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BOOK REVIEW
UNVEILING HIDDEN NARRATIVES ACROSS SOUTHERN AFRICA: HISTORIES OF WILDLIFE FILMMAKING AND BLACK PRESENCE IN THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Dlamini, Jacob. *Safari nation*: *A social history of the Kruger National Park*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020. 350 pp. ISBN 978-0-8214-2409-4.

Glenn, Ian. *Wildlife documentaries in Southern Africa: From east to south*. London: Anthem Press, 2023. 271 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-83998-1-500.

In southern Africa, histories of wildlife parks and conservation rapidly expanded as a sub-genre of the dynamic field of environmental history at the turn of the twenty-first century.[1] This interdisciplinary field challenged previous historical approaches that viewed the past as distinctly 'human' and instead showed the importance of analysing historical changes as an entangled space of interactions between humans, animals, and the environment. This review essay examines two recent contributions to this growing body of scholarship; Jacob Dlamini's *Safari*

1 For historiographical overviews, see: J Carruthers, "Environmental history in Southern Africa: An overview". In: S Dovers, R Edgecomb and B Guest (eds.), *South Africa's environmental history* (Cape Town: David Phillips, 2003), pp. 3-15; S Swart, "South Africa's environmental history: A historiography". In: SR Rajan and L Sedrez (eds.), *The great convergence environmental histories of BRICS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 319-347.

Nation (2020), and Ian Glenn's *Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa: From East to South* (2023). Dlamini exposes a "hidden history" of the Kruger National Park (KNP) that allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the ways Africans have engaged and resisted the park's borders and the wildlife contained within them. By rejecting the historical notion that the relationship between the park and Africans was one only of restriction, Dlamini uses "histories of presence" to show that, while there was no singular black experience, their history was not only one of dispossession and exclusion (p. 3).[2] In turn, Glenn aims to expose a hidden history of his own by revealing the lack of scholarly engagement with southern African wildlife documentaries. Studies on the British Broadcast Company's (BBC) Natural History Unit and American documentaries have been extensive, and historians such as William Beinart and Katie McKeown have examined African wildlife media and representations on a broader scale between the 1950s and 1970s.[3] However, Glenn finds the lack of engagement after this period surprising, especially considering the international success southern African filmmakers enjoyed, which marked a crucial move away from East Africa as the central location for filming (pp. 15-19). Dlamini and Glenn's research intersects as Glenn largely explores a history of filmmaking in the KNP.

The KNP - which was established in 1926 - has attracted historical studies for decades, and as a site with much historical significance, it continues to be a space that allows for critical engagement across genres.[4] This review essay argues that Dlamini and Glenn's books highlight that the KNP, and wildlife conservation more generally, still have much to offer for historians. These monographs also serve as a reminder of how exposing neglected historical approaches can aid us in unpacking the complex socio-political factors that drive wildlife conservation practices across southern Africa.

2 Dlamini's political use of the term "black" incorporates Africans, Indians and Coloureds into his analysis.

3 American books on wildlife films include, G Mittman, *Reel nature: America's romance with wildlife on film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); D Bousé, *Wildlife films* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); C Chris, *Watching wildlife* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). For an analysis of BBC's wildlife film productions, see: G Davies, "Networks of nature: Stories of natural history filmmaking from the BBC" (PhD Dissertation, University of College London, 1998); W Beinart and K McKeown, "Wildlife media and representations of Africa, 1950s to the 1970s", *Environmental History* 14 (3), 2009, pp. 429-452.

4 Starting with J Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park*: *A social and political history* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 1995). Other works that focus on black histories in the KNP include, L Dikeni, *Habitat and struggle: The case of the Kruger National Park in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Real African Publishers, 2016); D Bunn, "The museum outdoors: Heritage, cattle and permeable borders in the Southwestern Kruger National Park". In: I Karp (ed.), *Museum frictions: Public cultures/ global transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

1. HISTORIES OF PRESENCE AT THE KNP

Safari Nation highlights the fact that the *political* exclusion of blacks from the nationalist aims of the KNP did not mean their *physical* exclusion from the park itself. Dlamini moves away from previous histories that have focused on the absence of Africans by arguing that there is a need to look at histories of presence that animate and unsettle our understanding of the KNP. Dlamini adds to the work of scholars such as Nancy Jacobs, who historicised Africans who played crucial roles in colonial and postcolonial birding networks, as well as Maitseo Bolaane, who placed African elites at the centre of the founding of the Moremi Game Reserve in Botswana's Okavango Delta in 1963.[5] Dlamini's examples of blacks who resisted the borders of the park include Africans who collected hides in the Portuguese colony, poachers, migrant labourers, tourists and people who resided in the park (p. 25 and p. 29). He is interested in how ordinary people, who have acted as something other than victims, have contributed towards and engaged with conservation in Africa. Despite this history of presence, Dlamini remains concerned with the violence, neglect, and displacement felt by black communities by the park's authorities. This is a current and essential piece of work that, "contributes to a growing literature about alternative histories of conservation in Africa" (p. 18).

Structurally, Dlamini's book is divided into two parts, each made up of four chapters. The first part, labelled "Movements", focuses on "poachers, migrant labourers and the histories of black tourism". Through his discussion on poaching, he shows the significant problems faced by the African wardens who, without rifles, stood no chance against native poachers entering the park from present-day Mozambique. He indicates that women were also involved in poaching and hunting in the reserve, which challenges conventional depictions of the African wild as a "male domain" (p. 47). The historically close relations between African wardens and poachers are significant considering the evidence about present-day poaching in the KNP. A recent report has shown that the park is, "severely affected by corrosive corruption and violent organised crime".[6] The staff involvement in poaching, both directly and indirectly, was posed as 70 percent. Dlamini exposes that this complex relationship between wardens and poachers has a long history.

5 See N Jacobs, *Birders of Africa: History of a network* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); M Bolaane, *Chiefs, hunters and San in the creation of the Moremi Game Reserve, Okavango Delta multiracial interactions and initiatives, 1956-1979* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2013).

6 See the transnational organised crime report by J Rademeyer, "Landscape of fear: crime, corruption and murder in greater Kruger," *Enact Observer*, <https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/landscape-of-fear-crime-corruption-and-murder-in-greater-kruger> , accessed 16 March 2022.

The second part, titled “Homelands”, asks: how did black Africans develop their own independent tradition of tourism? Notably, this section shows that in contrast to historical claims that Africans were not permitted to visit the park, the KNP “did not bar blacks from visiting” (p. 153). However, they were not a priority. In 1932, the National Parks Board created a camp, Balule, for the exclusive use of Africans and Indians, but this was badly maintained. Africans, Coloureds, and Indians had to bring their own shelter if they intended to stay at any other camp other than Skukuza. This indicates that there were, in fact, two camps available. However, up until the 1970s, more Africans visited the park as domestic workers to serve white interests than as regular tourists (p. 159). Dlamini highlights the important role of class and gender in determining black responses to white rule in the tourist sector. He works with limited evidence to construct a suggestive narrative of black tourist experiences in the KNP. He also remains conscious of the theoretical challenges he faces in using terms like “black tourism” as the various African, Coloured, and Indian visitors did not think alike, and even their modes of getting to the park were racially separated (p. 192). This signifies that further micro-histories of the racially separate forms of tourism could deepen our knowledge about people of colour visiting the park.

In his concluding chapter, Dlamini examines the KNP in the twenty-first century to show that the end of Apartheid did not bring about the end of tensions between Africans and the KNP. Blacks who could now visit the park as legal citizens found the game lodges “ontologically disturbing” as they had begun as extensions of white power (p. 245). He describes how the park continues to be used as a site for political protests, and how the difficulties of changing the name (which was selected to commemorate the South African Republic President Paul Kruger) indicates the consistent ways people insulate the park from the claims of history – not to mention the demands of justice (p. 275).

Overall, through using individual stories and microhistories like those of Jabavu and Thema, Dlamini challenges an account of absence and tries to construct a, “more cosmopolitan, democratic and ultimately more hopeful history of approaches to the KNP” (p. 261). Dlamini’s ambitious book forces us to critically consider the gaps in our knowledge about black responses to the park and what this could mean for other areas of conservation history.

2. WILDLIFE FILMMAKING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Glenn highlights another lacuna in the historiography of wildlife parks and conservation in southern Africa by tracing the history of wildlife documentaries filmed in the region. He analyses films made in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, to repudiate the idea that this genre, "is not influential or intellectually significant" (p. 9). Film has a large audience which makes his study accessible to historians but also to the broader public who are passionate about wildlife and cinema. This book is arranged thematically and consists of some backward-forward analysis ranging from the movement towards southern Africa as a centre for filmmaking, the political and terrain challenges faced by filmmakers, to analysing the topics explored and specific contributions made by a vast group of wildlife filmmakers. The first two chapters unpack his research methodology and focus. He is creative in constructing a theoretical framework that may be useful for other film historians. His method moves beyond simply watching attentively by drawing from scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour, whom he uses as "good spectators of cultural changes" to uncover the underlying factors that shape complex film productions (p. 24). In these early chapters, he also considers the politics behind wildlife filmmaking, which is an area that could have been explored more critically. While Glenn does state that the genre is a product of, "a group of white settlers and some other white European imports'', he does not elaborate on what this means when we analyse these films or if we can even call the groups of filmmakers "Southern African" (p. 19). He does analyse local filmmakers, but many prominent directors are not from the region. Jen and Des Barlett were born in Australia, Carol Hughes and Tim Liversedge were born in England, and Dieter Plage was German. Glenn does note that, "criticism of wildlife documentaries is that they are a portrayal of an artificial wilderness space that ignores the extent to which indigenous people have been omitted from the landscape" (p. 20). While politics could prevent filming, he notes that wildlife documentaries flourished amidst Namibia's struggle for independence and social upheaval in South Africa following the Soweto uprising of 1976. However, the opportunities these filmmakers had because of their white privilege that afforded them – during a time of political and social upheaval – to have the luxury of filming animals is something that cannot be ignored when exploring both the achievements and developments of this genre.

In Chapter Three, Glenn introduces the cultural, political, and economic factors that allowed African wildlife documentaries to move from the East Africa to Southern Africa in the late 1970s and 1980s. These include the rise of eco-tourism lodges, the advancement in animal capture methods, and the fact that shooting in East Africa was a saturated business region (pp. 38-42).

In Chapters Four, Six and Seven, Glenn examines the KNP as a location for filmmaking. It was an area that posed various regulatory and terrain challenges, which made the Kalahari and Okavango more popular until the growth of game lodges such as Mala Mala and Sabi Sand. He analyses *Wild Kingdom*, an American series that ran from 1963 to 1988 and filmed 50 episodes in southern Africa. He argues that this series "not only encouraged American tourists to see Southern Africa as a major wildlife tourist destination," but it also stimulated rival film companies to use it as a location (p. 86). Chapter seven examines three filmmakers, Jamie Uys, Laurens Van der Post and Norma Foster, who shot films in the KNP. It exposes a change of filmmaking in the KNP in the 1970s as The South African Department of Information saw the positive possibilities of promoting South Africa's success in wildlife conservation at a time when its trusteeship of Southwest Africa was coming under scrutiny (p. 91). Therefore, Glenn's research shows further linkages between politics and wildlife conservation at the KNP through the ways South Africa attempted to use conservation films to change anti-apartheid perceptions, especially in the United States (p. 97).

Glenn effectively demonstrates the complex factors that made southern African filmmaking different from the dominant British version in his fifth chapter. He pinpoints the crucial difference to the extended length of time shot in one area as well as the use of new techniques such as interspersing still photos with videos and allowing viewers behind the scenes. Glenn argues that southern African filmmakers were also more aware of issues of sustainability and had a, "critical awareness of the genre and a willingness to experiment with it" (p. 68).

Chapter Eight discusses Michael Rosenberg and his company, Partridge Films, who "re-shaped the wildlife documentary genre" and helped launch many careers of important southern African wildlife filmmakers (p. 118). The chapters that follow closely analyse the careers of various wildlife filmmakers (often couples). He examines over 80 different films and series, describing the technological innovations and unique individual styles of filmmaking that transformed the genre.

The final few chapters describe the various themes explored in southern African wildlife documentaries. A notable section includes his discussion of the "Social Turn" of wildlife documentaries, where he argues that in contrast

to preconceived notions that white filmmakers shied away from political presentations, local filmmakers were socially and environmentally conscious. His evidence includes Carol and Hughes' film, *Missing Link* (1988), which warned of the danger of modern man to the environment, but more notably, Rick Lomba's, *The End of Eden* (1986), which looked at arid regions across Africa, emphasising the role of the white settlers in this destruction (p. 223). This section importantly highlights our lack of knowledge about African attitudes towards wildlife films, although Glenn notes that national surveys show "surprisingly" high valuations of wildlife among all South Africans (p. 227). Glenn traces the various initiatives aimed to develop young black filmmakers such as Mike Kendrick's, Wild Shots Outreach and Black Beans production in Cape Town who have incorporated African perspectives in their films.[7] He also pinpoints the first "feminist wilderness documentary" as Karin Slater's *Sisters of the Wilderness* (2018) (p. 228). Drawing from Dlamini's analytical framework, black "presence" in the production of wildlife filmmaking is an area that demands further investigation. Glenn concedes that white filmmakers had a range of advantages and capital that stemmed from white supremacy that existed before and after Apartheid. This is one of Glenn's strongest sections, where he urges the need to fund more diverse filming projects. He argues that a rise of black African filmmakers could develop novel themes such as exploring trackers and poaching from a different angle (p. 234).

Chapters nineteen and twenty reflect on the future of the genre and its influence on viewers. Despite the rise of social media, Glenn argues that the recent success of Craig Foster's, *My Octopus Teacher* (2020), suggests the field is, "far from exhausting possible subjects and themes", but critical scholarly engagement is essential (p. 232). Overall, Glenn's aim to encourage more academic work and to create a general awareness of how the genre has developed in southern Africa excels throughout this book. Perhaps his work could do more than just inform by encouraging a new generation of filmmakers and drawing in viewers with a revived appreciation.

3. METHODOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

Methodologically, both authors use an extensive collection of primary sources. Dlamini utilises annual reports of the KNP and Native Affairs Department, in addition to the archive of the National Parks Board and South African National Publicity Association as well as newspaper articles that captured black

7 For example, see the film, "I am a Ranger" (2016) which highlights the work of rangers in Kenya in protecting the last Northern White Rhinos, p. 228.

tourist experiences, such as those coming from *Bantu World* (pp. 97-8). He supplements this with oral sources, which are essential to uncover African voices that are absent in the colonial archives. However, he is forced to work with limited evidence – individual stories and family photo albums – to construct a history of black experiences in the park (pp.165-166). It would be useful to know if there were research constraints that did not allow for more interviews or if this gap was linked directly to the limited opportunities for black visitors. Perhaps more details on his methods and challenges could inspire further oral investigations into black tourism in other wildlife parks in South Africa.

Glenn's analysis of a wide range of films is admirable, along with the meticulous research into individual filmmakers and their specific contributions. Glenn, too, makes use of oral interviews (some via email) and incorporates previous interviews with prominent filmmakers. However, Glenn notes the immense challenge of studying filmmaking in southern African archives, which only house films made by southern African broadcasters. He found that, surprisingly, the most accessible archive for wildlife documentaries is the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Therefore, his study is essential for film historians in the Global South who have limited archival access. Film sources could also be useful to environmental and social historians wanting to study multi-species history or explore the relationships between filmmakers and trackers that are lacking in written materials.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

These books highlight the hard work, passion, and time that is necessary for projects to reconstruct historical narratives about southern Africa's environmental past successfully. I appreciate Dlamini's ethos that to be critical about the history of the KNP, which we can extend to wildlife filmmaking as well, one must look "both at the beauty and the ugly side of history" (p. 32). Glenn has shown us that southern African filmmakers have played a crucial role in creating visual awareness of pressing environmental concerns. However, these achievements also expose a lack of black and feminist perspectives in wildlife documentaries. These authors, with their rich methodical and theoretical frameworks, present hopeful accounts of the important role of historians in providing alternative conservation histories. Further "hidden" stories embedded within the politics of southern Africa's environmental past are essential to uncover in the hope that they can offer new insight into the development of present-day social and environmental crises.