

Complicating histories of carnivores in Namibia: Past to present

Response to: Niki A. Rust and Nik Taylor, "Carnivores, Colonization, and Conflict: A Qualitative Case Study on the Intersectional Persecution of Predators and People in Namibia," *Anthrozoös*, 29 (4), 2016: 653-667

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Abstract

In November 2016, Anthrozoös, a top journal in the field of human-animal studies, published an article by Niki A. Rust (Canterbury) and Nik Taylor (Flinders) purporting to explain the "persecution" of carnivores on farmlands in Namibia through use of historical investigation and eco-feminist theories. While we were initially intrigued by the authors' goals and frameworks, as they dovetailed with projects which we'd been undertaking for the previous few years, we found ourselves disappointed by their shallow argumentation, sparse documentary evidence, and fundamental flaws in their research methodology. In order to further discussion on the subject, we raised our concerns with the authors and with Anthrozoös with hopes to create a forum. The journal, published out of the International Society for Anthrozoology, categorically refused to host such a debate or allow the publication any commentaries or rejoinders to their articles. Rust & Taylor also refused to participate in a forum, via Anthrozoös or elsewhere. In order to further productive discussion, INS has agreed to host this forum. The following three commentaries seek to elaborate on our concerns and urge the authors to follow suit.

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As a student, I was taught that the best way to deal with a bad book or paper was to ignore it. However, when the premier publication in the burgeoning field of human-

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animal studies, *Anthrozoös*, refuses to publish rejoinders or comments on articles it has published, serious questions must be raised. Disputation and debate are what robust scholarship is about, especially in this era of 'alternative truths' and 'fake news'.

The Rust & Taylor article has, in my estimation, great potential but has been shoddily evaluated by the referees assigned to it by the journal. There is much that one can say about their paper but I will restrict my remarks to two issues; the shallow historical analysis and fieldwork problematics.

Matters historical

The authors are correct in emphasizing the importance of the historical context and claim to have undertaken an archival review. Yet, strangely enough, they cite no primary archival material, only a selective reading of secondary sources. These concentrate on the so-called 'Herero Genocide' and ignore the one which would have strengthened their case, namely the 'Forgotten' extirpation in 1912–15 of those hunter-gatherers labelled Bushmen or San who were far more heavily burdened with the label 'vermin' than any other indigenous category.¹ Rust & Taylor fail to provide an understanding of why some (not all) indigenes were regarded as vermin. They also fail to appreciate that the values implied in the 'ethnic label' imposed by the discourse of colonial domination varied with changing socio-cultural contexts. They claim to have done archival research in order to gain a holistic understanding but do not show how the interrelationships constitute a whole. An example of trendy rhetoric flattening reality perhaps?

Pre-colonial accounts by many travellers, and especially missionaries, actively promulgated the view that Bushmen, and especially Chou-daman, (nowadays Damara), another group practicing hunter-foraging, were brutally killed and enserfed by pastoralist Herero and Nama peoples. Such accounts were of so common that they cannot be explained away simply as providing moral justification for colonialism and making sense in terms of conventional nineteenth century unilineal evolutionary models. However, with the expansion of the commercial hunting zone from the Cape Colony, the status of those labelled Bushmen improved. They were much admired as guides. Not so the Damara who, like Bushmen, practised a flexible production strategy, largely in areas unattractive to pastoralists in the more mountainous and drier regions. If these early accounts are to be believed, they were seen as being of even lower status than Bushmen and killed without qualm while Bushmen were at least valued, even admired, as hunting guides.

With the consolidation of capitalist ranching the situation again changed. Bushmen were now regarded as a plague and declared *vogelfrei* (beyond the protection of the law) and thus could be shot on sight while Damara were generally regarded as reliable farm laborers. How to understand this switch? Might it have to do with Western notions of property?

¹ Robert J. Gordon, "'Hiding in Full View": The Forgotten Bushman Genocides in Namibia", *Genocide Studies & Prevention*, 4, 2009: 29-58.

It was not coincidental that both feral animals and Bushmen were likened to convicts as they were deemed to share the attribution of having no moral compunction about taking what was not theirs. Since the eighteenth century, the bourgeois social and moral order was based on the principle of private property, solidifying a line of argument drawing sustenance from Aristotle, Locke, Hegel and Marx. The nineteenth century consensus was well stated by Engels when he wrote that production is the 'transforming reaction of man on nature. The most that the animal can achieve is to collect, man produces, he prepares the means of life, in the widest sense of the words, which without him nature could not have produced'. Since Bushmen were seen as hunters living off wild animals, they were regarded as 'unproductive'. Hugo von Francois, brother to the first governor, wrote in his memoirs that the problem with Bushmen was that they did not distinguish between '*herrenlose*' (ownerless) animals, namely game, and livestock. 'Both Races, the Herero as well as the Boers, have thus undertaken distasteful police raids and shot down Bushmen like vermin using organized battue and the value (of such hunts) is shown in the large number of people shot.' Both scholarly and official discourses portrayed Bushmen as unproductive, lacking a sense of property and little better than wild animals.²

Many colonials and other indigenes believed that Bushmen were *vogelfrei* precisely because they owned no property and allegedly did not have laws. Their alleged incapacity for work was also tied to notions of property. Most importantly, having no property meant that their territory was seen as terra nullius and thus available for the taking by settlers.

Matters methodological

Recently Rust was involved in a vigorous exchange concerning her methodology in which she and 13 colleagues made a robust defence of the use of qualitative research in conservation research.³ Unfortunately, some of the issues are still open.

Rust & Taylor's examination of contemporary practices is based on the claim that one of the authors spent eight months doing an ethnography using participant observation while based largely on a single farm in central Namibia, supplemented by 75 semi-structured interviews. We are not told what 'participant observation' entailed except that she participated in some unspecified farming activities. Nor is the reader informed of the depth of this activity. Did she simply stay at the farm manor, or did she stay in the compound or with the farm workers? More strikingly, the reader is not apprised of the author's linguistic competence. This is important given the generally poor English

² Robert J. Gordon, "Vogelfrei and Besitzlos, with no Concept of Property: Divergent Settler Responses to Bushmen and Damaras in German Southwest Africa", in: Mohamed Adhikari, (ed), *Genocide on Colonial Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 2014: 108-133 (127).

³ Gail Christine Potgieter et. al., "Comment on Rust et al: Human-Carnivore Conflict in Namibia is not Simply about Black and White", *Society & Natural Resources*, 30 (10), 2017: 1299-1303; Niki Rust, et. al., "Quantity does not Always Mean Quality: The Importance of Qualitative Social Science in Conservation Research", *Society & Natural Resources*, 30 (10), 2017: 1304-1310.

proficiency in rural parts of Namibia. The result is an extremely simplistic and naive view of Namibian history buttressed by a heavy reliance on verbal utterances. In short, Rust & Taylor engage in a classic case of what C. Wright Mills called “Abstracted Empiricism” – statements are used divorced from their social context. In highly stratified societies like Namibia – which has one of the highest Gini coefficients globally – informants on the bottom rung, such as farmworkers, are most likely to make statements which they believe the interviewer wants to hear. How likely is it that a young(?) itinerant *Miesies* (Missus) will gain the confidence of workers? Moreover, even neophyte social scientists are aware that there is a difference between what people say and what they do. To provide a simple Namibian example: In many parts of Namibia, as in most of Africa, the most hurtful insult among indigenes is to call someone a dog, not a jackal. Yet dogs are not subject to exterminatory practices. On the contrary, in some cases dogs were treated as pseudo-family.⁴

Rust & Taylor take at face value such statements by farmers as “black people don’t want or need the creature comforts that white people want” (p. 659) instead of using such statements as entry points for a dialogue. Had they done this they might have discovered that the situation was much more complex than their eluded and flattened analysis suggests. Farmers and farm-workers employ a cornucopia of ethnic stereotypes stressing each stereotype’s moral worth. Not only are farm-workers classified into Damara, Nama, Herero, Owambo, Kavango, Bushman or Coloured, itself a tricky mode of classification, but farm-workers classify farmers not simply as White but as German, Afrikaans, English, Coloured, Nama or Damara.

Exterminatory violence is usually attributed to certain conditions such as racism or poverty. However, Randall Collins has recently argued that exterminatory violence is generally the exception rather than the rule because violent confrontations go against human physiological hardwiring, regardless of the underlying conditions or motivation.⁵ Certain pathways around this emotional barrier have to be found and this results in violence typically coming in the form of atrocities against the weak, ritualized exhibitions before audiences or clandestine acts of murder. Rust & Taylor might have examined how farmers found ways around this hardwiring.

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Rust & Taylor’s article takes issue with white settler farmers’ intolerance of carnivores preying on their livestock in Namibia. The article is premised on the assumption that the

⁴ Robert J. Gordon, “Fido: Dog Tales of Colonialism in Namibia,” in: William Beinart and JoAnn McGregor, (eds.), *Social History & African Environments*, Cape Town, David Philip, 2003: 240-254.

⁵ Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

killing of predators is circumscribed to a rural Namibia, yet to be enlightened by an attitude of tolerance towards certain human and nonhuman beings. This intolerance is explained by a history of colonial violence. The history of predation amongst small livestock is a worldwide phenomenon and contemporary debates on the hunting and killing of predators in areas where predator geographies overlap with livestock farming have led to heated exchanges in places such as France (wolves), Australia (dingoes) and India (tigers), to name but a few. In 2015 disgruntled French farmers recently kidnapped the head of a National Park in the Alps to make a point about losses incurred through wolf predation.⁶

The question considered in this review is whether the conflation of racial violence (as related to the colonial and apartheid history of Namibia) with predator killings on settler farms is a useful analysis. It is certainly true that inherited categories regarding race continue to shape almost every aspect of daily life in the postcolonial countryside; but, as I contend, it is more nuanced and materially grounded than suggested by the authors. For example, Sylvain's ethnographic research on cattle ranches in the Omaheke region convincingly showed how inherited ideas of racial difference facilitated the institutionalization of a non-violent patriarchal relationship between farm workers and farmers. This relationship, despite its power disparities, also allowed (some) agency for the farm worker.⁷

Below I highlight a few points that question how straightforward the relationship between racial violence and predation control is in the context of Namibia.

Privileging whiteness

Predation is not an issue only affecting white-owned commercial farms. In fact, research suggests that black communal farmers also incur major losses due to predation.⁸ This is further complicated by the fact that many of Namibia's communal areas have been gazetted as communal conservancies, a postcolonial intervention aimed at bettering the livelihoods of indigenous Namibians through wildlife tourism and trophy-hunting. In conservancies, communal farmers are legally barred from using the same predation control strategies as on commercial and privately-owned farms (an obvious disadvantage), as all indigenous animals (including predators) are protected. By "[privileging] whiteness, both as an analytical concept and a unit of study" the authors risk "confining many of the issues studied to white groups and white identities" when they are in fact issues

⁶ See: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11839696/French-farmers-kidnap-Alps-park-chiefs-demanding-protection-from-wolf-attacks.html>> [accessed March 23, 2018].

⁷ Renee Sylvain, "Bushmen, Boers and Baasskap: patriarchy and paternalism on Afrikaner farms in the Omaheke region, Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (4), 2001: 717-737.

⁸ Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NASCO), *Namibia's Communal Conservancies: A Review of Progress and Challenges in 2009*, Windhoek, NASCO, 2010.

affecting all Namibian livestock farmers.⁹ An analysis of racism is not resolved by treating 'black' and 'white' farmers as polarised homogenous categories without difference and agency, as is the case in this article. Predation is a real issue and impacts on the profitability of farming in an area defined by limited ecological resources. It is difficult to determine the economic losses incurred by predation (and in many cases the figures are exaggerated), but a recent estimate suggests that the impact can amount to 200,000 Namibian dollars per year.¹⁰ Predation is thus an issue affecting the sustainability of livestock farming, irrespective of the colonial baggage in the Namibian countryside.

Theoretical matters

In order to consider the claim that racial violence is a process of exclusion similar to that of predator hunting, it is useful to reflect on the white farmers implicated in this reasoning. Brief mention is made of a farm on which one of the authors was accommodated, but no description is provided of the interlocutors of this paper. White commercial farmers are lumped together as "European Descendants" – or sometimes merely as "Europeans" (p. 662). This form of representation neglects to take into account the varied historical trajectories with which settlers arrived in Namibia and the difficulties of imagining a homogenous community in a context of diversity. For example, Silvester argues that:

The construction of an imagined Namibian community of white settlers – Southwesters – with political, legal, and residential rights involved processes of inclusion and exclusion as the identity of the settler community was negotiated and contested over time. At particular historical moments, for example, German-speaking settlers were conquered and denied the legal and political rights enjoyed by other settlers.¹¹

Research conducted on white farms in southern Namibia by the author of this review revealed a plethora of opinions held by white commercial farmers on the subject of predation and race. In fact, predator hunting practices exposes the fractions in the white community. For example, one poor farmer displayed jackal corpses on his farm gate to show neighbouring farmers that he was not the inadequate farmer they held him for. Ethnographic research is about accounting for these differences. The authors also neglect to mention the fact that most white farmers refer to themselves as Namibians (or sometimes as Southwesters)¹². This sense of belonging to Namibian soil and the

⁹ Rory Pilossof, "Reinventing significance: Reflections on recent whiteness studies in Zimbabwe", *Africa Spectrum*, 3, 2014: 135-148 (141).

¹⁰ Janie Swanepoel, "Habits of the hunters: the biopolitics of combatting predation amongst small stock farmers in southern Namibia", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 34 (1), 2016: 129-146 (138).

¹¹ Jeremy Silvester, "'Sleep with a Southwester': Monuments and settler identity in Namibia", in: Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen, (eds.), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Taylor & Francis, 2005: 271-286 (272).

¹² See *ibid.*

divergent attitudes of white settlers toward predation and indigenes does not come across in the analysis.¹³

But the diversity of the responses to predation does not eliminate the notion of whiteness in the Namibian countryside. Mamdani's notion of 'political identities' – as opposed to cultural identities – is useful in understanding the historical and contemporary uses of a white identity.¹⁴ Mamdani asserts that the origin of a settler identity lies in the colonial legal system (i.e. a product of unequal racial relations), but he also points to the resilience of these identities in the postcolonial moment. The continuous construction of race is therefore rooted in the invention of a white political identity (although notoriously fluid with personal and cultural difference). This understanding of an identity reveals why a notion of a white farming community sporadically (but strategically) emerges even though, individually, white farmers present a heterogeneous picture: as an inherited colonial legacy it serves the interests of a particular minority with an uncertain future in a democratic dispensation.

These historical and contextual nuances challenge the representation of white farmers in a stable essentialist fashion. By keeping these nuances in mind, one also avoids reducing settler identity to the violence inherent to colonialism. However, such essentialized representation does work well for the historical determinism implied in the authors' theoretical framework. They use Val Plumwood's seven steps to domination "to explore the subjugation of Namibian peoples and predators" (p. 659). The authors describe the latter as a "pathway [that] builds on the psychological theory of moral exclusion, whereby one group (the 'in-group,' also known as the 'One') believes it is dominant to others (the 'out-group' or the 'Others')" (p. 659). Applied to the Namibian context, by stage seven, white farmers have normalised the extermination of predators. Yet, farmers' relationships with predators are far more complex and pragmatic. For example, consider the following by one of the most respected jackal hunters in southern Namibia:

Finally, to root out or the "exterminating of species" was never my purpose. Although I believe that sheep farming, as I practice it, cannot go hand in hand with the protection of jackals, the purpose of my hunting is only to control the number of jackals on my land and to farm sustainably . . . not to root them out completely. If I wanted to root them out completely, my measures would have been much more drastic, cruel details I will rather spare you.¹⁵

¹³ Erika von Wietersheim, *This Land is my Land! Motions and Emotions around Land Reform in Namibia*, Windhoek, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 2008; Ute Dieckmann, "Land, boreholes and fences: the development of commercial livestock farming the Outjo District, Namibia", in: Michael Bollig, Michael Schnegg and Hans-Peter Wotzka, (eds.), *Pastoralism in Africa: Past, Present and Future*, New York, Berghahn, 2013: 255-286.

¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001.

¹⁵ Personal email communication, 6 June 2016. See also the example noted in Owen-Smith's book of the white farmer who refused to kill any predators because he claimed to have had created an ecological balance on his farm (Garth Owen-Smith, *An arid Eden: A Personal Account of Conservation in the Kaokoveld*, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2011, p. 6103 Kindle Version).

Many farmers have also given up on controlling predation through hunting and have simply started to raise electric fences around their farms or particular camps. This solution is predator specific but nonetheless points to the fact that farmers do not cultivate a stable disposition towards predators that would motivate the extermination of a species, as claimed by the authors (p. 661).¹⁶

Moreover, the relations between 'indigenous' Namibians and the settlers continue to be shaped by a range of factors, of which, at least in southern Namibia, the perpetual shortage of labour plays a tremendous role. Historically, settler farmers' relations with the indigenes were mostly defined by the need for labour within a growing capitalist economy, and issues of trust and cultural notions of idleness, rather than tendencies toward annihilation – as suggested by the authors –, shaped the colonial encounter.¹⁷

The development of predator hunting in Namibia is also more related to the spatial organisation of farming practices and the recruitment of labour,¹⁸ than a display of farmers' convictions of "[power] and dominance" to "eradicate an entire guild of species" (p. 662). In fact, predators have proved to be tremendously resilient to farmers' attempts to eradicate them in livestock farmed areas. The wide range of strategic practices employed by Namibian farmers to hunt predators point to their belief in the predators' "near human intelligence"¹⁹ rather than thinking of carnivores as "thoughtless, mindless beasts driven only by a thirst for blood" (p. 660). Moreover, jackal hunting practices are situated in the cultural and social constructions of identity and community, and often substantiated rural solidarity amongst white (male) farmers. The history of jackal hunting clubs in Namibia shows that eating and drinking in an atmosphere of conviviality were sometimes much more important than the violent acts of killing predators.²⁰ In short, hunting practices are also meaningful, especially for the construction of gendered and cultural identities. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of predator-human relations, the embodied materiality and limitations of hunting must also be recognised.

¹⁶ For example, writing from Zimbabwe, Suzuki clearly indicates how the image of wildlife as "vermin, destructive of the conditions for livestock (and crop) production" transformed to a "valuable resource" (Yuka Suzuki, "Drifting rhinos and fluid properties: the turn to wildlife production in western Zimbabwe", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1 (4), 2001: 600-625, here p. 600). She ascribes this "fluidity" in the discourse on wildlife to the changing contexts of the postcolonial farming landscape.

¹⁷ Jeremy Silvester, *Black pastoralists, white farmers: The dynamics of land dispossession and labour recruitment in Southern Namibia 1915–1955*, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of London, 1993; Tilman Dederig, *Hate the Old follow the New: Khoekhoe and Missionaries in Early Nineteenth-Century Namibia*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1997; Robert J. Gordon and Stuart Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000; Bernard C. Moore, *Canines, Carnivores, Capitalism and Colonialism: Some Transformations in Hunting, Agriculture, and Labour in Southern Namibia, 1915–1930s*, unpubl. M.A. thesis, East Lansing, Michigan State University, 2016.

¹⁸ See Swanepoel, "Habits of the hunters".

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 136.

²⁰ Swanepoel, "Habits of the hunters". For a South African example, see Andre Goodrich, *Biltong Hunting as a Performance of Belonging in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Maryland, Lexington Books, 2015.

Eco-feminist theory is a useful approach to understand the ways in which racial and social differences are born from a particular ontological relation with the environment. This theory has been described as a result of an entanglement of Enlightenment thinking and Christianity in which human (male) superiority is assumed over the environment, women and indigenous people. This discourse on domination, manipulation and appropriation of nature (and non-Western peoples) is important in order to understand how a particular notion of humanity abuts and justifies acts of violence, and exploitation of the environment and of indigenous populations.²¹ Yet the roots of patriarchy in the superiority-over-nature discourse are evident in most modern capitalist food producing industries and are not particular to postcolonial contexts.²² Furthermore, the strength of eco-feminist theory is embedded in its attention to gender. The authors expect that the reader will assume that the “farmers” of this study are male, but this conflation should be problematized and reconsidered in light of the complex genealogical traditions of the white farming community in Namibia (especially in terms of the gendered expectations of descendants) and the presence of women farmers and women farm workers. The authors’ analysis could have been more nuanced if gendered perceptions in the “Othering” processes discussed were considered.

Moreover, eco-feminist theory is essentially an ‘anthropocentric’ frame on discourse, an approach the authors claim to move away from. In spite of the experience of at least one of the authors in research on predator conservation in Namibia, and working in conservationist institutions (namely, the Cheetah Conservation Fund), little attention is paid to the predators in question. This would have shifted the argument closer to the less human-centred analysis the authors claim (p. 654). Besides the reference to “predators” and “carnivores” information on particular predators in the Namibian context, especially the jackal, cheetah and caracal, each with their own social biographies, personalities and geographies, is never discussed. The paper’s main theoretical thread, contending that the colonial and apartheid history of Namibia will shed light on an interspecies relationship based on violence and hostility, is decidedly anthropocentric. Predator hunting is a multispecies affair and in order to understand the practice the “importance of animal bodies and ecologies and their human interactions” needs to be foregrounded.²³ The authors’ argument could also benefit from a multispecies history of the region, especially in terms of how the limited ecological resources of Namibia have structured herding and farming practices and how predator populations responded to the development of commercial agriculture there.²⁴

²¹ Vassos Argyrou, *The Logic of Environmentalism: Anthropology, Ecology and Postcoloniality*, Oxford, Berghahn, 2005.

²² Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

²³ Jamie Lorimer and Sarah Whatmore, “After the ‘king of beasts’: Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid-nineteenth-century Ceylon”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (4), 2009: 668-689 (672).

²⁴ Swanepoel, “Habits of the hunters”.

Finally, the claim at the conclusion of the article stating that the paper was the authors' "political and ideological standpoint" on the matter seems like a convenient device enabling them to articulate their discomfort with the violence with which predators were killed and farm workers were treated on the farms they visited (p. 663). The experience of normalised predator killing can be discomfoting, especially for scholars with a background in conservation. But this does not mean that the uncomfortable reality of predator killing and local forms of racism can be linked into an all-encompassing theory of supremacy and oppression. Acknowledging one's subjectivity does not preclude one from a critical engagement with the limitations and biases involved in conducting research as sympathetic conservationist on predation and predator-hunting within a postcolonial context.

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Niki A. Rust & Nik Taylor argue that there are parallels between human "domination" of wild carnivores and European settler "domination" of indigenous Namibians, and that these dynamics can be better understood through historical engagement with human-carnivore relations during the colonial period. On the whole, they are correct; I have been working on the subject for some time now.²⁵ However, major oversights in their historical account of predator control during the twentieth century, as well as limitations in their understanding of "domination" render their argument misleading and problematic. For Rust & Taylor, domination is so all encompassing that it becomes shapeless, leading the authors into language and discourse analysis as a way to understand dispossession and 'othering', very much at the expense of material causes – which the reader learns little about. Language and discourse is naturally a factor in understanding these dynamics; however, we must see these cultural and discursive tendencies as manifestations of broader material conflicts pertaining to transformations in white settler farming in the region. While my colleagues Janie Swanepoel and Robert Gordon have focused on methodological and theoretical problems with Rust & Taylor's piece, I discuss problems with the historical narrative exhibited, elaborating on ways in which the authors could have presented a more accurate and nuanced analysis.

The political economy of agriculture in the twentieth century is poorly explored in Rust & Taylor's article, partially because the "archival review" they claim to have performed does not appear to have necessitated a visit to the National Archives of Namibia, or referenced consultation of any archival documents or primary resources at all. Only a

²⁵ Bernard C. Moore, "Canines, Carnivores, Capitalism, Colonialism: Some Transformations in Hunting, Agriculture, and Labour in Southern Namibia, 1915–1930s", unpublished M.A. thesis, East Lansing, Michigan State University, 2016; idem, "Fenced Out: Labour Reductions and Vermin Definitions in Southern Namibia, 1915–1990", PhD Dissertation, Department of History, Michigan State University (in progress).

very selective reading of published literature was undertaken, and much of these materials did not even deal with Namibian subject matter. The history of Namibia, particularly of capitalist settler agriculture, is presented as static, uniform, and unchanging. In reality, carnivore control campaigns – more appropriately titled “vermin” or “problem animal” control, as not all declared vermin were carnivores – evolved alongside developments in agricultural production and labour demands.²⁶ While there are some broad trends throughout the twentieth century, Rust & Taylor’s approach ignores these transformations and obscures some of the main reasons for engaging in vermin control. There is no room in the authors’ argument for changes in definitions of ‘vermin’ or in reasons for control.

In his recent book on coyotes, historian Dan Flores writes that in our engagement with the most ubiquitous American meso-predator, we make a fundamental mistake when we consider the coyote as part of “nature”. “The truth is” he writes “coyotes have never been solely wilderness creatures.”²⁷ Meso-predators worldwide always have sought out humans, whether on farms or in urban areas. Jackals, Namibia’s most numerous predators, are no exception to this rule. Alongside ecological pressures, the jackal’s diet can alter to include non-carnivorous foods, such as insects and desert melons. With the onset of colonial settlement and ranching, ovine numbers spiked throughout the first half of the twentieth century. To be brief, the jackal quickly adopted sheep as a major source of protein, leaving behind the harder to catch game and the less satisfying rodents.

This is the root of the notion of ‘vermin’: jackals and other carnivores actually do eat sheep and are detrimental to the size of the flock and its reproductive capacity. The average desired lambing percentage of a flock of sheep in Namibia is roughly 120%; without adequate vermin control strategies, this rate can be reduced to 60% or less.²⁸ One farm owner remarked that he lost nearly an entire grazing flock to jackals and rooikat (caracal) when a camp’s fencing was breached.²⁹ While the authors accurately note (p. 660) that predators are often blamed for decreasing profitability when drought, theft, and markets play a role as well,³⁰ we must be careful not to diminish the very real threat of predation, particularly as it pertains to sheep and goats (more commonly

²⁶ I was invited to explore these transformations in a four-part blog series for the American Historical Association in 2017. An article is in preparation on the subject. For the blog series, see “Killing for Sheep: Locating ‘Vermin’ in the Namibian Archives”, (9 June 2017); “‘Dogs Were Our Defenders!’ Canines, Carnivores, and Colonialism in Namibia”, (16 June 2017); “‘Vermin Are Like Weeds in Your Garden’: Fences, Poisons, and Agricultural Transformations in Namibia”, (20 July 2017); “Caught Between a Rock and a Hyrax: Consequences of Vermin Control in Namibia”, (3 August 2017).

²⁷ Dan Flores, *Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History*, New York, Basic Books, 2016: 8.

²⁸ Live births/serviced ewes. Personal communication with Meatmaster sheep farmer, Karasburg District, 2017, among others.

²⁹ Personal communication with Karakul sheep farmer, Karasburg District, 2017.

³⁰ See also Niki Rust, “How Lions, Leopards, and Livestock are Affected by Racism on Namibia’s Farms”, *The Conversation*, 14 April 2016, <<https://theconversation.com/how-lions-leopards-and-livestock-are-affected-by-racism-on-namibias-farms-57167>> [accessed November 23, 2018].

owned by black communal farmers and agricultural labourers, as well as commercial farmers in Southern districts), as well as calves. Humans have always lived in a conflict-ridden, symbiotic relationship with jackals, which are simultaneously a source of grievance when stock losses are tabulated, and, in Beinart's words, "nature's sanitary corps" – preventing disease from spreading via carcasses in the veld.³¹

Furthermore, Rust & Taylor's lack of engagement with the history of agriculture in Namibia obscures the interrelation between predator control strategies and general desires to create 'progressive' and profitable farming enterprises during the colonial and apartheid periods. As an example, the jackal-proof fencing which forms the boundaries of most farms south of Windhoek and lines all the roadways was thought of as a labour-saving initiative. In the government commission held to inquire into whether this fencing should become mandatory in sheep-farming districts, nearly all of the interviewees noted that if jackal-proof fencing could be erected with interior stock-proof camp fencing, a large amount of the shepherding work force could be made redundant.³² In nearly all of the meetings, the estimated savings due to reduction of the labour force exceeded the monetary value of the sheep saved from predators.³³

This is not the medium to describe the history of these fencing initiatives and jackal eradication schemes, but the long-term control of the movement of jackals and the facilitation of their elimination were less a result of a Eurocentric desire to "dominate" wild animals, as Rust & Taylor would contend, than of efforts to reduce the labouring workforce on sheep farms in the Southern districts by between 30–70 per cent.³⁴ While the karakul sheep and the highly profitable, but labour-intensive pelt industry enabled the relatively poor, white settlers of Southern Namibia to find a degree of economic stability in these arid lands, government subsidised fencing and vermin control initiatives formed the backbone of a highly capitalised, intensive white agricultural sector during the apartheid period, transforming poor settlers into specialised fur farmers. Much of the labour released from these jackal-proofed farms was either directed towards the growing mining sector, urban industries, or to the nascent Orange River irrigated agriculture projects at Noordoewer and elsewhere. Some of the shepherds who were not automatically made redundant were transformed into a new, lower-paid class of farm worker, the camp walker, who tended to fences rather than sheep. Finally, a large number of black, former agricultural labourers formed part of the growing masses of

³¹ William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment, 1770–1950*, New York, Oxford, 2003: 201.

³² National Archives of Namibia (NAN), Archives of the South West Africa Agricultural Branch (AGR) 500, File 68/6/1/1/1 (v. 1): Minutes: Kommissie van Ondersoek: Jakkalsproefomheining – Meeting at Witbooisvlei, 19 September 1955.

³³ NAN AGR 500 File 68/6/1/1/1 (v. 1): Minutes: Kommissie van Ondersoek: Jakkalsproefomheining - Meeting at Koës, 19 September 1955.

³⁴ NAN AP 5/7/8: Verslag van Kommissie van Ondersoek: Wenslikheid van Verpligte Jakkalsproefomheining (February, 1956).

rural or peri-urban precariat, eventually taking residence in one of the so-called apartheid 'homelands'.

The interrelated dynamics of range management, predator control, and political economy in Namibia throughout the twentieth century and beyond are striking, and they complicate the argument Rust & Taylor put forth. As agricultural technologies and economies change, so does the very definition of 'vermin'. The insectivorous aardwolves, which the authors dismiss as possessing "no threat to livestock" (p. 660), were not ordinarily killed prior to the mid-1950s, except when mistaken for jackals or young hyena. After jackal-proof fencing initiatives were underway or completed, aardwolves and other creatures became 'problem animals' not because of active predation, but because of their interference with newly created agricultural technologies and the feasibility of a shepherd-less farm, and by extension, the longevity of white settler agriculture.³⁵ Furthermore, as late as 1989, aardvarks and honey badgers were officially listed as vermin and could be legally killed on jackal-proofed farms, not on grounds of predation but because their tunnelling under fences enabled jackals to re-enter cleaned camps.³⁶ The authors correctly note that aardwolves are still killed today, but they mislead readers by stating that many farmers believe them to be carnivorous. Farmers largely kill aardwolves and aardvarks because of burrowing tendencies.³⁷

With regard to herbivorous 'vermin', many farmers in the South began to complain of dassies (rock hyrax) competing with their sheep for grazing. The dassie was not considered 'vermin' or a 'problem animal' prior to the 1960s. However, the completion of fencing initiatives led to the exclusion of the carnivores which preyed on the hyrax and kept their populations in check.³⁸

These changing definitions of vermin are what makes an "animal sensitive"³⁹ history of Namibia so intriguing, by showing both the limits of an anthropocentric framework, as well as the real need to consider human actions, decisions, and mental conceptions. Along those lines, Clapperton Mavhunga encourages us to think about the conceptual

³⁵ NAN AGR 500 File 68/6/1/1/1 (v. 1): Minutes: Kommissie van Ondersoek: Jakkalsproefomheining: Meeting at Leonardville, 10 February 1956. NAN AP 5/7/8: Verslag van Kommissie van Ondersoek: Wenslikheid van Verpligte Jakkalsproefomheining (February, 1956).

³⁶ NAN BB/3587: Departement van Landbou en Natuurbewaring, Jaarverslag, 1988/89.

³⁷ Personal communication with Dorper sheep and Gemsbok farmer, Bethanie District, 2017.

³⁸ NAN PB/6440: J.E. Lensing, *The Ecology, Population Dynamics, Control, and Certain Aspects of the Behaviour of the Rock Hyrax (Procavia Capensis) in South West Africa*, Windhoek, Afdeling Natuurbewaring en Toerisme, 1974; J.E. Lensing and Eugene Joubert, "Intensity Distribution Patterns for Five Species of Problem Animals in South West Africa", *Madoqua: Tydskrif vir Natuurbewaringsnavorsing, Suidwes-Afrika*, 10 (2), 1976: 131-141 (132). See also J.E. Lensing, "Feeding Strategy of the Rock Hyrax and its Relation to the Rock Hyrax Problem in Southern South West Africa", *Madoqua: Tydskrif vir Natuurbewaringsnavorsing, Suidwes-Afrika*, 13 (3), 1983: 177-196.

³⁹ Sandra Swart, "Writing Animals into African History", *Critical African Studies*, 8 (2), 2016: 95-108.

movement between 'wild animals' and 'vermin' in Southern African contexts.⁴⁰ Do we consider it 'hunting' when ungulates are shot during tsetse-control operations? Mavhunga says no, arguing that the animals had crossed the conceptual and material boundary between game and vermin. This is now 'problem animal' control. A detailed history of changes in human-animal relations reveals points of friction which may go unnoticed in traditional frameworks; regretfully, Rust & Taylor did not attempt this.

Had Rust & Taylor engaged in an adequate historical analysis of Namibia and of human-carnivore (or human-vermin) relations, the reasons for this mobility between 'wild animals' and 'vermin' would provide a rich body of knowledge, allowing them to deconstruct and engage with the discourse and language they observe regarding carnivores (in Central Namibia, it appears). They are right to imply that the language regarding and persecution of carnivores and vermin in Namibia are historically conditioned; however, they neglect to examine much of the structural and material conditions of capitalist agriculture during their time period, rendering their argument misleading and shallow. There must be a recognition that the history of vermin and predator control is more than merely psychotic tendencies and "speciesism" on the part of (white) farm owners (p. 658), but rather a point of confluence between desires to decrease predation rates on farms, and to make farming operations as independent of black labour as possible.

Thus, their final section, "improving the situation", falls a long way short of delivering what it promises, mostly because it fails to address the root of the problem in the first place. Rather than engaging with colonial/apartheid capitalist agriculture and the links between vermin eradication, land theft, and labour relations, the authors claim that improvement can be reached by "breaking down negative stereotypes, particularly by empathy building" (p. 662). Presenting vermin destruction as a colonial problem that must be solved with new mentalities and empathetic understanding further neglects the fact that black Namibians have been controlling vermin populations for centuries using a variety of methods from the most to the least 'humane'. And finally, if we are going to link colonial mentalities to that of perceptions of wild animals, we must remember that colonial and apartheid laws and governance were not ended by more empathy, but rather by armed struggle and political negotiation.

Agricultural production of any sort necessarily means conflict in some way with 'nature' and 'wild animals'. It is misleading and ahistorical to allege, as Rust & Taylor do, that vermin control reflects merely a "European attitude towards African wildlife" – that they must "dominate" it (p. 658). And finally, arguing that through empathetic engagement these issues can be solved is at best utopian and at worst obscuring the very reasons for this 'domination' in the first place.

⁴⁰ Clapperton C. Mavhunga, "Mobility and the Making of Animal Meaning: The Kinetics of 'Vermin' and 'Wildlife' in Southern Africa", in: Linda Kalof and Georgina M. Montgomery, (eds.), *Making Animal Meaning*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2011: 17-43.

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