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Anti-Poaching's Politics of (In)Visibility: Representing Nature and Conservation Amidst a Poaching Crisis

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Abstract

Conservation organizations are increasingly using tourism and social media to raise funds and support for anti-poaching interventions. This article examines how these strategies represent poaching and the responses that are ostensibly needed to disrupt it. To do so, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork in the rhino poaching hotspot of the Mozambique-South Africa borderlands and analyze social media and tourism campaigns from organizations in the area. These campaigns emphasize violently decimated wildlife, threatened rangers, and the subsequent need for a securitized conservation. They obscure or neglect the social relations influencing poaching and related violence, other conservation priorities, and the implications of hardline enforcement measures and militarized anti-poaching practices. The strategic ways in which poaching is made legible and consumable to a broad audience and how this shapes conservation practice constitutes what I call anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility. I emphasize how this politics and its simplistic representations of poaching and solutions may undermine the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts in two ways. First, anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility vitalizes a militarized response, leading to negative social implications that alienate people adjacent protected areas. Second, it jeopardizes the mundane ecological management activities vital to effective conservation. Understanding anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility thus contributes to a more robust political-ecology of anti-poaching specifically, and of conservation in the current context of heightened commercial poaching and efforts to disrupt it more generally. The article ends with a discussion of how a politics of visibility might be harnessed for a more sustainable approach to the poaching problematic.

1. Introduction

To raise funds for the protection of biodiversity, wildlife conservation organizations have long used tourism and the circulation of images to communicate conservation needs, challenges, and successes to the public. With the increases in commercial wildlife poaching and the so-called "war" on poaching over the last decade, these strategies are being adopted specifically to support anti-poaching organizations and interventions. For example, on November 14th, 2015, poachers shot a female rhino and her calf at a reserve in southern Mozambique where I was conducting research on anti-poaching. The story and images were posted on social media. The adjacent reserve offers tourists the opportunity to pay to observe anti-poaching rangers at work. Both the images and the tourism experience are meant to represent the ostensible realities of poaching and anti-poaching, and subsequently garner funds to protect rhino in the area. What neither of these initiatives do, however, is communicate the socio-political conditions from which rhino poaching emerges, how the anti-poaching interventions promoted might contribute to these very conditions, and how they potentially detract from other conservation priorities related to ecological and biological management. Which dynamics of poaching and anti-poaching are made visible, which are not, for what reasons, by whom, and with what implications constitutes what I call anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility.

This article combines insights from the political-ecology and cultural politics of conservation, ethnographic fieldwork with an anti-poaching organization in protected areas in the rhino poaching hotspot of the Mozambique-South Africa borderlands, and an analysis of their social media campaigns. I demonstrate how anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility turns on drawing attention to violently decimated wildlife, the poachers responsible, and hard-line enforcement measures to combat them. Left out are more holistic understandings of conservation and poaching, the implications of militarized responses, and possible

alternatives. The result is the shaping of conservation practice in areas of commercial poaching in concerning ways. First, simplistic representations of poaching and anti-poaching vitalize a militarized response yielding negative social implications for people in and around protected areas. Second, and less studied, such representations risk jeopardizing the mundane ecological and biological management of protected areas. Understanding anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility, or how the illegal hunting of wildlife and purported solutions are represented, is thus necessary to develop a more robust political-ecology of anti-poaching specifically, and of conservation in the current context of heightened commercial poaching and the intensification of efforts to combat it more generally.

In developing this argument, this article complements existing analyses of how conservation and natures are made legible and consumable for a public audience. Conservation actors often represent nature as an untouched wilderness free from people with conservation as a practice meant to uphold this (Adams, 1992; Brooks, 2005; Brooks et al. 2011; Neumann, 1995, 1998). Tourism, film, fundraising campaigns, and increasingly social media help circulate and communicate these representations to a wide audience. Anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility does not replace these long-standing and familiar understandings of conservation's cultural politics based on the wilderness ideal. Rather, it exists alongside them and further reifies practices of exclusionary conservation as it similarly serves to ignore, obscure, or render invisible more complex social, political, and ecological realities and relations that shape conservation and related problematics. I also build on and extend recent work that analyses the discursive aspects of conservation's militarisation and its legitimation (Büscher, 2016b; Lunstrum, 2017; Marijnen & Verweijen, 2016). While I highlight the social implications of such strategies, as such literature begins to do, I also draw attention to the ways in which anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility negatively impacts the ecological and biological management functions of conservation. This is an aspect that is

overlooked in recent work on political-ecological analyses of conservations' militarization and securitisation.

I begin with a brief overview of my methodology, context, and the problem of commercial rhino and elephant poaching. I then review the literature on the cultural politics of conservation to more succinctly develop the notion of anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility. Of particular importance are insights concerning long-standing strategies of conservation-tourism and more recent work on the production and circulation of conservation imagery online – what others have termed Nature 2.0 (Büscher, 2016a, 2017). I then use this framework to analyse how poaching and anti-poaching are represented and ultimately made knowable and consumable through practices of anti-poaching tourism and spectacular social media representations of nature and rangers under threat. I examine what is made visible, what is left out, and why this matters for the social and ecological mandates of conservation on-the-ground. I end with a discussion of how a politics of visibility might be harnessed for a more socially and ecologically sustainable approach to addressing poaching.

2. Ethnography, Social Media, and Anti-Poaching

Certain species of wildlife are under threat from a new wave of commercial hunting. The African Elephant population, for example, has been experiencing an 8% annual drop, due in large part to illegal hunting for ivory, that could halve the population within a decade (Chase et al., 2016). Garnering equal attention, and central to the analysis of this article, is the plight of Africa's rhinos. The number of illegally killed rhinos in South Africa rose from 13 in 2007 to over 1000 in 2013, remaining above the 1000 mark every year since (Save the Rhino 2017). South Africa is particularly important as it is home to approximately 75% of the world's remaining 30,000 rhino, with about 40% of these in the country's Kruger National Park (DEA, 2017).

Paralleling the intensification of commercial poaching is the intensification of efforts to address it. While there are some efforts to reduce consumer demand of wildlife products and even fewer efforts to engage with communities (Duffy & Humphreys, 2014; Roe et al., 2015), a primary response has been a (para)militarized one often referred to as "green militarization" (Lunstrum, 2014). Specific practices include the hiring of military personnel and paramilitary training of rangers. The use of military-like surveillance and response technologies, intelligence and informant networks, and often-deadly violence against suspected poachers is also increasing (Büscher & Ramutsindela, 2015; Duffy, 2014; Marijnen & Verweijen, 2016; Massé, Lunstrum, & Holterman, 2017; McClanahan & Wall, 2016). These practices are predicated and promoted on the idea that heavy-handed policing of protected areas and the use of violence is a necessary, viable, and responsible way to address the illegal hunting of wildlife.

Militarized approaches to illegal hunting, however, have been met with stern critique from scholars and conservationists alike. Critiques largely centre on the negative social implications including a perpetuation and exacerbation of conservation-related social injustices, the use of violent tactics, and the abuse of human rights in the name of species protection which strain conservation-community relations (Barbora, 2017; Duffy et al., 2015; Haas & Ferreira, 2018; Hübschle, 2016; Witter & Satterfield, Forthcoming). Other critiques focus on the effects on rangers (GRAA, 2016; Massé et al., 2017), including a change in their responsibilities from broad conservation-related duties to focusing almost exclusively on paramilitary anti-poaching (Annecke & Masubele, 2016). Together, these critiques point to a concern that militarized conservation risks threatening the long-term social and ecological sustainability of biodiversity conservation.

From 2013-2016, I conducted over 16 months of ethnographic field research in the southern Mozambican borderlands adjacent South Africa and its Kruger National Park,

primarily in the Greater Lebombo Conservancy (GLC). The GLC is a collection of eight private reserves stretching 150 kms along the border. Each reserve has its own APU responsible for anti-poaching within its boundaries and works in conjunction with state authorities in both Mozambique and South Africa. This includes working in partnership with Mozambique's border patrol, environmental police, and Kruger National Park's rangers in cross-border collaborations. Several of the reserves have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF), an NGO, to aid, assist, and ultimately conduct anti-poaching. A similar MoU exists between the IAPF and the Government of Mozambique for the GLC. Anti-poaching efforts have intensified in this area because while Kruger is the most important site of rhino conservation and rhino poaching in the world, the large majority of rhino hunters come from the Mozambican borderlands crossing through the GLC (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016).

[Map 1. Location and regional context of the GLC and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area]

There are numerous villages located outside of the GLC's boundary. The towns representing the population centres and hubs of rhino poaching syndicates include Kaboc, Mapulanguene, Magude, and Massingir. Job opportunities and state services here are limited to non-existent. The majority of people rely on subsistence agriculture and migrant labour to South Africa's mines and plantations. In addition, the development of wildlife conservation based on exclusionary protected areas over the past two decades (and arguably longer) has resulted in the voluntary and involuntary resettlement of villages and the curtailment of access to land, resources, and livelihood activities, including hunting and farming (Milgroom & Spierenburg, 2008; Witter, 2013). Resettlement continues today, in part as an anti-poaching strategy, and is accompanied by increasingly paramilitarized efforts to combat the illegal hunting of rhino in Kruger and the GLC (Lunstrum, 2015; Massé & Lunstrum, 2016). Within

this context, rhino poaching presents a lucrative opportunity with crime syndicates recruiting impoverished and disenfranchised young men who can make several thousand dollars in two days' work if they succeed in obtaining a rhino horn.

In addition to over 70 interviews with rangers in Mozambique and South Africa, conservation managers, anti-poaching managers, and personnel from the Mozambican military, police, and state agencies to NGOs and development organizations, I repeatedly visited the private reserves in the GLC, as well as Limpopo and Kruger National Parks in Mozambique and South Africa, respectively. In 2015, I lived with an APU supported by IAPF in one of the GLC's reserves for nearly six months where I participated in the day-to-day activities of rangers, the APU, and reserve management including daily meetings, patrols, and responses to poaching and other incidents such as the shooting of rhino and the threatening of rangers. [1] We ate together and spent our down-time together, which offered opportunity for informal discussion concerning these issues. I also observed when photos of carcasses and other incidents were taken, how these were used on social media to raise funds and support for their anti-poaching interventions, and how poaching and anti-poaching were presented to potential donors who visited the reserve. During and after my time at the reserve I followed the APU's social media posts. Many of them rang familiar as I remembered the incident. I consulted my field notes, interviews, and memories of these events to connect what happened on-the-ground at the time of the incident with the story told to a broader audience to examine how issues and events are represented with a focus on what is communicated and what is left out.

Methodologically, ethnography helps develop a politics of visibility because it allows first-hand insight into how the realities on-the-ground compare with that which is

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[1] I name the IAPF not because I wish to single it out, but because it is needed for the robustness of supporting evidence. I do not use any examples of incidents that the organization has not made public on its social media.

communicated to an outside audience. Gaining first-hand insight into what is made known, what is not, who makes such decisions and with what strategic motivations enables an understanding of how a politics of (in)visibility comes to life and is mobilized. What emerges is an understanding of the life cycle of an incident such as the killing of rhino or the beating of a ranger from the incident itself, how it is represented and made legible to a broader audience, how such a representation becomes productive and commodified, and how the support this garners flows back into specific interventions on-the-ground, in particular locales, and with what implications.

3. Conservation's Politics of Visibility - Representing Nature and Biodiversity Protection

Studying representations and images is making somewhat of a comeback in cultural geography and other spheres. Anderson, for example, charts how (2018, p. 1) "cultural geography is once again concerned with representations." The concern, however, is not with the representations per se as an object of analysis, but with what "representations do, how they make a difference, within specific circumstances and situations" (Anderson, 2018, p. 3). This line of thinking is central to the work of political ecology that seeks to question taken for granted narratives and representations of nature, human-environment relations, and why they matter (Robbins, 2012). Specifically, political-ecological analyses of biodiversity conservation – or how various dynamics of material and discursive power help shape conservation practice, relationships between people and biodiversity, and vice-versa – interrogate the ways in which conservation actors represent nature and conservation practice (Brockington, 2002; Escobar, 1998; Neumann, 1998). Much of this work looks critically at representations and narratives of 'nature' as wilderness and conservation as an apolitical practice meant to uphold this. These representations often obscure the socio-ecological, political, and historical complexities of conservation and people-biodiversity relations

(Adams, 1992; Brooks, 2005; Neumann, 1995), including in the Mozambique-South Africa borderlands (Rodgers, 2009; Witter, 2013). Green cultural criminology complements these insights with a specific focus on the representations of environmental crimes, criminals, and responses (Brisman & South, 2014).

Of particular importance to understanding the work of conservation representations is the notion of the spectacle. Drawing on Debord (1995[1967]), Igoe understands conservation spectacle as "the increasingly encompassing mediation of relationships and interests by images" that makes certain aspects of nature and conservation visible while obscuring others (Igoe, 2010, p. 492). Critiques of conservation spectacle thus centre on how this mediation produces a simplified narrative of biodiversity and its protection that obscure or renders invisible the relations between people and their surrounding environment and the socio-political and historical context of conservation.

For example, people and livelihoods located within and around protected areas are often excluded from communications about biodiversity and its protection (Igoe, 2017; Neumann, 1995), including in the GLTFCA (Spierenburg & Wels, 2006). Moreover, the ill or negative effects of the very conservation practices – such as exclusionary protected areas and increasingly militarised conservation – that simplistic representations (re)produce are also hidden from view. What one knows about conservation influences the shape of interventions. Hence, various forms of "spectacular environmentalisms" are important in shaping understandings of how to address conservation and ecological problems (Goodman et al., 2016). The commercial poaching of rhinos is one such problem.

It is worth reflecting briefly on the concept of "the poacher" as it is the poacher who often symbolises the threat to wildlife. The poacher in Africa as we know it originates from the creation of legislation and the territorialized conservation model implemented by colonial powers that outlawed certain hunting practices (Brockington, 2002; Neumann, 1998).

Standing in contrast to sanctioned, largely white sport hunters, the poacher in Africa is racialized, understood as a black or native African acting in contravention to colonial and post-colonial hunting and conservation mandates (Carruthers, 1995; Steinhart, 2006). As poaching becomes increasingly framed as an issue linked to a global politics of crime and security (Duffy, 2014, 2016; Lunstrum, 2014), recent representations posit poachers and the communities they belong to not only as morally reprehensible, dehumanised, and barbaric killers of innocent wildlife (Neumann, 2004; Lunstrum, 2017), but as violent criminals and threats to national and global security (Marijnen & Verweijen, 2016; Massé, Lunstrum, et al., 2017). As such, the poacher must be prevented from entering protected areas and killing wildlife, often through force and violence.

Framing illegal hunters in these ways obscures the extent to which people involved in extra-legal hunting may have legitimate critiques of conservation. These are critiques that turn on past and continuing racialized dispossession of access to land and resources that contribute to their ongoing impoverishment (Carruthers, 1995; Kepe, 2009; Büscher, 2016; Somerville, 2017; Haas & Ferreira, 2018). This socio-historical context is necessary for understanding the why people might risk their lives to hunt. Writing on the LNP, Witter and Satterfield (Forthcoming), for example, demonstrate how conservation-induced resettlement, the criminialization of resources-based livelihoods, and the subsequent loss of access to land and resources produces insecurity among people living in the park. They argue that in addition to the more spectacular violence of conservation's militarization and its human rights abuses, this persistent "slow violence" is fundamental to understanding and addressing the current wave of rhino hunting by LNP residents (also see Hübschle, 2016).

Complementing representations of poaching is the ranger who is an integral part of conservation. The narrative of the ranger as a hero selflessly working to protect threatened nature from the villainous poacher is also simplistic. Drawing on a clear and moral separation

between the two obscures the realities of rangers, poachers, and the often blurry relations between the them including underlying issues of corruption and the vulnerability of both anti-poaching personnel and local people (Hübschle, 2015; van Uhm & Moreto, 2017). Marijnen and Verweijnen (2016), for example, examine how the organization managing the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo mobilises this binary to raise funds and support for militarized conservation there. But, the campaign ignores the complex socio-historical and political context of Virunga as a long-standing site of armed conflict with a perpetuation of human rights abuses by different parties; dynamics that are fundamental to addressing the problematic of illegal hunting.

This example also points to the structural issues that help shape the use of representational and discursive strategies by conservation actors. The neoliberalization of conservation in particular has resulted in the privatization of biodiversity protection and the increasing need for conservation to pay for itself (Igoe, 2010; Igoe & Brockington, 2007; Igoe et al., 2010). Protected areas, state and private conservation agencies, and NGOs thus look to commodify nature and conservation through tourism and social media campaigns to raise support and funds for their operations (Brockington & Duffy, 2010; Büscher & Igoe, 2013; Igoe, 2017). Anti-poaching itself is increasingly in need of funds because of the perceived urgency and the costs of combatting poaching, with militarized approaches being particularly expensive (Annecke & Masubele, 2016). One reserve in the Greater Kruger National Park area, for example, has seen an 850% increase in security costs over the past five years (Scott, 2018). In the relatively small reserve where I lived, rhino-focused anti-poaching costs more than doubled in the span of a few years. The Head of Anti-Poaching in the LNP explained "the big challenge is we need financial support" (Interview, 2016). As I demonstrate in the next section, anti-poaching and conservation actors, especially in the private sector, are adopting tourism and social media strategies to fund anti-poaching.

However, wildlife and conservation-related tourism is not a neutral process with paying visitors merely gain first-hand insight into the socio-ecological realities of conservation. Reflecting notions of the tourist and eco-tourist bubble (Jaakson, 2004; Carrier & Macleod, 2005), conservation tourism is a heavily mediated experience (Duffy & Moore, 2010; Igoe, 2017). Tourists in protected areas and on safari pass through what Cohen calls "protective walls" (1972, p. 166) that constitute the tourist bubble, or "the physical places created for tourists, and - significantly - the attitudes and beliefs of tourists" (Jackson 2004, 44). Conservation tourists are thus carefully moved through pre-defined circuits and places where they experience and see a particular version of conservation, wildlife, and 'nature' that fulfils the expectations of what they paid for and sustains the narrative they have been sold (Igoe, 2017). Similar strategic dynamics characterise anti-poaching tourism.

Far from protected areas, another increasingly important space through which conservation spectacle happens is social media. What has been termed Nature 2.0 turns our attention to the ways in which nature and conservation are increasingly communicated and made accessible via online platforms to garner funds and support (Büscher, 2016a, 2017). Verma et al., for example, use the term "spectacular visual accumulation" to account for the process through which conservation organizations use communications technologies to make that which is in protected areas visible and consumable online for fundraising purposes (2015, p. 659). Moreover, online platforms deepen the interaction between observer and observed resulting in an emotional response that motivates individuals to care about and donate to wildlife and the particular conservation issues and landscapes made available to them (Büscher, 2017; Büscher et al., 2017). Through social media, the public is often told what the problem is and how they can contribute to conservation successes through their donations and support in online spaces.

Recent work begins to examine social media representations of poaching, the poacher,

and threatened nature, and how these representations might inform conservation and anti-poaching practice. Lunstrum (2017), for example, focuses on South Africa National Parks' (SANParks) posting of images and stories of rhino carcasses and anti-poaching "successes," including the killing, shooting, and arresting of poachers, to Facebook. She argues this online platform has become a site for the "development of an online community that demands the extreme punishment of rhino poachers" (Ibid. 1). Relatedly, Büscher interrogates how the online "politics of hysteria" around rhino killings and the emotional responses by white users who call for violence in the name of protecting rhino "drowns out broader political-economic power structures that historically privileged, and continue to privilege" white control over wildlife and spaces of conservation in South Africa (Büscher, 2016b, p. 993).

To further develop how poaching and anti-poaching articulate with the politics of visibility of conservation I analyze the ways in which campaigns and organizations harness the representational and affective power of both Nature 2.0 and the curated tourism experience to represent poaching and anti-poaching in certain ways to raise funds and support for interventions deemed necessary and effective in combatting illegal hunting. I discuss what is and what is not communicated, how this helps shape anti-poaching interventions, and what the consequences are for the social and ecological mandates of conservation more broadly.

4. The Spectacle of (Anti-)Poaching: Social Media Campaigns and Anti-Poaching Tourism

4.1 Dead rhinos and beaten rangers on social media

The incident of November 14th, 2015 that opened this article was particularly wrenching. Poachers shot a female rhino and her calf. The mother had her horn removed, was significantly injured in the process, but was not dead. To put an end to her suffering, one of the anti-poaching managers had to shoot her. I described the phone call that happened

between the APU managers who responded to the carcass and the CEO of the organization they worked for in my field notes:

> [APU Manager 1] entered the room and said "worst day of my life job wise."
> On the phone was [their boss] who was asking if there were photos or videos
> of the suffering rhino being put down. There was outrage on the part of the
> [APU manager 1 and 2] that he would ask for this for fundraising purposes
> and that one could possibly think about fundraising at this time.

The managers were upset that such an extreme and traumatic event were being requested for fundraising purposes on social media when they were personally traumatised. I was thus surprised when I saw the story along with a photo of the dead rhino and her dead calf on Facebook. Below is a screenshot of the story as posted on the NGO's Facebook page. A post talking about of the "savage" killing of a baby rhino on its Twitter that also links to the Facebook story about "Ranger X," the APU manager in question (IAPF, 2015). Both the Facebook and Twitter posts highlight a nature that is simultaneously under threat and protection, and end with a request for donations: "Please never forget their sacrifice and continue to support the first and last line of defence for nature."

[Figure 1. Screenshot of IAPF Facebook post on December 1st, 2015 (IAPF, 2015).]

It is not only rhinos that are represented as violently under attack. Another social media fundraising post highlights violence against rangers. In October of 2016, rangers and an APU manager were attacked (IAPF, 2016). This news, along with graphic pictures of the bloodied men were again posted on social media [see Figure 2 (accompanying photos) and Figure 3 (text)]. A plea for funds and donations followed the description and accompanying images of the situation:

> A lone, off-duty police officer from the town came and stood over the rangers with his weapon
> in the middle of the mob to protect the rangers from further injury. Our helicopter landed soon
> after and evacuated our injured men to HQ where all were stabilized and airlifted to hospital.

> The actions of this police officer, along with immediate first aid and rapid evacuation by helicopter, almost certainly saved the lives of these men. This is only possible because of you, our dedicated donors and I thank you emphatically (IAPF, 2016).

According to this post, the public's donations produced the conditions through which these rangers were saved. The post then explains the need for more donations to purchase 4x4 trucks, and how fundraising is continuing "with urgency."

[Figure 2. Images of IAPF Facebook post from Oct. 17th, 2016 (IAPF, 2016).]

[Figure 3. Facebook Post from IAPF, October 17th, 2016 (IAPF, 2016).]

A similar event occurred in May 2016 in which community scouts were attacked in their homes. This incident was used to launch a gofundme.com campaign under the banner of an "Urgent Appeal" (gofundme, 2016). The web page describes the incident and includes a direct appeal for funds with a wish list of anti-poaching items needed to protect rangers and rhinos. Examples include boots for rangers, communications and navigation equipment, ten rangers' annual wages and a helicopter, among other items. The web page tells people that by donating they directly participate in saving rhinos, the injured scouts, and preventing future attacks on heroic rangers. Indeed, a video starring famed Hollywood actor Joaquin Phoenix ends with the following message on screen: "The only things standing between these amazing creatures and extinction…are our rangers…and your donation" (gofundme, 2016).

What is made visible in these social media posts and campaigns are specific rhinos and rangers that are violently under threat from and attacked by anonymous uncontextualized "poachers" (more on this below). Arguably more important is the positioning of militarized anti-poaching as a needed and appropriate response, and even solution to this violence. For example, in the urgent appeal described above, the initiator of the campaign on behalf of NGO writes on the gofundme webpage:

> [The] IAPF has grown into a respected global conservation charity which brings military–derived tools, technologies and techniques to the front line of the poaching war. Applying the motto "Wildlife conservation through direct action", the organisation shows that such experience and skills have a significant use beyond the human battlefield where they were conceived (gofundme, 2016).

Using similar language, the NGO's founder is quoted on the urgent appeal campaign site explaining:

> To scale up our operations we need more resources: more rangers, better equipment, more canine units, more vehicles, more helicopter hours. Through the support of our donors we are helping to give both animals and the communities which surround them a chance to live their lives in peace (gofundme, 2016).

The appeal uses the violence against rangers and rhinos to directly engage and call on the public to fund paramilitarized conservation already underway in the area. Donors are told this militarized approach to conservation and anti-poaching is what is needed to keep rhinos, rangers, and even communities safe. Indeed, the campaign claims that just as IAPF rangers engage in direct action to combat poaching, "YOUR DONATIONS = DIRECT ACTION" (gofundme, 2016; caps in original). The campaign had raised over $US 67,000 at the time of this writing.

4.2 Anti-Poaching Tourism: Nature Under Protection

In 2015, Prince Harry visited South Africa's Kruger National Park. Hosted and toured around by Major General Johan Jooste, the man in charge of Kruger's anti-poaching, The Prince was

taken on a whirlwind tour of poaching and anti-poaching on-the-ground. This included visiting "a crime scene with environmental investigations rangers," being taken to the carcasses of a "mother rhino and two-year old baby who was killed when it returned to its slain mother," and participating in a rhino de-horning. This was all in an effort to understand the "urgent challenges faced by people on the ground working to protect Africa's most endangered animals" (English, 2015). Harry's trip was carefully documented by media outlets and by him as he posted updates and photos of himself with rangers, carcasses, live rhinos, and the work of APUs to Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Similar to the Prince's trip, I observed how prospective large donors to anti-poaching pass through carefully scripted and curated visits to protected areas in poaching hotspots, such as in the reserve where I was living for my research. When potential donors visited, the APU held meetings to discuss the presentations to be given and how the operation room needed to be presented in a certain way. APU members wore their best uniforms and organised activities such as going out on a patrol drive and visiting rhino carcasses.

Curated, first-hand experiences into anti-poaching, however, are no longer only for elite donors. In South Africa and Mozambique, major safari tourism operators offer tourists the opportunity to see anti-poaching work first-hand. For example, as part of a 5-night/6-day safari trip in the GLTFCA offered by Singita, tourists head to Balule Lodge in Garingani Game Reserve, Mozambique. Garingani and the Balule Lodge are part of the GLC located adjacent to Kruger and between the towns of Mapulanguene and Massingir. On offer is a unique conservation-tourism experience that differs from a traditional safari. The main attraction is not wildlife, but anti-poaching initiatives. As the tourism promotion explains, "Whilst you are at Balule Lodge you will be introduced to the Anti-poaching team who will show you first-hand the work they are doing to preserve the wildlife of this area" (S.A.F.E., 2017). The anti-poaching team "will accompany the guests on an excursion to understand the

challenges and the progress being made." This includes "exploratory and educational drives, focused on the anti-poaching programme" (S.A.F.E., 2017). After Balule, guests head to Raptor's lodge in Hoedspruit, South Africa, where they can continue their immersion in anti-poaching by taking a guided tour of the "Protrack Anti-Poaching Unit Training Camp," the largest private anti-poaching security provider in South Africa (Protrack, 2015). Anti-poaching tourism is an innovative way to fund the reserve's anti-poaching operations. The cross-border trip costs US$5,100 per person, with 10% going directly to the reserve's anti-poaching project. Through anti-poaching tourism, and other visible markers of anti-poaching like outposts and active rangers, the work, successes, and challenges of anti-poaching are celebrated and made available first-hand to paying visitors. However, like conservation tourism more generally (Igoe, 2017), and Prince Harry's trip to Kruger, this is a mediated and curated experience of anti-poaching. Paying tourists are taken through a carefully planned itinerary as advertised on the tourism package's website (S.A.F.E., 2017).

Tourists, however, are not relegated to merely observing. Like Prince Harry, they can volunteer and become active participants working "alongside rangers responding to poaching attacks" in Southern Africa (Davies, 2015). The IAPF's Green Army, for example, is a program where people pay to join anti-poaching rangers in their front-line, day-to-day work in an area of rhino poaching in Zimbabwe. According to The Green Army webpage:

> By signing up for the IAPF's Green Army, you'll be joining us here on the frontline of conservation. Members will be integrated into the lifestyle of an anti-poaching ranger. This means heading out on patrols with our rangers, checking for snares and ensuring the integrity of the property is kept (IAPF, 2017).

The opportunity to see and experience anti-poaching first-hand will cost you US$650 for the first week, and US$650 for every additional week, with a general "minimum stay of two weeks." As per the organization, "The Green Army initiative is an important means of funding for the IAPF, meaning we do charge for the experience but the cost is treated 100% as a donation towards the cause" (IAPF, 2017). Much like the touring Prince Harry, the

tourists who participate in the Green Army often re-count their stories via news and social media. One couple who participated in the anti-poaching voluntourism wrote a piece for Africa Geographic lauding IAPF's work (Addison, 2017). Another couple was interviewed and wrote about their experience directly linking to where people can donate to the IAPF (n/a, 2014).

What we see with Garingani and The Green Army is anti-poaching becoming part of a commodified conservation and tourism landscape, itself becoming commodified and rendered a consumable experience where paying tourists can see poaching and anti-poaching first-hand. Whether a tourist or donor, the experience of anti-poaching on-the-ground is a representative spectacle catered to and made accessible for a particular audience to attract donor funding in support existing anti-poaching practices interventions. Anti-poaching tourism is now part of a wide range of (volun)tourism experiences used to raise funds for social and ecological causes in neoliberal times (Brightsmith et al., 2008; Fletcher & Neves, 2012; Mostafanezhad, 2013). Moreover, the anti-poaching tourism experience extends Marijnen and Verweijen's (2016) notion of "militarization by consumption" to anti-poaching by consumption that presents the opportunity to not only directly fund certain conservation activities, namely militarized anti-poaching, but to pay to observe, and even participate in anti-poaching first-hand and on-the-ground. Instead of bringing rangers and anti-poaching into the homes of would-be 'consumers' or donors, the consumer or donor is brought to the landscape of anti-poaching with a radically different, and more visceral, pre-packaged conservation-related consumer experience that is meant to go beyond the "tourist gaze" (Carrier, 2003, p. 6) and offer a much deeper engagement and participation in protecting threatened wildlife (also see McClanahan & Wall, 2016). In the process it intensifies consumer complicity in anti-poaching activities, one that is arguably more involved than online money transfers to organizations.

Much like IAPF's social media posts and campaigns, the anti-poaching made visible to and supported by tourists and donors in Garingani and by the IAPF is one based on a militarized approach, of which it is very upfront about. During months of ethnographic research with IAPF rangers I observed its use of militarized tactics to secure the protected areas and rhinos in question and neutralize suspected poachers. Indeed, the IAPF advertises its support of Garingani's anti-poaching efforts using its military-based approach. I have also seen first-hand how money from IAPF's fundraising funds the hiring of former military personnel as APU managers, the paramilitary training of rangers, and technologies like helicopters to deploy rangers in response to poaching incidents. The objective of this investment is to improve the capacities of rangers to keep unwanted people out of the reserve and neutralise them if and when they enter.

To be sure, this is not merely an IAPF-specific dynamic. While the IAPF is unapologetic about its military-first approach, it is not an anomaly but an example of a broader dynamic (Duffy, 2014; Lunstrum, 2014). Alongside Kruger, Prince Harry also lauded what he saw as the anti-poaching successes of Botswana, a country he also visited, who uses the country's defense force and a controversial shoot-on-sight policy to protect its rhinos (English, 2015). State conservation agencies like SANParks in South Africa who are responsible for the park are also engaging in a politics of visibility that turns on using spectacular images of violently decimated wildlife and the perceived "successes" of and "need" for military-style enforcement approaches (Lunstrum, 2017). Kruger officials are quite active in making the 'need' for green militarization a priority in the fight against poaching arguing it is the "responsible" approach (Hübschle & Jooste, 2017; Jooste, 2017). Officials even laud the donation of military technologies like grenade launchers and helicopters for the purposes of combatting rhino poaching (Lunstrum, 2018; Massé, Lunstrum, & Holterman, 2017). Others similarly illustrate how the social media and

fundraising campaigns of organizations discursively produce the need for a conservation based on "militaristic violence and spatial policing" (McClanahan & Wall, 2016). Marijnen and Verweijnen, for example, use the term "militarisation by consumption" to capture how the discursive productions of ranger-hero, poacher-villain, and militarized conservation as an ostensible force of stability in the Virunga region "invite individual supporters to directly fund militarized conservation practice" via online donations (2016, p. 275). However, developing anti-poaching's politics of visibility, and thus a more robust political ecology of anti-poaching, is equally about an explicit politics of invisibility, or what is not represented or communicated.

4.3 Silencing poaching's social relations

Ethnographic fieldwork in the centre of the rhino poaching conflict highlights how the representations of illegal hunting renders the local social relations, lived realities, and histories of dispossession related to protected areas where commercial poaching exists invisible, and why this matters. One Kruger official touched on this when talking about the narrow focus of donor funding:

> Part of it [the problem] comes from the language used in the media. You go to a press conference and all the talk is about rhinos killed and how many rhinos are still there and convictions stats and all this sort of thing. They paint it as a rhino problem. Nothing about the people. And I think the people…in fact quite often our language is that the people are the enemy (Interview, 2016).

Simplistic understandings of people as enemies who need to be stopped with force and violence fails to account for the underlying drivers that might influence why people risk their lives to hunt rhino or other species in the first place. What is left out of the many stories and campaigns described above are the untidy complexities of the socio- and political-ecological dynamics where poaching is occurring. These include resettlement, loss of access to land and resources as a result of conservation, and a resentment towards heavy-handed and violent

anti-poaching tactics (also see Annecke & Masubele, 2016; Duffy et al., 2015; Fenio, 2014; Hübschle, 2016). Moreover, militarized conservation risks reproducing already strained park-people relations, possibly aggravating the poaching situation even further (Duffy et al., 2015; Hübschle, 2016; Massé, et al., 2017). This is precisely why many people working in conservation in Mozambique and Kruger are pushing back against militarized approaches to anti-poaching (see for e.g. Annecke & Masubele, 2016; Haas & Ferreira, 2018).

Seeing people as the enemy who need to be shut out of conservation rather than engaged with as active collaborators is part of the logic upon which militarization is rationalized. As the Head of the APU in one Mozambican reserve routinely extolled "You are either with us or against us." The Commander of a special APU in the LNP similarly explained "All guys inside of the Park are poachers" (06/2016). Such blanket representations of communities legitimize heavy-handed tactics, targeting communities as a whole (also see Witter, Forthcoming), and further motivates forced resettlement of communities outside of protected area boundaries (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016). Moreover, they close off possibilities of working with local people and thus further alienate the stakeholders who are arguably most important for the long-term success and sustainability of conservation efforts.

Indeed, many rangers with whom I spoke believe that the more heavy-handed they are, the more local people push back (Interviews, 2015; 2016). Community liaison managers in the GLC reserve became frustrated with APUs, arguing the militarized, community-as-enemy approach is undoing the long-term work and investment in building positive park-people relations. As one conservation manager explained, being too heavy-handed and hostile towards people adjacent the reserve alienates them and increases reserve-community tensions (Interview, 2016). These are tensions that I saw culminate in protests against the reserve and even threats again myself as people perceived me as being associated with the anti-poaching unit.

Similar silences are present in the narrative about violence against rangers. I return to the incident of the abduction and assault of community rangers as outlined in the gofundme campaign above to examine how the campaign strategically obscured the messy realities of what happened, and thus distorts what might be needed to prevent violence against rangers. The campaign tells us, for example, "We may never know exactly by who or why these rangers were targeted last week" (gofundme, 2016). But, the campaign does provide a solution: "more rangers, better equipment, more canine units, more vehicles, more helicopter hours" (Ibid). However, as an official involved in the matter explained, the beating of the community scouts and rangers was part of a much broader and more complicated story whereby corrupt rangers, police, and border patrol tasked with anti-poaching in the area were allegedly active in organizing poaching and extorting protection money from poachers (Personal Communication, 2017). The abduction of the scout and violent backlash emerged when these law enforcement officials allegedly used reserve anti-poaching personnel to execute arrest warrants against the very poachers they were extorting for protection money. The poaching group responsible for the attack admitted these details in a police report submitted to the local prosecutor. So, we do know who attacked the scouts and at least part of the reason why, but none of the above was communicated in the urgent appeal or social media stories. Rangers themselves are among the forgotten victims of the poaching crisis, often hidden behind a façade of heroism that renders their vulnerabilities and internal contradictions invisible. But, to effectively address the violence against them, in addition to poaching, there is a need to accurately understand and represent the origins of such violence and why it persists.

The social relations behind conservation and anti-poaching are left out of the conversation or otherwise obscured. Studies demonstrate how approaches that try to address the local socio-economic realities of poaching, corruption, and legal system, for example, are

given relatively little attention and resources, if not completely ignored (Duffy & Humphreys, 2014; Roe et al., 2015). On-the-ground, conservation managers explain how money for community development programs is near impossible to come by, but money for boots and guns for rangers is abundant (Interviews, 2015; 2016). One manager explained: "Before no one would go near equipping rangers, especially in terms of providing funding for firearms and ammunition. Now that is the easiest thing to support" (Interview, 2016). For obvious reasons, no organization wants to highlight the details of rangers using violence on suspected poachers or of their rangers possibly being involved in corruption and poaching themselves. Moreover, and drawing on insights concerning fundraising for humanitarian (De Vos, 2011; Omaar & de Waal, 2007) and environmental issue more broadly (Sullivan, 2016), tackling issues of corruption, legal systems, park-people relations, and decades of conservation-related injustices are likely deemed too complicated to resonate with a wide audience and are thus not presented. The result is the normalization of a threatened nature whose primary, if not only, salvation is a security-focused conservation practice aimed at neutralizing the "poacher."

This is narrow vision of addressing poaching is especially concerning as there is mounting evidence and agreement that much more energy and resources need to be directed towards addressing corruption, legal systems, and developing interventions that have communities as a focus if we want to systematically address the poaching problem and without which heavy-handed enforcement will be unsuccessful (Haas & Ferreira, 2018; Massé, et al., 2017; Moreto, et al., 2016; Roe et al., 2015; van Uhm & Moreto, 2017). Organizations like the IAPF and SANParks themselves acknowledge this, and they do provide needed support for rangers and protected areas. Yet they, and others, still problematically promote militarized anti-poaching as a primary and even responsible approach.

4.4 Silencing conservation's other ecological priorities

An overlooked problem in the critiques of militarised conservation and one that requires further empirical research are militarisation's impacts on the ecological integrity and management of protected areas. A politics of visibility begins to address this gap by drawing attention to how the increasing visibility and normalization of a nature under threat and an enforcement-first response not only serves to reproduce itself, but risks hi-jacking and undermining broader ecological and conservation mandates and priorities that might seem mundane, but are required for the effective management of biodiversity in protected areas.

For example, a focus on spectacular representations of poaching and decimated wildlife render non-charismatic and non-threatened species invisible, a dynamic we see with conservation-tourism more broadly (see Duffy, 2002). Managers of protected areas did not hesitate to explain how conservation efforts in areas of poaching are increasingly focused on protecting a singular species, such as the rhino, from a particular brand of poacher using specific tactics rather than focusing on broader ecosystem health, functioning, and management. If not invisible, then at the very minimum they become marginalized along with other conservation priorities.

A consistent theme in conversations with conservation practitioners was the need for funding conservation activities that are not related to anti-poaching, but that are still vital. Rangers, conservation managers, and ecologists confirm how a focus on militarized anti-poaching and the hiring of (former) military personnel is having concerning impacts on ecological monitoring and assessments (Interviews 2016). They desperately described how they are not doing the mundane yet essential monitoring and maintenance work required to sustain the functional and ecological integrity of protected areas because the funding they receive is earmarked for anti-poaching. As one official in Kruger National Park explained,

now booking a helicopter to conduct what he calls "conservation" work such as "landscape assessments" and "vegetation condition assessments" is difficult as the helicopter has been largely monopolized for anti-poaching surveillance and the deployment of reaction teams. He explained, "someone had resources, they have control over the helicopters, and we ended up not doing [vegetation assessments]" (Interview, 2016). Another Kruger conservation official and ecologist explained how the park now has four helicopters but that "It's very hard for me to get a helicopter to go catch a rhino [for biological studies]" (Interview, 2016). Frustrated by the lack of attention and resources for non-anti-poaching conservation activities, a conservation manager of a reserve in Mozambique created a foundation to help private reserves pay for the everyday maintenance and conservation activities that are overlooked with the focus on the spectacular aspects of poaching and anti-poaching, yet are paramount to the health of conservation landscapes.

The move away from conservation and ecology towards a more narrowly focused anti-poaching extends to the training and specific work of rangers as well. The same Kruger official quoted above explained how rangers "think their job is to wake up and look for poachers" (Interview, 2016). When asked if rangers are trained in "conservation," he answered: "It's not an emphasis from the organization [SANParks] that you must report biological observation out there." I observed how the IAPF funds the training of rangers in paramilitary counter-poaching and the tracking, detecting, and neutralization of poachers with very little if any training on broad conservation management mandates and ecological monitoring. Effectively, rangers in many protected areas are now tasked almost exclusively with anti-poaching at the expense of broader ecological health of conservation landscapes (also see Annecke & Masubele, 2016).

5. Anti-Poaching's Politics of (In)Visibility

Anti-poaching funding campaigns and anti-poaching tourism are emotion-provoking. The result is that anti-poaching has become part of the expanding "geographies of compassion" and "neoliberal moral economies" that traditionally focus on poverty and humanitarianism (Mostafanezhad, 2013, p. 319). Conservation, anti-poaching, threatened species and the rangers working to protect them provide one more geography of compassion and one more moral economy to which people can contribute. However, there is a real risk that Prince Harry, other donors and paying tourists remain in an anti-poaching version of the tourist bubble. This a bubble that "induces ignorance of the context of the visit" (Carrier, 2005, 316). The context here is the actually-existing realities of poaching and interventions aimed at addressing it. Tourists and visiting donors experience a simplified version of the realities of anti-poaching produced through carefully planned and curated visits. Similarly, while spectacular and violent images and stories of poaching online are a way in which to draw attention to real problems and an important cause, the strategy is reminiscent of the familiar strategies of "disaster" or "famine" pornography where simple narratives and graphic images are used to provoke an emotional response, and ultimately donations (De Vos, 2011; Omaar & de Waal, 2007). Focusing on environmental films, Sullivan argues the "false framings of nature" based on the use of sensational and extreme images produces "affective registers" that are as important as the words and images used in garnering support (2016, 751-754).

In the face of a mounting poaching crisis, anti-poaching tourism, social media and the ways in which they represent the killing of wildlife and the needed solutions help (re-)produce paramilitarized anti-poaching and conservation for the ostensible safety of both wildlife and rangers. Indeed, drawing on the empirical data above, there is widespread agreement that poaching and anti-poaching has a near monopoly on fundraising in many areas, including the Mozambique-South Africa borderlands (also see Annecke & Masubele, 2016; Duffy & Humphreys, 2014). This is what is made visible and this is what people

consume, contribute to, and support. The result: resources available for equipping and arming rangers, related infrastructure and technologies, and for hunting and capturing poachers, but relatively little for other activities, both ecologically and community-oriented. While there might be an overlap in certain cases, it is not a given.

This is the crux of anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility: while violently decimated wildlife, threatened rangers, and the need for a securitized conservation to address these issues is made visible and brings in much-needed resources, the social relations influencing poaching and related violence, the implications of militarized conservation and anti-poaching practices, and other conservation priorities are rendered invisible or neglected. The result is a normalization of and support for a conservation practice that further consolidates protected areas as exclusionary territories to be defended with force while simultaneously jeopardizing the overall ecological integrity and management of protected areas.

However, making anti-poaching and poaching visible is not inherently negative or problematic. Building on Brosius and Hitchner (2010) who argue a politics of visibility is essential to recognizing new ways of knowing and practicing conservation, I end by imagining how a politics of visibility might be harnessed for positive change. First, the importance of communities as allies in conservation and even in addressing poaching requires more visibility. Moreover, the dynamics of demand driving the illegal wildlife trade, the corruption, and broader socio-economic and historical contexts that give rise to poaching and violence against nature and rangers in the first place need to be front and centre if wildlife crime is to be addressed in a sustainable, long-term manner. Making visible any injustices and abuses that are not only problematic in and of themselves but that may very well take away from the noble objectives of rangers and conservation organizations might also help keep conservation and anti-poaching actors accountable. We are beginning to see this with the denouncing of Veterans Empowered to Protect African Wildlife and reports the

organization is no longer allowed to operate in Tanzania given their portrayal of their anti-poaching work as "do some anti-poaching. Kill some bad guys and do some good" (Anderson, 2015). In addition, the IAPF is seemingly attuned to critiques and is developing alternative approaches such as its all-female anti-poaching force that purportedly "builds an alternative approach to the militarized paradigm of 'fortress conservation'" aimed at "working with rather than against the local population" (IAPF, 2018). There is a risk, however, that such initiatives serve as a means to raise even more funds for a paramilitary, enforcement-first approach as has been argued with similar initiatives (Huijssoon, 2017). Indeed, and, potentially troubling gender dynamics aside, promotional material for the project still shows the women undergoing "special forces training" clad in military fatigues with military assault rifles (Barbee, 2017; Steirn, 2017). As seen with other initiatives, the hard approach as a principal way to address anti-poaching is "not displaced but rather complemented by a softer approach based on counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine" that involves working with communities (Massé, Lunstrum, & Holterman, 2017, p. 202). Indeed, what is left out is of the promotional material is how mixing community development with paramilitary tactics and bringing community members under the auspices of an external paramilitary-style anti-poaching organization potentially puts the women and community members at risk of violence while also turning people against conservation (Biggs et al., 2016; Massé, et al., 2017). And importantly, there is little if any mention of non-anti-poaching related training and responsibilities such as biological monitoring and management that are central to conservation. It is with these latter points that a practice of visibility can shift to become a positive force harnessed to produce a more balanced approach to conservation in a time of poaching crisis.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined how anti-poaching actors use spectacular images of dead rhinos and beaten rangers on social media, and the curated experiences of anti-poaching tourism to raise funds and support for interventions to address the illegal hunting of rhinos. These practices convey a simplified narrative of a threatened nature in need of a conservation practice that if not outright militarized, is based on an enforcement-first approach to maintain a separation between spaces of conservation and local people through the use of force. Equally important is how these representations of poaching and anti-poaching obscure the more complex socio-historical context from which the illegal hunting of wildlife emerges, and the potentially negative social and ecological impacts of an increasingly militarized conservation.

Building on debates from the cultural politics of conservation and recent work on the discursive aspects of green militarization, I understand these dynamics as constitutive of a politics of (in)visibility of anti-poaching that undermines the social and ecological mandates of conservation. First, it reifies a forceful conservation that yields negative social implications for people living in and around protected areas, thereby alienating them even further. Second, an overdetermined focus on anti-poaching shifts attention and resources away from the mundane, yet essential non-poaching related work of conservation. The politics of (in)visibility of anti-poaching is thus a framework that can help develop a more robust political ecology of anti-poaching and of conservation in the current context of a poaching crisis and an increase in militarized conservation responses. Moreover, it offers a basis for thinking about how the realities of poaching, anti-poaching and conservation more generally might be represented and made knowable in ways that move efforts to address wildlife poaching away from militarized and enforcement-first approaches to more holistic interventions that take into consideration the multiple complexities of conservation and human-wildlife relations.

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