Masters Minor Thesis

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Minor Dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department of Film and Television studies.

Faculty of Humanities - Centre for Film and Media Studies

University of Cape Town

September 2023

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: 08.09.23

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Exploring Nature and Environmental Conservation through Nature and Wildlife Films in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of colonialism and apartheid not only shaped ideologies around who was considered superior and inferior, it ultimately shaped our understanding of both people and their relationship to the natural landscape. This paper aims to explore how this history has influenced the presentation of environmental landscapes and species through nature and wildlife documentary films. This paper draws on unique examples focusing mainly on exploring wildlife and species representation within Southern Africa. This paper offers a unique position by delving deeper into various conservation models and exploring films that may draw on understandings from those models. The concluding chapter of this paper will focus on more recent works which have begun shifting the narrative around species and conservation as well as explore new forms of representation on screen. This paper does not by any means suggest that there is a more suitable model when it comes to conservation but rather allows the reader to gain a greater understanding as to how these models may also shape and influence the visual imagery and narratives that are presented in such films. Through this thesis, the reader will gain a fresh perspective regarding the underlying complexities present within nature and wildlife documentaries.

Chapter 1: Nature documentary and conservation introduction

Amongst the various forms of documentary, nature and wildlife documentaries offer particular insights into our understanding of nature. It is a form which, unlike other documentaries, claims to denote nature as its primary character which takes centre stage in the narrative. Nature documentaries and wildlife films provide a particular lens through which nature should be approached and protected. These films place themes around conservation and the preservation of nature for future generations at the forefront of their themes. For this reason, I will begin by unpacking some of the historical influences that have shaped those steering the narrative around these themes as well as how strategies around conservation have been shaped during the early colonial period. The regional focus of this paper is around Southern Africa, given my interest in exploring early colonial and scientific conservation through early wildlife films in this region. The ways in which species have historically been represented also shape our expectations on screen. It is also important to note that much of the genre's history has been influenced by early Western examples, even those which centre African landscapes within their narrative.

This paper's investment lies beyond just the exploration of wildlife representation on screen. Instead, the central focus of this paper is to explore how the scientific and historical conservation methods are presented on screen to the extent that they thus have a significant influence beyond the screen itself. Before we can begin to unpack discussions around conservation and how they are presented in these films it is important to understand the history of nature and wildlife documentaries, how they have developed and been understood. Wildlife documentaries have also been constructed with themes and ideas which shape and inform their content. They draw on elements of well-known fiction film genres such as the romcom, slapstick comedy, and theatrical tragedy in their narratives and aesthetics. As Bouse points out in his discussion, there was not a clearly distinct moment in which wildlife films and nature documentaries were formed; instead there was a certain period during which they became more popular and more evident (Bouse, 2000:39). He also reminds us that indeed there were other forms of media such as photographs which had already begun engaging with trying to present nature and wildlife visually. What House also reveals is the lens through which wildlife was being explored even through these early media forms, again leaning on the idea of viewing nature through a more scientific gaze. It also reveals the invested interest in which individuals had to establish a relationship between themselves and these species.

This paper places a very clear emphasis on the kinds of films it will explore. The films selected in this discussion are specifically ones located within the Southern African region. They are films that reveal and reflect on the various models of conservation that will be explored and how what is shown to us visually onscreen does in fact have an impact beyond entertainment and pleasure. In order to do this, this paper will rely on a few case studies which offer a gradual historical framing of how these films emerge and continue to transition overtime. The first case study will help provide a more historical understanding of how wildlife film had been framed in the mid-19th century and will then delve into various other framings later on with the different conservation models.

A landmark in the history of wildlife documentaries is the *True-Life Adventures* series created by the Disney company in the 1950s'. What makes the series so unique for its time lies in the shift away from the safari-driven point of view whereby humans are at the forefront of the

narrative. The series breaks this convention by placing species as the main protagonist instead, which allows for a different approach towards the narratives being produced. Given that these were also being screened to schools, churches, and other establishments, this also meant that the series had a profound influence on societal understandings of nature. "Nature may be studied with either of two objects: to discover new truth for the purpose of increasing the sum of human knowledge; or to put the pupil in a sympathetic attitude toward nature for the purpose of increasing the joy of living" (Armitage, 2009:1). The sympathetic attitude which Armitage reveals here becomes crucial not only in terms of wildlife viewing but also in what this paper will later explore around conservation models. It is however vital to begin by exploring some of the narrative and visual ways in which the *True-Life Adventure* series approaches nature. This paper will now take a deeper look into some of the episodes within the series and place those into conversation with wildlife documentary conventions.

The series consisted of 13 films from 1949 to 1960. Each of the films cover various regions and natural habitats with various species being featured as well. From Seals, Beavers and African lions the series offers multiple species through which the viewer can enjoy. For the purposes of this paper we will not be exploring the series in its entirety but rather highlight two critical films in the series from the first release in 1949 of *Seal Island,* 1960s *The Jungle Cat*. *The Jungle Cat* and *Seal Island* form part of some of the most popular and well recognised of the series. Both have in common the idea of exploring species and providing knowledge about the environments in which those species are surrounded. Even within these depictions, the viewer is immediately immersed into viewing nature and wildlife through a more exploratory lens.

From the opening sequence of *The Jungle Cat,* as viewers we are reminded of our long and historical relationship towards domestic cats. Through a voice-over narration, we are reminded of the domestication of these species, we are also reminded that not all cats are tame and this sets the scene for our introduction to the various wild cats. We shift between tigers, lions and cheetahs throughout the introduction of this episode. In this episode, we hear the voice-over narration when the African leopard appears on screen, and the viewer is reminded of their ruthless nature. The leopard is presented as a species that has no regard for those living amongst it and one that dominates over most other species. Although the leopard is described in such a manner, the series places great emphasis on its introduction of the Jaguar. The Jaguar is characterized by the narrator as the greatest hunter of all, this indicates to the viewer that this will therefore be the central species in which the episode will be focused on. We see extreme close-ups of the Jaguar's eyes accompanied by jarring music as it prepares to attack its prey. Their contrast however lies not only in how the Jaguar is represented as a powerful predator unlike the other species, but also the way in which the smaller species are often referred to in the episode as peculiar and fantastical.

> "Jungle Cat of the Amazon is a beautiful presentation of the jaguar and the rainforest of South America. The predatory nature of this carnivore is clearly illustrated. Animals of the South American Jungle is probably the best filmstrip of the five to illustrate ecological relationships, adaptation and evolution in a jungle environment" (Tolman, 1981:104)

What is clear to the audience throughout the film is the way in which the environment they are being shown is uniquely one of the Jungle. This is constantly reiterated to us both verbally through the narration as well as visually. We see the camera constantly pan over the

lush vegetation and are briefly taken along a journey to appreciate the various rivers that flow throughout the forest. After this journey we return back to our central character the Jaguar where we are reminded of its untamed and unpredictable nature, this is further enhanced by the use of sound in the episode. We see the more jarring music played when they are on the hunt which further highlights their nature and more playful music when other species or the surrounding habitat is shown. This is crucial in that as we will later discuss, the colonial framing of these species and their surroundings played a key role in how geographical landscapes had been understood.

Alongside these visuals as mentioned earlier the viewer is also given scientific information as a means of almost validating the visual depictions and descriptions in which they are being shown. *Seal Island* was also one of the first live-action nature documentaries that Walt Disney had created which further allowed for viewers to feel as though they were immersed into a more intimate relationship with nature. This also therefore assisted viewers in feeling as though they were part of the exploratory process. As much as the series was invested in educating and exploring species and landscapes, their engagement also had to be engaging for audiences to sustain their desire to view the various films. To ensure individuals remained invested in the content being created, these shows also had to maintain the entertainment aspect of the show. The series had also been created just after the war which meant that the show also served as a form of entertainment away from the human realities in society at the time. (Mitman 2016,110).

The entertainment Mitman points out here is crucial in that it reveals that for audiences at the time, these films were seen to provide a form of escape from daily life. “To a wider public, Disney's nature – benevolent and pure – captured the emotional beauty of nature’s grand design, eased the memories of death and destruction of the previous decade, and affirmed the importance of America as one nation under God” (Mitman, 2016: 110). By presenting nature as a pure untouched form therefore influences the response from viewers when that purity becomes jeopardised. One can therefore see how this untouched purity becomes further sustained given the shift between having the human explorer be the most prevalent onscreen to now having nature be presented as the protagonist.

One may think that *Seal Island* presents nature in a much more animated form through the opening sequence, however, this soon shifts into visuals of the island. The sequence opens with an animated visual of the Islands location as we hear a voice-over describing the island's history. We then see an animated brush paint over the waters that surround the island before we are zoomed into visuals of the actual island itself. The episode explores the various seal colonies and other species that share their habitat with these colonies.

The voice-over narration used in the film also reveals information regarding early representations within wildlife and nature films. It was indeed quite common to find the majority of the voice-over work being done by white males as opposed to any other race or gender. The episode begins with the viewer taking a specific and curated journey. We are presented with specific detailed information regarding the geographic location upon which we are about to explore. As this information is being told through the narration, the camera pans over the ocean and seals lying on the sand. The use of music within this film is also interesting in that the visuals are often accompanied by light-hearted upbeat sounds. It leaves

the viewer with an almost positive, light-hearted feeling towards what they have been watching.

The series dedicated each episode to exploring different regions and species. Some of these regions also included parts of the African continent. Given the period in which the series was created, much of the content revealed colonial ideologies and preconceptions about the continent, a primitive space in need of conquering to save which will be explored shortly when we discuss *The African Lion* (Wainaina, 2005: 93). These approaches are revealed through these films through the ways in which the natural landscape was framed and presented to the audience. Through the panning across desert areas and lakes also revealed the exploratory lens of the filmmakers. The continent being viewed through the lens of a place filled with wild and savage nature also impacted how species were being perceived. Although the African landscape was represented as pure, rustic and untouched, many of the species were presented as violent, unpredictable, and untamed.

> "Always use the words África', Darkness or Safari in your title. Subtitles may include words like 'Zanzibar, Masai, Zulu, Zambezi, Congo, Nile, Drum, Sun, or bygone. Also use words such as Gorilla's, Timeless, Primordial and Tribal" (Wainaina, 2005: 92)

What Wanaina explores here becomes crucial when analysing episodes from the series in that we do not only see these being reflected through narrative but also visually. We can see which species the series identifies and focuses on as a means of exploring wildlife in the continent. His statement above examines not only some of the physical attributes within which the continent had been visualised but also the psychological colonial understanding of the land and its people. We will now explore examples from films during the 19th century which further highlight the sentiments in Wainaina makes.

The African Lion by James Algar was released in 1955 by the Walt Disney company and is an excellent example of how early films in the series presented species and landscapes on the continent. The film is clearly reflective of early colonial ideologies about Africa. This is evident from the DVD cover of the film with words written in black bold, "Here comes entertainment!" (1955). This cover becomes important to note in that it immediately positions the viewers into expecting a film that will provide a sense of spectacle. It is clear to the viewer from the introduction of the film, that indeed the African continent is being presented as a majestic world separate from the West. This film is also reflective of Wainaina's sentiments in his article whereby he unpacks the way Africa had been written about during colonisation as it also makes use of many of the terms which he identifies. The film refers to the African continent as "The Dark continent" which was a popular term used during the colonial era (Walt Disney, 1955). The term "dark" reflects an almost unknown void space that can be somewhat dangerous or timid. This connotation of the unknown also reflects how indigenous knowledge systems and individuals were not recognised or acknowledged. The ideology around Africa as a primitive is constantly reiterated to the viewer throughout. In many ways, this constant reiteration serves to remind European viewers, who would have been the target audience at the time, that this wild and untamed life is their lived experience.

By referring to the continents' landscapes as a primitive paradise, the filmmakers are able to remind the audience that indeed they are to understand these spaces and species as alienated from the rest of the world, and it is because of their primitivism that they are therefore an

interesting paradise. Primitivism is celebrated as 'untouched' but only from a Western perspective. This means when the West wishes to promote conservation, it is with this idea of pristine, primitive (depopulated) nature in mind. As this thesis will later discuss, this therefore also has an impact in terms of how conservation efforts and the understanding of landscapes should therefore be protected.

When it comes to the representation of wildlife in this film, we also see how they have been observed through a colonial lens. The film often refers to wild animals in relation to one another positioning a particular species as the ruler in relation to another as the ruled. This therefore mimics colonial conceptions in that they also positioned themselves with the responsibility to rule over the "unruly." This thus reflects on an earlier conversation with regards to the relationship between humans and wildlife in that we desire such an intimate relationship to the point whereby often human conceptualisations about life are projected onto wildlife. What also becomes interesting through this film is in relation to the animals being explored. The film clearly takes great interest in featuring some of the big five, we see the lion, elephant, and rhinoceros all being presented on screen. Although not all the animals featured in the film are shown in combat, it is quite frequently presented in the film, the lions are presented in survival mode when a lioness tries to enter the pride. The elephant on the other hand is presented in a much more playful manner whereby we follow a herd of elephants in search of water and watch as they bathe and coexist amongst the other species. Even with regards to the framing of the herd, it is noticeably clear to the viewer that they are being presented with a narrative of cohabitation, it is about how these elephants thus share the water source with other species. The way the elephants are presented is also reflective of a more light-hearted whimsical atmosphere which also speaks back to films of the time needed to provide an entertaining escape for the audience from their reality.

The way in which these species have been presented does allow for the viewer to understand that they are a separate species but also that they possess traits in which we as humans have created amongst ourselves. The viewer is invited to not only understand and appreciate nature but to do so in a way that allows for one to identify with some of those characteristics. Common characteristics in which films such as this and other earlier works explored are those of the female as a nurturer and the playfulness of younger species. It is important to reiterate that these are not only represented visually but also using varying sounds throughout the film. This was used not only for the *True-Life adventure's* series but for many of the earlier wildlife films as well. The audience are taken on a journey through which sound becomes incorporated to enhance a particular moment with the goal of having the audience feel certain emotions towards that moment.

In terms of the production and aesthetic choices used by the creator, the series was quite innovative for its time. We see this innovation through the series attempts to film this through live action. As mentioned in the opening quote of the film, the approach was to provide a sense of reality through the visuals whilst still allowing for a sense of creativity through the story. Therefore, the creators intend for the natural environment to be an active part of the story. The intention to create a sense of intimacy between the viewer and continent is also continuously reiterated throughout the film. The approach towards creating live-action content also reveals a sense of reality and truthfulness towards the film. Due to the audience being under the perception that the creators have gone out to capture nature in its purest form, they associate the overall visuals and narrative with a sense of truth.

The sense of pure reality within these films is essential in that it allows us to understand why such films would take on more traditional documentary techniques. Horak states: “It is also characteristic of nature documentaries that despite their intention to reproduce the real ironically, they are never strictly documents of animal activity, but are artificial constructs which are largely dependent on classical documentary film techniques” (Horak, 2006:461). What Horak reveals here is the way although these films may claim to capture nature in its real-time and truest form, there are always limitations to that. In other words, there is always a level of creative decision-making when it comes to these films. This can also be through the framing of species, some areas have surrounding communities that live amongst species. However, it was quite often for those kinds of visuals to be ignored entirely or excluded when creating these films.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between species on screen and human interaction is quite an intricate one. In most earlier forms of the genre, wildlife documentaries were quite limited in terms of engagement between species and humans on screen. In fact, for the most part earlier forms relied on voice-over narration as the representation of the human presence as opposed to them making a physical appearance onscreen. We see this even within the *True-Life adventures* episodes discussed earlier in this paper This may also be because species presence was so heavily emphasized and the idea of nature in its purest form.

This relationship also becomes crucial in understanding the genre itself in that it reveals key components considered by the genre and which take priority over others. Louw delves further into unpacking the genre and coins what she refers to as “pure wilderness” (Louw, 2006: 150). “The pure wilderness type is named because it excludes human beings visually from the scene. It tries to construct a reality where no human beings exist purely a natural animal, insect or plant domain. The human element however is provided through the voice of God narration” (Louw, 2006: 150). By allowing the “human element” through the voice-over narration, viewers are still able to identify themselves within this untouched world given that they are able to recognise the voice as a human one. This is important to note as it sets the tone for not only how the human element was being presented on screen but also who was considered as being able to fulfill the dominant voice narration.

Films that did place a heavier emphasis on human engagement almost formed their own unique subcategorization in that their approach towards nature was much different. In her discussion, Louw reveals how there are distinct approaches when it comes to documenting nature. We have documentaries that take on a more educational approach, using nature to educate and reveal information to its audiences, we also have nature documentaries which place a much heavier emphasis on entertainment. These are usually documentaries which place a greater emphasis on the human presence.

The message of bringing human beings closer to their natural environment and taking care of animals has remained central despite debates around whether species or humans should be the central protagonists. The approach towards achieving that may differ however the overarching goal remains the same. Although the central aspect of this paper will not focus on whether this is effective, what becomes key for this paper's discussion lies in the way these films present conservation within this human to wildlife relationship. A 2002 animation film that dealt with conservation efforts was that of *The Wild Thornberry's* (2002). Having watched the film in my early childhood it was one of those films which established my love for wildlife yet at the same time served as a fantastical reminder of the need to protect them as well. The film makes direct reference to issues such as cheetah and ivory poaching and tailoring such matters in a manner that a younger generation would still be able to grasp. By incorporating nature into children's viewership there is a power to develop the relationship towards nature from a much younger age. Tietge reminds us that indeed this form of filmmaking is one which has taken form in varying ways from anthropomorphising Disney animation to 20th-century films (Tietge, 2018:4).

Although this film is an animation film rather than a traditional nature documentary film, its approach towards the nature/ human narrative reflects a different approach. It does so by identifying that humans can also be the cause of species endangerment and as a result identifies that there are "good guys" and "bad guys". Although the film does convey these environmental protection efforts in a more magical way, it is progressive for its time in that it visually depicts conservation efforts as well. We see poachers with ammunition and explosives which reminds the viewer that indeed there can be a danger when human interaction with wildlife becomes more exploitative. Unlike with the True-Life series this film does not place the wildlife as entertainment or spectacle but tries to illustrate the beauty that can result from establishing a relationship with wildlife. This is not to say the film is without its flaws. Although it tackles issues of poaching in a way that younger audiences would understand, it does still stigmatise representations of people of colour. We see this particularly when Debbie forms a relationship with the Jomo. It is clear to the viewer that his main purpose is to track Debbie's sister by following the trails, it is also clear that Jomo does not have any knowledge of Western ways of living. This further perpetuates the stigma that people of colour need to be taught about new Western ways of living and continue to be limited in what they can offer to the overall film narrative.

Within this animated film, there is also another interesting layer that is rare to see in such films at the time. The film also touches on a sense of spirituality through the Shaman who gifts our main character Eliza with the ability to speak to animals. As much as this recognition of the spiritual is commendable, apart from Jomo this is the only other time we are presented with a central character of colour. It also has the danger of presenting the stigmatisation of indigenous people as being valuable only when they can "gift" their fellow white counterparts with something that will be beneficial to them. We only see the Shaman thrice throughout the film, once when gifting Eliza her powers, when they are taken away, and again when she has been regifted the powers after saving the Elephant herd. His appearance on screen is also constructed in a way that presents him as a messenger of nature rather than someone who has dominance over it.

Thus far, this paper has reflected on the historical representations of nature as well as the central themes in which these films place emphasis on. The interchange between what and whose narrative takes precedence has also been briefly discussed. In this next chapter, it is important to therefore reflect on the distinction between nature films and films which primarily present wildlife species, known as wildlife films.

Chapter 2: Nature and wildlife films

Theorists such as Bouse (1998), Horak (2006) spend time elaborating on the key features of each of these kinds of films and the kinds of visual displays they present; however, there is no clear distinct definition of what constitutes the two types of films. According to Louw: "In spite of the illusory aspect of the documentaries in this subgenre, I think that they can have a strongly educative value as they give insight into the workings of animal and insect communities that would be impossible to see in real life for most people (in the illustrative style) (Louw, 2006:151). This paper also approaches nature documentaries from the perspective of them exploring the relationship between species and their natural ecosystems. Exploring the natural habitat microsystems in order to reflect something about the macro-environmental issues. Wildlife documentaries on the other hand are only sometimes invested in exploring the ecosystems surrounding them as much. These films are very much species-focused and often the larger species which will capture and entertain the viewer. Not only is the selection of species more specifically curated in these films but even the use of sound between the two kinds as well.

"Every image, sound, and intonation in a film, however subtle, will add to a person's general disposition toward wildlife" (Choate, 2012: 4).

Before we begin to delve into some of the ways in which sound is used in different natural habitats it is important to reflect on what Choate states above. As mentioned earlier, it is not every individual that has access to interacting with nature and wildlife daily and what we see and hear onscreen is what aids our knowledge of certain species. It is because we often rely on such films to understand species that we associate sounds we hear with the exact ways in which that species may sound in real life. This therefore has the potential to blur the audience's reality of being in those environments and what they may sound like.

When it comes to wildlife films and the focus on the bigger species, we often see them presented in a manner as mentioned earlier that reiterates the survival of the fittest element. As much as sound can be used to aid viewers in learning more about a particular species and provide an idea about some of the reactions they may have to certain actions, there is also an element of spectacle involved. For nature films, there is a slight shift with more innocent upbeat sounds being used to present nature as a pure innocent untouched space and to encourage a sense of curiosity from the spectator. An example of this is in the BBC Series *The private Life of Plants- Tree and plant life* This six-part series provides a clear example of the ways in which sound is used in nature films. The episode titled Flowering shows this from the very opening sequence of the film where upbeat violin music is playing in the background as we take a closer look at pollen grain from the local flowers. The use of sound therefore leaves the viewers feeling a sense of peace/blissfulness from what they have

witnessed and heard on screen. The sound adds to the almost delicate nature of these plant species from their pollination through to their blossoming from the roots. Another example in which this could take place is with the actual sounds species make in these films. As non-filmmaking viewers, audience members might not always know most of the sound they hear has been edited in post-production. This allows for audiences to get a much more clear and more amplified sound of that species however; this is not necessarily how audiences might hear the sound when experiencing it in the natural environment. The infamous loud roar of the African lion, although lions by nature tend to roar loudly, the way in which their sound is presented on screen after editing further amplifies and enhances that powerful roar.

Although technology has allowed us to advance in terms of how we capture sound and present it on screen, there is still a distinction to what the natural ear may hear and what we hear through film. Oftentimes the background noise is edited out of the sound allowing for that crisp roar to further project on screen, in reality there is often immense background noise.

This is true even for those films which focus on large underwater species. More recently, *Our Planet* (2019) released a film containing behind-the-scenes of some of the episodes. Although the film helps the viewer understand some of the struggles that come with filming wild species, the use of sound still sensationalises some of the species presented. We see this in the preliminary stages of the film whereby the crew is setting up lighting gear to go underwater and film some of the sharks in the evening during their predator time. The way in which sound is used within this scene serves to remind the viewers of the dangers in which these expert professionals place themselves in, to obtain the amazing shots we see in the series. The sound used creates a sense of anticipation amongst viewers which is quite common for wild and dangerous species. As viewers, we feel anxious about the safety of the filmmakers when engaging with the sharks which further allows us to immerse ourselves within the experience.

In as much as this may create a more immersive experience for the viewer, we do see a shift in tone when it comes to smaller species and landscapes in terms of the kinds of sounds used to present those scenes. There it is presented in a much more upbeat and positive manner. The sound becomes much more playful and gentle when we see the crew waiting in anticipation for a specific species and how during the day the smaller species such as squirrels and rabbits make their appearance on the icy snow. Although these may not have necessarily been the targeted species, their presence does provide more depth and understanding of the natural ecosystems within those spaces.

Apart from the tailoring of species as a form of entertainment for its viewers, we are also reminded through the series of the psychological impacts in which observing nature can have on individuals. By watching the various crew members express their appreciation of being able to capture certain species feeding or merely being in frame, we are reminded of just how precious nature itself can be. It is clear to the viewer that for these crew members, those shots go beyond providing content for future films but are also representative of a moment of intimacy between themselves and the environment in which they find themselves in. The manner in which nature and wildlife species are presented also shift when we begin to explore the various films which take a more centred focus on conservation.

This essay will now begin to theorize various forms of conservation as a means of exploring the kind of images presented in films that incorporate some of these forms. This chapter aims to explore how these various forms shape and tailor the kinds of visual imagery we see onscreen. As we have now begun setting the foundation in terms of understanding earlier nature and environmental films and what they had been trying to establish, we can shift towards understanding the theory behind conservation. By exploring how conservation has become understood will reveal not only the theoretical research surrounding it but also some of the more physical attributes that have come to be connoted with conservation as well. This paper will now explore conservation in general as a theoretical concept before diving into some of the branches of conservation and how they have been explored through various films.

Chapter 3: Theorising conservation

According to the National Geographic Society, conservation is something that not only considers the preservation of dying habitats and species but also considers the importance of sustaining habitats for future generations. (National Geographic Society, 2023). As mentioned earlier the understanding of conservation is however much more complicated than simply protecting and preserving habitats and species. It has also been rooted in both sociological and scientific research as well therefore offering multiple perspectives and approaches through which conservation can be discussed and interpreted. The discussion around conservation is central to this paper in that to understand how conservation has been explored in film, the theory behind the concept needs to be explored. It is through this theory that we can see how conservation has visually been depicted through film.

It is important to consider the fact that in as much as conservation practices and management projects may be embedded within scientific research, the role of human and species interaction also forms a crucial part of how we have come to understand conservation efforts. For this reason, the understanding of conservation has also found itself within the social sciences. As Bennett et. al. argues, it is through the social sciences that the understanding of human involvement can thus be highlighted and understood (Bennett et. al., 2017: 96). This is significant as later in this thesis we will begin to explore some of how the shift in human presence becomes visible in wildlife documentaries and nature films with more visuals of conservation efforts. However, it is essential to unpack in more detail the understanding of conservation and how efforts to conserve have also been complicated because of colonialism.

What is central to the exploration of these various understandings of conservation is the idea that various scholars acknowledge the fact that conservation is not a concept that requires

passivity but rather one that requires physical action. For Sandbrook, defining conservation has become something understood following theorists' own interpretation and for this reason its understanding should always be carefully unpacked whilst keeping that in mind. He offers the following definition for conservation: “actions that are intended to establish, improve or maintain good relationships with nature” (Sandbrook, 2015: 565). What is interesting about Sandbrook's definition of conservation is his use of the word actions, instead of specifying that conservation efforts are embedded in science, he broadens the understanding to positive actions towards nature in general. He also highlights a mutual understanding amongst scholars that the idea of conservation is once more deeply rooted and embedded in the relationship between humans and nature. By referring to nature and not only wildlife Sandbrook's understanding also acknowledges the environmental aspect as well in that the natural habitat is just as critical as the wildlife itself. This paper is also focussed on exploring conservation through action and visual action shown on screen more specifically as a means of understanding how films present conservation efforts and projects to its viewers. It is also important to note that whilst Sandbrook and Williams were exploring conservation as a more general concept, this paper is concerned with looking at wildlife conservation and nature conservation specifically.

DeMotts proposes the idea of conservation as one that requires an active role in her article on the challenges of conservation through transfrontier parks in Africa. She states: “For a conservationist, participation may offer the chance to educate local people about sustainable natural resource use and management that will further the ends of the project rather than counter them through overuse, poaching, or other practices deemed to be at odds with conservation goals” (DeMotts, 2017: 6). Her statement is also crucial particularly as it counters fortress conservation models which isolate individuals from being part of the conservation efforts.

Conservation and environments under apartheid:

It is essential to reflect on the definition deMOTTS provides in terms of resource management. Particularly in the African continent, land and resources is something which is accompanied by a complicated history not only in terms of who has access to certain spaces but also who has access to certain resources as well. When it comes to discussions around conservation and ownership of land it becomes crucial to understand the colonial and Apartheid history in South Africa. Without spending too much time unpacking the history of colonialism and Apartheid, what is crucial to acknowledge is the fact that much of the land for most of the colonial and apartheid era had been owned by white Europeans. This therefore means that much of the control and management of parks and reserves were consequently created and run by colonialists as well. We know this given the time in which some of the oldest most renowned South African nature parks were established. The Kruger National Park was not only established for physically experiencing wildlife but also for early wildlife filming and colonial species research as well (Cock & Fig, 2000: 22). Cock and Fig go further to elaborate how although in 1926 the Kruger national park became part of the National Parks board (Cock & Fig, 2000: 23). The board also led to the beginning of conservation policies within South African national parks which further isolated surrounding communities of colour from having access to these natural spaces and participating in conservation efforts.

Ownership of these parks and reserves contributes to our understanding of the land within Southern Africa as one which not only carries physical history but also a tapestry of various identities as well. For the National Parks Board at the time, the park also represented a sense of ownership for the Afrikaaner community. A space within which they could mark their Afrikaner nationalist identity.

Although much of the management and ownership was allocated to white Afrikaners, when it came to the maintenance and labour in these parks, much of that was conducted by black workers. Historically, workers of colour were key impactors on the success and overall maintenance of these parks. "There was no recognition of the labour of the thousands of black workers who made the national parks possible and devoted themselves to wildlife conservation." (Cook & Fig, 2000: 24). With the majority of the labour being conducted by black workers, this meant that they were also central to the preservation of these parks as well. Therefore, one would assume that when it comes to the presentation of conservation projects through film, that these workers would have more knowledge on how to effectively conserve species and would therefore be central to the overall conservation discussion. However, as mentioned earlier, the controlled space and film industry at the time often completely ignored indigenous knowledge on sustainable and conservation practices.

Fortress conservation:

The physical boundaries within these spaces also further ensured that local communities were left out of the conservation conversation. This paper will now begin to look at another form of conservation that places great emphasis on boundaries. It is important for us to first establish an understanding of what constitutes fortress conservation before we can begin to unpack its presentation through film. Fortress conservation is also centred around the idea of protecting habitats and thus takes on a different approach in that for areas to be preserved and protected, they need to be closed off with limited and monitored access. Fortress conservation is not only a theoretical concept, but one which is physically practiced as well. Brockington gives us a visual understanding of what fortress conservation areas look like when he states: "The phrase connotes images of strongly protected conservation areas, surrounded by fences and barbed wire, policed by well-armed rangers, defending nature from powerful external threats" (Brockington, 2015:2). His reflections become crucial in that they reflect on the physical barriers and surveillance that are associated with this kind of conservation model. It also reveals the potential conflicts in which this model may present when it comes to fencing and isolating land shared between wildlife and communities.

Alongside these physical attributes also lies the ideology that humans are to be separated entirely from the natural environment to ensure its protection. In other words, it is the exclusive few who proclaim an interest for these species' protection that have to them. It is worth noting that the theory behind this kind of conservation was also a Eurocentric creation. We see examples of this in the early 1900s where new policies were signed by Europeans who had ownership over colonies on the continent. For example, Jones reflects on the 'Convention for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birdsand Fish in Africa'bill that was signed in the 1900s to protect certain species. (Jones, 2006: 484).

This is important in that when fortress conservation becomes incorporated into the African continent, there are potential issues that may arise. Given that many of the indigenous populations within the continent have relied on wildlife, particularly game as their source of food and income, fortress conservation can create conflicts between communities and these preserved areas. By physically barricading wildlife from communities this therefore cuts off not only the land in which they must be able to take care of their livestock but also cuts off their access to smaller game such as springboks which would also be enclosed within these areas. The origins of such conservation also become interesting in the African continent given that the approach towards wildlife and hunting was quite different from that of early colonialists. Jones writes: "Many of the protected areas in Africa owe their origin to the practice of hunting. Historically widespread throughout Africa, hunting has played an essential role in livelihood provision (game meat, hides etc.) and social functions (rites of passage, social cohesion)" (Jones, 2006: 484). What Jones reveals here is the deeply socio-cultural relationship between locals and wildlife. In the 19th century colonialists on the other hand approached notions of hunting from a distinct perspective, they were focused on the thrill of hunting.

Through this approach, one could see how the relationship dynamic between Europeans and indigenous communities to wildlife could influence the approach towards caring for wildlife and nature. As colonial hunters tried increasingly to establish a monopoly over game resources in Africa, tensions with subsistence hunters mounted. Hunting controls were designated and 'protecting game became part of the larger concern of the empire' (Beinart and Coates, 1995:28). Through Beinart and Coates sentiments, we can begin to see how because of these initial engagements species required more protection and regulations to ensure hunting was properly regulated. It is important to note that although regulations and protection at the time were to ensure control over hunting from both parties, colonialists also had their own agenda regarding the privatisation of land. "The implication of preservation was that protected areas had to be 'depeopled' to allow 'Europeans to impose their image of Africa upon the reality of the African landscape' as there existed 'a wish to protect the natural environment as a special kind of "Eden"'– a natural wilderness (Anderson and Grove, 1987:4). This becomes particularly crucial in that it reveals how the image of Africa and its natural environment was initially established to disturb notions of local individuals and wildlife in cohabitation.

This initial image is crucial in that it also reveals how earlier films would have framed this relationship and focused on highlighting the enclosed space to spotlight its efforts to conserve. In many ways the fortress model ensured colonialists were able to not only create this special kind of place through physical barriers but also control the film's overall image. Through the privatisation of land, Colonialists were also able to control and maintain the image of the land in accordance with the message in which they wanted to convey about Africa. Through early wildlife films they could promote their conservation efforts and the idea that to protect species, there needed to be limited access to these areas. Colonialists were able to maintain the image of wilderness as being areas untouched by indigenous people but protected by superior high authorities for the ultimate good of nature.

"The fortress conservation paradigm relied on Malthusian notions and the state was 'trusted' by the global community to be the best manager of natural resources especially in the developing world" (Singh & van Houtum, 2002: 256)

What Singh and van Houtum point out here is the fact that this model is politically tailored to place ownership in the hands of the state. In South Africa, during the 90's this meant that conservation parks were therefore managed by the apartheid government. Given the fact that the Apartheid regime was also deeply invested in segregating racial groups this therefore also continued to influence who had access to these parks and reserves. This was the case for most of the continent which continued to further perpetuate colonial ideologies regarding the value of indigenous communities and their inability to contribute to conservation and scientific discovery. The ownership of these national parks specifically in South Africa during the time, also had nationalist and political undertones. Spierenburg and Wels discuss how at the time South Africa had established a special board of trustees known as SANF which was run by Afrikaners (Spierenburg & Wels, 2010: 659). This also had an influence in terms of the cultural ideologies around wildlife and the kinds of efforts that were supported by the board which would have been in alignment with Afrikaans ideologies and that of the state as well.

To create these parks and maintain their ideologies on how they should be maintained and preserved, there were also deep implications for local communities as well. Many indigenous communities were evicted from these areas which had direct consequences on their cultural relationships towards the land. Given that most of the funding at the time was generated through the state, park managers were able to not only evict but also sustain barriers to prevent local communities from being involved in these efforts.

Some of the criticisms of this model include the notion of untamed untouched wilderness was one which could not be maintained given that surveillance and species research by nature required the human presence. By identifying the fact that this model was created during the colonial period it also revealed the unjust racialised nature in which individuals inside the park and those outside had been selected. The rise in tourism and increased interest in wildlife also meant that the notion behind keeping humans out of those spaces had to be reconceptualised and the economic value became a crucial part of these parks and spaces. This was also due to more films beginning to engage with wildlife and establish a relationship between the viewer and species onscreen. Although the colonial image of Africa continued to be maintained to attracted global tourists, the presence of indigenous communities was still not highlighted within these images. The fortress model continued to pose significant challenges to indigenous communities who continue to rely on livestock and wildlife for their own cultural practices.

A film which does try to reflect these challenges and illustrates this tension quite well is that of *The Great Dance (*2014) directed by Craig Foster. This documentary follows the life of two Khoi San hunters through the Kalahari. What makes this film so interesting is not only the way in which it emphasizes the importance of nature and its relationship to members of this community but also how the film highlights the issue of the lack of access to local game for surrounding communities. It visualizes the tension between indigenous community members and private reserve owners and in many ways essentialises the Khoi San culture within the film. A criticism of this approach could lie in the fact that through this essentialism, the film therefore needs to reflect on the communities ability to adapt to modern conditions. The conflict between fortress areas and this community is further highlighted when the men are on a hunt for local buck which then runs into private land which they therefore cannot access. They explain to Foster how this poses a great obstacle for them given that their traditions are slowly fading and as more land becomes privatised this therefore adds

limitations on their ability to continue hunting traditions. In many ways this film not only exposes the strict access and barriers when it comes to fortress conservation, it also reveals the lack of acknowledgment when it comes to indigenous practices and their relationship to nature. As mentioned earlier, fortress conservation models are much more concerned with restricting access between humans and species rather than a more inclusive approach.

The film's marriage of sound and image offer a unique and interesting ambiance for the viewer. Through the use of both diegetic and non- diegetic sound into the film, the audience is reminded of the beauty within indigenous knowledge systems as well as the intricate relationship between humans and nature. There are various examples of this throughout the film; we here the non-diegetic sound of upbeat drumming as we watch Xlhoase track the Kudu bull through the area. In another scene we hear uplifting music as we hear the sounds of birds soaring about Xlhoase as he reflects on hunting as part of his fathers and forefathers identity. Throughout the film, the viewer is made to feel as though they are walking alongside Karoha and Xlhoase as we zoom in on their hunting skills and celebrate their victories which they take back home to their family. The film offers a multilayered conversation through its framing both in terms of the subjects presented onscreen and the environment in which they live as part of everyday mundane life.

> "The Great Dance is indeed a film about hunting and dancing, about hunting and tracking being like dancing. What is novel and particular about the film is its focus on a peculiar kind of hunting, a type of activity in which hunting and dancing merge in a frenzied blur."
> (Douglas, 2001:313).

This merged blur Douglas reflects on also speaks to the film in terms of it is a celebration of everyday life and a plea for the shifting ways of living which have an impact on traditional ways of life. The way in which the dancing is framed in relation to the rain also allows the viewer to feel as though they are transcending the now into the spiritual realm. The dancing does not only add to the visual aesthetic of the film but also describes its valuable meaning within the tradition. It is a celebration of the earth providing back not only for the community but also to renew the earth's grounds and its species. The dance once again highlights the potential for such films to also tap into the spiritual realm as well. The dance is very much linked to the thanking of the Gods for the rainy season after the drought, Karoha and Xlhoase mention multiple references to the Gods throughout the film as well. This once again reveals the intimate relationship between indigenous communities and the spiritual realm.

Despite the challenges that fortress conservation may present in terms of its relationship with indigenous and local communities that rely on livestock, fortress conservation does also offer a solution around issues such as poaching. Fortress conservation does not only rely on barricading methods as a means of preserving species but there is also a level of surveillance involved as well through trackers and other technological devices. These tracking methodologies are also often explored visually through the film as viewers are taken on journeys with rangers who track the injured species or perpetrators who may still be in the area. To achieve these forms of surveillance, there is also therefore a greater need for support from funders and other individuals to sustain these efforts.

By presenting these efforts on screen through film, viewers can gain a better understanding of the severity of poaching in various areas. We are also able to understand the complexities that come with trapping and capturing perpetrators of this crime, the need to constantly monitor

various areas for any activity that may hinder or harm the survival of various species. Luckily through the continued expansion and development of multiple technologies, this allows for surveillance to take place in various forms. Drones for example therefore offer an opportunity to not only monitor species on the ground which can contribute greatly to anti-poaching efforts, they also act as another tool to visually capture species. The visuals can also act to both entertain viewers but also make an effective contribution towards wildlife protection as well.

This becomes important especially when looking at issues such as poaching which demand a higher level of surveillance to protect species. In 2008 illegal Rhino poaching in the African continent began to rise which made these species a target for extinction given the rapid rise. This also meant that there was a need for tighter surveillance and monitoring of these species. In this way we can see how fortress conservation is therefore used as a means of protecting species from outside threats. 2016 film *The Ivory Game* directed by Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani, examines the impact of ivory poaching and the influence in which local individuals play in poaching. This film becomes valuable to observe for these papers,' discussion in that it illustrates through visuals, key features of fortress conservation.

Although the film's focus is not centred around exploring the physical barriers which surround this wildlife, it does centre around conservation efforts and reveal some of the efforts in which local conservationists are making to combat poaching in the region. The film makes it clear to its viewers through the opening sequence of the film that it is one which intends to not only bring awareness to poaching and conservation efforts, but to also provide insight into the poaching networks both locally and internationally. The film does not present conservation efforts as a means of spectacle but instead the film shows these efforts as a reminder to the viewer of how large and complex these syndicates can be.

As viewers, we are not gradually introduced to the themes presented in the film but are thrown straight into local conservationist's efforts to locate poachers within the region. Even though these species are located within enclosed reserves, the first narration we hear is of a local individual well known for killing and poaching elephants within the area. The way in which this is introduced to the viewer also sets the tone for the rest of the film in that viewers understand the level of concern and serious tone of the subject matter being presented to them. Given that the film starts off by introducing us to the local involvement of ivory, viewers are able to gain a better understanding of how these local involvements can often be connected to the much larger international networks.

The film opens by framing the task team in action, capturing local poachers recruited by the notorious Alias Shetani. We are provided with an extreme close-up of the elephant tusks which zooms out into thousands. The issue of poaching is brought to the forefront for the audience, immediately setting the tone for the severity of the subject matter that is about to be presented to us. We are given the local issue of poaching as well as the Global Chinese market which at the time legalised ivory businesses. This, therefore again brings in the conversation around the value of nature with the economic benefactors that come with our interaction with nature. This will also be reflected later in this paper when we discuss the approach towards new conservation.

In many ways, this film gives us insight into the underground surveillance work that goes into catching ivory poachers and how local officials challenge in finding the minor involvers as

opposed to the big operating members. As viewers, we also begin to realise how local poachers are engaged within the activity because of much larger poverty issues rather than having an invested interest in the ivory itself. The film presents itself as much more than one centred around rhino poaching by revealing the multi-layered relationship between locals understanding the importance of protecting species and the commodification of species for capital gain. We have a micro view of how these individuals are thus willing to put their own lives in danger to prevent poaching and that perpetrators are found and arrested for their crimes. Through the activists and local intelligence task force we are also reminded that not all individuals advocate for poaching and the film is not reflecting a particular bias towards community members or Chinese individuals, for example. As viewers we are presented with a much more balanced perspective, we understand that there are poachers who work alongside locals, locals fighting against poaching, and those whose livelihoods have been jeopardised because of the human-wildlife conflict. By having these multilayered perspectives, the viewer can also gain a greater understanding of the issue at hand.

Visually we also see the film transport the viewer across multiple areas both locally and internationally which reminds the viewer that the conservation of nature is connected on a global scale. We are also transported both within the reserve spaces and local community farms which further allows the viewer to get a sense of who is considered to have access "legally" within these reserves and who would be regarded as a trespasser. The human presence within these spaces is clear and begins to challenge how the environment and nature had previously been understood and represented visually on screen. The film leaves us with a sense of encouragement that we too can be part of those fighting against poaching, irrespective of where we may be geographically located.

Based on our discussion thus far it is clear to see the way in which due to the progression towards a post-colonial society and a deeper investment by society into conservation methods, the fortress model needs to consider a restructuring of some of its approaches towards conservation nature whilst still taking into consideration the needs of local members. The idea of an untamed wilderness was only possible with the rise in rhino poaching and human influence on the environment. For this reason, we begin to see new forms of conservation emerge, ones which, instead of separating human involvement, place it as a foundation for conservation efforts.

'New' conservation

Although there are different forms of conservation, as mentioned earlier, the foundation of each form remains centred around the need to navigate between nature as a human resource and its preservation for future generations. There are no clear distinct factors which separate one model from another and in many ways, they often intersect with the intention between nature and human relationship. Each model develops and changes because of social factors which thus require a readjustment to the way in which conservation had previously been explored.

This alternative model of conservation reveals another focus that shifts away slightly from that of the models previously discussed. The model takes on a more global approach towards its efforts and places the natural resources for human consumption discussion quite closely to efforts of preserving species. "The new conservation is a reaction to a frank assessment of global trends in human population growth, resource demands, habitat loss, and species loss

and asks what we can do that really makes a difference on a global scale in the face of these huge counterforces" (Karieva, 2014: 634). What is interesting about how Karieva defines new conservation is the shift from focussing on preserving species on a local micro level to exploring conservation on a more global scale. Through her definition we therefore begin to see the ways in which new conservation not only recognises direct impacts on nature such as extinction and habitat shifts but also the human influences because of a growing population in demand of more resources.

Karieva goes further to argue that for "new conservationists" the focus is not only about looking at prominent areas and species in need of protection, but also considering the social and economic forces that prevent areas from being preserved. She emphasises the fact that due to economic factors, the majority of the surrounding communities of preserved areas thus also have an impact on preservation. It is also since biodiversity conservation does not consider these economic and social factors that the concept of new conservation can therefore be more effective in protecting and conserving spaces on a more global level. This model of conservation has received as much contestation as that of fortress conservation especially when one begins to consider the uneven approach towards nature as a resource and preservation as a priority.

Debates around the previously mentioned conservation models have also produced a difference in opinion and influenced the development of a so-called 'new conservation model'. For example, scholar Soule offers a slightly different view from that of Karieva by stating that indeed more traditional conservation efforts have been effective in preserving and protecting species whilst still considering the economic factors that contribute to these projects (Soule, 1995). It is important to note that these are not the only scholars who partake in this debate and that indeed this debate emerged at the end of the 20th century. This debate centres around the politics around prioritisation, in other words do surrounding communities impact preservation projects and how do economically disadvantaged communities therefore impact these projects. "Commonly referred to as the ''parks vs. people" debate, this argument turns on the question of whether biodiversity scientists and advocates should prioritize nature protection or human welfare in conservation projects – and within the wider conservation agenda more generally" (Miller et. al., 2001:949). As Miller mentions here not only is the debate focused on addressing surrounding communities and their economic and social impacts on conservation, but it is also about the prioritization between species and humans.

> "Outside the park, however, is a social context with problems like poverty, conflict, and lower levels of biodiversity. Under this view it is the forces outside of the islands of protection that threaten the existence of biodiversity and the natural order of things inside the park" (Miller, 2011:949).

One might then initially ask the question of how outside communities would therefore have an impact on conservation spaces and how exactly the two come into tension with one another in this debate. Through Millers' sentiments above, we can begin to see how the tension lies not necessarily in whether communities are active participants in conservation projects through their impact on biodiversity. Although communities may be situate outside of the parks, their economic conditions may impact the biodiversity and natural resources that the parks may need to preserve and protect species. One may see how this side of the debate may be an important consideration however, it does also speak back to the kinds of

relationships that private reserves have with the outside communities and whether efforts have been made to educate those communities about the impact in which they may have on conservation efforts.

It is important to note that the concept of new conservation is one which is continuously developing which is why for theorists like Soule, the main issue with moving forward with relying on new conservation is that there is indeed not enough evidence to prove its claim. His article clearly illustrates his oppositional point of view concerning new conservation by providing evidence of how the theory can often contradict actual outcomes. He states: "The key assertion of the new conservation is that affection for nature will grow in step with income growth. The problem is that evidence for this theory is lacking. The evidence points in the opposite direction, in part because increasing incomes affect growth in per capita ecological footprint" (Soule 1995; Oates 1999). As to whether Soule makes an accurate critique of the new form, it is still worth observing in that even through his debate, his arguments are reflective of the people vs species debate, which Miller reflected on earlier in this paper.

Holmes, Sandbrook and Fisher try to situate the debate from a conservationist point of view, they start off by providing a distinction between more traditional forms of conservation and what now constitutes as new conservation. "New conservation is more anthropocentric, emphasizing the benefits of nature to humans and prioritizing the emergent properties of ecosystems that provide these, such as stability and productivity. Traditional conservation is more biocentric, emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature and prioritizing issues of species diversity and extinction" (Holmes, Sandbrook & Fisher, 2017: 354). Drawing on their sentiments we can begin to see why prioritization becomes so central to the debate as for traditional forms nature was the centre of concern whereas new conservation steers away from that and places individuals and economic growth at the forefront of its concern. Part of the pushback with regards to new conservation also has to do with the fact it also sustains the idea that nature should still be the main source of economic and political growth rather than prioritising the fact that it is due to human consumption in the first place, that many endangered species and habitats have therefore emerged.

What is central for this paper's argument is also the exploration of these distinct kinds of conservation in that in as much as there has been a development in the physical conservation projects this may also impact how these projects are presented onscreen. By establishing the foundational understanding that conservation is a concept which is very much invested in the relationship between individuals and species we are therefore able to better understand how this relationship may be presented on screen through wildlife films. It will also allow us to understand the impact in which reconceptualising conservation could have in reframing the kinds of prominent imagery presented on screen because of this new conceptualisation.

Hulme and Murphree speak directly to this relationship in their discussion around African communities and wildlife (Hulme & Murphree, 1999: 278). They state: "In effect these challenges constitute a `new conservation' that seeks to take both the theory and practice of conservation beyond the colonial and neo-colonial construct of `fortress conservation' (Adams and Hulme, forthcoming) that has shaped it throughout most of this century" (1999:278). In other words, the distinctive factor of new conservation lies in extending itself beyond how more colonial fortress conservation efforts have been used. It is important to

situate the idea of new conservation in the African context, given that its rich socio-political history could thus have an impact on how new conservation is shaped or applied in this region.

Hulme and Murphree acknowledge the fact that although for most rural communities living on the outskirts of these privatised fortress areas, they have been deemed as degraders to conservation efforts and thus hinder conservation efforts. This is not the case: “Indeed, the indigenous technical knowledge of rural Africans indicates that they have sophisticated understandings of environmental processes. Instead, they must be recognized as `citizens not criminals' (Hulme and Infield, forthcoming) with rights and responsibilities over the nation's conservation estate (be that species, habitats, or biodiversity)” (Hulme & Murphree, 1999: 278). This is particularly crucial in the African continent mainly since much indigenous knowledge on preserving biodiversity remains ignored with a reliance more on Eurocentric scientific and biological understandings that therefore steer these projects. This factor could also be due to the ingrained ideology that local citizens in these rural communities are seen as criminals to conservation efforts rather than potential contributors to them.

Another central aspect of new conservation is its shift in perspective from preserving species and biodiversity to acknowledging them as a form of resource. “No longer do things that are to be conserved (species, habitats or biodiversity) have to be automatically set aside: rather, they can be viewed as renewable natural resources that can be utilized as long as that does not compromise sustainability” (Hulme & Murphree, 1999:278). In other words, new conservation acknowledges the fact that biodiversity and species can be used as benefactors to human consumption if they are, therefore not overused to the point where they cause unsustainability. On the one hand, one could argue that this acknowledges the reality that society relies on much of the environment and species for survival. Drawing back to the relationship between fortress conservation as enclosed privatised areas, this therefore means that biodiversity and species will therefore be available to the privileged wealthy in society and therefore not be economically empowering or accessible for surrounding rural communities.

“But the communities that live with the lions are the ones best positioned to help the lions the most. Local people should be at the forefront of the solutions to the challenges facing their wildlife. Sometimes change can only come when the people most affected and impacted take charge” (Moreangels Mbizah, Ted)

In her Ted talk on conservation Dr Mbizah emphasises the importance of community in conservation efforts and highlights that for many local Zimbabwean communities, although they live near wildlife areas, they do not have the opportunity to engage and develop a relationship with species. She emphasizes the need for conservation projects to consider surrounding communities and help educate them about conservation efforts so that they can form part of the project. This will increase the number of people fighting for change and allow surrounding communities to form relationships with the biodiversity and species surrounding them. Although her sentiments are important regarding how we approach conservation, another underlying message is the importance of acknowledging traditional knowledge when it comes to preserving natural landscapes and species.

Even within the models in which this paper explores, much of its theorisation is based on Western scientific strategies. That is not to say that these strategies are applicable in the

Southern African region. In fact, the majority follow the Western scientific strategies for their approach. This is why these models are still worth exploring for this paper. At the same time it is important to address some of the gaps in thinking around nature from more traditional knowledge systems as well.

Given that this paper is centred on exploring wildlife conservation and its presentation through film it is therefore fitting to try and explore documentary and film projects which may apply some of the ideologies associated with new conservation in their filmmaking projects. It therefore becomes interesting to see the ways in which filmmakers thus embrace the presence of individuals on screen as opposed to more traditional wildlife documentaries given its central aim in viewing nature and wildlife as a resource for individuals. *The Story of Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT)* created a 3-part mini-series centred on community conservation featuring Kenyan community members at the forefront of their projects and of the series itself. The project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) however the local Kenyan government was also involved in the creation of the project. This 3-part series is available via YouTube and has also been screened across local communities raising awareness not only to conservation efforts but educating communities on the power of local conservation as well.

> "It is widely acknowledged that for humans and wildlife to coexist and to continue to use our earth's natural resources, we must protect 30% of the land, rivers and wetlands across the world within the next decade." At the Northern Rangelands Trust, we recognize that to do this successfully, we need to work hand in hand with the communities we serve to develop solutions that benefit the people, land, and wildlife. This is what the community conservancy model is all about." (The Northern Rangelands Trust, n.d).

CEO of the Northern Rangelands Trust Tom Lalampaa highlights for us the central aim of this project in embracing the need for communities to be involved in assisting with conservation projects. In part one of the film titled *Celebrating Community Led Conservation* we hear the director of the project Ian Craig reiterate how this project is not only owned but also managed and run by local community members. Mr Lalampaa is also featured throughout part 1 of the series whereby we hear his childhood background having managed livestock and mingled with wildlife throughout his early childhood. This, therefore reiterates how indeed surrounding communities grow up looking after livestock and, therefore do offer valuable knowledge when it comes to their preservation as well.

This project becomes such an integral part of the exploration of new conservation that the project also reflects on socio-economic aims in which new conservation aims to achieve. "To enable communities to conserve their natural resources and use them sustainably, integrate livestock keeping and wildlife conservation, securing peace and security and good governance" (The Northern WIldlife Trust, 2019). Through Lalampaa's sentiments we can see how he too reflects on this idea of integrating the use of land and livestock whilst at the same time ensuring that species remain, and land remains sustainable. The series also addresses issues of rhino poaching and how by involving the community and having them feel part of the landscape and establish a relationship with species, they can therefore be more encouraged to help in the fight against poachers who may be hiding out in the surrounding areas. By acknowledging the need to use livestock still and to do so sustainable one could argue to some extent Lalampaa therefore adopts a new conservationist approach for this

project. However, there is also something interesting about how this project frames its imagery in the 3-part series which is slightly different from more conventional wildlife documentaries.

Interestingly, this project's use of filmmaking is that unlike more conventional documentaries, there is an equal balance if not more of the human presence seen in the series. It is quite clear that a central theme in this series is displaying community involvement in these projects that highlighting the actual wildlife presented, the way these projects were presented onscreen where also not necessarily exaggerated or presented in a manner to make them appear as a spectacle for the viewers pleasure. The incorporation of traditional sounds and music also resituates the audience, reminding them that although the project may be displayed locally, it has been created by and intended for local Kenyan communities.

Part 2 of the series highlights an elephant sanctuary that has been established and run by local communities. Even though we see the elephants being presented here, they are presented in a manner that reminds the audience that this is about conserving species with the community. It emphasises the relationship in which members of the community have managed to establish through these projects whilst still taking care of the elephants. We see members of the community feeding the baby elephants which further reiterates this message. One of the community members in the film states that: "Conservancy is a beautiful thing, which has changed so many communities particularly it has changed the Samburu community. We are now conservationists" (Northern Rangelands Trust). By identifying herself and members of the community as conservationists, we can begin to see how through community involvement and acknowledgement of their skills and knowledge they are able to feel valued and acknowledged as part of the contributors to conservation.

By incorporating these visuals, the series begins to reveal a more positive progressive shift when it comes to wildlife and nature conservation films. It becomes a point of encouragement to other surrounding community members that they too can be involved in conservation projects. This inclusion therefore also subverts the narrative that local communities can only be collaborators to endangering natural local ecosystems. Local communities watching this therefore feel more encouraged that they too can be part of the conservation efforts.

Chapter 4: Wildlife conservation and contemporary films

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between humans and wildlife is intimate. This is further enhanced when theories and discussions around wildlife conservation are considered. The understanding of wildlife conservation is crucial for the discussion of this paper as it allows us to conceptualise the kinds of efforts presented to the viewer onscreen which are presented under the umbrella of preservation and conservation. However, it is important to note that despite this paper's reflection on a few key definitions, the theory of conservation is one filled with many complexities and is conceptualised in a variety of ways. In his discussion around animal behaviour and wildlife management, Festa-Bianchet gives us an idea of his understanding of wildlife conservation. He states: "Wildlife conservation is concerned with the preservation of species and their habitat in the face of threats from human development" (Festa-Bianchet & Apollonio, 2003: 3). What is central to Bianchet and

Apollonio's definition of conservation is the notion of not only the species themselves but also their habitats needing preservation because of human action.

If one takes Festa-Bianchet & Apollonio's definition of wildlife conservation in the context of film one can begin to think of many different films and shows which place this notion at the forefront of their content. As mentioned earlier, most early wildlife films and those centred around conservation often framed the fragility of nature through their narrative. Conservation efforts were often framed in a way that revealed the fragility of nature as opposed to directing the responsibility for nature's fragility towards humans. These films often centre the narrative around species extinction to invite viewers to be part of larger efforts and organizations that preserve nature. "The aim of such films is to mobilize audiences by raising awareness of problems in the hope that attitudes, behaviours and policies will change as a result" (Bouse´, 2000: 280). Here we see Bouse providing us with shifts between conventional wildlife films with conservation films. We see how he elaborates that these kinds of films are much more centred around mobilisation for change rather than simply giving the audience visualisation of endangered species. He is suggesting that entertainment and activism can be equal in these films and that they each in some ways rely on one another in these films.

Although there are many traditional wildlife conservation films, we also see the rise in shorter documentary series which center their content around inviting audiences into the natural habitat and conservation work. One such series is that of Netflix *Shamwari Untamed* (2018). What makes this show such an interesting study for the discussion is that the show zooms in on conservation through a micro lens rather than presenting nature to spark a broader conversation around conservation efforts.

"It is the most accurate, insightful and authentic depiction of the incredible work conservation team does and now that it's on *Netflix* people around the world with an interest in conservation will be able to see what goes into making a project such as Shamwari succeed."
(Shamwari CEO Joe Cloete)

As Cloete points out in his sentiments, the show is heavily invested in providing its audiences with a visual representation of conservation efforts within the area and tailors towards audiences with an invested interest in the wildlife conservation conversation. This investment also presents a shift from earlier films as mentioned in the previous chapter, whereby nature was presented as pure and untouched by humans. This series subverts that notion from the very first episode given that experts and conservationists are at the forefront of the narrative constantly interacting with both the species and the natural space. As viewers, we are taken through the sciences of conservation specifically in the scenes where species have been taken to the nearby centre to receive treatment or find out more about their condition.

As viewers we immediately get a sense of the level of investment and emotional concern for each species from each of the professionals which allows us to understand how their efforts stem from both the need for scientific work through treatments but also from emotional investment. In many ways the series presents a visual representation of the anthropence. "The Anthropocene calls for us to erase the dividing lines between humanity and non-human nature and also challenges geographers to cross disciplinary boundaries." (Lorimer, 2015:

117). We also see the blurring of these boundaries in the series as injured wildlife are transported from their natural habitats into made centres to receive treatment.

As mentioned earlier, it is because the show is heavily invested in the conservation efforts that the spectacle or entertainment of the show does not necessarily stem from the species and landscape as per more traditional forms but from the behind-the-scenes into the conservation and scientific work. As viewers, we find a sense of delight in seeing species receive treatment and anticipation as to how they respond towards the conservation team after the sedation has worn off. The show takes us into the Shamwari Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre where viewers get to experience various species receiving their treatments, from Kudu to jackal puppies. The extreme close-ups of the syringe entering the rhino mother to watch her reunite with her baby calf are just some of the other ways in which the show can captivate its audience.

The fact that the show is also segmented into smaller episodes each around 26 minutes also makes it easier for audiences to digest the content they are being presented. The show takes on a more serialised format, allowing each episode to build on from one another. This therefore also allows for its viewers to consume bit size information whilst still having the leisure of coming back to explore more at a later stage.

Although the show does invite audiences into the experience of conservation efforts, we are also seeing the historical influences still present with regards to who has access to these spaces and who is conducting conservation efforts. Most of the experts, much like in earlier wildlife films, are white, which once more speaks to how the theories and ideologies of conservation thus present themselves onscreen. Although we do see men of colour represented in the series, however, we mostly see them as part of those carrying each of the species into the rehabilitation centre or as part of the anti-poaching response team. The anti-poaching segment as part of the series also adds another layer of conservation tactics presented throughout the series. Much like with the rehabilitation team, we also get to witness the anti poaching team strategize and work together to capture poachers on the ground. This episode is further enhanced by upbeat music as they zone creating further anticipation for the audience.

The sound used in the series also plays a key role in also establishing the series on a more local level. We often hear traditional upbeat music used throughout the series, reminding audiences that the series is located in Africa. The use of this music also allows for the audience to remain optimistic or positive with regard to the various rehabilitation efforts being presented. Sound also establishes a sense of optimism for viewers throughout the various episodes, we find joy in knowing that these species are receiving the treatment they need to be released back into the natural habitat.

As mentioned earlier, it is because conservation theory and efforts are constantly evolving overtime that we therefore begin to see shifts in terms of the various models which get used and which become represented on screen. Thus far, Much of the conversation has been around looking at earlier conservation models, which in many ways linked to colonial ideology. However, these shifts have allowed us to be able to position how conservation was framed back then to how it is framed now. The example mentioned above is a clear indication of how post-colonial society has begun not only allowing viewers into conservation efforts visually but have also begun exploring new ways of framing wildlife and the natural environment in general. To continue this conversation in this concluding chapter, we will

explore a few more film case studies that reveal this approach towards wildlife both in terms of narrative and visual representation as well as viewer consumption of such content.

Another recent 2015 series *Siyaya Come Wild with Us* directed by Dr Francois Odendaal explores nature and wildlife through a particularly unique lens. Not only does the show place great emphasis on exploring local spaces but takes on a unique approach with its targeted audience The show promotes its ability to instill curiosity of nature through having young individuals travel and explore the natural environment. The show takes a group of young individuals guided by Francois Odendaal to explore various landscapes from the coastal shores of cape point to local cave areas.

Having completed his doctoral studies in ecology in 1981 and having more that 30 years of experience in the ecological conservative space, one can see why the series would thus select someone like Odendaal to be the main explorer of these natural spaces. His passion is further shown through how he guides the viewer along the journey and his engagement with the young explorers invited to the show. Before unpacking this in more detail, it is important to look at some of the more stylistic elements in which the show incorporates.

Figure A

The series is also titled in a manner that presents itself as welcoming to its viewer. As mentioned earlier in this paper, often the colonial approach to wildlife films also meant the exclusion of certain racial groups both from representation and access to these films. This show clearly embraces local South African culture not only through its title but also through its selection of students as well. By titling the serious "Come Wild with Us" the show as viewers we immediately feel as though this is a show which invites us to travel along the journey with the young individuals. The show also includes a specialised bus painted in Zebra stripes, reminding audiences that this is a series about nature and wildlife, specifically in Africa. Although later in the series, we see the explorers being exposed to nature outside of the continent, the series remains more centrally focused. The brown font used at the front of

the minibus can also be interpreted as representing the playful, youthful nature of the show. In figure A, which is one of the posters of the film, we see the individuals in the minibus looking excited and as though they are having fun which is also what the show prides itself on trying to present.

“Siyaya unravels the mysteries of the natural world and imparts a sense of wonder and respect for Nature in young people, leaving them fully convinced of the need to preserve our last wild places for future generations” (Siyaya TV).

What makes this show particularly interesting for this paper's discussion lies in the fact that unlike the shows discussed earlier in this paper, this series not only embraces the human presence within the natural environment on screen but also encourages the young individuals to be part of efforts to protect the environment as well. From the first few episodes, it is clear to the audience that the series is also trying to encourage individuals from a younger age to establish a relationship with the environment as well. The fun and youth educational approach of the series makes it particularly unique to other shows that also explore nature and its protection. We see this highlighted in one of the first few episodes whereby the group are taken to explore the coastal shores of Cape Point. The group is collected from the local school in Simons Town and therefore taken on an educative tour of the coast and local fauna as well. Upon their excursion, they encounter a snake, and the children are supervised and encouraged to interact with it. By allowing them to do so, the show further encourages the group and viewers to engage with nature, which can be insightful and reminds us of the role in protecting it.

Within the same episode we see the children come across a local whale that has washed onto the shore. They are encouraged to run and touch the whale as well. By incorporating such imagery, the show, unlike previous wildlife documentaries, is therefore also able to counter earlier ideologies that only the elite and exclusive can therefore be part of conservation efforts. Although our main guide is a white male, the group of school children are often a while mix of races. This also, therefore counters the idea that only certain races are therefore interested or should be allowed to participate within these environmental efforts.

The entertainment aspect of the show lies not within the species themselves as is the case with earlier wildlife shows but rather it lies in the journey through which these children take to find and explore various species. By emphasising the young explorer's journey, the show can also encourage and draw in younger audiences. The show is also insightful in these journeys as Ordendaal provides these explorers with key details about the landscapes and species in which they come across. As viewers, we are taken along this journey and also share in receiving the valuable information about the surrounding environment. Through the approach taken by the series, young children are thus able to feel encouraged that they too can enjoy learning about nature and be part of efforts to take care of it as well.

As we move into exploring more contemporary films and their exploration of conservation, it also, therefore, becomes interesting to consider the shift in gender representations as well. The role of gender forms an important part of this paper's discussion given that not only did this have a historical impact on representation in films but also in the inclusion of conservation efforts within wildlife and nature films as well. This provides another layer of divide as discussed earlier, conservation was a strategy considered to be set out for an elite group to maintain and control. By adding gender exclusivity to conservation efforts, further

narrows the scope regarding who could be part of and reflected on visually through conservation efforts and nature films. “Logically then, if male and female environmentalists differ in their values, priorities and/or approaches to conservation, this may impact how environmental management has been and is currently being practiced” (Tenouri, 2019: 4). What Tenouri points out here is the way in which conservation and environmental efforts are shaped will thus also be influenced by the consideration of gender. The exclusion of gender in conservation efforts would, therefore create an uneven approach toward conservation values and approaches.

Most earlier efforts and practices around conservation were solely reliant on science and research as the foundation for all its practices. The sciences were often predominantly dominated by white men, which also filtered through into conservation research. More recently, we have begun seeing a more equal representation of males and females within the scientific field but even with this progression, there is still much work to be done. Chaudhury & Colla explain that for the sciences and conservation to progress truly, there needs to be an acknowledgment of the barriers through the researchers, committees, and fieldworkers where the representation is also lacking (Chaudhury& Colla, 2021: 4). This is important in that as mentioned earlier, it is through the exclusionary nature of the field and around conservation strategies themselves thus infiltrates into the visual representations and exclusions as well. Within the wildlife space most game drivers and guides were thus also predominantly male and those who would share information with the viewers about the species and park management were also predominantly white male figures.

Despite the inequality around scientific researchers and filmmakers at the time, we have now begun to see an improvement and acknowledgment of the participation of females within nature and scientific work as well. This is also true for nature and wildlife films which have begun including more females especially those of colour. *Sisters of the Wilderness* directed by Karin Slater (2018), is an ideal example of how films have now begun progressing and transforming representation through gender on screen. This film has most of its production team as females, and all the central characters are also black females. The film centres around 5 women, which is conventionally unusual in wildlife and nature films. Not only is this film progressive in terms of gender, but it also begins to shift the narrative when it comes to wildlife films and the representation of race.

Although within a post-colonial society, there has been a progression in terms of representation both within the sciences and through film, it remains quite rare to find films that uniquely embrace the presence of women of colour as the central participants for nature and wildlife films. As mentioned earlier, Sisters of the Wilderness is a film which completely subverts this by reminding the viewers that this film is indeed centred around these 5 women and their experiences of nature. This is also made clear on the official film page with reviews such as the following: “It is a documentary with the sensitive female eye and strong female spirit... This is an exquisite film”. — Marianne Fassler . As Marianne points out through her sentiments, this film is heavily invested in not only having these 5 women present on screen but also exploring through their journey with nature, the strength and power of the group together.

Visually the film is also unique in that it transports the viewer across multiple spaces. At first,

we are introduced to the women within their communities, we are given a glimpse into their daily activities and living conditions. This is shown whilst they narrate who they are and where they are from. From quite early in the film, the audience gains a clear understanding of their various socio-economic conditions, most of the women are from the township and work hard to make ends meet. Alongside this, we are also exposed to their story within the wilderness as well. As they explore and travel through nature, we begin to see their journey unravel as well, we often see the women sitting within the fields and sharing parts of their story as they go along. It is through hearing the story of each of these women and visually seeing the struggles within the community, that the audience begins to realize socio-economic tensions that are at play within this film. Through sharing their story within the reserve, the filmmakers are able to also illustrate the healing in which nature can provide. We watch them each take turns to share their story and interact with the various species during night watches. In as much as the viewer is taken on a beautiful journey of watching these 5 women grow and engage with the wilderness, we are also constantly being reminded of the dangers in which the reserve faces.

The Mfoleni reserve is under threat not only due to illegal poaching of rhinos but also the intention to develop an open-cast mine near the reserve. This is something in which the film makes it quite explicit to its viewers at the very beginning of the film. This, therefore, adds another layer to the film in that we not only journey with these women, but we are also reminded that we value the beautiful landscapes they are traveling through, we are also reminded of how crucial it is to preserve this area as well. How this reminder is presented to us is also heavily embedded in the overall narrative of the film. “Environmental films are more than just sequences of images, explanations of ecological phenomena or arguments for change. Central to this review is the fact that environmental films are—or in the least, contain aspects of—narratives “Cornwall & Williams, 2021: 1195). As mentioned earlier in this paper, often when we think about wildlife or environmental films, there is an expectation of the imagery and content in which these films may produce. This often leads to the neglect of the fact that these films also offer a story/ narrative. With *Sisters of the Wilderness* the narrative is told equally by the characters and through the environment itself. The narrative of this film is not centrally focused on the journey of these women but placing that journey into a broader conversation around access to reserves and the environmental impact in which the mine would have on the community and the environment.

In the film we see audiences being constantly reminded of this imminent threat as the camera pans over the mining project quite visible near the park. Through doing so, we remain aware of the implications that project could have for the nature and wildlife in which we are seeing on screen. It also disrupts earlier notions of nature as an untouched place of escape in that we are directly presented with the reality of the mining project on screen.

The film's central narrative also reminds the audience of the need for a collective appreciation and understanding of the environment. It reminds us to weigh environmental concerns just as much as we weigh the economic gains at the expense of nature. In many ways this film touches on some of the dangers that arise within new conservation in that it links back to the understanding of nature and the environment as a resource and the delicate balance between nature as an economic resource and the exploitation of the environment for economic gain. The film and its narrative finally speak to the power of film as a tool to create awareness and activism to combat a larger issue. After watching the film, the viewer is left with a sense of

encouragement to stand up against the exploitation of the environment. We are also reminded that women of colour and everyone should be part of the conservation conversation to ensure the preservation of heritage and natural spaces.

Finally, the film also brings into conversation the way in which landscapes in the continent have a deep historical history and the preservation of such areas is linked to the preservation of history. Cryer writes that the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park has a long socio-political history but also a cultural heritage, from inhabitation of the San people into the area to the resettlement of black people into the area (Cryer, 2009: 13). In other words, there is also a tapestry of indigenous knowledge and sacred connotations attached to this land which may now be in danger because of an economically centred mining project.

Although this is not the only film that has begun challenging the status quo when it comes to representation and using film for impact, it is one which in many ways speaks to key points within this paper's discussion around new conservation and post-modern visual representations through film. This paper will now delve deeper into the new forms of viewing wildlife which continued to expand and develop over the years. These new forms have also therefore begun to demonstrate the potential for new structures when it comes to the presentation of these shows.

Our Great National Parks:

"We have lived on two different planets for decades: one threatened by ecological collapse, the other characterised by televised wildlife programmes" (Monbiot 2002)

Continuing the discussion around innovative approaches through representation, this paper will now explore a more recent documentary which also challenges who narrates wildlife films. Shows have begun to not only shift through representation but have also placed conserving nature at the forefront of their narratives. Netflix 2022 show *Our Great National Parks*, takes us on a journey alongside former president Barak Obama, as he explores various national parks across the globe. The show places its focus on reminding us as viewers of the importance of appreciating and protecting nature. It is a show that places great investment on the species and landscapes using advanced technology to display these majestic images. What makes this show particularly interesting for this paper's discussion is the way in which it exposes how there have been efforts to shift conventions when it comes to representing people of colour in nature and wildlife films. The selling point of the series is indeed Mr Obama as the narrator of the show. As viewers, we are intrigued to explore nature alongside this well-known public figure. It is because he is such a well-known public figure not often shown in films about nature, that even prior to viewing the series we are already intrigued to join him on this journey. By having such a prominent figure as Obama, viewers become invested in learning about his own journey with nature as well. It is important to note that through this high-profile figure, the show is still, therefore, positioned from a place of the privileged elite as it explores parks that remain secluded from surrounding communities. This is one of the criticisms which one can make of the show.

"Barack Obama's nature documentary is beautiful, but reminds us of the hole that will be left should David Attenborough retire" (Power, 2022)

As viewers we are extremely intrigued by the choice of narration, the show has been criticized and compared by many to the work of David Attenborough. This once more speaks

to the racial and historical stigmatizations that earlier nature and wildlife documentaries had. Attenborough has for many years as a white male been viewed as "The voice of nature documentary," his presence has become recognized as the main voice through which nature and wildlife documentaries are narrated. By shifting narrators, there is an underlying shift therefore in terms of racial and social understandings of who can and cannot narrate the story of nature. Yet at the same time the positionality of the privileged still comes into conversation when looking at the series. It is because for many years Attenborough has been the main face and voice in nature and conservation documentaries that the thought of him leaving or being replaced therefore becomes unthinkable to some viewers.

Despite the mixed reactions towards having Obama as a narrator, the series itself is one which is very much invested in highlighting the beauty and delicate details present in the natural environment. It is without a doubt that the series wasted no expense when it comes to the cinematic experience it had intended for its audience. The series places emphasis on the aesthetic beauty of landscapes and species. It encourages viewers to see the beauty of these landscapes and reminds us of the importance of preserving these spaces for future generations. In a way paying homage to the fantastical element mentioned in earlier wildlife films to present this beautifully cinematic image. The investment in high tech and providing the viewer with the best quality visuals of the landscape is also subtly mentioned by the narrator himself . By focusing on various locations through each of the episodes, the series is therefore able to ensure that the viewer is constantly engaging with new environmental landscapes and also reminds the viewer of the diversity of nature across the various spaces.

The heavy emphasis on high technology therefore reminds us as viewers of the shifting perspectives in which wildlife documentaries have begun in more recent years. Unlike before where emphasis was placed on species as spectacle, the intricate detailing of the landscape is the central focus.. It is because the show is constantly moving from river and ocean life to species on land that we are truly able to appreciate each of the picturesque images we are presented with. There is however an argument that can be made that if too much attention is paid to creating these picturesque images that indeed films could therefore fall back on the escapism it had once established.

"You distort speed if you want to show things like plants growing or look in detail at the way an animal moves. You distort light levels. You distort distribution, in the sense that you see dozens of distinct species in a jungle within a few minutes, so that the places are teeming with life. You distort size by using close-up lenses. And you can equally well distort sound" (Burgess and Unwin 1984: 103).

Sound in this series, much like with other nature documentaries, plays a very crucial role in not only establishing the ambiance of the film but also by guiding the audience through the various actions of the species. What Burgess and Unwin point out here is that just like with visual post-production work, there is also a large amount of editing that goes into the sounds we hear as well. It is also because of editing that we are able to enjoy the sounds of nature alongside musical notes which further set the tone for various scenes. For example, In the Kenyan episode when we enter the forest space with the sloths, we hear birds and the natural environment alongside the more upbeat musical tones. This indicates to the audience the more playful and gentle nature of the sloths' actions as he hangs from one branch to another to find the perfect leaf. The use of sound in this series also adds to the spectacle experience in

which the show tries to present in that alongside these clear aesthetic images is high-quality environmental sounds.

In the episode exploring Kenya we see Mr Obama share how part of his family had grown up here and how important Kenya was to his for him and his family to visit. Although the episode begins by panning across the African horizon as is typically done and exploring members of the big five, it does also integrate this with some of the smaller species. For example, we are offered an opportunity to explore the birdlife through the Hornbill and mongoose populations as well. This is important for the narrative of this series as it serves to remind the audience that all species become crucial and that our ability to protect and preserve the ecosystem will influence all forms of life. This is also something as mentioned earlier, that the series constantly reiterates and that Obama himself constantly states in the narrative. By traveling through the various parts of Kenya as with the other episodes, we are allowed to explore both inland species as well as those in water all within one episode. By doing this the series can further remind audiences as to how crucial each of the various species play in maintaining the balanced ecosystem.

The smaller species explored in the series are presented in several ways. In one of the first episodes, we are exposed to some of these insects through a microscopic lens. In the episode we are introduced to the sloth and soon come to learn that indeed there is a whole variety of species which reside within its fur, and which rely on the algae produced by its fur. This once again highlights to the viewer how the show is invested in illustrating the interconnected ecosystems between the various species. The micro lens also thus gives us as viewers an opportunity to appreciate a more intimate connection with nature and its interconnected system which we otherwise may not appreciate or even recognise on a daily basis.

The series does not take the approach of excluding life outside of the park as most earlier documentaries do, instead it addresses the ways in which human activity have also impacted life around these parks across the globe. In the Kenyan episode we see how the roads built alongside the park have now become a form of barrier which disrupts or prevents species from freely moving across from the eastern to the western side of the park. In this way the series addresses the ways in which human activity can have an impact on species as well as their overall ecosystems. Much like with the other films mentioned earlier, the inclusion of life outside of the park is extremely crucial in that it provides the viewer with a much more holistic understanding of what surrounds the park especially for those who may not be familiar with the local landscapes.

The segment in Kenya and Indonesia, is particularly crucial in the series since we as viewers are aware of how important Kenya is to Mr Obama's upbringing. By sharing this information with us, as viewers, we feel a sense of intimacy and sense how important this space is for Mr Obama and his family. In many ways, by sharing this personal journey we as viewers are reminded that for many, the species and landscapes in which these parks occupy have an historical significance as well. It reminds us that indeed, nature is a place which not only holds historical memories but personalized ones making its preservation ever more crucial. In this way, the show can appeal to our emotions as viewers by making us think about our interactions and engagements with nature and loved ones.

The investigation around who gets to narrate nature and documentary films is an important one that needs to be addressed however I would argue that so too is the investigation of

filming nature from a privileged position. This is particularly important in this series given that former president Obama does not necessarily come from an environmental or scientific background. This is something in which Power does not necessarily discuss in his article. As mentioned earlier the show's investment in the picturesque cinematic image and narrator who is from an extremely powerful position, is not necessarily something in which the show presents itself as being aware of. Although Mr Obama does mention how privileged he feels being in the various reserves and natural spaces, he is addressing it from a conservation lens as opposed to his privilege in relation to surrounding communities or individuals who may not necessarily be able to afford to enter those spaces.

Our Great National Parks, is a great segway into the final chapter of this paper. This chapter shifts our perspective to more modern forms which have seen a boom in the industry both prior to the COVID pandemic and as a result of the pandemic itself. It reflects innovative low budget ways in which filmmakers managed to sustain telling stories about nature with the limited resources available.

Chapter 5: New forms of viewing wildlife:

Thus far, this paper has spent time unpacking various wildlife documentary films which have begun shifting and changing through their presentation on screen, the same can also be said for many wildlife television shows as well. There has without a doubt been a shift from more traditional forms of television viewing to live streaming content as a means of having the viewer be more engaged and feel as though they are part of the world being presented to them. This form of viewing allows for viewers and creators to take in innovative approaches to create a more interactive experience. This closing chapter will take a closer look at the ways in which wildlife live streams have gained popularity since COVID-19 and have allowed for a new form of viewing and appreciating wildlife on screen. How we consume media is constantly shifting and changing this is further highlighted during the pandemic as well.

Although the pandemic may have propelled the move towards new forms of viewing, the shift in terms of viewership had already begun prior to this especially within wildlife television. Live Streaming shows and platforms had already begun emerging in their own respects however, it was quite rare to find shows catered specifically to wildlife. We begin to see this shift not only in the kind of content being produced on screen but also through the flexibility in terms of the duration of content as well which bends the norm of more traditional wildlife documentaries. We even see the famous Joubert's, creating a short series on YouTube to bring awareness to ranger efforts to combat rhino conservation as well. This new flexibility of content and structure thus also allowed for new forms of viewing wildlife even through forms such as live streams not only on conventional YouTube platforms but also through television as well. Given the pandemic had resulted in many individuals working from home, this also thus meant that they had more time to view and consume content throughout the day and evening as well. Unlike before the pandemic when shows continued to target audiences at specific times, this new era meant that shows had to adapt to the fact that their audiences could watch throughout the day at various times.

"People now have access to live streams of wildlife, virtual reality experiences and—notably—more stories of the natural world, than ever before" (McCormack & Williams, 2021: 1194)

Although there had been a few live-streamed wildlife programs before the pandemic, audiences still had the option to watch more traditional wildlife shows and have access to nature parks to experience this in person. With the emergence of the pandemic, the latter was therefore taken away from them which not only took its toll on national parks and tourism industry but also on the wildlife filmmaking industry as well. The pandemic also meant that filmmakers had to find new alternative means of filming whilst still providing the viewer with quality entertainment they would have previously. The closure of reserves and parks meant that many individuals could no longer access national parks and wildlife enclosures. As a result, we began to see filmmakers place more emphasis on new forms of wildlife viewing which included more live-stream content. The pandemic also ultimately meant more viewers available to watch and stream content for longer periods of time, which meant creators could get creative with the duration of their content.

The economic and financial constraints also meant that filmmakers had to narrow down on their big productions and work within a more sustainable budget and shooting schedule . This impacts the style within which shows had to present and shoot their content. Although there were budget constraints, the fact that streaming platforms had already been evolving meant that filmmakers could still highlight their work and broadcast to wider audiences.

"It is the technology behind a new generation of 'virtual safaris' based on live streaming of film footage which seem to enable democratic and immersive experiences of wildlife by permitting viewers to observe the unfolding of 'real' nature stories in real time, as well as to participate in discussion via online comment options" (Sullivan, 2011)

As Sullivan n points out, this kind of viewing is because of the development of technology which is therefore able to allow for viewers across different areas to be able to view and experience wildlife through their screens in the comfort of their homes. Before the pandemic we had already begun to see a few shows experimenting with this new way of viewing nature; however, the pandemic led to more shows and viewers engaging with this mode of viewing. Through their research findings Xu & Golding remind us of how during the pandemic, safari and nature viewing served to provide a sense of escape and relief from the realities of the pandemic (Xu & Golding, 2021). This, therefore links back to the earlier discussion in this paper around the perception of wildlife during its early years. Livestream viewing became popular not only due to its ability to provide access to wildlife but also through its interactive nature as well. Often shows allow for viewers to engage in the comments which are shown and shared live with rangers who are taking them along the game drive. This also adds to the sense of intimacy between viewers and the content they are being shown as well.

"WildEarth is great if you are feeling stress or anxiety. Our mission is to allow you to escape, slow down and give you the opportunity to look at the bigger picture. It's not meant to be a high-paced television show but rather an experience in nature." (Emily Wallington, Co-Founder)

Speaking on the Wild Earth and Safari sunrise show, Emily reveals the way in which online live streaming of nature is also set at a particular pace and is meant to evoke a sense of comfort and ease for viewers rather than fast-paced action content. Given that such shows are not as limited in time unlike conventional wildlife tv shows, this also means that a variety of viewers are able to engage in conversation and viewing at various moments in the day rather than at a particular time for a smaller duration. This has an impact on the documentation of nature and the way it is presented in such shows as well. Given the flexibility in terms of time, viewers are allowed to not only appreciate the wildlife but also jump in and out of viewing as well. The show offers flexibility by having both sunrise live streams as well as sunset livestreams. This means that the show is able to target those working remotely who may not be able to view the show during the sunrise sessions however still have access to viewing for sunset.

As mentioned earlier, this new way of viewing also therefore allows viewers to be able to interact and engage with the rangers and other viewers as well. The show allows for viewers to post their comments for rangers and other viewers to respond to. By doing this, the viewer can feel more immersed within the experience as though they were on the game drive with the ranger. The overall narrative, and conversation of the film is heavily reliant on the ranger being well-versed on various species and behavioural patterns. This is also because the show relies little on text because it is live and unedited. The rangers are framed in a manner that does not present them as having power over species or the audience but rather that they also appreciate and observe nature alongside the viewer.

Beyond the overall experience for viewers the show also presents a shifting perspective in terms of the visual presentation of the landscape and wildlife. Unlike with more conventional wildlife and nature films which place additional emphasis on the action and chase, these films give viewers the leisure to simply appreciate nature and wildlife even if there is no action taking place. Little emphasis is placed on presenting the audience with specific wildlife and they are therefore given an opportunity to appreciate both the larger and smaller species. This is unlike conventional wildlife shows, specifically those in Africa which would regularly focus on the big 5. Instead, this show allows for both micro and macro species to equally be part of the experience for its viewers. These shows steer away from traditional wildlife conventions in that the human presence is acknowledged much more as part of the viewing experience. As viewers, we recognise that our journey is steered by the game drivers who take us along routes where species are most visible and provide us with information about those species to further spark conversation. The filming of these species also steers away from conventions, given that there is no post-production work being done. As viewers, we often see the camera zoom in and out of focus to capture various species.

In many ways, the stripping down of post-production allowed for audiences to have a newfound appreciation for looking at nature through the eyes of the ranger and in real time. By relying on the natural environment for sound rather than additional background music, the viewer can experience and react to what they are being shown for themselves rather than being guided by additional sound. Although life has begun to return as per usual, it can be noted that these shows have continued to air, and viewers continue to engage with this new form of viewing nature. Although there is still much work to be done with regards to representation within these films, its ability to adapt and find new ways of nature storytelling continues to highlight the importance of the genre. It also reminds us that, indeed, the

relationship between humans and wildlife is one that is constantly evolving and adapting both in real life and onscreen.

In as much as the show can provide a means through which viewers can continue to appreciate nature, it can also sustain the desire of audiences to revisit areas across the national park post covid. The show travels across various regions of the Kruger National Park and is also able to market the park through that approach. By exploring various areas such as the infamous Sabie Sabie, the show can also maintain the intrigue of local tourists who may not have yet had a chance to explore all the park sections. Once more, this speaks to the greater financial influences these shows can have. Alongside the shows channel on DSTV is their website allows for viewers to subscribe as explorers and become involved and feel part of the explorer experience. This option also allows for those wildlife enthusiasts to become loyal members not only of the show but also of various programs in which they may run within the various park spaces. This investment was challenged in early 2020 with the rise of COVID-19 cases.

"We feel that the injection of wildlife into people's homes, particularly at this point, would be really valuable and uplifting" (Chris Packham, 2020)

COVID- 19 not only impacted the way in which shows were consumed but also encouraged filmmakers to therefore find innovative financial ways in which to share their content with viewers. As naturalist and presenter Chris Packham points out, creators had to find ways of bringing wildlife into homes across the globe. Wild Earth discussed above is one of many channels which also offer free content for its viewers to enjoy. Another channel established in 2019 is the Free Documentary- Nature. Available on YouTube with over 1,5 Million subscribers, the channel offers short documentary episodes worldwide for their viewers to enjoy at no additional costs. The content available on the channel ranges from wildlife and ocean life across various regions of the world catering to the various desires of its viewers.

The decision to make this channel free to its viewers is quite interesting, particularly in the case of Southern Africa which as mentioned earlier has been shaped by various historical factors which have also had economic effects as well. By making their content free during this time, the channel is also able to allow various viewers to access and enjoy their content without having hesitations that they would have to therefore pay to consume and enjoy. Although not all their content is free, the access to bite-size wildlife viewing has the potential to then spark viewers to want to become members of their channel to be able to enjoy more of their content. During that time, this strategy works well in that it allows for those who can financially, to be able to enjoy more content whilst benefiting the channel through their subscriptions. At the same time, it does not, therefore, hinder those who cannot afford it from being able to enjoy their content.

The quality of each documentary is still able to give the audience a cinematic experience whilst being on a platform more accessible to individuals. This channel also allows for younger individuals to learn and sustain their knowledge of nature. Much like with Siyaya Come Wild with Us, the content within these episodes is also catered towards a more educational approach. Elephants- Back to the Wild was released on the channel in 2022. Within the episode, the audience is given information about the formulas used within

elephant rehabilitation centres to help care for some elephants. Many of the other episodes on the channel also take on a similar approach. This approach is mainly during the lockdown period as it, therefore, allowed for viewers to have the opportunity to enjoy viewing nature whilst still being educated by what they were watching in the process.

The psychological and social impacts in which the lockdown had on individuals also comes into play in terms of the kinds of content in which individuals were consuming at the time. This also draws back to this paper's earlier discussion on nature and wildlife documentaries offering a form of escape from its viewers. The kind of "escape" these films offered at the time was slightly different. Instead of allowing viewers to feel part of an imagined world outside of reality, viewers are encouraged to feel nostalgia. They can engage with these shows and imagine places they could be going or have already experienced and are now no longer able to access because of the lockdown restrictions. This also makes these shows that much more powerful in terms of advocating for conservation and the preservation of nature in that we are now forced to imagine a life where access to species is no longer an option. The restriction of movement also meant that individuals were able to feel a sense of longing to be in the outside environment surrounded by nature and the only ways in which to access that feeling of the real and now was through such shows.

"In sub-Saharan Africa, media commentators reported a rise in game reserves and lodges using virtual safaris to keep people engaged with nature and to help fund conservation efforts" (Globetrender, 2020)

As much as it was important for YouTube nature channels and other streaming shows to be able to keep up their subscriptions for viewership, reserves and nature parks also had to find innovative ways of ensuring donations and funds continue during this period as well. As Barker and Dyer identify in their articles, one of how they could do this was through the virtual safaris specifically by conservation operators. Given that the virtual space is such an interactive platform within which various organisations and projects are able to create their own channels, the task of sustaining viewership and support also means finding unique and innovative ways of capturing their audiences.

In this way channels can capitalize on the sense of nostalgia in which audiences may experience by promoting the need for financial support to ensure that reserves can be maintained even post-lockdown. In some ways, this further highlights the power these virtual spaces also have in contributing to sustaining financial efforts between supporters and reserves. Shows were also able to shift the narrative from merely being an appreciation of nature addressing conservation issues to a call to action. By highlighting specific conservation efforts, shows are not only able to show funders and community supporters where their money is going, but they are also able to call on members (specifically like during the lockdown period) for further support for their projects whilst still providing them with the sense of entertainment they crave.

Conclusion:

As this paper concludes its discussion, it is crucial to reflect on some of the key discussion points in which it has been explored. Nature and wildlife documentaries have a long-standing history that has both been shaped and shifted by their socio-political history. The history of Apartheid in Southern Africa had implications for its people and embedded certain understandings regarding nature and how it should be explored, as this paper has reflected. The kinds of images and representations presented to us on screen have also been influenced by the discourses and ideologies presented throughout this history, especially through the film and media spectrum. This paper has attempted to reflect on this by looking at earlier case studies of the genre. Integrated with this exploration, this paper has also explored models of conservation from the early colonial and Apartheid periods until more recently.

By looking at the various kinds of conservation models, this paper has attempted to illustrate how the framing of conservation not only structures how efforts are created and sustained on the ground but is also evident on screen as well. At the same time this paper has recognised that by looking at these models which are based on Eurocentric theorisations, there is still potential to explore how more traditional knowledge systems and strategies can be integrated within these models as well. In a postmodern world where nature and wildlife has become increasingly under threat, the need to remind audiences to conserve and protect the environment is greater than ever. Some of the shows discussed in this paper illustrate that indeed the inclusion of surrounding communities and landscapes helps counter the idea that conservation is something in which only the elite may participate in. Rather than there merely being one victim and perpetrator, the conflict between humans and nature is much more complicated than that which we might understand at the surface level.

Others have shown how more recent models have had an impact on framing nature as something within which humans need to find a balance between economic sustainability and environmental preservation. The case studies accompanying these models have also shown how their approaches can thus present themselves on screen in several ways.

The expansion of technology has also allowed us to explore how nature and landscapes can be presented to enhance the cinematic experience. The adaptability of the genre is also something that this paper discusses through its exploration of livestreams during the COVID and post-COVID period. This exploration has not only continued the shift towards new forms of viewership but has also challenged traditional wildlife documentary format and structure. The continued growth of ‘virtual safaris’ and more interactive engagements between rangers and their viewers. Interaction between viewers and safari drivers has become an intimate space that allows viewers to feel as though they too are part of the exploratory experience.

Indeed, much progress has been made when it comes to how nature and wildlife have been presented; however, there is still room for those presentations to be further explored and reimagined. Unpacking the history of a genre can reveal underlying information about how we structure these films and therefore possibly also provide solutions as to where we can begin in shifting colonial ideologies and structures within the wildlife documentary space. Its progress will take time; however, through the case studies illustrated in this article, we can begin to acknowledge and celebrate that indeed, this progress has already been made. As shown, this progress goes beyond just the visual image; in fact wildlife documentaries have progressively continued to shift the storytelling nature of the genre as a whole.

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