

Controlling Sex and Death: On the Wildlife Trophy Industry in South Africa

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An Ankole bull belonging to Cyril Ramaphosa, now president of the Republic of South Africa, sold for R640,000 at the Ntaba Nyoni auction in May 2017. With horns of over 110cm the bull was the prize animal at the first Ankole auction in South Africa. Ramaphosa had fallen for the creature in Uganda, but was prohibited by the Department of Agriculture to import the breed. Together with an embryo transfer specialist, he therefore travelled to Uganda to bring embryos back home instead.¹ With its majestic horns, the Ankole has quickly become popular with game farmers, who buy them for breeding purposes and who sell hunts and horns in the wildlife industry. The Ankole is but one example of the industry's constant search for new trophies.

This chapter looks into the commercialisation of wildlife in South Africa and explores how natures are transformed into resources through specific social appraisals.² By looking at South Africa's trophy-breeding industry, it aims to show how many new commercial human-nature relations have emerged. In a short span of time since the legal privatization of wildlife, virtually each life stage and body part of wild animals has been employed for commodification. As Noel Castree writes: by means of socio-technical procedures 'noun-chunks of reality' are being 'cut' from the dynamic complexity of nature and are marketed as resources.³

By examining the different roles certain species play in the trophy industry, this chapter argues that the privatization of wildlife has led to intensive management and control over not only the habitats of wildlife but also over each aspect of the lives of such animals. Whereas the wildlife business before was mainly focused on experiencing animals in nature (ecotourism) and taking their lives (hunting), it is now quickly developing methods to capitalize

1 See <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/cyril-ramaphosas-ankole-bull-sells-r640-000>.

2 D. Harvey, 'Population, resources, and the ideology of science', *Economic Geography*, 50:3 (1974), 256–277.

3 N. Castree, 'Commodifying what nature?', *Progress in Human Geography*, 27:3 (2003), 273–297.

on other aspects of wildlife bodies (such as the alteration of bodies and body parts). It is thereby actively producing new kinds of nature.

The text is divided along the lines of three phases in the lives of wildlife, namely sex (on breeding wildlife), death (on hunting and killing wildlife), and after-death (on wildlife meat, souvenirs and trophies). I will start off with a contextual paragraph that conceptualises the research, and illustrates the steep rise in trophy breeding.

Performing Wildlife in South Africa

Cooney and colleagues define trophy hunting as the hunting of animals with specific desired characteristics (such as a large horn size) that is carried out on a recreational basis and is not a part of livelihood strategies or subsistence.⁴ The practice of trophy hunting usually involves a financial transaction by a hunter to a hunting outfitter, who sells the hunting experience as well as the animal and the sought-after trophy. This trophy is an animal part, which is seen as a token of remembrance of the hunt and can consist of the complete animal or, more often, a specific body part such as antlers, horns, tusks, or teeth.⁵ This study delves into the practices of a relatively novel exercise within the hunting sector whereby animals are bred specifically for the trophy industry. This trophy breeding has quickly become the norm in South Africa and is facilitated by South Africa's property regime. In South Africa, legal frameworks have shifted to provide land owners, who demonstrate their intention to own wildlife (by erecting fences and taking other measures), ownership over species as well as many other liberties regarding the lives of wildlife (see Snijders, 2015). The breeding of wildlife has thereby become possible outside of zoos or laboratories, and has become common on private wildlife ranches and game farms.

This has led to a blurring of the concept of wildlife.⁶ To understand what wildlife is in South Africa, it is important to look beyond category names and study how animals are 'enacted' and how human-wildlife interactions are shaped.⁷ Because human-nature interactions influence the proliferation, behaviour, and the morphology of animals, it is important to understand how

4 R. Cooney, C. Freese, H. Dublin, D. Roe, D. Mallon, M. Knight, et al., 'The baby and the bathwater: trophy hunting, conservation and rural livelihoods', *Unasylva*, 68:1 (2017), 249.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 M. E. Lien and J. Law, "'Emergent aliens': On salmon, nature, and their enactment", *Ethnos*, 76:1 (2011), 65–87.