

CONVIVA

Convivial Conservation

Decolonising & convivial conservation



What do we mean by decolonising conservation?

WHAT:

Conservation practices reflect the influence of colonial histories and (neo-)colonial mindsets that [create hierarchies of difference based on race, identity or background](#).

Firstly, they have shaped spaces where conservation research and policy is applied: [colonial histories have left indelible traces](#) on land, people, and the physical and organisational structures built to govern land and people. All of these aspects need to be taken into account, whether planning research or a conservation intervention. Secondly, histories and mindsets have influenced how we think about nature and conservation, and their relationships to humans. There are many conservation approaches that were forged in the Global North and [deny indigenous rights, prioritise tourism revenues, start from the idea that nature needs to be saved from local residents, or fail to take on board](#) and value the perspectives of those who live with wildlife and conservation.

WHO:

We must address the question of who conducts research and makes decisions on conservation. In addition to the lack of involvement of local priorities and knowledges, critics have [lamented](#), and [continue to lament](#), a lack of agenda-setting power on conservation issues being granted to scholars and practitioners from the Global South. They argue that there are [broader gender and cultural biases](#) which create abiding power imbalances that hinder conservation.



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What do conviviality & convivial conservation have to do with decolonising?

[Ivan Illich's \(1973\) idea of conviviality](#) proposes a society built on justice and freedom in responsible interdependence: there is a strong emphasis on participatory, grassroots decision-making, living within bounds by the rich, and recognising that human and nonhuman nature are interconnected. [Büscher and Fletcher's \(2019\) idea of convivial conservation](#) similarly prioritises a shift away from strict human-nature separations and democratic engagement in the name of justice. These ideas can serve as [decolonial options](#): ways to identify, and address, problems which have arisen because of coloniality-related power imbalances. This applies both in terms of the 'what' - ideas such as strict human-nature separation - and the 'who' - groups who have not previously been part of decision-making processes. However, as with all decolonising intentions, to avoid external imposition, locally created adaptations are vital to [overcome hierarchies of difference](#) along race, gender, age, status or (dis)ability lines.

Case-in-point: Ubuntu and just conservation in Southern Africa

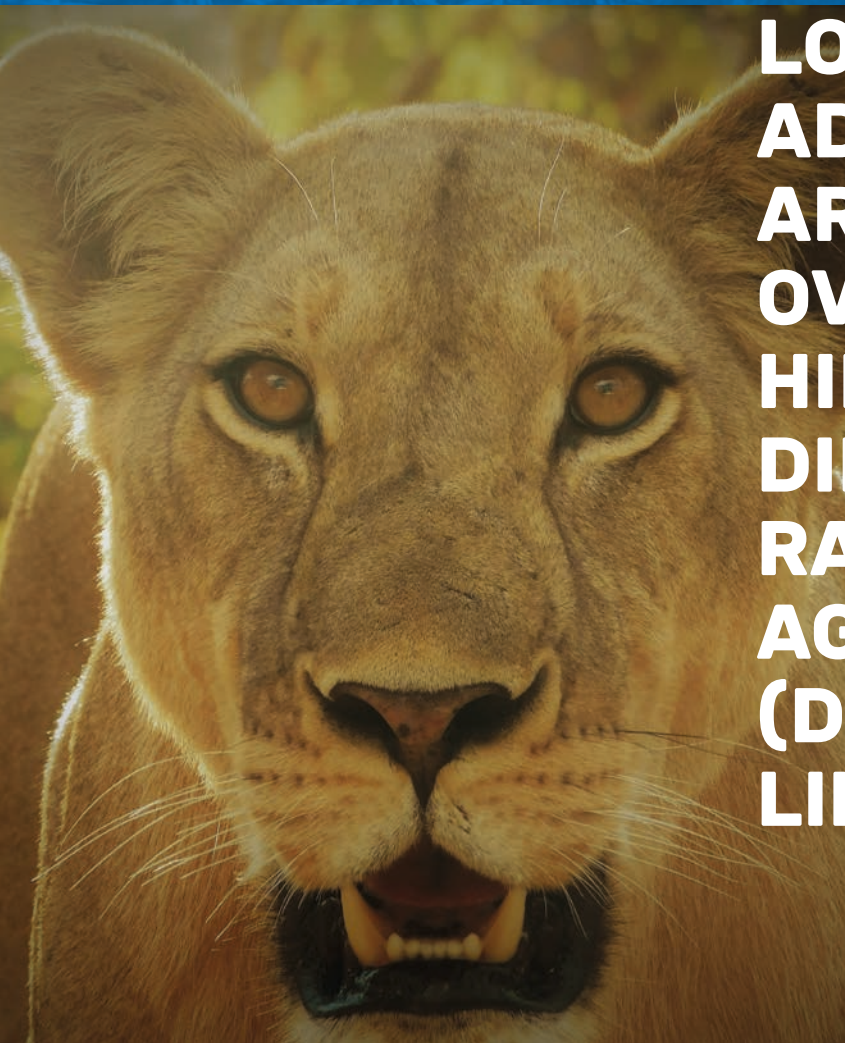
Conservation in Southern Africa has seen [significant colonial influences](#), including through the ['fortress conservation' model](#) which prescribed strict separation between humans and nature: This encouraged colonial-era hunters to create spaces and institutions dedicated to preserving fauna and set aside land [through protected areas](#). However, protected areas entail significant socio-ecological consequences for those who live close-by, shaping uneven [distributions of fortune and misfortune](#).

By contrast, a 'decolonial option' is Ubuntu, a Southern African philosophy rooted in notions of [communitarianism and interdependence](#): it is an [ethic of care for and between past, present and future human generations](#), as well as [nonhuman nature](#). In Southern Africa, it can be a powerful tool to design conservation using local and indigenous knowledges, as knowledge is created through [communal discourse in Ubuntu](#). It can help overcome the strict separation of humans and nonhumans on which much conservation is based, as Ubuntu emphasises interdependence and connections and re-initiates harmony and solidarity between humans and nature.

Key questions to ask yourself/your project

- Who is involved in your project (researchers, conservationists, local residents, decision-makers)?
- In what space is it taking place? What measures are you proposing to implement?
- Are you the right organisation to do this? Should you ally with locally-led organisations?
- What power asymmetries and injustices around rights, representation, benefits, decision-making linked to colonial histories or colonial thinking predate your project for both 'who' and 'what'?
- Are your actions risking to perpetuate or add to these structures?
- What concrete steps can you take to address these structures within the confines of your project?
- What decolonial options are available within your project space?
- While it is important to listen to and consult those whose rights have been violated in the past, the onus is not on them to 'solve' these problems - it is on you.

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“ TO AVOID EXTERNAL IMPOSITION, LOCALLY CREATED ADAPTATIONS ARE VITAL TO OVERCOME HIERARCHIES OF DIFFERENCE ALONG RACE, GENDER, AGE, STATUS OR (DIS)ABILITY LINES.”



About the project

The CONVIVA - convivial conservation - research project develops new convivial (literally: 'living with') approaches to understanding and practising environmental conservation, with a particular focus on bears, jaguars, wolves and lions. It aims to establish a truly transformational approach to conservation that benefits both wildlife and humans, and that combines structural change with grassroots solutions to promote co-existence, (cultural and bio)diversity and justice. It is funded by the generous support of NORFACE/Belmont Forum. All views expressed are those of the authors, not the funding body or other organizations.

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