

## **Conservation in violent environments I & II**

Esther Marijnen and Rosaleen Duffy

### **Conservation in violent environments I**

#### **1. Garamba National Park and the ‘foreignness’ of conservation protection and threat**

Dr. Kirstof Titeca, University of Antwerp

This paper aims to analyse the history of military-environment relations in Garamba National Park, with a particular focus on how foreign actors have shaped these relations. There has been a wide scholarship analyzing the interactions between various forms of military activity and the environment (and conservation in particular). Garamba National Park, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a prominent example of these dynamics: on the one hand, it historically has been the base of a range of rebel groups and other non-state armed groups, most of which have been engaged in armed poaching, and most of which are foreign. Particularly since 2007, as a consequence of the LRA conflict, there has been an increased presence of foreign armed groups and armed poaching. On the other hand, it also are foreign actors which have dominated conservation efforts, from colonial times (as an elephant taming station) up to today, with the non-profit African Parks managing the park. Based on research within the park administration and the surrounding communities, this paper engages with questions to what extent the ‘foreignness’ of both threat and protection has produced military-environment relations, and the ways in which this is understood by various sets of the population (in terms of legitimacy, resistance, and so on).

#### **2. Creating the ‘other’: Conservation and ethnic violence in the Manas Tiger Reserve, India.** Trishant Simlai, University of Cambridge

Multiple armed insurgencies and questions over identity continue to destabilize the state of Assam in India’s northeast. Conservation practice is increasingly under pressure to adapt and adjust to the changing socio-political narratives on the ground in this region. The Manas tiger reserve in Western Assam on the border with Bhutan is recovering from a decade long organized insurgency that resulted in a peace accord between the Government of India and a militant group called the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) claiming to represent the largest indigenous community in the region called the ‘Bodos’. Before the peace accord and during the peak insurgency period, conservation narratives focused on forest degradation by the ‘Bodo’ people, large scale poaching by armed Bodo insurgent groups of and local extinctions of large charismatic species like the Indian one horned rhino. However post-accord, the narratives have changed considerably and now focus on forest degradation and poaching by non-Bodo ethnic minorities and the perceived ‘illegal immigrants’ of the region. This has led to multiple violent evictions, sporadic ethnic violence and even use of racist interventions. Drawing on 8 months of ethnographic field research this paper attempts to explore and deconstruct the dominant conservation discourse pre and post the peace accord. It demonstrates how and why the discourse significantly changed and how conservation practice is shaped through the changing power equations on the ground and the broader conflict dynamics evolving around ethnicity and identity and citizenship.

### **3. ‘Innocent animals in a dangerous land’: Affective landscapes of gorilla-war tourism and weaponized tourism**

Dr. Esther Marijnen, University of Sheffield

Focusing on gorilla-war tourism in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) this article explores the production of affective landscapes and how this contributes to the weaponization of tourism in Eastern Congo. Visiting the mountain gorillas is currently promoted as a unique ‘life-affirming experience’, where you can experience the ‘threat of mortality’, not referring to the threat gorillas can pose, but rather its ‘violent environment’. The amalgamated commodification of war and gorillas leads to the ‘bunkerization’ of tourism, contributing to an uneven geography of ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ spaces. Moreover, this form of gorilla-war tourism re-produces Eurocentric ideas about how, and by who, gorillas need to be protected, which are shaped by multiple colonial historical registers. While the management of Virunga National Park markets tourism as contributing to peacebuilding in the region, it formostly creates a sense of belonging for tourists, and reaffirms their affective landscapes of Congo, and their population, as ‘dangerous’. Moreover, this in turn legitimizes the use of military means to expand tourism and conservation practices within the east of the DRC, mounting to the weaponization of tourism.

### **4. Constructing the poacher: Narratives of blame in ivory poaching**

Marlotte de Jong and Dr. Bilal Butt, University of Michigan

Poaching has been, and continues to be, a significant detriment to the conservation of biodiversity. However, definitions of poaching arise out of a legacy of biodiversity conservation. Protected areas, constructed using a Euro-American ethos of conservation, transform previously acceptable practices into illegal acts. Hunting and fishing become poaching and indigenous people become poachers, while comparable acts by wealthy elites are defined as sport. Yet, in discussions of poaching, the identity of the poacher is almost never revealed. It is essential to understand how different groups create, ascribe, and enforce identities on others to get a nuanced understanding of conflicts between poachers and protected area officials. By ignoring these elements of identity, one ignores the complex social, political, and historical contexts that shape these conflicts and reinforce dominant narratives of poaching. In order to understand the genesis of the term poacher, we performed media narrative analyses on newspaper reports from 1980 to 2017 of poaching from four continents: North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Results suggest that, across the sampled time period and sites, identities of poachers are often excluded from dominant narratives that reinforce notions of incompatibility between local people and biodiversity. Additionally, there is a trend of poachers increasingly being identified with criminal syndicates with Asia as the final destination of poached biodiversity and the increased militarization of protected areas as the proposed solution. Understanding the role that the media plays in perpetuating apolitical narratives of poaching is essential for pushing back against such depictions.

## **Conservation in violent environments II**

### **1. Black Rhinos, White Elephant? – Conservation on the defense in the Greater iMfolozi Biodiversity Economy Node**

Dr. Adrian Nel, University of Kwazulu-Natal.

The environs of the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi national park in northern Kwazulu-Natal can be characterized as a violent environment in which the temporalities and intensities of violence are broad ranging. Here the visceral, immediate violence of rhino poaching and anti-poaching efforts can be counterposed to the slow violence pursuant to the expansion of coal mining in the area, increasingly permeating the landscape adjacent to the park and the lives of its residents. Echoes of earlier forced dispossessions in the apartheid era are also felt in the form of land restitution claims in the park itself, and a contentious politics of ownership and control is unfolding in this regard. In this context conservation actors and NGOs are engaging on the defensive in an attempt to attempt to mitigate threats to conservation, and to engage these varied forms of violence or their effects, with their efforts culminating in inception a spatial development initiative entitled the Greater uMfolozi Biodiversity Economy Node (uBEN). Far from privileging the defensive aspect of the initiative, the uBEN is partly construed by environmentalists and development actors to constitute some form of decolonized conservation, apprehended by many as a necessity to intend towards. The paper questions the degree to which the initiatives embody the same, focusing on changing conservation territoriality. Specifically the paper situates the ways in which the initiatives are part of a contested and conflictual reproduction of conservation space and political economy. These reterritorialisations relate to the expansion of fenced conservation area into communal lands on the one hand paired with attempts to variously facilitate a biodiversity economy, expand participation of local communities, and fund the expansion of wildlife corridors between diverse sets of conservation areas- into the regional protected area complex. In the face of these tensions, the paper suggests that as the initiatives are premised on the commodification of natural capital and are conditioned by a neoliberal policy context (including the land reform dispensation), they may expand conservation territories but are likely to be enwrapped in ongoing contestation and conflict and exhibit asymmetries in their development opportunities; for a handful of luxury eco lodges and hunting establishments, and those they benefit and employ. The risk is the BEN, covering the fabled genetic home of Southern Africa's re-established rhino stock in Africa's first national park (HiP), is at risk of being something of a white elephant in addressing broader conservation tensions, if not exacerbating the conflict lines across it.

## **2. Securing green: Contested terrain and embattled tenure in the community managed forests of Nicaragua and Guatemala**

Dr. Naomi Millner, University of Bristol.

Community forestry (CF) programmes have combined sustainable forestry with community empowerment and poverty alleviation since the late 1970s, reflecting broader moves to decentralise environmental resource management and so to democratise conservation, especially in 'developing' contexts. On Nicaragua's Caribbean coast and in the Petén region of Guatemala, nationally legislated schemes are now approaching their 25th year of operation, yielding important lessons about what works; what economic benefits can be sustainably derived from the forest; and what institutional conditions can support the kind of advocacy required to enable effective and fair collective action. In recent years, geographers have treated claims of effective conservation goals with suspicion, emphasising the neoliberalising governance contexts in which CF emerged, and the additional responsibilities that community governance frameworks bring into contexts where tenure insecurity and poverty are often already defining conditions. Indeed, the mismatch between local conceptions of tenure or livelihood practices, and the obligations set out in national frameworks, has often resulted in social conflict, and sometimes violence. In the RACCN region of Nicaragua for example, conservation goals have largely failed due to the lack of

recognition of communal land rights at the national level, to the effect that multiple parties now claim rights to the same portions of land. Meanwhile, the borrowing of financial instruments into the practices of management, including metrics for assessing 'natural capital,' across community forestry projects raise a different kind of concern, with some suggesting that CF programmes have reinforced elites and existing patterns of exclusion in regions of intervention. The professionalisation of forestry does not always lead to an equal distribution of wealth, and, in areas like the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala, it can result in fierce and sustained battles for allegiance with incipient private investors. In this paper I review 25 years of community forestry in these two regions, using conflict as a central window on changing technologies, agendas, and legal frameworks. I argue that in these regions, the struggle to determine effective tenure is at the heart of violent conflicts, but the rise of new financial tools and monitoring technologies (such as drones) is resulting in new conceptions of 'green securitisation.'

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

Dr. Brock Bersaglio, University of Sheffield

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

### **4. Conservation Induced Displacement and livelihood Options: A case study of Kanha national park, Madhya Pradesh**

Dr. Sonali Yadav, Jawaharlal Nehru University

The Fortress model of conservation which was adopted in India for conservation took centre stage in late 90s. The model has been successful in the protection of wildlife as the population of tigers increased from a dying figure of 1100 to 4263 in the last decade. However, the model failed to address the problems of giving a secured livelihood to the relocated population. The adequacy of Fortress model is challenged by its negative outcome on the lives of thousands of indigenous communities. The incidence of poverty, malnutrition, misery became a norm among people after relocation. Central Indian forest has been the abode of indigenous people and is one of the richest tribal belt of the world. The tribal communities living in these semi - arid tropical forests are dependent on forest for their livelihood sources. They have a strong emotional affiliation and a sense of belongingness to

the forest. Land alienation of tribes living in the Madhya Pradesh after declaring nearly 40% of the total geographical area as protected created existential crises for these communities. The relocation from homeland was opposed in its first phase. There have been conflicts over land and land rights which has resulted in extreme violence in the hilly tracts of central India, claiming their lives and livelihood. The relocation package and compensation have not ensured even the basic amenities to these deprived people. The Paper focuses on the framework of nature as a political tool, contestation of spaces by major powers vis - à - vis Tribal identities facing a threat for their livelihood and social security.