Wild game or soul mates? On humanist naturalism and animist socialism in composing socionatural abundance

Sian Sullivan s.sullivan@bathspa.ac.uk

Abstract: Modern biodiversity conservation in southern Africa is replete with reference to the value(s) of 'the wild'. 'Last wildernesses' become conservation areas, 'wilderness schools' encourage human experiences of a transcendent 'wild nature', and 'game' farming and trophy hunting are framed as economically necessary for the sustenance of 'wildlife'. The category of 'wild' is extended to 'wild people' or 'Bushmen', whose othered identities are sustained through Living Museums where tourists can consume in the present apparent past practices. Drawing on recent ethnographic encounters with created wild landscapes, wild life and wild people in Namibia, conveyed through a montage of still and video images, this paper seeks to problematise categories of both 'wild' and 'game' in conservation discourse and practice. Inspired by recent 'anthropology of nature' work by Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro among others, 'wild' and 'game' are theorised as intrinsically problematic terms and categories for the sustenance of socionatural abundance. This is due to their associations with a 'humanist naturalist' (cf. Descola) ontology of separateness between cultured heroic humans and their antithesis of a constructed wild natural realm that can become the object of productive management and instrumentalisation. This humanist naturalism of the wild is contrasted here with an ontology of what I will call 'animist socialism', documented ethnographically as characterising the worldviews of many indigenous peoples globally. In this, plants, animals and other subjects are assumed to be animated by souls, language and culture in ways that bestow personhood and the possibility of social relationships between what are thus kindred others. Understanding the structuring and ethical implications of the different ontologies of humanist naturalism and animist socialism is considered critical for conceiving and composing socionatural abundance based on cohabitation with other species as 'soul mates', rather than through barriers between humans and 'wild game'.

Key words: wild, game, wilderness, biodiversity conservation, Bushmen, humanist naturalism, animist socialism, socionatural abundance

Wild: Adj. (Of an animal or plant) living or growing in the natural environment; not domesticated or cultivated; (Of a place or region) uninhabited, uncultivated, or inhospitable; (Of people) not civilized; primitive; Lacking discipline or restraint; Not based on sound reasoning or probability.

Wilderness: Noun. An uncultivated, uninhabited, and inhospitable region; A neglected or abandoned area; A position of disfavour, especially in a political context.

Home: Noun. A place where something flourishes, is most typically found, or from which it originates; Adj. Relating to the place where one lives.[1]

On 'wilderness' and 'the wild'

I am increasingly troubled by the categories 'wilderness' and 'the wild', and particularly by the uses to which these can be put. 'Troubled' here, of course, is a nod to William Cronon's famous essay - 'The trouble with wilderness' - published nearly two decades ago.[2] Cronon argued that wilderness is 'a profoundly human creation': an 'unnatural' product of the civilisation by which remaining wild places have remained 'unspoilt', and from which 'wilderness' is experienced as 'outside' and beyond.[3] Cronon sees 'wilderness' as a 'mirror' reflecting the 'unexamined desires and longings' of the modern, disenchanted human, expelled (and self-propelled) from the homely, nurturing, untainted paradise of the Garden of Eden.[4]

The second part of the title of Cronon's essay - 'getting back to the wrong nature', is an acknowledgement that living better with profoundly different and diverse more-than-

---

[1] Definitions from the online Oxford Dictionary, at
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/wild,
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/wilderness and
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/home accessed 9 January 2015.
[2] Cronon, W. 1996 The trouble with wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong nature, pp 69-90 *in* Cronon, W. (ed.) *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature.* New York: W. Norton.
[3] Ibid., p. 69.
[4] Ibid.

human[5] others might require cultivating more accommodating relationships *with* their otherness.[6] Making ourselves *at home* with more-than-human others thus might be rather different to preserving spectacular(ised) and viewed wilderness landscapes in which nonhuman othernesses are set aside, with human presence construed primarily in terms of contamination. As well as emphasising the seemingly intractable impossibility of humans living well with nonhuman others, this latter construction masks the clearance of such landscapes of those other 'wild' and 'savage' humans who often have been at home there. Such clearances are as necessary for the creation of land areas as 'pristine, unspoilt wildernesses'[7] as they were for the creation of the Scottish Highlands as extensive sheep ranches (frequently now élite hunting estates) emptied of tenant farmers in the 18th and 19th centuries[8]. Through these processes wildernesses are constituted as enclosures, sealed off to those who made them through their everyday ways of knowing, living and valuing; whilst

[5] 'More-than-human nature' is a term advocated by phenomenologist David Abram as a way of overcoming the way that the term 'nonhuman nature' defines nature-beyond-the-human in a negative sense, i.e. as nature that is not human (Abram, D. 1996 *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. London: Vintage Books). His intention is to acknowledge that the *human world* is always a subset of the latter, but never the other way around. The human world thus is always '*embedded within, sustained by* and thoroughly *permeated by,* the more-than-human world', while the more-than-human world, although including the human world, and frequently 'profoundly informed by the human world', 'always *exceeds* the human world' (Abram, D. pers. comm.). Occasionally I also use the term 'other-than-human' nature(s) or 'nature-beyond-the-human' (after Kohn, E. 2013 *How Forests Think: Towards and Anthropology Beyond the Human.* Los Angeles: University of California Press), when referring to organisms, entities and contexts other than the modern common sense understanding of the biological species *Homo sapiens*. At the same time, I acknowledge that the situation may be even more complex in that for many 'animist' and amodern cultural contexts embodiments other than the modern biological species category of *Homo sapiens* may be perceived ontologically as representing different bodily perspectives – different natures – that nonetheless are embraced by a broader, inclusive category of culturally human persons (see Viveiros de Castro, E. 2004 Exchanging perspectives: the transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10(3): 463-484). To think of 'nonhuman' or 'other-than-human' nature in these cultural contexts might thus discount the perceptual and ontological reality guiding understanding and practice in such contexts, in which a greater degree of underlying ontological and communicative continuity is acknowledged between different embodiments 'in nature' than might be the case in the species thinking informing modern natural science.
[6] On which, see, Haraway, D. 2008 *When Species Meet.* Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press; Kohn *op. cit.*; discussion in Sullivan, S. 2013 Nature on the Move III: (Re)countenancing an animate nature. *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Enquiry* 6(1-2): 50-71 http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/newproposals/article/view/183771/184353
[7] For a recent example of how this pristine wilderness discourse can have potential land clearance effects, see Sullivan, S., Hannis, M., Impey, A., Low, C. and Rohde, R. 2015 Future Pasts? Sustainabilities in west Namibia. http://careforthefuture.exeter.ac.uk/2015/02/future-pasts/
[8] See, for example, Wightman, A. 2013 *The Poor Had No Lawyers: Who Owns Scotland and How They Got It*. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd.

opened as viewed, sublime, 'wild' and 'sporting' landscapes for those for whom contingent

economic privileges make it possible to pay the price of a restorative visit.[9]

Given the popularity of wildlife and wilderness tourism, however, 'the wild' clearly still

calls. But what really is this 'wild' that beckons from beyond the built environments of the city,

and the tamed landscapes of industrial agriculture? There are complexities here that beg

nuanced engagement.

For example, I have read and been inspired by the passion and poetry of Jay

Griffiths' relatively recent meditation on 'the wild' in *Wild: An Elemental Journey*[10]. But the

'wild' places, landscapes and peoples encountered here are not untended, uninhabited,

inhospitable, lacking discipline or primitive (as in the dictionary definitions above). Instead the

book is a celebration of the ways in which indigenous peoples know and tend the natures

with which they live, such that these are familiar, familial and social rather than 'wild'[11]. Such

contexts and the affects they may generate are indeed different to the hierarchies,

transformations and controls associated with modernity, urbanisation and industrial

production. But this difference springs from value practices affirming familiarity and

relationship with the self-directedness of other, nonhuman selves, rather than from an

objectively real state of 'wildness' immanent to such places, ecologies and peoples. Thus

although many of the 'wild worlds' Griffiths encounters pose psychological and physical

challenges to her as she displaces herself from 'home', these same wilds are familiarly

'home' to those she meets there; homes that ironically are sometimes under threat through

---

[9] Cronon *op. cit.*
[10] Griffiths, J. 2006 *Wild: An Elemental Journey*. London: Penguin Books.
[11] On which, it is instructive to note that the lexicon of such peoples - characterised as they are by deep ancestries sustained in particular places and landscapes - tends not to include equivalent terms for or concepts of 'wild' and 'wilderness' (cf. personal fieldwork with Damara / ≠Nū Khoen, west Namibia; discussion in Ingold, T. 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge; Descola, P. 2013 *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Forbes *et al.* (2014: 7) after Burnett and Kamulyu wa Kang'ethe (1994) refer to a 'lack of wilderness concepts in African world views'. See Forbes, W., Antwi-Boasiako, K.B. and Dixon, B. 2014 Some fundamentals of conservation in South and West Africa. *Environmental Ethics* 36(1): 5-30; and Burnett, G.W. and Kang'ethe, K. 1994 Wilderness and the Bantu mind. *Environmental Ethics* 16:145-60.

their capture and construction as wild lands and wildernesses. Griffiths notes some of these paradoxes early in her book. Thus,

> I found a paradox of wildness in the gliding softness of its charisma, for what is savage is in the deepest sense gentle and what is wild is kind. In the end - a strangely sweet result - I came back to a wild home.
>
> [And] … culture is woven with nature's vivacity and nature is intricate with culture's meanings.[12]

Similarly, whilst I support efforts and advocacy towards 'rewilding' as a corrective to contemporary species loss and industrial habitat transformation[13], I also note the many instances historically and today in which landscapes and associated species have been wrenched from cultures living there, so as to create these 'rewilded' localities. Wilderness conservation ideals encourage the emptying of landscapes of people, a structuring effect particularly noticeable today in the 'global south' where remaining biodiversity 'hotspots' and charismatic megafauna - the 'game' of imperial sport-hunters and adventurers[14] - prevail.[15] As such, wilderness geographies are entangled with political economy and racialised structures so as to create impoverished refugees from such landscapes that have also been homes, at the same time as enhancing access to the ensuing wild places for a globally mobile élite, able to pay for the privilege of constructed (and frequently luxurious) 'wilderness experiences'.[16]

---

[12] Ibid. p. 3, 45.

[13] Monbiot, G. 2013 *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding*. London: Allen Lane.

[14] On which see the influential essay by Mackenzie, D. 1988 Chivalry, social Darwinism and ritualised killing: the hunting ethos in Central Africa up to 1914, pp. 41-62 *in* Anderson, D. and Grove, R. (eds.) *Conservation in Africa: Peoples, Policies and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Others have noted the machismo and military aesthetic that tends to be associated with 'big game hunting' (cf. Eliis, S. 1994 Of elephants and men: politics and nature conservation in South Africa. *J. of Southern African Studies* 20(1): 53-69). These are in stark and poignant contrast with indigenous encouragements to address the world, the forest, gently and with tenderness (as related in Griffiths op. cit. p. 69).

[15] As documented, for example, in Brockington, D. and Igoe. J. 2006 Eviction for conservation: A global overview. *Conservation and Society* 4(3): 424–470; Dowie, M. 2009 *Conservation refugees: The hundred-year conflict between global conservation and native peoples*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

[16] cf. Sullivan, S. 2011 Conservation is sexy! What makes this so, and what does this make? An engagement with *Celebrity and the Environment. Conservation and Society* 9(4): 334-345.

'Wilderness' and 'the wild' thus seem to be inherently problematic framing and aspirational categories that may structure thinking and experience in directions that work against the enhancement of everyday socionatural interactions, empathies and nourishments. Nonetheless, 'wilderness' and 'the wild' are also productive categorisations of 'nature' whose varied values can be seen in the profitable uses to which they are put[17], uses that may also be in critical tension with the socionature sustainabilities such categorisations claim to amplify. In what follows I trace some of these uses and their effects through an experiential case-study of an African 'wild land' - namely, Erindi Private Game Reserve in Namibia, southern Africa.

Wild landscapes, wildlife, wild people - values of 'the wild' at Erindi Private Game Reserve, Namibia

I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in west Namibia on and off since 1992. On a flight to Namibia in February 2014 an article in *Flamingo*, the Air Namibia in-flight magazine, drew my attention with the headline 'Erindi Game Reserve for sale for N$1.3 billion' (around US $103 million).[18] Erindi is identified as the largest private *game* reserve in Namibia: '70 719 ha of pristine wilderness'[19] boasting 'the biggest elephant and lion population in

---

[17] This connects the economic values of 'wilderness' and the 'wild' with a burgeoning literature on the various economic value accumulations now arising from different forms and framings of 'environmental conservation', given a now economically profitable concern with the environmental impacts of capital(ist) accumulation. See, for example, Robertson, M.M. 2006 The nature that capital can see: science, state, and market in the commodification of ecosystem services. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24:367-387; Smith, N., 2007 Nature as accumulation strategy, pp. 16-36, *in* Panitch, L. and Leys, C. (eds.) *Coming to Terms with Nature*. London: Socialist Register, The Merlin Press; Sullivan, S. 2009 Green capitalism, and the cultural poverty of constructing nature as service-provider. *Radical Anthropology* 3: 18-27; Büscher, B., Sullivan, S., Neves, K., Igoe, J. and Brockington, D. 2012 Towards a synthesized critique of neoliberal conservation. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 23(2): 4-30; Sullivan 2013 Banking nature? The spectacular financialisation of environmental conservation. *Antipode* 45(1):198-217; Büscher, B. and Fletcher, R. 2014 Accumulation by conservation. *New Political Economy* DOI 10.1080/13563467.2014.923824
[18] Steynberg, F. 2014 Erindi Game Reserve for sale for N$1.3 billion. *Flamingo* March 2014: 48-51. Also see Kaira, C. 2013 Erindi going for a billion. *The Namibian* 1 July 2013 http://www.namibian.com.na/indexx.php?archive_id=111276&page_type=archive_story_detail&page=1401, accessed 4 January 2015; Muyamba, J. 2014 Namibia: Erindi On Sale for N$1.3 Billion. *New Era* 4 February 2014. http://allafrica.com/stories/201402040769.html, accessed 4 January 2015.
[19] Ibid.

Namibia… 15,000 head of game and more than 300 bird species'[20]. Here, 'game', is a sporting term that since ancient Greece has connected the hunting of animals 'in the wild' with 'victory won by competing with the game'[21]. As at Erindi, however, such 'wild game' in fact frequently requires significant management and intervention in order to be present(ed) as 'wild animals'. Fittingly for the luxurious prestige of Erindi, 'game' has an additional connotation, in that historically and today such animals have tended to be accessible to the particular strata of society able to own or enter protected, i.e. set aside and enclosed, land areas where 'wild game' can be found.[22]

Most of the *Flamingo* magazine article focused on an interview with the owner of Erindi, South African businessman Gert Joubert, on the difficulties of attributing priced values to the tourism and conservation worth of Erindi's (p)reserve of 'wild game' animals. At N$20,000/hectare, Erindi's sale price is seen as low compared with elsewhere in southern Africa (Sabi-Sabi, Hoedspruit, Timbavati in Mpumalang at R60,000-80,000/hectare, Mala Mala at nearly R1 billion for 13,000 hectares), particularly since the reserve is well positioned as an 'eco-tourist' destination attracting 'upmarket international tourists', perhaps capitalising on a growing Chinese market.[23] Nonetheless, N$1.3 billion constitutes an immense potential accumulation of financial value for an area that prior to becoming a game hunting and then viewing reserve was, until recently, comprised of a set of cattle ranches and a South African army base[24].

These hard-nosed calculations of economic value build on and mesh with the (re)wild(ed) values of Erindi that entice visitors to part with upwards of US $200/person/night, in a context where 34.9% of the population live on US $1 per day and 55.8% live on US $2

---

[20] Ibid. p. 49.
[21] cf. Descola *op.cit.* p. 52-53.
[22] Marx, for example, notes the destruction of 36 villages in 1079 by William the Conqueror of Normandy, so as to create a royal hunting ground of the New Forest in south England. See Marx, K. 1974 1887 *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*. Ed. by Engels F., translated by Moore, S. and E. Aveling. London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 685.
[23] Steynberg op. cit. p. 50.
[24] Recorded interview with Erindi employee, 2nd April 2014. To date the Erindi sale has not gone through.

per day[25]. Erindi is marketed as offering an 'authentic, unadulterated, and unforgettable game viewing experience', with 'the widest selection of exciting species (in the greatest numbers)' experienced through 'relaxed game viewing' in 'ultimate bush luxury'.[26]

A few weeks after reading the article on Erindi in *Flamingo* I visited the Bushman village of Duinpos in the north-east Namibian region of Bushmanland during a week's introduction to Ju|'hoan healing dances and associated practices led by anthropologist and colleague Chris Low[27]. Whilst there I noticed a young Bushman man wearing a t-shirt boasting the Erindi Game Reserve logo. It seemed impolite to ask how he had come by the t-shirt, but I remember wondering how someone in a significantly marginalised rural community could have acquired such an item of clothing identified with a high-end luxury tourist destination hundreds of kilometres away. The connections between these two contexts were to prove stranger than I could have imagined.

Intrigued by both the extreme value accumulations represented by Erindi's advertised sale price, the advertisements of wild authenticity with which this economic value is connected, and the unlikely reminder of the Reserve in the very different context of a Bushman village in a completely different part of Namibia, I decided to go and take a look. What I found there was a series of surreal contradictions that seem to be at the heart of the problematic uses to which concepts of 'wilderness' and 'the wild' can be put, as well as the value accumulations, inequities and privileges these may serve. I highlight two aspects below.

1. *Telemetry and experiencing 'the wild'*

The uses of modern electronic technology (e.g. telemetry / radio-tracking and use of electrified fences and enclosures) enables the somewhat sanitised 'relaxed game viewing'

---

[25] Figures reported at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Namibia, accessed 1 February 2015.
[26] http://www.erindi.com/ Accessed 10 January 2015.
[27] www.thinkingthreads.com; Low, C. 2008 *Khoisan Medicine in History and Practice.* Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

advertised for Erindi. 'Telemetry tracking' is one of the 'activities' available to guests whilst staying at Erindi, although my experience was that this was also used on a 'normal game drive', i.e. with no telemetry advertised, in order to locate specific animals. Telemetry generates a paradoxical experience of encountering 'wild' animals. It has been argued elsewhere that telemetry turns 'wild animals' into electronic 'data machines' rather than living beings, thus perhaps 'destroying the very essence of the poetry of wilderness'[28]. There is indeed something absurd, as well as somehow deflating, about seemingly tracking a wild cheetah only to realise that this cheetah has been found 'in the wild' by homing in on it with a handheld aerial picking up the beeps of the animal's location from a radio collar. Telemetry, accompanied at Erindi by the significant use of electrified enclosures or paddocks to restrict the movement of animals and, in the case of lions, to control access by males to females for breeding purposes, did create a sense that '[t]he animals in these landscapes always perform perfectly on cue as the tourists pass by'[29]. This quote, again by Cronon, describes California's Disneyland theme park, seemingly a far cry from 'wild Africa'. But it seems somehow also apposite for the Erindi experience: a planned landscape 'where fantasy and commercial profit reign supreme' and from which '[s]ocial problems are carefully excluded'[30].

---

[28] Former US National Park Service employee Adolph Murie quoted in Benson, E. 2010 *Wired Wilderness: Technologies of Tracking and the Making of Modern Wildlife*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp. 31, 69.
[29] Cronon, W. 1996 Introduction: in search of nature, pp. 23-56, *in* Cronon, W. (ed.) *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. New York: W. Norton, p. 40.
[30] Ibid.

2. Experiences of 'wild people' in 'the wild' at Erindi

Which leads well into my second set of observations. Erindi is comprised of a cluster of former settler commercial farms from which indigenous Namibians were removed in colonial land appropriation processes that began in the late 19th century. African Namibians who now have contact with Erindi's land do so mostly as workers bussed in daily from a town some 60km of dirt road away. But there is one community of African Namibians living on Erindi's land. These are a group of so-called 'Cwi Cwi San', marketed as living 'solely off the land' and 'still follow(ing) their disappearing traditions'[31]. In the vein of a 'living museum'[32], these 'Bushmen' can be visited and observed (when they are around) for a visitor's fee of N$50/person (approx. US $4). Except that there have been no San/Bushmen people living in this area for at least decades, and it is unclear even where the name 'Cwi Cwi' hails from[33].

---

[31] http://www.erindi.com/activities/san-village-visit/, last accessed 1 February 2015.

[32] In Namibia the concept of a 'living museum' as been promoted by the Living Culture Foundation Namibia (LCFN), a German-Namibia organisation seeking to generate income-streams from indigenous Namibians performing selected elements of 'traditional culture' for payment by tourists and other visitors http://www.lcfn.info/. The San village at Erindi is not a LCFN 'Living Museum' but shares performative shape and organisation with these, as well as following a mid-1990s impetus for luxury lodges such as Kagga Kamma in South Africa and the Namibian Intu Afrika lodges to introduce displaced Bushman communities as tourist attractions (see discussion in Garland, E. and Gordon, R.J. 1999 The authentic (in)authentic: Bushman anthro-tourism. *Visual Anthropology* 12: 267–287).

[33] The closest seems to be G|wi or |Gwikwe, which names a Bushman people who in contemporary times have lived in the area of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, hundreds of kilometres away in Botswana (Silbauer, G. 1981 *Hunter and Habitat in the Central Kalahari Desert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Myburgh, P.J. 2014 *The Bushman Winter has Come: The True Story of the Last Band of |Gwikwe Bushmen on the Great Sand Face*. London: Penguin).

The Bushmen living at Erindi in fact were Ju|'hoan San who had been brought in from the settlements I had just come from in the north-east Namibian Region of Bushmanland, some 600kms and several ecological zones away. This is the link behind the Erindi Game Reserve t-shirt I noticed whilst in Bushmanland. Bushmen from Bushmanland are able to earn some money through their relocation to Erindi, through performing a selection of cultural practices for an hour a day to tourists. But they are not on the formal payroll of Erindi, and their income is thus dependent on tourists signing up for the 'San Village Visit' and the additional purchase of handicrafts. As such, these 'people at home in the bush', although dislocated from their homes, are valued to the extent that they can re-enact and sell what are perceived to be authentic traditional practices associated with living 'in the wild'. At the same time, they remain second-class citizens whose 'primitive' status as authentically wild people within a modern Namibia mitigates against their qualifying for a formal wage for the work that they do, work that also adds value to the commercial enterprise that is Erindi.

Erindi, then, does much to emphasise and celebrate a Bushman past that involved real people living in close and sustainable entanglements with the animate more-than-human natures given the appearance of once being present in this now rewilded landscape. Even the Erindi logo is a recognisable rock art depiction of a spear-carrying, leaping Bushman. But the wild Africa of Erindi is itself an intensively managed construction containing species such as crocodiles and hippos that seem unlikely to ever have overlapped here with humans, Bushman or otherwise. And the experience of Bushmen sold to tourists is a performative spectacle of authenticity that masks layers of displacement, marginalisation and violation constituting contemporary Bushman difference.

Given contemporary environmental crisis, and the crisis of human relationships with nature-beyond-the-human that this signifies, there perhaps is something of a tragically missed opportunity here. This is that the constructed encounters with 'authentically wild nature and wild peoples' at Erindi (and elsewhere) might act against communicative and experiential encounters that instead affirm commonalities between equal people globally

affected by environmental crisis and mutually concerned to affirm more benign ways of being

at home with earth's diversity of other-than-human-natures. Such cultural re-enactments also

rest uneasily with the colonial encounter of the European modern world with its 'primitive

other' globally, which involved export and exhibiting of the spectacle of indigenous peoples,

both living and their dead remains, in museums, circuses, and various touring staged

performances throughout Europe and North America[34]. In considering these historical

precursors, and as I have noted elsewhere[35], the power relationships, projections, and

strange fascinations structuring this present-day encounter attain some focus. Despite the

agency with which local people participate in and self-direct tourism ventures arising in the

context of contemporary conservation situations, they tend not to be equal co-authors of the

script that makes them so saleable to consumers of 'the wild' from afar.

From 'humanist naturalism' to 'socialist animism'?

Paradoxes and displacements thus 'run wild' through the framing categories

'wilderness' and 'the wild'.[36] In particular, and as noted in my introduction, it is not clear that

notions of 'wilderness' and 'the wild' are either accurate descriptions of what is indeed

encountered, or helpful in assisting 'us' with better (re)calibrating our experience with the

diverse ecologies of selves constituting nature-beyond-the-human. Worse, an accompanying

implication that 'nature' does best when somehow separated from the contaminating effects

of humans can be a deadening and defeating 'wilderness effect', at a time when we

---

[34] As detailed for Australian Aborigines in Poignant, R. 2004. *Professional savages: Captive lives and western spectacle*. London: Yale University Press; and for southern African KhoeSān peoples in Skotnes, P. 1997 *Miscast: Negotiating the presence of the Bushmen.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
[35] Sullivan 2011 *op. cit.*; Sullivan, S. 2001 Difference, identity and access to official discourses: Hai||om, 'Bushmen', and a recent Namibian ethnography. *Anthropos* 96: 179-192.
[36] On why and how framing matters in relation to 'nature' see Lakoff, G. 2010 Why it matters how we frame the environment. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 4(1), 70-81; Sullivan, S. Forthcoming. Beyond the Money Shot: Locating *Green* at Wildscreen. *Journal of Environmental Communications*, special issue on 'Spectacular environments/environmentalisms'.

desperately need stories that affirm the abilities of humans to make good homes with other-than-human natures.

It is worth noting that 'wilderness' and 'the wild' arose as conceptual domains in association with the 'humanist naturalism' of the Enlightenment, an era which consolidated nature as the passive, transcendent and scientifically knowable background to human cultural and economic adventure[37]. 'Wilderness' ideals can thus reiterate these separations, instead of assisting with attunements that heal modernity's defining estrangement of 'culture' from 'nature'. At the same time, and as indicated in the case material above, they can be used in ways that collude with unequal and environmentally destructive economic structures. This is through the marketisation and value accumulations associated with the manufactured spectacles and 'pastiches' of constructed 'wild nature' and 'wild people', and the associated consuming-via-viewing[38] enacted by those of us now privileged to access such wilds: given that both seem to be occurring in an absence of redress of the structures generating inequity and global environmental damage.

To add complexity, there is much to suggest that the worldviews of various indigenous peoples, as well as others, tend not to be structured by such framing concepts.[39] By 'indigenous' I refer to those who have remained in and sustained their ancestral homes, often in the face of extraordinary pressure to leave and/or give up these homes[40]. Bracketing for a moment the risks of romanticisation, essentialism and idealisation, what perhaps is found instead in the ordinary egalitarianisms and cross-species empathies of celebrated 'wilderness peoples' - including Namibia's Bushmen - is what I will term an 'animist socialism'. By this I mean an ethos through which human experience is systemically

[37] Descola *op. cit.*
[38] Cf. Urry, J. and Larsen, J. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0.* London: Sage Publications.
[39] Strathern, M. 1980 No nature, no culture: the Hagen case, pp. 174-222 *in* McCormack, C.P. and Strathern, M. *Nature, Culture and Gender.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Descola *op. cit.*
[40] Clastres, P. 1989(1974) *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*. New York: Zone Books; Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 2004(1972) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. By R. Hurley, M. Seem and H.R. Lane. London: Continuum.

entwined with nonhuman natures - through direct observation, use, celebration and sharing[41]

- in ways that might curb individual accumulations whilst at the same time creating space for

the shared, collective flourishing of life's abundance, both human and nonhuman. Many

people(s) experience nonhuman natures as animated by souls, communicative possibilities

and culture, in ways that bestow personhood and the possibility of social relationships

between what are thus allied kin,[42] accompanied by attentiveness to the requirements and

embodied perspectives of the other selves known and encountered through direct

interaction. This is why hunting, gathering and varied tending practices connecting peoples

and other-than-human-natures frequently require the uttering of words that affirm that these

are social activities engaging social beings who experience themselves as selves. In being

treated as other than abstracted objects available for instrumentalisation - an

instrumentalisation that can be as present in preparing wild nature and wild people for

consumption as in any other process of commoditisation - nonhuman natures might thus be

given greater space to come fully alive. And sharing such space with nonhuman others,

seems intrinsically suggestive of more rigorous sharing with each other[43].

  This is not so much a romantic animism of a sublime transcendent nature, as it is a

pragmatic, quotidian, everyday animism arising from living with[44], relying on, and being

attuned to multiple kinds of selves[45]. It is an ontology that amplifies experiences and values

---

[41] See, for example, Bird-David, N. 1992 Beyond 'the original affluent society': a culturalist reformulation. 33(1): 26-34; Bird-David, N. 1999 'Animism' revisited: personhood, environment, and relational epistemology. *Current Anthropology* 40 (Supplement): S67-S91; Lewis, J. 2008a *Ekila*: blood, bodies, and egalitarian societies. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14: 297-315; Lewis, J. 2008b Maintaining abundance, not chasing scarcity: the real challenge for the 21st century. *Radical Anthropology* 2: 11-18; also discussion in Sullivan 2013 *op. cit.*

[42] See, for example, Viveiros de Castro, E. 2004 Exchanging perspectives: the transformation ofobjectsinto subjectsin Amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10(3): 463-484; Griffiths *op. cit.*, p. 69; Brightman, M., Grotti, V.E. and Ulturgasheva, O. Animism and invisible worlds: the place of non-humans in indigenous ontologies, pp. 1-27 *in* Brightman, M., Grotti, V.E. and Ulturgasheva, O. (eds) 2012 *Animism in Rainforest and Tundra: Personhood, Animals, Plants and Things in Contemporary Amazonia and Siberia*. Oxford: Berghahn; Descola *op. cit.*; Kohn op. cit.

[43] See, especially, Lewis 2008a and b *op. cit.*

[44] Also see Turnhout, E., Waterton, C., Neves, K. and Buizer, M. 2013 Rethinking biodiversity: from goods and services to 'living with'. *Conservation Letters* 6: 154-161.

[45] cf. Kohn *op. cit.*; Suzman, J. 2014 Sympathy for a desert dog. *New York Times* 31 August 2014, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/sympathy-for-a-desert-dog/#more-153997, accessed 1 September 2014.

of being at home and cohabiting with other species as 'soul mates'[46], rather than as 'wild game' found in distant wildernesses. My reason for drawing attention to this here is to suggest that the tones of connection and sharing implicit in an ontology of animist socialism might offer a corrective to some of the more problematic current separations, inequities and accumulations that 'wilderness' and 'the wild' can justify. In doing so 'we' might look forward into the future as well as back to the past at a world 'filled to the brim with different creatures'[47]; filled to the brim too with diverse cultural intelligence for ways of living with such different creatures.

In searching for the elusive freedoms of 'wilderness' and 'the wild', then, perhaps we will find instead that what is of greater benefit to both so-called 'wild places and peoples' are experiences engendering senses of kinship, solidarity and *home*. As in the dictionary definition above, 'home' is the place where one lives, and evokes all the ambiguities, ambivalences and empathies that mature relationships with loved ones implies.[48] Nurturing possibilities of being *at home* in and with the multiple selves and environments of 'nature' in ways that permit the immanent flourishing of their difference, is a critical challenge given a post-'Enlightenment' *zeitgeist* of enclosure, alienation, uprootedness and separation: a *zeitgeist* of which the categories of 'wilderness' and 'the wild' may constitute both productive, and problematic, parts.

---

[46] Cf. Viveiros de Castro *op. cit.* on shared soul as the hypostases of connection between the differently embodied forms understood to be present in Amerindian contexts.
[47] As framed by Collard, R-C., Dempsey, J. and Sundberg, J. 2014 A manifesto for abundant futures. *Annuls of the Association of American Geographers* DOI: 10.1080/00045608.2014.973007, p. 2.
[48] Weintrobe, S. 2013 *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

people at Erindi and in Bushmanland with whom I interacted, and especially to Rudi who I interviewed at Erindi, as well as to Mike Hannis who read and commented on an earlier draft. Any errors of interpretation are mine alone.