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Power to the People - A Review of Decolonial and Community Driven Conservation of African Elephants

Rachael B Gross
Fenner School of Environment and Society
Australian National University

Abstract

Increasing human-elephant conflict is a recurring issue and the overarching recommendation for elephant management across Africa is to invest time, finances, and planning into community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). In this paper, I outline what CBNRM currently looks like in Africa, and how it may look in the future of elephant conservation.

Introduction

Kamau and Sluytor (2018) demonstrate that colonisation fundamentally changed the relationship between humans and elephants in Kenya. By showing the relationship before, during and after colonisation they demonstrate how formerly flexible and collaborative interactions turned into a binary model of human versus elephant (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). As elephant habitat becomes more fragmented, resources deplete in response to climate change and human populations continue to grow, it is evident that a human versus elephant model is unsustainable and detrimental to both parties (Gross & Heinsohn, 2022). As with many colonised continents, the value and success of local people's natural resource management is being realised in Africa. The reintroduction of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is heralded as a new ethical phase of conservation and as pressure on elephant populations increases, it is necessary to adapt conservation policy and management in the most effective and ethical way. While CBNRM is pivoted around endorsing elephant and landscape management by local communities, it is not a clear-cut solution.

Firstly, as Kamau and Sluytor (2018) show, time and resources need to be dedicated to repairing the relationship between humans and elephants without the influence of Westerners and on the terms of local people. This relationship will be key to the successful and meaningful integration of CBNRM into

conservation of elephants in Africa. Secondly, local people must have full autonomy over the definition and implementation of CBNRM which is not necessarily the case for many protected areas claiming to use CBNRM. There is still also an inherited “us” versus “them” mentality built into CBNRM between local people and Western management (Chase et al., 2016). While Western management is analogous with colonisation and the associated trauma, there are technologies and methods that can be brought into CBNRM and work collaboratively with local knowledges and sciences. It is thus the aim of this review is to piece together the history of elephant management in modern African history and how it has changed with colonisation. I explore the strengths and weaknesses of both CBNRM and Western management to see which paths are available in the elephant management space that focus on best elephant conservation practice and the empowerment of local people on their land.

To compartmentalise elephants away from the ecology and society is antithetical to the core recommendations for this review and so, while we use elephants as a focal species, we will most commonly draw the point back to the landscape level. To follow in the footsteps of Kamau and Sluytor (2018), I have broken this review into three key components: the history of colonisation and CBNRM, the presence of colonisation in CBNRM and the future of decolonisation in CBNRM of African landscapes.

Premise

For change to be carried out, a need must be established. The need for CBNRM to become the norm in the management of elephants is mounting philosophically, ethically and in practice. In part, this is due to how African landscapes are changing dramatically and quickly because of the varying effects of climate change. In another part, this is because of colonisation becoming more apparent as African voices become louder and are heard more widely. What we know is that elephants are declining (Chase et al., 2016) and climate change is increasingly becoming a contributor to this (Gross & Heinsohn, 2022). Their role in ecology and society is critical and the way Western science perceives ecology and society as separate is inhibiting our ability to conserve elephants and their landscapes. The change being called for is founded on this information as a premise.

Elephant Decline

African elephants have experienced a 98% population decline in

200 years because of the ongoing colonisation of the African continent by several European nations (Adams & Mulligan, 2003; Chase et al., 2016). Colonisation introduced the most prominent causes of population decline: poaching ("illegal killing") for ivory, habitat fragmentation and destruction and more volatile human-elephant conflict (Adams & Mulligan, 2003; Chase et al., 2016). When there was a smaller human population, before colonisation began, there were ~20 million elephants across Africa and that number has since dropped to ~415,000 according to the 2016 census (Chase et al., 2016; Thouless et al., 2016).

Importance of Elephants

While elephants are prolifically a flagship species, they uniquely fall under all five species concepts. Most importantly, elephants are a keystone species (Haynes, 2012). Their innate behaviours in foraging, migrating and use of surface water shape the landscape around them, making them ecosystem engineers and landscape architects (Wall et al., 2013). Elephants are largely responsible for creating and maintaining savannah ecosystems which is indicative of their high, and irreplaceable, ecological value. As one of the "Big 5", elephants are also a critical part of the tourism industry and contribute significant economic value to many African countries (Spenceley & Snyman, 2017; Szott et al., 2019). Their combined ecological and economic value proposes the current case for their conservation. However, I argue that the most important value of elephants is cultural value. The primary reason is that, while largely overlooked in conservation management and policy, investment in the importance of cultural value is intrinsically linked to the success of ecological and economic values of elephants, especially in a climate change scenario.

African Ontology of Indigenous Sciences and Knowledges

To group all indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal and local communities together across multiple continents is unethical and contributes to denying the self-determination of people/s that started during colonisation. It is not the role of the author to choose a label or delegate a term, especially to so many diverse and robust cultures within Africa. As such, I use multiple terms but use "local communities" most commonly as it is reflected most in the literature and is non-denominational and does not pre-assign a role to people. We also recognise that many of the theories and literature centre the experience and perspective of other First Nations communities and so we are

wary of drawing false equivalencies between African cultures. However, First Nations groups from across the globe face the same oppressor and oppressive systems because of colonisation and colonialism. The way to describe communities without detracting from self-determination and autonomy is not clear cut but here I aim to bring together history and ideas in this space to find the best way forward.

The history of colonisation in CBNRM

In this review, we refer to the foundations of colonisation summarised succinctly firstly by Smith (1999):

> …the colonisation of their [indigenous peoples] lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonising society that has come to dominate the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out.

And by Reeves (2009):

> European colonial power came to be based upon a series of separations and exclusions that cast colonised peoples and nature as being outside the 'ideals' of 'civilised' Europe and, therefore, inferior. The colonised were denied their individuality and diversity and treated as belonging to stereotyped classes: they were by marginalised by, and incorporated within, the colonial project, which was, in turn, driven by an overriding desire for order and control.

I emphasise that colonisation was not a single event but is an ongoing process of oppression and that it is an active threat against colonised nations, even if they have been 'liberated', the legacy of colonisation remains prevalent in shaping livelihoods and politics.

Enlightenment and Entitlement

The industrial and philosophical Western Enlightenment throughout Europe in the 18th Century introduced the idea of humans dominating nature (Krebber, 2011). Nature became a tool and commodity for humans to own and use for profit, and anthropocentrism became the core of Western science, lifestyle and philosophy (Krebber, 2011). As major European countries invaded and colonised other continents, where nature has

been treated as and centred around humanity, anthropocentrism also colonised the minds and spaces of Indigenous peoples. Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism created a rift between humans and nature, and all within as Western culture imposed that humans are superior to nature which has become entangled with human identity (Dressler et al., 2010a). On a deeper level, English and mathematics became the languages of science and nature in the motion of turning nature into something mechanical and easily disenchanted and has established a difficult socio-psychological barrier to overcome in the space of CBNRM (Krebber, 2011). Anthropocentrism is antithetical, on various levels and in many manifestations, to most Indigenous cultures and African cultures are no exception. The Western Enlightenment is the basis for how relationships were forced to change to accommodate Eurocentrism and how communities came to be in a philosophical and identity-entangled battle with their landscapes.

Protected Areas

The historical establishment of protected areas in Africa works on the same premise as the establishment of National Parks across the world – protecting land from humans (unless you can pay to access it) by displacing them from it. This is known as the Yellowstone Model (Wuerthner, 2015). This is more evident in some countries than others. It perpetuates the colonial notion that people are and should be separate from nature. The premise is the inherited assumption that humans have a negative impact on the landscape which justifies excluding them to protect it. In Africa, there is segregation of landscape into space for humans separate from wildlife, often reinforced by fences. While there were areas set aside for agriculture, most landscapes functioned on a more holistic and integrated approach with wildlife (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018).

For example, the pre-colonial tribes inhabiting the Maasai Mara region were partially nomadic and mobile. While this was not implicitly to coexist with wildlife, it did create a flexible relationship between humans and wildlife (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018; Ofcansky, 2007). There was also lateral violence between the tribes that meant this relationship was often changing to adapt to shifting geopolitics, but the premise of a holistically fluid relationship with the environment remained until colonisation (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). As Britain colonised Kenya, the land was claimed as property of the British Monarchy along with the inhabiting wildlife (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). Colonial administrators would only recognise land claims by agriculturists

and pastoral groups and not hunter/gatherers which favoured tribes like the Maasai and allowed the lateral violence between tribes to escalate beyond tribal warfare by allowing agricultural tribes to dominate hunter/gatherer tribes (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). This also effectively criminalised hunting, the life source of many tribes, and set the precedent for 'illegal poaching' punishable by incarceration or death which is the poaching system we know and admonish today (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018; Ofcansky, 2007). The establishment of protected areas also set the premise for habitat fragmentation as the land was set aside for conservation and cut off from other areas, such as railways opening more landscape to British settlement, that served as a hard line between elephants and access to resources outside protected areas (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018).

Criminalising hunting not only restricted cultural practice, but effectively starved hunter/gatherer tribes and made them more susceptible to lateral violence from pastoralist tribes (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). In contrast, game/trophy hunting concurrently became an active and highly sought-after sport for wealthy British tourists thus introducing a paradigm of Black poachers and White hunters (Ofcansky, 2007). As with hunting, being in 'protected areas' became criminalised (Daskin & Pringle, 2018; Frisbie, 2021b). The first act of the former military officers now in charge of protected areas was to remove all humans from the landscape they were ordered to protect (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). Since the British Monarchy had laid claim to all land and wildlife, wardens were able to 'resettle' people from protected areas (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). In Kenya, those who were not complacent were forced onto trucks, had their huts burned down, tracked and arrested or gunned down in the parks (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). This is how the relationship between humans and nature was fundamentally split into two and weaponised against each party, when the relationship became "us" and "them" where "us" is local communities and "them" is Westerners and the land/nature they took with them as they colonised.

A History of CBNRM

CBNRM did not start as a management strategy, but as a government experiment. Across Zimbabwe in the 1970s, the government experimented with the legislation of private land ownership. The government stated that if a private land holder can fence the perimeter of their property, then any wildlife that is within belongs to the landowner (Frost & Bond, 2008). In the 1980s, landholders (particularly agriculturalists) could earn more money from

the hunting and auctioning of wildlife than through livestock and agriculture (Frost & Bond, 2008). This saw a large-scale shift in land use from agriculture to wildlife conservation. Communities surrounding private land were not receiving any benefit while also losing local stocks of food supply. As a result, local districts of Zimbabwe were given the right to manage and benefit from wildlife that resided in community land (Mutandwa & Gadzirayi, 2007).

This model held a lot of benefits for the community and for independence from colonial strongholds in the conservation sector. Other countries followed suit, namely Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania. Namibia began designing and implementing CBNRM models in 1996 having had 20 years to learn from the history of the movement and has gone on to become one of the leaders in the CBNRM space. Namibia became the first country in Africa to incorporate environmental protection into its constitution. The government passed a law enabling communities to set up “conservancies”, giving them the right to manage and benefit from their own natural resources. Since then, there has been a 47% increase in wildlife sightings in Namibia (since 2004), 132,000 km^2 of land is protected under community-based models and there are 59 community-led conservation areas set up to protected wildlife (WWF, 2019).

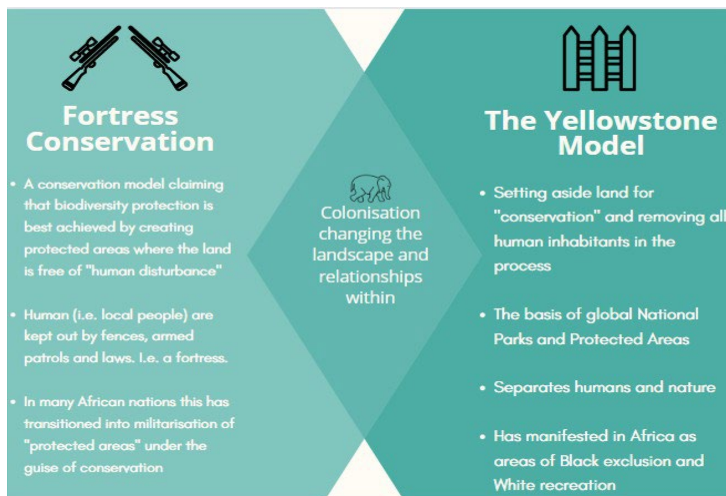
In other, more heavily colonised places such South Africa, there is still contention on land use. Where Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism is most prominent, the value of nature is still below that of humans. In the hierarchy of land use, conservation and local community occupation are both residual land uses that conflict with each other (Kepe & Hall, 2018). These places are where genuine CBNRM is needed the most for the survival of both wildlife and people, but where there is the most resistance and difficulty in implementation.

The Presence of Colonisation in CBNRM

Fortress Conservation

The Yellowstone Model focuses strongly on the assumption that protected areas and “wildernesses” are pristine and untouched by humans, which is antithetical to land-use by First Nations communities globally. A parallel model to this is Fortress Conservation. This is the idea that the best option for land and biodiversity is to be protected from human disturbance by setting up a fortress around the area and calling it protected from humans (Frisbie, 2021b). In Africa, we see this implemented through fencing under

the guise of conservation (Somers & Hayward, 2012). Fortress conservation runs on the premise that the only people who are allowed into protected areas (other than those 'protecting it') are those who can pay – tourists. This has led to conservation areas becoming recreation space for wealthier white people across Africa (Steinhart, 1989).



Fortress conservation has also introduced militarisation of conservation areas. Lunstrum (2014, 2015) described this as Green Militarisation. The militarisation draws from key colonial measures: military generals and ex-militia were the first park wardens and tasked with the construction of protected areas and brought with them military tactics to be used against locals (Lunstrum, 2014; Simlai, 2015). Further, anti-poaching units are predicated on military personnel, equipment and training (Lunstrum, 2014).

Poaching is also a side-effect of the Fortress Conservation effect as the fences and fortresses can be justified through the notion of keeping poachers out and keeping wildlife safe within them. This has allowed the militarisation of conservation efforts and in nations like South Africa has turned conservation into warfare between locals, often conflating subsistence hunting with illegal killing and associating locals with poachers (Lunstrum, 2015). Much of Green Militarisation stems from the process of colonisation

when former colonial military officers became park wardens and key strategists in establishing protected areas (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018; Lunstrum, 2015). Today, most anti-poaching units in South Africa are under the leadership and management of ex-military officials (Lunstrum, 2015). Further, many anti-poaching teams consist of locals and other Africans which is sanctioning lateral violence between locals and the teams, and the fractured relationship between locals and nature can become a complex issue of gatekeeping by the "us" in the "us" and "them" divide. It also allows the face of Green Militarisation to be Africans which, while exploitative, may make it more amenable when Africans are being paid for enforcing and, in theory, agree with the foundations of Fortress Conservation.

There has been a resurgence of Fortress Conservation in response to the resurgence in poaching, but the militarisation of conservation is politically unstable (Kelly & Ybarra, 2016), especially as the needs of the wildlife and landscape expand in response to a changing climate and dwindling resources. Fortress fences are a fallible solution that addresses a symptom and not a cause. They are a fortress of colonialism and not of protection as they are designed to appear.

Voluntourism and Ecotourism

Voluntourism and ecotourism programs have largely focused on money and not land which is often not how they are advertised. It is also a way to keep enforcing exclusionary models, like 'conservation' fencing, under the ruse of keeping wildlife in a protected area so volunteers and tourists who pay to come and see them will be able to. It does beg the question, particularly in private reserves, where the money from volunteer and tourism programs goes. Both the ecotourism and voluntourism industry relies heavily on taking advantage of the limited understanding and knowledge of Africa in the Western world (Stronza et al., 2019). Volunteers working with both people and wildlife may be under the impression of helping, when in many cases they are paying to perpetuate the "White Saviour" complex, a narrative that more civilised (white) outsiders are the only ones who can save Africans from their oppressed livelihoods because Africans are powerless and without agency to solve their own problems (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Gatwiri, 2019; Stronza et al., 2019). Meanwhile, some countries still allow trophy hunting and canned hunting.

The idea of trophy hunting itself is controversial. The trade of wildlife and wildlife parts has been part of African cultures for millennia, and

there is the opportunity for a model to exist where communities stand to control and benefit from the hunting industry, but this is rarely the case, and the profit remains private and White (Ofcansky, 2007).

Tourism functions at very high profit and the conservation industry in Africa is deeply entangled with and dependent on tourism. While many of these companies hire local people, it is generally in lower paying roles like guides, cleaners and cooks. These staff are also only able to culturally engage with the landscape if it is for profit, like performing for tourists and wearing traditional and ceremonial clothing (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). This is not meaningful engagement or an act of reparation but exploitation of culture for profit and the white gaze, despite a long history of attempts to destroy and extinguish such culture. There appears to be a cognitive dissonance between wealthy tourists driving for hours through 'impoverished' towns and people arriving in an expensive and high-class resort style camps in a protected area.

Monopolising Science

Western conservation science is a product of colonialism that perpetuates ongoing colonial violence and facilitates neo-colonialism in African landscapes. In some cases, like that of Charles Darwin, science was a weapon of colonisation. As he travelled to places he was not invited to, he took observations and specimens without permission and published his findings without recognition of this or acknowledgment that most of his theories and observations were already recorded by Indigenous communities. He was among the first Western scientists to set this process as a precedent for oppressing knowledge and autonomy of First Nations people and set in motion the process that we now know as "Parachute Science" (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022).

Western science, as we know it, has monopolised knowledge and how we practice science. However, the premise of science is that knowledge (and the pursuit of advancing it) is for everyone, and everyone should be able to contribute. Therefore, if Western science insists on co-opting science and knowledge there is an inherent obligation to make it accessible to everyone and open for everyone to contribute. As it stands, this scientific process does not accept (and in many cases, actively excludes) Indigenous and First Nations methodologies, languages and knowledges because they do not fit within a rigid framework (Genda et al., 2022; Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022).

The research industry is a proponent of neo-colonialism. Having monopolised science and scientific practice, Africa and its wildlife and people

have become a case study of the damage of parachute science, defined by the actions of researchers arriving in places in Africa, largely unannounced or invited by local people, extracting data and leaving. This approach to research lacks accountability and enforces the inherent extractive nature of research where the goal is perpetually getting data, regardless of the side effects. By not meaningfully engaging with the community, researchers are creating two problems with their research. Firstly, they are setting a poor precedent for collaboration and going through due ethical process to collect data (Odeny & Bosurgi, 2022). Secondly, researchers are missing the opportunity for better, historical and more robust data by not consulting and *collaborating* with local people who potentially hold intergenerational knowledge that is key for contextualising data (Genda et al., 2022). Parachute science is a disservice to the foundations of science and sets a dangerous precedent for continuing a long tradition of oppression without consequence. As one of the most studied species, elephant researchers are particularly guilty of this, especially given the cultural value of elephants and lack of procedure around studying them in a culturally sensitive manner.

Neo-colonialism in Africa – The Invention of Poaching

Neo-colonialism allows the ongoing oppression of First Nations peoples in deeply systemic ways. The most prominent way that neo-colonialism is present in the relationship between humans and elephants is poaching. The ongoing international perception of poachers is an active barrier to allowing local communities to manage elephant populations due to the "risk" of increased poaching. It is critical to highlight that 'poaching' under the Western definition conflates poaching with subsistence and cultural hunting, which has taken place (sustainably) on pre-colonial African landscapes for millennia, as did the trade of wildlife and wildlife parts (Ofcansky, 2007; Steinhart, 1989).

The elephant (and rhino) poaching crisis has been a global topic of discussion since the 1970s Green Movement when populations dropped dramatically low and began to impact tourism (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Manrai et al., 2020). Since then, it has been sensationalised by media. The most critical point is that local communities did not have access, influence or the ability to defend themselves to these media. Consider the basis of poaching. Men from local communities break into protected areas and kill or injure elephants for their ivory to be sold on black markets, largely in China, Hong Kong and until recently, Britain (Greenfield, 2022). When news of

poaching or trophy hunting breaks, the international community mourns. A prime example of this is Cecil the lion, an infamous individual male lion who was a star of the tourism industry but killed by a trophy hunter just outside of Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. The death of Cecil was in headlines around the world for weeks and sparked many ethical discussions about trophy hunting. To further how this was perceived, Cecil was shot outside a protected area where there were no anti-poaching patrols and locals were blamed for not protecting him, with suggestions that they had aided the trophy hunter, and bore as much blame as the hunter (Frisbie, 2021a; Greenfield, 2022).

People, most of whom have never been to Africa, react the opposite way to the news of the death of a poacher. Celebrating the death of a poacher, for the most part, is celebration of a colonised person being colonised and yet there is no public outcry or constructive discussion about the poaching industry. The death or incarceration of a poacher is met with a standing ovation, wishes for the same fate for all poachers and the glorification of either an excruciating death or a militarised execution (Greenfield, 2022). I argue that the death of a poacher is neither environmental nor social justice. While there are exceptions, individuals or groups who poach for greed, most poachers are not in the position by choice.

Colonisation functions on the premise of exiling local people from the land they have inhabited for millennia and then forcing new systems of economics and trade on those communities designed to intentionally impoverish and disempower them. If communities are offered enough money to survive in exchange for ivory, is poaching really a choice? Further, elephants hold cultural value in all the communities they have coexisted with. For example, the Waata people of the Maasai Mara region had a mutualistic relationship with elephants, especially during times of strained resources like drought. Where elephants would dig holes for water, the Waata people then accessed it for bathing, washing and cooking (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). During colonisation, the Waata people became the primary 'poachers' being persecuted by the colonial administration and are now the smallest and most marginalised group in the Mara Region because they were hunter-gatherers and not agriculturalists (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). The choice to hunt, injure or kill a culturally significant species for non-cultural means seems rarely a choice but an ultimatum between life and death given the value of ivory and state of many African economies post-colonisation. This creates a deadly dichotomy for local people between not being able to afford food but also not

being allowed to hunt for it either.

In a framework where elephants have been framed as the enemy – eating crops, raiding villages, injuring and killing people – the real choice seems to be between life and death. The poaching industry exists for the same reason any market does - consumer demand. There is a high demand for ivory which is entirely ornamental and comes from significantly wealthier economies (Moore, 2011; Moyle et al., 2014). African governments are not innocent in this issue as many, such as those in Botswana and Kenya, introduce hunting bans and burn ivory stockpiles for clout and to appear stronger and more effective to Western media and international conservation organisation (Moyle et al., 2014).

Further to the narrative of "Black poachers, White hunters" (Ofcansky, 2007), a review of hunting bans and benefits by the Luc Hoffman Institute showed that hunting and tourism were unrivalled in terms of narrowly defined economic benefits (Roe et al., 2020). However, there is power in leveraging communities to restore carbon and wildlife friendly products by providing incentives to use agricultural products that do not rely on poaching (Roe et al., 2020).

A Note on Media and 'Global' Conservation Organisations

The reality of working with charismatic species is that international media has strong influence over policy enforcement and conservation management in Africa. Much information about the conservation situation in Africa is filtered through global 'non-profit' organisations that are largely seen as trustworthy and legitimate sources. While there are examples of communities misleading or withholding information from the media, the way elephants and African landscapes are managed should not be under the influence of Western media. It is not the role of the media to control and hold people accountable for how they manage their own land and wildlife.

Depictions of Africa are largely constructed from Hollywood movies and charity campaigns like Amnesty International. They build a picture of Africa and its people as impoverished, starving, desperate and illiterate and mostly importantly, dependent on white people for livelihood. In 'classic' and highly prized Hollywood movies, like Out of Africa, African people are low class workers and subservient to the white stars of the film. Africa itself is seen as wild, despondent and untamed wilderness, most notably free of Africans who exist only in the margins of 'the help'. Many Western media focusing on Africa tells a narrative of white people having to save Africa from

the Africans and that image is consistently still perpetuated and clings to Africa as a high level of oppression and denies Africans the agency to define themselves and their history. That notion is the premise for protected areas across Africa and the foundation of the Yellowstone Model and Fortress Conservation.

This image is further perpetuated by modern documentaries from media outlets like the BBC that depict white people exploring the African 'wilderness' with locals playing no more roles than as B-role, short interviews or as background characters to the narrative of white people in the wild. In turn, the promise of wild landscapes and wildlife is the key driver of the tourism industry. The image of the peoples of Africa is homogenised and filtered through both the film industry and the charity industry. This depiction of Africans is what has built the global image of people who do not know how to or do not have the means to manage their own elephants and other wildlife. This image informs the opinions of people who are not African yet have a loud voice in the management of elephants.

The Decolonial Future of CBNRM in African Landscapes

Community-based Management of Elephants

CBNRM is defined by natural resource and landscape management being designed and implemented by First Nations communities. Some of these programs, like CAMPFIRE, have been running for a significant time (Mutandwa & Gadzirayi, 2007). While many of these projects make movements towards returning sovereignty and autonomy to local peoples, many are also unfortunately still under the influence of Western organisations and community engagement is tokenistic and not meaningful. In places like Kenya, where the British monarchy still 'own' the wildlife, including elephants, it defies the concept of autonomy for local people. For many organisations, CBNRM can include employing local people in the protected areas and running community outreach programs to nearby villages (Dressler et al., 2010b; Turner, n.d.). In theory, to educate them about the protected areas and wildlife within. Though it begs the question about which party involved is more knowledgeable of the landscape and the nuances within.

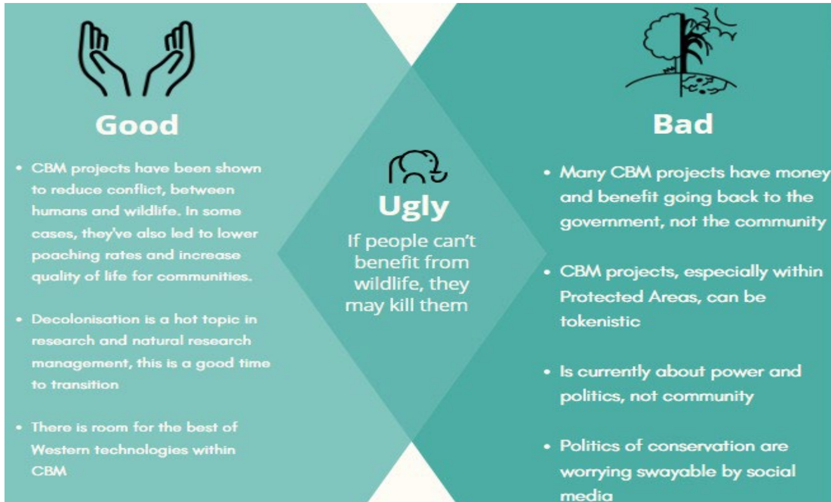
Strengths and Weaknesses of CBNRM

CBNRM has objective strength in being able to tap into generations of environmental and ecological knowledge built around and for the

landscape that elephants inhabit, including the potential for knowing past migration and habitat use (Dyer et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2021). There is the perpetual caveat that colonisation destroyed the languages, stories and intergenerational knowledge that may hold this information and so, in many places, it may not be available. However, CBNRM also increases quality of life for local people, provides meaningful employment and gives some autonomy back to people of their traditional land (Dyer et al., 2014; Gibson Stuart & Clark, 1995; Salerno et al., 2018). CBNRM, or a variation thereof, is already being implemented across Africa with varying levels of success, as in the CAMPFIRE program in Zimbabwe and the community conservancy model in Namibia (Ntuli et al., 2020; Shereni & Saarinen, 2020; Turpie & Letley, 2021). The core component that sets these programs apart is that local communities have full autonomy over wildlife and can treat wildlife as a financial resource. The idea of trophy hunting is becoming less palatable to some western people, but under community control, can be fully sustainable and profitable and allow communities to better integrate into a post-colonial economy and rebuild the community livelihood on their terms (Dyer et al., 2014; Salerno et al., 2018). For many communities, cultural and sustenance hunting and the wildlife trade pre-dates colonisation and was a key part of livelihoods and is not a new concept (Gibson Stuart & Clark, 1995).

CBNRM does not have a singular application or definition across countries, localities and communities. There is location-specific nuance and many CBNRM projects are marred by power and politics, and many remain under state control. For example, in Zimbabwe, despite being one of the first nations to invest in CBNRM in the 1970s, there are problems with how much money goes back to government and rural district councils instead of back to the communities (Mutandwa & Gadzirayi, 2007). The issues of power and politics are not enforced just by Westerners but also by federal and local governments who act as neo- colonial forces (Ntuli et al., 2020). The reality of human-wildlife conflict in communities is that, if people cannot benefit from wildlife, they may kill them. Wildlife, especially large species like elephants, inadvertently cause harm to communities through crop-raiding, village raids or volatile interactions so the financial and physical cost of coexisting with them can be much higher than the cultural benefit of a post-colonial relationship (Dressler et al., 2010b). CBNRM needs to be pivoted around incentivising communities to protect wildlife by providing them a direct way to profit from wildlife (Roe et al., 2000, 2020). This means that land use for wildlife must be valuable, more so than agriculture or livestock

(Roe et al., 2020) which circles back to how CBNRM projects were initiated in the first place.



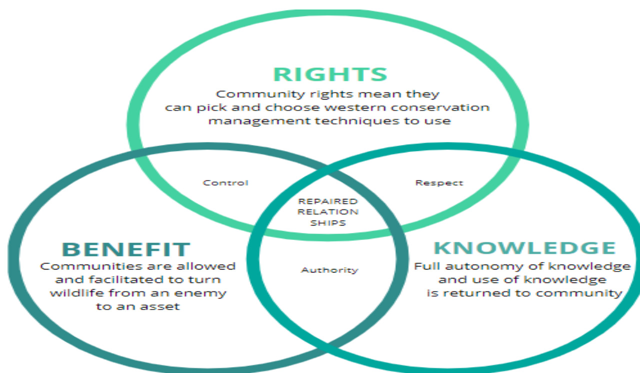
True CBNRM requires investment in community control instead of state control and must become about community instead of power and politics (Roe et al., 2020). The reality is that CBNRM may not be palatable to Westerners and can include trophy hunting, wildlife trade and profiting from wildlife (Roe et al., 2000, 2020). This discomfort does not override the rights of Africans to exist in and manage their lands and wildlife, and there is no evidence to show that CBNRM leads to further wildlife population declines or unethical practices. Further, the resurgence of Green Militarisation in response to poaching is politically unstable and in the face of climate change, using wildlife can be favourable given communities have the opportunity to turn wildlife from an enemy into an asset and for wildlife conservation to be a valuable land use (Roe et al., 2020).

Importantly, dismantling the oppressive and unsustainable practices of fortress conservation and the Yellowstone Model requires philosophical reframing from an "us versus them" mentality regarding communities and Westerners to a collaborative effort working towards the same goal. This concept already exists as the concept of Ubuntu, an African philosophy and value system that is largely regarded as a core cultural value in sub-Saharan

Africa and pre-dates colonisation (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). Ubuntu is pivoted on building and maintaining community and communal relationships rather than focusing on respect and autonomy as seen in most Western cultures (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). While nuanced based on the location, the priority of Ubuntu is grounded in justice and mutual care and act towards a communal good (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019). The core concepts for CBNRM exist and are already entrenched in many African cultures but a lack of investment and support from governments and Westerners acts as a barrier to implementing Ubuntu in the wildlife conservation space.

To avoid exploitation and misuse of power, investment must be in grassroots organisations. We need to support and incentivise grassroots organisations that are community initiated, managed and designed. This is the key to handing power back to communities and deplatforming the power and politics at play, especially taking power from the state and reinvesting it in communities.

Three key components need to be returned to communities in full for CBNRM to be implemented sustainably, ethically and meaningfully across Africa: knowledge, rights and benefit. Investing time, planning and finances into these components of landscape and wildlife management becoming fully community controlled is a critical step towards repairing the relationship between local communities and elephants, while also ensuring that repair is happening on the terms of local communities.



While CBNRM is pivoted around endorsing elephant and landscape

management by local communities, it is not a clear-cut solution. Firstly, time and resources need to be dedicated to repairing the relationship between humans and elephants without the unsolicited influence of Westerners and federal governments and on the terms of local people (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). This relationship will be key to the successful and meaningful integration of CBNRM into conservation of elephants in Africa. Secondly, local people must have full autonomy over the definition and implementation of CBNRM, which is not necessarily the case for many protected areas claiming to implement CBNRM strategies (Roe et al., 2000, 2020). Thirdly, there is still also an inherit "us" versus "them" mentality built into CBNRM between local people and Western management (Dressler et al., 2010b). While Western management still reflects colonisation and associated historical issues, there are technologies and methods that can be brought into CBNRM that complement local knowledge and practices.

Lastly, it is essential to understand that decolonisation is not a metaphor (Yang & Tuck, 2012). It is critical to manage elephant populations in the most sustainable, effective and ethical way which largely leads back to the integration and adaptive implementation of CBNRM. However, the theory and philosophy of CBNRM is only meaningful if it ends in the act of giving land back (Yang & Tuck, 2012). This must be achieved academically, philosophically, materially, and culturally.

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