

Killing Softly

European Whiteness, Black Labor, and African Wildlife in Ulrich Seidl's *Safari*

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This essay examines how Ulrich Seidl's film *Safari* addresses European whiteness in a moment of intensified racialization of European border regimes. Featuring white European tourists travelling to Sub-Saharan Africa for big game-hunting vacations, the documentary dissects contemporary trophy tourism's relations to colonial archives of race and animality. At the time when European discourses on migration largely frame racialized others as intruders claiming space at the expense of white nationals, the film foregrounds trophy tourism as a site for reproducing hegemonic white masculinity. Through the contrast between white gazes and black looks, speech and silence, *Safari* conveys how the regeneration of European whiteness depends on the association between disposable black labor and killable animal life. Although *Safari* never visualizes European borders, it compels audiences to consider how the racial hierarchies that underpin the governing of mobility have been historically articulated in relation to African people and lifeworlds. Thus, this film provides a poignant counterpoint to the disavowal of race in contemporary European public discourse.

Keywords: Ulrich Seidl, whiteness, race, animality, postcolonial nature, white mobility

In the dominant European public discourse, migration has become synonymous with «crisis» and «emergency». In 2015 approximately one million people crossed European borders. Hundreds died at sea, turning the Mediterranean into a mass grave. As mainstream media narratives framed migrants and refugees as dangerous, suspicious and sometimes vulnerable outsiders (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017), policy makers scrambled to reconfigure tactics of border control and migration management (Heller and Pezzani 2016; De Genova 2017). The crisis of border control contributed to the creation of new convergences between neoliberal capitalism and the rise of nationalist and racist forces across Europe. Although largely suppressed from elite political discourse, race and whiteness have been playing a key role in the bordering of the continent. Through the interplay with gender and sexuality, race works to exclude black or brown bodies from European spaces and imaginaries even as migrant bodies are selectively included to perform servile and reproductive jobs (Farris 2017; Giuliani 2017). As Nicholas De Genova argues (2018, 1766), the European border regime can be understood as «yet another re-drawing of the global colour line».

It is against this backdrop of racialized bordering that, in September 2016, Austrian filmmaker Ulrich Seidl premiered the documentary *Safari* out of competition at the Venice Film Festival. If «uncontrolled» migration flows from Africa and potentially «dangerous» migrants have become central in European public discourse, this film directs attention to other movements across borders and figures of mobility: European tourists traveling to postcolonial Africa for big game hunting vacations. Introduced in the production notes as a «vacation film about killing», *Safari* illuminates the vastly uneven power relations linking together white tourists, safari entrepreneurs, black workers, animals and supposedly pristine, yet tightly controlled, natural landscapes. *Safari* follows groups of Austrians and Germans on their hunting ground at the Leopard Lodge, a vast estate in Namibia, the former German colony bordering South Africa. It alternates hand held camera hunting sequences with Seidl's characteristic full frontal, static interviews that capture the gestures and repertoire of feelings experienced by white hunters in Africa. In these highly staged interviews, trophy tourists and settlers speak about hunting and reveal assumptions about whiteness, race, gender and animality. The black workers in the safari industry are silent presences but it is clear that their labor, including the dismembering of animal corpses, provides the conditions of possibility for white wildlife adventures. While they never get the chance to speak, a series of tableaux vivant show them staring back at the camera thus addressing the (primarily white) film audiences.

Seen as an important economic asset by local governments, trophy tourism in Africa sparks occasional controversies. In 2015, the killing of Cecil the lion at the hands of a wealthy white dentist from Minnesota was followed by a global outcry about the protection of wildlife¹. Although *Safari* addresses the ethics of big-game hunting, I contend that this is not the film's main concern. Rather, its central focus is the connection between the killing of animals and the reassertion of racial hierarchies of humanness in the postcolony. Much recent scholarship on animals and films has tended to focus on the ethics of killing animals and the power of films to generate ethical concern for animal suffering (von Mossner 2014; Creed 2014). Critics attuned to both cinema scholarship and animal studies have examined animal slaughtering on screen in relation to the sensorial dimensions of cinema (Shukin and O'Brien 2015; Smaill 2016). Drawing attention to cinema's aesthetic registers, Nicole Shukin and Sarah O'Brien (2015) have probed the continuity between the sovereign power to slaughter and attempts to struck, affect and

¹ After Cecil's killing in Zimbabwe, thousands of people signed petitions demanding justice for the lion, and donated to wildlife conservation organizations. Activists and scholars in the United States pointed out that the outrage around Cecil's killing was disproportionate when compared to responses to the killing of Black people at the hands of police officers. The emphasis on the ethics of killing animals in Cecil's controversy, they argued, ran the risk of obfuscating the state-sanctioned disposability of black lives (Gruen 2015). For a reading of Cecil's killing in relation to white settler colonialism in Zimbabwe see Suzuki 2017, 150-152.

mobilize audiences through film language and techniques. In this exciting body of work, however, less sustained attention, has been paid to the nexus of race and species that informs human-animal encounters in film. Responding to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's call to consider the entanglements of animality and blackness in Western thought (Jackson 2013), in this essay I examine how the regeneration of whiteness in *Safari* depends on the conjoined subjugation of racialized and animal bodies. At the cinematic level, Seidl foregrounds racial formations through the contrast between white gazes and black looks, words and silence, and highly stylized visual compositions that place white hunters in asymmetric relation with black workers and African wildlife.

In the following sections I demonstrate that in making visible the power relations between European whiteness, African people and animals, Seidl's film challenges its audiences to discern the centrality of whiteness and race in the current European moment. This move, I argue, counters the tendency in dominant European discourses to disavow the relevance of whiteness as racial formation (Goldberg 2006; Triulzi 2006; Lentin 2008; Lewis 2013; Giuliani and Lombardi Diop 2013; Salem and Thomas 2016). In investigating the trophy tourism industry in Africa, *Safari* shows how white hunters and adventurers draw on colonial archives of whiteness, race and gender while journeying into African nature. Thus, it compels viewers to confront the colonial legacies that contemporary European discourses obfuscate. At the time when European migration policies and discourses frame racialized others as intruders claiming space at the expense of white nationals, this film explores the safari industry as a site for bolstering the hegemony of white masculinity. Providing a counterpoint to narratives of migration that depict Africans on the move as threatening to European and Western ways of life, *Safari* shows that European travels to postcolonial Africa continue to engage in the «project of freezing African space – its meanings and boundaries – and controlling African movement» (Dunn 2004, 483).

2. Colonial Whiteness and the Grammar of Animality

Oblivious to any straightforward notion of political cinema, Seidl is one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary European filmmaking. Unlike the Austrian director Michael Haneke, who embodies the cosmopolitan European auteur capable of transcending nationality (Galt 2010), Seidl's work seems informed by the specificities of his birthplace. But while his films, even those set in exotic locations, always start from or refer back to Austria, they investigate power formations that extend beyond its boundaries (von Dassanowsky and Speck 2011). Combined with the focus on the quirky habits and grotesque bodies of working and middle-class Austrians, his carefully crafted tableaux vivant expose viewers to everyday

strangeness. Film scholar Mathias Frey (2011, 191) points out that such unsettling effect brings to mind the sense of estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekt*) pursued by Bertolt Brecht's plays. Rather than providing pleasure, Seidl provides the audience with the opportunity to feel the trouble with the normal in European society.

Safari revisits themes that Seidl had already explored in the past, including human-animal relations, migration and the ongoing legacies of the European colonial project. If the documentary *Animal Love* (1995) focuses on the obsessive care that Austrians reserve to their pets, *Import/Export* (2007), the director's second feature film, follows movements of people and goods linking Austria and Eastern Europe. Using parallel montage, it depicts the trajectories of Olga and Paul, who experience the uneven precarity of labor and life in the European space. While Olga's leaves her child and employment as a nurse in Ukraine to end up working low-paid service jobs in Vienna, Paul is fired from his job as security guard in Austria and drives to Eastern Europe to sell outdated gumball machines. *Paradise: Love* (2012), the first segment of Seidl's *Paradise Trilogy*, explores material and affective legacies of colonial power in Africa. It features Teresa, an Austrian single mother in her fifties, seeking intimacy at a Kenyan beach resort where local «beach boys» promise pleasure to middle-aged white women in exchange for money. Interestingly, the beach resort is advertised as a «comfort safari» location but, as film scholar Tarja Laine (2015, 248) remarks, instead of stalking wildlife, European sex tourists pursue Kenyan men and code them as animals even as they depend on them for sexual and emotional gratification: *Safari* takes the investigation of whiteness and white ideas of African people and nature a step further. Here trophy tourism becomes a field study for addressing the racial formations that deeply inform the current geopolitical moment in Austria and Europe as a whole.

A foundational category of the colonial project of modernity, race permeates European subjectivities, including white subjectivities (Lewis 2013). In the wake of recent mobility flows, European politicians, media commentators, and popular discourse in social media have converged in representing the arrivals of racialized others as invasion, a threat to the defining values, ways of life and boundaries of Europe. Yet, even as racialization saturates dominant discourses, categories of race and whiteness are often disavowed, displaced and enfolded into discourses about culture, religion and ethnicity. Colonial oppression and racism are described as relics of the past, part of a historical phase that came to a close with the defeat of Nazism and Fascism, and the affirmation of post-war humanism. When acknowledged, racism is relegated to the extremism of far-right groups rather than understood as institutional phenomena that structures state policies (Salem and Thompson 2016). Today, black and brown people on the move face both institutional racism and the hostility of white European citizens who react to their own social downgrading and the increasing precarity produced

by capitalist globalization by calling «their» states to expel migrants and refugees (Balibar 2004; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Balibar 2017).

In this landscape, Austria has become a site for experimenting the convergence between neoliberal economies and nationalist forces. In 2017 the free-market supporter and leader of the center-right People's Party Sebastian Kurz entered a government coalition with the nationalist and xenophobic far-right Freedom Party. A self-described liberal politician and vocal advocate of anti-immigration policies, Kurz defined the migrant arrivals of 2015 as «a catastrophe» whose repetition must be avoided though an «axis of the willing» ready to stop the flow of migrants and refugees across borders (Golod 2018). From the perspective of European leaders what is catastrophic are not the black and brown bodies drowning in the Mediterranean, but the failure to prevent them from leaving North-African shores in the first place. Amidst the right-wing surge, *Safari* engages whiteness as a racial formation that emerges from European colonial history but remains largely unspoken in mainstream European discourses.

A major tourist attraction and source of income for several African countries, the development of the safari industry reflects «historical and economic structures of colonialism» (Akama 2007). This recreational activity, once pursued by colonial government officials, members of the European aristocracy and wealthy travellers from the United States, is now increasingly popular among white middle-class Europeans attracted by a touristic colonial imaginary that encourages «those who never experienced the grittiness of colonial realities to come and “play” colonialism without guilt or hope of return» (Gravari-Barbas and Graburn 2016, 21). Infused by what Caren Kaplan (1996, 63) calls «imperialist nostalgia», these trips to Africa provide European tourists with the opportunity to visit the exoticized destinations they once controlled. As Kenyan tourism scholar John Akama (2007) demonstrates, the master-servant colonial relations regulating the interaction between European hunters and indigenous populations remain intact, with Africans working in servile positions as porters and cleaners.

The persistence of colonial hierarchies, of «tropes and scripts drawn from colonial-era representations of Africa and Africans» (Dunn 2004, 484), is featured prominently in Seidl's film. The relation between Europe and Africa is established right at the beginning with the opening shot showing a grey-skied forest with a human subject in green hunting gear framed at the center of the screen. The blowing of a horn recalls the European hunting tradition. Then the film cuts to the full frontal framing of a hunting cabin in a dry, yellow landscape. The transition to Africa is reinforced by a crispy photographed series of static shots showing an elderly couple first sunbathing and then getting dressed in safari attire. They are Manfred and Inge Ellinger, already seen in Seidl's *In the Basement* (2014), a documentary exploring the most private spaces of white middle-class houses in Austria. The Ellingers are back to Africa to collect more trophies for decorating

the walls of their single-family home basement. *Safari*'s main focus, though, are the Eichinger-Hofmanns, a family of four sharing the passion for killing animals.

While *Safari* was shot in Namibia and South Africa, these locations are not easily identifiable. The audience, however, learns that the central setting is the Leopard Lodge from the logo printed on the shirts and caps worn by the black workers. As Seidl explains in an interview, «the sheer size of these farms is difficult to imagine from our perspective» that is, the perspective of Westerners used to the density of European built environments (Kchiefer and Seidl 2015). Vast and enclosed, the Leopard Lodge is a controlled landscape where the movements of Africans are strictly regulated and «only one way to narrating or experiencing the space is privileged» (Dunn 2004, 492). The Lodge functions as biopolitical site for recreating colonial stratifications of race and gender within the human and between humans and other beings. Here the German owners Marita and Volker Neemann employ several black workers who help them managing the space. The life of animals is made available to white hunters who pay to kill them. As settlers of European descent, the Neemanns negotiate their whiteness in relation to African people and nature. Their status as proprietors and hunting industry operators is linked to histories of land dispossession and the killing of native people.

As most tourist infrastructures in Africa, particularly hunting farms, the Leopard Lodge has colonial origins. According to the facility's website, the lodge was constructed «in 1928 by former members of the German colonial forces who returned to Namibia after WWI». This concise description conceals the extent of colonial violence that, from 1884 to 1915, marked the German rule on what Europeans used to call Southwest Africa. German control of this expansive territory was brief but devastating. At a time of demographic growth and increasing migration flows, Germany saw Southwest Africa as a *Lebensraum*, a living space capable of accommodating the creation of a second homeland. Settler colonialism was at the core of this project. Initially, the Kaiser's Germany attracted new settlers by providing financial aid to purchase low-cost land. In this particular version of colonial rule, Africans were seen as source of cheap labor at the service of the settlers. Then, in 1904, colonial forces launched a full-scale war of extermination on indigenous people (Kössler 2015).

In the late 1890s, the Herero, a population of shepherds and farmers living in the fertile lands of central Namibia, suffered malaria, droughts and a cattle plague. The wave of destitution that followed forced them to sell large tracts of land to the white settlers who saw this as an opportunity for accelerating the acquisition of indigenous territory. The tension between natives and settlers became more pronounced until the Herero rose up against colonial power in 1904. Local colonial authorities responded with an Extermination Order aiming at expelling the Herero and exterminating those who refused to leave. Considering this genocidal project ultimately unviable for the economic survival of the colony, Berlin revoked the

policy. From then on, prisoners were used as forced labor hosted in concentration camps located near German settlements, they were recruited as domestic servants and employed in construction sites. The death toll of humans and nonhumans living in Herero communities was massive. Historians estimate that only fifteen thousand of about eighty thousand Herero living before the war survived. Even after the official end of hostilities in 1907, a set of Native Ordinances imposed the large-scale deportations of the Herero, the expropriation of communal land and restrictions on owning cattle that effectively deprived them of primary means of subsistence. Genocidal violence was also perpetrated against rebel Nama people. Those who were not killed in battle, were sent to labor camps.

In *Discourse On Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire (2001, 36) described Nazi policies of extermination in Europe as the «boomerang effect» of practices experimented in the colonies. What shocked the European bourgeoisie, he argued, were not the Third Reich's genocidal policies as such but the fact that, all of a sudden, they «applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then has been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the Coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa» (*ibidem*). German concentration camps in Namibia provided a blueprint for developing racial discourses and practices later imported in Europe (Friedlander 1995; Madley 2005). In the years following the annihilation of the Herero and Nama communities, German settlers flourished in the territory. Some of them were former *Schutztruppe*, colonial soldiers who took possession of indigenous land to start cattle farms. In the space of a few generations many landowners switched to the more profitable wildlife hunting business. Since the independence of Namibia in 1990, land reform has been slow, with white owners still in control of the majority of fenced ranches. Government authorities now support hunting tourism as an important economic asset for the country but little has been done to reallocate land and wealth to historically marginalized people.

German colonialism in Namibia contributed to the production of what Achille Mbembe (2001) calls «grammar of animality», that is, the exclusion of the natives from the field of the human which «justifies the domestication of the colonized individual» (ivi, 236). European colonizers, Mbembe contends, saw animals as beings that could not distinguish between themselves and the external world. Similarly, native people were seen as unable of transcending biological life. In contrast, great white hunters, explorers and naturalists, encapsulated the proper form of the human capable of subjugating and taming both natives and animals. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, big-game hunters such as Gordon Cumming, Frederick Selous and Teddy Roosevelt embodied the triumph of the individualist, adventurous white man over the Dark Continent. Celebrated for their services to empire-building and scientific knowledge, they left a mark on the European imagination of Africa through a host of materials including written accounts of hunting exploits, photos, films and collections of

specimens that were used for realistic displays at major natural history institutions. As James Ryan (2000) demonstrates, there was an intimate association between capture and representation, hunting and visual media such as photography and even taxidermy. Developing a theme already explored by Susan Sontag (1973), Ryan argues that both the gun and the camera involved physical closeness between humans and animals, civilization and wilderness. Yet, the display of wild animals in natural museums and the circulation of their images in places far removed from colonial spaces preserved the distance between the civilized and the savage. Donna Haraway (1989) makes a similar point in her now classic analysis of science, nature and white manhood focusing on Carl Akeley, the North-American hunter and taxidermist known for crafting dioramic habitat groups for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In Akeley's African adventures, wild animals were captured first with the gun then with taxidermy and the camera, in the quest to convey the truth of African nature (as seen by white men).

Trophy hunting companies in Africa draw heavily on the figures of great white hunters and explorers. Even when these references are not explicitly articulated, they provide citational material for the ritualized performances of contemporary safari adventurers. In analyzing North-American adventure sports, Bruce Braun (2003, 189) points out that adventure today is «understood to be the *same as*, or *continuous with*, acts of European exploration set in the past». The Leopard Lodge offers its customers an experience of wilderness that is no longer available in Europe. This space is designed to satisfy the search of staged authenticity, gendered rituals of passage, and racialized assertion of power. An island of comfort nested in the pristine landscapes of Namibia, the lodge is a sanitized version of the African Eden, African nature as it should be, tamed and devoid of the chaotic excesses associated to the Dark Continent.

Imperialist nostalgia surfaces in Seidl's interviews to Marita and Walter Neemann, the inheritors of German settlers. Prompted by an unseen interviewer, they speak freely about the corruption of African governments and the political chaos that reign in what used to be European territory. At the Leopard Lodge colonial memories also materialize in the form of the taxidermic specimens decorating the walls. Memorializing an age whose glory has faded, the specimens «represented a specific ordering of the world» (Suzuki 2017, 113) one in which «capturing nature glorified the magnificence of white achievement in a primitive and savage environment» (*ibidem*). The dead animals reproduced as trophies and commodities in the civilized space of the Lodge recall white subjugation of nature and black labor. *Safari's* stylized mise-en-scène is filled with embalmed wilderness. In Seidl's tableaux, taxidermic specimens appear next to speaking white hunters and silent, usually static, black workers. Such juxtapositions convey, on the one hand, white mastery over nature and, on the other, the conflation between animal and racialized bodies. In so doing, they make visible the colonial

grammar of animality and its afterlife in the trophy hunting industry. As remnants of an unspeakable past, taxidermic specimens travel with the hunters who bring them into their private homes in Europe, safe havens within the increasingly unstable environment of economic austerity, one in which flexible work and the insecurity of income have become the new norm for a variety of social groups.

3. Killing in the Postcolony

Safari's patterned, even repetitive, narrative structure shows how hunting in postcolonial Africa relies on routines performed in a highly controlled space. As in other films by Seidl, the documentary displays disturbing regularities. Series of almost identical shots and recurring elements in the mise-en-scène and framing suggest that there is nothing exceptional in the activities undertaken by white Europeans in African hunting facilities. What they do and how they do it, their actions, gestures, and feelings, are consonant with a history of colonial racialization that is ongoing and continuous. The hunting sequences open with the shot of an SUV entering the frame and approaching the camera. Filmed with a fluid hand held camera, they continue with long and medium shots showing the trophy hunters and their guides moving slowly through the sparse vegetation. Dressed in khaki safari outfits, the hunters patiently stalk impalas, gnus and zebras, waiting for the animals to get close. Close ups capture the intense focus on their faces, their bodies sweating and even shaking from rushes of adrenaline. After shooting and waiting to make sure the prey is dead, they carefully arrange the animal corpses and proudly pose for trophy photos. They thus shoot the animals twice, once with the gun and then again with the camera. Instead of using the camera as a sublimation of the gun, as Susan Sontag (1973) suggests, they employ it in addition to the gun as a means for reinforcing their claims of possession. Thus, they participate to the visual tradition of capturing and representing perfected by Akeley and his contemporaries. In *Safari* the conjunction of the gun and the camera gestures toward the role of the (mediatized) white gaze, one of the film's main concerns. From this perspective, it is significant that while wildlife films generally focus on animals in their natural habitat, in *Safari* animals are fugitive presences whose full appearance on screen signifies death². Rather than following wildlife, Seidl's film stalks and shoots the white hunters. Animals are not the

² In *Watching Wildlife* (2006) Cynthia Chris provides a useful overview of the wildlife genre from colonial visual culture to its current status in global TV programming. In the early twentieth century, European audiences were exposed to a steady flow of wildlife films featuring European and American hunters and explorers. In the Post-War period, however, classic wildlife filmmaking focused on animals in environments devoid of human presence. Incorporating narrative elements, these films placed emphasis on drama and the intimate life of animals. With the rise of cable TV, the genre found new audiences and reality variants. According to Gregg Mittman (1999), the rise of the wildlife genre recreated the sense of

only marginal elements in these scenes. The black workers who help wildlife tourists tracking the preys are often framed through long shots as if they were part of African landscape rather than individual human bodies. By foregrounding whiteness and placing black workers in the background, *Safari* reproduces and reveals colonial narratives of imperial control that relegate black people in the realm of nature, out of civilization. On the hunting ground, interrogated as site for regenerating racial formations, blackness is aligned with animality and placed at a distance from the proper form of the human, the white Man.

Such masculine figure is clearly embodied by Gerard Eichinger and his teenage son Manuel. The film critic Olivier Père (2016) notes that for Manuel slaying animals in Africa is a rite of passage into masculinity. The acquisition of masculinity through an act of controlled violence is displayed in a striking scene showing Manuel's physical rush while engaging his target, a zebra. The flushed cheeks and tense body register his arousal, the effort to keep nerves under control, and the fear of failing. A sense of (almost sexual) release follows the realization of having hit the animal. Adding to Père's point, I would argue that hunting in Africa is also a way to conjure up whiteness (Cooper and Stoler 1997) in a moment in which its privileges are seen as under attack. Hunting provides the young Manuel with a challenge but also a measure of comfort against the increasing anxiety around the loss of status for young European white men now facing the uneven effects of precarity, that is, the instability of work, the disappearance of welfare provisions and a sense of permanent insecurity³.

Lauren Berlant (2011) defines cinema of precarity a group of films, including Laurent Cantet's *Human Resources* (1999) and Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's *Rosetta* (1999), that shows how the crisis of the Euro-American *fantasy* of the good life, achieved through work and upward mobility, has become ordinary. Precarity, Berlant suggests (ivi, 192), is not just economic but it «permeates the affective environment too». For Alice Bardan (2013, 71) the European cinema of precarity also lays bare «the struggle to maintain traditional class hierarchies». These struggles for privilege involve race too, and the resentment of those who enjoy the benefit of citizenship against the racialized subjects who are excluded from it and seen as intruders in a space where they do not belong. Although *Safari* does not narrate these tensions, it is my contention that it examines the continuous work of becoming white in relation to African people and nature. Specifically,

wilderness destroyed by the rise of consumer society. It provided a highly staged and sanitized image of wildlife, allowing audience to feel simultaneously close to nature and apart from it.

³ In using the term precarity, I draw on debates emerged in the context of European precarious movements over the past two decades. Precarity refers to the uneven yet escalating insecurity experienced by those living under the flexible regimes of exploitation of post-Fordist capitalism. As Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2005) point out, precarity cuts across labor markets and positions and reconfigures the boundaries between life and work. Following the capitalist restructuring of labor processes that began in the early 1980s, precarization has become, as Isabell Lorey (2015) argues, a neoliberal instrument of government.

it visualizes and narrates the regeneration of whiteness through the immersion in African hunting grounds. Discussing the early twenty-century Euro-American imagination of nature, Bruce Braun (2003, 197) suggests that in a context of rapid urbanization and racialized immigration, «nature served as a purification machine, a place where people became white, where the racial and hereditary habits of immigrants could be overcome». In this vein, I suggest that *Safari* conjures African nature as a purification machine that affords European travelers the possibility to journey into whiteness and journey away from the race of the black and brown people who cross European borders.

Manuel's success, reinforced by his father's praise for his «great shot», stands in sharp contrast with the lack of self-confidence shown by his younger sister Tina. The promotional material for the film includes a still of the siblings posing with the dead zebra. Holding the gun with one hand, Manuel protectively drapes the other arm around Tina's shoulder. Her diminished status, juxtaposed to her brother's accomplishment, is exposed repeatedly throughout the film. Unlike the other family members, she is never shown engaging a target. This, however, does not imply that the hegemonic form of the (white) human cannot accommodate femininity. On the contrary, as historian Angela Thompsell (2015) contends in her study of late eighteenth-century British hunting expeditions in Africa, imperial femininity complemented the assertion of white masculinity while also offering some women the opportunity to experience a degree of freedom from the stifling norms of Victorian and Edwardian domesticity. While Tina illustrates the failure of whiteness, Eva, her mother, rearticulates imperial femininity by combining the intensity of physical sensations with extreme focus and the search for precise shots. Eva and Tina are the family members who most clearly articulate the range of feelings experienced on the hunting ground. Filmed on meticulously crafted backgrounds of animal heads and richly print fabrics, they discuss a repertoire of feelings that comprises the anxiety that precedes the shot, the self-doubt, and the joy of hitting the animal. Eva explains: «After the shot I feel agitated, empty. The tension releases only after you recuperate the prey».

The hunters' reasoning around their practice is remarkable: hunting, one of them argues, «does not mean to kill animals without a reason». On the contrary, traveling for trophy tourism supports the economy of developing countries. Moreover, killing weaker, older, or rogue animals facilitates the reproduction of the species. In the hunters' peculiar idiom, dead animals become «mature pieces», blood is described as «sweat». The animals are addressed as adversaries, warriors who were given an honorable death on the field of battle. For these hunters, how one kills is a measure of moral correctness. So, as one of the white guides remarks, «precise shots are important to avoid animal suffering». This is consistent with European and North American expectations of the proper hunter as someone who is «supposed to be humane, to make the kill quick and clean» (Emel 1998, 104).

Thus, there are barely traces of blood in the bizarre trophy photos. The animals are, for the most part, unstained, their skin and bodies appear intact. White hunters kill softly, making sure to minimize suffering, as if by doing so they could assert more control over living and dying. In killing softly, without rupturing the body of the prey, they project the Western ideal of the body as enclosed, bounded entity onto the captured animals.

Safari provides a grotesque counterpoint to the idealized vision of white masculinity embodied by Gerard and Manuel. The camera often lingers on Manfred Ellinger's decaying, rotting and snoring body. In capturing Ellinger's bodily excesses, his penchant for drinking and falling asleep in a hunter's cabin, Seidl brings to the fore the obscene underside of white masculinity. A scene where the Ellingers discuss trophy prices epitomizes the European impulse toward the commodification of African wildlife. With its crass materialism, this version of whiteness contrasts with the idealized rendering of Europeaness that the Eichinger-Hofmanns represent. Rather than portraying whiteness as undifferentiated, *Safari* illuminates its inconsistencies and failures. But what is at stake in the hunting sequences featuring the Eichinger-Hofmanns (and preys that get bigger as the film goes on) are neocolonial instantiations of whiteness laying claim to full human status. These claims depend on hierarchies that were established in colonial times and remain active today albeit in altered forms.

4. White Gazes, Black Silences

Safari's reviewers often discuss two extended sequences of animal dismemberment as particularly disturbing. What I find interesting, however, is that in showing white hunters looking at Leopard Ledge's workers skinning the bodies of zebras and giraffes, these scenes put on display the white, «imperial gaze» (Kaplan 1997), a racializing gaze that conflates black and animal bodies and fixes them in space and time. This section contrasts *Safari's* scrutiny of the white gaze with its use of silence and active looks in a series of tableaux that portray black men and women.

As scholars of animal and film studies point out, the use of animal death to signify human suffering has a rich, transnational lineage (Shukin and O'Brien 2015, Smaill 2016). This trope is central in Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) where the bloody slaughter of a bull is cross-cut with the violent repression of striking workers. As Shukin and O'Brien observe, in Eisenstein's film such association aimed to reflexively condition and mobilize viewers. The metaphoric linking of slaughtering and colonial capitalism returns in Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's *La Hora de Los Hornos* (1968), the militant documentary embodying the theory and practice of Latin American Third Cinema, as well as in Barbara Kopple's *American Dream* (1990), a documentary about workers' struggles in a Minnesota

meatpacking plant. *Safari* interrogates the conjunction between dead animals and colonial trauma in a more observational but not less disturbing manner that draws attention to the controlling power of the white gaze.

Fifty minutes into the film, the camera follows a group of black workers handling the zebra killed by Manuel in an abattoir that gets darker and more shadowy as the scene unfolds. They incise the animal's skin, separate it from the flesh and wash the blood away. Their chattering is almost inaudible, it blends in with the noise of scalpels and broken bones. This moment makes visible the «dirty» black labor on which the soft, clean killing of white hunters depends on. Manuel and his father quietly observe the scene from the dark left side corner of the screen. A column separates them from the black men signaling the divide between white masculinity and its framing of blackness as closely related to animality. This is a powerful cinematic moment in that it turns the white gaze into an object of reflection.

Critical work in black and postcolonial studies has illuminated the objectifying power of the white gaze, the ways it has historically worked, and still does, to construe black bodies as sources of danger, threat, dirt, and exotic spectacle (Fanon 1967; hooks 1992; Shohat 1993). Crucially, scholars such as Fatima Tobing Rony (1996) have also insisted on the «returned gaze» that interrogates whiteness and the divide between those who possess or lack what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls «the right of look» (2011). Building on postcolonial insights on the imperial gaze, Ann E. Kaplan (1997) distinguishes between the gaze as a one-way process and the look as involving a relation and, potentially, a questioning of power relations. The bearer of the imperial/colonial gaze, she argues, is not interested in the object per se, but as a threat to his (*sic*) own autonomy and security that must therefore be defined and fixed. For George Yancy (2008) the white gaze renders black bodies as entities to be confined to symbolic and physical spaces. The gaze of Manuel and Gerard reinforces racial hierarchies of humanness by positioning black workers in a confined space external to proper (white) humanity.

The second scene of dismemberment features Gerard's prey, a giraffe. It is still daylight when the dead animal is brought into the abattoir. While the handheld camera focuses on the workers moving the heavy corpse with naked hands, the hunters are seen and heard in the background, observing the giraffe's bones being broken and the skin coming off. Then, the workers are left alone to complete the job. The carcass is disemboweled and cut open, the tiled floor slimy with blood and entrails. A frame shows one of the workers with his head and shoulders inside the giraffe's body, removing what is left of vital organs. Once again, this arresting image indexes the association between animal bodies and black bodies that white humanity assumes from its place of privilege.

These scenes also allude to the proximity between the dismemberment of animals and the breaking of black bodies under white control. In her discussion of bodies and personhood in eighteenth-century American plantations, literary critic

Monique Allewaert (2014) observes that the breaking of Afro-Americans bodies was both an historical fact and a cultural trope circulating both in Afro-American oral cultures and European literary production. Mutilation and decapitation were sanctioned in colonial legal codes as proper forms of punishment for rebel slaves. Such violence demonstrated the absolute power of white owners over black bodies. The fragmentation of black bodies, however, was not just a consequence of punishment. For white masters it also referred to a status distinct from the full humanity of Anglo-Europeans. Colonial discourses, including natural history, labor practices, and legal provisions, coded the colonized as «parahumans», that is, beings that occupied a space suspended between humanity and animality. Always potentially dismembered, their broken bodies stood in opposition to the coherent, enclosed body of European colonizers. In Namibia black bodies were broken by German genocidal policies and forced labor. The bodies of the Herero and Nama were dismembered and used as specimen in scientific research. Their skulls were sent to Berlin and studied by German scientists as representative of the African race. The memories of colonial violence haunt the scenes of dismemberment in *Safari*. If in the past the European rulers could kill and bring home the heads of the colonized, now white hunters traveling to Africa can dispose of the life of animals thanks to the availability of cheap black labor in the trophy hunting circuit.

The Eichinger-Hofmanns proudly kill animals on the hunting ground but they position themselves at the margins of the scene of dismemberment, as if they were mere witnesses of what happens in the abattoir. However, framing the hunters as observers exposes the power of the white gaze to align the broken bodies of animals to the bodies of black workers. This imperial gaze attempts to fix black wildlife and people, it aims to demarcate their boundaries and control their movements, denies them mobility, a defining attribute of trophy tourists. These moments also draw attention on Seidl's own looking practice as a white European filmmaker traveling to Africa. His work, after all, is made possible by the same enduring structural asymmetries that underpin white hegemony in Europe as well as Africa. The full-frontal, symmetric tableaux of black workers that recur in the second half of the film provide rich material for addressing this concern.

What interests me in these images is the strategic combination of silence and active looks. Black men and women, employed by the Leopard Lodge or other big-game hunting facilities, are usually filmed in working clothes. Some of them appear indoor framed against walls of taxidermic specimens. White and yellow tags attached to the stuffed heads draw attention to the monetary value produced by the entanglement of human labor and animal life. Others are photographed outdoors, perhaps nearby their living quarters. They all look right into the camera, motionless and silent. Unlike the white hunters, they do not have the chance to speak and reflect on their own experience. Yet, they stare back at the audience.

The use of silence and active looks are not new in Seidl's films. *Good News* (1990), his first feature film, has been criticized for looking with distant eye at migrant newspaper vendors working in Vienna. The audience can see them but cannot hear what they say. This contrasts with the voices of white Austrians captured in the film. As Martin Brady and Helen Hughes (2011) point out, this changes in *Import/Export* when Olga, the Ukrainian woman employed in an Austrian geriatric hospital, looks straight at the camera, and thus at the audience, with an intense long-held look. Similarly, in *Safari* black workers' active looks produce an unsettling effect. In returning the gaze, they interrogate whiteness, make it available to critical scrutiny. If framing white tourists staring at black workers exposes the power of whiteness to define itself through the confining of others in fixed spaces, the shots of black workers staring back signal their refusal to be fixed in places scarred by histories of colonial violence.

5. Conclusion

In *Safari* Seidl interrogates whiteness via the exploration of European trophy tourism in Africa, its historical ties with the colonial tradition and the creation of updated versions of hegemonic relations with African labor and nature. In the vast and enclosed spaces of game reservations, white hunters enjoy the freedom to move and dispose of wildlife. The immersion into a sanitized version of African nature allows them to reenact and renew colonial stratifications of race, gender and species. *Safari* displays the hunting experience as a journey into whiteness and its possessive claims to full humanity, sustained through the conflation between African people and wildlife. Game reservations provide European hunters with the possibility of reasserting the power of European whiteness at a time in which it is seen as threatened by the mobility of people crossing borders. The hierarchical order of these spaces is in stark contrast with the visions of chaotic Africa that resurface in current European evocations of migration flows as spiraling out of control. Contributing to a cinematic lineage that reflects on the entangled oppressions of humans and other animals, *Safari* draws specific attention to the assertion of whiteness at the expenses of racialized bodies and animal life. The scenes of dismemberment put the white, imperial gaze on display, examine how it fixes black bodies in spaces excluded from the realm of humanity. The presence of active black looks, however, presents a powerful challenge to white gazes and their power to define black lives and control their movements. Through the juxtaposition between white gazes and black looks, *Safari* also reflects on white practices of filmmaking in Africa. There are no claims to authentic representation made here, no assumptions about the possibility of conveying African points of view on trophy tourism.

Rather, the combination of silence and active looks interrupt the flow of white voices, creating noticeable gaps in white narratives of adventure. This film offers no solutions for the unmaking of whiteness as racial formation built on the exclusion and exploitation of others who claim for themselves the freedom of movement that Europeans have enjoyed historically. But while the dominant European discourse on migration displaces race and the legacies of colonialism, *Safari* puts them back at the center of attention. Although it never visualizes Europe and its borders, it dissects how the racial hierarchies that underpin the governing of mobility have been articulated in relation to African people and nature. This film confronts its audiences with what Nicholas De Genova (2018, 1766) calls the «cruel (post)coloniality of the “new” Europe». In holding open space for narrative gaps and active looks that convey the refusal to submit to the postcolonial project of freezing African movements, it contributes to undermining the project itself.

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