

Rhino poaching and the “slow violence” of conservation-related resettlement in Mozambique’s Limpopo National Park

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, South Africa’s Kruger National Park has become embroiled in a rhino poaching crisis. In response, state authorities are applying military logics, personnel, training, and equipment to protect endangered black and threatened white rhinos. Many suspected poachers are Mozambicans, including those who are resident in Mozambique’s Limpopo National Park (LNP). Based on a sequence of fieldwork conducted in the LNP between 2003 and 2016, we examine the relationship between this extremely tense and armed clash and the thousands of already socially and economically marginalized LNP residents targeted for resettlement as part of conserving rhino habitat. As they await relocation, the basic human security of residents has become deeply undermined by decreased access to services and environmental resources and the criminalization of their livelihoods. While much of the critical scholarship on anti-poaching focuses on the spectacular forms of violence that characterize rhino poaching, beneath this a more structural and “slower” form of violence persists. Seeking to develop an understanding of violence that extends beyond the spectacular, we argue that the cumulative losses and instability that have followed conservation created the conditions under which rhino poaching unfolded in the LNP. Communities found guilty of rhino poaching by mere association bear tremendous costs while the reduction of resettlement to an urgent need to control aberrant human behavior masks tremendous opportunity costs forgone. Better understandings of these costs and their links to violence need be taken seriously in any discussion of poaching response and poaching motivation.

1. Introduction

At the turn of the millennium, the co-joining of the Kruger and Limpopo National Parks emerged as an important symbol of sustainability, security, peace, and reconciliation in post-apartheid southern Africa. A decade and a half later, each of these goals, and the well-being of local residents and protected species, are under threat as South Africa’s Kruger National Park (KNP) has become embroiled in a rhino poaching crisis. This threat persists at the uneasy intersection of poaching, poverty, dispossession, and militarized conservation. In response, state authorities are applying military logics, personnel, training, and equipment to protect endangered black and threatened white rhinos. Many suspected poachers are Mozambicans, including those residing in Mozambique’s Limpopo National Park (LNP) (see Fig. 1).

One explanation for this extremely tense and armed clash is the thousands of already socially and economically marginalized LNP residents who have, since 2003, been targeted for resettlement as part of conserving wildlife, including rhino habitat. As they await relocation,

the basic human security of residents has become deeply undermined by decreased access to environmental resources, an erosion of basic services, increased human-wildlife conflict, and the criminalization of their livelihoods. Intensification of poverty and state disenfranchisement have followed. Simultaneously, some park residents have been implicated in rhino poaching, while the resettlement program itself has been re-envisioned as an anti-poaching strategy.

Much critical scholarship on rhino poaching focuses on illicit forms of violence that characterize militarized anti-poaching responses in the KNP. However, beneath this spectacular form of violence is a more structural, dispersed, and indeed “slower” violence that also threatens the human security of chronically liminal, project-affected people in the LNP. Forms of slow violence are theorized across the social and natural sciences, albeit using different languages. Thus, threat analysis in coupled human-natural systems must include both the big shocks, harms, and changes to a system *and* the pre-existing vulnerabilities and cumulative insecurities. Seeking to develop an understanding of violence that extends beyond personal, illicit, and militarized formations, we explain poaching-related violence in terms of the rights, lives, and

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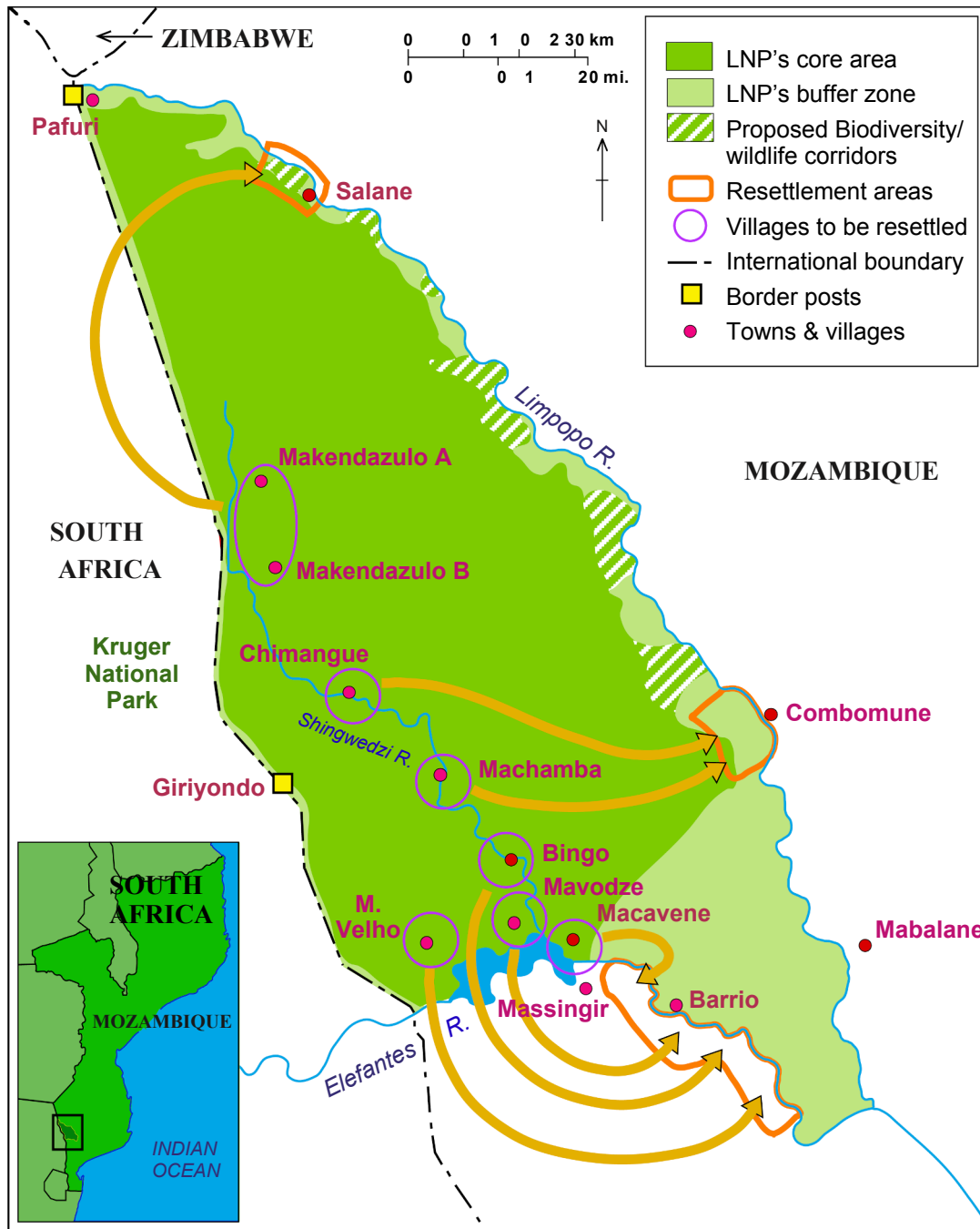


Fig. 1. Map of LNP villages targeted for resettlement and resettlement destinations, reprinted with permission from Lunstrum, 2015b. Cartographer Carolyn King (York University) made the map based on data from Salas (2011).

livelihoods of Mozambicans.

All material reported here is drawn from long-term ethnographic research conducted by Witter in the LNP and analyzed by Witter and Satterfield. In what follows, we review scholarship on militarized conservation, slow violence, and the LNP's protracted resettlement and introduce the research methodology. Thereafter, we assess the losses LNP residents have experienced over the past decade and a half as they became targeted for and subsequently await, conservation-related resettlement. We examine how indicators of sudden wealth ostensibly linked to rhino poaching remain deeply entangled in struggles to overcome poverty, drought, and food insecurity. We examine further how communities blamed for poaching through a logic of guilt-by-association pay tremendous costs as the harms visited upon them intensify and become increasingly justified in the name of halting

'aberrant behavior'. We argue that long-term socio-economic divestment, vulnerability, disempowerment, and liminality induced by the implementation of conservation in this region contributed to the local conditions under which rhino poaching unfolded. Thus, any serious consideration of poaching response and motivation must prioritize the role of conservation in impoverishing, dispossessing, and disempowering people.

2. Literature review and background

2.1. Rhino poaching and its attributions in the GLTP

The 2001 establishment of the LNP was key to subsequently co-joining the LNP with the KNP (in 2002) to form the Great Limpopo

Transfrontier Park (GLTP). The GLTP is, ostensibly, an international ‘peace park’ that also includes the Makuleke Region in South Africa and four designated conservation zones in Zimbabwe. Framed as “global solutions” to conservation challenges, peace parks prioritize cross-border efforts to protect biodiversity, promote peace and international development, and enhance socio economic development (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015: 2; Duffy, 2001). Concern now prevails, however, that the poaching crisis will undo progress made towards achieving these goals (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015).

There are four species of rhinoceros: two, Sumatran and Javan (both classified on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered) in Asia; and two, White and Black, in Africa. Of the two subspecies of White rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*), the Northern white (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) rhino is classified as Extinct in the Wild, with 3 individuals living in captivity (Karimi, 2014). The Southern White rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) is Threatened and the Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*), Critically Endangered.

South Africa is home to about 70–80% of the latter two rhino populations, and a significant number of these (~9000) live in the KNP (Ferreira et al., 2015; Hübschle, 2017). Since 2010, nearly 4000 KNP rhinos have been killed for their horn with an overall escalation of rhino mortality over time: 146 in 2010, 252 in 2011, 425 in 2012, 606 in 2013, 827 in 2014, and 826 in 2015, 662 in 2016, and 504 in 2017 (DEA, 2015, 2017). Mozambique is a primary source of poachers, and in 2013–14, was home to estimated 75% of those suspected of illegally hunting that population to procure rhino horn for the illegal trade (Hübschle and Joost, 2017).

A primary source of the poaching problem is the highly lucrative value of rhino horn, which increased from approximately \$4700 per kilogram in 1993 to approximately \$65,000 per kilogram in 2012, rendering rhino horn worth more by weight than gold, diamonds, or cocaine (Biggs et al., 2013: 1038). Researchers explain the tremendous demand for rhino horn, especially from China and Vietnam, in terms of rising levels of affluence among a growing consumer base and changing cultural norms, including the emergence of rhino horn as a status symbol (Miliken and Shaw, 2012; Lunstrum, 2014; Duffy, 2015; Hübschle, 2017). Corruption is also a major contributor to poaching: government and conservation officials, rangers, veterinarians, pilots, and police have all been variously implicated in poaching networks. Moreover, until the 2014 Conservation Law, there were minimal legal consequences for poaching in Mozambique, which shares a 350 km border with the KNP (Duffy and Humpheys, 2016).

Most importantly here, a former administrator of the LNP cited extreme poverty as the reason young Mozambican men come to “be used as foot soldiers for poaching syndicates” (Club of Mozambique, 2016). Widely assumed to be the key factor driving people to poach, poverty is undeniably important here, and Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world. Yet discourses that assume poverty as prime motivator for poaching tend to maintain too narrow a view of “economic deprivation,” one that discounts losses in status, dignity, and self-determination and overlooks poaching as a response to these more-than-economic losses (Duffy and Humpheys, 2016; Hübschle, 2017). Absent, moreover, from most accounts of poaching motivations is any meaningful consideration of the role of conservation in impoverishing and disempowering people. This absence persists despite scholarship demonstrating that increased poverty and social marginalization are widespread consequences of protected area conservation (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau, 2006; Adams et al., 2004) and despite a broader conservation community committed to addressing this trend (Durban Accord, 2003; CIHR, 2014). To overcome these shortcomings, we engage seriously with social and political contexts of persistent marginalization, while also avoiding overly-simplistic explanations about poverty as a prime motivator for rural men drawn into wildlife crime.

2.2. The militarized, racialized response to rhino poaching

Increased poaching has been met with government and conservation management aimed at preventing poaching in the borderlands via law enforcement, intelligence gathering, greater punishment for poaching (i.e., increased jail time), and catching and stopping suspected rhino poachers in the act (DEA, 2015, 2017). Over the past decade, anti-poaching activities have pervaded most conservation programming, planning, and policing (Lunstrum, 2014; Duffy, 2014; Hübschle and Joost, 2017; Massé et al., 2017). On both sides of the border, former military leaders have taken on key leadership roles in para-military anti-poaching enforcement (Massé et al., 2017). Increased budgets have financed the training of rangers in the use of military equipment (e.g., guns, night vision goggles, drones). Partnerships with military and private military companies have expanded and intensified security and surveillance, especially along the Mozambique-South Africa border (Lunstrum, 2014; Duffy, 2014; Ramutsindela, 2016; Hübschle and Joost, 2017). Moreover, and while not included as an official component of South Africa’s so-called “war against poaching,” (DEA, 2015; see Hübschle and Joost, 2017) shoot-to-kill-practices regarding poachers have been taken up in the KNP. An estimated (and contested) 200–500 hundred Mozambican deaths have been associated with rhino poaching (Smith, 2015; Hübschle, 2017: 439).

Encounters between militarized violence and protected area conservation are not new, including in the KNP (Carruthers, 1995; Lunstrum, 2015a). The use of para-military partnerships and tactics to “wage war more effectively on the poachers” entering African parks (Peluso, 1993: 205) has rested on the idea “that biodiversity protection is a war, that Africans found inside protected areas should be shot on sight, and that advanced military equipment and training are key to the conduct of wildlife conservation” (Neumann, 2004:828). This idea has been re-invigorated in the current “war on poaching” where the intensification of military personnel, weapons, and tactics in pursuit of conservation goals again “rests... on the logic of violence as an appropriate means to resolving conflict” (Lunstrum, 2014:829).

Scholarship on “militarized conservation” (Duffy 2014), “green militarization” (Lunstrum, 2014), and “green violence” (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015) emphasizes that para-militarized, conservation-related violence is highly racialized. Tracking down, and if not killing, then arresting, detaining, interrogating, and jailing suspected poachers plays out on a landscape still alive with brutal apartheid-era violence, where structural inequalities run wide and deep (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015; Lunstrum and Ybarra, 2018). The racialized dimensions of that violence are echoed in the very term “poacher” as, for well over a century, references to native Africans as poachers, even when they were “hunting for the pot,” have been a primary basis for dispossession. Dispossession of land and criminalization of access to valued animals was enabled in the first place by what Duffy (2014: 828) referred to as “deepseated fear of the poor and their claims on resources” that encouraged “conservation agencies to view poor people as the enemy”. In South Africa in particular, whites portrayed blacks as “barbarous poachers whose relationship to wildlife was one of illegality” while recasting themselves as civilized, principled “stewards of nature” (Nixon, 2011: 190; Carruthers, 1995). These discourses were formative to the creation of the KNP (in 1926) and to the impoverishment and removal of thousands of residents to remake the region as sovereign, white territory (Carruthers, 1995; Ramutsindela, 2016). They are formative, moreover, to the enduring sense that “government and conservation authorities value wild animals more than black rural lives” (Hübschle, 2017: 439).

Racialized under- and over-tones are visible in contemporary social media as well.irate and embittered online commentators refer to poachers as “savages”, “the lowest of predators” (Lunstrum, 2017: 4) who fail to “display the faintest smattering of respect” (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015: 20) and “need to be done away with” (Lunstrum, 2017: 4). Some commentators praise the killing of poachers and even

volunteer their own services (Lunstrum, 2017). “Foreign poachers” in particular are portrayed as security threats, not only to the KNP, but also to the South African state (Ramutsindela, 2016; Massé and Lunstrum, 2016). In these other ways, racialized discourses about poverty and poaching have long been influential and extremely consequential in this region. Past and present, they legitimize illicit violence against suspected poachers and the slower violence involved in dispossessing thousands from their ancestral lands. What we emphasize here is that illicit and slow violence are two sides of the same coin, both spent in the name of promoting conservation.

2.3. *Slow violence: impoverishment as system threat and instability*

In the face of illicit and overt forms of violence, where the lives of rhinos, rangers, and poachers are at stake, and where the clock is running out on rhino populations, turning the discussion to the slow violence experienced by LNP residents might appear trivial. But it is not. Instead our turn in focus highlights the relationship between poaching and what we refer to as the eternal loop of scarcity whereby the processes that gradually wear down, weaken, or destroy social worlds elude blame and responsibility for that wearing down and for the consequences that follow. The ‘slow’ in such violence is amorphous and attritional: “low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects” (Nixon, 2011: 11).

Parallel observations appear in the study of socio-ecological systems. Researchers have long examined the relative importance of near unprecedented events (e.g., a 500-year flood) versus long-term structural inequities (e.g., the chronic lack of investment in infrastructure) as factors in system collapse. For example, in their efforts to understand species loss, ecologists debate the relative importance of “shocks” (Nixon’s “spectacles”) versus “stressors” (insidious, less perceptible or easily measured) in the collapse of a system. Scholars similarly debate the effects of all manner of events, including extreme weather, market forces, or climate change (Freudenberg et al. 2008; Jackson et al., 2001; Kaplan-Hallam et al. 2017). This research demonstrates, to emphasize the point raised in the introduction, that in order to understand the threats to, changes to, and instabilities of socio-ecological systems, it is essential to understand both the big shocks, harms, and changes to a system and the pre-existing vulnerabilities, insecurities, and cumulative losses.

In the case of rhino poaching, the market value of rhino horn serves as a major shock to the system, motivating the poor (and the rich) to participate in rhino poaching. However, a full understanding of system threats and instabilities also necessitates attention to the persistent stressors of poverty and marginalization, including how impoverishment and dispossession have been exacerbated by conservation. In the LNP context, a prolonged and failed resettlement project (introduced next) has increased impoverishment, threatened livelihoods, and motivated resistance against conservation. We do not go so far as to claim that the poverty and instability wrought through conservation alone caused the poaching crisis. Instead our goal, following Clark (2007: 93–94, cited in Freudenberg et al., 2008: 1018), is to draw needed attention to “the conditions that lead to the calamity in the first place”.

Conservation-induced poverty and instability have produced a state of what Cliggett (2014) referred to as “normalized uncertainty” and “chronic liminality”, whereby the compounding effects of slow violence accumulate over time. This inverted sense of accumulation – measured in terms of escalating losses and harms that amass alongside conservation implementation – plays a crucial role in enabling rhino poaching and its associated violence to take hold. Yet such losses and harms, and the role of conservation in inducing them, are largely ignored in discussions of poaching response and poaching motivation.

2.4. *Resettlement in the LNP: ever justified, ever delayed*

Approximately 25,000 people live in the LNP mostly along the

Limpopo River, which comprises the extended eastern boundary of the park. In 2003 the Mozambican government targeted approximately 7000 people residing in the LNP for resettlement. Since then a few villages have resettled (Nanguene, Macavene, and Massingir Velho), but the majority (Makandezulu A & B, Mavodze, Chimangue, Machamba, and Bingo) remain in the park with little certainty about when or even if resettlement will occur (see Fig. 1). Those still resident in the park include the approximately 400 residents of Makandezulu B, located about 10 km east of the border with South Africa. This population also includes some residents of the recently abandoned (not resettled) village, Makandezulu A.

Described as “one of the most protracted conservation-related displacements unfolding” (Lunstrum, 2015b: 2), persistent delays to the resettlement have occurred in a context of struggles to obtain community consent for conservation, resettlement, and compensation plans; high staff turn-overs; budgetary constraints; uncertainties related to funding, materials, and land acquisitions; and frustration and mistrust among ministers, funders, park authorities, and project-affected communities (Spierenburg, 2013; Milgroom and Spierenburg, 2008; Witter, 2013; Lunstrum, 2015b; Milgroom, 2015). In the meantime, for a decade and a half, those still resident in the LNP have variously awaited, lost hope in, ignored, and resisted resettlement all the while a suite of shifting narratives about why resettlement should nonetheless take place emerge and circulate.

Arguably the most pervasive narrative is that conservation-related resettlement presents a key opportunity for sustainable development. International tourism will provide development for the nation while the resettlement program itself will provide development for project-affected people (Ramutsindela, 2004; Spierenburg, 2013). Resettlement plans progressed despite the large body of evidence demonstrating resettlement too often causes and exacerbates, rather than overcomes, impoverishment (for a recent overview, see Vancly, 2017). Moreover, LNP compensation plans demonstrated minimal understanding of the structural drivers of poverty and very little ambition or agency to engage with or change these (Witter and Satterfield, 2014).

An additional discourse maintained that resettlement is voluntary. This narrative persisted even as critical research told a different story of community leadership “accepting to leave” in a context where they felt they had little other choice (RRP, 2002; Milgroom and Spierenburg, 2008; Witter, 2013). A subsequent narrative – resettlement is needed to protect villagers from dangerous wildlife – cast further doubt on the idea that LNP residents have had meaningful choice in the matter of their removal. As their populations increased in the LNP, elephants damaged fields, water supplies, fruit stores, and ancestral gravesites. Thus, residents claimed that wildlife, and not citizens, are being protected and positioned themselves as the ones who are in danger (Witter, 2013).

This brings us to the current, inverse narrative: that resettlement is needed to protect threatened and endangered wildlife, rhinos in particular, from dangerous people. The logic follows that removing residents from villages located along the borderlands will “lengthen the distance between communities and Kruger... and also ensure easier policing” (Lunstrum, 2017: 232). Thus, the most recent village resettled from the LNP, Massingir Velho, was reportedly moved “as a measure to curb rhino poaching” (Hüschle, 2017: 434). The re-imagining of LNP residents as security threats and would-be “poacher insurgents” legitimizes illicit violence and dispossession (Lunstrum and Ybarra, 2018), as well as, we argue, practices and decisions that further impoverish, marginalize, and criminalize residents as they variously seek out, await, and resist resettlement.

3. Methods for assessing conservation-induced impoverishment and its repercussions

Our findings as to the deep problem of slow violence are based on ethnographic research conducted in the LNP in 2003, 2006–2007,

2011, and 2016. Observations and interviews conducted during field work in 2016 (including 2 weeks in the LNP) are most important here, but these are contextualized by longer-term research observations. During the 2016 field season, Witter interviewed 17 LNP residents and 3 park employees. Interviews with park residents were semi-structured (guided but open-ended) and took place primarily in residents' homesteads. Interviews also took place in Witter's campsite, while procuring water and firewood, and during a half-day visit to the now abandoned village of Makandezulu A. Interviews included questions pertaining to genealogies and family relations (i.e., births, deaths, changes in residence); changes in resource use; current challenges faced by households and villages; and residents' ideas about and experiences with the impending resettlement and, sometimes, violence related to anti-poaching tactics. To protect research participants, Witter did not ask direct questions about people's involvement in wildlife crime; though there were cases where the topic was initiated by research participants. During most interviews, illegal hunting was either not addressed or addressed indirectly. Thus, Witter gained insights into rhino poaching and its relationship to impoverishment primarily through more subtle forms of discussion, including, for example, contexts where participants referred to the escalating dangers of travel through the KNP or reflected on suspected rangers' motivations for burning houses.

In cases where discussions of rhino poaching (and other types of illegal hunting) were initiated by interviewees, Witter pursued questions related to residents' understandings of the events reported. This enabled the triangulation of various accounts, keeping in mind that the stories were, by and large, third party accounts. The interpretive focus was and remains less about proving or disproving detailed accounts, and more about what poaching (and its repercussions) mean to people who are variously entangled in illegal practices. Whether that entanglement is substantive or wrought via misplaced blame, it clings to and coils around people's dispossession from their ancestral territory, territory since converted into a para-militarized conservation zone.

4. Results: Slow violence in four parts

4.1. Divestment poverty

Residents targeted for resettlement from the LNP are not of one mind with respect to their future plans and priorities, but they do share the sense that they have far too little choice in these matters. The sentiment, "We agreed to move, but we did not do so freely," (Spierenburg, 2013) has been widely expressed by LNP residents, including in the 2016 field season when interviewees emoted, "...people didn't want to move but [are] forced to move" and "We agreed to it, we've got no choice". Indeed, by 2007 the majority of Makandezulu A and B residents expressed clearly that they did not want to resettle, though many felt they had no other choice (Witter, 2013). By 2016, and with increasingly poor conditions, feelings appeared to have shifted such that a minority continued to express explicit resistance, while many were resigned, in some cases eager, to leave. Nonetheless, resettlement remains out of reach for most residents, primarily because their destination locations are nowhere near ready for them.

Those awaiting resettlement are, in no uncertain terms, "displaced" even without having physically moved (see Cernea, 2006). Their access and control over lands and decision-making processes have receded while what it means to live in their home villages has been destroyed, or at-best, upended (Witter and Satterfield, 2014). In the meantime, a blindness, on the part of conservation decision-makers, to the social consequences of induced and yet delayed resettlement appears to have set in, as demonstrated in their attachments to aforementioned resettlement narratives. A major driver of these conditions is the strategic channeling of investment away from those still living internally to the park in the hopes that resettlement would become more attractive and necessary, and it has.

The reality is that simultaneously recurring divestment in

resettlement-targeted communities has resulted in an uneven geography of community well-being. Particularly evident during the 2011 and 2016 field seasons were the continued development efforts outside of the park versus their counterpoints within. Specifically, government officials continue to make substantive investments in the forms of cement houses, schools, health clinics, water pumps, irrigation schemes, community nurseries, sustainable use programs and support for a long-term livelihood diversification strategy in proposed resettlement destinations. Meanwhile, inside the park, there are investments in tourist facilities, roads, and most recently, increased border patrols, but there are also relatively dramatic divestments in the villages and villagers targeted for resettlement.

First, access to basic services, including water and health care, eroded. For example, the water pump in Makandezulu B broke in 2001. Because the village was located in a national park and targeted for resettlement, the government has made no evident plans to repair it. Instead, for more than a decade and a half, the water supply in Makandezulu B has consisted of hand dug wells in a tributary of the Shindwedzi River that is dry much of the year. In 2016 there were six such wells throughout the riverbed. Health care services also diminished. There is a health clinic in Makandezulu B that, since park implementation, has remained effectively unstaffed (see also LNP, 2014: 39). Non-functional as a clinic, it instead houses the District Administrator from Chicualacuala.

Second, food insecurity is widespread, a condition long exacerbated by climate effects. Those living internal to the park depend on subsistence-based, rain-fed, agriculture focused primarily on maize. Residents also keep cattle, goats, and chickens and depend on wild forest products. Well before park implementation, climate variability in the form of extended periods of low rain undermined agricultural production and food security for residents (Ekblom et al., 2012). Further, a 2004 FAO report characterized the district containing both Makandezulu villages as at "severe risk of drought" and structurally "food insecure" (FAO, 2004: 72). Such classifications are not the fault of the LNP. Nonetheless, the practices of community divestment that followed park implementation (e.g., the aforementioned unrepaired pump) and that have since accumulated, increase resident vulnerability to food insecurity in the forms of restricted livelihood activities and decreased ability to cope with drought.

Food security has been further undermined by changing hunting and harvesting practices. Before the establishment of the LNP, the area was administered as a hunting reserve (Coutada 16) where hunting was technically restricted, but where it nonetheless occurred. Residents hunted "for the pot" and some served as guides for colonial then international hunters. With the onset of the LNP, hunting, even for subsistence, was rendered illegal, even for food-poor residents. The harvesting of fish and forest products (fruits and roots) remained and since 2001 was typically tolerated by park authorities. Even where these are still tolerated, residents are now fearful. In a conversation about mounting food insecurity, Witter asked one interviewee if she planned to harvest makwakwa (*Strychnos madagascariensis*) fruit in an area near Makandezulu A where she had gathered it for decades, not least during periods of drought and hunger (see Witter and Satterfield, 2014). The interviewee responded, for reasons we elaborate on in Section 4.3, "I am [now] scared to go there, one can be killed!"

Concurrent with these vulnerabilities are the dramatic changes in wildlife populations in the decade following park implementation. Elephants destroyed crops and lions destroyed cattle (Witter, 2013), but the losses remain under-acknowledged and almost entirely uncompensated. As of 2016, plans for food-for-work opportunities in some villages were organized at district levels, and LNP employees, including the few who reside in Makandezulu B, are provided food as part of their remuneration for labor. These recent plans aside, conditions have worsened since the early years of park implementation. Interviews from the 2003 period indicate that residents had more access to NGOs and faith-based organizations that provided food relief, whereas current

efforts to provide assistance target already resettled villagers rather than those still waiting (PPF, 2017).

These observed changes are consistent, thirdly, with declines in recent years in opportunities for paid labor. Currently, the vast majority of LNP residents targeted for resettlement are under- and un-employed. For well over a century, men in particular, have engaged in migrant labor to the South African mines and the KNP. In more recent decades, both men and women work in South Africa, often in the farms west of the KNP, a strategy that is much harder to support given that it is no longer safe for residents to travel through the KNP. Illegal foot travel through Kruger has long been insecure, with fear of “police” during the day and lions at night, thus many travel around the KNP, legally instead. Nonetheless, for generations illegal travel, even as it ebbed and flowed, persisted. In more recent years (2012–2016), however, the fear of being shot or arrested appears to have effectively halted cross-border travel.

While residents have long held strong ideas about the KNP, referred to colloquially as “Skukuza,”¹ interviews in the 2016 season revealed an intensification of negative feelings, fear of violent anti-poaching tactics in particular. One interviewee, whose family made this crossing for generations, responded to the question, “Do people still travel through Skukuza [for work]?” with: “If you want to die, you go there”. Another described the KNP as a place “where people die when you *steal* things”. (We return to the idea of stealing below). The declining state of labor opportunities is exacerbated further still by degraded access to social networks and the difficulty of getting family remittances home.

Fourth, residents report feeling utterly left in the dark with respect to their future and the decisions effecting it. Lack of communication about community development, including resettlement, has long been a serious problem in the LNP (DeMotts, 2005). Episodes of peak albeit fleeting communication introduce periods of hope, but likely hinder any sense of individual agency. For example, in 2006–7, Makandezulu B leadership met with resettlement coordinators at least three times, and at least one of these meetings took place in the village. The village-based meeting was, in principle, accessible to all interested villagers, although household dynamics and other gendered norms are known to constrict attendance.

Past communications were by no means perfect, or for that matter, adequate, but more recently, communications of this kind have suffered to the point where residents interact primarily with game rangers and border patrol, but not community developers and those who ultimately oversee relocation. In particular, Makandezulu residents report going years, most recently from 2011 to 2016, without receiving an update on the status of the resettlement or plans for community development, beyond brief news delivered to village leadership in 2014 that the building of their resettlement houses (in Salane) had stopped. Thus, as one interviewee explained, “When you have a house that needs to be renovated, you hesitate to do it. People are resettling but not willingly; they are not sure if it will happen”. Such “inconsistencies in intervention and subsequent neglect” (Cliggett, 2014: 131) are key factors in the production of systemic uncertainties, frustration, and anger.

Enter, fifth, representations of “poaching communities”. Among other examples, a 2013 news piece described “the towns spread along” the Mozambican border with the KNP as “staging posts for rhino poachers”. In one such village, “new mansions” spring up in a village that is otherwise “dirt poor”. These are reportedly the “houses the rhino poachers built for themselves”. Later in the piece, an infamous poacher reportedly glides by in a Landcruiser (Smillie, 2013). A subsequent policy report described one village internal to the park, Mavodze – the home of “at least one central/trafficking kingpin” – as having witnessed, in recent years, an “obvious influx of wealth... new houses are

being built, and there is a prevalence of 4X4s...” (Fenio, 2014: 8). For its part, the larger town of Massingir, located just outside the LNP park headquarters and “considered a central hotspot for poaching in southern Mozambique” (8) has “more money... 4x4s with heavily tinted windows, houses currently under construction, and bars... catering to expensive tastes” (22). A 2015 source (Grill, 2015) described Massingir as home to 20 poaching kingpins whose “houses are unmistakable: ostentatious villas rising up out of the bush between shacks...”.

These excerpts paint a portrait of sudden wealth relative to, in the midst of, and indeed “rising up from” structural poverty and then attribute that sudden wealth to poaching activity. Even where such conclusions may be true, they are highly problematic. First, these and other portrayals tend to amplify the oversimplified claim that poverty drives poaching, yet sociologists have long “refuted claims that poor people are more prone to deviant behavior” (Hübschle, 2017: 430–431). Second, mediated portrayals of wealth do not take seriously enough questions about wealth maintenance and distribution, and they obscure the extent to which sudden wealth is deeply entangled in poverty and marginalization. We turn to the latter points next.

Before doing so, the following point is critical: poaching is evident in the LNP, and it has introduced new wealth. The assumption prevails, however, that high profile symbols of wealth (e.g., in the form of four wheel drive pick-up trucks) equal widespread involvement in poaching. Instead, empirically, we found the majority of vehicles to be employed in a different attempt to mitigate poverty and violence, namely the selling of cattle. Cattle sales occurred as ostensibly more viable development opportunities (in the form of resettlement packages) continued to wane.

4.2. Parked cars, moving cattle: probable wealth amidst certain poverty

It is widely known and accepted (including by us) that rural Mozambicans, including those residing in or travelling through Mozambique’s extensive border region with the KNP, make up the “vast majority of men commissioned by criminal syndicates to hunt Kruger’s rhinos” (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016: 231). It is equally well accepted (again, also by us) that they incur the tremendous risks of the illegal hunts due to the potential for substantial economic returns. Given high levels of poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and uncertainty in the LNP, the lucrative value of rhino horn presents an undeniable economic opportunity, reportedly worth more than \$7000/kilo for those who are willing *and able* to procure and deliver it (Smith, 2015). This is a substantial amount of money in rural Mozambique, enabling presumed “poachers” to make material investments that were, in previous times, extremely rare if not unheard of in this region. Also apparently well accepted is the idea that such material investments serve as indicators of the influx of wealth in rural Mozambican villages suspected to be involved in poaching. In this case, considerable qualification is warranted.

In 2016, as Witter prepared to return to the Makandezulu villages for the first time since 2011, she was told by people she trusts to prepare herself: She should expect to encounter significant signs of wealth, and she did. For example, there were new restaurants and some bigger houses in Massingir, two brick houses going up in Chimangue, and four new *chapas* (general stores selling oil, beer, cornmeal, and candy) in Makandezulu B. Housing and businesses might very well be bi-products of poaching; though such claims need substantiating. However, other observations, especially of 4x4 trucks, belied concurrent realities, not of material gains, but of both social and material losses.

Throughout the interior of the park, more non-tourist, non-government, non-park operated 4x4s were evident than during any prior period of field work. Five in total. In June 2016, LNP residents were in the midst of a three-year drought. Residents reported no food production and no food reserves in their storage sheds for the entirety of three years. In response, families reported and were observed buying, selling,

¹ Skukuza is the main tourist and administrative camp of the KNP. “The name, which derived from “the Zulu verb ‘*khukhuza*’, meaning ‘to scrape clean’, originated as a nickname given by the local black population” to the KNP’s first warden (Rodgers, 2009: 401).

and moving cattle, selling in some cases all cattle reserves save for nursing cows and calves. The cattle herding happened on foot, by motorbike, and in three observed cases, with the use of 4x4s. Thus, three of the five vehicles Witter encountered were engaged in moving cattle. In each of these instances, people residing in villages targeted for resettlement were selling to people residing in villages located outside or elsewhere in the park. Thus, several homesteads in Makandezulu B had no fresh food reserves and shrinking holds of livestock (goats were also being sold). The only large herd observed in Makandezulu B was owned by a resident from the Mapai region. Ironically, the grasses in Makandezulu B and other villages in the LNP are healthy with less grazing in comparison to the KNP or villages along the Limpopo River. The cattle owner from Mapai had paid the family in Makandezulu B for access to grazing.

Thus, part of the observed increase of locally owned/operated 4x4s was directly associated with dozens of heads of cattle moving out of LNP villages. If the former is a potential indicator of wealth, the shrinking food reserves and loss of cattle are sure signs of economic desperation. Both the influx of cars and the outflux of cattle made for scenes not heretofore encountered in this region, and both types of observation merit further investigation. What must be emphasized in the meantime is the fact that potential wealth and affluence emerging in the LNP is deeply entangled with poverty. If indicators of wealth are to be taken seriously, then so too must be indicators of poverty.

This brings us to the two other vehicles encountered in the LNP. Both were parked (one in good shape and another lopsided with what appeared to be a bent rear axle) in homesteads of men suspected of rhino poaching. Informants relayed the story that in 2013 three residents from Makandezulu B crossed the border and travelled into Kruger. (Reports about rhino poaching operations consistently describe men moving in groups of three: “the tracker, the shooter, and the cutter” – one carries water, the second a gun, and the third an ax (Fenio, 2014; Milliken, 2014). Not far over the border, the men had been caught by rangers. The owner of the one 4x4 was shot and killed. The owner of the second was arrested and remains in jail in South Africa. The third man reportedly got away and remained in hiding.

Our points here are this: just as the acquisition of these cars marks an influx of money linked to rhino poaching, their parked, broken-down state may be an indication of how quickly the money dissipates. As one informant reported, someone could have “1 billion *metacais* [Mozambican currency] and in two years it will be gone!”. Of course, the fast dissipation of the money (and state of the 4x4s) could also indicate irresponsible asset management on the part of those who spend lavishly knowing they can hunt again². Even if this is the case, reporters and researchers should avoid over-attributing the influx of 4x4s to sudden wealth in this region given the use of vehicles (however they are obtained) to respond to severe poverty. These and other research findings (see Fenio, 2014; Hübschle, 2017) trouble the assumption that wealth trickled-down is widespread, substantive, or enduring.

4x4s parked in homesteads where the owners are dead, incarcerated, or in hiding, indicate moreover, not only (temporary) material gain, but also and more crucially permanent personal loss. It is certainly the case that “high profits associated with [rhino poaching] appear to offer immediate relief,” especially in contrast to the lack of benefits trickling down from community development projects and protected area conservation (Fenio, 2014; Hübschle, 2017: 436). Yet, parked and broken down 4x4s, especially parked in villages long targeted for resettlement and now presumed to be linked to rhino poaching, are also “solemn reminder(s)” that some poachers do not return home (Hübschle, 2017; 438–9). In other words, they serve as a type of material haunting, a reminder of loss of life and of community development gone awry. Further still, when people equate 4x4s with

poachers, even where the link might be valid, it perpetuates a logic of guilt-by-association, with tremendous consequences for those still residing in LNP, including those we turn to now.

4.3. Anti-poaching via dispossession and the added problem of guilt-by-association

We turn first to the way the poaching crisis mobilized and invigorated discourses about why resettlement must happen in the LNP. Recall that in recent years, conservation-related resettlement has been re-envisioned as an anti-poaching strategy. We see this, for example, in reports that describe the villages internal to the park as “hotbeds for poachers” from which “an endless stream of foot soldiers are drawn”. More worrying, are statements such as one affiliated with the LNP’s former warden: “freeing the park of human settlement will reduce... poaching” (Tsivhase, 2016). The idea that villages targeted for resettlement comprise ‘poaching communities’ rests on a logic of guilt-by-association derived from LNP residents’ proximity to the KNP, their enduring poverty and desperation, and the involvement of a minority in rhino poaching. The status conferred on targeted resettlers appears to justify further inequities, violence and, ultimately, their dispossession.

Importantly, all the discourses about why resettlement is needed in the LNP – that resettlement is voluntary and that it is needed to promote sustainable development, protect wildlife-vulnerable citizens, and prevent aberrant behavior – support the resettlement program’s most long-standing logic. A widespread belief among all park managers that Witter has interviewed over the past decade and a half indicates that resettlement is and has long been inevitable. As described by one manager in 2016, “That train has long since left the station.” In this context, the discourse of resettlement as an anti-poaching strategy is particularly effective. It does the work of suggesting that LNP residents are not only poor (thus the need for sustainable development) and in danger (thus the need for protection) but also that they are no longer regarded as legitimate peoples and rights-holders dwelling peacefully in this region. This latter sentiment has enabled a ramping up of the poor treatment of communities in the park, especially those associated with extra-legal hunting.

This brings us to the intensification of harms against targeted resettlers in the name of preventing their aberrant behavior. Before elucidating such harms, note that in a context where resettlement seems inevitable, and yet it remains out of reach and delayed, resident concerns about not having a meaningful choice in the matter are presently overlaid by a different order of concern. By this we mean, colloquially speaking, the ‘rock and hard place’ of not being able to reap the full benefits of the resettlement package if residents abandon what has become their de facto “conservation refugee” status and instead leave the park early (i.e., before being formally resettled). Among those few residents who have abandoned their park-based village without formal resettlement, most continue to reside within or have returned to the park under conditions that grow increasingly worse in reference to both livelihood and self-determination.

In recent years, the village of Makandezulu A has been, again, abandoned and not resettled. No longer able to endure the livelihood challenges introduced by war and exacerbated by park-introduced restrictions, nor the protracted uncertainties as to when resettlement might occur, a majority of residents left. To be clear, the population of this village had long been declining. Like most Shingwedzi Watershed villages, Makandezulu A never recovered its former population (nor, residents pointed out, its former vitality) after Mozambique’s prolonged Civil War (1977–1992). In 2007, residents reported that as many as half the population of Makandezulu B and two-thirds of the population in Makandezulu A did not come home at all. This trend was evident throughout Gaza Province as, by the turn of the century, tens of thousands of refugees remained in South Africa (Kreike, 2004: 108). Yet, more so than other Shingwedzi Watershed villages, Makandezulu A has been dwindling ever since. This is a situation that has been deeply

² We are grateful to a reader of an earlier version of this manuscript for arguing this point.

worrying to (now former) Makandezulu A residents, a few of whom (three families in particular) remained living in the village until 2014 and have since tried to return but have been unable to do so for the reasons described next.

Weeks following the aforementioned death of one suspected poacher and imprisonment of the other, four homesteads in Makandezulu A were burned. One of the homesteads belonged to the aforementioned deceased, suspected rhino poacher, whose family had moved to Makandezulu B earlier in 2014. The other three homesteads belonged to the last three families still remaining in the village and were burned with personal possessions still inside. The families were not in the village when the houses burned. Recall that the LNP region was in the middle of a prolonged drought. As in previous instances of war and drought, the families moved to a village along the Limpopo River, where they hoped to find support from relatives and the opportunity to farm while they awaited resettlement.

Some residents suspect that the homes were burnt as an anti-poaching tactic.

Weeks following the burning of the homes, one of the affected families moved back to their original homestead in Makandezulu A where they lived in a temporary shack they built next to a burnt *rondavel*. A few days later, eight armed rangers reportedly entered the homestead with guns drawn. They found the remains of a *munthi* or small antelope that had been killed by a snap trap. The residents were unarmed and found without guns. Nonetheless, a woman was handcuffed, and verbally harassed with threats that they would take her away from her husband. During that interaction, the lead ranger claimed responsibility for burning the houses in order to prevent residents, presumed “poachers”, from moving back to Makandezulu A. The burning of houses has apparently also been employed as anti-poaching via dispossession tactic elsewhere in Mozambique to “prevent people from returning and to encourage those who want to remain to leave” (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016: 233).

Since the event in Makandezulu A, other rangers claimed that the houses were burnt not by rangers, but by poachers from outside of the area, who used them as outposts for illegal hunting in the KNP. Whether or not the houses were burnt by rangers or by rhino poachers, they were burnt in a context where there are extended allowances for the poor treatment LNP residents based on the assumption that they are involved in illegal hunting. That assumption rests on the acknowledgement that park residents are poor, even desperate, but ignores the role of conservation itself in creating these conditions. By contrast, interviewed residents tended to place the responsibility for harms, including that of poaching itself, at the door of conservation.

4.4. *Ku yiva* (“stealing”)

In response to these and other anti-poaching tactics, research participants expressed fear, anger, frustration, and the amplification of the impression that the government values wildlife more than citizens (Witter, 2013; Hübschle, 2017). Interviewees expressed these sentiments broadly, including in their descriptions of the cross-border parks as dangerous. Of interest and a point for future research, there is reportedly not a word for poaching in Shangaan. Thus, interviewees who discussed illegal hunting (*ku hlota swi nga ri nwaini*) often employed an alternate term, “stealing” (*ku yiva*). Recall the aforementioned reference to the KNP as having become the place “where people die when you steal things”. There are also new concerns about safety on the Mozambican side of the border. For reasons described above, recall that some residents expressed fear of being killed and arrested travelling through the forest to harvest fruit or to fish. Another referred to the LNP as a “police park”.

In addition to fear, research participants expressed frustration with the idea that they were being blamed for poaching unjustly. One interviewee described some of the current challenges faced in the village, “drought, hunger, no rain this year” then abruptly added, “it doesn’t

mean that if we are hungry that we will go and steal! We sold four cows [instead].” Another employed the notion of stealing to point to corruption. Asked “How are people dying?” one interviewee responded, “When you hear that people were killed, that person was hunting illegally...” He went on to explain, “If a father comes with a stolen goat, the child will see and do that too. Government officials also do that [steal], and people see that [conservation authorities] cannot blame or point fingers when rhinos die.” In these and other ways, interviewees questioned the hypocrisy of blaming residents for poaching when others set the example.

Other research participants focused less on who is to blame for poaching and more on the etiquette and responsibilities of conservation authorities. Among other examples, is the response from an elder resident and former game guard in the KNP, to the question of whether his work ever involved shooting people. When the interviewee responded, “Only for those who resisted arrest or fought back, and only in the front, not in the back,” he also took the opportunity to comment (however subtly) on current shoot-to-kill anti-poaching practices.

These responses support the claims made by conservation and wildlife crime authorities that travel into the KNP from Mozambique has decreased significantly. In apparent response to increased security, tougher legislation, and, we argue here, increased fear linked to the poor treatment of villagers (aka, suspected poachers), the movement of illegal hunters into the KNP from Mozambique slowed (from 75% in 2013–2014 to 30% as of May 2017) with the majority of traffic into the KNP now traced to Kruger’s western border (Hübschle and Joost, 2017). Yet, these responses also point to important social consequences of an ostensibly effective anti-poaching program and the near impossibility of promoting community support for conservation in a context of fear, anger, violence, and dispossession.

5. Discussion: poaching and the eternal loop of scarcity

Recent scholarship has drawn needed attention to myriad ways violence is increasingly mobilized in efforts to protect threatened and endangered species, namely black and white rhinos, in South Africa’s KNP. Violence is not limited to enforcement techniques; it extends to the abuse of social power, racism past and present, and in the very choice of heavy-handed methods (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2015). With this article we draw needed attention to the slow violence occurring just over the border in the LNP region of Mozambique.

People’s experiences with domestic violence and with racialized state violence demonstrate that there are deep entanglements between illicit and structural forms of violence. As with structural violence, attending to slow violence involves uncovering the entrenched, normalized and thus sometimes imperceptible structures and processes that “can give rise to personal violence and [that] constitute violence in and of themselves” (Nixon, 2011: 10). Slow violence also attends to the accumulation of harms as manifest in socio-ecological contexts. As an organizing frame, therefore, slow violence enabled us to consider the links and interactions between illicit and structural forms of violence and, as importantly, to the compounding effects of these over time.

Chief among these compounding effects is the production of an eternal loop of scarcity whereby, in sum, resettlement delays and development divestments have undermined livelihoods and human rights, producing states of chronic liminality, vulnerability, and the local conditions under which rhino poaching in this region unfolded. As rhinos continue to perish, para-militarized conservation ensues: “poachers and state actors both enter the [KNP] willing to engage in deadly force,” and the violence escalates (Lunstrum, 2014: 822). In Mozambique, media outlets report wealth rising up from poverty, belying both the extent to which people daily struggle and the sources of that struggle. Also neglected are other strategies, like hand dug wells, temporary moves, and the selling of cattle, used to overcome enduring, conservation-enabled poverty and instability. In the meantime, parked 4x4s and orphaned children tell their own stories of lost kin while burnt

houses relay the message that residents with little other choice but to wait there are truly unwelcome.

In this context, the reduction of resettlement to an urgent need to control aberrant human behavior, however much this might be a warranted act of desperation vis-a-vis collapsing rhino populations, masks tremendous opportunity costs forgone. Ongoing and future livelihood security and self-determination have diminished alongside alternatives promised in the form of development opportunities assured through resettlement, which remains out of reach. Vastly overlooked is the fact that in the LNP, people have been asked to make enormous sacrifices for the benefit of species protection, yet those same people continue to be shamed and treated as threats.

Diminished decision-making power with respect to resettlement and its human rights implications have long been a concern (e.g., RRP, 2002) with responsibility long averted (Spiereburg, 2013). What we emphasize in the current context is, first, there are potential rights violations attached, not only to induced resettlement, but also to the accumulating harms associated with anti-poaching, including those tactics that rest on a logic of guilt-by-association. Second, residents' personal losses and damages, their ideas about precisely what and by whom things have been stolen, as well as their fear, anger, shame, and lack of self-determination must be taken seriously in any discussions of poaching responses and motivations.

In Hübschle's (2017) interviews with convicted and active rhino poachers, most "cited feelings of shame of not being able to provide for their families (and shame of having to do so through illegal means), emasculation, stress, disempowerment and anger" (see also Fenio, 2014) as factors motivating them to hunt rhinos illegally. Hübschle linked these motivations to historic and ongoing food insecurity, land expropriation, diminished rights to resources (including hunting), and forced and induced removals, processes that have occurred for generations in southern African conservation contexts. It's not only convicted poachers, but also communities negatively affected by conservation who might "regard poaching as a legitimate form of resistance to state authority" (Duffy and Humphreys, 2016: 29). Thus, it is incumbent on conservation decision-makers to recognize that as the harms against people meant to benefit from conservation increase, so do the justifications to become involved in or otherwise support illegal hunting.

6. [Conclusion]: conservation cannot afford to be counter-productive

Resettlement in the LNP has long been framed as an opportunity for targeted residents. The logic follows that conservationists, funders, and the government are doing local people a favor by bringing them access to basic services, markets, and development opportunities and by protecting them from dangerous wildlife. However, this framing enables the sidestepping of crucial matters such as self-determination and appropriate compensation. Moreover, development discourses of this kind have remained remarkably stable despite stalls and divestments that have amplified poverty and marginalization while suppressing market integration or related sustainable development opportunities.

For these and other reasons, the expansion of conservation areas in this region has led to structural conditions that facilitate rather than fight rhino poaching (Hübschle, 2016: 170). Thus, it's not only enforcement techniques, but conservation implementation more broadly that has been counter-productive – so much so that the case exists for a counter-argument: conservation has provided the need and moral justification for residents to be involved in or otherwise tacitly support extra-legal hunting, including rhino poaching. At the same time, the poor treatment of people has been productive of at least one important conservation goal: propelling residents to leave the park. As insecurity and instability of residents living in the LNP increases, so does the stability of the idea that their resettlement is inevitable.

There are alternatives to violent responses to anti-poaching and, for

that matter, to resettlement induced by insecurity and desperation. Approaches that provide benefits, uphold rights, and protect local assets increase the incentives for those living with wildlife to support conservation (Cooney et al., 2016; Blackburn et al., 2016) and provide a framework for non-violent outreach and response. Governments and major conservation organizations have long committed to rights-based conservation and the promotion of efforts that advance equity and justice alongside ecological sustainability. Though there has been very little commitment, across the board, to realizing rights integration in practice (Witter and Satterfield, 2018), we see here every indication that the need for taking these seriously has never been greater.

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