissertation is to explore the question: *In what ways does WWF's Earth Hour embody Marshall McLuhan's ideal global village and in what ways might it engender eco-imperialism?* The operationalisation of this question using three different research methodologies fails to offer a single decisive conclusion, nor does it aspire to; rather it illuminates the ways in which Earth Hour might do both.

WWF's Earth Hour relies upon a global ethos that transcends physical national borders to draw new lines by which imagined communities are formed (Anderson, 1991). Just as with news media, these imagined communities are actively constructed by claims-makers (Hansen, 2010) - instead of journalists, it is environmental pressure groups like WWF who frame public discourse regarding environmental action. The first portion of this research project (Audio/Visual Semiotic Analysis of WWF Earth Hour video) decodes the signs and sign systems embedded in media that help construct a distinctly *global* ethos. The second and third parts of this project (Social media analysis of #Connect2Earth amongst South African Twitter users and Semi-Structured interviews with WWF-South Africa employees) aim to test the global ethos that WWF uses to brand its Earth Hour campaign. In response to McLuhan's celebration of a single global village brought about by globalised communication technologies, Castells (2010) argues that "we are not living in a global village, but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed" (370). Findings from the second and third portions of this project support the claim that WWF's Earth Hour is 'globally produced' in the West and 'locally distributed' by WWF offices around the world. It is 'globally produced', or at least produced with a global ethos in mind (Chapter 4, Section i, Finding #1). This research argues that the customized cottages from which WWF's Earth Hour originate are largely Western cosmopolitan centres as opposed to a single democratic global village, as evidenced by the fact that not all countries are represented equally in the official Earth Hour video (Chapter 4, Section i, Finding #3). The qualitative interviews shed light on the ways in which local WWF offices implement the Earth Hour campaign and tailor it to their particular audiences (Chapter 4, Section iii, Finding #2), though there remains considerable pressure from WWF International Offices, headquartered in Europe, to implement certain campaigns such as Earth Hour (Chapter 4, Section iii, Finding #1). This pressure can be interpreted by some as evidence of a form of eco-imperialism, in which Western environmental values are imposed upon those in developing countries in the Global South. However, there are opportunities and evidence of resistance that challenge the unidirectional flow of cultural capital from the West (Chapter 4, Section iii, Findings #3 and #4).

By looking more critically at who controls environmental messages that are disseminated globally and the ways in which this process is negotiated across national, political, socioeconomic and cultural borders, this research lends a more critical lens to seemingly benign environmental campaigns. The purpose of this critical research is certainly not to discourage environmental action or environmental consciousness on a global scale, but to expose some of the weaknesses or oversights in mainstream environmentalism that campaigns like WWF's Earth Hour embody and perpetuate.

CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This section considers the limitations of each of the three research methodologies used in this dissertation, as well as recommendations for further research.

Semiology, or the study of signs and sign systems, helps researchers analyse texts as constructions of meaning rather than transparent reflections of reality (Hall, 1997). As a method, semiotic analysis stresses the relation of one text to others and to society as a whole by constantly asking what is being signified. Its insistence on cultural codes and conventions encourages the viewer (or researcher) to make links and comparisons with other texts, ultimately highlighting the way meaning is socially produced (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). However, there are considerable limitations to the semiotic analysis as a research method.

First, the method relies heavily on the skill, positionality and subjectivity of the individual researcher. As Leiss *et al*. (1990) argues, semioticians often choose examples which illustrate the points they wish to make rather than applying semiotic analysis to an extensive random sample. A major disadvantage of semiology, he argues, is that it "is heavily dependent upon the skill of the individual analyst" (Leiss *et al*., 1990: 214). What conclusions can be drawn from the semiotic analysis is not only reliant upon the *skill* of the researcher, but his or her positionality and subjectivity. In the case of this dissertation, for example, the researcher is an American woman who has formerly volunteered for WWF (both the International office and the WWF-South Africa office) and is currently pursuing a master's degree at the University of Cape Town. These and other factors inevitably shape the lens through which the semiotic analysis is conducted. While there can certainly be a *preferred* reading (Leiss *et al*., 1990) of a particular media text based on shared cultural knowledge, it cannot be assumed that these readings are unchallenged. Second, as cultural theorists (Derrida, 2002; Hodge & Tripp, 1986) argue, the main fallibility of semiology is that there are too many variables - variations in cultural

knowledge, contexts and audiences create polysemic readings that can never be truly complete. Signs communicate through particular codes and conventions which are culturally shared, and thus depend on cultural knowledge that exists within a particular time and space (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). There can never be "an exhaustive semiotic analysis...because a 'complete' analysis...would still be located in particular social and historical circumstances" (Hodge & Tripp, 1986: 27). Derrida (2002) develops this argument in his concept of *différance*, which refers to an endless chain of signification in which each sign is linked to or associated with something else, so that the complete or final meaning is infinitely deferred (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). The empirical testing of semiotic claims thus requires the addition of other methods, as it does not in itself shed light on how people in particular social contexts actually interpret texts (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992). Finally, semiology focuses on the rules of language and sign systems - what Saussure calls the *langue* - as if they are fixed, but does not consider the concrete processes of language (*parole)* that can change over time. The rules and conventions of language itself can and often do change as people struggle over meaning and exert some autonomy over and through language systems.

Due to these limitations, empirical testing of semiotic claims are most effective when combined with other research methods (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992), which is why this research project adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines the audio-visual semiotic analysis of the WWF Earth Hour 2019 promotional video with two other research methods - social media metrics and semi-structured interviews. A mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to triangulate findings by testing conclusions drawn from a semiotic analysis against other data (McQuarrie & Mick, 1992). As an example, the researcher identified through semiotic analysis that a 'global ethos' was heavily present in the Earth Hour promotional video (Chapter 4, Section i, Finding #1). This finding was reinforced during the qualitative interview process, during which all four interviewees elaborated on the importance of being part of a global brand like WWF.

The benefits of using social media as a research tool are considerable given the increasingly digital nature of global environmental campaigns. Still, the use of social media - specifically for

this project, tweets - are not without practical and ethical limitations. To mitigate ethical concerns surrounding the scraping of social media data, the only tweets that were collected for this research were those available for every user of the social network to see. Based on Twitter's terms of services, researchers can consider that these messages are public and informed consent has been given (Corti et al., 2014). In addition, no tweets by individual members of the public were included in this dissertation; all screenshotted tweets were by either WWF-South Africa or its corporate partners. This dissertation relied more on data analysis of social media analytics than on textual analysis of specific tweets, thereby limiting much of the more traditional ethical concerns regarding individual privacy that might apply to social media research.

This research could be expanded by including data from Facebook and Instagram. Since the purpose of the social media portion of this research is to gain insight into how South Africans engage online with the Earth Hour campaign, research including metrics from Facebook and Instagram - two of the most popular platforms in South Africa and worldwide - would broaden the scope of this research considerably. According to the latest South Africa Social Media Landscape 2019 report, Facebook remains the most popular social media platform in the country, with some 21 millions users (representing 28% of the population).[22] The report also found that Instagram is the fastest growing platform in South Africa, boosting its users from 3.8 million to 6.6 million (a 73% increase) over the past year. A closer look at how South African users are engaging with Earth Hour on Facebook and Instagram would undoubtedly enrich the data for this research dissertation by offering a broader picture of exactly how online users interact with Earth Hour on social media platforms. The absence of these methods is due to logistical limitations: In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 in which data was allegedly harvested from 50 million Facebook profiles, Facebook has been imposing more and more data access restrictions.[23] These restrictions have made it harder for academic researchers (and the public) to access information. On August 21, 2019, Netvizz, an open-source app that had allowed researchers to download data from the Facebook platform, lost access to public Facebook pages,

[22] https://www.iabsa.net/assets/Usedebbieiabsanet/Social_Media_Landscape_2019_report,_Executive_Summary.pdf
[23] http://theconversation.com/facebook-risks-starting-a-war-on-knowledge-101646

according to a tweet from Bernhard Rieder[24] who developed the app in 2009. This limitation made it infinitely more difficult to scrape and analyse Facebook data without paying for a private service. Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, would be of particular interest for the study of the Earth Hour campaign due to its rapid rise amongst South African internet users (particularly young users) and WWF-South Africa's interest and investment in using the platform to implement visual campaigns (Interview #2). However, researchers like Laestadius (2016) have highlighted the challenges of using the platform for academic research. Instagram differs from Twitter in that each post must include an image or short video; thus, each post involves a conscious decision about aesthetics, which is not required on Twitter (Laestadius, 2016). This highly visual culture conveys meaning through photographs, with texts and hashtags used to anchor particular meanings. While this might offer researchers rich data from which a variety of thematic content analysis could be done, this is a highly subjective research method. Getting an appropriate data sample would be the first challenge, as scraping Instagram data is difficult due to its emphasis on the visual rather than the textual. While a researcher can certainly search for posts that use a particular hashtag, sifting through this data is time-consuming and as of current, there does not exist a publicly available application like Mecodify or Netvizz that allows researchers to organise the data by location, date posted, retweets or shares, or other organisational markers. This limitation would make it impossible to analyse South Africa-specific posts using the #Connect2Earth hashtag in the same way this dissertation analysed #Connect2Earth tweets. A primary recommendation for further research would be to expand social media analytics to include Instagram and how South African users engage with the Earth Hour campaign on the visual platform.

Thus, an important practical limitation of this research project is its reliance upon Twitter data. This must be considered within the context of South Africa, where just over half (54%) of the country's total population (56.72 million people) have Internet access.[25] This digital divide must be acknowledged particularly because this research aims to use Twitter analytics to speak for

[24] https://twitter.com/RiederB/status/1164167809573826560
[25] https://www.iabsa.net/assets/Usedebbieiabsanet/Social_Media_Landscape_2019_report,_Executive_Summary.pdf

South African publics and how people in the Global South interpret and engage with global environmental campaigns like Earth Hour.

Qualitative in-depth interviews are a popular method for academic researchers who seek to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters (Gill *et al.*, 2008). As a research method, the qualitative interview was useful in informing this project on local WWF offices policies and procedures, perspectives of those in charge of implementing global campaigns, and other privileged information that is not publicly available. The interviews with elite subjects, or those who have experience in the subject matter, thus enabled a deeper understanding of not only how WWF operates but also how those who work for WWF-South Africa perceive the work they do.

As with any other research method, there are limitations to the qualitative in-depth interview. First, one must consider the positionality of both the researcher and the interview subject(s) and how this might influence the interview itself. As Kvale (1996) points out, the one-to-one interview may seem like a conversation between two people, but it is important to keep in mind that the power relationship between those two people is not equal. It is thus necessary for the researcher to establish rapport and trust from the outset (Kvale, 1996). The researcher achieves this with positive body language, active listening and the use of silence (Ryan *et al.*, 2009). In addition to being an active process in which researcher and subject are both engaged, the interview is also one in which positionality informs the data. Three of the four interviewees for this dissertation are currently employed by WWF (either WWF-South Africa or WWF-International). It would be naive to assume that their positions as employees of WWF would not impact the responses they give during the interviews. It is possible for the researcher to sift out which responses might be more "honest" as opposed to ones that might be perceived as "safe". To illustrate this point, the two current WWF-South Africa employees both stressed that the local office had not only the ability but the responsibility to adapt international campaigns like Earth Hour for their local audience. Interviewee #1 spoke about the Eskom petition that was circulated in 2017 as an example of making Earth Hour more relevant to South

Africans. What was left out of this conversation, which took place at WWF-South Africa's office in Newlands, was that Earth Hour is targeted at a very specific sector of South Africans. Both Earth Hour events in South Africa - the adventure run at Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Cape Town and the adventure run at the Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden in Johannesburg - charged admission fees (R180 per adult and R100 per child). With more than half of South Africa's population living in poverty,[26] the argument that Earth Hour in South Africa is inclusive and not marketed toward a particular (and privileged) sect of the population is, at best, subject to interpretation. When pressed about the deep digital divide in South Africa and how that may or may not fit with WWF-South Africa's targeting when it comes to marketing campaigns, Interviewee #2 acknowledged that their target audience is "middle class and up" (Chapter 4, Section iii, Finding #5), but did not offer any reflexive commentary about the exclusion of the vast majority of South Africans.

The positionality of the researcher must be considered with the same intensity as that of the respondents, as it is she who has the power of selection, editing and framing the interview and interview data. As Warren (2002) writes, "The interviewer, like the respondent, participates in the interview from historically grounded biographical as well as disciplinary perspectives. Biographical perspectives may frame entire analyses or affect the selection of illustrative quotes" (18). The qualitative interview portion of this project was structured around a specific research question: *How do local WWF offices adapt global environmental campaigns to suit local audiences?* A set of detailed research questions were designed to guide the conversation, but each interview offered insights into the varied nuances of the question, which the researcher interpreted at her discretion. These interpretations are subject to the researcher's own inherent biases and subjectivities. In this way, the interview is about the self as well as the other (Warren, 2002). The purpose of qualitative interviewing, Warren (2002) says, "is to understand others' meaning making" (18). Using her own experience as a researcher to illustrate this claim, she states, "As many qualitative researchers report, I came early on to the point at which I viewed those meanings as intersecting with my own story. Yet, even with our knowledge of the different

[26] https://m.fin24.com/Economy/more-than-50-of-sas-population-is-living-in-poverty-20170822

perspectives from which respondents and researchers talk and write, the empathic appreciation of others' meanings is not an easy task, especially across various cultural divides" (Warren, 2002: 18). For this dissertation, the researcher's position(s) as an American, a graduate student at the University of Cape Town, a longtime WWF volunteer, and a non-white woman of colour indubitably influence both how she was interpreted by respondents and how she interpreted the interview process.

Finally, expanding the interview subjects to include broader South African citizens who actively engage with Earth Hour (either at events or online) would enrich the breadth of this research. By only interviewing 'elite' subjects who either currently or formerly worked for WWF-South Africa, this dissertation narrows the scope of data to a particular set of perspectives. A broader sample of interview subjects, including but not limited to South African residents who participated in the Adventure Run in Cape Town and Johannesburg, would yield greater insights into how people in South Africa perceive and engage with Earth Hour.

A primary objective of this research is to encourage further critical research of global environmental campaigns. Unlike news media, environmental messages are often taken at face value. 'Save the Rhino, 'Recycle', 'Switch off the lights' - these seem like all but common sense. This research project aims to interrogate these kinds of widely-circulated messages to expose the underlying complexities embedded within them. Yes, endangered species like the rhino need to be protected, but one cannot hope to do so with any success without first addressing the complicated socioeconomic conditions that drive impoverished people to risk their lives to poach and sell rhino horn on the black market in exchange for money to feed their families. In terms of 'Recycling,' a common trope of mainstream environmentalism, it is not so easy as putting plastics into a green bin. As environmental justice advocates have argued, only about 20% of discarded plastics in the world are actually recycled, and the process of shipping plastics from 'First World' nations to less developed countries where plastics are actually processed is problematic and environmentally detrimental in and of itself. Finally, when it comes

to switching off the lights in the name of the environment, one must ask exactly why is this conceptualised as an environmental action and who in the global village does it serve best?

Again, the intention of this research is not to discourage people from participating in environmental campaigns and initiatives. Instead it aims to look inward at how these campaigns can be made more inclusive and aware of different brands of environmentalism outside of mainstream or 'First World' environmentalism (such as indigenous systems of knowledge) that exist in the modern globalised digital age. The goal is and has always been to improve these global environmental campaigns for the betterment of the environment and the people who live in it.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation is to interrogate the global in global environmental movements like WWF's Earth Hour by applying a critical lens to seemingly benign environmental campaigns. The empirical research in this dissertation explores the overarching research question: *In what ways does WWF's Earth Hour embody Marshall McLuhan's ideal 'global village' and in what ways might it engender a form of eco-imperialism?* Insights gleaned from a mixed-methods approach to this research fail to offer any definitive conclusions, but instead contribute to a growing body of academic scholarship, rooted in environmental justice and decolonial studies, that is critical of mainstream environmental movements not to discourage environmental consciousness but to ultimately reformulate it.

Because climate change and environmental degradation affect the entire planet in ways that transcend national and cultural borders, collective action is needed on a global scale. Mainstream environmental campaigns like WWF's Earth Hour have relied on and continue to construct a 'global village' narrative that encourages people from all around the world to get involved and 'take action,' though the environmental action being promoted - e.g. switching off the lights or posting a status update using a particular hashtag - are hardly environmental at all. More importantly, this global village rhetoric often ignores the lived differences within and among different peoples. Climate change affects different places in disproportionate ways, certain countries have more political, social and economic power (and thus responsibility) to take more action, and environmental action takes many forms, not merely the tree plantings and beach cleanups most often seen in environmental campaigns. The environmental debate is multi-faceted and requires collective action across national and cultural borders. However, the 'global village' narrative used by Earth Hour and similar environmental campaigns obscures critical differences in othered populations, and celebrates a specific brand of mainstream environmentalism that arguably caters to the cosmopolitan and capitalist values of the West. In

this way, these campaigns, though well-meaning, nevertheless exclude certain peoples from the 'global village,' further hindering the Herculean effort needed to tackle issues as pervasive and far-reaching as climate change and sustained environmental degradation.

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