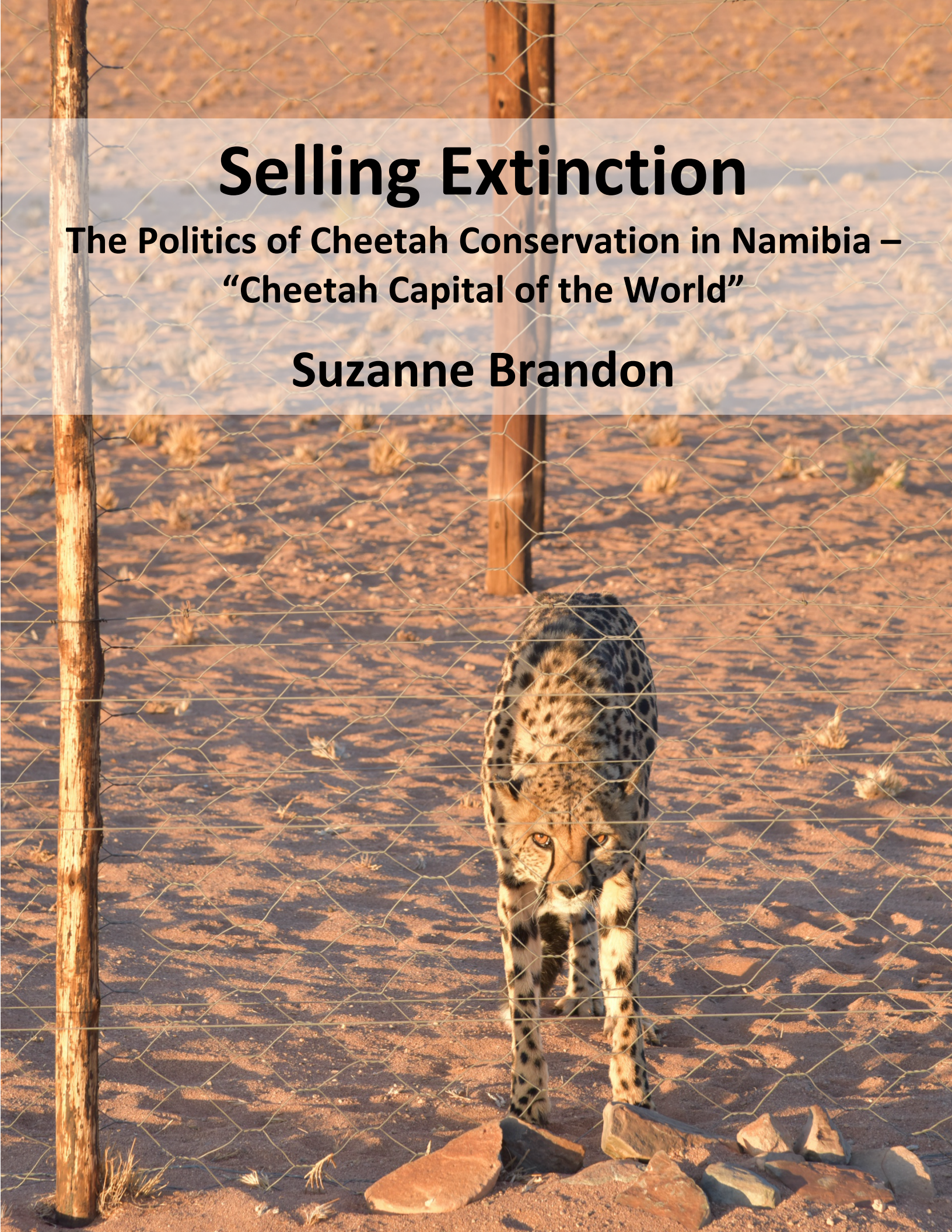
Selling Extinction

The Politics of Cheetah Conservation in Namibia – "Cheetah Capital of the World"

Suzanne Brandon



Propositions

1. Centering individual charismatic species in global conservation campaigns distracts from broader issues affecting global biodiversity loss.
(this thesis)

2. International conservation NGOs do not work in conservation unless their work directly supports local efforts in food security/sovereignty, wealth redistribution, poverty alleviation, and resource rights.
(this thesis)

3. The rise of misinformation, disinformation, 'fake news,' and propaganda online highlight the continued importance of Debord's (1967) concept of the Spectacle.

4. The field of political ecology is distorted by epistemic bubbles.

5. Universities should advocate for student activism in issues of social and environmental justice, climate change, and human rights.

6. Wageningen University and other international universities have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide furnished, low-cost, and accessible housing to international students, especially for students who have children and families.

Propositions belonging to the thesis, entitled

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Suzanne Brandon
Wageningen, 21 February 2025

Selling Extinction:

The Politics of Cheetah Conservation in Namibia – “Cheetah Capital of the World”

Suzanne Brandon

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Selling Extinction: The Politics of Cheetah Conservation in Namibia – "Cheetah Capital of the World"

Suzanne Brandon

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List of Abbreviations

CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CIC	Conservation Industrial Complex
HWC	Human Wildlife Conflict
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MET	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (now MEFT)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

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Abstract

This thesis underscores the importance of examining how environmental crises are communicated, especially over global social media platforms. With the rise of 'post-truth' and 'fake news' online, it has become increasingly difficult to discern validated sources of evidence. This is all the more important as claims of the extinction of globally-valued, charismatic species—like the cheetah—are circulated at the global scale. This thesis describes the findings of an embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and provides a nuanced and complex understanding of cheetahs' Extinction Spectacle over global social media platforms. This thesis developed and employed an analytical framework based on Debord's (1995) concept of the Spectacle to contextualize the conditions and processes of selling extinction over social media platforms. Importantly, this work extended the concept of the Spectacle to account for changes over social media platforms in the attention economy. The NGOs studied engaged in conservation politics that circulated as content where they competed for visibility, money, and attention to #SaveTheCheetahs. This research used a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, international volunteers, researchers in the field, commercial farming communities, Namibian government, and global audiences, incorporating various media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I designed this embedded case study so that I could look at the broader context of the NGOs' work to get a deeper understanding of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia.

After thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia, this embedded case study suggested diverse politics are at work within the NGOs' service-based conservation intervention policies at global, national, and local scales. Cheetahs' ecological adaptation(s) in Namibia point to the need for a fuller picture of the permutations of conservation and conservation NGOs in Africa. Cheetahs' ecology is central in this thesis. Cheetahs' ecological, biological, and behavioral adaptations to interspecies threats and competition has moved conservation efforts to private property and into the private sector. In the case of Namibia, cheetahs' territory is primarily on private commercial farms where they cause human wildlife conflicts (HWCs). Cheetahs' territory, HWCs, and the cheetah conservation service industry is inextricably linked to Namibia's history of private land ownership. The entwined history of cheetah ecology, apartheid era land policies, predator control, HWC, private livestock and land ownership, and settler colonialism have shaped both cheetahs' territory and their conservation. The NGOs in this study are land-owning conservation elites, thus part of a conservation capitalist class. Because of their work mitigating HWC in Namibia, the cheetah conservation NGOs have positioned themselves as institutions of global academic, economic, and social power in cheetah conservation.

The cheetah conservation NGOs in this research manifested as private, insulated 'bubbles' across the Namibian landscape, geographically, conceptually, and ideologically isolated from the socio-economic and political contexts of conservation in Namibia writ large. The institutional context of these NGOs required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights in conservation efforts in Namibia as well as in the spatial production of conservation knowledge claims. Property relations underlie epistemic territorialization in this study and influence power relations in the volunteer programs and in conservation more broadly and this has certain implications for how knowledge is

produced by the NGOs. Through private property ownership, the NGOs hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife. Private property rights include the right of access and of exclusion and, in this case study, these rights extend to what information about conservation is communicated and circulated globally as well as on-the-ground in Namibia. Informational asymmetries are created by the production of problematic information embedded in the NGOs' knowledge claims and inextricable from the politics of epistemic territorialization. Epistemic territorialization is bounded through the production of problematic information. The volunteer programs are illustrative of how problematic information is circulated in ways that disrupt politics and power in conservation and mask the economic and political interests of the NGOs studied. The production of problematic information results in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs.

Epistemic territorialization is a political maneuver as it is a process used to leverage political power and unilateral control over the broader conservation agenda. The NGOs are on private property which situates them outside of the political realm in conservation governance and independent of state-, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation policy interventions. The NGOs studied in Namibia are a private service-based industry. They invest in both tangible and intangible conservation services rather than market-based participatory approaches, ecosystem services, and/or economic development. This is illustrative of a shift from market-based conservation to a service-based approach. Private property, in the context of this case, is governed by different legal, regulatory, social, political, and economic structures than property in the commons and in political ecology more broadly. Consequently, different laws apply to private property than apply to common property or state-owned land in which Namibian conservation is based. The NGOs hold and/or occupy private property which means they hold legal power and (absolute) rights over their property (and the wildlife within). Private land ownership codifies (absolute) rights to land and wildlife and also renders on-site conservation a private good. As a consequence, the NGOs were outside of the egis of the dominant political ecology framework.

The findings of this thesis revealed an anomaly in the field of political ecology that has moved from conservation as a public good to conservation as a business. In this shift, cheetah conservation was divorced from natural resource management and development approaches that prioritize protecting nature through fortress, private, neoliberal, market-based, community-based, participatory, or other normative approaches to conservation. When conservation is a private good, it changes the avenues through which private actors, such as the NGOs studied, access, engage, contribute, and participate in local, national, and global conservation politics. This context also effects how, where, and by whom conservation interventions are implemented. As a consequence, conservation as a private good and source of income generation through a service-based business model requires a different approach and frame of analysis than what is currently in place in the field of political ecology. This then would mean widening the political ecology lens to include political epistemology and account for the role of private property, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights in local and global conservation approaches and conservation claims.

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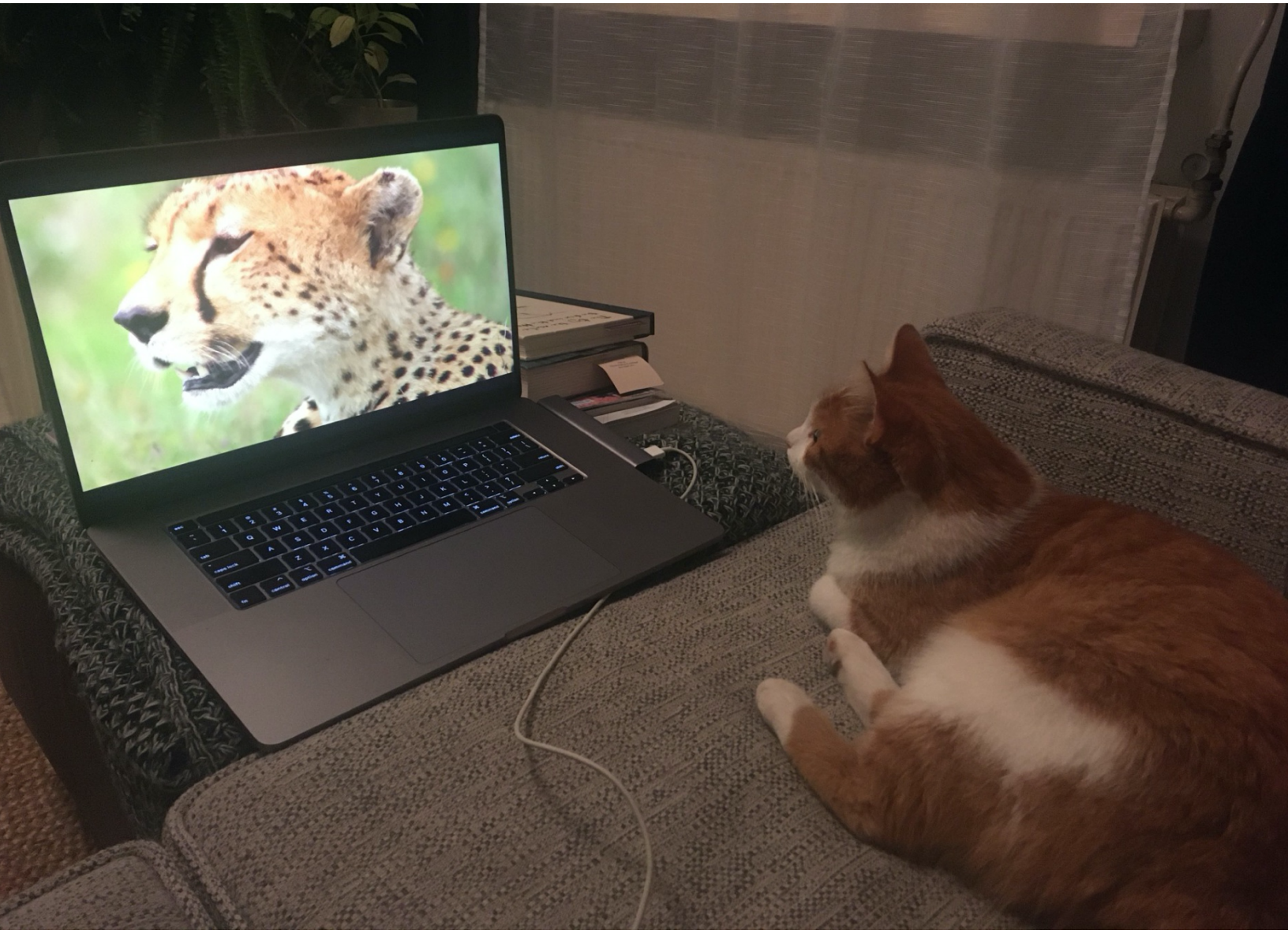

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In global conservation campaigns, it is nearly impossible to find information on conservation that does not use extinction claims in its messaging. Extinction, when used to communicate conservation crises, is both a pedagogical tool and a strategy to leverage social, economic, and political relations over global social networks and media landscapes. In raising awareness about extinction crises, global conservation campaigns use language intended to provoke fear to 'act now' or 'lose the species forever.' And it is effective. Revenue from the US alone for one cheetah conservation NGO in this study was close to three million US dollars in 2018 (Muehlhausen et al. 2018). For cheetahs, global fears of extinction are leveraged in global conservation campaigns to gain support, followers, and fund conservation efforts by the NGOs studied, calling on global audiences to act, either through donating and/or by sharing, posting, and tweeting cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction. Hashtags, such as #SaveTheCheetah and #RaceAgainstExtinction for example, are not just statements or straphangers to a post, they are part of the visual politics of raising awareness and a substructure that links images, posts, tweets, debates, and conversations online. The Namibia-based cheetah conservation NGOs in this study practice political power in conservation through awareness raising to #SaveTheCheetahs, amplifying media/public responses that influence rather than ground power in the political realm. The way conservation politics is mediated over social media conflates and confuses raising money and awareness with effective action. Importantly, when conservation efforts to #Save globally valued and threatened charismatic species are mediated over social media and media outlets more broadly, conservation NGOs are selling extinction.

The intent of this thesis, to be clear, is not to minimize extinction (risks) but to examine the spectacularized representation and circulation of extinction. Global extinction, in theory and in practice, elicits emotional responses which, more often than not, foreclose critique. So, to understand how extinction—a word—can evade meaningful critique, I draw upon Arnold's (1988) depiction of the emotive power of the word famine.

> "Famine is one of the most powerful, pervasive, and arguably one of the most emotive, words in our historical vocabulary, and that in itself makes it all the more difficult to isolate its meaning and wider significance" (5).

So it is with extinction. When the emotive power of extinction is used to engage global audiences in local conservation crises and to fund conservation NGOs, narratives of fear around losing a species are increasingly overriding narratives of social and ecological justice. The emotive power of extinction obfuscates the political, economic, social, and historical contexts across cheetahs' full range. How extinction is employed to draw attention to global conservation efforts promising to #save certain individual charismatic species raises questions about flows of global money, information, politics, and power and its influence in local conservation efforts. Global conservation campaigns to #SaveTheCheetah in the #RaceAgainstExtinction create and reinforce asymmetrical power relations while raising money, awareness, and attention for the NGOs' conservation efforts. How extinction crises are communicated is of concern. Social media has a propensity to be used as a tool to create both fear and urgency over the platforms as well as to

circulate misinformation and disinformation online. Engagement over social media can create what Odell (2019) calls an "arms race of urgency" (59). How this is expressed over social media "so often feels like firecrackers setting off other firecrackers in a very small room that soon gets filled with smoke" (Odell 2019: 60). This describes precisely how it can feel when a species' #RaceAgainstExtinction gets attention over social media. And when #extinction gets attention, it can seem like it is everywhere, all at once.

I first noted this phenomenon in cheetah conservation on December 27th, 2016. On this specific day, Durant et al.'s (2017) article—The global decline of cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and what it means for conservation— was published, catching the attention of media networks across the world. The purpose of Durant et al.'s (2017) study was to initiate a call for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to change the cheetahs' status from vulnerable to endangered, claiming cheetahs were critically close to extinction (Gormon 2016). Their publication grabbed the attention of internationally recognized news and media sources, too many to list here, and was picked up and circulated across media platforms. For a brief moment, the scientific community, international zoos, conservation experts, global corporations, international governments, celebrities, politicians, and global audiences among many others appeared to come together online through sharing, posting, commenting, and circulating cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction. In the three days messages to #SaveTheCheetah circulated over media platforms, it felt like these calls to action could inspire material change in conservation on behalf of the cheetahs. Before any actions could materialize in concrete form, another study was published and another species needed to be #saved, shifting attention away from cheetahs and on to the next #extinction crisis. The hyper-circulation of cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction over social media for that brief moment in time illuminated an interesting phenomenon—the Extinction Spectacle.

In this thesis, the Spectacle of Extinction illustrates how communication platforms, technologies, and media align in the production, reproduction, creation, co-creation, amplification, and circulation of cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction. I conceptualized the extinction spectacle based on Debord's (1995) concept of the Spectacle and Igoe's (2010) interpretation as the Spectacle of Nature. The Spectacle of Extinction expands these concepts to account for changes in the operation of attention and engagement over social media platforms through sharing, posting, tweeting, and amplifying content to reach broader participation. In the last decade, new media spaces, communication platforms, and technologies have shown an immense capacity to create a spectacle (Adams 2019). However, the use of media and technology to produce and circulate spectacular nature has changed significantly. Global audience that once viewed spectacular nature in televised programming, magazines, and nature documentaries are now viewing spectacular nature online and engaging with conservation content over YouTube, blogs, websites, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. These changes in mass media, Tufekci (2017) explained, represent a "radically different mode of information and attention flow" (29). In the past, mass media operated as the sole mediator of public attention (Tufekci 2017); now, anyone with a page and/or platform can create, co-create, and circulate content, generate ideas, document events, and spread news as part of the "decentralized structure of the internet" (Fuchs 2017: 243). These changes have also meant that

social relations mediated by images through the Spectacle have also transformed along with new media platforms (Fuchs 2017; Adams 2019). The Spectacle of Extinction takes these changes over social media platforms into account by extending the Spectacle to include a broader understanding of attention and the hyper-circulation of content to raise awareness and influence in the attention economy.

Social media platforms have changed the game in how extinction crises are communicated to the general public and how audiences across the world connect and engage with local conservation efforts. If and/or when the extinction spectacle gets attention, it can appear that global audiences are acting collectively through a shared responsibility towards the planet. Spaces opened up by social media are increasingly being perceived as facilitating public engagement and considered central in bringing environmental issues, like extinction, to public and political attention (Hansen 2011; Stieglitz and Dang – Xuan, 2013). Social media and media platforms more broadly function not only as a platform for communication but a 'public' space and an online digital commons (see Coleman and Blumler 2009; Fuster Morell 2014; Ossewaarde and Reijers 2017). Hashtags are a substructure online that spans across all social media platforms and are part and parcel to constructing the appearance of public space and an online digital commons as well as the appearance of political action. Social media is a platform for the NGOs to engage in conservation politics and put into action their own agenda in cheetah conservation. How this translates in the on-the-ground conservation of cheetahs in Namibia is the overarching focus of this thesis.

Debord's (1995) analytical approach in *The Society of the Spectacle* was a lens for understanding how extinction circulates and was circulated over social media by the NGOs studied, creating a problematic interaction between abstract and concrete/material reality in cheetah conservation. This thesis examines the chasm between spectacularized extinction online and the socio-economic, historical, and political realities of cheetah conservation in Namibia, pointing to the problem of mediating conservation and conservation politics online. The problem with mediating conservation politics over social media is that perceived action only works to integrate global audiences into the spectacular global extinction mode of production and not effective action in conservation. The emotive power of the word extinction in conservation draws attention away from important political contexts, critical perspectives, and expanding informational, economic, and power asymmetries. Importantly, the illusion of agency to act over the platforms does more than just funnel money into the NGOs, it circulates misinformation/disinformation and pits globally threatened species against each other for visibility, attention, and funding. When the emotive power of extinction is used and, subsequently, incentivized to engage global audiences in local conservation crises and fund conservation NGOs, narratives of fear around losing a species are increasingly overriding critical discussions on social, epistemic, and ecological justice.

Global climate change, biodiversity loss, and mass extinctions are real threats. Efforts to garner more and more global attention to these threats, and thereby elevate human activism and global action, are indeed warranted as well as urgent. My thesis shows, however, that it is necessary to look at how these threats are communicated, what information is provided and how, especially over social media platforms, it is expressed. Over social media, attention can be leveraged to amplify and/or draw attention to #extinction but it can also serve as a distraction. Global calls to

#SaveTheCheetahs online obfuscate the connection between conservation fundraising campaigns and broader structures of global capitalism. Addressed in this thesis, not only is cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction decontextualized from conservation realities in Namibia, but mediating cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction online abstracts from cheetah conservation NGOs' contribution to global processes that are part and parcel of the global extinction crisis they seek to redress[1]. Cheetah conservation fundraising campaign tactics do not work in isolation from broader structures of global capitalism. In the urgency to act on global climate change and mass extinctions, it is important to consider how social media functions to incentivize extinction using media platforms and technology made possible by resource extraction and exploitation through mining and energy consumption. #SavingCheetahs online relies on platforms based on a financial model that requires continued, even accelerated, consumerism by a privileged global class, one whose overconsumption is linked to climate change and associated ecological crises (Holmes 2012; Hickel 2021).

1.2 The Epistemological Challenge of Researching Cheetah Conservation at the NGOs in Namibia

The conservation NGOs in this research manifested as private, insulated 'bubbles' across the Namibian landscape, geographically, conceptually, and ideologically isolated from the socio-economic and political contexts of conservation in Namibia writ large. The institutional context of these NGOs required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights in conservation efforts in Namibia as well as in the spatial production of conservation knowledge claims. Knowledge that is produced by these NGOs about cheetah conservation and their broader work in conservation in Namibia is constructed under the aegis of private property. Through private property ownership[2], the NGOs hold and/or maintain (absolute[3]) rights to both land and wildlife. Private property rights include the right of access and of exclusion and, in this case study, these rights extend to what information about conservation is communicated and circulated globally as well as on-the-ground in Namibia. The NGOs control the means of knowledge production at their private facilities and can construct what is 'real' in cheetah conservation according to their own agenda/goals. This case study illustrates an epistemological challenge concerning how cheetah conservation knowledge is produced, circulated, justified, and geographically bounded through cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia.

[1] For additional discussion on the environmental costs of social media and associated technologies, see Oyedemi 2019 and Notley 2019.

[2] Ownership (of property) "vests in the holder a multitude of entitlements, *ius fruendi,* which include the right to control, use, encumber, alienate and vindicate" (Amoo 2014: 63). Importantly, the entitlement of control, that is granted through ownership, provides the holder the right of physical control over the thing that is owned (Amoo 2014). In Namibia, the lawful ownership of both movable and immovable property is "constitutionally recognized and protected by article 16(1) of the Constitution" (Amoo 2014: 4).

[3] In private property, absolute rights grant legal power over a property "which may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3).

In epistemology, how knowledge is produced through these NGOs presents a conundrum. Because the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation,' volunteers and global audiences online are seeing conservation as it really is. The conundrum is that they are only seeing conservation as it really is through the perspective of the NGOs. As a consequence, the volunteer programs, social media content, and global conservation campaigns representing cheetah conservation at these NGOs in Namibia cannot and do not serve as verification of authenticity of their conservation practices in Namibia. Because the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia could not be drawn from information provided online and at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia, this embedded case study offered an opportunity to study on-the-ground truth claims in cheetah conservation. To this end, I asked the question:

- How is the cheetah extinction crisis mediated online and what is the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia?

I designed this research study so that I could look at the broader context of the NGOs' work to get a deeper understanding of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia. To see the broader context of cheetah conservation in Namibia, I needed to 1) look at cheetahs' ecological adaptations, 2) examine how the NGOs' work contributed to conservation outside of their private facilities, 3) look at how knowledge was produced online and off, 4) speak with farming communities about HWC and their experiences with HWC mitigation, 5) understand Namibian conservation policy and practice through the work of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)[4], 6) look at related associations and organizations (LCMAN, NAPHA, WRN, for example), and 7) understand the organization of the broader conservation community in Namibia. I knew this research needed to use a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, international volunteers, researchers in the field, commercial farming communities, Namibian government, and global audiences, incorporating various media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

This embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the Extinction Spectacle makes for an important contribution to the literature by providing a framework for analyzing global conservation claims and their on-the-ground context. Given the analysis that follows, it could be argued that raising awareness for cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction is undergirded by a process to leverage both political power and unilateral control over the broader cheetah conservation narrative. Governing what can be known and who can know is often "the privilege of those who hold the power to define, determine, and distribute the known and the not known" (Knudsen and Kishik 2022: 344–345; McGoey 2019). By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the conservation NGOs studied determine what knowledge, history, and experiences are made visible and which ones are not.

[4] After fieldwork was completed the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) changed to the Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism (MEFT). Because MET was used in my data and in citations, I am referring to MEFT as MET for the purpose of this thesis in order to maintain consistency and avoid confusion.

1.3 Cheetah Conservation In Practice

The problem in this thesis lies in how cheetah conservation and cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction is communicated and circulated at local, national, global scales as well as over media platforms. The NGOs studied have significant influence over what information is communicated, how it is communicated, and how meaning is made in cheetah conservation in Namibia and across the world. How information is communicated matters, especially in how meaning is conveyed, as "it gives the impression of 'the truth'" (Smith 1999: 35). How conservation is communicated can lead to assumptions about what conservation is, how conservation should proceed, how it should appear, and who has authority and/or expertise to implement conservation interventions. It also constructs what is considered as conservation and what is not considered conservation. These assumptions can shape what kinds of conservation interventions and/or solutions are desirable, appropriate, or even possible and who should have power in these conservation decisions. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs studied entails assumptions about conservation and about how conservation is proceeding in Namibia and across the globe.

Conservation, Igoe (2017) noted, is not possible "without fantasy and storytelling" (110). Fantastic stories and spectacles in conservation intertwine with what seems like sensible approaches towards fixing problems and/or crises in conservation like extinction (Igoe 2017). Being from Florida, the 'Cheetah Hunt' roller-coaster at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is one of my favorite examples of such fantasies. The 'Cheetah Hunt' is designed to look like a cheetah and celebrate the fastest animal on land. Alongside the 'Cheetah Hunt,' you can view cheetahs and pay extra to watch 'the cheetah run' tourist attraction at the base of the rollercoaster. The cheetah run offers tourists a chance to observe cheetahs' impressive speed as it chases a piece of cloth on an electric lure. Afterwards, a Busch Gardens employee explains to guests that cheetahs are threatened in the wild and provides notable information on cheetah ecology and the threats currently facing the species. The employee also informs the tourists how a certain percentage of admission into the park goes to help cheetah conservation efforts in Africa. This activity is available on YouTube for those who, like myself, could not visit in person. There is also an array of educational material available on Busch Garden's website developed with NGOs in this study. Cheetahs' status as nearing extinction was part of discussions with tourists and a common theme in online narratives circulated over various media platforms. Importantly, when cheetahs' status was communicated both online and off, the emphasis was placed on how these commercial activities contribute to the work of the NGOs studied in cheetah conservation and the various ways 'you' can help. And there are many ways to help.

Figure 1.2 Cheetah Hunt Rollercoaster Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Fl

Saving cheetahs is "an 'all-hands-on-deck' undertaking" (Broughton 7/11/2023). To bring the species back from the brink of extinction, cheetah conservation efforts need supporters. Celebrities are often used to spread the word. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt[5] are the benefactors of one NGO studied. Longtime friends of the NGO's directors, the celebrities donated $2 million dollars in 2011 and have made numerous donations since. They have also established a foundation for rescued rhinos in partnership with the NGO that is named after their daughter. Their support is well documented at the NGOs and in the media. Especially in a stunning Harper's Bazaar cover that shows Angelina Jolie accompanied by several cheetahs taken at the NGO's southernmost location. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt are not the only celebrities that sponsor cheetah conservation in Namibia. Gillian Andersen recorded a video stating her support for efforts to save the species. British Royalty have also promoted their cause. Princess Michael of Kent is a patron of cheetah conservation in Namibia and South Africa as well. Cheetahs are also recognized in sports. British racing driver Sam Bird recently became an ambassador for cheetah conservation through launching "Racing for Survival" a new campaign to raise money and

[5] For clarification, it is unclear if Brad Pitt continued to be involved with the project following the celebrity's divorce.

attention for cheetahs' race against extinction in Namibia and beyond. Celebrities give the NGOs and their work legitimacy as well as a platform to reach broader audiences through their advocacy campaigns raising both money and awareness for cheetahs' plight.

Celebrities help spread the word about efforts to #SaveTheCheetahs and are part of larger social media campaigns by the NGOs studied. Social media is a tool cheetah conservation NGOs use to further their mission and broaden their user base. All cheetah conservation NGOs in this study are active on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and all circulate what is conceptualized in this thesis as the spectacle of extinction. Cheetah conservation NGOs have their main page as well as pages for other locations, business ventures, and foci, both in Namibia and globally. Social media use varies between the NGOs; however, all have shared images and narratives of cheetah conservation and the extinction crisis over the platforms. While all NGOs have significant global reach, one stands out. This NGO in Namibia has affiliate groups and organizations in most US states as well as in multiple countries in Europe, Japan, Australia, and several in Africa. Most, but not all, of these chapters/affiliates have social media sites as well. Affiliate and volunteer organizations/locations link to the main website(s) for information, content, and donations. Some of the sites include fundraising pages so anyone can support the NGO's mission by helping raise money on Facebook. These fundraisers are linked from personal Facebook pages to the NGO's main page and anyone can check and see how much money each fundraiser has made. For example, on March 9th, 2021, seventy-four online fundraisers collected upwards of $80,636 US dollars for one NGO (accessed 3/09/21). Tourists, volunteers, researchers, celebrities, news organizations, professional photographers, and the global public also share cheetah conservation NGOs' social media content. What links the stories and fundraising efforts are the hashtags (e.g., #SaveTheCheetah, #RaceAgainstExtinction, #Cheetahs, #extinction, #Conservation etc.). People sharing the story can reach an exponentially larger audience the more shares, tweets, likes, and engagement by people and organizations with more followers, like National Geographic.

While social media is useful in raising awareness for cheetah conservation efforts, the NGOs do go out and spread the word themselves. Directors and staff travel across the world every year to speak about the state of global cheetah populations presenting at international tourism shows, COP 2016, international conferences, the Explorers Club, Google, and to the US Senate among others. Public engagement through a US tour by the director of one NGO in 1977 was how the conservation community and broader public audiences first learned about human wildlife conflict (HWC) and the threats facing cheetahs' survival in Namibia that could lead to their extinction. Arguably, cheetah conservation as we know it today began with the story of Khayam, a hand raised cheetah from Wildlife Safari in Oregon. Khayam was the first of many ambassador cheetahs that toured alongside an American researcher as they made public appearances across the US. Kayam had first travelled with the then PhD student on fieldwork in Namibia in 1977. According to Beaudufe (2016), the American researcher had brought Khayam to Namibia to study reintroduction and whether or not captive cheetahs could learn how to hunt. While the study showed reintroduction was possible, the issue of HWC between cheetahs and commercial farming communities was 'uncovered' (Beaudufe 2016). After several months of research, the pair returned to the US and worked to spread the word about cheetahs' plight. After their first trip to Namibia, the American researcher was inspired to act and returned to Namibia in the early

1990s founding the first research center dedicated to cheetahs (Beaudufe 2016). This NGO as well as the others have continued to raise awareness partnering with universities such as Cornell, Duke, and Colorado State. Public engagement has continued to be an important vehicle in which to communicate the NGOs' work and raise money as well as engage with academic institutions.

Education is central to the NGOs' work globally as well as on-the-ground in Namibia. In a recent post on Instagram, one NGO pictured a recent training session for their mentorship program for local Namibian schools. The students visited the NGO over the weekend with the goal to learn about cheetah ecology, the NGOs' conservation strategies, and how it all connects to cheetahs' survival in the wild. From the images posted online, the training appeared to be a success with students enthusiastically engaged in the program. This training session was part of the NGOs broader mentorship program and this particular training session was provided in partnership with Anglo American. Anglo American (plc) is a multinational mining company and the world's largest producer of platinum as of 2021 (Garside 8/31/2023). Anglo American is also an owner of Da Beers with 85% stake in the diamond company and has vested interests in numerous other commodities including copper, diamonds, coal, polyhalite, nickel, iron ore, and manganese. Anglo American is not the only mining company partnered with cheetah conservation NGOs. Two Canadian based international gold mining companies, Dundee Precious Metals Inc. and B2Gold, also support cheetah conservation in Namibia. Dundee operates in Namibia as well as Bulgaria and is engaged in "the acquisition, exploration, development, mining and processing of precious metal properties" (Investor Presentation n.a.). B2Gold also has operations in Namibia and supports cheetah conservation efforts particularly those focused on mitigating HWC. Writing about the NGO's partnership with B2Gold, their websites posted an article describing that "if we're going to have a sustainable earth, with our wildlife on the land, we need partners… [and] having good partners who have similar visions is really important" (Broughton 7/11/2023).

The cheetah conservation NGOs have many other corporate partners sharing similar visions of sustainability and conservation. The nuclear energy corporation, Urenco, is one such partner. The Urenco Group is a British-German-Dutch nuclear fuel consortium who envisions a "sustainable net zero world" (Urenco 2023). In operationalizing their vision, Urenco runs several uranium enrichment plants in Germany, the Netherlands, United States, and United Kingdom. These are a few examples of the NGOs partnerships with nuclear and natural gas industries. Other brands supporting cheetah conservation include Varta and Powerbat, both brands of batteries. Sponsors include other industries as well such as internet services, developers, and real estate. For example, Quartz construction and property development company. This company was founded by one of the NGOs' directors and is also a supporter of their conservation efforts. Van Uden Holding BV is another. The Van Uden Holding BV Company's line of business "includes the management of funds, trusts, and foundations organized for purposes other than religious, educational, charitable, or nonprofit research" (Bloomberg 2023). Van Uden Holding BV developed the lodge and sanctuary with proceeds from these commercial activities going to the foundation. The NGOs studied all have luxury lodges and all but one has volunteer programs that promote and fund their foundations dedicated to conserving wildlife and cheetahs specifically.

To further their conservation goals, the NGOs work with international travel and volunteer businesses both in Namibia and globally. You can book your volunteer experience through The Great Projects, Enkosini, GoAbroad.com, or Conservation Travel Africa. These global volunteer companies connect volunteers with volunteering opportunities across the globe. There are also plenty of volunteering websites that provide information about volunteering at the NGOs in Namibia. YouTube offers videos from volunteers, global volunteer companies, and the NGOs themselves that visualize the volunteer experience with inspirational pop music. For the NGOs', both tourism and their volunteer programs are essential to their efforts in conservation. As one NGO states on their website "our purpose is to help conserve the landscapes of Namibia, to protect the wildlife, and to improve the lives of the people we work with through sustainable innovative commercial activities"[6]. Commercial activities that include tourism, volunteering, and activities available on-site such as the cheetah and baboon walks. The lodges offer international guests an array of experiences ranging from wine tasting and tours of their vineyard to carnivore feeds, cheetah walks, cheetah runs, hikes, and sundowners. While staying at the lodge and during activities, guests are informed about the NGOs' conservation mission and all the ways in which both guests and volunteers support their work during their stay. Volunteering, however, is much more hands on and significantly less luxurious. Detailed in Chapter 5, volunteering encompasses both physical and manual labor as well as fun activities. The NGOs' volunteer programs do vary in focus and size. The largest volunteer program has between 50 to 100 international volunteers at any given time throughout the year[7]. At all NGOs, volunteers pay a significant fee for the "rare and exciting opportunity to actively participate in the conservation, rehabilitation, care and research of African wildlife"[8].

The NGOs in this study had a long list of conservation approaches, global connections, and ways anyone and everyone could contribute to their efforts to 'save' the cheetahs. The volunteer programs were volunteers' primary source of conservation knowledge while media platforms allowed the NGOs to communicate their conservation mission globally. Empirical evidence was gathered during the volunteer experience as well as online. Knowledge on cheetah conservation and conservation in Namibia more broadly that was gathered was based on volunteers' experiences, tourists' visits, and the visual representations of cheetah conservation online that are produced and circulated by the NGOs over global media networks. Empirical evidence gathered justifies these visual representations and on-the-ground experiences in cheetah conservation at these NGOs as cheetah conservation in Namibia broadly construed. It was generally not assumed, however, that most commercial activities described in this section and in this thesis, i.e., staying at a lodge, volunteering, sharing the NGOs' social media content, and/or partnering with an international mining company are considered as conservation in Namibia. Rather, it is assumed that, through the NGOs studied, all of these activities contribute to conservation efforts in Namibia writ large. Less obvious in these claims to conservation was when

[6] Volunteer organization's website accessed 8/4/2023.

[7] Fieldwork for this study was conducted prior to Covid 19. The NGOs' tourism and volunteer programs were impacted by the pandemic although to what extent it is not known by the author. Currently, tourism and volunteer programs have resumed and have even expanded with new volunteer sites and lodges added.

[8] Volunteer organization's website accessed 4/5/2022.

does spreading the word, donating to the NGOs, volunteering, partnering with corporations, and circulating cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction become conservation in Namibia?

Mentioned in the beginning of this section, how conservation is communicated can lead to assumptions about what conservation is, how conservation should proceed, how it should appear, who should be involved, and who has authority and/or expertise to implement conservation interventions. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs studied entails assumptions about conservation and about how conservation is proceeding in Namibia and at the global scale. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs studied is based on problematic information. Information is problematic when it is "inaccurate, misleading, inappropriately attributed, or altogether fabricated" (Jack 2017: 2). Problematic information, following Di Domenico and Visentin (2020), can include hoaxes, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and true specialist information rendered in a distorted way to support one's viewpoint. It is the later that is important in this thesis. Problematic information is most often seen in how information is presented over media platforms and the recent phenomena of 'fake news' is a well-documented example (Di Domenico and Visentin 2020). Jack (2017) described how "recent controversies over "fake news," and concerns over entering a "post-fact" era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture" (2). How information is created and circulated by the NGOs studied is disruptive. The NGOs supply and circulate information crafting global knowledge claims and on-the-ground experiences according to their own conservation agenda/goals. This information, however, is not inclusive of the broader context of conservation in Namibia writ large.

In the following sections, I will unpack the complexities of cheetah conservation and conservation on-the-ground in Namibia. I will first describe the situated context of cheetah conservation at the country level. I will then look at the analytical approach and theoretical framings that have informed this work that include: the Spectacle (1.5.1), conservation capitalism (1.5.2), the attention economy (1.5.3), private property (1.5.4), (epistemic) territorialization (1.5.5), and the epistemological challenge of problematic information (1.5.6). I will then provide the thesis outline detailing a short summary of the Chapters as follows: Methodological Approach (Chapter 2), Selling Extinction: The Social Media(tion) of Global Cheetah Conservation (Chapter 3), The business of saving cheetahs: Cheetah ecology and the diverse politics at work in human wildlife conflict (HWC) interventions in Namibia (Chapter 4), The Geopolitics of Problematic Information: Epistemic Territorialization and Wildlife Conservation Volunteering in Namibia (Chapter 5), and the Conclusion (Chapter 6).

1.4 The On-The-Ground Reality of Cheetah Conservation in Namibia

Detailed in this thesis, the NGOs' social media accounts shared pictures of international volunteers at work, videos of the cheetah run, captive cheetahs in their enclosures, and descriptions of how all of this contributes to cheetah conservation by these NGOs in Namibia. While representations of cheetah conservation online were a fairly accurate depiction of cheetah conservation at these NGOs, it was not, however, an accurate portrayal of cheetah conservation

in the country of Namibia. What proved to be difficult to address in my research was the differences between what the NGOs claimed as cheetah conservation and what was Namibian (cheetah) conservation policy and practice. This thesis will examine the disjuncture between what is circulated online as cheetah conservation by the NGOs and the complexities of cheetah conservation on-the-ground in Namibia. In order to do so, this thesis paid close attention to 1) ecological context and historical background of cheetahs' territory and conservation in Namibia, 2) the institutional context of the Namibia-based NGOs, 3) the context of conservation in Namibia today, and 4) the context of captive cheetahs in Namibia. The following sections will look at the situated context of cheetahs and cheetah conservation in Namibia.

1.4.1 On Property: A Brief History of Cheetah Ecology and Conservation in Namibia

Cheetahs are unique among large carnivores in Namibia. Specifically, they are not apex predators at the top of the food chain like lions, hyenas, wild dogs, and leopards. Cheetahs are characterized by their spots, black tear lines, distinct vocalizations, and for their speed. They are the fastest terrestrial mammal species and can reach up to 70 mph in short sprints. While cheetahs' slender, fragile body is adapted for speed, it makes them vulnerable to interspecies threats and competition with other carnivores. As a result, cheetahs are both predator and prey. Cheetahs are preyed upon by other large carnivores for reasons including scavenging a recent kill and/or overlapping territories. Leopards and lions pose the greatest threat to cheetahs but hyenas and wild dogs are a problem as well. Even non-carnivore species such as baboons can pose a threat under the right circumstances. As a consequence, free-roaming cheetahs tend to range in areas with fewer carnivore species. Because there are large populations of carnivores in Namibia's national parks and private reserves, more than 95% of free-roaming cheetah population(s) are found on private/freehold commercial farms (Morsbach 1987; Melzheimer 2021)[9]. Cheetahs' territory on private commercial farms is not solely an ecological phenomenon. Their territory is also a consequence of colonial- and apartheid-era land policies as well as the history of private livestock farming in South West Africa (now Namibia).

Cheetahs' territory in Namibia today is the result of the historic dispossession and appropriation of land during German colonial rule that continued during South African apartheid. Namibia's history of land dispossession and appropriation that shaped cheetahs' territory is also "the history of capital accumulation" (Lenggenhager et al. 2021:1). Land and wealth are interconnected and the links between land ownership and wealth accumulation are well established. Land, as Melber (2019) noted, was and continues to be the backbone of Namibia's economy. Land dispossession in Namibia "happened relatively recently, just over a hundred years ago, and is therefore still a political and emotional issue, especially in a context in which most of

[9] For both clarity and brevity, commercial farms/farmers will be used to represent commercial game and livestock farms/farmers in this paper. Cheetah conservation NGOs are also private commercial farms. While most NGOs have converted their farms for tourism, some still remain as working farms. Commercial farms are predominantly owned by commercial farmers of Afrikaans and German backgrounds. Land reform has allowed for the redistribution of some land for emerging commercial farmers. While cheetahs can be found in CBNRM and communal areas, commercial farmers and the cheetah conservation NGOs studied are the focus of this thesis.

those who lost their land remain poor, while other income-generating activities are either insecure or unavailable" (Leggenhager 2021: 1). Almost three decades after independence, land continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few (De Villiers et al. 2019: 2). The interconnections of land, wealth, and race is important context in this thesis and will be discussed in the following two sections. The following sections will detail the historic context of cheetah ecology and of property in cheetah conservation in Namibia.

1.4.1.1 Cheetahs' Territory: Ecological Context and Historical Background

Cheetahs' territory was shaped through the privatization of land that, as Melber (2019) explains, is a "leftover of colonial-era dispossession and appropriation" (74). The formal process of land dispossession in Namibia began in 1883 through European agency (Lenggenhager 2021). In 1884 – 1885, The Berlin Conference laid down the rules for the European partition of Africa in which the colonial political geography was derived. In the following 'scramble for Africa,' German interests turned to Namibia (Griffiths 1986). Germany took control of Namibia in 1884 as its 'protectorate,' thus consolidating German authority in the country (Wallace 2011; Lenggenhager 2021). Around the turn of the 19th century, several events accelerated European acquisition of land in Namibia (Amoo and Harring 2009; Lenggenhager 2021). First, the outbreak of the rinderpest epizootic in the mid-1890s devastated livestock populations. The fallout from the outbreak led to the establishment of a veterinary border or 'red line' putting into place a crucial geographical, socio-political, and economic line of division sealing off Northern Namibia (Amoo 2008; Odendaal 2011; Heydinger 2020). This outbreak impoverished local farming communities, shifted the power structure in the colony, and is often described as "the beginning of a process of gradual land dispossession by the colonizers" (Lenggenhager 2021: 2; see also Werner 1993, Marquardt 2007, and Miescher 2012). The Namibian War and the genocide (1904-1908) was another significant event escalating land acquisition. The genocidal war "largely destroyed all remaining local access to livestock and land in southern and central Namibia" (Lenggenhager 2021: 2). After the genocide, the German colonial administration instituted regulations that expropriated all 'tribal land,' ultimately barring the ownership of land by Africans (Kangumu 2011; Cumberland 2018; Lenggenhager 2021).

German colonial rule over Namibia came to an end at the beginning of the First World War (Cumberland 2018). German rule ended with the conquest of Namibia by troops of the South African Union in 1915 (Lenggenhager 2021). In 1920, the League of Nations granted South Africa a mandate over Namibia, implementing land legislation through South Africa that supported white settlement (Werner 1993). This program started by the South African government allocated farms "to poor whites from South Africa, either in the form of long-term leases with the option to purchase the land at the end of the lease, or in the form of short-term grazing licenses" (Lenggenhager 2021: 2). What resulted was the inequitable division of land between Indigenous communities and white settlers. Land policies privileged "white farmers and the contributions they could make to the South West African and South African economies through intensive livestock husbandry" (Heydinger 2020: 92). These land policies, however, were challenged by an inhospitable environment proving livestock husbandry difficult (Heydinger

2020). The presence of predators made an already inhospitable environment even worse. Predators such as lions, wild dogs, and hyenas, among others, were seen by officials and settlers as threats to the socio-economic prospects of commercial farming (Heydinger 2020). In order to protect the socio-economic viability of commercial farming, the colonial administration implemented policies that supported retaliatory practices against predator species on settler farms. As a consequence, "the colonial administration empowered rural white settlers to eradicate so-called 'vermin' on settler land" (Heydinger 2020: 92). Policies that supported the eradication of predators on settler farms, however, were prohibited in African communities that suffered the same financial and physical impacts of predator species (Heydinger 2020).

The racialized policies of apartheid not only impacted the people of South West Africa (now Namibia), they also affected predator populations and their distributions as well (Heydinger 2020). Because of these apartheid era land policies, many predator species were eradicated in central and southern Namibia, land that remains mostly private/freehold commercial land today (Melber 2019). The eradication of predators, however, did not resolve issues of predation on commercial farms, what is now considered human wildlife conflict (HWC) today. Rather, the reduction of predators and less competition for prey on commercial farmland now opened up a space for cheetahs to fill (Nowell 1996). In other words, when settler farms eradicated lions, hyenas, and wild dogs from their land, cheetahs moved right on in.

1.4.1.2 A Brief History of Conservation in Namibia (1965 to Independence)

Namibia's colonial and apartheid history of land appropriation discussed in the previous section not only impacted cheetah populations and their distribution but conservation in Namibia more broadly. Conservation is indelibly linked with development in Namibia and this has historic grounding in South African rule. South African policies were that of colonial encapsulation and marginalization in north-western Namibia following the redistribution and appropriation of land in central and southern Namibia to white commercial farmers (Ogude and Mushonga 2022; Leggenhager 2018; Rizzo 2012; Bollig et al. 2023). With South Africa's implementation of the apartheid system, development discourses regarding north-western Namibia became central in South African policy (Van Wolputte 2007; Kangumu 2011). These policies were based on the notion of 'separate development,' in particular, the "economic development of the so-called homelands, which were – according to the logic of apartheid – envisioned to become self-reliant" (Leggenhager 2018: 35). The environment and, in particular, the wildlife in Namibia were considered to be especially suited for development by South African officials. This initially manifested in South African regulations over hunting and other laws relating to the use of natural resources (Legenhagger 2018; Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016).

Current national conservation strategies promote conservation through wildlife utilization based on the devolution of rights over wildlife that is rooted in the laws regulating natural resources (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021; Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). Namibia's current conservation model was developed drawing from policies first implemented on private land. Specifically, when private rights to wildlife dwelling on commercial farmlands were granted to

freehold farmers in the 1960s (Bollig et al. 2023). The process that began in the 1960s "returned the rights over wildlife to landholders, and which at the same time increased its commercial value" (Bond et al. 2013: 30). As a result, legislative changes in the 1960s – 1970s saw a shift from livestock farming to wildlife-based land uses after rights were granted to landholders (Lindsey et al 2013; Bond et al. 2013; Bollig et al. 2023). It wasn't until after Independence when the Namibian government enacted the Nature Conservation Amendment Act in 1996 which "extended rights to legal and regulated wildlife use beyond freehold rangelands to communal-area residents that formed management units called 'conservancies'" (Bollig et al. 2023: 279; Bollig 2020; Hewittson and Sullivan 2021). In communal areas, privatization of wildlife is not straightforward. The state still maintains ownership rights to wildlife on public land (Bollig et al. 2023). As a consequence, communities organize into conservancies or in game management units in which the ministry in charge of wildlife management may then allot the communities rights or quotas for some animals (Nuding 2002; Bollig et al. 2023). However, there is no right conferring freehold ownership that is "capable of being granted or acquired by any person, group, or organization in communal areas, unlike in the previously 'white-only' settlement areas of the country" (Lavelle in Bollig et al. 2023: 154). As a consequence, communal residents are not permitted to own the capital constituted by their land or the resources on it that is granted to freehold farmers (Lavelle in Bollig et al. 2023).

While the NGOs' land may be considered protected through the enclosure of their property, the NGOs are not private protected areas drawn from public land (Bluwstein 2018; Banerjee and Dunaway 2023), privatization (Fletcher et al. 2015), or through an easement (Morris 2008; Gooden and 't Sas-Rolfes 2020). The NGOs in this study occupy private commercial freehold land. For the NGOs, private land ownership evolved from commercial farming units and, in turn, businesses to now include conservation. The NGOs were already established commercial entities and conservation is tied to their economic activities and business practices. The NGOs are self-contained entities with private facilities throughout Namibia and work independently from both state–, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation offering both tangible and intangible conservation services. Because the NGOs are on privately-owned property, they hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to wildlife on their land and are not competing for control over the environment and/or the natural resources within the physical borders of their property. As established private commercial entities, the NGOs studied have already staked their claim to land, labor, and natural resources and are not protected areas with inherent conservation value in Namibia.

Issues of land, land rights, and private ownership underlie cheetah ecology and, in turn, their conservation. The NGOs in this study began as commercial farms prior to and/or at the time of Namibia's Independence in 1990, most remain working commercial livestock farms to this day. As already established private commercial farms, the NGOs are directly linked to a business entity either through commercial livestock farming or through their tourism enterprises. The NGOs who maintain working commercial livestock farms are in Namibia's agricultural sector. All of the NGOs are part of Namibia's tourism sector which has included tourism, broadly construed, into their conservation model. Cheetah conservation NGOs have all converted some portion of their land into private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, and/or

volunteer operations. All are commercial economic activities that support the conservation work of the NGOs. While the NGOs studied do have private reserves on-site, cheetahs are kept separately in smaller enclosures due to the threat posed by other large carnivores. None of the NGOs studied have large private reserves with free-roaming cheetahs. All NGOs have captive cheetahs on-site as well as other species including lions, hyenas, leopards, baboons, caracals, wild dogs, and porcupines to give a few examples. The keeping of captive wildlife is considered an economic activity in Namibia (MET 2016).

Namibia's colonial and apartheid history of land appropriation and rationalization has produced a clear distinction between private (mostly) fenced freehold land and public (mostly) unfenced communal land (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021). This was clear driving across Namibia during fieldwork. A respondent described the difference between public and private conservation during my time in the field summarized here as how one side of Namibia wildlife roams free and the other side there are animals in cages. Wildlife roam free in conservation spaces that are located on land that is public and common property. Cheetahs, and other wildlife, are in captivity because the farm and/or organization in which they are held is privately owned. The NGOs in this study hold and/or occupy private property. As a consequence, the NGOs hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private property ownership. This right affords the NGOs or the land holder the legal power over their property (and the wildlife within) which "may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3). In other words, the NGOs hold the legal right to keep cheetahs and other species in captivity as long as they abide by Namibian laws and regulations[10]. Individuals, communities, organizations, and NGOs on public and/or common property in Namibia do not have this right[11].

In Namibia, nearly half of all land is privately owned (Klataske 2017; Werner and Odendaal 2010; Harring and Odendaal 2002; Mendelsohn et al. 2009; Amoo 2024). When Namibia gained Independence in 1990, there were 6,350 commercial farms in Namibia owned by 4,045 white farmers of which 230 (3.6%) were owned by black Namibians and 352 were owned by foreigners (Adams 1990; de Satgé, 3/31/2021). Much of the private freehold land in Namibia today remains white owned (Harring and Odendaal 2002; Amoo 2024; Odendaal 2024). The following section will take a deeper look at the institutional context of the NGOs in this study.

[10] When Namibia gained Independence in 1990, private land remained private (Melber 2019). The accepted constitutional provisions that protected the freedom and protection of property after Independence also allowed for permits granted on private property to remain in effect. This included permits required for keeping wildlife in captivity.

[11] On CBNRM and communal land, rights are granted over wildlife, though not over the land itself (Sullivan 2006). Rights over wildlife in CBNRM/conservancies are not the same as the rights granted through private land ownership. In Article 100 of the Namibian constitution confers the "allodial title of the land in the State by the provision that land, water and natural resources below and above the surface of the land and in the continental shelf and within the territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone of Namibia shall belong to the State, if not otherwise lawfully owned" (Amoo 2014: 4). Individual rights over communal land are in the form of "rights of usufruct or rights of use, with limited security of tenure" (Amoo 2014: 27). Usufruct, according to Amoo (2014), is "a right to use property belonging to another, a grantor, and to enjoy it while maintaining the substance of such property" (27). The right of usufruct is a right of use and enjoyment of the property and an example of a limited real right (Amoo 2014).

1.4.2 Cheetah Conservation NGOs: Institutional Context

The cheetah conservation NGOs in this study are self-contained commercial entities on private property and they are in Namibia's private sector (see Nowell 1996). Importantly, the NGOs studied hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private property ownership. The NGOs are registered as international NGOs, businesses, charitable trusts and/or foundations and function independently from both state-, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation. They are private facilities, commercial farms, private residences, service-based industries, land holders, and international NGOs all in one. Cheetah conservation NGOs' private facilities are research centers, working commercial farms, private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, and, for some, opportunities for volunteers that sell the novelty of cheetah experiences, activities, attractions, and, importantly, conservation. All are economic activities that financially support the NGOs' own practices of cheetah conservation. This is all possible through private land ownership. The NGOs in this study were already established private commercial farms before they expanded to include tourism and cheetah conservation respectively. The NGOs in this study are registered in Namibia as foundations and/or charitable trusts. Internationally, these NGOs are registered 501(c)(3) in the US and in the UK (as charities). The NGOs' statutory state is Namibia; however, they also have other centers, global partners, and affiliate organizations across the world. All NGOs in this study combine varied revenue streams generated through tourism, volunteering, merchandise, corporate sponsors, and global fundraising campaigns among many other economic activities that contribute to their cheetah conservation work specifically. The NGOs provide both tangible (e.g., farmer trainings, translocations, livestock guarding dogs, etc.) and intangible services (e.g., saving cheetahs from extinction) that are on offer both in Namibia and to international governments, other international organizations, communities, scientific institutions, conservationists, corporations, and global audiences worldwide.

The aforementioned structure, composition, and management of the NGOs studied does adhere to the legal frameworks of international NGOs. Karns (2024, April 24) defines NGOs as a "voluntary group of individuals or organizations, usually not affiliated with any government, that is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy" (n.a.). While the vast majority of NGOs are nonprofit organizations, Karns (2024, April 24) noted, some NGOs include for-profit corporations. Taken literally, Werker and Ahmed (2008) explained that an NGO "could describe just about anything from social groups like Mensa to educational institutions like Harvard University to for-profit firms like Wal-Mart" (74). This thesis, however, does not argue that the NGOs included in this study are for profit, only that they are directly attached to a business entity. In defining NGOs, there is diversity among the definitions, meanings, and structures and, as such, the NGOs in this study do fit within these definitions.

The institutional context of the NGOs has particular implications for cheetah conservation interventions, practices, and politics both in Namibia and at the international level. Importantly, conservation by the NGOs is fundamentally different from conservation in Namibia and should not be confused with official Namibian conservation policy and practice. The NGOs in this study

are geographically, conceptually, and ideologically separate from conservation in Namibia. Differences in conservation approaches and agendas mean that cheetah conservation by the NGOs and conservation in Namibia are a difference of kind. The following section will contextualize conservation in Namibia and how it relates to cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied.

1.4.3 Contextualizing Conservation in Namibia Today

Cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied needs to be differentiated from Namibian conservation policy and practice. Conservation in Namibia and cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied are fundamentally different approaches. Conservation policy and practice as it is formally constituted and applied in Namibia is constructed through environmental laws and protections embedded in Namibia's constitution. This work in its entirety uses the legal definition of conservation as stated in Namibia's constitution under Chapter 11 The Principles of State Policy, article 95(l). For the purposes of this work, conservation is defined as follows:

> "maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future; in particular, the Government should provide measures against the dumping or recycling of foreign nuclear and toxic waste on Namibian territory" (Article 95(l)).

In addition, this paper draws from MET's strategic Objective 3 proposed to "ensure that Namibia's environment, biodiversity and ecological processes are conserved, managed, and sustainably utilized" (MET Strategic Plan 2012/13-2016/17). These definitions and their implementation are what is referred to as Namibian conservation and/or conservation in Namibia throughout this thesis. These definitions are included to situate the NGOs' claims of on-the-ground cheetah conservation in the context of Namibian conservation governance.

Namibian conservation is implemented through Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), conservancies, national parks, and reserves. The implementation of official conservation policy and practice in Namibia is the role of the state, in conjunction with Namibian NGOs, and enacted through CBNRM, communal, and national parks/reserves for the benefit of local communities broadly construed (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). Namibian conservation policy and practice is legislated through national environmental governance (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). National conservation efforts are implemented to benefit local communities on public land, particularly communities that coexist with dangerous wildlife. The program relies on tourism to provide economic benefits to the communities living in communal and CBNRM areas (Mufune 2015). Namibia's national park and reserve system also generates money from conservation to benefit communities through park fees and accommodation inside the park (Barnes et. al. 1999). The cheetah conservation NGOs studied do have projects working with local communities in CBNRM and communal areas that provide public services, though the programs are not generally focused on cheetahs and do not provide financial

support, economic development, or livelihood opportunities for those communities. The cheetah conservation NGOs benefit from private ownership of land without the attachment to state-sanctioned conservation areas, national parks, and reserves that directly benefit local communities through market-based approaches[12].

Namibia maintains what many consider a progressive stance, employing environmentally focused policies and practices in conservation (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). While Namibian conservation policy and practice does include cheetahs in their conservation model, conservation policies are not specifically directed to conserve cheetahs as a single species (MET 2016; Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). Namibian conservation policies are generally focused on the management and sustainable use of wildlife but are not specifically targeted to conserve cheetahs individually (MET 2016; Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). Namibian conservation policies group cheetahs under the umbrella of large carnivores and conservation policies are focused on similar conservation issues and concerns of large carnivores as a whole (MET 2016; Nowell 1996). Cheetahs are a protected species and are also covered under national and international legislation concerning protected species and under IUCN and CITES, although not all large carnivore species fall under this form of protection (Nowell 1996). At the time of this research, there was no conservation policy and/or practice in the country of Namibia that addressed cheetah conservation alone apart from those designating them as a protected species. While cheetahs are not singled out in Namibian conservation governance, they still fall under the scope of Namibian conservation policy and practice.

Land policies in Namibia dictate ownership of both land and wildlife and conservation depends on whether the land is public or privately held (Sullivan 2006). The Namibian conservation model is based on conservation approaches aimed at protecting nature on public land and managing natural resources on common property. Cheetahs are not kept in captivity in CBNRM and conservancy areas nor are cheetahs kept captive in Namibia's national parks and reserves. Namibia's conservation model supports conserving free roaming wildlife, including public and private conservation areas. At the NGOs, however, cheetahs are in captivity. It is important to mention again that none of the NGOs studied had large private reserves with free-roaming cheetahs. Cheetahs were captive, fed by staff, tourists, and volunteers, and part of the NGOs' commercial conservation activities.

Namibian conservation governance has national policies in place to protect cheetahs on all areas of land tenure (Nowell 1996). What this means is that cheetah conservation is not delegated away from the state nor has the oversight of their protection been moved from the public to the private sector. The Namibian government does include cheetahs within their conservation model

[12] Namibian conservation policies are focused on the management and the sustainable use of wildlife which includes both tourism and trophy hunting to support economic development in CBNRM and communal areas in Namibia. While the NGOs studied do have programs in CBNRM and communal areas, these programs are service-based and are not connected to either trophy hunting or the tourism component of the CBNRM and conservancy model. The luxury lodges and volunteer/tourist accommodations are registered businesses per the Namibian Tourism Board. The NGOs' tourism practices do not benefit CBNRM and/or conservancies and are separate physically, financially, and conceptually from CBNRM and the conservancy system.

and national policies recognize that "the State shall promote the conservation of large carnivores in the wild and within their natural environment" (MET 2016). Namibian conservation is through the state, whereas cheetah conservation by the NGOs is in the private sector and outside of state-sanctioned conservation in Namibia. Cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is not tied to state-sanctioned conservation efforts in Namibia. Instead, they are service-based and on offer or by the request of commercial farmers, the Namibian government, global audiences, and Namibia's farming community writ large. Because they are self-contained private entities, these NGOs construct their own conservation agenda, generate income through the services they develop and provide, and hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to wildlife and land through private property ownership. This context allows the NGOs to keep captive wildlife on-site at their private facilities and claim that captive cheetahs are part of their own conservation model.

1.4.4 Captive Wildlife Management in Namibia

Captivity can have different interpretations; therefore, it is important for this thesis that the context of captive cheetahs at the NGOs in Namibia is clear. In the Regulations For Large Carnivores In Captivity: Nature Conservation Ordinance, 1975, 'captivity' is defined as "the restriction or confinement of a large carnivore, causing such large carnivore to become fully dependent on being fed" (Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022: 3). Cheetahs in captivity at the NGOs fit this criteria. All animals kept after a period of eighteen months are considered to be permanently captive animals per the Act (Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2012). Namibian laws, discussed further below, dictate the size and height of enclosures, length of rehabilitation, healthy conditions for rehabilitation facilities, permitting system, and holding/release procedures among other conditions/requirements and apply to the NGOs and all other entities with captive wildlife in Namibia. For all rehabilitation facilities, the Act states that large carnivores in captivity "must not be exposed to public viewing, or be allowed to breed, or have direct contact with humans, except for the administration of treatment or medical procedure" (Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2012: 4). All facilities with captive wildlife, including the NGOs studied, are monitored by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and require inspections and veterinary assessments to be performed, at minimum, once per year. Namibian conservation legislation is implemented on private property through regulations that are in place to monitor economic activities pertaining to the keeping of large carnivores in captivity (MET 2016; Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022). Discussed further in the following section, captive wildlife is viewed by the Namibian government to be an economic activity. Regulations are intended to protect valuable wildlife from being removed from nature unsustainably and to ensure they are in a healthy environment (MET 2016; Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022). Because cheetahs are kept in captivity by the NGOs, the NGOs must comply with state regulations.

Due to the keeping of cheetahs and other species in captivity, conservation by the NGOs at their private facilities is not, in and of itself, conservation in Namibia. The National Policy on Conservation and Management of Large Carnivores in Namibia (MET 2016) states that the "keeping of large carnivores, which cannot be rehabilitated or are not suitable for release in wild,

or which cannot survive on their own in the wild, does not contribute to wild populations and conservation…" (MET 2016: n.a.). The objective(s) of the policies are "to prevent unsustainable, illegal, and unregulated utilization of large carnivores and their products" (MET 2016: n.a.). Captive wildlife is viewed by the Namibian government to be an economic activity and laws are intended to clamp down on these facilities and prevent this from becoming an attractive business enterprise (see Chapter 4). Namibian policies on captive wildlife are intended "to identify and put in place mechanisms to regulate, control, and sanction the large carnivore utilization practices that are unethical and unsustainable" (MET 2016: n.a.). The government, however, does recognize that captivity, to some extent, is necessary and "captive wildlife may provide other conservation benefits (e.g., awareness and education)" (MET 2016: n.a.). It is the Namibian government's viewpoint in conservation to keep cheetahs and wildlife as a whole, wild. Captive wildlife is not part of the Namibian conservation model and wildlife is not in captivity in CBNRM, conservancies, and in national parks and reserves. Mentioned above, the focus of Namibian conservation policy and practice is on conserving large carnivores in the wild and within their natural environment (MET 2016; Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022).

The following section will look at the inherent contradictions of captive cheetahs in conservation in Namibia.

1.4.5 The Inherent Contradiction of Captivity

Cheetahs in captivity is one of the contradictions examined in this work. Braverman's (2011) analysis of zoos in America is useful in understanding the problem in this thesis and the complexity of cheetah conservation in Namibia more broadly. Looking at zoos, Braverman (2011) explored the "importance of vision in the zoo's presentation of its animals as well as the major technologies that the zoo uses to intensify such animal visions" (809). Braverman's (2011) work looked at what was made visible and seen at zoos and what is often overlooked or invisible. What is made visible and what is abstracted in cheetah conservation is also a common theme throughout this thesis as well. In the article, Braverman (2011) looked at the type of nature displayed at the zoo exhibits and the strategies designed to facilitate what was referred to as "an 'illusion of nature' in these exhibit spaces" (810). The NGOs' private facilities were in remote areas of Namibia; therefore, they did not need to design the artificial representations of nature Braverman (2011) described. The NGOs did, however, need strategies designed to facilitate the 'illusion of conservation' to establish their work, role, and authority in cheetah conservation in Namibia.

How knowledge is produced by the NGOs presents an epistemological conundrum. Because the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation', volunteers and global audiences are seeing conservation as it really is. The conundrum is that they are only seeing conservation as it really is at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia. The volunteer programs were volunteers' primary source of conservation knowledge while media platforms allowed the NGOs to communicate their conservation mission globally. Empirical evidence is gathered during the volunteer experience as well as online. Knowledge on conservation that is gathered is based on

volunteers' visual experiences at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia and the representations of conservation online that are produced and circulated by the NGOs over global media networks. The social make-up of the international volunteers, the daily routine, the isolated private facilities, activities that centered around team building, and a common interest in conservation contributed to a hegemonic 'sphere of influence' (see Jackson 2020). Shared beliefs created in the NGOs' sphere of influence through volunteer programs and that extend over social media platforms foster a sense of group identity and moral positioning, specify targets of hostility or rather an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, and enable coordinated (in)action on global conservation issues. Empirical evidence gathered justifies these visual representations and on-the-ground experiences in conservation at these NGOs as wildlife conservation in Namibia broadly construed.

The NGOs must legitimize their work, role, and authority in conservation in order to access and control conservation resources. In this thesis, information is a resource and it is the NGOs source of social, cultural, political, and economic capital. Claims to conservation knowledge, expertise, and authority is the new territory in which the NGOs studied engage in conservation politics as well as expand and market their conservation efforts. Property relations influence power relations in the volunteer programs and in conservation in Namibia writ large and this has certain implications for how knowledge is produced by the NGOs. Because the NGOs are on private property and private commercial entities, they are not compelled to supply an exact account of their role and authority in conservation in Namibia. As a consequence, these volunteer programs and global conservation campaigns representing conservation at these NGOs cannot and do not serve as verification of authenticity of their conservation practices in Namibia.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The following section will look at the analytical approach and theoretical framings that have informed this thesis. I begin with Debord's (1995) conceptualization of the Spectacle and Igoe's (2010) interpretation as the Spectacle of Nature in Section 1.5.1. Debord's (1995) analytical approach in The Society of the Spectacle was useful to illustrate how extinction circulates and was circulated over social media by the NGOs, creating a problematic interaction between abstract and concrete/material reality in global extinction narratives. The sections that follow will include: the Spectacle (1.4.1), conservation capitalism (1.4.2), the attention economy (1.4.3), private property (1.4.4), (epistemic) territorialization (1.4.5), and the epistemological challenge of problematic information (1.4.6).

1.5.1 The Spectacle

Cheetahs and other threatened charismatic species are quickly becoming mascots/icons for raising awareness and attention for global environmental crises (Heise 2016; Brockington 2008; Jepson and Barua 2015). The "omnipresence of endangered species" (Heise 2016: 4), range from grocery store products, stuffed animals, make-up brands, and cryptocurrency to pictures

circulated over social media, news coverage, zoo exhibitions, theme parks, TV, and film. Alongside these representations of species are stories of their loss coupled with details on the ways you can help, albeit mostly financially (Igoe 2017). Debord (1995) explained that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). Environmental knowledge that is transmitted through such images, representations, and narratives of loss are shaped by dramatic performances and language and formed deliberately to elicit affective relationships and moral obligations coupled with financial support (Goodman et.al. 2016; Tsing 2009). Representations and the visual articulation of environmental problems follow what Debord (1995) called 'the Spectacle' and Igoe (2017) conceptualized as the Spectacle of Nature. Debord (1995) saw such mediation of images "as a central feature of late capitalism, in which images become commodities alienated from the relationships that produced them and consumed in ignorance of the same" (Igoe, 2010: 375).

Drawing from Debord's (1995) analytical approach in The Society of the Spectacle, I examined the nature of cheetah conservation and how images, ideas, and representations of the extinction crisis expand across the globe (Tsing 2009). Anna Tsing (2005) explained that the "self-conscious making of a spectacle" (p.57) was an essential component in creating both global need and financial support. Spectacular images of biodiversity conservation "promise Western consumers escape from alienation through consumption, self-expression and connections to imagined places, people and animals" (Igoe 2010:389). Debord (1995) called this process the Spectacle, the large-scale (mediation) of images in societies where "modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (12). New media spaces and technological advances make it simple to share images, ideas, and communicate ecological knowledge at a distance (Tsing 2009). The physical and ideological shortening of such distances can be seen as facilitating new financial arrangements that make it easy to move both money and ecological solutions around the globe promising global profit alongside global solutions to local and national ecological crises (Tsing 2009). Over social media, the production and dissemination of images and knowledge(s) "not only shape people's perceptions of the world, but mediate social and human–environmental relationships" (Igoe 2010: 375). Conservation knowledge, images, and power are produced, negotiated, and sold across "space, place, and at various scales" through "assemblages of science, media, culture, environment, and politics" (Goodman et al., 2016: 678). Because, as Tsing (2005) states, "capitalism, science, and politics all depend on global connections" and "global connections are everywhere" (1). The Spectacle questions how conservation and the global articulation of environmental knowledge is conceptualizing extinction of globally valued charismatic species and to what end (Debord 1995, Igoe et.al. 2010; Igoe 2010; Goodman et.al. 2016).

Cheetah and wildlife conservation practices are legitimized in the language of extinction (Campbell 2007). The language used to convey the extinction crisis flows through mass media and social platforms and conservation organizations utilize these virtual spaces in creating both movement and stasis in what information/knowledge is conveyed and what is not (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). Differential access to new media spaces and technologies "reflect structures and hierarchies of power" (Tesfahuney 1998, in Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006: 3). The politics of cheetah conservation is a politics where extinction becomes central to

conservation discourse and central to legitimating social relations that are redefining politics and the construction of global environmental knowledge (Giroux 2016). Conservation 'experts' cite the global status of cheetahs as precarious due to both global and local threats that necessitate international approaches for conservation (Campbell 2007). It becomes clear through analysis of the local, national, and international scales that ecological arguments vary in accordance to differing types of land and property rights and subsequently, which particular conservation intervention to employ depends on the scale (Campbell 2007). In other words, conservation policy and practice is not "simply a matter of biological or ecological necessity but serves the political interests of particular groups" (Campbell 2007: 313). How ecological 'crises' are visually articulated across the globe as spectacular environmentalisms abstracts from the interconnections, contradictions, and antagonisms that underlie conservation policy, practice, and ideology (Tsing 2009), especially in relation to the on-the-ground realities of conservation governance in Namibia. Linking the global spectacle to conservation practices by these NGOs in Namibia is critical in understanding how power is utilized through different conservation networks and narratives. When creating, co-creating, circulating, and amplifying cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction cheetah conservation NGOs are selling extinction and extending the alliance between conservation and capitalism every day. The following section will look at conservation capitalism and its role in cheetah conservation by the NGOs in Namibia.

1.5.2 Conservation Capitalism

In the field of political ecology, theoretical and conceptual contributions tend to focus on conservation that is *in situ* and/or territorially-based (Vaccaro et al. 2013) whether it be through national parks, private reserves, or in collaboration with local communities. Vaccaro et al. (2013) observed that political ecology from its inception "devoted analytical attention to the socio-ecological context of conservation policies" (255; Neumann 1992). Conservation policy and practice that in most political ecology literature links conservation with nature and protected areas, both public (Peet et al. 2011) and private (Holmes 2015) and to the state (Margulies and Karanth 2018). Mainstream conservation, Büscher and Fletcher (2020) recently wrote, is part of a broad mix of approaches but can be broken down into two key characteristics: its capitalist character and a central focus on protected areas. Mentioned in the introduction, cheetahs' ecological adaptations mean free-roaming cheetahs are predominantly found outside of both public and private protected areas, including the NGOs' private facilities. Therefore, fortress conservation models and scholarship on both public and private protected areas is not addressed in this thesis. Cheetah conservation does, however, maintain a capitalist character.

When creating, co-creating, circulating, and amplifying cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction, cheetah conservation NGOs are selling extinction and extending the alliance between conservation and capitalism every day. And it is in this way that the spectacle of extinction is a particularly productive process in capitalist production. Spectacular claims of extinction necessitate both economic and dramatic performances in order to conjure global finance (Tsing 2005). This is what Tsing (2005) conceptualized in her book, Friction, as "the economy of appearances" (57). Economic and dramatic performances over social media are dependent on

harnessing and mobilizing the attention of global audiences. Over the last decade, changes in media platforms have affected how social relations are mediated by images, as well as how images are shared, circulated, and consumed (Giroux 2016). Extinction is turned into capital, in part, through its global creation, co-creation, circulation, amplification, and hyper-visualization over social media. In this way, social media and new technologies are continuously (re)shaping how social relationships and human-environmental relationships are perceived and spectacularized in new processes of accumulation, circulation, and control (Debord and Nicholson-Smith 1995; Giroux 2016). In the continuous flows of information over media spaces, capital works as a unit in images and representations; that are subsequently, realized, invested, and accumulated in the sphere of circulation (Castells 1996). Attention, Nixon (2020) noted, is a source of value as well as a limited commodity. The power to harness and maintain attention is "power over consumption" (Nixon 2020: 75). According to Nixon (2020), power over consumption can be realized by both consumers (global audiences) and advertisers (cheetah conservation NGOs) alike.

In the last decade, new media spaces, communication platforms, and technologies have shown an immense capacity to create a spectacle (Adams 2019). However, the use of media and technology to produce and circulate spectacular nature in conservation has changed significantly. Conservation has moved from broadcasting spectacular nature over televised programming, magazines, and nature documentaries to circulating it over YouTube, smart phones, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Cheetah conservation NGOs studied utilize the hyper-visibility of social media to focus conservation efforts, politics, and funding globally by circulating news, information, and images with #SaveTheCheetah, #RacingExtinction, #Conservation, and simply #Cheetah, etc. #SaveTheCheetah is not just a statement or straphanger to a post, it is part of the visual politics of raising awareness and is a link to corresponding images, posts, tweets, debates, and conversations online. Changes in the operation of attention over social media means that it is not, merely, content or information conveyed through images that is a commodity, but engagement through sharing, posting, tweeting, and amplifying content to reach broader participation. Media platforms and the corresponding technology that facilitate digital connectivity are significant social mechanisms that have changed the operation of a vital resource: attention (Tefucki 2017). The following section looks at how changes over social media have changed how conservation is communicated and shared.

1.5.3 The Attention Economy

In the attention economy, Zhang et al. (2018) explains, "attention shifts the conversation from who has the power to communicate to who has the power to attract an audience that will pay attention" (3162). Tufekci (2017) explained that in the twenty-first century and in terms of the networked public sphere, that it was useful to think of attention as:

> "a resource allocated and acquired on local, national, and transnational scales, and censorship as a broad term for denial of attention through multiple means,

> including, but not limited to, the traditional definition of censorship as an effort to actively block information from getting out" (30).

In the past, mass media, like news media, websites, newspapers, T.V. etc., held a near monopoly on public attention (Tufekci 2017). Mass media was necessary to publicize a cause or crises and/or tell a story (Tefucki 2017). While mass media was useful in publicizing an issue or a social and/or environmental movement, mass media could also censor and disrupt the message or cause if it were to be shut out. Tufekci (2017) noted that "a movement shut out of mass media could try being disruptive or provocative as a strategy to get attention, but this strategy ran the risk of provoking negative coverage…" (31). Mass media could smother attempts for organizations to tell their story or raise awareness by denying attention or by publicizing a negative account and distort the message. Mass media operated as the arbiter of public attention, leaving little room for those receiving little to no attention or negative coverage to respond (Tufekci 2017). As the arbiter of public attention, Tufekci (2017) noted how media networks could deny attention through censorship describing how mass media could publicize or censor stories, events, movements, and information broadly construed. With changes in media platforms, now anyone and everyone with a page and/or platform can publicize their cause and tell their own story. As a consequence, there is no longer a dependency on mass media to publicize and communicate information. As mass media no longer holds a monopoly on attention, "neither censorship nor the competition for attention operates in the same way" (Tufekci 2017: 31).

Changes across media platforms represent a "radically different mode of information and attention flow" (Tufekci 2017: 29). Now anyone with a page and/or platform can create, co-create, and circulate content, generate ideas, document events, and spread news about conservation issues, threats, interventions, and solutions over social media platforms. More people on social media, the more useful the platforms are, and for more people as social media platforms harness the "power of network effects" (Tufekci 2017: 20). And currently, social media platforms have enormous user bases to harness this power. Facebook has 1.84 billion daily active users worldwide (Facebook, Inc., 2021). Instagram has one billion users sharing 500 million stories every day (Iqbal 2021). And Twitter reports 192 million "monetized active daily users" (Twitter, Inc., 2021). What is important about these numbers is not how many users are on each platform, but the immensity of the space(s) to engage global audiences and compete for attention and funding. Space that is created through online engagement connects global audiences through the constant flow of images, information, and content across social media landscapes.

Spaces opened up by social media are increasingly being perceived as facilitating public engagement and considered central in bringing environmental issues, like extinction, to public and political attention (Hansen 2011; Stieglitz and Dang – Xuan 2013). Media power is fetishized and believed to influence public opinion and hold weight in policy decisions and debates (Ross et al. 2021). Calls for global participation to 'save' endangered and/or threatened species online are imbued with assumptions about political power over social media. Assumptions that more

information, awareness, and attention to environmental issues over social media will lead to effective change. For example, in Conservation Biology, an editorial on the benefits of Twitter, described how "engaging with Twitter can be a powerful way for conservation scientists to reach journalists, policy makers, and the general public" (Parsons et al. 2014: 300). Twitter, Parsons et al. (2014) claimed, can "provide a platform for scientists to directly reach decision makers (or their staff) with conservation messages" (300). The politics of technology, however, is "entangled with the politics of public space and of the environment" (Odell 199). Dean (2005) argued that the fantasy of activity or participation is "materialized through technology fetishism" (54). Media power is in the power of the flow and not in the flows of power (Castells 1996). In other words, media power lies in its ability to harness attention. The spectacle of extinction draws on this idea of media power, attempting to harness global attention to focus on the NGOs and cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction.

Attention, Tefucki (2017) explained, is "the oxygen of movements" (30). Without attention, campaigns like those to #SaveTheCheetah cannot 'catch fire.' Cheetah conservation NGOs rely on public support therefore must be "spectacular enough to capture public interest" (Verma et al. 2015: S649). Global marketing campaigns to 'save' threatened and/or endangered species are circulated over mass media, social media, and other communication platforms and technologies attempting to engage global audiences and to mobilize attention. How conservation is communicated online is a particular concern given social media's propensity to be used as a tool to create fear, both by news media and users alike (Odell 2019). Online engagement with #extinction creates what Odell (2019) calls an "arms race of urgency" (59). This construction of urgency fuels competition over and between the platforms using the logic of advertising and clicks (Odell, 2019). Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are, after all, in the business of monetizing attention (Tefukci 2017). As a consequence, cheetah conservation NGOs must compete with each other and with larger, more well-known NGOs, other globally valued and threatened charismatic species as well as the continuous flow of information online. In this way, social media platforms incentivize extinction, as spectacle, through market competition, pitting threatened charismatic species against each other for global awareness, attention, and funding.

1.5.4 Private Property

The institutional context of the NGOs required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors, private property, and private property rights in cheetah conservation. Blomley (2019) explained that there is a tendency to link territory with the state and public land with little attention to the territorial dimensions of property leaving the territorial dimensions of property understudied. Byer (2023) pointed out that "ignoring geography has political consequences" (4). If we do not ask questions about the locations, who is impacted, and its effects, such as environmental destruction and the dispossession of land, may be dismissed (Byer 2023; see also Bartel et al 2013). These questions are important to ask here when looking at cheetah conservation in Namibia. Discussed in Section 1.3.1, colonial- and apartheid-era land dispossession and appropriation in Namibia impacted cheetahs' territories, thus, their conservation. Therefore, in this case study, what cannot be ignored is how issues of land, land

rights, and private ownership underlie cheetah conservation by the NGOs that were units of analysis in this research.

For the purposes of this thesis, property is defined as a "system of relationships between people, which derive from, enforce, and sustain a set of relationships of power" (Blomley 2019: 245). As Byer (2023) noted, property is an established legal category. Through private property ownership, the NGOs hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife. The organization and distribution of property rights is the organization and distribution of social privileges and power (Bromley 2019). The presumption is that the "rights of the owner (to use, occupy, alienate and so on) applies uniformly across and exclusively within a defined space, and are operative at all times..." (Blomley 2019: 235). Insofar as they refer to land, private property rights are "defined by the exclusive ownership of a bundle of rights that can be transferred by title" (Byer 2023: 1). As such, the legal title holder of such rights can determine exclusive rights as to who can and cannot use and benefit from the land (Byer 2023). This, however, is two-fold. Private property establishes exclusive rights over access and, at the same time, establishes rights to determine how land is used. The legal title holder of private property can decide land use whether it be to conserve the land or to destroy the land if they so choose. As Byer (2023) explained, "in both the common law and civil law systems, *ius abutendi*[13] grants the owner the right to neglect and abuse property…" (2). According to Byer (2023), this can conflict with the "sustainable governance of resources and notions of integrating planetary limits in policymaking" (2). The 'owner' of a property is assumed to command all resources within their designated space as well as the right to govern access. As such, the property owner is "assumed to have a territorial 'gatekeeping function' that is not unduly constrained by the wishes and needs of others" (Blomley 2019: 235). In the following section, I draw from political ecology literature to extend the concept of territorialization to include epistemic territories.

1.5.5 (Epistemic) Territorialization

In the field of political ecology, the environment is defined as "an arena where different social actors with asymmetrical political power are competing for access to and control of natural resources" (Vaccaro et al. 2013; see also Bryant and Bailey 1997). Protected areas are the arena in which this competition usually takes place (Vaccaro et al. 2013). It is often the case, as Vaccaro et al. (2013) argued, that territorialization in conservation infers asserting control of land, people, labor, and resources within a conservation space and between NGOs and state, community, and private actors. Larson and Brockington (2018) described conservation as relational by nature and thus requiring constant responses to changing social, political, and economic boundaries. Usually, NGOs are not seen as monolithic and their role in conservation constantly evolving through "boundary interactions with a variety of networks, multiple sectors, and institutional contexts" (Larson and Brockington 2018: 4). Because the NGOs already have exclusive rights over their

[13] Ius abutendi in civil and Roman law refers to the "right to consume entirely…the right to exercise complete dominion over certain property, including the right to let it lie fallow, to let it go unused, or to damage or destroy it...." (Fellmeth and Horwitz 2009: n.a.).

property, this thesis explored how this impacted how the NGOs' assert control over the conservation narrative. For the NGOs in this study, boundary interactions are not grounded in a physical territory. Rather, boundary interactions are negotiated across space, place, and scale. The NGOs' role in cheetah conservation evolved through hybrid arrangements that created such collaborations, interactions, and relations.

Sack (1986) defined territoriality as "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area" (19). Acts of territorialization, Bluwstein (2021) noted, have been conceptualized as the "historical processes of enclosure and appropriation of land, labor, and resources" (n.a.; see also Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Sack 1986). Processes of territorialization are "power exercises that can be harnessed by anyone who seeks to stake claims to land, people, labor and resources, and can legitimize these claims" (Bluwstein 2021: n.a.). A goal of territorialization, according to Bassett and Gautier (2014), is to "govern people and resources located within and around the territory" (2, see also Scott 2008). Rasmussen and Lund (2018) used territorialization for describing a way of controlling resources through a strategy of using bounded spaces for particular outcomes (see also Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). Territorialization, as Delaney (2009) explained, can be "seen as a device for accomplishing certain ends" (198). The problem lies when territories and territoriality are accepted or 'naturalized' and, therefore, 'naturalizing' the territory would also have the effect of naturalizing what is associated with the territory itself (Delaney 2009). Importantly, establishing territoriality and, thus, naturalizing power would then facilitate justifying opposition to any proposed changes (Delaney 2009). Territorial spaces are "frequently created in order to amplify, intensify, or consolidate various forms of power (Delaney 2009: 202). Alternately, such spaces also have the ability to exclude, disempower, and dilute opposition (Delaney 2009). In other words, territories have the ability to foreclose interrogation.

Territorialization helps to explain the operationalization of spatial arrangements, such as boundaries and inside/outside distinctions, and define, communicate, and enforce a set of relations, specifically, relations of access and of exclusion (Blomley 2019). For the purposes of this paper, territory is defined as "a unit of bounded, meaningful space" (Delaney 2009: 196). Territories, Delaney (2009) explained, are organized in "relational ensembles or mosaics that have the effect of differentiating segments of social space" (Delaney 2009: 196). Territories vary in social and political objectives but have three core components. Those core components being a border delimiting the limits of the territory, the enclosed space, and the 'outside' to which 'the inside' is set in contrast (Delaney 2009). Importantly, territory can also delineate the scope and limits of power (Delaney 2009). By definition, a territory is a bounded, meaningful space, making meaning within such spaces contributes to defining its space as well as its power (Delaney 2009; Blomley 2019). Delaney (2009) recognized that in order for the objectives of territory "to 'work' – to do what is expected or intended – something has to be 'communicated'" (Delaney 2009: 203). Ideologies, represented through discourse, can inform and provide the social and/or political conditions of territories (Delaney 2009).

The most pervasive albeit often overlooked territories are those organized through the distinction of public and/or private (Delaney 2009). Blomley (2019) explained that there is a tendency to link territory with the state and public land with little attention to the territorial dimensions of property. In political ecology literature, territorialization is an act of boundary making wherein power relations are considered written on the land (Bluwstein and Lund 2016; see also Peluso and Lund 2011). Property and territory are both "social institutions that organize a set of relations between people, institutions, and resources" (Blomley 2019: 234). Territory is, however, "not simply an outcome of property relations, but serves as a significant means for its realization, legitimation, and enforcement" (Blomley 2019: 235; see also Sack 1983). Byer (2023) noted that property has "diverged from land in a complex historical process" (3) and the conceptualization of land as property has "retreated from grounded perspectives on land in favor of abstract rights that are individual, exclusive and alienable—the so-called classic indicia or hallmarks of property" (4). These rights can be extended into what Vázquez (2011) conceptualized as epistemic territory. Following Vázquez (2011), epistemic territory designates both the realm where discourses thrive and their horizon of intelligibility. This thesis extends the concept of territorialization to include epistemic territories. Where power relations are 'written on the land' through territorialization, this thesis conceptualized epistemic territorialization to describe how power relations are shaped through conservation knowledge claims.

In this thesis, the epistemic territorialization of conservation is a particular way of governing and controlling conservation resources through constructing a hegemonic sphere of influence. In conceptualizing epistemic territorialization, territory and property combine in a particular way to command all resources and govern access through territorial 'gatekeeping' measures. The volunteer programs studied are an example of how epistemic territorialization forecloses critique of the nature of conservation knowledge and mask the inner workings of the NGOs. Property relations underlie epistemic territorialization in this study and influence power relations in the volunteer programs and in conservation in Namibia writ large and this has certain implications for how knowledge is produced by the NGOs. This system of relationships through which power relations are enforced, legitimized, and sustained not only impacts access and restrictions of physical borders but extends, in this case, to the production and circulation of conservation knowledge claims across the NGOs' epistemic territory. Epistemic territorialization, in this case, is bounded through the production of problematic information under the aegis of private property which impacts how knowledge about conservation in Namibia is verified. In this case, problematic information results in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs.

1.5.6 The Epistemological Challenge of Problematic Information

The social, political, and corporate structure of the conservation NGOs studied worked to silo volunteers and wider audiences into a particular territorialized and bounded way of knowing what conservation is or, rather, what it should be in Namibia. The institutional context of the NGOs has particular implications for how conservation information is communicated, circulated, and justified. Jacobson (2007) argued that the transfer of knowledge is "a reciprocal process of

knowledge generation and application" (117). Jacobson (2007) described this as an interactive process between the producers and the users of knowledge. In Jacobson's (2007) explanation, this process involves the "traditional producers (e.g., scientists) and traditional users of knowledge (e.g., practitioners and policy makers)" (117). Examining a similar process of knowledge generation and application, the NGOs studied are the producers of conservation knowledge claims and global audiences and the international volunteers, coordinators, and, to some extent, researchers are the intended users of the knowledge produced. While Jacobson's (2007) model follows the traditional perception of how scientific knowledge should be applied in on-the-ground conservation politics, my case study marks an important contextual difference. This differentiation is highlighted because it denotes the politics of visibility and of erasure underlying cheetah conservation by the NGOs. As Vázquez (2011) argued, epistemic territorial practices require a politics of visibility and of erasure. International volunteers and global audiences were the intended users of conservation knowledge in this work while the traditional users of knowledge or, rather, the policy makers in official conservation policy and practice in Namibia were left out in the knowledge transfer.

By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the conservation NGOs studied determine what knowledge, history, and experiences are made visible and which ones are not. What is made visible and what is made invisible in scientific practice and in other forms of knowledge production is not by chance (Silva et al. 2020; Ademolu 2023). Epistemic territorial practices are a "process of selection, classification and appropriation that erases all that does not fit into the proper place of the already established epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011: 27). Visibility, as Silva et al. (2020) states, is produced by the power of the "tradition of the theoretical and methodological elements that delimit a certain world view and what questions can be formulated about a given spatial reality" (Silva et al. 2020: 272). To construct and maintain the spatial reality of (cheetah) conservation, the NGOs must continuously verify, reinforce, and legitimize their work in conservation in Namibia as well as their conservation business model, structure, and institutions within this world view. This 'world view' of conservation, however, cannot and does not serve as the complete picture of (cheetah) conservation knowledge.

Cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia crafted local and global knowledge claims according to their own conservation agenda/goals. What was communicated as 'real' in conservation was created by the NGOs and existed through experiences online and at their private facilities in Namibia. Through these experiences, the NGOs disseminated information on 'what conservation is' or, rather, 'what it should be.' How conservation is communicated can lead to assumptions about how conservation should proceed and who has authority and/or expertise to implement conservation interventions. These assumptions can shape what kinds of conservation interventions and/or solutions are desirable, appropriate, or even possible and who should have power in these conservation decisions. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs entails assumptions about conservation in Namibia and how cheetah conservation is proceeding. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs studied is based on problematic information.

Information is problematic when it is "inaccurate, misleading, inappropriately attributed, or altogether fabricated" (Jack 2017: 2). Problematic information, following Di Domenico and

Visentin (2020), can include hoaxes, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and true specialist information rendered in a distorted way to support one's viewpoint. It is the later that is important in this thesis. Problematic information is most often seen in how information is presented over media platforms and the recent phenomena of 'fake news' is a well-documented example (Di Domenico and Visentin 2020). Jack (2017) described how "recent controversies over "fake news," and concerns over entering a "post-fact" era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture" (2). Discussed in Chapter 5, how information is created and circulated by the NGOs studied is disruptive. Power – socioeconomic and political – is harnessed and maintained through information exchange by the NGOs. The NGOs supply and circulate information crafting global knowledge claims and the volunteer experience according to their own conservation agenda/goals. The production of problematic information results in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs.

1.6 Thesis Outline

1.6.1 Chapter 2: Methodological Approach

In this chapter, I describe how I used an embedded case study design in order to gather qualitative data at multiple sites throughout Namibia. This embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the global extinction spectacle was organized and selected on the basis of known attributes and distinctive features which allowed for the collection of a variety of data and sources. According to Simons (2009), grounded data can lead "to a unique understanding or a potential theory of the case" (33). The embedded case study research design offered the best strategy for understanding the dynamics of the extinction spectacle and the nature of cheetah conservation in Namibia (Cohen et al. 2000). The empirical inquiry I describe in this doctoral dissertation is an instrumental type of case study strategy. This strategy was chosen for the purpose of gaining an understanding or insight into cheetah conservation within the real-life context of Namibia (Simons 2004). This case study used a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, international volunteers, researchers in the field, commercial farming communities, Namibian government, and global audiences, incorporating various media platforms. A case study, following Yin (2009), is an empirical inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (18). A case study inquiry is useful to manage technically distinctive situations, thus, relies on "multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (18). In such circumstances, a single-case study is an appropriate research design to document a phenomena, determine the nature of the case, as well as ascertain whether related and/or similar phenomena exist (Yin 2009).

1.6.2 Chapter 3: Selling Extinction: The Social Media(tion) of Global Cheetah Conservation

This chapter contextualizes the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation and examines how representations of extinction are 'spectacularized' and used to leverage global money and power. 'Spectacles of extinction' flow quickly over social media platforms; specifically, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, gaining support, followers, and funding for conservation efforts in Namibia. This paper draws from thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia and two years of online data collection and examines the chasm between spectacularized extinction online and conservation realities in Namibia, pointing to the problem of mediating conservation politics over social media. The Namibia-based cheetah conservation NGOs in this study focus their efforts at the international level. Their global marketing campaigns to #SaveTheCheetah are circulated over mass media, social media, and other communication platforms and technologies to engage global audiences and mobilize attention to cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction. This paper argues that by mediating conservation politics online, cheetah conservation NGOs conflate and confuse raising money and awareness with effective action. Framing extinction as something that can be solved by global audiences over social media reinforces economic, informational, and power asymmetries in conservation. The spectacle of extinction illustrated how communication platforms, technologies, and media align in the production, reproduction, creation, co-creation, amplification, and circulation of cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction.

As spectacles of extinction are hyper-visualized and -circulated over social media platforms, social media(tion) represents how this process severs both social and political relationships through the ability of social media to create the illusion of agency to act politically online. Changes in media platforms have not only altered how social relationships are mediated through the hyper-visualization and -circulation of images, information, and content online but have also impacted political communication, information, engagement, and action. The spectacle, following Giroux (2016), has transformed the very nature of politics over social media spaces. Spaces opened up by social media are perceived to encourage public engagement and are continually used in political contexts (Stieglitz and Dang – Xuan 2013). In the 'cute cat theory' of activism and the public sphere, platforms that have nonpolitical functions can become politically powerful due to the sheer numbers of users looking to connect and the difficulty in censoring large amounts of these users sharing content such as 'cute cat pictures' (Tefucki 2017). Campaigns to #SaveTheCheetah in the #RaceAgainstExtinction by the NGOs studied utilize the hyper-visibility of these platforms to focus conservation politics globally. Dean (2005), however, noted a chasm or disconnect between "politics as the circulation of content and politics as official policy" (52 – 53). The cheetah conservation NGOs in this study engage in a "politics that circulates as content" (Dean 2005: 53) where they must vie for visibility, money, attention, and authority to be competitive in global conservation politics. The NGOs practice political power in cheetah conservation through awareness raising to amplifying media/public responses. Raising awareness for cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction, the NGOs attempts influence rather than ground political power in the realm of policy. What Arendt (1958/1998) considered as the political realm. It is ultimately the separation of power and politics in local and global cheetah conservation practice that presents one of the main contradictions analyzed in this thesis. This

contradiction is in line with what Debord (1995), Marx (1867/2013), and Igoe (2010, 2017) theorized as processes of alienation.

1.6.3 Chapter 4: The business of saving cheetahs: Cheetah ecology and the diverse politics at work in human wildlife conflict (HWC) interventions in Namibia

This chapter is concerned with the intersection of cheetah ecology, human wildlife conflict (HWC), settler colonialism, and private land ownership in Namibia. Cheetahs' ecological adaptation(s) in Namibia point to the need for a fuller picture of the permutations of conservation and conservation NGOs in Africa. In the case of Namibia, cheetahs' ecological adaptations to interspecies threats have shaped their territory to be primarily on private commercial farms where they cause HWC. While cheetahs cause HWC on commercial farms and farming communities in Namibia writ large, HWC itself is not the conflict discussed in this research. Rather, HWC is the catalyst for what this paper will analyze to be a conflict between two private sector industries—commercial farming and cheetah conservation. After thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia, this case study suggested diverse politics are at work within the NGOs conservation intervention policies at global, national, and local scales. This research identified a theoretical and conceptual fissure which led to an anomaly in the field of political ecology. This paper will argue HWC is an organizing structure in the business of saving cheetahs. The NGOs studied in Namibia are a service-based industry. The NGOs produce both tangible and intangible conservation services rather than market-based participatory approaches, ecosystem services, and/or economic development. This is illustrative of a shift from market-based conservation to a service-based approach and calls for widening the political ecology lens to account for other cases of NGOs' on-the-ground conservation business practices in Africa.

Where the service-based approach diverges from market-based conservation is rooted in what services are and in the definition of the service industry. Per the Cambridge Dictionary, service-based is "used to describe an activity that is based on services (doing things for customers) rather than on manufacturing" (accessed 8/1/2023). The service industry is defined as "all those firms and employers whose major final output is some intangible or ephemeral commodity or, alternatively, that residual set of productive institutions in the formal economy whose final output is not a material good" (Gershuny and Miles 1983: 3 quoted in Karaomerlioglu and Carlsson 1999: 177). While Karaomerlioglu and Carlsson (1999) did not define the service industry with cheetah conservation in mind, their definition is still relevant here. What is important in the service-based approach for cheetah conservation by the NGOs is the attributes of the services they provide—they are intangible. 'Saving cheetahs (from extinction)' is the intangible service provided by the NGOs for global audiences 'afraid of losing the species forever.' While the service itself is intangible, it still has a material base. In the service-based approach both tangible and intangible conservation services have a material base as they are produced through the NGOs' labor, their research would be an example.

Intangible services are foundational for how the service-based approach diverges from market-based approaches in political ecology. In market-based approaches, land and nature cannot be valued as they are not produced through human labor (Büscher 2013). Büscher (2013) noted that services, derived from land and nature, are valued through fictitious capital, defined by Harvey (2006) as "capital without any material basis in commodities or productive activity" (95). Büscher (2013) argued that the 'environmental services' provided by material natures have to be disconnected from these material natures so that they can properly be valued in global markets - they need to become 'liquid' (in the economic sense of liquidity in markets), which means you need to separate material natures from their representations as services. In this particular case, neither cheetahs nor nature are the source of value. Because services are derived from the NGOs' conservation interventions, their services are valued through their specialization and expertise in the field.

1.6.4 Chapter 5: The Geopolitics of Problematic Information: Epistemic Territorialization and Wildlife Conservation Volunteering in Namibia

This chapter will describe how power–socioeconomic and political–is harnessed and maintained through information exchanged under the aegis of private property. What was 'real' in conservation was created by the two international NGOs studied and existed through the wildlife conservation volunteer experiences in Namibia they used to justify 'what conservation is' or, rather, 'what it should be.' Embedded in every aspect of the volunteer experience was the practice, the theory, and the approach of the NGOs to control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space. This process is what is conceptualized in this paper as epistemic territorialization. Epistemic territorialization is used to describe how knowledge claims organize and consolidate geographic, epistemic, and virtual communities into territories within a controlled space and bounded system. Epistemic territorialization is constructed through a politics of border keeping around what can be known about conservation and who can know it. This process underscores the volunteer experience at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia and extends through broader conservation communication over media platforms and, thereby, expands into epistemic territory. By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation.' The volunteer programs are illustrative of problematic information and how information asymmetries are created and reinforced through epistemic territorialization. Epistemic territorialization is power—it is the power that forecloses critique of the premises of conservation knowledge and the power that masks the economic and political interests of the NGOs in this study.

In epistemic territorialization, claims to conservation knowledge, expertise, and authority is the new territory in which the NGOs studied engage in conservation politics as well as expand and market their conservation efforts. The epistemic territorialization of conservation is a particular way of governing and controlling conservation resources through constructing a hegemonic sphere of influence. In conceptualizing epistemic territorialization, territory and property combine in a particular way to command all resources and govern access through territorial 'gatekeeping' measures. In this case, information is a resource and it is the NGOs source of social,

cultural, political, and economic capital. The volunteer programs studied are an example of how epistemic territorialization forecloses critique of the nature of conservation knowledge and mask the inner workings of the NGOs. Property relations underlie epistemic territorialization in this study and influence power relations in the volunteer programs and in conservation in Namibia writ large and this has certain implications for how knowledge is produced by the NGOs.

Chapter 2: Methodological Approach

2.1 Introduction to the Study

Namibia is located in Southern Africa and is often referred to online as the 'cheetah capital of the world.' In the world of conservation, Namibia has the distinction of being one of the first African countries to include conservation in its constitution. Namibia has remained a stronghold for cheetahs (Nowell 1996) and, at the center of conservation efforts to save the species (Durant et al. 2016). Since the early 1990s, the worldwide decline in cheetah populations has received global attention and thereby heightened global awareness to the plight of the cheetah in Namibia. NGOs located in Namibia reach out to their global audience through social media platforms and media spaces. Social media is a tool whereby cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia further their mission, broaden their user base, and grow their audiences and funding sources. Despite global recognition and support for the NGOs' cheetah conservation efforts, there is a paucity of research aiming to capture the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia itself. The aim of my research was to fill in the blanks and produce an up-close, in-depth description of cheetah conservation in Namibia. This thesis developed and employed an analytical framework from Debord's (1995) concept of the Spectacle to contextualize the conditions and processes of selling extinction over social media platforms as well as the disjunction between the abstract and concrete/material realities of cheetah conservation in Namibia[14].

Case study research starts from a researcher's aim to produce up-close, in-depth understanding of a case, set in a real-world context (Bromley 1986). An embedded case study research design offered the best strategy for understanding the dynamics of the extinction spectacle and how the politics of cheetah conservation played out locally, nationally, globally, and over social media spaces as well (Cohen et al. 2000). To collect the data for this thesis, I traversed the country, driving nearly 9,000 miles (14,485 km). Put into context, I drove farther than I would have if I had driven from my home in Wageningen, Netherlands to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia (7,137 miles or 11,485 km). I designed this research study knowing I would need to gather data from multiple sites, locations, and actors. What that would take I could not fathom when I first set foot in Namibia in 2017. Figure 2.1 traces my journey to produce this in-depth analysis of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia. I hope this thesis will generate insightful appreciation for this unique 'case' (the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia) and the applicability of embedded case study research design to examine at multiple scales, context specific, real-world situations in species conservation. My hope is that new insights into contemporary, real-world cheetah conservation actions and their meanings will be seen as a contribution to the field of political ecology.

[14] There are multiple and complex material-technological relationships that produce or circulate commodified images and material impacts of digital technologies and infrastructures; however, these material-technological relationships/impacts were not the focus of the analysis. Rather, this analysis focused on the continuous (re)shaping of social relationships and human-environmental relationships over social media, focusing on power and politics in cheetah conservation and the spaces where cheetah conservation politics are mediated online.

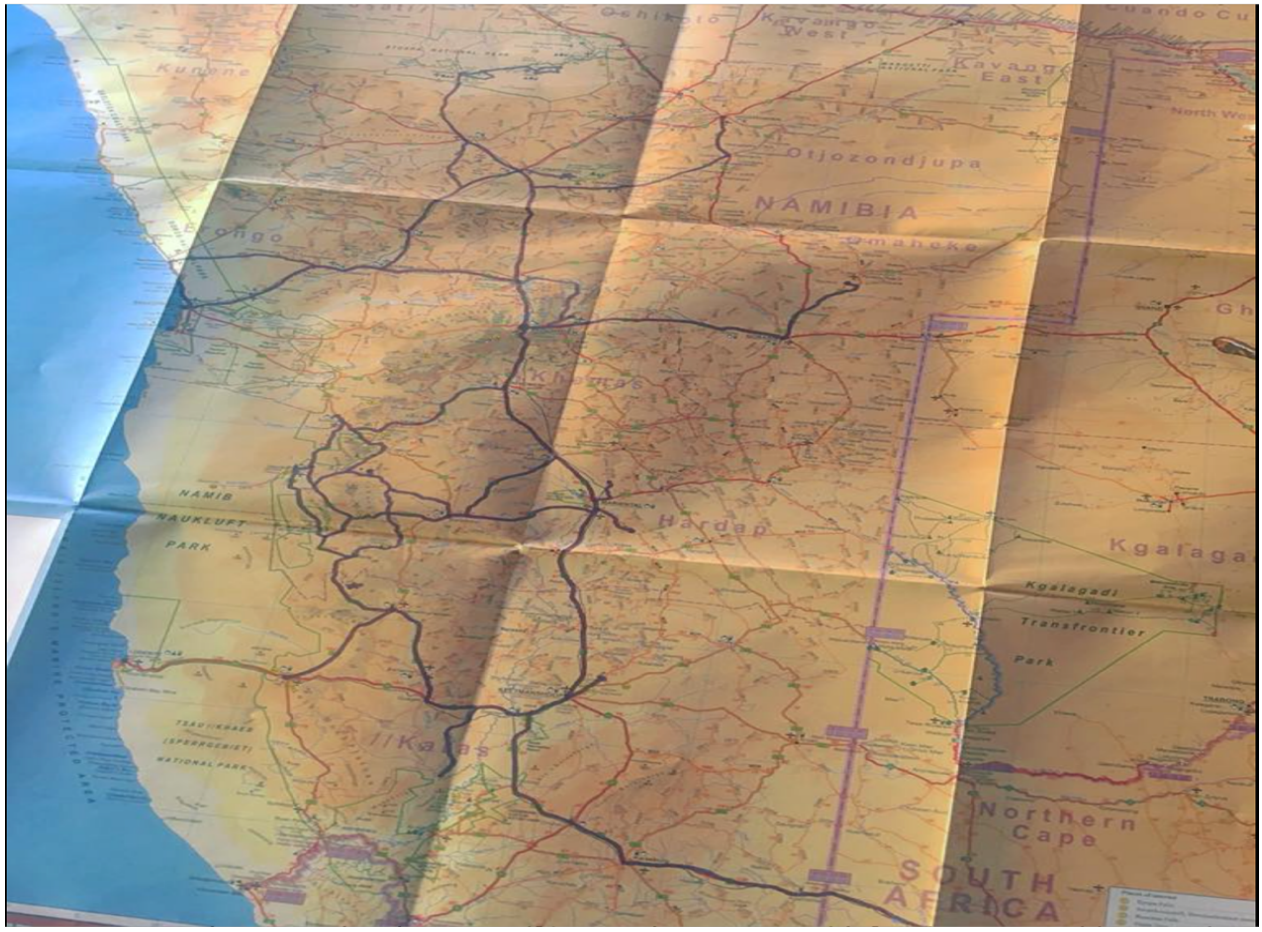

Figure 2.1 The ground covered during 13 months of fieldwork

In Section 2.2, I describe my research objectives for this embedded case study design. I begin with the methodological considerations that informed a research approach, aligned with the research questions, the data collection instruments, and subsequent data analysis methods. Further, I identify the systematic procedures I employed to maintain internal consistency, trustworthiness, and rigor throughout the case study research process.

2.2 Methodological Considerations

Inspiration for my Ph.D. came from fieldwork undertaken for my master's degree in Human Development and Food Security at Roma Tre University in 2014. While there, my thesis for this degree focused on human wildlife conflicts (HWC) and the economic impact of cheetah predation on Namibian farming communities. My main focus was on NGOs located in Namibia specializing in cheetah conservation and HWC mitigation. Preliminary research online showed that these NGOs had significant experience working in farming communities and engaged in a variety of

conservation strategies mitigating HWC in Namibia. Online research detailed the NGOs mitigation efforts alongside descriptions of the threats facing cheetahs and the NGOs' specialized programs developing innovative conservation strategies in Namibia and beyond. The NGOs' websites and social media accounts provided detailed descriptions of their efforts to #SaveTheCheetahs and used dramatic narratives to describe what was at stake if the species was to be lost forever. In organizing my master's fieldwork, I selected these NGOs because of their claims to be conserving cheetahs and addressing the threats to their survival.

When I arrived in Namibia for fieldwork in 2014, I spent six weeks as a volunteer and participant observer at one of the NGOs in this thesis[15]. Conservation work was undertaken predominantly on-site by volunteers at the NGO's private facilities. Volunteer activities included: food preparation and small animal feeding, veterinary care, game counts by car and on horseback, carnivore feeds, project work, and research going through camera trap data or changing camera trap batteries or placement. All volunteer activities had a purpose. The conservation threats, solutions, and barriers to the NGO's work was communicated throughout the daily routine. On activities like the carnivore feed, a coordinator/researcher would explain the activity, why the large carnivores are fed this way, why the carnivores are at the NGO, as well as their individual stories if there was one. Conservation discourses often centered on difficult positions particularly concerning the issues of HWC conflict situations. It was explained that most animals in captivity at the NGO were victims of HWC conflicts. While we learned about the NGO's work in conservation and their approach to HWC mitigation with Namibian farming communities, we rarely went beyond the NGO's properties. When I finished collecting data for my master's thesis, I left the field with some nagging questions about the nature of cheetah conservation outside of the confines of the NGOs. I felt something important was happening with cheetah conservation in Namibia that I did not fully grasp and could not explain. This research raised more questions than answers, leading me to pursue this topic further.

Based on my fieldwork at these NGOs for my masters, I knew I needed to use a wide lens to research the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia. For this reason, I chose a research approach that would accommodate an in-depth analysis of a broad range of contextual and complex conditions going beyond the kind of isolated variables I had analyzed when studying the economic impact of cheetah predation on Namibian livestock farmers. A qualitative embedded case study design proved perfect for producing the in-depth understanding of this complex, contemporary phenomenon in the context of a real-world setting of Namibia. More specifically, this approach is appropriate when there are many variables and where the boundary between the context (Namibia) and the issue (the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation) isn't clear (Creswell 2013; Yin 2014). To provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia, I needed a design that was flexible enough to allow analysis across four units (i.e., NGOs, Government Actors, Local and Wider Community Actors, Namibia-based Organizations &

[15] Fieldwork for my masters thesis included the NGOs in this research study. While I visited the other NGOs during my masters project, I spent six weeks at only one of the NGOs' volunteer programs.

Associations) and several subunits (e.g., volunteers, researchers, staff, etc.) within those four units.

2.3 Ethics

When I started this project, I planned to examine the ways global conservation was constructing environmental crises. I had initially argued that cheetah conservation organizations inside Namibia create powerful global extinction narratives. In my research proposal, I had posited that these representations did not necessarily reflect the on-the-ground realities of conservation in Namibia or how individuals participating in my project may or may not experience conservation in practice. I had begun this research project understanding that I had an ethical responsibility to be aware of power imbalances and to be mindful that my project did not place participants at risk (Creswell 2013). Below are examples of how I first approached and continued to address ethical dilemmas during and after fieldwork in Namibia.

Prior to conducting fieldwork in Namibia, I read the Netherland's code of conduct for researchers and followed the codes throughout my project. I also maintained the visa requirements to stay in Namibia for the duration of my fieldwork. I also arranged permission from the NGOs to conduct fieldwork at their different sites in Namibia. I took courses and learned about the appropriate ways to show respect for stakeholders and their needs, the needs of the field sites as well as culturally appropriate ways to establish supportive, respectful relationships (Creswell 2013). Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, analyzing my data, and writing up the results, I made sure that stakeholders and respondents were not deceived about the nature of my research project and that I informed them about the nature of my inquiry throughout the process (Creswell 2013). The respondents interviewed for this research voluntarily agreed to participate and to be audio recorded, anonymity was guaranteed. All interviews were audio recoded and consent obtained prior to the interview then confirmed at the beginning of the audio recorded interview. As Creswell (2013) suggested, I acknowledge that I have a personal history that situates me as an inquirer. During this data collection process, I had to examine my own judgements and belief systems by being reflexive. I had to make sure none of my personal beliefs, political biases, and opinions would affect my research and was reflexive about the traditions and conceptions of self, ethics, and politics that I brought to this project. During the inquiry and my research report writing, I collected and presented multiple perspectives (Creswell 2013). Furthermore, I used accepted validation strategies for my interpretations and triangulated data (Creswell 2013).

For this thesis, the embedded case study design offered a strategy for understanding the dynamics of the extinction spectacle and the local, national, global, and media spaces of the politics of cheetah conservation while also looking at the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia (Cohen et al. 2000). Case study design is bounded by time, space, and activity and accommodates multiple units of analysis within a single study (Yin 2003). The bounded nature of case study design enabled me to frame and manage contextual variables during thirteen months of fieldwork in Namibia and two years of online data collection to

produce thick descriptions of the units of analysis detailed in this section. This study focused on conservation NGOs in Namibia working in similar capacities in local, national, global, and media spaces. Several NGOs are included in this study but, for the purposes of this thesis, are identified as the 'cheetah conservation NGOs,' Namibia-based NGOs,' or, simply, 'the NGOs' to protect the identities of all the respondents in this study. Conservation in Namibia is a small community, cheetah conservation even smaller. Therefore, it was necessary to maintain the anonymity of the NGOs and all respondents included in this embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the global extinction spectacle.

2.4 Methodological Approach: Embedded Case Study

This case study used a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences at multiple scales of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, international volunteers, researchers in the field, commercial farming communities, communal farmers, CBNRM actors, land rights activists, Namibian government, and global audiences, incorporating various media platforms. A case study, following Yin (2009), is an empirical inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (18). A case study inquiry is useful to manage technically distinctive situations, thus, relies on "multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (18). In such circumstances, a single-case study is an appropriate research design to document a phenomenon, determine the nature of the case, as well as ascertain whether related and/or similar phenomena exist (Yin 2009).

For my dissertation research, I used an embedded case study design, gathering qualitative data at multiple sites throughout Namibia. This embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the global extinction spectacle was organized and selected on the basis of known attributes and distinctive features which allowed for the collection of a variety of data and sources. According to Simons (2009), grounded data can lead "to a unique understanding or a potential theory of the case" (33). The embedded case study research design offered the best strategy for understanding the dynamics of the extinction spectacle and the nature of cheetah conservation in Namibia (Cohen et al. 2000). The empirical inquiry I describe in this doctoral dissertation is an instrumental type of case study strategy. This strategy was chosen for the purpose of gaining an understanding or insight into cheetah conservation within the real-life context of Namibia (Simons 2004).

In contrast to hypothetical-deductive approaches, my qualitative embedded case study research design is inductive, iterative, and adheres to the critical concept that "a case study research project is the case" (Yin 2009: 18). The case or the focus of my embedded case study research design is--the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation, the context for this case is Namibia. It is a singular, unique, and significant case that comes with a package of sub-issues, including units, a case, and boundaries (Yin 2009). Case study design is bounded by time, space, and activity and accommodates multiple units of analysis within a single study (Yin 2003). Defining the case

(unit of analysis or object of the study) and bounding the case can be difficult as many points of interest and variables intersect and overlap in case study research. (Merriam 2009; Stake 2006; Yin 2014). Bounding the case is essential to focusing, framing, and managing data collection and analysis (Merriam 2009; Stake 2006; Yin 2014). The following figure shows the units of analysis in this case and how I categorized my data for analysis.

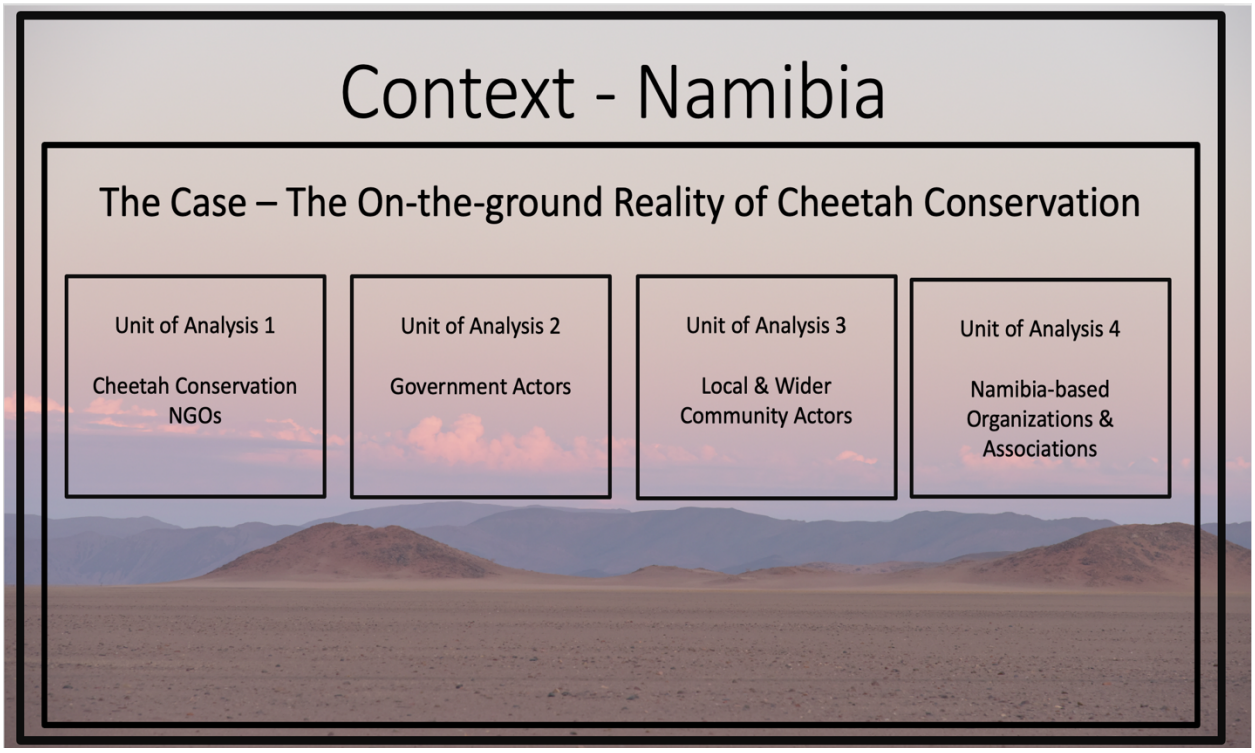

Figure 2.2 The Units of Analysis

Yin (2014) argues that embedded designs can include multiple units of analysis, and often, the practice is to have one major unit and subdivide it into smaller units at different levels. The subunits of analysis were the data collected and analyzed for each subunit. This is how I organized my data and performed my analysis. The figure above showed the main units, units of analysis 1) cheetah conservation NGOs, 2) government actors, 3) local and wider community actors, and 4) Namibia-based organizations & associations. Unit of analysis 4 included WRN, NAPHA, LCMAN, as well as other conservation NGOs and research institutions in Namibia. In what follows, I have detailed the units and the subunits in Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6.

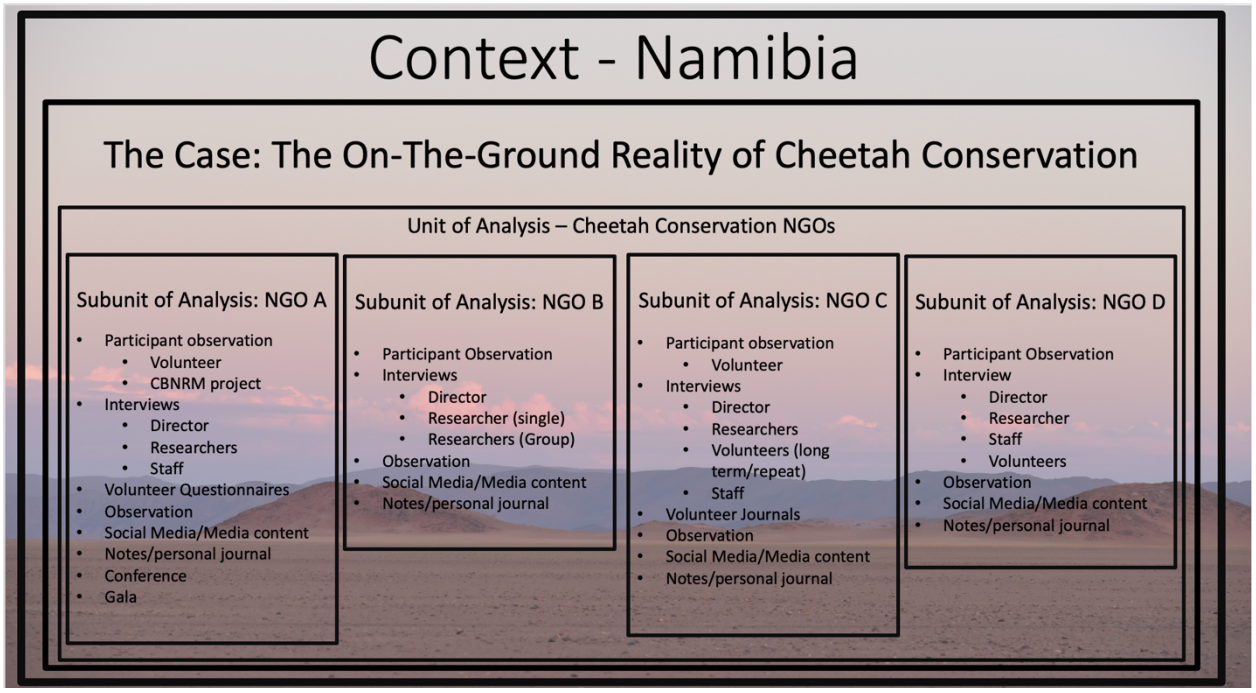

Figure 2.3 NGO Subunits of Analysis

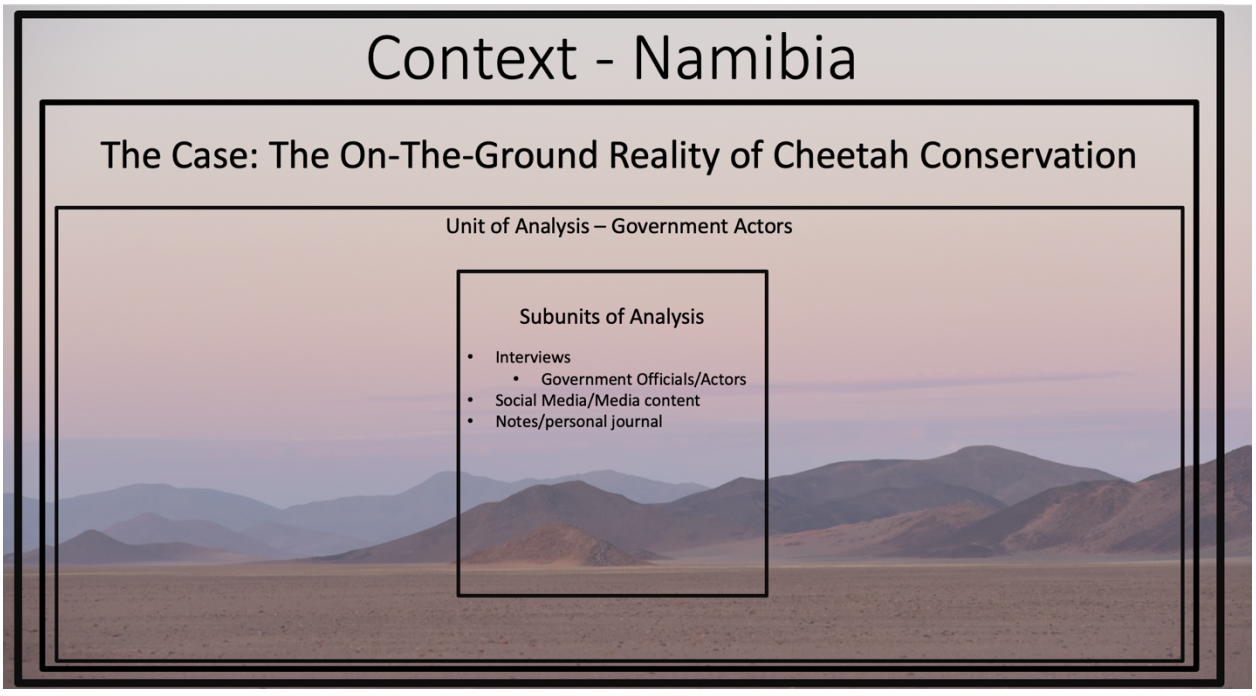

Figure 2.4 Government Actors Subunits of Analysis

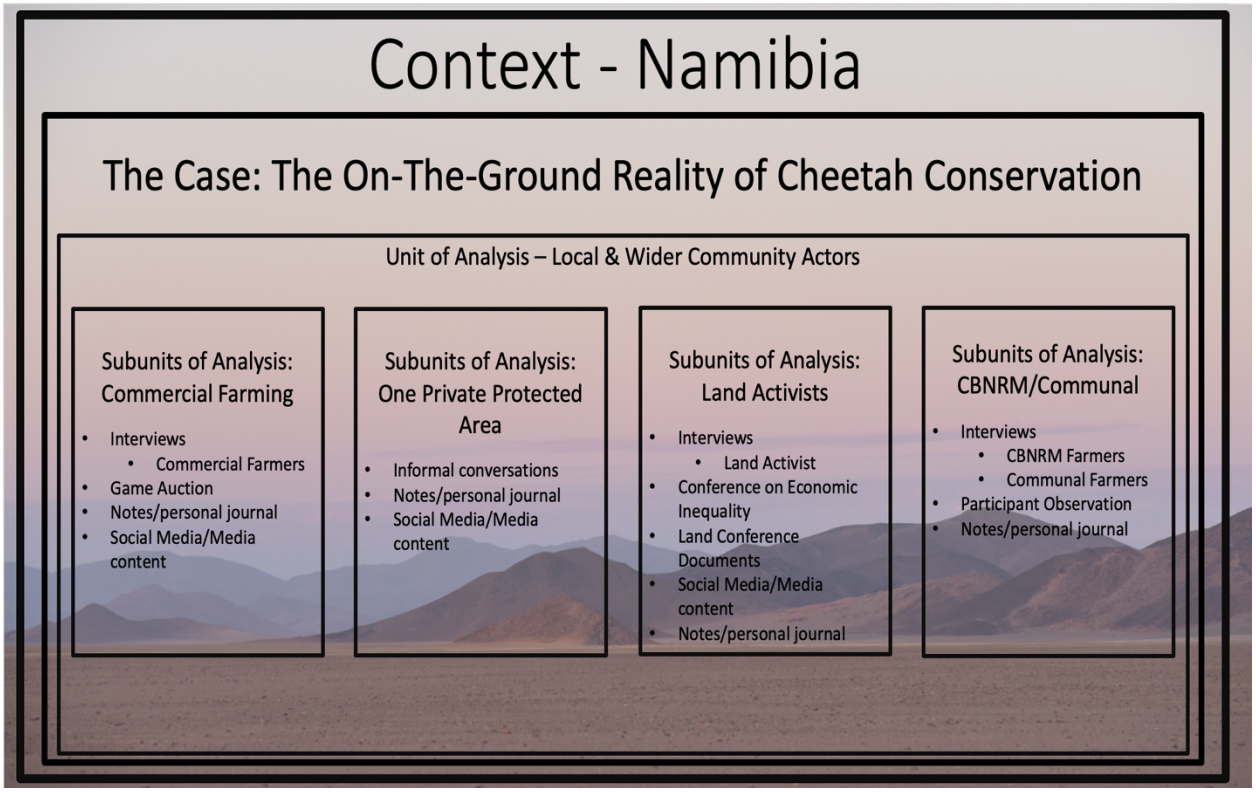

Figure 2.5 Commercial Farming Subunits of Analysis

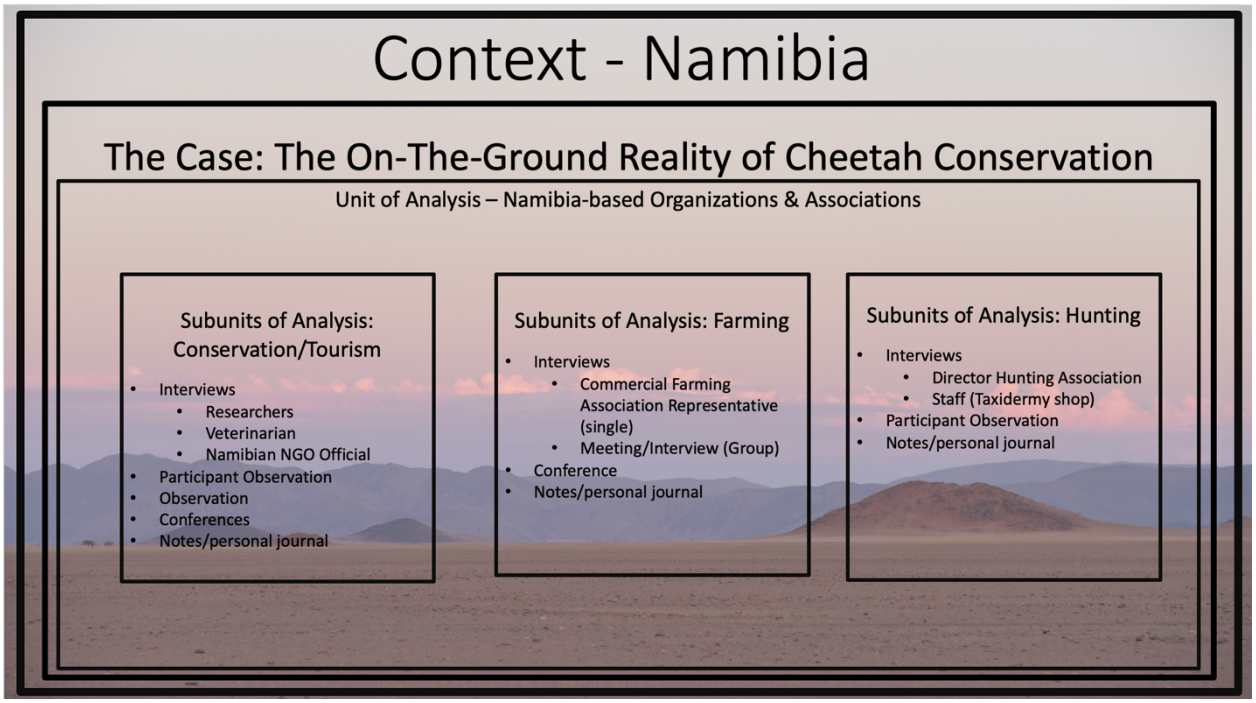

Figure 2.6 Namibia-Based Organizations & Associations Subunits of Analysis

Conservation in Namibia is not static, the embedded case study approach was used to capture the diversity of practices and forms as well as the social, economic, political, and cultural relations that are important for answering the research questions. In so far as this single-case study must attend to particular sub-units of analysis, this research design offered the best strategy for understanding the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation and the extinction spectacle (Cohen et.al. 2000).

2.5 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Empirical data was collected in Namibia through ethnographic fieldwork from September 2017-September 2018. As there were multiple units of analysis and each level of analysis required different sources of evidence, the embedded case study design offered the best approach (Yin 2009). The data collected informed participant sampling decisions and the observation and interview protocols I utilized in Namibia. In preliminary research online, I reviewed social media pages including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as well as websites and other online sources. Documents were collected both online and off on the historical, political, cultural, economic, and social contexts of cheetah conservation in Namibia. The following sections will detail the methods of data collection I employed.

2.5.1 Direct and Participant Observation

Following Yin (2009), participant observation is useful as it covers events in real time, provides insight into interpersonal behavior, and details the context of the 'case.' Participant observation was used as a method at the volunteer programs and in joining a research trip to a CBNRM area to collect data. At the two volunteer programs run by the NGOs, I participated in volunteer activities such as the cheetah walk, fence braiding, game counts, carnivore feeds, research, logging camera trap data, feeding baby goats, caring for livestock, and logging ecological data among many other activities both planned and unplanned. Participant observation was also used when joining researchers collecting data in a CBNRM area. While this particular initiative is described online as pertaining to cheetahs, it was, however, predominantly focused on problems with wild dogs in the area. I spent two weeks camping with two researchers from the NGO collecting camera trap data and speaking with community members regarding the wild dog issues in the area. We drove upwards of eight hours a day picking up camera traps, changing batteries, moving their locations, and removing some from different locations. We stopped along the way to check-in with community members. While the problems in this community involved wild dogs, the researchers did enquire about the presence of cheetahs.

2.5.2 Informal/Conversational Interviews

Informal, conversational interviews were used during my thirteen months of fieldwork. Conversational interviews were the preferred method as it provided a more interactive interview style (Simons 2009). Simons (2009) compared the interview process to a conversation as it supported a more informal approach. The conversational approach employed was useful as it attempts to equalize the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and encourages a more natural conversation style (Simons 2009). I engaged in informal and conversational interviews because I wanted to document interviewees perspectives, be actively engaged in learning, and identify and analyze the issues that were important to the case. Unstructured, open-ended questions offered me flexibility to "change direction to pursue emergent issues, to probe a topic or deepen a response, and to engage in dialog with participants" (Simons 2009: 43). Finally, this approach offers the potential for "uncovering and representing unobserved feeling and events that cannot be observed" (Simons 2009: 43). I found this to be insightful for both me and the respondents I was interviewing. I agree with Simons (2009) that "unstructured, interpersonal interview encourages an openness that can lead to unexpected disclosure of issues that interviewees would have preferred to keep quiet" (44).

In this study, interviews also used active listening, focusing more on the respondents' experiences than asking questions. All interviews were conducted using this approach. During interviews, I used active listening and drew most questions from the conservation; however, I did have two questions that I asked most respondents. The questions were: 1) How do you define conservation? And 2) What is most important for me (researching cheetah conservation) to know and take back with me when I leave Namibia? The second question was asked in conversation during the first interview and had a surprising response so was then used in the interviews that followed. After interviews, memos were written about the conversation.

All interviews (43 in total) were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded by hand for patterns and themes. Initially, I used a deductive approach to analyze my data. I developed my code book with an initial set of codes based on my research questions (first 5 codes in Figure 2.7). The coding process entailed looking for excerpts in the transcribed interview data that I could assign to this initial set of codes. After several rounds of analysis, a lot of data remained which could not be assigned to the original set of codes or their iterations. I decided to add an inductive approach to the coding of my data. In subsequent analyses of the data, I looked for larger underlying ideas, concepts, patterns, and phenomena within the data. Basically, my aim was to identify and link categories and themes through both inductive and deductive analysis. Over 13 months in the field, I had amassed a substantial amount of interview data. The transcribed interviews represented the beliefs, views, and thinking about cheetah conservation from a myriad of respondents that included field researchers, conservationists, government officials, land activists, commercial farmers, CBNRM/conservancy farmers, and volunteers. Eventually, I realized I could categorize sections of my case study into a structure for a deeper analysis and insight into cheetah conservation in Namibia. The structure became the units of analysis for the embedded case study research approach I designed (see Figure 2.2). Each unit of analysis contains codes and subcodes that are similar to each other or pertain to the same topics.

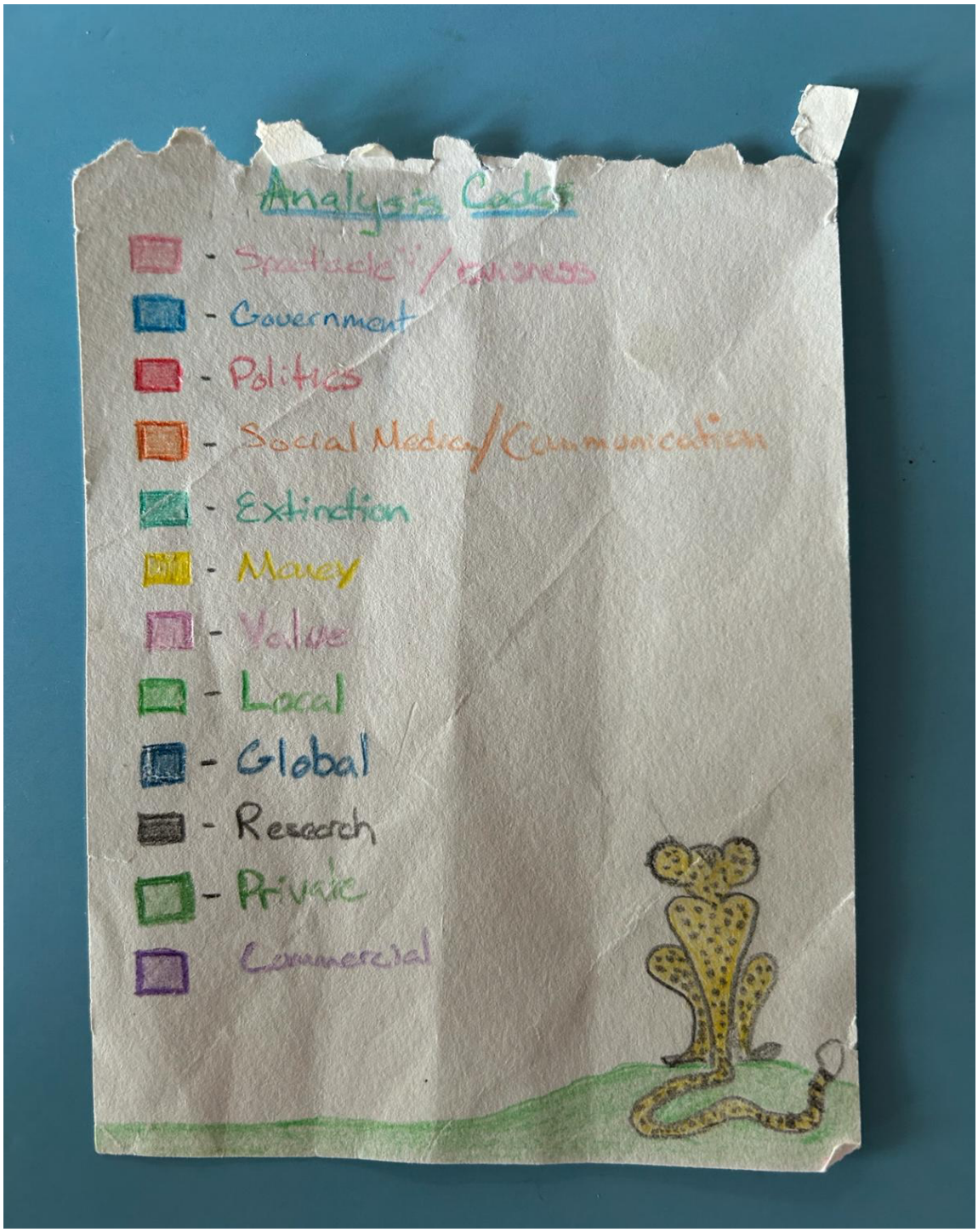

Figure 2.7 Codes for Analyzing Data

2.5.3 Volunteer Journals/Questionnaires

During participant observation at the volunteer programs, I asked volunteers to fill out journals during their stay. 52 volunteers filled out the journals or questionnaires. The questionnaires used the same questions but did not include the longer descriptions of the volunteers' experiences and were used when volunteers were not able to do the full journal. The volunteer journals were handwritten on a journal that I provided. At two of the locations, the researchers on-site allowed a few minutes after their weekly presentations to explain my research and ask the volunteers if they would like to participate. The volunteers who participated were given a journal to complete and were also asked to choose an animal for their journal. This was done to differentiate between the different sites by using different species; for instance, one site was mammals, another marine creatures, and birds, etc. The animal could be anything the volunteer chose and did not have to be real per se. While I did this for coding, volunteers did enjoy this detail (see Addendum 1 for an example journal and instructions). I then collected the journals from the volunteers before they left.

The volunteer journals were helpful in gaining the insights of the international volunteers. Many volunteers mentioned they were keeping their own journal as well and filled them out together. Volunteers also mentioned that they enjoyed the process as they were able to think more about their experiences when writing them down. Not all volunteers filled them out entirely but the majority of volunteers answered the questions. Some volunteers even included drawings in their journals. Questions in the journals were intuitive and question number 9 was added after a volunteer's suggestion (see Addendum 1). Overall, volunteer journals were a creative way to collect data on volunteers' experiences and how volunteers learned about conservation at these NGOs.

2.5.4 Print Media, Online Media, and Cheetahs' Global Extinction Crisis

For upwards of thirty plus years, stories, and narratives of cheetahs' global 'race against extinction' have been printed, published, and shared across various media platforms. Cheetahs' extinction crisis was first circulated through print media before incorporating broader media platforms as new media and technology developed over time. The extinction narrative was pervasive over media sources that included news articles, scholarly journals, toolkits, educational material, books, emails, advertisements, and other publications both online and in print. Data was collected for over two years from a wide range of media sources that included print media, online media, and social media detailed in the following section. I collected data from print media sources such as books, scholarly articles, brochures, newspapers, advertisements, newsletters, mail, and magazines. Over online media, I collected data from sources that included publications, websites, newsletters, journals, videos, blogs, advertisements, email fundraisers/newsletters, news articles (e.g., NYTimes, BBC, Al Jazeera, Nat Geo, etc.), and YouTube videos. Cheetahs'

extinction crisis narrative was prevalent in data collected from print media as well as in online sources. Importantly, the data collected online and in print portrayed the global status of cheetahs, not the local status in Namibia, which at the time of this research was considered stable. To the best of my knowledge, Namibia's stable population was not otherwise documented in print, online, or over social media. Starting my analysis of this data, I saw that there was a distinct divide between what was communicated over social media (Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter) and the rest of my data. There was a clear extinction crisis narrative that had been circulated for upwards of thirty plus years in both print and online media that was not consistently shared over social media platforms. Cheetahs' extinction crisis narrative was prevalent in print and online media sources, however, social media content varied significantly post to post and did not consistently discuss extinction explicitly. Because of the difference in how information was communicated between media sources, I chose to focus attention on social media platforms in this thesis.

2.5.5 Social Media and Online Data Collection

Data was collected online and over social media platforms for a period of two years. Social media content was collected from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and consisted of screenshots taken of social media content related to cheetahs, cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, and conservation in Namibia more broadly. My approach to data collection online was consistent with a qualitative research design in the sense that the gathering of my data was iterative. Social media data was gathered from the NGOs and cheetah conservation actors' social media accounts as well as organically as content was shared online over my social media feed. At the time I started collecting data over Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, I had been following the NGOs' accounts for a couple of years. I had followed the NGOs in this study as well as other conservation institutions, actors, researchers, and organizations during my masters fieldwork when I first conducted research at the NGOs in Namibia. When I started collecting data online for my PhD, I was already following upwards of 2,500 Twitter accounts of conservationists, NGOs, researchers, and other conservation institutions focused on cheetahs and conservation writ large. I had also similarly followed the same NGOs and global conservation institutions on Instagram and Facebook during my masters but not to the same extent as I had on Twitter. Because I had followed a significant number of accounts prior to collecting data online, my research was not set up with the purpose of focusing solely on selected feeds, posts, and content by the NGOs and affiliate organizations.

During the two years collecting data over social media, I took screenshots of nearly all posts and online content related to cheetahs, cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, and conservation in Namibia broadly construed that I saw online. If I saw that anything related to cheetahs was 'trending' then I would document posts of what content was shared and do a search to consolidate posts into a single related thread, screenshotting the content. This was first noted and documented on December 27th, 2016 when Durant et al.'s (2016) article—*The global decline of cheetah Acinonyx jubatus and what it means for conservation*— was published. While cheetah content did not often 'trend' as it did in 2016, there was a notable increase in attention

and posts every year around December 4th to celebrate International Cheetah Day. Because of increased attention every year on Dec. 4th, I documented the conversations online more frequently. When I was conducting fieldwork in Namibia, I visited the main site producing social media content to document International Cheetah Day on-the-ground in Namibia. During fieldwork, I also used social media to keep updated and informed of what was being shared and what was shown to be going on in Namibia and at the NGOs. I collected online data every day during fieldwork as long as WIFI access was available. Because I had already followed a significant amount of profiles and accounts over social media, data that I collected online was extensive.

Over social media platforms, the data I collected on content related to cheetahs, cheetah conservation, and cheetah conservation NGOs varied widely. Looking at the Namibia-based NGOs' content specifically, social media posts ranged from updates on resident captive animals, global fundraising events, and volunteer experiences to ongoing conservation efforts in Namibia and across the world. While social media content varied, what was notable through my analysis was the consistent use of hashtags in social media posts such as #SaveTheCheetah, #Cheetahs, #extinction, #InternationalCheetahDay, and #RaceAgainstExtinction for example. Focusing on hashtags allowed me to condense a wide range of online content into a manageable form. Hashtags are a clickable and searchable link over social media and a superstructure that connects images, posts, tweets, debates, and conversations across all social media platforms (Messina quoted in Pandell 2017). Because hashtags are a clickable, searchable link to and across all social media platforms, hashtags were not a part of the discourse or simply a rhetorical device used in the NGOs' online content. Hashtags were a means for the NGOs to raise awareness, attention, and money as well as to engage in conservation politics. For this reason, what was of importance in my analysis of data collected over social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) was that the NGOs used hashtags over social media platforms. The NGOs as well as others provided, shared, and circulated information on cheetahs, cheetah conservation, and the cheetah conservation NGOs widely by sharing content and 'hashtaging' #SaveTheCheetah in the #RaceAgainstExtinction among other hashtags. This was evidenced in broader communication over social media from content that incorporated the hashtags and the NGOs' message that was shared by other institutions, actors, researchers, and broader global audiences not otherwise associated with the NGOs studied. Media and communications scholarship have written extensively on the use of hashtags in online communication particularly in literature on the attention economy. I relied on the existing literature in those fields to support this approach (see Dean 2005; Hanson 2011; Stieglitz and Dang – Xuan 2013; Fuchs 2017; Tufekci 2017; Odell 2019).

Data that I collected over social media documented how hashtags were used and circulated online as well as noted when they attracted attention. In this thesis, hashtags were monitored but no individual pages/posts were identified. Data analysis included the Namibia-based NGOs and affiliate organizations of the same name but different country (for example: WWF, WWF UK). While data collected online did include broader content related to global cheetah conservation efforts, content related to Namibia was the primary focus of this thesis. All media data included in this thesis was collected from public pages/accounts and not from personal and/or individual social media pages unless said individual was a public figure. All social media content was kept anonymous.

2.6 Sites and Participants

Important for this research was that the NGOs all have similar practices: pose solutions to the same conservation issues, part of the private sector, regulated by the state, have captive cheetahs on-site, and all use social media to promote their mission. All NGOs studied were located on private property. The NGOs' main sites in Namibia are the governing body for the organizations, setting the standard not only in constructing the conservation agenda at their private facilities but through extending the NGOs' conservation intervention policy and practice across the world. The NGOs conservation activities and strategies range from education, tourism, volunteering, internships, research, and on-site animal interactions/viewing. Conservation work was done predominantly at the NGOs' private locations. All these NGOs had luxury lodges and offered cheetah activities to both volunteers and tourists alike. Important to note here is that the NGOs lodges, volunteer programs, and tourist activities were the purview of the NGOs and/or a collaboration with an international investor. Tourism at the NGOs was not connected to economic development and/or livelihood strategies as is typical in conservation in Namibia. The NGOs are on their own private property which means the NGOs' lodges, volunteer programs, and tourist activities contribute to the NGOs' conservation efforts alone.

Information was collected from both public and private conservation organizations as well as from government officials, community members (CBNRM, conservancy members, and land activists), tourists, volunteers, interns, and researchers. Conservation in Namibia is a small community, cheetah conservation NGOs even smaller; therefore, it was necessary to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents. Respondents are organized into the following categories: researchers, Namibian officials, commercial farmers, volunteers, and coordinators. Namibian officials include government and conservation officials who are engaged in Namibian conservation governance. Researchers are individuals with knowledge and/or connection to cheetah conservation and specifically, cheetah conservation NGOs. At the time of this research, individuals on site at the NGOs were researchers, interns, and volunteers who had traveled to Namibia to work and/or volunteer. A majority of these volunteers were from the EU, UK, US, and Australia. English was not typically the first language of the many volunteers but they knew enough English to be interviewed and completer their volunteer journals. Commercial farmers in this study spoke Afrikaans but communicated with me in English.

Chapter 3: Selling Extinction: The Social Media(tion) of Global Cheetah Conservation

Selling Extinction: The Social Media(tion) of Global Cheetah Conservation

Abstract:

This paper contextualizes the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation and examines how representations of extinction are 'spectacularized' and used to leverage global money and power. 'Spectacles of extinction' flow quickly over social media platforms; specifically, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, gaining support, followers, and funding for conservation efforts in Namibia. This paper draws from thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia and two years of online data collection and examines the chasm between spectacularized extinction online and conservation realities in Namibia, pointing to the problem of mediating conservation politics over social media. The Namibia-based cheetah conservation NGOs in this study focus their efforts at the international level. Their global marketing campaigns to #SaveTheCheetah are circulated over mass media, social media, and other communication platforms and technologies to engage global audiences and mobilize attention to cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction. This paper argues that by mediating conservation politics online, cheetah conservation NGOs conflate and confuse raising money and awareness with effective action. Framing extinction as something that can be solved by global audiences over social media reinforces economic, informational, and power asymmetries in conservation.

Keywords: Political Ecology, Social Media, Environmental Communication, Conservation, Conservation Capitalism, Extinction

3.1 Introduction:

Screen culture and new visual media, communication platforms, and technologies are making it easier to access and communicate environmental crises at the global scale. Cheetah conservation NGOs in this study use social media to mediate conservation politics globally by circulating 'cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction.' Over social media, these NGOs use language intended to provoke fear to 'act now or lose the species forever.' And it is effective. Revenue from the US alone for one conservation NGO in Namibia was close to three million US dollars in 2018 ('Taking Global Action' 2018 Visual Annual Report). These NGOs leverage global fears of extinction to gain support, followers, and fund conservation efforts in Namibia, calling on global audiences to act, either through donating to the NGOs and/or by sharing, posting, and tweeting cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction. This paper argues that the way conservation politics is mediated over social media conflates and confuses raising money and awareness with effective action. This paper is not a critique of social media itself, rather, it will examine what Odell (2019) describes as "the invasive logic of commercial social media, and its financial incentive to keep us in a profitable state of anxiety, envy, and distraction" (xii). While the urgency of cheetahs' global #RaceEgainstExtinction is circulated daily, it might come as a surprise that in Namibia, not only is

the extinction crisis narrative missing but cheetah populations are considered stable[16]. Cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction and the absence of their local status in global narratives makes cheetah conservation in Namibia a particularly unique case for analysis. This paper examines the chasm between spectacularized extinction online and the political realities of conservation in Namibia, pointing to the problem of mediating conservation politics over social media. When cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia mediate conservation politics over Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, they are selling extinction.

The intent of this paper, to be clear, is not to minimize extinction (risks) but to examine the spectacularized representation and circulation of extinction. Global extinction, in theory and in practice, elicits emotional responses which, more often than not, foreclose critique. So, to understand how extinction—a word—can evade meaningful critique, I draw upon Arnold's (1988) depiction of the emotive power of the word famine.

> "Famine is one of the most powerful, pervasive, and arguably one of the most emotive, words in our historical vocabulary, and that in itself makes it all the more difficult to isolate its meaning and wider significance" (5).

Extinction rivals the pervasive, emotive power of famine that Arnold (1988) described. Consequently, the emotive power of extinction draws attention away from varied political, economic, social, and historical contexts across cheetahs' full range as well as its meaning and wider significance in conservation capitalism. Because, when extinction is used, and, subsequently, incentivized to engage global audiences in local conservation crises and fund conservation NGOs, narratives of fear around losing a species are increasingly overriding complex local contexts, critical perspectives, and expanding informational, economic, and power asymmetries in conservation. When extinction is sold online, it undermines effective political action and transformative change in conservation.

Why this is of particular importance is that, for cheetahs, it is not the fear of extinction in Namibia per se, rather, it is the fear of losing funding for the NGOs, that dictates how cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction is represented over social media. Cheetah conservation NGOs rely on public support therefore must be "spectacular enough to capture public interest" (Verma et al., 2015: S649). Consequently, it is not extinction, in and of itself, that is incentivized but the status. Cheetah conservation NGOs compete with each other and with larger, more well-known NGOs, other globally valued and threatened charismatic species as well as the continuous flow of information online. In this way, social media platforms incentivize extinction, as spectacle, through market competition, pitting threatened charismatic species against each other for global awareness, attention, and funding. Over social media, attention can be leveraged to amplify and/or draw attention to #extinction but it can also serve as a distraction. Not only is cheetahs'

[16] Namibian cheetah populations, according to respondent interviews and personal communications with experts in the field, are considered stable. This does not mean that they are not at risk in Namibia and/or globally or could be in the future, simply, at the time of this research, cheetah populations in Namibia were regarded as stable. Respondent data is used here, however, (Fabiano et al. 2020) does discuss stable trends in cheetah populations in Namibia.

#RaceAgainstExtinction decontextualized from conservation realities in Namibia, but mediating cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction online abstracts from cheetah conservation NGOs' contribution to global processes that are part and parcel of the global extinction crisis they seek to redress[17]. Cheetah conservation fundraising campaign tactics do not work in isolation from broader structures of global capitalism. Over social media, #SavingCheetahs relies on platforms based on a financial model that requires continued, even accelerated, consumerism by a privileged global class, one whose overconsumption is linked to climate change and associated ecological crises (Holmes, 2012; Hickel, 2020). In the urgency to act on global climate change and mass extinctions, it is important to consider how social media functions to incentivize extinction and integrate global audiences into the spectacular global extinction mode of production in place of effective action.

Media, broadly construed, increasingly shapes how "we – as individuals, cultures and societies – view, perceive, value and relate to our environment" and is central to bringing "environmental issues and problems to public and political attention" (Hansen, 2011: 8). Social media is distinct from media writ large; platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter need to be differentiated from broader media structures in discussions of power and politics in political ecology. As mass - and image - based media has changed, so has conservation's use of media and media spaces to raise awareness, attention, and funding for conservation, and shape human and nature relationships. Social media creates a global space where conservation politics are visualized, negotiated, and sold as global activism. To act over social media is to share, post, tweet, like, comment, and tag—all actions that engage broader global participation the more they are circulated and are perceived to represent public opinion (Ross et al., 2021). Global claims of #extinction capitalize on what Giroux (2016) describes as 'stylized political action' where such likes, posts, tweets, and shares distract global audiences through the 'theatricality of power' (Giroux, 2016). This 'theatricality of power' is how the NGOs raise awareness, attention, and funding and engage global audiences in the politics of conservation. Raising awareness and attention for cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction, however, does not equate to political power in Namibian conservation governance and that is where decision-making power resides. Dean's (2005) understanding of politics in communicative capitalism is useful here. The chasm discussed in this paper is in line with what Dean (2005) describes as the "disconnect between engaged criticism and national strategy in terms of a distinction between politics as the circulation of content and politics as official policy" (52-53). My analysis will show cheetah conservation NGOs engage in a "politics that circulates as content" (Dean, 2005: 53) where they must compete for visibility, money, and attention.

Changes in social media platforms have meant that the politics of extinction no longer requires extinction to be central to cheetah conservation in practice in Namibia but is central in the visual demands of amplifying extinction to global audiences. Extinction, as spectacle, creates an abstract power in engaging global audiences in conservation campaigns—perceived power that global audiences can #save cheetahs by engaging through social media and online consumer

[17] For additional discussion on the environmental costs of social media and associated technologies, see Oyedemi 2019 and Notley 2019.

activism, giving the "illusion of agency" (O'Niell, 2009: 156). Media power, Castells (1996) argues, is the power of the flow and not the flows of power that take precedence over media spaces. In other words, media power is not in who has the power to communicate but who has the power to attract an audience that will pay attention (Zhang et. al. 2018). The spectacle of extinction operates in the attention economy that, simply put, buys and sells attention (Odell 2019). Online engagement with #extinction creates what Odell (2019) calls an "arms race of urgency" (59). This construction of urgency fuels competition over and between the platforms using the logic of advertising and clicks (Odell, 2019). The urgency to #SaveTheCheetahs can appear to unite global audiences in (false) collective action, universalizing a privileged position of promising global solutions to local conservation 'crises.' In doing so, informational, economic, and power asymmetries are expanded. In effect, social media is facilitating a new kind of political community, one where attention is a key resource and "attention getters, stunts, and spectacles are rewarded" (Tufekci, 2017: 271). Debord's (1967, 1995) analytical approach in *The Society of the Spectacle* is applied here to illustrate how extinction circulates and is circulated over social media, creating a problematic interaction between abstract and concrete/material reality. To explicate this process, literature from political ecology (Igoe, 2010, 2017; Goodman et.al., 2016; Büscher, Dressler, and Fletcher, 2014; Büscher, 2021) as well as broader publications on the spectacle (Giroux, 2016) were used. In addition to a political ecology framework, this paper draws from media and communication studies (Castells 1996; Dean 2001, 2005; Fuchs 2017; Tufekci 2017; Odell 2019) as social media is fundamental in the production, reproduction, circulation, and amplification of the spectacle of extinction and can be useful to political ecology discourse.

3.2 Spectacle of Extinction

In this paper, the spectacle of extinction is theorized based on Debord's (1967) concept of the Spectacle, illustrating how communication platforms, technologies, and media align in the production, reproduction, creation, co-creation, amplification, and circulation of cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction. Debord (1967/1995) explained that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). Debord (1967) saw such mediation of images "as a central feature of late capitalism, in which images become commodities alienated from the relationships that produced them and consumed in ignorance of the same" (Igoe, 2010: 375). Discussed below, changes in the operation of attention over social media means that it is not, merely, content or information conveyed through images that is a commodity, but engagement through sharing, posting, tweeting, and amplifying content to reach broader participation. Spaces opened up by social media are perceived as facilitating public engagement and are increasingly used in a political context (Stieglitz and Dang – Xuan, 2013). In the "'cute cat theory' of activism and the public sphere," (Zuckermen, as cited in Tefucki, 2017: 20) explains how "platforms that have nonpolitical functions can become more politically powerful because it is harder to censor their large numbers of users who are eager to connect with one another or to share their latest 'cute cat' pictures" (20). Cheetah conservation NGOs utilize the hyper-visibility of social media to focus conservation politics globally by circulating news, information, and images with #SaveTheCheetah, #RacingExtinction, #Conservation, and simply #Cheetah, etc. #SaveTheCheetah is not just a

statement or straphanger to a post, it is part of the visual politics of raising awareness and is a link to corresponding images, posts, tweets, debates, and conversations online. Increasing online engagement along with the hyper-circulation of politics as mediated content is where the spectacle of extinction diverts from Debord's (1967/1995) Spectacle and Igoe's (2010, 2017) conceptualization of the Spectacle of Nature. Section 2.1 reviews social media engagement—illustrating the space(s) where cheetah conservation politics are mediated and showing how extinction is amplified in the attention economy. Section 2.2 looks at the online 'space(s) of appearance' over social media and the alienation of politics and power through the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation.

3.3 The Politics of Cheetah Conservation in the Time of the Attention Economy

In the last decade, new media spaces, communication platforms, and technologies have shown an immense capacity to create a spectacle (Adams, 2019). However, the use of media and technology to produce and circulate spectacular nature in conservation has changed significantly. Conservation has moved from broadcasting spectacular nature over televised programming, magazines, and nature documentaries to circulating it over YouTube, smart phones, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Changes in media platforms have transitioned from specialized communities of users to reach a more diverse globalized public (Giroux 2016; Poster 2001). Consequently, social media has "changed the operation of a key resource: *attention*" (Tufekci, 2017: 30). In the past, mass media operated as the sole mediator of public attention (Tufekci, 2017); now, anyone with a page and/or platform can create, co-create, and circulate content, generate ideas, document events, and spread news as part of the "decentralized structure of the internet" (Fuchs, 2017: 243). Changes in mass media, Tufekci (2017) explained, represent a "radically different mode of information and attention flow" (29). More people on social media, the more useful the platforms are, and for more people as social media platforms harness the "power of network effects" (Tufekci, 2017: 20). And currently, social media platforms have enormous user bases to harness this power. Facebook has 1.84 billion daily active users worldwide (Facebook, Inc., 2021). Instagram has one billion users sharing 500 million stories every day (Iqbal, 2021). And Twitter reports 192 million "monetized active daily users" (Twitter, Inc., 2021). What is important about these numbers is not how many users are on each platform, but the immensity of the space(s) cheetah conservation NGOs work in to engage global audiences and compete for attention and funding. Space that is created through online engagement connects global audiences through the constant flow of images, information, and content across social media landscapes. It is in this space where spectacular representations of politics, agency, and struggles are mediated and where the possibility for the global public to socially, economically, and politically engage and connect for a cause lies.

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Odell (2019) argued, "act like dams that capitalize on our natural interests in others and an ageless need for community, hijacking and frustrating our most innate desires, and profiting from them" (xi). Over social media, the production and dissemination of images and knowledge(s) "not only shape people's perceptions of the world, but mediate social and human–environmental relationships" (Igoe, 2010: 375).

Conservation knowledge, images, and power are produced, negotiated, and sold across "space, place, and at various scales" through "assemblages of science, media, culture, environment, and politics" (Goodman et.al., 2016: 678). Growing scientific, political, and global concern over environmental issues, like extinction, raises questions about how social relations with nature are mediated and how contemporary systems of communication are influencing and constructing such relationships and crises (Harrison and Burgess, 1994). This is significant given social media's propensity to be used as a tool to create fear, both by news media and users alike (Odell, 2019). Over social media, the urgency inferred in cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction is a product of the sites' need to compete, where the "logic of advertising and clicks dictates the media experience…" (Odell, 2019: 59). What drives this process is not the content or information in social media posts but the engagement (Odell, 2019), in other words, the amount of people reached through likes, posts, retweets, and shares. These hyper-accelerated actions might be for a well-intentioned cause but instead of generating reasoned communication, there is a reactionary response propelled by fear and anger (Odell, 2019). According to Odell (2019), how this is expressed over social media "so often feels like firecrackers setting off other firecrackers in a very small room that soon gets filled with smoke" (60). This describes perfectly how it sometimes feels when #extinction is circulated and shared over social media.

When creating, co-creating, circulating, and amplifying cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction cheetah conservation NGOs are selling extinction and extending the alliance between conservation and capitalism every day. And it is in this way that the spectacle of extinction is a particular productive process in capitalist production. Spectacular claims of extinction necessitate both economic and dramatic performances in order to 'conjure global finance' (Tsing, 2005). This is what Tsing (2005) conceptualized in her book, *Friction,* as "the economy of appearances" (57). Economic and dramatic performances over social media are dependent on harnessing and mobilizing the attention of global audiences. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are, after all, in the business of monetizing attention (Tefukci, 2017). Attention, in and of itself, is a scarce commodity (Nixon, 2020) as it relies on global attention spans easily distracted by the continuous flow of information online. Global 'fear' of extinction plays on the emotions of global audiences by using dramatic imagery and urgent calls for action, attempting to harness global attention, funding, and support. Extinction is incentivized and turned into capital, in part, through its global creation, co-creation, circulation, amplification, and hyper-visualization over social media. In this way, social media and new technologies are continuously (re)shaping how social relationships and human-environmental relationships are perceived and spectacularized in new processes of accumulation, circulation, and control (Debord, 1995; Giroux, 2016). In the continuous flows of information over media spaces, capital works as a unit in images and representations; that are subsequently, realized, invested, and accumulated in the sphere of circulation (Castells, 1996). Attention, Nixon (2020) noted, is a source of value as well as a limited commodity. The power to harness and maintain attention is "power over consumption" (Nixon, 2020: 75). According to Nixon (2020), power over consumption can be realized by both consumers (global audiences) and advertisers (cheetah conservation NGOs) alike. Media power is power over attention. The spectacle of extinction draws on this idea of media power, attempting to harness global attention to focus on the NGOs and cheetahs'

#RaceAgainstExtinction. The following section will explain how the power to enact such politics in Namibia is the abstraction.

3.4 Cheetah Conservation Online: Activism, Politics, and Power

If/when the spectacle of extinction gets attention, it can appear global audiences are acting collectively through a shared responsibility towards the planet. The appearance of collective action over social media is part of the logic of the platforms. Media power is fetishized and believed to influence public opinion and hold weight in policy decisions and debates (Ross et al., 2021). Calls for global participation in cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction are imbued with assumptions about political power over social media. Assumptions that more information, awareness, and attention to environmental issues over social media will lead to effective change. For example, in Conservation Biology, an editorial on the benefits of Twitter, described how "engaging with Twitter can be a powerful way for conservation scientists to reach journalists, policy makers, and the general public" (Parsons et al., 2014: 300). Twitter, Parsons et al. (2014) claimed, can "provide a platform for scientists to directly reach decision makers (or their staff) with conservation messages" (300). Harrington et al. (2018) maintains, public awareness of conservation "can be hugely important in instigating, driving and supporting remedial action, largely through influences on policy change and funding" (108). The politics of technology, however, is "entangled with the politics of public space and of the environment" (Odell, 199). Dean (2005) argued that the fantasy of activity or participation is "materialized through technology fetishism" (54). In the attention economy, Zhang et al. (2018) explains, "attention shifts the conversation from who has the power to communicate to who has the power to attract an audience that will pay attention" (3162).

Social media creates new spaces for the global public to come together over what appears as public space (Fuchs, 2017). In a sense, this follows what Arendt argued in *The Human Condition* "all political acts require a 'space of appearance;' people appearing collectively defines politics and the public realm: 'it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the world" (Merrifield, 2015: 289; Arendt, 1958/1998: 198). Arendt's thinking about power is useful here. For Arendt (1958/1998), the political realm is created out of acting together in the sharing of "space and deeds" (198). Subsequently, power, Arendt (1958/1998) argued, is what "keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking [men], in existence" (200). Odell (2019), described Arendt's 'space of appearance' as the place to be addressed, understood, and challenged. It was the physical space where "we gather, we say what we mean, and then we act" (Odell, 2019: 177). Social media spaces, however, challenge what Merrifield (2015) and Arendt (1958/1998) understood as public space and political 'spaces of appearance.' Mobilized engagement gives the appearance of people appearing collectively. The online 'political realm', consequently, is constructed out of engagement, in other words, the creation, co-creation, amplification, and hyper-visualization and -circulation of images, information, and content to reach broader participation. Consequently, power in cheetah conservation is not situated in the cheetah conservation NGOs themselves, but in their constant need to circulate and amplify the extinction crisis to raise global awareness, attention, and money. Image-making, Castells (1996)

stated, “is power–making” (476). Over social media, political actors “exist in the power game through and by the media” (Castells, 1996: 476). Namibia-based cheetah conservation NGOs practice political power in conservation through awareness raising to amplifying media/public responses that influence rather than ground political power in the realm of policy, or, rather, the political realm. It is ultimately the separation of power and politics in local and global cheetah conservation practice that presents the main contradiction analyzed in this paper. This contradiction follows what Debord (1967/1995), Marx (1867/2013), and Igoe (2010, 2017) theorized as processes of alienation.

Alienation, to quote Igoe (2010), is “a general loss of control by people over the conditions that shape their lives and their ability to express themselves in creative ways” (378). Igoe (2010) gave an example of this as the severing of “social relationships and detachment from place” (378). Social media(tion) is not only the detachment from place, but the severing of both social and political relationships. The ability of social media to create the illusion of agency to act politically online, is the alienation of politics and political power that the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation represents. By mobilizing attention through mediated communication, Giroux (2016) argues that the spectacle offers the “populace a sense of unity that serves to integrate them into state power” (p. 21). The spectacle of extinction here is operationalized outside of state power through non-state, private conservation actors by engaging spaces opened up by social media platforms and growing international concern over biodiversity loss and extinction. Extinction is both a pedagogical tool and a deliberate strategy used by cheetah conservation NGOs to leverage social, economic, and political relations over global social networks and critical in narratives of global awareness raising and action. Giroux (2016) argued that the spectacle is transforming the very nature of politics; particularly, how the spectacle is central in legitimizing social relations “in which the political and pedagogical are redefined in ways that undercut democratic freedom and practice” (19). Over social media, what is promised as a democratic space (Amedie, 2015), not only creates and engages new spaces for the global public to come together, connect, and interact collectively; but, more critically, space for economic, political, and cultural power structures and asymmetries (Fuchs, 2017).

3.5 Research Methodology

3.6 Research Design

This paper examines the politics of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the mediation of spectacular representations and circulation of extinction and conservation politics over social media as an embedded case study. This research design offered a strategy for understanding the dynamics of the extinction spectacle and the local, national, global, and media spaces of the politics of cheetah conservation (Cohen et.al., 2000). Case study design is bounded by time, space, and activity and accommodates multiple units of analysis within a single study (Yin, 1984). The bounded nature of case study design enabled the researcher to frame and manage contextual variables during thirteen months of fieldwork in Namibia and two years of online data

collection to produce thick descriptions of the following units—cheetah conservation NGOs and their actors (voluntourists and researchers), social media content, other conservation NGOs in Namibia, and Namibian conservation policies and practices that intersected with the politics of cheetah conservation in Namibia.

3.7 Sites and Participants

This study focused on conservation NGOs in Namibia working in similar capacities in local, national, global, and media spaces. Several NGOs are included in this study but, for the purposes of this paper, are identified as 'the cheetah conservation NGOs' to protect the identities of the respondents. Cheetah conservation in Namibia is a small community; therefore, it was necessary to maintain the anonymity of NGOs and all respondents. This paper is focused on the politics of cheetah conservation, subsequently, is not intended to be a deep dive into cheetah conservation and/or the work of each NGO. Important for this paper is that the NGOs all have similar practices: pose solutions to the same conservation issues, part of the private sector, regulated by the state, have captive cheetahs on-site, and all use social media to promote their mission. The only substantial difference is that one NGO does not have a voluntourism program where voluntourists pay a significant fee to participate. The NGOs have locations across Namibia, and all are located on privately-owned land. Conservation work is mainly done on-site, through voluntourism and ecotourism. Important to also mention is positionality, both the author and most, but not all, respondents at the NGOs were from Western countries. The NGO actors in this study were mainly researchers and voluntourists who had traveled to Namibia to work and/or volunteer.

3.8 Data Collection Methods and Analytical Framework

This embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the global extinction spectacle was organized and selected on the basis of known attributes and distinctive features which allowed for the collection of a variety of data and sources resonating with a theory-led methodology. This paper develops and employs an analytical framework from Debord's (1967) concept of the Spectacle to contextualize the conditions and processes of selling extinction over social media platforms as well as the concrete/material realities of the politics of cheetah conservation in Namibia. There are multiple and complex material-technological relationships that produce or circulate commodified images and material impacts of digital technologies and infrastructures, however, these material-technological relationships/impacts were not the focus of the analysis. Rather, this analysis focused on the continuous (re)shaping of social relationships and human-environmental relationships over social media, focusing on power and politics in cheetah conservation and the spaces where cheetah conservation politics are mediated online.

Empirical data was collected in Namibia through ethnographic fieldwork from September 2017-October 2018. Cheetah conservation 'in practice' was conducted predominantly on-site at the

NGOs in Namibia. Cheetah conservation strategies at the NGOs in this study ranged from tourism, voluntourism, research, and on-site animal interactions/viewing. What was important in this study was to understand how cheetah conservation politics was framed at these organizations and how it is understood by all actors involved. Information was collected from private conservation organizations (the NGOs), Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), local community members and officials, tourists, international voluntourists, and researchers in the field. Respondents were organized into three different categories (Researchers, Namibian Officials, and Voluntourists) in order to protect the identity of the respondents. So as not to confuse readers, Namibian officials is the combination of government and conservation officials that work directly in Namibian conservation governance and researchers consisted of researchers both at the NGOs and other NGOs with knowledge and/or connection to cheetah conservation. Data collection methods included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, volunteer journals, and questionnaires. Interviews were used when speaking with researchers, Namibian officials, and a small selection of voluntourists and were recorded and transcribed. Participant observation at the NGOs meant taking part in conservation activities and research mostly on-site. Conservation activities ranged from animal/carnivore feeds, cheetah walks, research, and game counts. During participant observation, the voluntourist journals (52) were filled out by voluntourists who agreed to participate. The journals documented their experiences and how/if their understanding of conservation changed over the course of their stay at the NGOs.

Data was collected over social media for a period of two years. Data analyzed in this paper consisted of screenshots taken of the NGOs' and affiliate organizations' social media content. The data used in this paper does portray the global status of cheetahs, not the local status in Namibia, which at the time of this research was considered stable. Namibia's stable cheetah population was only revealed during interviews and personal communications with respondents in Namibia and generally not a topic of conversation among international voluntourists and tourists or documented online. All posts quoted in this paper are from the NGOs in Namibia. Data analysis did include affiliate organizations of the same name but different country (for example: WWF, WWF UK). All social media content refers to cheetah conservation in Namibia only. All media data in this paper was collected from public pages/accounts and not from personal and/or individual social media pages and will also be kept anonymous. Hashtags were monitored but no individual pages/posts are identified.

3.9. Contextualizing the #Extinction Spectacle

The following analysis serves to contextualize extinction; specifically, the disjuncture between the abstract and concrete/material reality of cheetah conservation politics in Namibia. What is important to keep in mind is that cheetah conservation at the NGOs' is done mostly on-site, on privately-owned land. Conservation in Namibia is through the state, whereas cheetah conservation is in the private sector and outside of state-sanctioned conservation in Namibia. The NGOs in this study have established cheetah conservation as their business model, and this has particular implications for structures of politics and power imbricated in land ownership and

rights. Specifically, the NGOs location outside of state-sanctioned conservation on privately-owned land means that the NGOs are regulated, and therefore, do not have the political power in Namibian conservation governance that is promised in the social media posts examined in this paper. The following is a discussion of my findings: (4.1) the power and politics of selling extinction, (4.2) cheetah conservation politics #online, and (4.3) cheetah conservation politics offline.

3.10 Extinction: The Irony of Our Time

What emerged from the data collected both in Namibia and online is that extinction was used as both a pedagogical tool and deliberate strategy by the NGOs to leverage global attention and funding. It was the general consensus in interviews and personal communications with respondents based in Namibia that cheetah populations in Namibia were stable. Outside of these personal communications, however, cheetahs' global status was the reference point at the NGOs and for tourists and voluntourists visiting Namibia if/when extinction was discussed. Cheetahs may be under threat when looking at the global context, but, as a Namibian official stated, "in Namibia, it is just not so."[18] In an interview, the Namibian official explained, "the irony of our time, is that we incentivize extinction." Downlisting species, the official continued, "threatens the direction of many of these organizations as they must keep things rare so that they can get funded." Because of this, the official added, "there is no incentive to take species towards being common… if your species is not extremely threatened, you're not getting money."[19] In regards to globally threatened species, the official noted, people tend to want a global solution to environmental concerns when wildlife management options vary depending on the context. This was the case with cheetahs and the global #RaceAgainstExtinction. Extinction, another Namibian official responded, "needs to be contextualized."[20] Because, the official explained, extinction claims serve a particular agenda depending on who is making the claims, "if it is an NGO whose life depends on saving the cheetah from extinction and that is how it has raised money for twenty, thirty, or forty years, the cheetah will be at the brink of extinction."[21]

The cheetah conservation NGOs in this study have been working on cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction for thirty plus years. The NGOs' ongoing efforts have adapted to changes over social media by incorporating visual politics (e.g., #SaveTheCheetahs) in raising awareness for cheetah conservation. Political action to #SaveTheCheetahs means spreading the word and embedded in the social media posts and content is the idea that you are part of a shared goal. A voluntourist explained, "conservation has to get spread so more people know about it, with movies, social media, and so on…. find a way to make it fun and interesting!"[22] In an interview, a researcher described that over social media; environmental education, awareness of extinction,

[18] Interview 10/11/18
[19] Interview, Namibian official, 10/11/2018
[20] Interview 9/27/18
[21] Interview 9/27/2018
[22] Volunteer Journal

and other environmental concerns can "go straight out from the images, it's very exciting." As another researcher discussed, social media "is great for promoting things and for getting the message out there because everybody's always on social media… If you want to bring awareness or something like that, it's a fabulous tool."[23] For one voluntourist, extinction was something "the world should know more about it and everybody should fight against it." Voluntourists' and researchers' fears of extinction and ideas about conservation reflected a global perspective. Conservation, a voluntourist argued, is "a global issue, or at least ownership of the problem lies with the world, not just the hosting countries, e.g., cheetah conservation should matter to, and be addressed by, the whole world, not just Africa…If a species ceases to exist, it effects the whole planet." Another voluntourist believed, "as a society we must work together to prevent this [extinction] from happening."[24] These perspectives appeal to this abstract global unity and action over social media; monolithic ideas of what should be done to solve the crisis as opposed to looking critically at what is being done by cheetah conservation NGOs locally, globally, and online. As a researcher noted in an interview, "there's so much misrepresentation and fake news and angled exposure that it just doesn't give the complete picture for a lot of things." And this is important when looking at the NGOs' efforts to #SaveTheCheetah.

In Namibia, one voluntourist reacted to the horror of extinction: "I wish people would care more, instead of wasting time on politics." [25] This statement illustrates the central issue addressed in this paper—the problematic interaction between the abstract and concrete/material reality of conservation politics and the way money and power is leveraged through global claims of extinction. The voluntourist's frustration at 'wasting time on politics' indicates this disjunction and comes from the voluntourist's experiences at the NGOs where urgent conservation actions were hindered by government regulations. And it is clear from the voluntourist's statement whose interests should be prioritized. 'Wasting time on politics' infers that conservation is not political and is ultimately in service of the greater good, thus should supersede local political processes that are viewed by voluntourists as impeding the NGOs conservation efforts. Voluntourists, however, were not generally informed about Namibian conservation policy and practice, only the hurdles the NGOs must go through in order to carry out their conservation agendas. This voluntourist's sentiment is one among others reflecting apolitical views of extinction that gloss over how asymmetrical power relations are created and reinforced through extinction narratives. Social media posts mirrored the voluntourists' sentiments, reflecting ideas that social change can be realized if there are more people caring about conservation, more awareness of the issues, and more attention to the NGOs. The idea that political action for cheetahs can be done over Twitter or through global awareness of the issues provides a singular and privileged view of the complex reality of on-the-ground conservation politics in Namibia. Not only is this problematic but it confuses online 'likes' and 'activism' with effective on-the-ground political action and involvement.

[23] Interview 9/25/2018
[24] Volunteer Journal
[25] Volunteer Journal

Changes in social media have created new political communities online, and, in so doing, offering an increasingly larger space for cheetah conservation NGOs to mediate conservation politics and influence larger global audiences. In mediating conservation politics and, in extension, extinction online, power resides in the ability to harness and maintain both attention and money for cheetah conservation. As a Namibian official explained "many times they [NGOs] have the power because they have the money"[26]. This calls attention to questions about the flow of money and power in cheetah conservation and its influence in Namibia. One Namibian official spoke with me at length about politics, power, and money in conservation. The official recounted tensions inherent in conservation when political relationships develop around environmental resources. The political part of conservation, according to the Namibian official, is that we have a common responsibility for the planet, similar to the common responsibility detailed in voluntourists' sentiments on extinction. With that common responsibility, the official explained, political relationships have developed around these resources, as they have with cheetahs. While there is a common responsibility for the planet, the official noted, the responsibility is differentiated. What brings tension, the official continued, is what role the species has locally. The official asked, "if you bring in foreigners to manage or conserve a particular species, how is that perceived locally?" This question is important to ask in regards to global extinction narratives and cheetah conservation practice at the NGOs in Namibia and, in particular, voluntourism programs. Explaining how "power relations stems from information asymmetry," the official went on to say:

> There are different power relations that comes to play due to the information asymmetry in this equation, but also to the flows of money. They say money is power. So, if I'm the holder of grant to do conservation work, I also then have certain bargaining power. Is that with the community or the government or somebody else? Then comes the policy power. In that policy power, of course, can make or break a project. If you're not aware of the policy issues and implications of your project you are not working within the realm of the policy... So, I think one is to be aware of these relations between power and information and all. And also, then that's the question, who has enough power to sit in the circle of influence?[27]

Questions of power and power relations is of particular importance when looking at how cheetah conservation NGOs are circulating and amplifying the #RaceAgainstExtinction across the globe. The social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation, discussed in the following section, and the conservation experiences described by the international voluntourists visiting Namibia, work in tandem to shift political power from state to non-state, private conservation actors.

[26] Interview 6/14/2018
[27] Interview 6/14/2018

3.11 Cheetah Conservation Politics #Online

On International Cheetah Day December 4, 2018, an informational photo was posted on Instagram. It implored followers to "please help spread the word, learn and share to #CelebratetheCheetah."[28] Subsequently, a purring cheetah video directed Instagram followers to enjoy the "fun clip" and "share and tag your friends to raise awareness for the plight of the cheetah."[29] At that time, there were over 13,039 views of the post. It was one of many others claiming the cheetah "still needs our help if it is to survive and win the race against extinction."[30] These posts offered a glimpse of what was circulating over Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter by the NGOs and amplified by global audiences in one day. While #InternationalCheetahDay draws more attention to cheetahs online, cheetah conservation NGOs are active daily over the platforms. Posts depict content ranging from global events to on-the-ground conservation efforts at the NGOs. Efforts that include feeding captive wildlife, baboon walks, and cheetah/carnivore feeds. Audio-visual representations show current research, voluntourist experiences, cheetah merchandise, global collaboration, and corporate sponsorships. The same social media posts directed global audiences to act by donating, posting, tweeting, and sharing. The focus of this section is on the spaces over social media where cheetah conservation NGOs engage the politics of extinction and compete for global attention and funding.

Social media is a tool cheetah conservation NGOs use to further their mission and broaden their user base. All cheetah conservation NGOs in this study are active on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and all circulate the spectacle of extinction. Cheetah conservation NGOs have their main page as well as pages for other locations, business ventures, and foci, both in Namibia and globally. Social media use varies between the NGOs; however, all have shared images and narratives of cheetah conservation and the extinction crisis over the platforms. While all NGOs have significant global reach, one stands out. This NGO in Namibia has affiliate groups and organizations in most US states as well as in multiple countries in Europe, Japan, Australia, and several in Africa. Most, but not all, of these chapters/affiliates have social media sites as well. Affiliate and voluntourism organizations/locations link to the main website(s) for information, content, and donations. Some of the sites include fundraising pages so anyone can support the NGO's mission by helping raise money on Facebook. These fundraisers are linked from personal Facebook pages to the NGO's main page and anyone can check and see how much money each fundraiser has made. For example, on March 9th, 2021, seventy-four online fundraisers collected $80,636 US dollars for one NGO (accessed 3/09/21). Social media is also used across Namibia. Many groups and pages engage with local environmental matters, policies, and concerns, occasionally some also include information on cheetahs.

While the NGOs' global reach isn't incredibly large per se, the platforms do provide the opportunity for those numbers to expand if a post grabs attention and/or is amplified. This is why, over social media, attention is both a source of value and a limited commodity. In an

[28] Cheetah conservation NGO in Namibia, screenshot by author 12/5/18
[29] ibid
[30] ibid

interview a researcher stated that drawing attention to conservation is important, because, as the researcher explained, attention "will move on." The researcher discussed how "lion numbers, cheetah numbers, all of those things, again, can have these moments where they're hot topics, and then they kind of disappear and come back again." To the researcher, what was important was that there was a message to send out. Another researcher spoke to this from experience: "social media is one of the most powerful tools right now… one of the most powerful marketing tools."[31] Social media platforms have incredibly large user bases (see section 2.1) and provide increasing opportunities for the NGOs to reach broader audiences. The researcher quantified the global reach of one of the NGOs, explaining that "the average number of people that we reach per week is anywhere between 20,000 to 25,000 people." The researcher continued, discussing how the global reach depends on the images posted, if that week "we post more images of animals, baboons, cheetahs, or even the lions, that number normally does better… between 20,000 to 50,000 people." However, "when you do basically a mixture of both humans and animals, it's normally between 15,000 to 19,000 people per week." Not all researchers at the organizations knew how to use social media but it was explained that the photographers who came to the organizations did. What was nice about having photographers, a researcher noted, was "some of the people have got like two million followers on Instagram and Facebook…they're the ones putting the story up for us…it's amazing."[32] Another researcher mentioned working with film crews from BBC and National Geographic among many others. From data collected online, this can be said for all of the NGOs in this study. It is not only professional photographers that share cheetahs' story, tourists, voluntourists, researchers, celebrities, news organizations, and the global public share social media content as well. What links the stories and fundraising efforts are the hashtags (e.g., #SaveTheCheetah, #RaceAgainstExtinction, #Cheetahs, #Conservation etc.). People sharing the story can reach an exponentially larger audience the more shares, tweets, likes, and engagement by people and organizations with more followers, like National Geographic. Discussed in 2.1, this is possible through changes in social media and the operation of attention as a key resource. Cheetah conservation NGOs engage in the politics that circulates as content where they must compete for visibility, money, and attention. As the next section explains, the Namibian political system functions independently of online cheetah conservation politics discussed here.

3.12 Cheetah Conservation Politics Offline

'Doing cheetah conservation' at the NGOs in Namibia can mean walking with baboons, cleaning enclosures (e.g., poop-based labor), going on game counts, caring for goats, and feeding resident carnivores (e.g., tossing raw meat over enclosures). Conservation work that also included luxury lodges, merchandise, various business ventures, and tourist activities (e.g., carnivore feeding, cheetah walks, cheetah runs, etc.). All are activities that help support and fund the work of the NGOs. Conservation practices can easily be justified to young multi-national voluntourists excited to get the chance to work closely with charismatic species. Voluntourists were generally uncritical

[31] Interview 11/22/2017
[32] Interview 9/3/2018

of their experiences at the NGOs and the immersive structure of daily conservation work-work that ran up against government regulations. Through my own experiences at the NGOs, conservation work was all encompassing. Daily activities and regular conservation emergencies legitimized the NGOs' conservation narratives. All day, every day, the 'reality' of conservation at the NGOs was explained to the voluntourists while doing what the NGOs defined as conservation. While extinction wasn't a topic of daily conversations, the urgency of conservation was. In the journals, voluntourists detailed a singular, all-encompassing view of conservation, only to be complicated by offline conservation 'realities.' These conservation realities meant having to work within a regulatory framework instituted by the Namibian government. Voluntourists expressed their surprised at how much politics was involved in conservation. "It's very political" one voluntourist put in a bullet point. Another voluntourist argued: "conservation is not just going out and [saving] a single animal once in a while and then things will get better… It is hard work with politics and changing people's minds." A voluntourist wrote: "being in Namibia made me realize that conservation might be more complicated than it seems," explaining why: "it can be hard to find a solution that will make everyone (wildlife, farmers, government etc.) happy." Another voluntourist stated that conservation "should not be (but it is) up to governments to decide on."[33] The international voluntourists were quite explicit on where they think political power should be located and whose agenda should be prioritized in conservation in Namibia.

Government regulations were viewed as an impediment to conservation efforts at the NGOs by both the voluntourists and researchers. One voluntourist concluded:

> …I've realized not only the importance of cheetah conservation (and conservation in general), but also the hard work behind it. I now not only see the challenges we have with the locals and poachers, but also with the state/government that also have other interests than conservation on their minds. A lot of interests has to add up and are unfortunately often in conflict and has to be worked out. [34]

Despite many conservation challenges facing cheetahs and Namibia's wildlife, some voluntourists argued the need for the cheetah conservation NGOs and the work they were doing. Another voluntourist wrote that the NGOs "will always come up against hurdles, money, legislation, and politics but we need projects like this." One of the hurdles that shaped voluntourists' and researchers' experiences with conservation politics was when immediate actions for conservation were thwarted by the MET. Actions that, for example, required the immediate translocation of wildlife rescued from persecution on private/commercial farms. What might sound like good conservation work by the NGOs and a win – win for conservation, however, demands a bit more scrutiny. Translocations are a zero-sum game finding where rescued animals can be released, or if they can be released. Cheetahs, for example, often don't stay in national parks ranging predominantly on private/commercial farms. Rescuing one from

[33] Volunteer Journal
[34] Volunteer Journal

one site usually means trouble for another, even if released on NGOs' property. The alternative is captivity or worse. Cheetah conservation NGOs have a bad reputation in commercial/game farming communities for releasing wildlife without notifying nearby farmers. Commercial farmers are not financially compensated for livestock lost to predation nor do they have voluntourists paying to help them. These challenges with locals, and MET's work to regulate the NGOs, frustrate multi-national voluntourists eager to participate. And acutely felt when researchers and voluntourists were denied the permits necessary to proceed. Translocating wildlife without a permit is illegal in Namibia.

Cheetah conservation NGOs must follow Namibia's laws regulating what can and can't be done on-site and off, regardless of the urgency. Subsequently, the voluntourists' understanding of politics picked up on the tensions between public and private conservation interests. What the voluntourists weren't aware of, when describing their frustrations dealing with politics, is that conservation at the NGOs is privatized and considered an economic activity by the government. Voluntourists are not generally provided information about Namibian conservation policy and practice, only the NGOs' conservation agenda. What is not explained to voluntourists is that Namibia, as one of the first countries in Africa to put conservation in its constitution, has put considerable effort into conserving its endemic species in the wild. Something Namibian officials take great pride in. Because the NGOs are private actors in conservation, this perspective is absent in voluntourists' statements. The NGOs' location on private property and in the private sector means institutional conservation practices are regulated by the state. The regulations, however, are not intended to impede the NGOs' conservation efforts. The MET does bring in the NGOs when their services are needed. But the NGOs are regulated for a reason. Namibian policy for large carnivores, in which cheetahs are included, is meant to monitor all organizations with captive animals on-site. All NGOs in this study have captive cheetahs and various other economic activities throughout Namibia. A Namibian official related that when the organizations "organize themselves as non-government organizations and they run volunteerism programs they say they are supporting conservation"[35]. The Namibian official explained that at the NGOs, that "is what goes into conservation work." The NGOs, the official continued, are "linked to a business entity, either on their farm or somewhere else." Subsequently, the NGOs in this study are considered "income generating sources"[36] and part of Namibia's private sector, not state-sanctioned conservation. When it comes to decisions, particularly regarding conservation policy, conservation organizations are consulted by the MET, but, at the end of the day "most of the laws are meant to regulate them."[37] The private sector attends meetings and workshops and can provide feedback but nothing in terms of directly influencing policy. Stated in one of the principles (2,3,4) of The National Policy on Conservation and Management of Large Carnivores in Namibia (Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2016), "the State recognizes civil society, including the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations, as important stakeholders in the long-term conservation of large carnivores and shall consult, where necessary, with civil society to ensure the long-term survival of large carnivores" (7). A Namibian official explained,

[35] Ibid
[36] Interview 9/27/2018
[37] ibid

"scientists and researchers are not really policy-makers."[38] The official discussed that "some places they do a very good job if the organization is focused on conservation of these animals." But, as another Namibian official said, there are "people hiding behind conservation to make money."[39] The Namibian official stated that there is a "fine line between what is said in the narratives and conservation."[40]

As mentioned previously and detailed in this section, cheetah conservation NGOs have established cheetah conservation as their business model. On privately-owned land in Namibia, any form of business practice can be carried out, barring any illegal activities of course[41]. And this does include conservation. Cheetahs are a huge "draw card"[42] for the voluntourists and for tourism; but, also for global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever'. Raising awareness for cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction draws both voluntourism and international funding to the cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia, however, not political power or a seat at the table in decision-making processes in Namibian conservation governance. In an interview, a Namibian official brought up an important question regarding the role(s) of the private sector in conservation, in which cheetah conservation NGOs are a part. The official asked rhetorically "if there was equity in conservation?" Particularly, if the private sector is brought to the table, into this conservation conversation in Namibia, and the sector starts to make money, does money go to the community or does the money flow out of the community?[43]

3.13). Conclusion

Social media and new technologies are continuously (re)shaping how social relationships and human-environmental relationships are perceived and spectacularized in new processes of accumulation, circulation, and control (Debord, 1995; Giroux, 2016). In discussing social movements, Tufecki (2017) explained that attention, rather than information, is the vital commodity. And in the struggle for power, it is attention that is the prize (Tufecki, 2017). The invasive logic of commercial social media platforms, Odell (2019) argued, keep us "in a profitable state of anxiety, envy, and distraction" (xii). And it is in this way extinction, as spectacle, is incentivized over social media. The NGOs engage in political power through awareness raising to amplifying media/public responses to influence rather than ground political power in the realm of policy, or, what Arendt (1958/1998) understood as, the political realm. It is ultimately the separation of power and politics in local and global cheetah conservation practice that presents what Debord (1995), Marx (1867/2013), and Igoe (2010, 2017) theorized as processes of alienation. In this paper, social media(tion) is the alienation of politics and political power.

[38] Interview 10/11/2018
[39] Interview 10/11/2018
[40] Ibid
[41] Interview 9/27/2018
[42] Interview 6/14/2018
[43] Interview 6/14/2018

In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Debord (1998) wrote: "when the spectacle stops talking about something for three days, it is as if it did not exist" (20). What happens, then, if cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction is no longer tweeted, posted, shared, or otherwise, circulated? What happens if global audiences stop paying attention? Will cheetahs be 'saved,' or will they have lost the #race? And, what happens in conservation if extinction loses its emotive power? The problem with mediating conservation politics over social media is that perceived action only works to integrate global audiences into the spectacular global extinction mode of production and not effective action in conservation. The emotive power of the word extinction in conservation draws attention away from important political contexts, critical perspectives, and expanding informational, economic, and power asymmetries. As this paper showed, the reality of cheetah conservation is that it is a business regulated by the state and extinction is both a pedagogical tool and a deliberate strategy used to leverage social, economic, and political relations over global social networks. The illusion of agency to act over the platforms does more than just funnel money into the NGOs, it circulates misinformation and pits globally threatened species against each other for visibility, attention, and funding. When the emotive power of extinction is used and, subsequently, incentivized to engage global audiences in local conservation crises and fund conservation NGOs, narratives of fear around losing a species are increasingly overriding narratives of social and ecological justice. At the same time, the urgency to #SaveTheCheetahs obfuscates the connection between conservation fundraising campaigns and broader structures of global capitalism, a system that is ultimately responsible for biodiversity loss and climate change.

Chapter 4: The Business of Saving Cheetahs: Cheetah ecology and the diverse politics at work in human wildlife conflict (HWC) interventions in Namibia

The Business of Saving Cheetahs: Cheetah Ecology and the Diverse Politics at Work in Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC) Interventions in Namibia

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the intersection of cheetah ecology, human wildlife conflict (HWC), settler colonialism, and private land ownership in Namibia. Cheetahs' ecological adaptation(s) in Namibia point to the need for a fuller picture of the permutations of conservation and conservation NGOs in Africa. In the case of Namibia, cheetahs' ecological adaptations to interspecies threats have shaped their territory to be primarily on private commercial farms where they cause HWC. While cheetahs cause HWC on commercial farms and farming communities in Namibia writ large, HWC itself is not the conflict discussed in this research. Rather, HWC is the catalyst for what this paper will analyze to be a conflict between two private sector industries—commercial farming and cheetah conservation. After thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia, this case study suggested diverse politics are at work within the NGOs conservation intervention policies at global, national, and local scales. This research identified a theoretical and conceptual fissure which led to an anomaly in the field of political ecology. This paper will argue HWC is an organizing structure in the business of saving cheetahs. The NGOs studied in Namibia are a service-based industry. They invest in both tangible and intangible conservation services rather than market-based participatory approaches, ecosystem services, and/or economic development. This is illustrative of a shift from market-based conservation to a service-based approach and calls for widening the political ecology lens to account for other cases of NGOs' on-the-ground conservation business practices in Africa.

Keywords: Service-Based Conservation, Political Ecology, Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC), Cheetah Ecology, Conservation Service Industry, Cheetah Conservation

4.1 Introduction:

Cheetahs are unique among large carnivores in Namibia. In taxonomic classification, cheetahs are the only remaining member of the *genus* Acinonyx (Melzheimer 2021). A large cat native to Africa and central Iran, cheetahs are characterized by their spots, black tear lines, and speed. Cheetahs are the fastest terrestrial mammal species and can reach up to 70 mph in short sprints. Built for speed, cheetahs have powerful muscles, semi-retractable claws, and a long tail that serves as a rudder. While cheetahs' slender, fragile body is adapted for speed, it renders them vulnerable to interspecies threats and competition with other carnivores. As a result, cheetahs are both predator and prey. Cheetahs might not be 'what's for dinner' but they are preyed upon by other large carnivores for reasons including scavenging a recent kill and/or overlapping territories. Leopards and lions pose the greatest threat to cheetahs but hyenas are a problem as well. Consequently, free-roaming cheetahs in general range in areas with fewer carnivore species, including public and private protected areas and the private facilities of the NGOs studied. Because of large populations of carnivores in Namibia's national parks and in private reserves, more than 95% of the free-roaming cheetah population(s) are found on

private/freehold commercial farms[44] where cheetahs do cause human wildlife conflict (HWC) (Morsbach 1986; Melzheimer 2021). While cheetahs cause HWC on commercial farms and farming communities in Namibia[45] writ large, HWC itself is not the conflict discussed in this research. Rather, HWC is the catalyst for what this paper will analyze to be a conflict between two private sector industries—commercial farming and cheetah conservation. HWC with cheetahs has become an entry point for the NGOs' conservation intervention policy and practice in Namibia. The NGOs specialize in the business of saving cheetahs and have constructed a private service-based conservation industry around conflict mitigation. This paper posits human wildlife conflict (HWC) is an organizing structure for the business of saving cheetahs.

During fieldwork, on-the-ground experiences in Namibia complicated *a priori* assumptions about conservation and conservation NGOs. In this research, analyzing the NGOs' service-based approach to conservation located a fissure in political ecology theorizing and revealed an anomaly. The dominant conservation paradigm in the field of political ecology could not shed light on what is unique to the nature and character of both cheetah conservation and the NGOs studied in Namibia. Kuhn defined an anomaly as "empirical fact that fails to be predicted by an established theorem" (Sam 2013: n.a.). What makes this particular case an anomaly is that empirical evidence collected revealed that the cheetah conservation NGOs were self-contained entities on their own private property and were in Namibia's private sector (Brandon 2021). These NGOs are registered as international NGOs, businesses, charitable trusts and/or foundations and functioned independently from both state- and Namibian NGO-led conservation. They are private facilities, commercial farms, private residences, service-based industries, land holders, and international NGOs all in one. Cheetah conservation NGOs' private facilities are research centers, working commercial farms, private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, and, for some, opportunities for volunteers that sell the novelty of cheetah experiences, activities, attractions, and, importantly, conservation. All are economic activities that financially support the NGOs' own practices of cheetah conservation. Cheetah conservation is inextricably linked to economic activities and business practices at these NGOs. Therefore, the NGOs in this study are conceptualized as the conservation capitalist class. The structure, composition, and management of these NGOs studied adhered to the legal frameworks of international NGOs. Their attributes, however, could not be accounted for under the egis of the established political ecology theorems making the business of saving cheetah less than obvious. This begs the question—Why is it so hard to see conservation as a business model within a political ecology frame of analysis?

The cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia are indeed an anomaly. They are outside of the egis of the dominant political ecology framework because of cheetah ecology, private property, and

[44] For both clarity and brevity, commercial farms/farmers will be used to represent commercial game and livestock farms/farmers in this paper. Cheetah conservation NGOs are also private commercial farms. While most NGOs have converted their farms for tourism, some still remain as working farms. Commercial farms are owned by mostly commercial farmers of Afrikaans and German backgrounds. Land reform has allowed for the redistribution of some land for emerging commercial farmers. While HWC with cheetahs also occurs in CBNRM and communal areas, the conflict discussed in this paper is not HWC itself but the conflict between commercial farmers and the cheetah conservation NGOs studied.

[45] For the broader context of HWC conflicts in Namibia see (Lendelvo and Nuule 2021).

private sector actors in conservation. In cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied, private conservation takes a unique form. Specifically, cheetah conservation studied is private because of private land ownership. Namibian conservation, as Brandon (2021) explained, is through the state, whereas cheetah conservation by the NGOs is in "the private sector and outside of state-sanctioned conservation in Namibia" (193). Because they are self-contained entities, these NGOs construct their own conservation agenda and generate income through the services they develop and provide. Their HWC intervention policies and practices are not tied to state-sanctioned conservation efforts. Instead, they are on offer to commercial farmers, the Namibian government, and Namibia's farming community writ large. The cheetah conservation NGOs benefit from private ownership of land without the attachment to state-sanctioned conservation areas, national parks, and reserves that directly benefit local communities through market-based approaches. The NGOs invest in both tangible and intangible conservation services rather than market-based participatory approaches, ecosystem services, and/or economic development. The NGOs studied provided both tangible services (e.g., farmer trainings, captive animal care, rehabilitation, translocations) and intangible, nonmaterial services/goods (e.g., 'saving' cheetahs). As a result, cheetah conservation by these NGOs is service-based rather than *in situ*, territorially-based nature conservation. All of the above contributes to the shift from market-based conservation in political ecology to a service-based approach focused on 'saving' species.

The shift from market-based to service-based conservation described above is significant because of differences in value creation and the NGOs' conservation 'services'. In the case of the NGOs, cheetahs and their habitat are not a source of value—value is not derived through fictitious capital and/or natural capital but through the NGOs' conservation services only they provide. For example, the 'services' discussed in this paper are not embodied in nature like ecosystems services. Cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice has a material basis because it is produced through research, global fundraising campaigns, and the production of knowledge centered on HWC mitigation by researchers and staff at the NGOs studied. 'Saving cheetahs (from extinction)' is the intangible service and goal of the NGOs' labor and valued by global audiences 'afraid of losing the species forever'. As defined by Quinn (1992), the service sector includes all economic activities whose output is not a product and one that adds value in a form that is essentially an intangible concern of its purchaser. A service industry is "a type of business that provides services to customers rather than producing a product" (accessed 8/25/22). The primary distinction between service-based and market-based approaches is that the service-based approach is not reliant on selling a product or, in this case, 'selling nature to save it' (McAfee 1999). The NGOs in this research market their own conservation services that contribute to their ultimate intangible goal of 'saving' cheetahs (from extinction).

This service-based approach to cheetah conservation does not provide financial and/or economic compensation for loss to incentivize commercial farmers and farming communities in Namibia writ large to conserve cheetahs within their territory. Using HWC conflicts, the NGOs studied have constructed a specialized conservation industry based on providing conservation services, not mitigating HWC. HWC situations in cheetah conservation follow Hussain's (2019) argument,

leaving commercial farming communities with the burden of conservation[46]. In this way, the NGOs are adding fuel to the fire in HWC with commercial farming communities whose land comprises the majority of cheetahs' territory. This case calls for widening the political ecology lens to account for other cases of NGOs' on-the-ground conservation business practices in Africa.

4.2 Research Design

This is an embedded case study of cheetah conservation NGOs that was organized and selected on the basis of known attributes and distinctive features which afforded an opportunity to look at the nature and character of cheetah conservation in Namibia at multiple scales. Empirical data was collected in Namibia through ethnographic fieldwork from September 2017- October 2018. As this single-case study focused on multiple sub-units of analysis, the embedded case study research design offered the best strategy for understanding the complexity of factors constructing HWC and the structure of cheetah conservation NGOs and their intervention policies. This embedded case study had multiple units to be analyzed—cheetah conservation NGOs and their actors, social media content, other conservation NGOs, commercial livestock/game farmers, and Namibian conservation governance that intersect with cheetah conservation in Namibia. This case study used a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, and HWC conflicts and mitigation. Several NGOs are included in this study but will be identified as 'the cheetah conservation NGOs' in order to protect the identities of the respondents. Data was collected from international cheetah conservation NGOs, Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)[47], local community members and officials, commercial farming/game community members, tourists, international volunteers, interns, and researchers in the field. Respondents were organized in this paper and divided into three different categories (Researchers, Namibian Officials, and Commercial Farmers) in order to protect the identities of the respondents. So as not to confuse readers, Namibian officials as a category is the combination of government and conservation officials that work directly in Namibian conservation governance. Researchers as a category consists of researchers both at the NGOs and other NGOs with knowledge and/or connection to cheetah conservation and/or HWC situations. Data collection methods included participant observation, semi-structured and conversational interviews, and document analysis.

4.3 Intersections: HWC, Cheetahs' Ecology, Private Land Ownership, and Settler Colonialism

A growing body of scholarship in HWC literature seeks to understand the proximate and structural drivers of HWC (Margulies and Karanth 2018). As a term, HWC has received criticism for obscuring context that may be pivotal in these conflicts (Margulies and Karanth 2018; see also

[46] While commercial farmers are the focus, it is important to note that the burden of cheetah conservation also rests on the shoulders of CBNRM and communal farmers in Namibia as well since mitigation efforts by the NGOs are 'service-based' across the board. For labor and employment issues relevant here, see Thakholi 2021.

[47] Now Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism (MEFT)

Peterson et al., 2010; Redpath et al., 2015). In Namibia, cheetah conservation NGOs portray HWC as one of the main threats to cheetahs' survival. What is considered historic declines in cheetah populations are attributed to HWC and unabated retaliatory killing by commercial farmers over the past century (Nowell 1996). HWC is characterized by conflicts between predators and, in this case, commercial farming communities, communities that often retaliate by eradicating predators from their land (Hodgson et. al. 2020). Consequently, cheetahs' territory on commercial farms is not solely an ecological phenomenon. Cheetahs' range and adaptations to territorial threats reflect historic changes in land ownership in Namibia during German colonial rule and South African apartheid that has influenced cheetahs' territory today. The racialized policies of apartheid not only impacted the people of South West Africa (now Namibia), they also affected predator populations and their distributions as well (Heydinger 2020). Subsequently, Namibia's history of apartheid-era land policies, private property, private livestock ownership, and settler colonialism are important contexts regarding the nature and character of cheetah conservation by the NGOs in Namibia.

Cheetahs' territory was shaped through the privatization of land that, as Melber (2019) explains, is a "leftover of colonial-era dispossession and appropriation" (74). In Namibia, the inequitable division of land between Indigenous communities and white settlers is rooted in the history of cattle and livestock ownership (Heydinger 2020). Heydinger (2020) discussed how "this was primarily achieved through land policies privileging white farmers and the contributions they could make to the South West African and South African economies through intensive livestock husbandry" (92). These land policies, however, were challenged by an inhospitable environment proving livestock husbandry difficult using the traditional practices by the white settlers (Heydinger 2020). Even with government support, settlers in South West Africa struggled to keep afloat (Heydinger 2020). The presence of predators made an already inhospitable environment even worse. As a consequence, "the colonial administration empowered rural white settlers to eradicate so-called 'vermin' on settler land" (Heydinger 2020:92). Cheetahs' territory is the result of the colonial administrations' policies that supported retaliatory practices against predator species on settler farms. Predators such as lions, wild dogs, and hyenas, among others, were seen by officials and settlers as threats to the socio-economic prospects of commercial farming (Heydinger 2020). Because of these apartheid era land policies, competing predator species were eradicated in central and southern Namibia, land that remains mostly private/freehold commercial land today (Melber 2019). Policies supporting the eradication of predators on settler farms, however, were prohibited in African communities that suffer the same financial and physical impacts of HWC. The eradication of predators, however, did not resolve issues of HWC on commercial farms. The reduction of predators and less competition for prey on commercial farmland now opened up a space for cheetahs to fill (Nowell 1996). In other words, when settler farms eradicated lions, hyenas, and wild dogs from their land, cheetahs moved right on in.

In so far as cheetah conservation NGOs have created a private service-based conservation industry based on mitigating HWC, it was made possible by Namibia's land tenure system. The history of land dispossession and appropriation in Namibia is also "the history of capital accumulation…" (Lenggenhager et. al. 2016:1). Land, as Melber (2019) noted, was and continues to be the backbone of Namibia's economy. Land and wealth are interconnected and the links

between land ownership and wealth accumulation are well established (Lenggenhager et. al. 2016). The interconnection of land and wealth is particularly important in this context. Through private land ownership, cheetah conservation NGOs are, for all intents and purposes, the owners of the means of production and part of the conservation capitalist class. The NGOs could be considered as part of what Büscher and Fletcher (2020) categorize as, the "land-owning capitalist class" (182). Except, not all NGOs fully fit within what Büscher and Fletcher (2020) categorize as — "capitalist farmers and/or land holders…" (182). While some cheetah conservation NGOs still remain as working commercial farms, many were not successful and refocused their commercial endeavors on conservation and tourism respectively. In Namibia, the agricultural sector is one of the main economic sectors, tourism another (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). The cheetah conservation NGOs are part of Namibia's tourism sector which has included tourism, broadly construed, into their conservation model. Tourism, as Jafari et. al. (2000) noted, is a global service-industry, one that exerts significant economic, cultural, and political importance across the world. Cheetah conservation NGOs have all converted some portion of their land into private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, research centers, and/or voluntourism operations. All of these are economic activities within the service industry and all contribute directly to the conservation work of the NGOs. The NGOs studied have focused on cheetah conservation threats in both tourism and voluntourism activities, institutionalizing HWC in the NGOs' conservation model. While cheetahs do cause HWC, the conflict here is between two private sector industries—commercial farming and cheetah conservation.

Bixler et al (2015) argued that "participatory forms of nature conservation must be understood as [a] political project in the context of a neoliberal accumulation regime" (165; Khan and Lynch 2013). HWC is a political project within such a regime. Cheetah conservation by the NGOs is not, however, participatory. To underscore, these NGOs are self-contained entities as both the NGOs and their work in cheetah conservation is independent of state-led and Namibian NGO-led conservation. In the field of political ecology, conservation is considered relational in that it typically requires "constant responses to and engagement with changing social, political, and economic boundaries" (Larson and Brockington 2018:4). Inevitably, conservation NGOs then "entail interactions with a wide range of actors" (Larson and Brockington 2018:4). Larson and Brockington (2018) argued that, in conservation, NGOs are not monolithic; rather, "evolve through boundary interaction with a variety of networks, multiple sectors, and institutional contexts" (4). This is not the case for the NGOs under study here. The NGOs did not evolve through boundary interactions and/or diverse networks of actors and relationships but were already established commercial endeavors that diversified to focus on both conservation and tourism. This diversification was not through collaborative approaches to conservation but through private land ownership as well as through developing their own specialized conservation model based on mitigating HWC conflicts.

Cheetahs' territory, HWC conflicts, and the cheetah conservation service industry is inextricably linked to Namibia's history of private land ownership. Namibia's history of apartheid era land policies, private property, cattle and livestock ownership, and settler colonialism are underlying structural drivers of HWC as well as important context regarding the nature and character of cheetah conservation by the NGOs in Namibia today. HWC from cheetah predation is an ongoing

problem and cheetahs do cause conflicts in all areas of Namibia's system of land tenure. While cheetahs' territory is predominantly on private commercial farms, cheetahs can still be found in public, communal, and CBNRM areas as well. HWC with cheetahs does impact the livelihoods of commercial/freehold farming communities as well as communal and CBNRM areas. The difference is that commercial farmers own the land. While cheetahs' territory on commercial farms is a unique adaptation, it is also a consequence of the large-scale dispossession and appropriation of land in Namibia that continued until the 1960s (Melber 2019). Cheetahs' territory, HWC on commercial farms, and cheetah conservation by the NGOs is part and parcel to Namibia's history of private land ownership. For the NGOs in this study, private land ownership evolved into commercial farming units and, in turn, businesses. What cannot be ignored is how issues of land, land rights, and private ownership underlie HWC and cheetah conservation by the NGOs that were the focus of this research. The question of land and land rights is, fundamentally, a question about equity. And equity, a Namibian official explained in an interview, is missing in conservation discussions and debates in the country. To do justice to these important conversations and debates is beyond the scope of this paper, however.

4.4 Cheetah HWC in Namibia

Cheetahs' ecological, biological, and behavioral adaptation(s) in Namibia point to the need for a fuller picture of the permutations of conservation and conservation NGOs in Africa. Cheetahs and efforts to conserve the species, Brandon (2021) explained, are a huge draw for tourism, voluntourism, and for "global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever'" (196). The NGOs studied are known globally for their work mitigating HWC. HWC narratives and conservation interventions are circulated widely and attract global support and funding for the NGOs in Namibia. Conservation policy and practice, as Campbell (2007) argued, is not "simply a matter of biological or ecological necessity but serves the political interests of particular groups" (313). Because they are self-contained entities, the cheetah conservation NGOs studied can construct their own conservation agenda and generate income through the services they themselves provide. As discussed in the introduction, the NGOs' HWC intervention policy and practice is not tied to state-sanctioned conservation efforts but is on offer to commercial farmers, the Namibian government, and Namibia's farming community writ large. HWC mitigation strategies detailed in the following sections highlight solutions and interventions that focus on awareness, education, toolkits, and, importantly, on changing the perspectives of those impacted by HWC. Conservation interventions that are examples of the tangible services provided by the NGOs in their service-based approach. These conservation services contribute to the ultimate goal to 'save' cheetahs (from extinction). For global audiences 'afraid of losing the species forever', the NGOs are providing an important and intangible service through their conservation intervention policy and practice. In Namibia, as the following sections will show, the impact of the NGOs' conservation services remains an abstraction.

The following sections will look at data collected on 1) the role of cheetah conservation NGOs in conservation in Namibia, 2) illustrate the struggle over resources between commercial farming

communities and the NGOs, and 3) contextualize HWC mitigation efforts by the cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia.

4.5 The Role of Cheetah Conservation NGOs

Cheetah conservation work defined by the NGOs in this study is done mainly on-site at the NGOs' private facilities across Namibia. Conservation work at the NGOs includes research activities such as testing out HWC mitigation strategies, livestock guarding dogs, and farmer updates. All of which are activities for voluntourists and interns alike. Cheetah conservation and work to mitigate HWC are essential to the voluntourism programs and tourism at the NGOs. With few exceptions, cheetahs at the NGOs are generally in captivity. Cheetahs in captivity at the NGOs are cared for by volunteers and part of tourist activities at the centers. While there are many reasons for cheetahs being in captivity at the NGOs, HWC between cheetahs and farming communities was discussed as one of them. Cheetahs are also not the only species 'persecuted' by local farming communities, the NGOs have many species ranging from lions, leopards, and wild dogs to aardvarks, meerkats, baboons, and a rather pesky porcupine. The Namibian government does acknowledge that captivity, to some extent, is necessary. The government also recognizes the need to regulate the keeping of captive wildlife as the government does not want this to become an industry in Namibia. Per a Namibian official:

> Some people argue that the animals that they have in captivity are the ambassadors for the animals in the wild. Somebody would come and see the cheetah and say, oh, these animals need protection. If I go home, I have to go and fundraise and send money, or even send more people to come in this country to volunteer with this organization[48].

The Namibian government's viewpoint in conservation is to keep cheetahs and wildlife as a whole, wild. While recognizing that captivity, to some extent, is necessary, it is not considered conservation. The policy explains in terms of the "keeping of large carnivores, which cannot be rehabilitated or are not suitable for release in wild, or which cannot survive on their own in the wild, does not contribute to wild populations and conservation but may provide other conservation benefits (e.g., awareness and education)" (7). This is not in opposition to conservation NGO narratives and focus 'in theory'; however, in practice, the contradiction lies where most cheetahs on-site at the NGOs are captive and used for tourism and voluntourism programs. What has resulted is that one side of Namibia has free roaming wildlife and the other side there are animals in enclosures. This contradiction highlights the issue of property rights. The NGOs in this study are on their own private property and in Namibia's private sector. The NGOs are also considered by the government to be income-generating sources (see Brandon 2021). Therefore, the NGOs do not have political power in Namibian conservation governance (Brandon 2021). When it comes to decisions, particularly regarding conservation policy, cheetah

[48] Interview 9/27/2018

conservation NGOs, as Brandon (2021) found, are "consulted by the MET, but, at the end of the day most of the laws are meant to regulate them" (196). Cheetah conservation NGOs do not have a seat at the table and are not policymakers in Namibian conservation governance. This is attributed to both captive cheetahs on-site and the NGOs as private sector actors. Regarding captive wildlife, several Namibian officials all agreed that "Namibia is not a zoo and we don't want to have zoos."

It is a fundamental principle and basis for government policies that "the State shall promote the conservation of large carnivores in the wild and within their natural environment" (6). The National Policy on Conservation and Management of Large Carnivores in Namibia (2016) states in the policy framework, the objective(s) of the policy is "to prevent unsustainable, illegal, and unregulated utilization of large carnivores and their products" (6). As well as "to identify and put in place mechanisms to regulate, control, and sanction the large carnivore utilization practices that are unethical and unsustainable" (9). At the time of this fieldwork, a new wildlife bill was in the works. A Namibian official explained the basis for the new bill:

> The idea from the regulated perspective is to try and clamp down on potential mass roaming of these facilities. Because it's an economic activity. For some people it works so it may be an attractive business enterprise... We don't want to see this to be a purely business thing. One purpose of the regulation is to have checks and controls on the numbers. Secondly, is to prevent taking of the animals from the wild to feed these markets. There are species that are in hiding and species like the lion, especially the lion, is in high demand. Everybody wants to have a lion in the facility. If we don't have this regulatory framework, people would do anything to get their hands on the lions. Because it pays to see a lion.

Explaining the intentions of the new bill, the Namibian official continued:

> This regulation is getting to a mutual ground to say, okay, we don't want to see this, but you want this as your industry. The constitution of the country provides for capitalism, not really capitalism, but for free entrepreneurship. You can do whatever business you think is good for you. You've got that liberty and a constitutional provision or a right to do any type of business you want in Namibia. That is within the framework of the law, not illegal business... In meeting at the middle ground, you want to regulate things. You try to keep the numbers in check by coming up with regulations.

In an interview, a researcher spoke about cheetah conservation NGOs and how cheetah conservation is not through keeping individual cheetahs. The researcher continued, adding that "organizations that just take in cheetahs, and cheetahs, and cheetahs…. do in the sense that

people expect you to conserve a valuable animal"[49]. This is evident at the NGOs where cheetahs are kept as ambassador animals. Cheetahs in captivity are not often released back into the 'wild' but typically kept in enclosures separated from other carnivores in private protected areas. The researcher said how a lot of people in Namibia consider the removal of problem species and keeping them as a solution. As government officials stated, captive wildlife is not viewed by the government to serve conservation value. Noting the difficulties in cheetah conservation as it is currently practiced by the NGOs in Namibia, a researcher described how cheetah conservation cannot work if conservation does not focus on cheetahs' habitat and whole surrounding areas. The role of the cheetah is important to see as the whole picture, the researcher stated that "you can't just take, conserve a cheetah alone"[50]. What this means is that conservation needs to account for the whole habitat, consider the whole attitudes, and the whole farming methods, etc. in order for cheetahs to have a chance. Both the researcher and the government officials described that in some cases keeping cheetahs in captivity is necessary, but both agreed that it is not a solution.

4.6 Struggle Over Resources

Tourism is a big part of Namibia's economy, and, as a Namibian official stated, is "the only sector in Namibia that is doing well"[5152]. People come from all over the world to see Namibia's wildlife. Therefore, a big portion of Namibia's tourism sector is nature-based tourism. And, a Namibian official explained, "a lot of that happens on free land". A member of the commercial farming community explained that changes in land practices on commercial farms have moved to incorporate and/or switch to focus on tourism. The commercial farmer discussed how tourism in Namibia is centered around the national parks and reserves, however, visitors tended to stay outside, rather than inside, the national parks. This has brought opportunities for the surrounding commercial/private farms to "diversify and to develop some other income, additional income, [through] tourist accommodation"[53]. And tourism has exploded, the commercial farmer continued, in this instance, on private/freehold commercial farms bordering Etosha national park. The change in land use to tourism on commercial farms is also affecting wildlife populations; in particular, increasing predator/carnivore populations. While the tourism sector benefits from these increases, growing populations pose a risk for livestock/game farming communities nearby. Land change in Namibia, a commercial farmer explained, has "made it more viable for predators[54]". Changes in land use towards tourism, the commercial farmer continued, "made it a big problem, predator problem, in Namibia[55]". For commercial farmers, cheetahs are one of the main culprits.

[49] ibid
[50] Interview researcher 9/1/2018
[51] Interview Namibian official 10/11/2018
[52] Fieldwork for this paper was completed in 2018 and cannot account for the impact of Covid 19 on Namibia's tourism industry.
[53] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018
[54] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018
[55] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018

In Namibia, tourism is not specifically for cheetahs but Namibia's prolific wildlife according to a Namibian official. People are not coming to Namibia just to see cheetahs. The official described how there is a small subsection of the tourism market around endemics, particularly birds, only "a very small number of people are coming just to see a cheetah[56]". As a result, the NGOs are all competing for the same funding sources as well as with conservation and tourism in Namibia writ large. As a commercial farmer explained in an interview, the cheetah conservation organizations are all "fighting for the same piece of cake[57]". The 'cake' is only so big, the commercial farmer discussed how they need to "get this donor money for their own survival and they are now competing against each other for favoritism of the species[58]". And to do that, the farmer stated, the NGOs draw on emotional responses, asking commercial farmers' "why do you kill it?"—'it' meaning cheetahs. The emotional responses the commercial farmer was referring to draw from cheetah conservation NGOs construction of HWC that is described as an impossible situation for cheetahs. HWC from cheetah predation is a problem. Subsequently, the cheetah conservation NGOs have framed this conflict as one of the main threats to cheetahs' survival. In so doing, cheetah conservation efforts have conducted and distributed a great body of work describing the problem and offering their solutions.

Cheetahs, a Namibian official explained, are a 'good draw card,' for generating money in tourism. This is illustrated by billboards lining the B1, the main highway leading to Etosha National Park. Along the highway, billboards can be seen advertising cheetahs on-site at local guest farms and lodges as well as signs directing tourists to several cheetah conservation NGOs in this study. Cheetahs' ecological adaptations and tensions with commercial farming communities mean that cheetah conservation work is done mostly on-site at the NGOs at their various properties across Namibia. The NGOs locations all include luxury lodges and most host voluntourism programs for international voluntourists. Voluntourism at the NGOs ranges in price starting at $1,200 US dollars for two weeks and up depending on the program, location(s), and other amenities[59]. To stay at the NGOs as a guest ranges from $384 US dollars per person per night to $576 US dollars per person per night depending on the season and the location[60]. Conservation activities are not included but taking part in the activities and staying at the lodge does contribute to the conservation work of the NGOs. Cheetah conservation activities and experiences are available to tourists and voluntourists alike and are intended for educational purposes as well as to raise awareness and funding for the NGOs. And these experiences can carry a steep price. One private reserve offered a cheetah walk for N$3,000 Namibian dollars (roughly US $218)[61]. Cheetahs and HWC problems and solutions are also situated as a global issue. Cheetahs and conservation issues are featured in merchandise, celebrity and corporate sponsorships, online symbolic adoptions, and as ambassador animals at local zoos and even at a theme park in Florida. Global fundraising campaigns that raise money, awareness, and support for the cheetah conservation NGOs and their work in Namibia.

[56] Interview Namibian official 10/11/2018
[57] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018
[58] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018
[59] NGO website accessed 1/9/2022
[60] NGO website accessed 1/9/2022
[61] Information card collected 9/14/2018

How and where cheetahs are valued depends on conservation and the onus of conserving cheetahs rests largely on commercial farming communities. Conflicts with cheetahs do negatively impact the livelihoods of commercial/freehold farming communities. Consequently, commercial farmers generally have little to no tolerance for cheetahs on their property. Changes in land ownership, use, and management, both in the past and in the current move towards tourism over commercial farming, have led to increasing problems with cheetahs on commercial farms. Cheetahs' behavior and ecology is especially important to consider when discussing HWC situations. Cheetahs like to hunt. A commercial farmer explained how cheetahs "just kill animals"[62]. On small livestock farms, losses incurred from cheetah predations are generally larger than from other species. The financial costs of predation on game farms are substantially more expensive than livestock, many are exotic breeds. Game is also cheetahs' natural prey. A commercial farmer described how a cheetahs taught their young ones to hunt, by killing the farmer's livestock. Cheetahs will often kill multiple animals and only consume one, if one is consumed.

Understandably, this is an economic liability and a cause of frustration on commercial livestock farms. The financial responsibility for predator control is on commercial farmers. The commercial farmer discussed how it is up to the farmers to carry the loss, that to "a certain extent you can tolerate if you are being paid". The commercial farmer stated that, for farmers, there was no donor money. The farmer suggested a solution for the NGOs was to pay farmers for the losses "instead of buying farmland, and instead of driving the best land cruisers on the market, and instead of… living extravagant[63]". For the farmer, there is no mutual ground, this is where the conflict starts. When it comes to cheetah conservation in Namibia, the burden and responsibility for conservation remains largely on the shoulders of private/freehold commercial farming communities. Not on the cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia. According to a commercial farmer, "at the end of the day, we the farmer is [the] ones who struggle". The farmer explained the problem and referenced that 'we' as a farming community "don't want to kill them"[64], but there's "animals left, right or center nobody cares about that"[65]. Interviews with commercial farmers tended to frame HWC with cheetahs as an impossible situation. During fieldwork I was warned of the difficulty to find commercial farmers willing to talk about cheetah conservation. Most commercial farmers statements reflected what was already known about the conflict. Commercial farmers are not blind to conservation work at the NGOs that includes voluntourism, luxury lodges, and cheetah activities. The commercial farmers all recognized the disparity in conservation, particularly, that commercial farmers do not benefit financially from cheetah

[62] Interview commercial farmer 9/1/2018
[63] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018
[64] Interview commercial farmer 9/1/2018
[65] Interview commercial farmer 9/1/2018

conservation. The only solution for the commercial farming community was to let commercial farmers 'value' cheetahs because, as one farmer noted, "if it pays, it stays"[6667].

4.7 HWC Mitigation

To date, there is little collaboration between the commercial farming community and cheetah conservation NGOs. Solutions for cheetah predation are offered by the cheetah conservation NGOs in the form of education, trainings, livestock guard dogs[68], and toolkits, not, however, financial compensation by the NGOs for loss. What compensation there is available is provided through the government and CBNRM and directed through public, state-sanctioned conservation. A commercial farmer explained that the NGOs like to be seen as working with farmers but couldn't say that the NGOs were working with the commercial farming community. The farmer continued, describing how the NGOs would like to claim they are working with farmers, "because it's to their benefit, but it's not the truth"[69]. Describing doubts about the NGOs, the commercial farmer described their interactions below:

> They do give these booklets out. They do discussions at farmer's association meetings. But they do not adapt their policies. They do not adapt their strategies. They do not adapt their way of thinking. They accuse us of not doing it. But as I've said we've got to pay each and everything from livestock that we are selling, which is not the case with them[70].

In an interview with a Namibian official, we discussed how conservationists understand how dynamic ecosystems are always in flux yet assume communities and people are static. The Namibian official noted:

> We make an assumption; you'll be happy with this we'll carry on this conservation. We don't go back and revisit, in relation to the change in conservation, and in relation to your changing circumstances, where do we stand now? We constantly just rely on assumptions from ten, fifteen years ago. We go and we interview a community. We carryout doing the conservation work, and just assume it's all the same. Because hey, people are people. They stay the same. They don't[71].

[66] 'If it pays, it stays' was used by the commercial farmer in an interview to illustrate the conflict over resources in cheetah conservation. Specifically, commercial farmers' view that the NGOs can benefit from cheetahs while commercial farmers cannot. 'If it pays, it stays,' however, is used more broadly as a principle of sustainable use in Namibia's Nature Conservation Ordinance 4 of 1975 that granted private landowners' rights to benefit from wildlife on their property.

[67] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/2018

[68] Livestock guarding dogs are available for a small fee (N$100). There is a long waiting list.

[69] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/18

[70] ibid

[71] Interview Namibian official 10/11/2018

Frustration with losses and no financial compensation has led to tensions between cheetah conservation NGOs and the commercial farming communities. These tensions are at the root of HWC and center around who can derive value from cheetahs, in particular, their conservation. Commercial livestock farmers see cheetah conservation NGOs as profiting from cheetahs' conservation but government policies and no compensation from the NGOs leave commercial farmers with few options to recoup from such losses. A commercial farmer described their experience of HWC:

> The conflict is just too big because there's no real practical solutions from this. They've got, they try to give solutions. They've got handbooks on cheetah control, and cheetah management, but it's not really practical. In the end, the losses are still incurred by me[72].

The farmer mentioned that the NGOs do attend farmer meetings, however, the farmer discussed how the NGOs are not always welcome or treated well, because people just can't afford it (predation) anymore and "people are fed up"[73]. The commercial farmer mentioned that, as part of a livestock organization, they were part of LCMAN[74] but removed themselves because they "we're one voice in the desert, calling in the desert"[75]. Another commercial farmer refused to work with the NGOs, explaining "that's the problem… these people just getting money from overseas and things like that and not using [it] in the right way"[76]. In an interview a commercial farmer explained how they have to deal with the people from the NGOs that the farmer didn't view as necessarily responsible or trustworthy. Explaining why, the commercial farmer asked a rhetorical question quoted below:

> We ask, why are you doing it? Why are you so absolutely frenetic about protecting the cheetahs while they are not on the brink of extinction? Is it because of your own sustained, your own being? Why are you doing it?[77]

The cheetah conservation NGOs in this study do have various HWC mitigation strategies that include a farmer hotline, daily updates on radio-collared cheetahs, and translocations of problem animals alongside toolkits, farmer trainings[78], raising awareness, and education. The cheetah conservation NGOs, however, do not compensate commercial farming communities, nor communal, resettled, and CBNRM farmers for losses. A researcher at an NGO explained that "people don't like predators, but they do like money"[79]. The researcher continued, discussing

[72] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/18
[73] *ibid*
[74] Large Carnivore Management Association Namibia (LCMAN)
[75] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/18
[76] Interview commercial farmer 9/1/18
[77] Interview commercial farmer 8/28/18
[78] It was not clear how often farmer's trainings occurred at the NGOs; however, images of trainings are shared over social media regularly.
[79] Interview researcher 8/26/2018

how "money is going to have to probably be what's going to dangle in front of everybody to make this change"[80]. What was important for the researcher was to say "it can be done if we have the will power and obviously the money and a way forward"[81]. Again, it is important to reiterate that the cheetah conservation NGOs do not compensate commercial, communal, resettled, or CBNRM farmers for economic losses due to cheetah predation. Despite what the researcher said about money, the cheetah conservation NGOs have yet to develop compensation plans or other economic benefits for any of the farming communities in Namibia[82].

4.8 From Market-Based Conservation to a Service-Based Cheetah Conservation Approach

In Namibia, conservation is the role of the state and enacted through state-sanctioned conservation that includes Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), national parks, and reserves. Namibia is known globally for its conservation; specifically, through national environmental policy and legislation, national parks and reserves, and the CBNRM model (Dressler et. al. 2010; Mufune 2015). In Namibia, national conservation policy and practice does protect cheetahs on all areas of land tenure (Nowell 1996). Cheetahs are also a protected species in Namibian conservation policy and practice (Nowell 1996). National conservation efforts are implemented to benefit local communities on public land, particularly communities that coexist with dangerous wildlife. National conservation strategies work to promote conservation through wildlife utilization based on the devolution of rights over wildlife (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021). The program relies on tourism to provide economic benefits to the communities living in communal and CBNRM areas (Mufune 2015). Namibia's national park and reserve system also generates money from conservation to benefit communities through park fees and accommodation inside the park (Barnes et. al. 1999). The cheetah conservation NGOs studied do have projects working with local communities in CBNRM and communal areas that provide public services, though the programs are not generally focused on cheetahs. Outside of providing these services, cheetah conservation by the NGOs is not structured to provide the same economic benefits to local communities[83] as those provided through national environmental legislation; specifically, through CBNRM, national parks, and reserves (Mosimane and Silva 2015). As opposed to a market-based approach providing 'livelihood opportunities,' particularly, in HWC situations, cheetah conservation NGOs highlight mitigation efforts focused on coexistence, awareness, education, and changing the perspectives of those affected by HWC. These differences in conservation practices and agendas mean that cheetah conservation by the NGOs and conservation in Namibia are a difference of kind.

Currently, there is no working theory or concept in political ecology that can address the full nature and character of cheetah conservation by the NGOs in Namibia. The dilemma of representing cheetah conservation by these NGOs stems from a curious mix of conservation

[80] ibid
[81] ibid
[82] Rather than delve into the debates on compensation plans, see Fletcher and Büscher 2020.
[83] Economic benefits to local communities are provided through employment. For a comprehensive discussion on labor in conservation also relevant here see Thakholi 2021.

interventions that contribute to Namibian conservation but not through the Namibian conservation model. The NGOs' contributions to conservation in Namibia are not through mainstream conservation models or market-based approaches that are typical in political ecology theorizing. While the NGOs in this study do provide (service-based) support that is directed towards CBNRM and communal areas, they are not located within CBNRM, communal areas, national parks, and reserves[84]. Conservation in Namibia, through CBNRM, national parks and reserves, does fit within an analytical framework in political ecology. Cheetah conservation by the NGOs in Namibia does not. The difference between cheetah conservation by the NGOs and the Namibian conservation model is the difference between a service-based approach and market-based approaches to conservation. Cheetah conservation by the NGOs is not engaged in participatory approaches (Bixler et. al. 2015) or economic development (Fletcher 2010; Sullivan 2006) to conserve cheetahs, nor is cheetah conservation 'conservation-as-development' (Büscher and Fletcher 2020). The NGOs in this study are considered "income generating sources and part of Namibia's private sector, not state-sanctioned conservation" (Brandon 2021:196). Assumptions about conservation and conservation NGOs in the field of political ecology make it difficult to see cheetah conservation by the NGOs for what, in essence, is a business. The curious mix of conservation interventions sets cheetah conservation by the NGOs apart from normative conservation models critiqued in political ecology.

Where the service-based approach diverges from market-based conservation is rooted in the definition of the service industry. For this analysis, the definition of a service industry refers to "all those firms and employers whose major final output is some intangible or ephemeral commodity or, alternatively, that residual set of productive institutions in the formal economy whose final output is not a material good" (Gershuny and Miles 1983:3 quoted in Karaomerlioglu and Carlsson 1999:177). While Karaomerlioglu and Carlsson (1999) did not define the service industry with cheetah conservation in mind, their definition is still relevant here. What is important in the service-based approach for cheetah conservation by the NGOs is the attributes of the services they provide—they are intangible. Intangible services are foundational for how the service-based approach diverges from market-based approaches in political ecology. In market-based approaches, land and nature cannot be valued as they are not produced through human labor (Büscher 2013). Büscher (2013) argued that services, derived from land and nature, are valued through fictitious capital, defined by Harvey (2006) as "capital without any material basis in commodities or productive activity" (95). The opposite is true here. Cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice has a material basis as it is produced through research, global fundraising campaigns, and the production of knowledge centered on HWC by researchers and staff at the NGOs. 'Saving cheetahs (from extinction)' is the intangible service and goal of the NGOs' labor. In this case, cheetahs are not the source of value. Therefore, value is not derived through fictitious capital and/or natural capital but through the NGOs' tangible and intangible conservation services.

[84] One NGO in this study includes a research center located in CBNRM working on HWC conflicts. The work conducted at this location, however, is not focused on cheetahs nor does the location have captive wildlife. This center is supported through tourism to the main site.

4.9 Not 'Business as Usual' Conservation: The Anomaly of Cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia

Conservation, Heise (2016) argued, has become an "arena of contention in the struggle over resources" (91). In the struggle over resources, the NGOs are competing for expertise, attention, and specialization in constructing cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice at local, national, and global scales. Cheetah conservation NGOs, according to Brandon (2021), compete "with each other and with larger, more well-known NGOs, other globally valued and threatened charismatic species as well as the continuous flow of information online" (190). Brandon (2021) described how cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia funded conservation efforts globally by selling extinction over social media platforms and how such fundraising campaign tactics to raise awareness for cheetahs did not "work in isolation from broader structures of global capitalism" (190). Global campaigns to #SaveTheCheetahs were not only intended to raise awareness about extinction but also communicated threats facing cheetahs and the proposed solution(s) by the NGOs in Namibia (Brandon 2021). In other words, cheetah conservation NGOs use the same global fundraising strategies to sell extinction that they use to promote their work in conservation in Namibia, including their work to mitigate HWC conflicts described in this paper. Because of their work mitigating HWC in Namibia, the cheetah conservation NGOs in this study have positioned themselves as institutions of global academic, economic, and social power in cheetah conservation. By institutionalizing conservation threats, such as HWC, generating value through conflict becomes necessary in order to maintain the business of saving cheetahs.

In Namibia, the NGOs service-based approach is an anomaly and illustrative of a new phenomenon outside the normative construction of conservation in the field of political ecology. As a conservation service industry, cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied does not conform to long-standing traditions and practices that Brockington et. al. (2010) considered typical of 'mainstream conservation'. In the field of political ecology, theoretical and conceptual contributions tend to focus on conservation that is *in situ* and/or territorially-based (Vaccaro et. al. 2013) whether it be it through national parks, private reserves, or in collaboration with local communities. Vaccaro et. al. (2013) observed that political ecology from its inception "devoted analytical attention to the socio-ecological context of conservation policies" (255; Neumann 1992). Conservation policy and practice that in most political ecology literature links conservation with nature and protected areas, both public (Peet et al 2011) and private (Holmes 2015) and to the state (Margulies and Karanth 2018). Mainstream conservation, Büscher and Fletcher (2020) most recently wrote, is part of a broad mix of approaches but can be broken down into two key characteristics: one that maintains a capitalist character and those that still revolve around protected areas. Mentioned in the introduction, cheetahs' ecological adaptations mean free-roaming cheetahs are predominantly found outside of both public and private protected areas, including the NGOs' private facilities. Therefore, fortress conservation models and scholarship on both public and private protected areas is not addressed in this analysis. Cheetah conservation does, however, maintain a capitalist character. In Büscher and Fletcher's (2020) argument, the capitalist character of mainstream conservation, is focused on natural capital so that the "pursuit of profit can effectively and efficiently be linked to the protection of nature and the 'environmental services' it provides" (Büscher and Fletcher 2020:3). Environmental services in

this context are services intrinsic to nature and a means to support human development through conservation. Büscher and Fletcher (2020) consider 'conservation-as-development' through natural capital as the "quintessential form of accumulation by conservation" (109). Because the NGOs are the owners of the means of production and are part of the conservation capitalist class, cheetah conservation is divorced from both development and nature as it is only the NGOs that are structured to benefit from the service-based approach.

Cheetahs' ecology is not inconsequential here. The entwined history of cheetah ecology, predator control, HWC, private livestock and land ownership, and settler colonialism have shaped both cheetahs' territory and their conservation. Cheetahs' ecological, biological, and behavioral adaptations to interspecies threats and competition has moved conservation efforts to private property and into the private sector. While there is a great deal of scholarship on private conservation (Thakholi 2021; Thakholi 2021; Marijnen 2018; Büscher et. al. 2022), this impressive work does not apply to this particular context. The NGOs studied are not organized through private sector partnerships in public conservation (Sullivan 2006; Vaccaro et. al. 2013) but are established commercial entities. What this means is there is no public/private partnership to market conservation commodities in private cheetah conservation. As self-contained private entities, the NGOs can construct their own conservation agenda and market it themselves through their own private business practices. Typically, it is the state that is the market facilitator for trade in alienated conservation commodities (Hewittson and Sullivan 2021). In political ecology theorizing, following Hewittson and Sullivan (2021), the state provides regulatory and supportive structures for the transfer of public goods to private sector actors (Hewittson and Sullivan 2021; Castree and Henderson 2014; Fletcher 2010; Büscher et. al. 2012). Because the NGOs are private self-contained entities working independently from both state– and Namibian NGO-led conservation, cheetah conservation by these NGOs is not privatized, market-based conservation. The NGOs are not a medium in assisting buyers and sellers of their products/services to come together through market exchange. Instead, the cheetah conservation NGOs are the producers specializing in cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice. A service they themselves provide and market to global audiences. In this way, the NGOs studied are competing for expertise and specialization in constructing cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice at local, national, and global scales.

Cheetah conservation by these NGOs is not 'business as usual' (Sullivan 2006). In this case, 'saving' cheetahs simply does not square with 'saving nature.' What is markedly different in the NGOs' service-based approach to cheetah conservation is that they are not reliant on deriving value from nature (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021). In other words, to derive benefits from conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs do not rely on 'selling nature to save it' (McAfee 1999), payments for ecosystem services (Kull 2015), and/or natural capital (Büscher and Fletcher 2020). Roth and Dressler (2012) explained, market-based conservation "emerged under the mantra that assigning a monetary value to nature was the most efficient and effective way of saving it" (363; McAfee 1999). What is significantly different between the two approaches is the difference in value creation and in their services. In market-based approaches to conservation, Büscher (2013) argued that nature-to-be-conserved functions as "a peculiar kind of fixed capital whose value circulates through the capital embodied in and implied by its environmental services" (22).

Büscher (2013) described how "nature is actively produced and transformed through its conservation" (21; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Dressler 2011). In this particular case, value is not derived through cheetahs and the environmental services they provide but through the NGOs' conservation intervention policy and practice that is marketed by the NGOs to global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever'. Through the service-based approach, cheetah conservation does not require value to be embodied in cheetahs and the environmental services they intrinsically provide. Rather, value is created by the NGOs through their conservation services to reach the ultimate intangible goal—'saving' cheetahs (from extinction).

What this means is that cheetahs are not, in this case, natural capital in which value can be derived. Rather, the NGOs use their expertise in cheetah conservation intervention policies and practices to gain a competitive advantage. As a result, the NGOs in this study have constructed a private service-based industry around conflict mitigation, transforming the 'value of conflict' in conservation into capital. In so doing, the approaches to mitigate HWC by the NGOs in this study are an accumulation strategy (Ekers and Prudham 2017). The value derived from conflict, however, is not shared. Market-based approaches are usually premised on "the additional benefit of being able to provide livelihood opportunities for those most affected by conservation practice" (Roth and Dressler 2012:363). As the data showed, the NGOs' global fundraising campaigns and income derived through tourism/voluntourism programs did not reach communities affected by HWC conflicts with cheetahs. In fact, cheetah conservation NGOs did not offer any financial compensation for loss to any of the farming communities in Namibia writ large. The service-based approach to cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied does not incentivize communities to conserve cheetahs. Because cheetah conservation by the NGOs is not market-based conservation and cheetahs are not a form of natural capital, commercial farmers cannot derive the same value from cheetahs as the NGOs studied, making cheetah conservation a wedge in the struggle over resources between two private sector industries. This marks a pivotal example of the need for widening out political ecology lenses to focus more analytical attention to conservation NGOs' business practices.

4.10 Conclusion

In biodiversity conservation, Heise (2016) highlighted the importance of looking at "who is in charge of designing and implementing conservation" (91). This becomes necessary as individual and/or charismatic species are perceived to be nearing extinction and conservation NGOs' role in intervention policies have been legitimized (Brandon 2021). For example, when the emotive power of extinction is used to "engage global audiences in local conservation crises and fund conservation NGOs, narratives of fear around losing a species are increasingly overriding narratives of social and ecological justice" (Brandon 2021:197). Global fundraising and awareness campaigns by the NGOs in support of their cheetah conservation efforts in Namibia brings into question the flows of money, information, and power and its influence. Because the NGOs are self-contained entities, they can construct their own conservation agenda and, through a service-based approach, that agenda can be focused on the intangible needs and concerns of global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever,' not those economically impacted by HWC.

Cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is an anomaly because cheetah conservation is not only detached from both nature and from development, it also does not provide an incentive for communities to conserve cheetahs. In analyzing cheetah conservation by the NGOs, there is the hope that this research will occasion a birth of a more socially equitable and environmentally benign cheetah conservation policy and practice by the NGOs in Namibia.

Chapter 5: The Geopolitics of Problematic Information: Epistemic Territorialization and Wildlife Conservation Volunteering in Namibia

The Geopolitics of Problematic Information: Epistemic Territorialization and Wildlife Conservation Volunteering in Namibia

Abstract

This paper describes how power–socioeconomic, epistemic, and political–is harnessed and maintained through information exchanged under the aegis of private property. What was 'real' in conservation was created by two Namibia-based international NGOs online and through wildlife conservation volunteer experiences at their private facilities in Namibia. Through private property, the NGOs control the means of knowledge production constructing wildlife conservation according to their own agenda/goals. Embedded in every aspect of the volunteer experience was the practice, the theory, and the approach of the NGOs to control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space. This process is what is conceptualized in this paper as epistemic territorialization. Epistemic territorialization describes how knowledge claims organize and consolidate geographic, epistemic, and virtual communities into territories within a controlled space and bounded system. This process underscores the volunteer experience and extends through broader conservation communication over media platforms, expanding into epistemic territory. By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known' in conservation based on problematic information. The volunteer programs are illustrative of how problematic information is circulated in ways that disrupt politics and power in conservation and mask the economic and political interests of the NGOs studied. The production of problematic information results in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs.

Keywords: Political Epistemology, Politics of Knowledge, Wildlife Conservation, Epistemic Territorialization, Private Property

5.1 The Epistemological Challenge of Problematic Information

This case illustrates an epistemological challenge concerning how wildlife conservation knowledge is produced, circulated, justified, and geographically bounded through two Namibia-based conservation NGOs. The conservation NGOs in this research manifested as private, insulated 'bubbles' across the Namibian landscape, geographically, conceptually, and ideologically isolated from the socio-economic and political contexts of conservation in Namibia writ large. Knowledge that is produced by these NGOs about wildlife conservation in Namibia is constructed under the aegis of private property. The NGOs studied are private commercial entities on privately-owned land in Namibia and work independently from both state, community, and Namibian NGO-led conservation[85]. The institutional context of the NGOs

[85] The NGOs studied are self-contained (private) entities, on private property, and in Namibia's private sector making it important to state that their structure, composition, and management adheres to the legal frameworks of

required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors in the spatial production of conservation knowledge claims. Importantly, this paper suggests widening the political ecology lens to include political epistemology and account for the role of private property, private property ownership[86], and (absolute[87]) private property rights in local and global conservation approaches. In the case of the NGOs studied, private property rights through land ownership impacts how conservation knowledge is produced. Private property rights include the right of access and of exclusion and, in this case study, these rights impact what information about wildlife conservation is communicated and circulated globally by these NGOs as well as on-the-ground at their volunteer programs in Namibia. By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the conservation NGOs determine what knowledge, history, and experiences are made visible and which ones are not.

How information is communicated matters, especially in how meaning is conveyed, as "it gives the impression of 'the truth'" (Smith 1999: 35). The volunteer programs were volunteers' primary source of conservation knowledge while media platforms allowed the NGOs to communicate their conservation mission globally. Empirical evidence is gathered during the volunteer experience as well as online. Knowledge on conservation that is gathered is based on volunteers' experiences working at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia and the visual representations of conservation online that are produced and circulated by the NGOs over global media networks. Empirical evidence gathered justifies these visual representations and on-the-ground experiences in conservation at these NGOs as wildlife conservation in Namibia broadly construed. The NGOs control the means of knowledge production at their private facilities and can construct what is 'real' in wildlife conservation according to their own agenda/goals (Brandon 2024). In epistemology, how knowledge is produced through these NGOs presents a conundrum. Because the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation', volunteers and global audiences online are seeing conservation as it really is. The conundrum is that they are only seeing conservation as it really is through the perspective of the NGOs. As a consequence, these volunteer programs and global conservation campaigns representing conservation at these NGOs cannot and do not serve as verification of authenticity of their conservation practices in Namibia writ large.

Edmund Gettier developed thought experiments in order to understand the necessary and sufficient conditions for (true) knowledge (Heatherington 2016; Borges et al. 2017). Gettier's thought experiments to look at challenges in knowledge production are useful here. Using the

international NGOs. The NGOs are registered as international NGOs, businesses, and charitable trusts and/or foundations.

[86] Ownership (of property) "vests in the holder a multitude of entitlements, *ius fruendi,* which include the right to control, use, encumber, alienate and vindicate" (Amoo 2014: 63). The entitlement of control, that is granted through ownership, provides the holder the right of physical control over the thing that is owned (Amoo 2014), in perpetuity, and "without interference from another" (De Villiers et al. 2019: 22; Amoo 2014). In Namibia, the lawful ownership of both movable and immovable property is "constitutionally recognized and protected by article 16(1) of the Constitution" (Amoo 2014: 4). In freehold titles, "an owner of land has absolute control over a specific surveyed parcel of land" (De Villiers et al. 2019: 22).

[87] In private land ownership, absolute rights grant legal power over a property "which may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3).

example of John, Frank, and the cows (Epistemology: Definition & Examples, 2015), one thought experiment goes as follows:

> Imagine that John arrives at Frank's farm, secure in his knowledge that there are indeed cows in Frank's field. When he arrives, however, Frank informs John that while there are cows in the field, they are hidden in a shaded grove far from the view of the road. What John actually saw and mistook for cows were scarecrows shaped like cows. John did have justified true belief, but his justification turned out to be based on a falsehood (Epistemology: Definition & Examples, 2015).

In this case study, volunteers arrive at the NGOs secure in the knowledge they are volunteering and that they are volunteering in wildlife conservation, assured of their purpose and goals. The NGOs legitimize this belief by constructing the nature and social character of the volunteer programs through daily routines, team building activities, and hands-on wildlife interactions that are described as contributing to the conservation work of the NGOs. The social character or camp-like atmosphere of the volunteer programs worked to build long-lasting friendships, encourage repeat volunteering, and grow an international volunteer community. The social make-up of the international volunteers, the daily routine, the isolated private facilities, activities that centered around team building, and a common interest in conservation contributed to a hegemonic 'sphere of influence' (see Jackson 2020). Shared beliefs created in these volunteer programs and that extend over social media platforms foster a sense of group identity and moral positioning, specify targets of hostility or rather an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, and enable coordinated (in)action on global conservation issues.

In other words, embedded in every aspect of the wildlife conservation volunteering experience was the practice, the theory, and the approach of the NGOs to control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space. This process is what I conceptualized as epistemic territorialization. This concept draws from territorialization in political ecology (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Nel 2021; Gutiérrez-Zamora and Estrada 2020) and Vázquez's (2011) use of epistemic territory as described in their article Translation as Erasure: Thoughts on Modernity's Epistemic Violence. I use epistemic territorialization to describe how knowledge claims organize and consolidate geographic, epistemic, and virtual communities into territories within a controlled space and bounded system. Epistemic territorialization is constructed through a politics of border keeping around what can be known about conservation and who can know it. Private property plays a crucial role in epistemic territorialization because it polices access to and control of resources by organizing social relations through both access and exclusion (Blomley 2019). In this case, information is a resource and the NGOs source of social, cultural, and political capital. Epistemic territorialization is an act of boundary making wherein power relations lie in constructing and controlling the conservation narrative. As this paper will show, epistemic territorialization is the power that forecloses critique of the premises of conservation knowledge and the power that masks the self-interests of the NGOs. Given the analysis that follows, it could be argued that epistemic territorialization is a process to leverage political power and unilateral control over the broader conservation narrative.

How conservation is communicated can lead to assumptions about what conservation is, how conservation should proceed, how it should appear, and who has authority and/or expertise to implement conservation interventions. These assumptions can shape what kinds of conservation interventions and/or solutions are desirable, appropriate, or even possible and who should have power in conservation decisions. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs studied entails assumptions about conservation and about how conservation is proceeding. The philosophical substructure of the NGOs is based on problematic information. Problematic information typically falls into the categories: misinformation or disinformation. The challenge of describing problematic information is that the familiar terms—disinformation and misinformation—do not have mutually exclusive definitions (Jack 2017). Rather, their meanings can overlap. What separates disinformation from misinformation is intent, which is hard to discern. Information is problematic when it is "inaccurate, misleading, inappropriately attributed, or altogether fabricated" (Jack 2017: 2). Problematic information can include hoaxes, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and true specialist information rendered in a distorted way to support one's viewpoint (Di Domenico and Visentin 2020). It is the later that is important in this paper. Problematic information is most often seen in how information is presented over media platforms and the recent phenomena of 'fake news' is a well-documented example (Di Domenico and Visentin 2020). Jack (2017) described how "recent controversies over 'fake news,' and concerns over entering a 'post-fact' era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture" (2).

How information is created, communicated, and circulated by the NGOs is disruptive. The NGOs supply and circulate information crafting global knowledge claims and on-the-ground experiences according to their own conservation agenda/goals. Rather than altruistic endeavors, the volunteer programs and their global conservation campaigns were transactional arrangements with the NGOs. Volunteers pay substantial fees to volunteer and 'make a difference' while global conservation campaigns bring in upwards of three million US dollars annually (Muehlhausen et al. 2018). Online engagement with the NGOs' media platforms and volunteering at their private facilities in Namibia are economic transactions for the benefit of the NGOs' conservation efforts, not for the benefit of conservation in Namibia writ large. Epistemic territorialization serves to determine whose conservation agenda matters by controlling the narrative, establishing epistemic authority, and building sovereignty in conservation for the NGOs' own financial and political gain.

Underscoring the politics of epistemic territorialization is a larger issue: what are the consequences when conservation is decontextualized and problematic information is assumed to be natural, taken for granted as the reality, and accepted as the complete picture of conservation knowledge? Epistemic territorialization, in this case, is bounded through the production of problematic information under the aegis of private property which impacts how knowledge about conservation in Namibia is verified. Because the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation', epistemic territorialization is a political maneuver that the NGOs use to leverage political power and unilateral control over the global conservation narrative. As this paper argues, the geopolitics underlying the production of problematic

information in conservation results in informational, economic, epistemic, and power asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs.

5.2 The Geopolitics of Problematic Information

Social relations, particularly those of power, do not neatly overlap with national or state boundaries and territories, thus societies cannot be separated into distinct unconnected units (Go 2017; Hustinx et al. 2022). International volunteer programs are geopolitical practices that encompass a "myriad of ways that people classify, order, and spatialize the world to produce geopolitical imaginaries of places and the people who inhabit them" (Henry and Mostafanezhad 2019: 295). In a recent study on Tanzania, Mabele et al. (2023) examined how the production and dissemination of knowledge on conservation is entrenched in unequal epistemic structures. Their findings revealed "major inequalities, attributed to researchers, institutions and countries from Europe and North America, dominating in the production, dissemination, and communication of biodiversity conservation knowledge on Tanzania" (Mabele et al. 2023: 279). Following Hustinx et al. (2022), geopolitical practices through knowledge production in the volunteer programs in this study universalizes the viewpoints, experiences, and education of volunteers from the Global North (Baillie Smith et al. 2019, 2021; Butcher and Einolf 2017; Lough 2021; Ademolu 2023). In looking at how knowledge is produced through volunteer programs, Hustinx et al. (2022) noted the need to "consider interactionist dynamics, cultural processes, discursive governmentalities, and epistemological hierarchies" (3). Vázquez (2011) argued that epistemic hegemony "rests in a politics of border keeping…" (27). In this paper, border keeping through epistemic territorialization, follows Vázquez's (2011) argument, as it is fortified and sustained through the construction, manufacturing, and control of the production of conservation knowledge and its reach and centered on the aims and experiences of a visiting and/or distant 'Western' audience.

The social, political, and corporate structure of the conservation NGOs worked to silo international volunteers and wider audiences into a particular territorialized and bounded way of knowing what conservation is or, rather, what it should be in Namibia. Jacobson (2007) argued that the transfer of knowledge is "a reciprocal process of knowledge generation and application" (117). Jacobson (2007) described this as an interactive process between the producers and the users of knowledge. In Jacobson's (2007) explanation, this process involves the "traditional producers (e.g., scientists) and traditional users of knowledge (e.g., practitioners and policy makers)" (117). Examining a similar process of knowledge generation and application, the NGOs studied are the producers of conservation knowledge claims and global audiences and the international volunteers, coordinators, and, to some extent, researchers are the intended users of the knowledge produced. While Jacobson's (2007) model follows the traditional perception of how scientific knowledge should be applied in on-the-ground conservation politics, my case study marks an important contextual difference. This differentiation is highlighted because it denotes the politics of visibility and of erasure underlying conservation claims by the NGOs. International volunteers and global audiences were the intended users of conservation knowledge in this work

while the traditional users of knowledge or, rather, the policy makers in official conservation policy and practice in Namibia were left out in the knowledge transfer. Epistemic territorial practices are a "process of selection, classification and appropriation that erases all that does not fit into the proper place of the already established epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011: 27). Epistemic territory designates both the realm where discourses thrive and their horizon of intelligibility (Vázquez 2011). As Vázquez (2011) argued, epistemic territorial practices require a politics of visibility and of erasure.

The volunteer programs are an example of how epistemic territorialization forecloses critique of the nature of conservation knowledge and masks the inner workings of the NGOs. Writing on the economics of information, Stigler (1961) argued, "information is valuable: knowledge is power" (213). Empiricism, in and of itself, is political (Peet 1977; Forsyth 2008) as knowledge is "always situated, always implicated in formations and systems of power…" (de Leeuw and Hunt 2017: 3). What is made visible and what is made invisible in scientific practice and in other forms of knowledge production is not by chance (Silva et al. 2020; Ademolu 2023). What can be known and who can know is often "the privilege of those who hold the power to define, determine, and distribute the known and the not known" (Knudsen and Kishik 2022: 344–345; McGoey 2019). Visibility, as Silva et al. (2020) states, is produced by the power of the "tradition of the theoretical and methodological elements that delimit a certain world view and what questions can be formulated about a given spatial reality" (Silva et al. 2020: 272). To construct and maintain the spatial reality of conservation, the NGOs must continuously verify, reinforce, and legitimize their work in conservation while, at the same time, delimit what questions can be formulated about their work on-site at their private facilities and in conservation in Namibia more broadly. The NGOs' 'world view' of conservation, however, cannot and does not serve as the complete picture of conservation knowledge nor does it align with the tradition of the theoretical and methodological approach in the field of conservation and, thus, it's critique in political ecology.

The institutional context of the NGOs studied required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors, private property, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights in the spatial production of conservation knowledge claims. The NGOs are private commercial entities that hold and/or occupy private property which means that they hold (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife (Amoo 2014). This right affords the NGOs and the land holder legal power over their property (and the wildlife within) which "may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3). Detailed in the following section, this is at odds with how conservation is defined in the field of political ecology as relational and contested through the need to protect and manage natural resources in the commons.

5.3 Territorialization and *In Situ* Nature Conservation

From its inception, the field of political ecology has not only devoted analytical attention to the relations between humans and nature but defined conservation and conservation politics through contestations within the sphere of activity of the commons (Vaccaro et al. 2013).

Conservation grew from the idea that natural resources need to be managed sustainably for future generations. Natural resources being, for example, land, forests, water, and fisheries (Harvey 2011; Ostrom 1990). The underlying problem in resource management lies in how "to govern natural resources used by many individuals in common" (Ostrom 1990: 1). Natural resources, such as those listed above, are considered common-pool and are thought to be at risk of overuse due to competing interests and needs of different actors. By definition, a common-pool resource is a "resource made available to all by consumption and to which access can be limited only at high cost" (Basurto 2015: n.a.). Common-pool resources typically fall under common property regimes indicating that "local communities devise formal and informal institutions in managing the local commons" (Adhikari 2021: 71). The 'commons' are an integral part of the intellectual history of the political ecology approach and questions of how to manage natural resources within the commons and between various actors is an ongoing debate and underlies processes of territorialization (Turner 2017).

In the field of political ecology, theoretical and conceptual contributions tend to focus on conservation that is *in situ* and/or territorially-based (Vaccaro et al. 2013), whether through national parks, private reserves, or in collaboration with local communities. Ongoing debates in the field center on contestations around rights, access, management, and use of natural resources in the commons (Haller 2019; Bollig 2016; Paulson et al. 2003). The environment is defined as "an arena where different social actors with asymmetrical political power are competing for access to and control of natural resources" (Vaccaro et al. 2013; Bryant and Bailey 1997). Protected areas are the arena in which this competition usually takes place (Vaccaro et al. 2013). Territorialization describes "historical processes of enclosure and appropriation of land, labor, and resources" (Bluwstein 2021:n.a.; Sack 1986) as a strategy that uses bounded spaces for particular outcomes (Rasmussen and Lund 2018). Importantly, territorialization is an act of boundary making wherein power relations are considered written on the land (Bluwstein and Lund 2016; Peluso and Lund 2011).

As a field, political ecology encompasses the "constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself'' (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 17). Territorialization in conservation infers asserting control of land, people, labor, and resources within a conservation space and between NGOs, state, community, and private actors (Vaccaro et al. 2013). Conservation is relational by nature and requires "constant responses to and engagement with changing social, political, and economic boundaries" (Larson and Brockington 2018: 4). The relational nature of conservation is informed by how property is defined by the field. Scholarship on the commons is "often informed by more general research on property rights and institutions" (Agrawal 2001: 1649). In political ecology, however, Turner (2017) noted how the approach has "long embraced the relational underpinnings of property" (797). Different strands within political ecology have engaged with the commons and changing forms of property institutions (Turner 2017). While engaging these topics from different perspectives, they "share common understandings of property rights as relational, contested, and shaped by broader political economies" (Turner 2017: 795). Within this view, property rights are considered as being "socially-mediated, over-lapping and contested, and necessarily

embedded within people's livelihoods" (Turner 2017: 797; Leach et al. 1999; Ribot and Peluso 2003). In this research, however, land is privately-owned, not common property.

5.4 Widening the Political Ecology Lens: Addressing Private Property Rights in Conservation

This study of the NGOs' conservation endeavors called into question taken for granted assumptions of conservation in the field of political ecology and required an alternative frame of analysis. Because of private land ownership, the NGOs are not relational by nature or responding/engaging with changing social, political, and economic boundaries. In other words, the NGOs are not protecting and managing natural resources as a public good within the commons. Rather, the NGOs are the sole arbiters of conservation and its benefits on their property(s) as well as in global fundraising campaigns and over social media networks. The NGOs' conservation endeavors are indicative of a shift in conservation from conservation as a public good to conservation as a private good. In this shift, conservation is divorced from natural resource management and development approaches that prioritize protecting whole ecosystems through neoliberal, market-based, community-based, and other participatory approaches to conservation (Brandon 2024). Rather than protecting and managing natural resources in the commons, conservation by the NGOs is on private property which situates the NGOs outside of the political realm in conservation governance and independent of state-, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation policy interventions.

Private property, in the context of this case, is governed by different legal, regulatory, social, political, and economic structures than property in the commons and in political ecology more broadly. Consequently, different laws apply to private property than apply to common property or state-owned land in which Namibian conservation is based. For example, the NGOs hold the legal right to keep species in captivity as long as they abide by Namibian laws and regulations[88]. Individuals, communities, organizations, and NGOs on public and/or common property in Namibia do not have this right[89]. The right to keep captive species is an (absolute) right held through private property ownership. The NGOs hold and/or occupy private property which means they hold legal power and (absolute) rights over their property (and the wildlife within) (Amoo 2014). Private land ownership codifies (absolute) rights to land and wildlife and also renders on-site conservation a private good. When conservation is a private good, it changes the avenues through which private entities, such as the NGOs in this study, access, engage, contribute, and participate in local, national, and global conservation politics. Property relations

[88] Following Namibia's Independence in 1990, private property remained private and the accepted constitutional provisions for private property allowed permits to remain in effect (Melber 2019), including permits required for keeping captive wildlife.

[89] On CBNRM/communal land, rights are granted over wildlife, though not over land itself (Sullivan 2006). Article 100 of the Namibian constitution confers the "allodial title of the land in the State by the provision that land, water and natural resources below and above the surface of the land and in the continental shelf and within the territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone of Namibia shall belong to the State, if not otherwise lawfully owned" (Amoo 2014: 4). Individual rights over communal land are in the form of "rights of use, with limited security of tenure" (Amoo 2014: 27).

underlie epistemic territorialization in this study and influence power relations in the volunteer programs and in conservation more broadly and this has certain implications for how knowledge is produced by the NGOs.

5.5 On Private Property: Epistemic Territorialization beyond the Commons

While territorialization is often used to analyze power relations underlying *in situ* territorially-based nature conservation, the concept is useful when extended to include epistemic territories. Processes of territorialization are "power exercises that can be harnessed by anyone who seeks to stake claims to land, people, labor and resources, and can legitimize these claims" (Bluwstein 2021: n.a.). In this case, information is a resource and it is the NGOs source of social, cultural, political, epistemic, and economic capital. The NGOs are private, freehold commercial farms with captive species, not protected areas with free roaming wildlife that hold intrinsic conservation value in Namibia. In order to legitimize their work, role, and authority in conservation, the NGOs must define, determine, and distribute the known and the not known in conservation. Epistemic territorialization of conservation is a particular way of governing and controlling conservation resources through constructing a hegemonic sphere of influence, in this case, under the aegis of private property. In epistemic territorialization, claims to conservation knowledge, expertise, and authority are the new territory in which the NGOs access and engage in conservation politics and power.

In both political ecology and geography literature, there is a tendency to link territory with the state and public land with little attention to the territorial dimensions of property leaving the territorial dimensions of property understudied (Blomley 2019). For the purposes of this paper, property is defined as a "system of relationships between people, which derive from, enforce, and sustain a set of relationships of power" (Blomley 2019: 245). Property and territory are both "social institutions that organize a set of relations between people, institutions, and resources" (Blomley 2019: 234). Property and territory are not mutually exclusive. Importantly, property can be territorialized. There are, however, important conceptual differences. In territorialization, the focus is on regulating access and exclusion (Bassett and Gautier 2014). When property is territorialized, greater emphasis is placed on individual rights (Blomley 2019). The organization and distribution of property rights is the organization and distribution of social privileges and power. The presumption is that the "rights of the owner (to use, occupy, alienate and so on) applies uniformly across and exclusively within a defined space, and are operative at all times…" (Blomley 2019: 235). When property is territorialized, the 'owner' of a property is assumed to command all resources within their designated space as well as the right to govern access. As such, the property owner is "assumed to have a territorial 'gatekeeping function' that is not unduly constrained by the wishes and needs of others" (Blomley 2019: 235). In conceptualizing epistemic territorialization, private property is territorialized so as private land holders/private institutions therein command all resources and govern access through epistemic 'gatekeeping' measures. This process underscores the volunteer experience at the NGOs' private facilities in Namibia and extends through broader conservation communication over global media platforms.

5.6 Methodological Approach: Empirical Inquiry into Volunteer Experiences

This paper is part of a larger case study that examined the politics of cheetah conservation in Namibia and over social media. This paper draws from research conducted online and at the volunteer programs of two conservation NGOs in Namibia. While the larger project was focused on cheetahs specifically, these volunteer programs did include wildlife conservation more broadly. This case was organized and selected on the basis of known attributes and distinctive features and allowed for the collection of a variety of data and sources. As this study included multiple units of analysis from different organizations, an embedded case study design offered the best strategy for understanding how conservation knowledge is produced and bounded within exclusionary social and territorial epistemic structures that was pervasive in every aspect of the volunteer experience (Cohen et al. 2000). The primary concern of this study was an in depth look into the production of knowledge by the NGOs through the volunteer programs, not the differences between the organizations themselves. Conservation in Namibia is a small community and volunteer programs even more so; therefore, all respondents, volunteers, Namibian officials, and NGOs are kept confidential. While the volunteer programs do vary in size, focus, activities, and in capacity, what was relevant is that the NGOs' volunteer programs all have similar practices: pose solutions to the same conservation threats, have varied volunteer programs, have education and research components, have captive wildlife on-site, and all use social media to promote and advertise both their programs and their conservation mission. Significantly, the activities at the volunteer programs were the pedagogical approach of the NGOs to communicate and raise awareness for their conservation agendas beyond the context of Namibia.

5.7 Sites and Participants

Empirical data was collected in Namibia through ethnographic fieldwork from September 2017-October 2018. What was represented as conservation was conducted predominantly on-site at the NGOs' private facilities. What was important in this research was to understand how conservation was being framed at these NGOs and how it was consumed by all actors involved. Information was collected from NGOs, international volunteers, and researchers in the field as well as through participant observation at the NGOs. Volunteers, coordinators, and most researchers at the NGOs had come from the EU, UK, US, and Australia. Respondents were organized into different categories (Researchers, Coordinators, Volunteers, and Government Officials) in order to protect the identity of the respondents. Data collection methods included participant observation, semi-structured and conversational interviews (43), volunteer journals, and questionnaires. Interviews were used when speaking with respondents and, with informed consent, were audio recorded and transcribed. Participant observation at the NGOs included conservation activities and research mostly on-site. During participant observation, a total of 52 volunteer journals and questionnaires were filled out by volunteers who agreed to participate.

The journals documented the volunteers' experiences, why they volunteered, what they learned, and how/if their understanding of conservation changed over the course of their stay at the NGOs. Additional data was collected online documenting how both the volunteer experience and conservation was represented over social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube as well as over email and various global volunteer websites.

5.8 Contextualizing the Volunteer Experience

Mentioned in the introduction, this case illustrates an epistemological challenge concerning how wildlife conservation knowledge is produced online and through volunteer programs by the NGOs. Because the NGOs create the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation,' volunteers and global audiences online are seeing conservation as it really is. Therefore, the empirical section that follows describes wildlife conservation as it really is on-the-ground at the NGOs in Namibia. Conservation activities and online resources detailed in this section are pedagogical tools used by these NGOs to identify, define, determine, and distribute the known and the not known in conservation, geographically, conceptually, and ideologically isolated from conservation in Namibia writ large. Namibian conservation policy and practice is fundamentally different from what conservation is on-the-ground at the NGOs' private facilities. Conservation by the NGOs described in this paper should not be confused with Namibian conservation. Importantly, the following description of the volunteer experience is not an account of Namibian conservation policy and practice. The volunteer experience, described here, can only provide insights into how the NGOs conceptualize and define conservation. What is made visible and what is put under erasure in these volunteer experiences shapes what questions volunteers can formulate about on-the-ground conservation in Namibia. As a consequence, the following empirical description of the volunteer experience details how conservation knowledge is produced through problematic information.

The following section contains an empirical description of one unit of the embedded case study undertaken in Namibia focusing on one volunteer experience specifically. One NGO, or unit, is highlighted as it presents the most obvious case illustrating the pedagogical and political practices embedded in constructing these volunteer experiences. While the volunteer programs vary in size and in activities, both NGOs use volunteer activities as pedagogical tools to raise awareness and communicate their construction of conservation needs and challenges in Namibia and beyond.

5.9 Volunteering: A Day in the Life…[90]

A day in the life of a volunteer starts first thing in the morning. After an early breakfast, volunteers make their way to 'food prep' the designated meeting place where volunteers, coordinators,

[90] This example doesn't represent a specific day in particular, only what any day at the volunteer program could be like. During activities, the number of volunteers varies on any given day.

researchers, and staff all gather to go over the schedule and make announcements. Volunteers are assigned a group on arrival which determines the rotation of activities for the duration of the program. The volunteers weekly/monthly schedule is set according to their group. In this account, the group's first activity was the carnivore feed. The carnivore feed is where volunteers, with the help of a coordinator/researcher, feed all of the resident large carnivores. Surprisingly, there is little hesitancy among volunteers when grabbing the bloody pieces of fresh meat or when preparing the food by chopping up animal carcasses for the various carnivores in residence. A thawing zebra or horse head was hardly a surprise walking into the food prep area. This meat was broken down and systematically fed to the smaller resident carnivores at the center; however, feeding the large carnivores required a vehicle. The carnivore enclosures are spread out across the NGO's extensive property. Feeding the carnivores meant throwing large pieces of fresh meat over the fence to the animals. This includes leopards, lions, cheetahs, and wild dogs all in separate enclosers. For the carnivore feed, several volunteers stood in the bed of the truck and one or two on the ground poised and ready to heave a big chunk of fresh meat over the enclosure fence. The first to be fed were two impatient, pacing cheetahs. Those who were not throwing the meat had their phones/cameras ready to record the feeding procedure. Feeding cheetahs is not the same as other large carnivores. To feed captive cheetahs you need to catch their attention. If the cheetahs do not see the meat, where it lands, or the meat flying through the air, the cheetahs won't necessarily know lunch was served. Cheetahs are not scavengers and the meat will be left uneaten, decomposing, and needing to be removed later. Leopards and lions, however, do not need such formalities. Seasoned volunteers know this already but it is explained to the new arrivals by a coordinator/researcher so they are ready when it is their turn. Throughout the activity the volunteers took turns throwing the meat and filming each other as they did. These films are shared quite often on YouTube.

The carnivore feed takes up most of the morning driving between enclosures and volunteers usually get back just in time to queue for lunch. Meals at the organizations are a communal affair. New volunteers stand out as they decide on finding a space at the table. Experienced volunteers already have their group and their places. New arrivals adjust quickly and are welcomed by other volunteers with stories of wild adventures 'in the bush.' Over lunch, volunteer discussions tend to revolve around the conservation experience. Volunteers offer each other advice on the various volunteer packages, what to do, what to avoid, and which sites to go, while others talk excitedly about their morning/afternoon activities. Not everyone, however, is enthusiastic. Some activities can be monotonous like going through camera trap data for research or tedious when building a new enclosure. There are also the typical group dynamics at play, not everyone gets along and there's often a bit of drama in the daily routine. But, even after difficult tasks or dealing with group dynamics, the volunteers noted their unique experiences getting to be part of the conservation efforts at the NGO. After all, as conservation volunteers, they have the "rare and exciting opportunity to actively participate in the conservation, rehabilitation, care and research of African wildlife."[91]

[91] Volunteer organization's website accessed 4/5/2022

After lunch, the work begins again. After everyone arrives back at 'food prep', volunteers are told where to go and what they'll be doing before scattering off to their different assignments. The afternoon activity is the baboon walk. In this activity, volunteers go with a staff member on a walk with rescued baboons that are 'humanized' and can't be released back into the 'wild.' These baboons are babies and/or juveniles as the full-grown baboons on-site would be too dangerous for this activity. The juvenile baboons are still large enough to pose a risk; therefore, volunteers must remove all jewelry and are warned against any sudden movements/reactions when baboons interact on the walk. This does include staying calm and collected when baboons 'relieve' themselves during such interactions. The purpose of this activity is to give the captive baboons the chance to be baboons and explore in areas beyond the confines of their enclosures. Volunteers walk with the baboons to a location decided on by staff then sit and relax watching the baboons play. The baboon walk is a favorite activity of the volunteers. The baboons will climb on volunteers' shoulders, groom volunteers' hair, and inspect all bodily crevices. These interactions with baboons are often filmed and many volunteers take these interactions as photo ops. These photos can be seen on both volunteers' and the NGO's posts on Instagram and Facebook as well as videos on YouTube.

The preferred volunteer activities were game counts, baboon and cheetah walks, and spending time in the 'cuddle' section but opinions did vary. Baboons, however, were almost unanimously the beloved species. Volunteer activities included: food prep and small animal feeding, veterinary care, game counts by car and on horseback, HWC conflict calls, and afternoon sports. The least preferred activities tended to be project work where volunteers help with various tasks. Project work generally involves manual labor and can mean building camps, new facilities, tearing down old structures, and the maintenance of roads/fences. Research was also a volunteer activity. Volunteers monitor high profile species on-site, track spoor (animal tracks), participate in research projects, change camera traps, go through camera trap and GPS data, and conduct research studies in collaboration with the researchers at the NGO. Volunteers also have the opportunity to focus on specialized programs outside of the daily routine. Volunteering at the NGO is not only about conservation. The NGOs also have volunteer programs at their medical clinic and early childhood education center. The medical, conservation, and early childhood education volunteer programs did not require prior experience to join, offering volunteers the ability to gain experience in these areas during their stay. Conservation volunteer programs, however, offered more diversity of choices. For example, the options in conservation include the opportunity to learn more about wildlife medicine in the vet program, captive animal care, and/or become a rhino ranger. As a rhino ranger, volunteers can help protect endangered rhinos (on-site). In an intensive two-week course, volunteers, whose ages generally ranged from 18 – 22, can join members of the anti-poaching unit on patrol. In the rhino ranger program, volunteers mostly from the EU, UK, and the US can learn the ins and outs of tracking and wildlife monitoring of rhinos as well as other species along the way[92]. According to the NGO's website, volunteers learn tracking skills, navigation, map reading, and receive weapons training. Rhino rangers trained and employed by the NGO teach the volunteers about the poaching crisis. In this

[92] All volunteers must purchase a shirt to wear everyday so they are not mistaken for poachers by the rhino rangers.

conservation experience, volunteers sleep 'in the bush' or, rather, inside the NGO's private reserve.

The volunteers' day does not end after the activities are done. Dinner is the culmination of an exciting adventure or long day of conservation work. During the evening and late into the night, volunteers discussed conservation and their daily activities connecting through shared experiences. Dinner also had nonhuman guests. A young zebra would often stroll by as the volunteers ate dinner and a goat regularly slept on the BBQ (the irony was not lost on anyone). There was also a rather pesky porcupine that would run underneath the tables (and tents). Volunteers were also responsible for orphaned baboons overnight. As a consequence, dinner was often disrupted by a rogue baby baboon aiming for a snack. After dinner the volunteers gather with their social groups and sit by the fire, debating conservation issues, telling stories, discussing their lives back home, playing games, competing at pool, and drinking well into the early morning hours. Weekends were more relaxed with only the necessary activities needing to be done. Weekends were spent by the pool, at the lodge, or, for a few who signed up in time, in town (Windhoek). On special occasions, the NGO would arrange a group activity. One weekend it was a soccer/football game, another weekend coordinators took volunteers to the local (Namibian) staffs' lodgings, bringing the local staff donated items[93]. Along with special events, the coordinators also arranged fun activities during the week. If the volunteers were lucky, coordinators would organize sundowners in the evenings, wine tastings, sleepouts under the stars, sandboarding, movie nights, and a sunrise breakfast. All activities at the organization fostered group cohesion, team building, and, for most volunteers, offered a balance between work and play.

5.10 Volunteering: The Social and Geographic Conditions of Conservation Knowledge Production

The volunteers' primary source for learning about conservation, was the NGOs. At the NGOs, all day, every day, the focus was on conservation. Activities were explained on a regular basis because of the steady stream of volunteers arriving and departing every week. All volunteer activities had a purpose. Wildlife conservation threats, solutions, and barriers, as defined by the NGOs, were communicated throughout the daily routine. On activities like the carnivore feed, a coordinator/researcher would explain the activity, why the large carnivores are fed this way, why the carnivores are at the NGO, as well as their individual stories, if there was one. Conservation discourses often centered on difficult positions particularly concerning issues such as poaching, trophy hunting, and human wildlife conflict (HWC) situations. Most activities included discussions

[93] This activity drew criticism from one volunteer who brought it to my attention. I did not attend this activity myself but it was shared by the NGO online. I was told this was not a regular activity but held twice a year. The activity was for volunteers to distribute donated items to local (Namibian) staff. The coordinators drove volunteers to the (Namibian) staff quarters where donated items had been spread out on a tarp. Namibian staff were then given the go ahead to race each other to collect the items while volunteers and coordinators cheered them on, taking pictures and/or videos. Volunteers mentioned later that this activity was a meaningful experience. Although only part of the problem underlying this particular activity, staff positions are generally low pay.

of conservation threats and the solutions offered by the NGO. Often during these discussions, the problems and/or barriers to the NGO's work became a topic of conversations, particularly during conservation 'emergencies.' The challenges of working within a regulatory framework instituted by the Namibian government was often discussed as a barrier. Namibian conservation policy was often placed in opposition to the NGO's mission. A common complaint by volunteers concerned conservation 'politics.' Volunteers considered the government to be an obstacle to the NGO's goals, lamenting what could be done if it were not for their interference. International volunteers were explicit in their journals where political power should be located and whose agenda should be a priority in conservation. One volunteer even went as far as to say wildlife conservation should not be a governmental decision.

At the NGO, non-conservation related communication and experiences are fairly limited. Volunteers were not usually given access to wi-fi and phone service was unreliable at best. Overall, the volunteer programs were carefully structured, leaving little room for individual activities, communication off-site, and free, unscheduled time. The NGO was geographically isolated and far from any major/minor cities or reliable public transportation. Unless you have a car, leaving the volunteer program must be arranged. For most volunteers, the NGO was their only stop. Volunteers stayed between two weeks and three months and most travel during that time was between projects. Conservation work itself rarely left the NGO's properties. If the volunteers did leave to join a conservation emergency, they were observers and their experiences carefully organized by the coordinator/researcher in charge. One commercial farmer explained their experience of an HWC conflict call. The commercial farmer noted the lack of engagement with volunteers who were standing off to the side.

Volunteers' status was carefully maintained through hierarchal social interactions. The volunteers' role at the NGO was prioritized and often put before research projects. If an activity had to be moved or a project delayed, coordinators/researchers would arrange a 'fun' activity in its place. The volunteers' role was reinforced in daily discussions, noting how the NGO's mission in conservation would not be possible without their help, work, and their contribution. The longer volunteers stayed, the more responsibilities they were given. Apart from activities, socializing was discouraged between volunteers and staff. Though difficult to avoid owing to the isolated locations and full accommodations. Volunteer accommodations are shared between two or more volunteers per room/tent. What this amounted to is a totally immersive experience in the project.

5.11 Volunteering: Conservation Lessons Learned

Discussing their motivations, a volunteer noted their privileged position: "I like being able to give back to the community as I've had a very lucky upbringing being able to travel and live in a first world country." In volunteer journals, volunteers' reasons for volunteering were similar and focused on the role of the individual. Volunteers came to Namibia—to 'make a difference.' For most volunteers it was a lifelong dream to travel to Africa, however, only a few to Namibia specifically. As one volunteer put it: "since I have been small I have always been in love with

African wildlife and I have always felt great respect for their well-being and their environment." It was for that reason this volunteer had "always planned on going to a reserve to help conserve such animals, because they live on the planet just like us and should be protected from poaching and loss of habitat." Many of the volunteers' primary source for learning about conservation was the NGOs. As one volunteer wrote: "even though before I came here, I always knew that conservation was important… I learned a lot more about the process of conservation and what it takes to do it correctly." Another volunteer wrote how they had "always been in love with African wildlife" and the work the organization was doing was what they wanted to do for a living, "so it seemed like the natural first step to gain some practical experience in the field." In another journal, a volunteer discussed how they needed a break from work to figure out their direction in life and wanted to do something hands-on and meaningful. The volunteer mentioned they had always loved animals and nature and "volunteering seemed like a perfect way to combine these without prior experience in the field." Another volunteer wrote their experiences learning about conservation:

> Yes, I have learned a lot. Before I had only a little bit knowledge about it. I knew that protection of carnivore is very important to the ecosystem but I didn't know any details. I have also discovered how to do the research and in the future I want to learn more about it. At least now I have the base.

Questions asked during fieldwork on prior experience in conservation was specific to cheetahs, however, questions on conservation research addressed conservation more generally. Both questions drew similar responses, that most of the volunteers did not have experience in cheetah conservation or conservation research prior to volunteering. What knowledge they attained about conservation and the NGOs was formed through what the volunteers' saw, experienced, and learned while volunteering. In a journal, a volunteer discussed how they had been to the NGO once before and that all of their "experience and knowledge of conservation comes from that 2 month stay." Describing how much they learnt at the organization, another volunteer mentioned that "before my trip here I didn't know anything about conservation." For the majority of the volunteers, this was their first experience. One volunteer noted that it was "hard to explain" that "everything I've learned a lot of it [is] a new perspective and a feeling for conservation that has deepened or learned how to stand on its own legs (be)cause I never knew so much about the effect of animals struggling to survive… and now I can really stand behind my opinions and spread the knowledge I have." Discussing their experiences in research, another volunteer wrote:

> It has changed my view on how to do research. Before coming here, I knew some of the basic techniques for carrying out research but experiencing them firsthand has made me realize how important it really is to carry out this work. Every sighting, paw print, and even 'scat' is exciting to see! It makes you feel like you have a real impact on these animals. It's a really rewarding experience. It makes me want to help more and give each animal a chance of surviving extinction.

Volunteers were looking for a meaningful experience and to make an impact, for some that was to mitigate global environmental threats. A significant portion of volunteers commented in their journals that global threats such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and extinction had influenced their decision to volunteer. One volunteer's motivation was "being part of a positive conservation movement to raise awareness about climate change and extinction." Another volunteer mentioned it "was something I needed to do for myself and the world." Volunteering in wildlife conservation at the NGO was considered an opportunity for the volunteers to combat global environmental crises. One volunteer wrote that they wanted to "contribute to sustainability in the world, a healthy environment, and also preserving wildcare." Global environmental concerns were mentioned often as a reason for volunteering and a common concern amongst volunteers. One volunteer raised questions about the contradiction underlying their position, stating "volunteering in conservation and being a part of the problem yourself (just in being a Westerner) is complicated." While this contradiction was noted, the volunteer emphasized the extreme importance to "safeguard what diversity we have left." The volunteer also remarked how "it makes you think of the root causes of the need for conservation and how those keep on going". The root cause referenced by the volunteer was global climate change, extinction, and biodiversity loss caused by overconsumption in the 'West.' Many volunteers mentioned those crises and their cause rooted in 'Western' countries and chose volunteering in Namibia as a means to compensate. Another volunteer wrote that they were "very aware of problems in the world" and would "like to be able to say that, when my time comes, I did something to help, that I wasn't just another life ruining the planet we call home." The role of the airline industry and international tourism in creating the environmental crises the volunteers travelled to Namibia to combat, however, was never mentioned.

What emerged from the analysis of volunteers' experiences was a gulf between what volunteers learned about and considered conservation and Namibian conservation policy and practice. The knowledge and experience gaps underlying the volunteer programs were echoed in the following rhetorical question(s) posed by a Namibian official in an interview. The Namibian official asked: "whose agenda matters in conservation?" Is it the local community or those "in the west who have decimated their wildlife who are now asking to conserve the wildlife here?"

5.12 The Problem with Problematic Information

Going back to Gettier's thought experiments in the introduction and the example of 'John, Frank, and the cows,' volunteers at the NGOs had justified true belief that what they were seeing and experiencing was conservation or, at least, contributing to the NGOs' conservation endeavors in Namibia. The justification for this belief, however, was based on problematic information. In this case, problematic information is when true specialist information is rendered in a distorted way to support one's viewpoint (Di Domenico and Visentin 2020). At the NGOs' private facilities, conservation was not, in and of itself, conservation in Namibia (Brandon 2021). Importantly, conservation at the NGOs was an economic activity and a private good inextricably linked to their business practices that included their volunteer programs, tourism, and other commercial activities. While the NGOs studied do contribute to conservation in Namibia, these contributions

are service-based and 'on offer' rather than *in situ* territorially-based nature conservation (Brandon 2024). Conservation on-site at the NGOs' private facilities cannot, by definition, be considered as conservation in the field of political ecology. As private, commercial entities, the NGOs are not protecting and/or managing natural resources in the commons. Instead, the NGOs shape 'what conservation is' or, rather, 'what it should be' in Namibia by controlling the means of knowledge production within their epistemic territory. Through private property ownership, the NGOs define wildlife conservation according to their own agenda/goals. To construct and maintain the spatial reality of conservation, the NGOs, however, must continuously verify, reinforce, and legitimize their work/role in conservation while, at the same time, delimiting what questions can be formulated about their work on-site at their private facilities and in conservation in Namibia more broadly. The NGOs' 'world view' of conservation, however, cannot and does not serve as the complete picture of conservation knowledge in Namibia or conservation at the international scale.

5.13 The Politics of Epistemic Territorialization

To understand the politics of epistemic territorialization and the broader consequences of problematic information, an example of political organizing by one NGO stands out. The politics is made explicit in this NGO's correspondence with supporters regarding legal troubles following a criminal investigation(s). This NGO emailed several newsletters in an effort to raise money for legal fees through their 'animal welfare legislation campaign'[94]. In one email labelled 'We'll Never Forget…'[95], the NGO requested money for their legal battle. This action was in response to a criminal investigation(s) alleging this NGO had violated Namibian laws "by buying, transporting, keeping, and breeding animals without the required permits" (Mongudhi and Haufiku accessed 10/13/2020). The emails framed the NGO's legal troubles as solely a matter of animal welfare and contained images of dead and maimed animals. Ostensibly, to show the consequences of a failed campaign. One email described this legal fight as "one of the most important legal actions in Namibian history[96]." The NGO called on their 'loyal' supporters to raise $200,000 US Dollars to cover their legal fees[97]. Fundraising for legal fees should be a controversial foray into conservation politics or, at the very least, should raise reasonable questions around the validity of the claims. While it is not known how much money had been raised from these campaigns, this example of the political organizing of one NGO illustrates the socio-economic and political possibilities of epistemic territorialization. It is also an example of problematic information (misinformation and disinformation).

Epistemic territorialization is the power to foreclose critique of the premises of conservation knowledge and the power that obfuscates the self-interests of the NGOs. It is also the power to determine whose conservation agenda matters. Epistemic territorialization serves to control the

[94] Email 9/5/2022
[95] Email 9/5/2022
[96] Email 8/23/2022
[97] Email 9/5/2022

narrative, establish epistemic authority, and build sovereignty in conservation for the NGOs' financial and political gain. Volunteer programs are a platform for the NGOs to put into action their own agenda in conservation, ensnaring international volunteers by making their participation a moral choice that will 'make an impact.' Absent in the volunteer experience was multiple perspectives and voices in Namibian conservation or conceptual linkages in the volunteers' work. Because the NGOs create the conditions for what is seen, experienced, and 'what can be known in conservation,' volunteer programs are illustrative of the problem of problematic information and how information asymmetries are created and reinforced through epistemic territorialization. Epistemic territorialization is a political maneuver as it is a process used to leverage political power and unilateral control over the broader conservation agenda. Informational asymmetries are created by the production of problematic information embedded in the NGOs' knowledge claims and inextricable from the politics of epistemic territorialization. As a consequence, epistemic territorialization is bounded through the production of problematic information serving as a political mechanism of the NGOs.

5.14 Epistemic Territorialization in Wildlife Conservation Volunteer Programs

In this research, the volunteer programs are not benign nor are volunteers uncontroversial figures in global conservation. While it cannot be known through this research exactly how volunteers employed what they had learned at these NGOs, this research did show what volunteers did not learn. For example, volunteers did not learn that captive wildlife did not hold value in conservation in Namibia. Volunteers were also not taught that throwing meat over enclosure fences to feed the resident carnivores was not conservation as it is practiced in Namibia writ large. Importantly, the volunteers were not told that captive wildlife was considered an economic activity by the Namibian government and regulations were in place to prevent this from becoming an industry (Brandon 2024). What was not mentioned while volunteering were the reasons behind state policies regulating captive wildlife and how the NGOs operate in Namibia (MET 2016; Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022). It was clear in this research that the regulations and permitting system implemented by the Namibian government served as a tool in conservation. In Namibian conservation policy, regulations are in place to protect wildlife from being removed from nature unsustainably (MET 2016). These regulations also maintain standards of care for keeping and transporting wildlife (MET 2016; Government Gazette Republic of Namibia 2022). These regulations are the same governmental regulations that volunteers are told by the NGO to be an impediment to their conservation work. Regulations and oversight of wildlife conservation volunteer programs are warranted. Without regulations in place, one misstep with an animal or activity could lead to broader repercussions in Namibia's tourism industry and in conservation more broadly.

Epistemic territorialization presented an epistemological challenge as what the volunteers' perceived and experienced as conservation was only considered conservation within the NGOs' sphere of influence. Because the NGOs are private commercial entities, they are not compelled to supply an exact account of their role and authority in conservation in Namibia (Brandon 2024). Mentioned in the introduction, Jack (2017) described how "recent controversies over 'fake news,'

and concerns over entering a 'post-fact' era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture" (2). The impact of problematic information and informational asymmetries are far-reaching. For example, volunteering at the NGOs may alter the volunteers' future actions and can set the foundation for future work and/or continuing education in conservation. And this was evidenced in many volunteers' future career goals. The majority of volunteers were gap year students heading off to university following the volunteer programs. A significant amount of volunteers were already students and had joined the programs to gain experience for a career in conservation and/or to conduct bachelors, masters, or PhD fieldwork. The consequences of epistemic territorialization of conservation knowledge claims are volunteers who think that they have 'made a difference' through these NGOs and incorporate what they think they 'know' about conservation going forward.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This thesis describes the findings of an embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia. My aim was to provide a nuanced and complex understanding of cheetahs' Extinction Spectacle online and of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia. To see the broader context of cheetah conservation in Namibia, I needed to 1) look at cheetahs' ecological adaptations, 2) examine how the NGOs' work contributed to conservation outside of their private facilities, 3) look at how knowledge was produced online and offline, 4) speak with farming communities about HWC and their experiences with HWC mitigation, 5) understand Namibian conservation policy and practice through the work of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), 6) look at related associations and organizations (LCMAN, NAPHA, WRN, for example), and 7) understand the organization of the broader conservation community in Namibia. I knew this research needed to use a wide lens to look at the many intersecting perspectives and experiences of cheetah conservation, cheetah conservation NGOs, international volunteers, researchers in the field, commercial farming communities, Namibian government, and global audiences, incorporating various media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

During fieldwork, my on-the-ground experiences in Namibia complicated *a priori* assumptions about conservation and conservation NGOs discussed further in this section. The cheetah conservation NGOs studied were self-contained commercial entities on private property and were in Namibia's private sector. The empirical data I collected evidenced that the NGOs held (absolute[98]) rights to land and wildlife through private property ownership[99]. This context raised questions about the nature and character of cheetah conservation by these NGOs in Namibia. Cheetahs' unique ecology (see Chapter 4) and the contextual differences of the NGOs studied has meant that my analysis of cheetah conservation contributes conceptually, methodologically, and theoretically to multiple bodies of literature. This embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the Extinction Spectacle made for an important contribution to the literature by providing a framework for analyzing global conservation claims over social media platforms and their on-the-ground context. This thesis developed and employed an analytical framework based on Debord's (1995) concept of the Spectacle to contextualize the conditions and processes of selling extinction over social media platforms. Importantly, this work extended the concept of the Spectacle to account for changes over social media platforms in the attention economy**.** Significantly, my findings point to what I consider a paradigm shift in conservation and an anomaly in the field of political ecology that has moved from conservation as a public good to conservation as a business. In this shift, cheetah conservation was divorced from natural resource management and development approaches that prioritize protecting nature through fortress,

[98] In private property, absolute rights grant legal power over a property "which may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3).

[99] Ownership (of property) "vests in the holder a multitude of entitlements, *ius fruendi,* which include the right to control, use, encumber, alienate and vindicate" (Amoo 2014: 63). Importantly, the entitlement of control, that is granted through ownership, provides the holder the right of physical control over the thing that is owned (Amoo 2014). In Namibia, the lawful ownership of both movable and immovable property is "constitutionally recognized and protected by article 16(1) of the Constitution" (Amoo 2014: 4).

private, neoliberal, market-based, community-based, participatory, or other normative approaches to conservation.

What became clear in this embedded case study was that the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation could not be answered through the most common and established frameworks in political ecology. As a consequence, this thesis suggests widening the political ecology lens to account for changes over social media platforms, service-based approaches to conservation, private property, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights, as well as other cases of NGOs' on-the-ground conservation business practices in Africa. What follows will further show how the NGOs' approach to cheetah conservation is unique and illustrative of a new phenomenon outside the normative construction of conservation in the field of political ecology (see Chapter 4).

6.2 Situating Conservation in a Political Ecology Frame of Analysis

Often when one imagines nature within Africa it conjures images of wildlife roaming freely across sweeping vistas and plains. Landscapes that have been made famous in films like Out of Africa, Born Free, and The Lion King. In such imaginaries, nature is produced and reproduced through representations of panoramic landscapes bursting with iconic species and devoid of human interruption. Igoe (2017) noted, nature is "pervasively represented in the form of dramatic panoramas" (5). Such panoramic views are iconic of nature as a "priceless and pristine realm, unsullied by human activities…" (Igoe 2017: 5). Images of pristine landscapes and iconic species not only shape how Africa and its wildlife are perceived but influence how conservation should appear as well. Popular associations of nature have been coproduced alongside modern nature conservation that uphold such images of panoramic landscapes and iconic wildlife as an ideal (Igoe 2017). From its inception, the field of conservation has been concerned with the "long-term viability of whole ecosystems" (Soulé 1985: 727). Conservation is generally understood to be the protection and sustainable management of natural resources for future generations. Natural resources being, for example, land, forests, water, and fisheries (Harvey 2011; Ostrom 1990). Whole ecosystems and the natural resources they contain, however, are not typically free from humans nor do they tend to be 'pristine,' and/or 'untouched' panoramic landscapes.

In practice, the conservation of natural resources attempts to reconcile the need to sustainably manage natural resources with lessening the impact of conservation interventions on often marginalized local communities dependent on the same resources for survival and/or for their livelihoods (Bixler et al. 2015). In reconciling the need to sustainably manage natural resources with lessening the impact of conservation on local communities, the field of conservation has not always found its balance. Rather, global efforts in conservation particularly those enclosing land have had detrimental social impacts throughout history from colonialism (Bluwstein 2021; Baumeister and Eicher 2021, Choudry 2013), imperialism (Sène 2024; Naidu 2015), to forced displacements (Lundstum et al. 2016; Brockington et al. 2010; Massé 2016; Akampurira and Marijnen 2024), dispossession (Colchester 1993; Akampurira 2023; Olanya 2016), land grabs (Holmes 2014; Balehegn 2015; Tura 2018; Mantz 2024), eviction (Brockington and Igoe 2006;

Bocarejo and Ojeda 2016), exploitation (Munro and Hiemstra-Van der Horst 2011; Lebillion 2003; Klein et al. 2023), militarization (Duffy et al. 2019; Duffy 2014; Marijnen 2022; Marijnen and Verweijen 2016), and violence (Akampurira 2023; Mushonga 2021; Smidt 2022). According to Turner (2017), “enclosures of all sorts including national parks, land titling, and assorted land grabs by private capital have figured prominently in animating the social justice outrage surrounding conservation and development programs…” (795). This outrage continues to fuel political ecological analyses of conservation intervention policy and practice that focuses on the differences in material interest and power in conservation (Turner 2017).

Political ecology from its inception has “devoted analytical attention to the socio-ecological context of conservation policies” (Vaccaro et al. 2013: 255; Neumann 1992). Conservation policy and practice that in most of the political ecology literature links conservation with nature and protected areas, both public (Peet et al. 2011) and private (Holmes 2015) and to the state (Margulies and Karanth 2018). Conservation policy interventions like national parks, CBNRM, and payments for ecosystem services for example are critical sources of analysis in political ecology frameworks. As a field, political ecology is oppositional in its approach for analyzing conservation intervention policy and practice. In other words, political ecology provides critical responses in the form of reconceptualizing conservation interventions to point out the differential material interests and power relations underlying global conservation practice. These oppositional efforts have, for example, conceptualized fortress conservation as a response to the forced displacement of communities and dispossession of land involved in creating national parks and reserves across the world. Whether it be through national parks, private reserves, or in collaboration with local communities, theoretical and conceptual contributions in political ecology tend to focus on conservation that is *in situ* and/or territorially based (Vaccaro et al. 2013). In very general terms, Vaccaro et al. (2013) explained, political ecology literature has “created an historical framework of analysis that describes the evolution of the territorially based 'conservationist industry' in three main phases” (256; see also Wilshusen et al. 2002). The phases included: fortress conservation (Vaccaro et al. 2013; Hussain 2019), varied forms of co-management conservation (Bixler et al. 2015), and neoliberal conservation (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Fletcher 2010; Bluwstein 2018; Mukono 2024). Within this framework, critical sources of analysis in conservation initiatives have grown to include market-based (Ruelas and Dunlap 2023; Massarella et al. 2022), mainstream (Kiwango and Mabele 2022; Asiyanbi and Massarella 2020), and new conservation (Dunlap 2020; Corson and Campbell 2023) for example. These conservation interventions are at the core of a political ecology frame of analysis.

Namibia provides an example of how global strategies in conservation, often discussed in a political ecology frame of analysis, are implemented. Namibia’s vast system of national parks offers boundless panoramic views of pristine nature, views that range from watching wildlife at the many waterholes across Etosha National Park, climbing ‘Big Daddy’ at Sossusvlei in the Namib-Naukluft Park, to the Skeleton Coast where mountains of sand dunes meet the Atlantic Ocean in spectacular form. There are twenty state-run protected areas in Namibia that cover seventeen percent of the land in the country (Overview Of National Parks 2/2/2024). These protected areas (PAs) “conserve biodiversity and ecosystems by protecting some of the country's most important habitats and species of national and global significance” (Overview Of National

Parks 2/2/2024). Namibia's extensive national park and private reserve system is known globally for its iconic wildlife and spectacular scenery. In its national focus on conservation, Namibia has expanded beyond national parks and reserves to include Community-Based Natural Resource Management areas and conservancies both public and private (freehold). National conservation efforts are implemented to benefit local communities on public land, particularly communities that coexist with dangerous wildlife. National conservation strategies work to promote conservation through wildlife utilization based on the devolution of rights over wildlife (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021). The program relies on tourism to provide economic benefits to the communities living in communal and CBNRM areas (Mufune 2015). Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) policies are lauded as "the most progressive of their kind in southern Africa" (Nuulimba and Taylor 2015: 89). While the success of the program is contested both in Namibia (Lenggenhager 2018; Nattrass 2021) and as a neoliberal approach to conservation more broadly (Hewitson and Sullivan 2021; Dressler and Büscher 2008; Duffy 2009; Dressler et al. 2010; Holmes and Cavanagh 2016), CBNRM has been an important instrument for meeting Namibia's goals in conservation and sustainable development (MET 2013). CBNRM and communal areas promote coexistence between local communities and wildlife establishing a means through which local communities benefit from living with often dangerous species.

In national approaches to conservation, Namibian officials were clear that the country's conservation efforts were not "perfect" but there had been a significant success that showed in increasing wildlife populations. In recognizing their success, all Namibian officials stressed that the priority of national efforts in conservation was focused on conserving wildlife in the wild. Within Namibia's national parks/reserves, CBNRM, and conservancies, wildlife roams freely and are (mostly) unfenced with spectacular views and panoramic nature.

6.3 The On-The-Ground Reality of Cheetah Conservation in Namibia

Arriving in Namibia—the 'Cheetah Capital of the World', one would expect to see cheetahs racing across the savanna after prey, hunting in the grasses, and/or napping in the afternoon shade. The expected sweeping vistas with free-roaming wildlife typical of conservation in Namibia transformed quickly into landscapes where cheetahs and other species were in enclosures. Cheetah conservation at the NGOs in this study predominantly entailed captive cheetahs as well as other wildlife held in separate enclosures. Captive wildlife was featured in both tourism and volunteer activities such as carnivore feeds and cheetah walks. These activities were advertised online and available for tourists and/or volunteers on-site at the NGOs' private facilities. Feeding tours were provided by the NGOs where guests fed their captive cheetahs and other carnivores by throwing fresh meat over their enclosure fences and tours that allowed guests to enter cheetahs' enclosures to get pictures sans fence. Instead of sprinting after prey, at the NGOs, cheetahs ran after a piece of fabric on an electric lure or a truck with guests or volunteers filming the action. With popular images of cheetahs online and national approaches centered on the species roaming freely in the wild, it was perplexing to find cheetahs in captivity while conducting this research study.

During the thirteen months I spent researching cheetah conservation in Namibia, not once did I see a cheetah in the wild. There were signs they were around of course. While the occasional free-roaming cheetah did pass through one NGO when I was conducting fieldwork, these appearances were only recorded for research purposes as opposed to being positioned at the forefront of the NGOs' conservation efforts. What I found missing in cheetah conservation efforts by the NGOs in Namibia were the dominant conservation approaches that have been the focus of much of the political ecology literature. Absent in cheetah conservation at the NGOs were conservation efforts that prioritized nature conservation through the protection and management of natural resources that provide economic benefit and livelihood opportunities for local communities. What also proved difficult to figure out while at the NGOs was how on-site conservation efforts at their private facilities impacted conservation in Namibia more broadly. Missing in my experiences on-site at the NGOs was their work with the government and communities in natural resource management and development that promoted coexistence between people and wildlife. Instead, I found captive cheetahs to be center stage.

During fieldwork, a respondent pointed out a noticeable territorial distinction in the landscape of Namibia and the geography of conservation. This respondent noted in a conversation how one side of Namibia wildlife roams freely and the other side there are animals in cages. This geographical distinction, however, was not illustrative of differences in public and private conservation approaches, differential development needs, or conservation intervention policy and practice in Namibia. Rather, this geographical distinction illustrated land ownership patterns and the differential rights embedded in private property ownership in Namibia. Wildlife roam free in conservation spaces that are located on land that is public and/or common property. Cheetahs, and other wildlife, are in captivity because the individual, farm, and/or organization in which they are held is privately owned. The NGOs in this study hold and/or occupy private property. As a consequence, the NGOs hold and/or maintain (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private property ownership. This right affords the NGOs or the land holder the legal power over their property (and the wildlife within) which "may be exercised in any manner whatsoever within the parameters of the law" (Amoo 2014: 3). In other words, the NGOs hold the legal right to keep cheetahs and other species in captivity as long as they abide by Namibian laws and regulations[100]. Individuals, communities, organizations, and NGOs on public and/or common property in Namibia do not have this right[101].

[100] When Namibia gained Independence in 1990, private land remained private and in the hands of the less than 5,000 mainly white commercial farmers (Melber 2019). The accepted constitutional provisions that protected the freedom and protection of property after Independence also allowed for permits granted on private property to remain in effect. This included permits required for keeping wildlife in captivity.

[101] On CBNRM and communal land, rights are granted over wildlife, though not over the land itself (Sullivan 2006). In Article 100 of the Namibian constitution confers the "allodial title of the land in the State by the provision that land, water and natural resources below and above the surface of the land and in the continental shelf and within the territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone of Namibia shall belong to the State, if not otherwise lawfully owned" (Amoo 2014: 4). Individual rights over communal land are in the form of "rights of usufruct or rights of use, with limited security of tenure" (Amoo 2014: 27). Usufruct, according to Amoo (2014), is "a right to use property belonging to another, a grantor, and to enjoy it while maintaining the substance of such property" (27). The right of usufruct is a right of use and enjoyment of the property and an example of a limited real right (Amoo 2014).

Cheetahs held in captivity is indicative of a shift in conservation from conservation as a public good to conservation as a private good. In this shift, conservation is divorced from natural resource management and development approaches that prioritize protecting whole ecosystems and neoliberal, market-based, community-based, and other participatory approaches to conservation. Rather than protecting and managing natural resources in the commons, cheetah conservation was independent of state-, community, and Namibian NGO-led conservation and inextricably linked to the NGOs' business model. Private property and the role of (absolute) private property rights to both land and wildlife in cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is the primary reason for considering this case as a paradigmatic shift in conservation and an anomaly in political ecology.

6.4 Conservation as a Common Good vs Conservation as a Business

Discussed in this thesis, Namibian conservation follows the normative approach in conservation within a political ecology frame of analysis. Cheetah conservation, however, does not (see Chapter 4). Conservation in Namibia is through the state, implemented using development strategies, and focused on conserving cheetahs, and wildlife as a whole, in the wild. Namibian conservation governance was implemented through national parks/reserves, private reserves, CBNRM, and conservancies. Namibian conservation intervention policy and practice included fortress conservation, varied forms of co-management conservation, private conservation, and neoliberal conservation, as well as market-based, mainstream, and new conservation approaches. These conservation approaches employed market-based solutions through privatization, natural capital, payments for ecosystem services, and environmental services that provide economic benefits and livelihood opportunities to incentivize local communities to conserve. While the state has been the primary agent of land conservation in Namibia consistent with broader political ecology texts (Gooden and 't Sas-Rolfes 2020; Bixler et al. 2015; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Vaccaro et al. 2013; LaRocco 2024), conservation also includes private protected areas (PPAs)[102] (Holmes 2015), conservation easements (Owley and Rissman 2016), and private conservation (Thakholi 2021; Thakholi 2021; Marijnen 2018; Büscher et. al. 2022). Importantly, in the Namibian conservation modal broadly construed, wildlife was not kept in captivity nor were economic benefits or livelihood opportunities for communities derived from captive species. Dominant conservation interventions in Namibia focused on *in situ*, territorial nature conservation, not on conservation interventions that include individual species taken out of their natural environment, kept in captivity, and used for commercial activities.

[102] There is one excellent example of this conservation intervention in Southern Namibia that uses ecotourism to benefit local development projects. This is the only PPA in Namibia officially recognized by the IUCN as a private protected area in Namibia (Mitchell et al. 2018). Not all private land used for conservation, however, is considered as PPAs. Mitchell et al. (2018) noted that "some wildlife ranches in South Africa and Namibia, where intensive game ranching is closely associated with commercial agricultural practices and involves internal fenced camps, feedlots and removal of predators" (3 – 4). The IUCN recognizes responsible business operations on private lands may retain key habitats and support endangered species, however, would still not be considered a PPA if conservation was not the primary goal (Mitchell et al. 2018). The NGOs in this study are not considered as private protected areas or as private conservation in Namibia and are not recognized as PPAs by the IUCN (see Mitchell et al. 2018).

Ongoing debates in and between the fields of conservation and political ecology center on contestations around rights, access, management, and use of natural resources within the commons. As a field of study, political ecology encompasses the "constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself'' (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 17). The 'commons' are an integral part of the intellectual history of the political ecology approach (Turner 2017). From its inception, the field of political ecology has not only devoted analytical attention to the relations between humans and nature but defined conservation and conservation politics through contestations within the sphere of activity of the commons. Importantly, scholarship on the commons is "often informed by more general research on property rights and institutions" (Agrawal 2001: 1649). Different strands within political ecology have engaged with the commons and changing forms of property institutions (Turner 2017). While engaging these topics from different perspectives, Turner (2017) wrote that they "share common understandings of property rights as relational, contested, and shaped by broader political economies" (795). This assumption that conservation is relational is informed by how property is defined by the field. Turner (2017) noted how the political ecology approach has "long embraced the relational underpinnings of property" (797). Within this view, property rights are considered as being "socially-mediated, over-lapping and contested, and necessarily embedded within people's livelihoods" (Turner 2017: 797; see also Leach et al. 1999; Ribot and Peluso 2003). As a consequence, conservation is assumed to be relational by nature and, as such, requiring constant responses to changing social, political, and economic boundaries (Larson and Brockington 2018).

In political ecology, assumptions that conservation is relational, contested, and shaped by broader political economies makes it difficult to see cheetah conservation in this case study for what it is—a private good, in other words, a product and/or service of the NGOs' business. The NGOs, or the land holder(s) of the property(s), possess legal power over both land and wildlife. This right has allowed the NGOs to function simultaneously as businesses, charitable trusts and/or foundations as well as work independently from state, community, and Namibian NGO-led conservation. This right has also allowed the NGOs to set the conservation agenda, develop their own conservation interventions, and establish both expertise and authority in conservation by specializing in a single species, the cheetah. The NGOs in this study supplied and circulated information constructed under the aegis of private property and, thereby, crafted global knowledge claims and on-the-ground experiences according to their own agenda and goals. Importantly, the NGOs' conservation agenda did not necessarily depend on or respond to changes in Namibian conservation governance. The NGOs studied maintained the ability to shape 'what conservation is' across their epistemic territory, foreclosing critique of the premises of conservation knowledge and masking the self-interests of the NGOs. Because the NGOs have (absolute) rights over land and wildlife, they can control access and exclusion to their properties as well as information on cheetah conservation in Namibia. As a consequence, the NGOs can control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space at their private facilities in Namibia and across the globe. In so doing, the NGOs can make claims about what conservation is and what it should be that have the potential to influence global conservation politics.

6.5 Namibian Conservation Intervention Policy and Practice

Conservation in Namibia and cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied are fundamentally different approaches. While the NGOs can contribute to conservation in Namibia, these contributions are not through national conservation policy interventions. Namibian conservation policy and practice as it is formally constituted and applied in Namibia is constructed through environmental laws and protections embedded in Namibia's constitution. This work in its entirety uses the legal definition of conservation as stated in Namibia's constitution under Chapter 11 The Principles of State Policy, article 95(l). For the purposes of this work, conservation is defined as follows:

> "maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future; in particular, the Government should provide measures against the dumping or recycling of foreign nuclear and toxic waste on Namibian territory" (Article 95(l)).

In addition, this thesis included MET's strategic Objective 3 that proposed to "ensure that Namibia's environment, biodiversity and ecological processes are conserved, managed, and sustainably utilized" (MET Strategic Plan 2012/13-2016/17). These definitions and their implementation are what is referred to as Namibian conservation and/or conservation in Namibia throughout this thesis. Namibian conservation interventions are through Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), conservancies, national parks, and reserves. The implementation of official conservation intervention policy and practice in Namibia is the role of the state, in conjunction with Namibian NGOs, and enacted through CBNRM, communal, and national parks/reserves for the benefit of local communities broadly construed (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). The legal definition of conservation and state conservation policy interventions was included here to situate the NGOs' claims of on-the-ground cheetah conservation in the context of Namibian conservation governance and outside of the political realm.

From its inception, the field of political ecology has "devoted analytical attention to the socio-ecological context of conservation policies" (Vaccaro et al. 2013: 255; Neumann 1992). Due to the context of this case, conservation policy and practice, as it applies to cheetah conservation by the NGOs, is regulatory. The NGOs' location(s) on private property and in the private sector means institutional conservation practices by the NGOs are regulated by the state. In this case study, Namibian policy for large carnivores, in which cheetahs are included, is meant to monitor all organizations with captive animals on-site. The MET does bring in the NGOs when their services are needed but the NGOs are regulated for a reason—all of the NGOs have captive cheetahs on-site, all are linked to a business entity, and all are considered income generating sources (see Chapter 3). As a consequence, the NGOs studied are not connected to the policy realm where conservation policy and practice in Namibia is debated and decided. As a respondent noted in Chapter 3, when it comes to decisions, particularly regarding conservation

policy, conservation NGOs are consulted by the MET, but, at the end of the day "most of the laws are meant to regulate them."[103] The private sector attends meetings and workshops and can provide feedback but there are no provisions in terms of directly influencing policy. Stated in one of the principles (2,3,4) of The National Policy on Conservation and Management of Large Carnivores in Namibia (Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2016), "the State recognizes civil society, including the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations, as important stakeholders in the long-term conservation of large carnivores and shall consult, where necessary, with civil society to ensure the long-term survival of large carnivores" (7). The NGOs studied are all organized as non-governmental organizations running volunteer programs, in which, they claim are supporting conservation in Namibia. This is what goes into their conservation work discussed below.

6.6. Cheetah Conservation as a Private Good

In Namibia, the cheetah conservation NGOs studied are land-owning conservation elites and part of a private service-based conservation industry. The NGOs are private facilities, commercial farms, private residences, businesses, land holders, and international NGOs all in one. Cheetah conservation NGOs' private facilities are research centers, working commercial farms, private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, and, for some, opportunities for volunteers that sell the novelty of cheetah experiences, activities, attractions, and, importantly, conservation. All are economic activities that financially support the NGOs' own practices of cheetah conservation. The cheetah conservation NGOs are the producers of cheetah conservation information and interventions, a service they provide and advertise to global audiences themselves. In this approach, cheetah conservation is a private good. A private good is a "product or service produced by a privately owned business and purchased to increase the utility, or satisfaction, of the buyer" (Henry and Summary 2023: n.a.). Through their global claims to #SaveTheCheetahs in the #RaceAgainstExtinction, the cheetah conservation NGOs in this study have positioned themselves as institutions of global academic, economic, epistemic, and social power in cheetah conservation. In so doing, the NGOs' work in cheetah conservation in Namibia serves to provide for the intangible needs and concerns of global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever.'

6.7 What is (Cheetah) Conservation?

During fieldwork in Namibia, the question – what is (cheetah) conservation? — was posed rhetorically by a wildlife manager on my first venture out 'into the field.' Following this conversation, this question fundamentally shaped how I thought about this research project. While this was not the original (primary) question this research sought to address, this rhetorical question rose up as a specter every time 'conservation' is mentioned in this work. This particular question has never quite lost its importance/relevance either. It framed my experiences during

[103] ibid

fieldwork, the questions I asked in interviews, and during participatory observation as well as when writing this thesis. Writing this thesis laid bare the underlying problem of using the term 'conservation' in regard to the work of the NGOs. What I found in this particular case study was that the term 'conservation' is not wholly suited or adequate to understand the full nature and character of cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied.

When this question was first asked, the wildlife manager had been telling me about the varied business ventures and financial streams of the NGOs as well as their contradictions. This was the first of many experiences learning about the NGOs' commercial activities in Namibia and beyond. Mentioned in the introduction, the NGOs' partners in cheetah conservation ranged from mining companies, celebrities, to global tourism/volunteer partners. The NGOs' business connections were not difficult to uncover as they are publicly available and circulated online, many shared alongside images of the NGOs' resident cheetahs. While the business connections were not out of the ordinary for conservation NGOs in general, captive cheetahs at the NGOs stood out. I had expected cheetahs to be in captivity from fieldwork at the same NGOs in 2014. At the time, I had thought that captivity was an unfortunate part of broader conservation efforts by the NGOs in Namibia. It came as a surprise to learn that was not the case. Rather, captive cheetahs and captive wildlife writ large were considered an economic activity by the government and part of the NGOs' business model. Importantly, captivity was not considered by the Namibian government to hold value in conservation. In other words, captive cheetahs were a private good benefitting the NGOs and did not provide economic benefit, livelihood opportunities, or financial incentives for local communities or those impacted by HWC to incentivize conservation of cheetahs in Namibia.

During the conversation mentioned above, the wildlife manager made an important point noting how debates in the field of conservation distract from larger problems. The manager stated that it is easier to go back and forth debating 'what is not conservation' rather than to ask what it is. While this statement by the wildlife manager related to debates around practices such as captivity, volunteering, and hunting, it does, in my opinion, apply to debates in conservation more broadly. Conservation, as a concept, carries baggage. For many, conservation is protecting and sustainably managing the worlds' natural resources for future generations. In this thesis, I could argue cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is not, by definition, conservation. I could argue that, because cheetahs are captive and on private property, cheetah conservation might not be in line with sustainable management and development goals. In this thesis, it is easy to insert myself into debates in both the field of conservation and in political ecology discussing what is not (cheetah) conservation. For example, cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is not fortress, market-based, private, community-based, participatory, or neoliberal forms of conservation in a political ecology frame of analysis. However, to debate 'what is not (cheetah) conservation' in this thesis would detract from the main point—that cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is a business.

Through an embedded case study of cheetah conservation in Namibia and the Extinction Spectacle, it became clear that cheetah conservation by the NGOs and conservation in political ecology were a difference of kind. The NGOs were part of a conservation capitalist class and a land-owning conservation elite. While the structure, composition, and management of the NGOs

studied adhered to the legal frameworks of international NGOs, their attributes could not be accounted for under the egis of the established political ecology discourse. Assumptions in the field of political ecology that conservation is participatory, policy-orientated, and a public good/common pool resource made the business of saving cheetahs less than obvious. This begged the question—Why was it so hard to see cheetah conservation as a business within a political ecology frame of analysis? Through my research, I found that the cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia were an anomaly and outside of the egis of the dominant political ecology framework (see Chapter 4).

In this research, conservation as a business challenges theoretical assumptions in political ecology, particularly those that assume conservation is a public good, within the commons, attached to development strategies, and relational by nature. This is not a slight deviation in conservation policy interventions analyzed in the field of political ecology. Cheetah conservation by the NGOs is not a policy intervention. The legal definitions and rights embedded in private property ownership in Namibia mean that the NGOs in this study are located outside of the political realm. Under the legal definitions of private property in Namibia, the business of conservation involves different legal, regulatory, social, political, and economic structures than conservation that is a public good, within the commons, attached to development strategies, through the state, and relational by nature. Private land ownership codifies (absolute) rights to land and wildlife thus allowing for conservation to be a private good by the NGOs. Because the NGOs studied are private sector actors and cheetah conservation is a private good, they are not protecting and managing natural resources as a public good within the commons. Rather, the NGOs studied are the sole arbiters of conservation and its benefits on their property(s) and, as such, in global fundraising campaigns and over social media networks. Because the NGOs are on private property and private commercial entities, they are not compelled to supply an exact account of their role and authority in conservation in Namibia.

The institutional context of the NGOs required that this research consider the role of non-state private actors in the spatial production of conservation knowledge claims. Private property rights include the right of access and of exclusion and, in this case study, these rights impacted what information about wildlife conservation was communicated and circulated globally by these NGOs. The NGOs tight control of evidence and narratives in conservation calls for the inclusion of political epistemology in political ecology approaches. With changes over social media and the rise of ‘post-truth’ and ‘fake news,’ it has become increasingly difficult to discern legitimate sources of evidence, particularly as misinformation spreads faster than ever before (Hannon and Edenberg 2024). Jack (2017) described how “recent controversies over ‘fake news,’ and concerns over entering a ‘post-fact’ era, reflect a burgeoning crisis: problematically inaccurate information, it seems, is circulating in ways that disrupt politics, business, and culture” (2). The practice, the theory, and the approach of the NGOs to control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space is a political maneuver. The cheetah conservation NGOs in this study practice political power in conservation through awareness raising to amplifying media/public responses that influence rather than ground political power in the realm of policy, or, rather, the political realm.

When conservation is a private good, it changes the avenues through which private actors, such as the NGOs studied, access, engage, contribute, and participate in local, national, and global conservation politics. This context also effects how, where, and by whom conservation interventions are implemented. As a consequence, conservation as a private good and source of income generation through a business model requires a different approach and frame of analysis than what is currently in place in the field of political ecology. This necessitates widening the political ecology lens to include political epistemology and account for the role of private property, private property ownership, and (absolute) private property rights in local and global conservation approaches and conservation claims. In Namibia, the legal title holder of private property can decide land use. Mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, ownership (of property), as Byer (2023) explained, "in both the common law and civil law systems, *ius abutendi*[104] grants the owner the right to neglect and abuse property…" (2). According to Byer (2023), this can conflict with the "sustainable governance of resources and notions of integrating planetary limits in policymaking" (2). Land ownership entitles the land holder the right to conserve their land but also the right to use and exploit it. In this case study, the NGOs are conferred these entitlements as land holders or through private land holdings. While this does not necessarily mean that the NGOs studied are exploiting natural resources on their property(s), it does allow them to run international volunteer programs, luxury lodges, and wildlife sanctuaries where animals are captive and financially benefit from these activities. It also allows them to circulate information on conservation and amplify their mission to global audiences across media platforms, raising money and awareness for their work. These activities are not benign nor are they environmentally neutral.

As a consequence, international conservation NGOs' effects on the environment at local, national, and global scales as well as online should be put under investigation. The conservation business model must entail further research on its broader environmental impacts. Critically, it is necessary to investigate the socio-economic and political implications of conservation NGOs, especially when partnered with environmentally destructive companies such as mining enterprises. Because, when conservation is a business and extinction is sold online, it undermines effective political action and epistemological issues regarding transformative change in conservation.

6.8 Contributions to the Field

Cheetahs' unique ecology and the institutional contexts of the NGOs studied has meant that this analysis of cheetah conservation in Namibia contributes conceptually, methodologically, and theoretically to multiple bodies of literature. The embedded case study research design is often undervalued in the field of political ecology. I believe using an embedded case study design would provide a framework for an in-depth approach for researchers to explore wider connections in

[104] Ius abutendi in civil and Roman law refers to the "right to consume entirely…the right to exercise complete dominion over certain property, including the right to let it lie fallow, to let it go unused, or to damage or destroy it...." (Fellmeth and Horwitz 2009: n.a.).

conservation more broadly and in other contexts. The following sections will further develop these ideas and concepts starting with the embedded case study approach.

6.8.1 Embedded Case Study Research Design

The embedded case study research design was invaluable for getting to the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia because, otherwise, it would not have been possible through research at the NGOs alone. In my experiences during fieldwork, problematically inaccurate information was circulated in ways that disrupted how conservation information was communicated and how knowledge was produced while at the NGOs' private facilities. The production of problematic information (misinformation and disinformation) while at the NGOs resulted in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs. Because the NGOs were private facilities, they determined what knowledge, history, and experiences were made visible and which ones were not. And because cheetah conservation NGOs had (absolute) rights to land and wildlife, they were not compelled to supply an exact account of their role and authority in conservation in Namibia. Therefore, it was necessary that I included broader connections to cheetah conservation in my research in order to get an accurate account of the NGOs' role and authority in (cheetah) conservation in Namibia. I was able to produce an in-depth analysis of cheetah conservation in Namibia because I employed an embedded case study research design.

The embedded case study research design provided a way for me to gather data from multiple sites, locations, and actors in Namibia as well as over social media. One of the broader issues raised by this study is the relation between "political ecology" and "political epistemology". I think this study is useful for exploring some of the wider connections in conservation. Importantly, my research showed how proper analysis in political ecology often needs epistemological depth. The embedded case study approach allowed for an in-depth look at the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation that revealed a shift in normative conservation approaches. Fieldwork in Namibia complicated *a priori* assumptions about conservation, conservation politics, and conservation NGOs. The dominant conservation paradigm in the field of political ecology could not shed light on what was unique to the nature and character of both cheetah conservation and the NGOs studied in Namibia. Therefore, this case study developed and employed concepts to describe the unique nature and character of cheetah conservation and the cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia. The following is a discussion of the concepts drawn from my embedded case study of the on-the-ground reality of cheetah conservation in Namibia.

6.8.2 The Spectacle of Extinction

The Spectacle of Extinction illustrated how communication platforms, technologies, and media align in the production, reproduction, creation, co-creation, amplification, and circulation of

cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction. In the attention economy, the spectacle of extinction diverges from both Debord's (1995) concept of the Spectacle and Igoe's (2010) interpretation as The Spectacle of Nature. The Spectacle conceptualized by Debord (1995) was based on passive consumption through mass media under mass media's monopoly on attention. New media platforms have disrupted mass medias' monopoly on attention and, in so doing, the competition for attention over the varied platforms (Tefucki 2017). These changes have meant that social relations mediated by images through the Spectacle have also transformed alongside new media platforms (Fuchs 2017; Adams 2019). Attention, Zhang et al. (2018) explained, shifted the conversation from "who has the power to communicate to who has the power to attract an audience that will pay attention" (3162). As a consequence, changes in how attention operates over new media platforms has led to an active and more engaged spectacle. What is meant by an active spectacle is that it is no longer only content or information that is conveyed through images that is a commodity, online engagement through sharing, posting, tweeting, and amplifying content to reach broader participation is now part of the commodification process. In the continuous flows of information over media spaces, capital works as a unit in images and representations; that are subsequently, realized, invested, and accumulated in the sphere of circulation (Castells 1996). In this way, social media and new technologies are continuously (re)shaping how social relationships and human-environmental relationships are perceived and spectacularized in new processes of accumulation, circulation, and control (Debord and Nicholson-Smith 1995; Giroux 2016). The Spectacle of Extinction took these changes into account by extending the Spectacle to include a broader understanding of attention and the hyper-circulation of content over social media platforms to raise awareness in global conservation campaigns.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were developed decades after *The Society of the Spectacle* was published in 1967. While Debord (1995) could not have foreseen the full extent of how social media landscapes have changed, the concept of the Spectacle remains prescient in understanding how social relations are mediated online and to what end. Importantly, the Spectacle was vital to illustrating how communication platforms, technologies, and media align in the production, reproduction, creation, co-creation, amplification, and circulation of cheetahs' global #RaceAgainstExtinction.

6.8.3 The Politics of the Extinction Spectacle

Extinction is both a pedagogical tool and a deliberate strategy used by cheetah conservation NGOs to leverage social, economic, and political relations over global social networks and critical in narratives of global awareness raising and action. Calls for global participation in cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction are imbued with assumptions about power over social media. Assumptions that more information, awareness, and attention to environmental issues over social media will lead to effective change. The idea that political action can be done by sharing cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction, donating to cheetah conservation NGOs, and/or simply raising awareness of cheetahs' extinction provides a singular and privileged view of the complex realities of on-the-ground conservation politics in Namibia. Not only is this problematic but it confuses

online 'likes' and 'activism' with effective on-the-ground political action and involvement. Dean (2005) argued that the fantasy of activity or participation is "materialized through technology fetishism" (54). Image-making, Castells (1996) stated, "is power–making" (476). Over social media, political actors "exist in the power game through and by the media" (Castells 1996: 476). Cheetah conservation NGOs in this study followed Castells (1996) and existed in the power game 'through and by the media.' In so doing, the NGOs engaged in conservation politics that circulated as content where they competed for visibility, money, and attention to #SaveTheCheetahs.

When the Spectacle of Extinction gets attention, it can appear as if global audiences are acting collectively through a shared responsibility towards the planet. The appearance of collective action over social media is part of the logic of the platforms. Media power is fetishized and believed to influence public opinion and hold weight in policy decisions and debates (Ross et al. 2021). Social media has created new spaces online for the global public to come together over what has appeared as public space (Fuchs 2017). Arendt argued in The Human Condition that "all political acts require a 'space of appearance;' people appearing collectively defines politics and the public realm: 'it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the world" (Merrifield 2015; Arendt et al. 1998: 198). Odell (2019), described Arendt's 'space of appearance' as the place to be addressed, understood, and challenged. It was the physical space where "we gather, we say what we mean, and then we act" (Odell 2019: 177). Power, Arendt (1958/1998) argued, is what "keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking [men], in existence" (200). Social media spaces, however, challenge what Merrifield (2015) and Arendt et al. (1998) understood as public space and political 'spaces of appearance.' Importantly, social media and media platforms more broadly function not only as a 'public' space but as an online digital commons (see Coleman and Blumler 2009; Fuster Morell 2014; Ossewaarde and Reijers 2017). The use and circulation of hashtags are part and parcel to constructing the appearance of public space and an online digital commons as well as the appearance of political action.

Mobilized engagement over and across media platforms gives the appearance of people acting collectively. The online 'political realm' is constructed out of engagement, in other words, the creation, co-creation, amplification, and hyper-visualization and -circulation of images, information, and content to reach broader participation. Hashtags facilitate this process. It is by design. The hashtag was intended to be an open source according to its creator (Messina 2017). Hashtags are a clickable, searchable link to conversations, ideas, information, and people and were created to be a superstructure that spans across and connects all social media platforms (Messina 2017). As stated by the creator, "the act of participating in the flow of a hashtag commons is a political act and contributes *attention currency* to something that is important or meaningful to you" (Messina 2017: n.a. emphasis in article). In other words, by using hashtags it signifies the "desire to join, connect, or speak your mind or share your perspective or experience" (Messina 2017: n.a.). Importantly, as the creator of the hashtag explained, it says, "I exist, I am here, and I choose to express myself!" (Messina 2017: n.a.). In opposition to Arendt's 'space of appearance,' detailed above, where political acts require people appearing and acting collectively in public spaces, politics over social media transforms into an individual 'political' act. As individualized political action, power is no longer situated in upholding the spaces of appearance

between acting and speaking in existence that make up public spaces, the commons, and the political realm where politics is practiced.

The separation of power and politics in local and global cheetah conservation practice was the main contradiction analyzed in this thesis. This contradiction follows what Marx (1867/2013), Debord (1995), and Igoe (2010, 2017) theorized as processes of alienation. Alienation, to quote Igoe (2010), is "a general loss of control by people over the conditions that shape their lives and their ability to express themselves in creative ways" (378). Igoe (2010) gave an example of this as the severing of "social relationships and detachment from place" (378). Social media(tion) is not only the detachment from place, but the severing of both social and political relationships. The ability of social media to create the illusion of agency to act politically online, is the alienation of politics and political power that the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation represents. In this case study, the social media(tion) of global cheetah conservation illustrated the separation of politics and power in global efforts to #SaveTheCheetah. Consequently, the spectacle of extinction documented a shift in conservation politics from conservation as a public process/public good to that of individualized/private political action online. By mobilizing attention through mediated communication, Giroux (2016) argues that the Spectacle offers the "populace a sense of unity that serves to integrate them into state power" (21). The Spectacle of Extinction here is operationalized outside of state power through non-state, private conservation actors by engaging spaces opened up by social media platforms and growing international concern over biodiversity loss and extinction. Namibia-based cheetah conservation NGOs practice political power in conservation through awareness raising to amplifying media/public responses that influence rather than ground political power in the realm of policy, or, rather, the political realm. Consequently, power in cheetah conservation is not situated in the cheetah conservation NGOs themselves or on-the-ground in Namibia, but in the NGOs constant need to circulate and amplify the extinction crisis to raise global awareness, attention, and money.

Giroux (2016) argued that the Spectacle is transforming the very nature of politics; particularly, how the Spectacle is central in legitimizing social relations "in which the political and pedagogical are redefined in ways that undercut democratic freedom and practice" (19). Over social media, what is promised as a democratic space (Amedie 2015), not only creates and engages new spaces for the global public to come together, connect, and interact collectively; but, more critically, space for economic, political, cultural, and, importantly, informational power structures and asymmetries (Fuchs 2017). In this thesis, the emotive power of the word extinction drew attention away from important political contexts, critical perspectives, and expanding informational, economic, and power asymmetries in conservation. Global claims of #extinction capitalized on what Giroux (2016) described as 'stylized political action' where such likes, posts, tweets, and shares distract global audiences through the 'theatricality of power'. By mobilizing attention to cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtintion online and offline, the NGOs created a sense of unity between global audiences online, volunteers, tourists, coordinators, researchers, celebrities, institutions, and guests alike. In creating this cheetah 'empire,' the NGOs legitimized their work, role, and authority in conservation in order to access, control, and influence global conservation politics and power. For the NGOs studied, power—political, social, epistemic, and economic—was fortified and sustained through the construction, manufacturing, and control of

the production of conservation knowledge and its reach and centered on the aims, experiences, and agenda of a visiting and/or distant 'Western' audience.

6.8.4 The Assetization of #SaveTheCheetahs and the Conservation Industrial-Complex (Forthcoming)

Cheetah conservation is a global affair and Namibia an epicenter for cheetah conservation across the world. By communicating, circulating, and amplifying spectacular narratives around cheetahs' #RaceAgainstExtinction, Namibia-based NGOs have been able to align global audiences, corporate sponsors, conservation experts, and international governments in remarkably effective ways. How conservation NGOs become entwined in social and political systems bolsters a profit economy in conservation creating the 'conservation-industrial complex' conceptualized here. Threats of extinction are used by the NGOs to consolidate global authority, money, resources, and power in a way that sustains an effective global cheetah 'empire'. As a result of the findings of this thesis, I conceptualized the conservation-industrial complex through which a global cheetah empire arose. Certain conservation NGOs studied are gaining global monopolistic influence and power over economic, political, and ideological spaces of conservation due to the profitability of saving globally valued, individual charismatic species. Cheetahs are an example of how the focus on individual species by conservation NGOs works to create and sustain a profit economy in conservation wherein individual threatened species compete for global attention and money as well as epistemic power and authority.

In global fundraising/marketing campaigns, cheetahs' extinction and/or threatened status is incentivized in order to be competitive in the global conservation market. #SaveTheCheetah and other similar hashtags are intangible assets that create income streams in such a profit economy. These hashtags are marketing taglines that appeal to global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever'. As intangible assets, #SaveTheCheetah and #RaceAgainstExtinction become ubiquitous over social media and correlated with the specialized organizations working on their conservation. Birch and Ward (2022) define an asset as "both a resource and property, in that it generates income streams with its sale price based on the capitalization of those revenues" (1). Assetization, Birch and Ward (2022) argued, is a "necessary concept to focus on the moment of enclosure and rent extraction" (1). Asset formation then is the "creation of property that will afford a revenue stream – it is, therefore, the creation of rent-bearing property" (Birch and Ward 2022: 2). In conceptualizing epistemic territorialization, territory and property combined in a particular way to command all resources and govern access through territorial 'gatekeeping' measures. For cheetah conservation NGOs, information is a resource and it is the NGOs source of social, cultural, political, and economic capital.

The institutional context of the NGOs, as private sector actors, has particular implications for how conservation information is communicated, circulated, and justified as well as how it is used to sell extinction. Through specialization in cheetah conservation, the NGOs engaged in rent-seeking behavior through marketing taglines such as #SaveTheCheetahs in the #RaceAgainstExtinction. Rent seeking refers to gaining control of land and natural resources in order to grow wealth (Birch

and Ward 2022). In cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied, this is done through epistemic territorialization and by establishing authority specializing in a single-species conservation focus. In what is conceptualized as the conservation industrial-complex, the interconnection of business, social systems, political institutions, and scientific communities in conservation creates a profit economy where individual species compete against each other for global attention and funding. While competition between globally valued and iconic species for funding is 'cut-throat', competition in cheetah conservation specifically is limited. Ultimately, the NGOs studied have created a cheetah empire through establishing epistemic authority and monopolistic influence and power through #SavingTheCheetahs. Monopolistic behavior has become "an accumulation strategy for individuals and organizations, leading to in some cases, catastrophic implications for society and the environment" (Rodgers 2023: 1; see also Fraser 2021). This is relevant in conservation capitalism that sees inflows of capital to finance efforts, in this case, by the NGOs in Namibia and specifically to #SaveTheCheetah in their #RaceAgainstExtinction.

6.8.5 Selling Extinction: The Spectacular Global Extinction Mode of Production

In biodiversity conservation, Heise (2016) highlighted the importance of looking at "who is in charge of designing and implementing conservation" (91). This becomes necessary as iconic species are perceived to be nearing extinction and conservation NGOs' role in intervention policies have been legitimized through global claims to save globally valued threatened and/or endangered charismatic species, like cheetahs. Conservation, Heise (2016) argued, has become an "arena of contention in the struggle over resources" (91). In the struggle over resources, the NGOs are competing for expertise, attention, and specialization in constructing cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice at local, national, and global scales. Cheetah conservation NGOs compete with each other and with larger, more well-known NGOs, other globally valued and threatened charismatic species as well as the continuous flow of information online. Cheetah conservation NGOs in Namibia funded conservation efforts globally by selling extinction over social media platforms. These fundraising campaign tactics to raise awareness for cheetahs do not work in isolation from broader structures of global capitalism. Global campaigns to #SaveTheCheetahs were not only intended to raise awareness about extinction but also communicated threats facing cheetahs and the proposed solution(s) by the NGOs in Namibia. In other words, cheetah conservation NGOs use the same global fundraising strategies to sell extinction that they use to promote their work in conservation in Namibia, including their work to mitigate HWC conflicts described in this thesis. As a private good, cheetah conservation by the NGOs serves to provide for the intangible needs and concerns of global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever.' By institutionalizing conservation threats, such as extinction and HWC, generating value through conflict becomes necessary in order to maintain the business of saving cheetahs.

6.8.6 Service-Based Conservation

The service-based approach to cheetah conservation by the NGOs studied is an anomaly in the field of political ecology. Because the NGOs are in Namibia's private sector actors and hold (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private land ownership, cheetah conservation is detached from both nature and from development. At the same time, the service-based approach does not provide an incentive for communities to conserve cheetahs as the NGOs do not offer financial incentives or compensation. Political ecology frames of analyses generally focus on nature conservation focused on market-based participatory approaches (Roth and Dressler 2012; Sullivan 2006), ecosystem services (Büscher and Fletcher 2020), and/ or economic development (Vaccaro et al. 2013). Benefits in conservation are typically derived from 'selling nature to save it' (McAfee 1999), payments for ecosystem services (Kull et al. 2015), and/or natural capital (Büscher and Fletcher 2020). These approaches center around conserving nature and biodiversity as a whole and are premised on NGOs working in conjunction with the state, local communities, and the private sector to value nature for economic development for the benefit of communities in support of conservation. The primary distinction between service-based and market-based approaches is that the service-based approach is not reliant on selling a product or, in this case, 'selling nature to save it' (McAfee 1999). In the case of the NGOs, cheetahs and their habitat are not a source of intrinsic value. In other words, value is not derived through natural capital but through the NGOs' specialized conservation services only they can provide.

In this thesis, the cheetah conservation NGOs studied are a conservation service industry. A service industry is "a type of business that provides services to customers rather than producing a product" (Merriam-Webster 2022). As defined by Quinn (1992), the service sector includes all economic activities whose output is not a product and one that adds value in a form that is essentially an intangible concern of its purchaser. The NGOs provide both tangible and intangible conservation services. Tangible conservation services include, but are not limited to, farmer trainings, HWC mitigation, animal translocation, and education. The NGOs also provide intangible conservation services; specifically, 'saving' cheetahs from extinction. Because the NGOs studied are self-contained, private entities, they are independent from state-, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation. As self-contained, private entities, cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice can become a private good or a specialized service the NGOs provide themselves. This has led to a service-based approach to cheetah conservation as the NGOs can construct their own conservation agenda focused on the intangible needs and concerns of global audiences afraid of 'losing the cheetahs forever,' not communities economically impacted by HWC caused by cheetahs.

This service-based approach to cheetah conservation does not provide financial and/or economic compensation for loss that could incentivize commercial farmers and farming communities in Namibia writ large to conserve cheetahs within their territory. Using HWC conflicts, the NGOs studied constructed a specialized conservation industry based on providing conservation services. HWC situations in cheetah conservation follow Hussain's (2019) argument, leaving commercial farming communities with the burden of conservation. In this way, the NGOs are

adding fuel to the fire in HWC with commercial farming communities whose land comprises the majority of cheetahs' territory. Ultimately, this thesis showed, HWC was a conflict between two private sector industries—commercial farming and cheetah conservation.

6.8.7 Conservation Capitalist Class

Insofar as cheetah conservation NGOs have created a private service-based conservation industry, it was made possible by Namibia's land tenure system. The history of land dispossession and appropriation in Namibia is also "the history of capital accumulation" (Lenggenhager et al. 2021: 1). Land, as Melber (2019) noted, was and continues to be the backbone of Namibia's economy. Land and wealth are interconnected and the links between land ownership and wealth accumulation are well established (Lenggenhager et al. 2021). The interconnection of land and wealth is particularly important in this thesis. Through private land ownership, cheetah conservation NGOs are, for all intents and purposes, the owners of the means of production and part of what is conceptualized in this thesis as the conservation capitalist class. As part of the conservation capitalist class, the cheetah conservation NGOs are the producers of cheetah conservation, a private service they develop on their own property and provide through their own labor.

The conservation capitalist class was conceptualized in this thesis using Büscher and Fletcher's (2020) "generic categorization of classes important for conservation" (Fig. 4, 182). Drawing from Büscher and Fletcher's (2020) categories, I drew from categories 2 (the 'land-owning capitalist class') to describe the context of the NGOs studied (182). To start, Büscher and Fletcher (2020) defined the 'land-owning capitalist class' as "commercial farmers, large plantation or otherwise productive land owners" (Fig. 4, 182). The NGOs could be considered as part of what Büscher and Fletcher (2020) categorized as, the "land-owning capitalist class" (182). Except, not all NGOs fully fit within the category of 'farmers' (182). While some cheetah conservation NGOs still remain as working commercial farms, many were not successful and refocused their commercial endeavors on conservation and tourism respectively. In Namibia, the agricultural sector is one of the main economic sectors, tourism another (Ruppel and Ruppel-Schlichting 2016). While not all NGOs are part of Namibia's agricultural sector, all the NGOs are part of Namibia's tourism sector which has included tourism, broadly construed, into their conservation model.

The NGOs in this study are considered income generating sources as part of Namibia's tourism sector. Tourism, as Jafari et al. (2000) noted, is a global service-industry, one that exerts significant economic, cultural, and political importance across the world. Cheetah conservation NGOs have all converted some portion of their land into private reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, luxury lodges, tourist accommodations, research centers, and/or voluntourism operations. All of these are economic activities within the service industry and all contribute directly to the conservation work of the NGOs. For the purposes of this paper, property is defined as a "system of relationships between people, which derive from, enforce, and sustain a set of relationships of power" (Blomley 2019: 245). The organization and distribution of property rights is the organization and distribution of social privileges and power. The presumption is that the "rights

of the owner (to use, occupy, alienate and so on) applies uniformly across and exclusively within a defined space, and are operative at all times..." (Blomley 2019: 235). When property is territorialized, as discussed in the following section, the 'owner' of a property is assumed to command all resources within their designated space as well as the right to govern access. The owner of a property is "assumed to have a territorial 'gatekeeping function' that is not unduly constrained by the wishes and needs of others" (Blomley 2019: 235). In this research, this 'gatekeeping' function extends to the NGOs' epistemic territory. In other words, private land holders/private institutions command all resources and govern access through both geographical and epistemic 'gatekeeping' measures.

6.8.8 Epistemic Territorialization

In this thesis, epistemic territorialization was conceptualized to describe the practice, the theory, and the approach of the NGOs to control the conservation narrative, agenda, authority, and space. Epistemic territorialization served to determine whose conservation agenda matters by controlling the narrative, establishing epistemic authority, and building sovereignty in conservation in Namibia for the NGOs' own financial and political gain. Governing what can be known and who can know is often "the privilege of those who hold the power to define, determine, and distribute the known and the not known" (Knudsen and Kishik 2022: 344–345; McGoey 2019). Because the NGOs created the conditions for 'what can be known in conservation', epistemic territorialization was a political maneuver that the NGOs used to leverage political power and unilateral control over the broader conservation agenda. What is made visible and what is made invisible in scientific practice and in other forms of knowledge production is not by chance (Silva et al. 2020; Ademolu 2023). Epistemic territorial practices are a "process of selection, classification and appropriation that erases all that does not fit into the proper place of the already established epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011: 27). By controlling geographic, spatial, and epistemic territories, the conservation NGOs studied determined what knowledge, history, and experiences were made visible and which ones were not.

In epistemic territorialization, claims to conservation knowledge, expertise, and authority was the new territory in which the NGOs studied engaged in conservation politics as well as expanded and marketed their conservation agenda. The NGOs worked independently from both state–, community-, and Namibian NGO-led conservation offering both tangible and intangible conservation services. As private sector actors on private commercial land, the NGOs, however, were not protected areas with inherent conservation value in Namibia. Therefore, the NGOs must legitimize their work, role, and authority in conservation in order to access and control conservation resources and influence conservation politics. In the struggle over resources, the NGOs were competing for expertise, attention, and specialization in constructing cheetah conservation intervention policy and practice at local, national, and global scales. Because the NGOs held (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private property ownership, they can construct their own conservation agenda and, through a service-based approach, that agenda could focus on the intangible needs and concerns of global audiences afraid of 'losing the species forever.' In their global reach, the NGOs were relatively unconstrained in the geographic,

epistemic, and virtual spaces where their conservation knowledge claims were marketed and sold. Global fundraising and awareness campaigns by the NGOs in support of their cheetah conservation efforts in Namibia brought into question the flows of money, information, and power and its influence in global conservation politics.

This thesis raised questions about the politics of extinction in communicating about cheetah conservation in Namibia. Because the NGOs in this study held (absolute) rights to both land and wildlife through private property ownership, they were not compelled to supply an exact account of their role and authority in conservation in Namibia. This materialized as an epistemological challenge as what was represented, communicated, and experienced as conservation by volunteers, tourists, and global audiences was only conservation within the NGOs' sphere of influence. What this thesis found was that both volunteer programs and global conservation campaigns representing conservation at these NGOs could not and do not serve as verification of authenticity of their conservation practices in Namibia. Epistemic territorialization, in this case, is bounded through the production of problematic information under the aegis of private property which impacts how knowledge about conservation in Namibia is verified. Problematically inaccurate information was circulated in ways that disrupted politics and power in conservation and masked the economic and political interests of the NGOs studied. The production of problematic information results in information asymmetries, drawing into question the local, national, and global implications of conservation knowledge claims by these NGOs. Underscoring the problem of epistemic territorialization and the politics of extinction as Spectacle discussed in this thesis is a larger issue: what are the consequences when dominant conservation paradigms are decontextualized and problematic information is assumed to be natural, taken for granted as the reality, and accepted as the complete picture of conservation knowledge?

Epilogue: Final Thoughts

Cheetah Conservation Governance

What was not often mentioned by the NGOs studied were the policies that regulated how they operate in Namibia. State policies are in place for the management of wildlife on both public and private land, though policies differ depending on land tenure. The Namibian government regulates how the NGOs work with and care for captive species on their property. State regulations are in place to ensure the NGOs implement the best practices in animal care and 'conservation' and not the other way around. Because all of the NGOs in this study have captive cheetahs, all NGOs are regulated by the state. Changes in wildlife management policies impact the commercial activities at the NGOs and these policies are those with which the NGOs are primarily concerned.

The work of the Namibian government is not to be underestimated here. From my own experiences interviewing different actors in conservation, it was clear that the regulations and permitting system put in place by the Namibian government also served as an effective tool in conservation, though not usually mentioned as such. This may be a controversial statement but the Namibian government needs to do more in terms of regulating these organizations. Government oversight of NGOs that run volunteer programs is necessary to ensure the safety of both volunteers and wildlife at these facilities. I have my own experience with hyenas during a research project where safety was a serious concern. While permits could not have helped in that particular situation per se, stronger regulations and oversight of the industry is needed. Without stronger regulations in place, one accident or misstep with an animal or activity at one NGO could lead to broader repercussions on Namibia's tourism industry more broadly.

Industry-wide impacts of the NGOs' work is relevant in discussing Namibian conservation governance. Rumors about the NGOs transporting and releasing cheetahs in Namibia are well documented. These rumors may be false but they have had a long-lasting impact on commercial farmers' perspectives of cheetahs and of the NGOs. So much so that it has negatively impacted conservation efforts for free roaming cheetahs. Namibia's permitting system is not perfect but it does put in place a mechanism to curb indiscriminate taking and transporting of wildlife in Namibia. However, more is needed to regulate the conservation industry and provide much-needed oversight of the NGOs' commercial activities, particularly those relating to the volunteer programs.

Chapter 8: References

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Photography Credits:

Cheetah Hunt Rollercoaster Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Florida
Photo 155819978 | Cheetah Hunt Tampa © Viavaltours | Dreamstime.com

Addendum

Volunteer Weekly Journal
Age:
Country of Origin:
Occupation:
Length of Stay:
Would it be okay to contact you with follow up questions:
If yes:

- Email:
- Facebook:

6). Reason for Volunteering:

7). How do you view conservation:

8). What is your past experience/knowledge of cheetah conservation:

9). Has your view of conservation and "how to do research" changed after your time spent at the different sites. Please describe how and in what way:

10). How do you view specie's extinction:

Journal Directions –

Write in your journal each day!

- What you learned?
- What surprised you?
- Did you have any questions?
- What was each activity like?
- How did you feel throughout the day with each experience?

⭐ Please pay attention to how and what was conveyed in each activity in what was taught and/or discussed; what were the issues and how/if they were similar or different from what you expected. Also note any questions and ideas that have popped up during volunteering, conservation moments and experiences, and events that you may have found challenging.

⭐ Please also have fun with this and include any and all cheetah facts, quirks, anecdotes, and jokes!

And Final Thoughts! → This is important!

I would like to know if/how your understanding of conservation and research and the project(s) has changed or remained the same, what was your standout! experience, do you plan on maintaining a connection with the project(s), have you documented your experiences on social media and do you plan to in the future, how will you describe your experiences to friends and family AND what, if anything, has changed in your overall perception of cheetah conservation?

Suzanne W. Brandon
Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)
Completed Training and Supervision Plan

Name of the learning activity	Department/Institute	Year	ECTS*
A) Project related competences			
A1 Managing a research project			
WASS Introduction Course	WASS, Wageningen University	2016	1
'The Spectacle of Extinction: The Social Media(tion) of Global Cheetah Conservation'	Conservation, Climate Change and Decolonization Exploring new frontiers in Conservation Social Science, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA- UAB), Spain	2019	1
'Rebel with a Cause: Cheetah Conservation, Ecology, and Governance in Namibia'	Political Ecology Network (POLLEN) conference University of Sussex, UK	2020	1
'Cheetah Empires: Mapping a single-species within the Conservation-Industrial Complex'	DOPE+, Political Ecology Working Group, University of Kentucky	2024	1
'The Production of Problematic Information: Epistemic Territorialization and Wildlife Conservation Volunteering in Namibia'	POLLEN 2024 Conference, Towards Just & Plural Futures, Lund University, Sweden	2024	1
A2 Integrating research in the corresponding discipline			
Spatial Thinking in the Social Sciences: on the local, the Rural, and nature	WASS, Wageningen University	2016	4
Political Ecologies of Conflict, Capitalism, and Contestation	WASS, Wageningen University	2016	3
Critical perspectives on social theory	WASS, Wageningen University	2017	4
Political Ecology summer school: Political Ecologies of the Anthropocene	WASS, Wageningen University	2017	4
B) General research related competences			
B1 Placing research in a broader scientific context			
Artfull – Relationships of Knowing, Doing, and Being	University of Coimbra (CES)	2016	1
Racism, Eurocentrism, and Political Struggles	University of Coimbra (CES)	2017	1.5
Writing Research Proposal	Wageningen University	2016-2017	6
B2 Placing research in a societal context			
Marx Reading Group	Wageningen University	2016-2017	1
Vidi Reading Group	SDC, Wageningen University	2016-2018	1
Organized 'Draw Your Ph.D.'	CSPS, Wageningen University	2019	1

C) Career related competences/personal development			
C1 Employing transferable skills in different domains/careers			
Organized the Ph.D. event for 'Coral Whispers: Scientists on the brink' with Irus Braverman	CSPS, Wageningen University	2019	1
Organized Ph.D. Workshop with Russell Prince, Massey University	CSPS, Wageningen University	2019	1
Organized conference panel: 'Political Ecology of Conservation in Namibia'	POLLEN 2024 Conference, Towards Just & Plural Futures, Lund University, Sweden	2024	1
Total			**35.5**

*One credit according to ECTS is on average equivalent to 28 hours of study load


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