

**Rhinopower:
The 'Make Live and Let Die' Politics of Rhino Conservation in Kenya**

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Abstract

In Kenya's devolved natural resource governance system, non-state actors experience heightened authority over wildlife in rural areas outside national protected areas. This authority requires private and communal landowners to sustain wildlife on their land and enables rural landowners to generate revenue from wildlife through market-based approaches to conservation. Protecting critically endangered species, such as rhinos, on private and communal land requires large investments in fortified enclosures, paramilitary defence forces, and military grade equipment, including munition, surveillance, and transportation technology. Such technologies are used to secure rhino habitat and to defend against illegal hunting. Interestingly, however, rhino conservation has become a strategy pursued by some private and communal landowners to defend against counter-claims on their land and livelihoods enacted by different ethnic groups. With state-sanctioned authority, such landowners deploy violent military tactics and technologies against their fellow citizens. Adapting the Foucauldian notion of biopower – the authority to make live and to let die – this paper explores the biopolitics of rhino conservation in Kenya. Specifically, it expounds on the relationship between rhino conservation and biopower, analyzes how and why rhino conservation is used to make some rural populations live and to let others die, and reflects on the violent implications of 'rhinopower'.

Keywords: rhino conservation; conservation violence; biopower; Kenya