Conservation and Society 19(3): 139-149, 2021

Article

Rhinos as "The Mine" and the Fugitive Meanings of Illegal Wildlife Hunting

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Abstract

Most scholarship and policy documentation that examines the problem of "rhino poaching" assumes that the potential for economic gain drives impoverished people to hunt threatened and endangered wildlife illegally. The amount of money illegal hunters can extract from the lethal trade in rhinoceros' horn is extraordinary. Yet, the provocation of one convicted hunter, who referred to rhinos as "the mine" (as in a gold mine) reveals complicated meanings underneath and adjoined to monetary explanations. In the transfrontier region comprising the Kruger and Limpopo National Parks, men have responded to colonial and post-colonial dispossession through institutions of migrant labour. When dispossessed mine labourers developed the wealth of southern African colonial states, they salvaged for themselves, economic benefits, status, and dignity. In the post-colonial context, the protection of threatened species forecloses opportunities for migrant labour and generates the need for "peripheral" or illegal labour. The killing of protected wildlife to trade in their parts enables hunters to extract money, cultural continuity, and dignity from the very processes that impoverish and dispossess them. Improved understandings of people's motivations to hunt wildlife illegally necessitate theorisations that are more explicitly co-produced, derived from and responsive to the people living (and dying) with conservation by dispossession.

Keywords: illegal wildlife hunting, more-than-economic meanings, conservation by dispossession, salvage accumulation, peripheral labour, Kruger and Limpopo National Parks

INTRODUCTION: RHINOS AS "THE MINE"

On an October morning in 2013, three men (I call them George, Eli, and Morris to protect them) departed a rural village in Mozambique's Limpopo National Park (LNP) on foot. George carried a .458 rifle; Eli carried an axe; and Morris carried food. They all carried water. In George's words, "We wanted money so we went to Kruger looking for rhinos…". Getting to the rhinos, which George referred as "the mine" (as in a gold mine) involved about a 10 km, 3 hour walk over the Mozambican border and into the Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa.

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.conservationandsociety.org.in
	DOI: 10.4103/cs.cs_20_142

Transfrontier conservation initiatives cross national borders to promote species protection, habitat connectivity, economic growth (via tourism development), and international peace and cooperation. In recent years, the cross-border region of Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) – which spans the LNP, KNP, and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, among other conserved areas – has instead been embroiled in conflict and violence, much of it linked to a surge in the illegal hunting of protected and endangered wildlife for trade in global markets. Among other critical concerns, involving the hunting of elephants for their tusks, leopards for their skins, and lions for their bones, between 2010 and 2020, an estimated 5,241 rhinos have been killed in the KNP for their horn, including by people residing in or moving through the LNP (DEFF 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020)[1].

"We saw the footprint of the rhino almost as soon as we crossed over [the border], and we began to track it" … At approximately 8am, "we sat [for a break] and were suddenly surrounded by rangers, around 30-something. Some from behind, and some from in front. The rangers started shooting"

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… Eli went in one direction – the rangers shot and killed him[2] – and George and Morris went in another. Then a helicopter came, carrying six rangers, and began chasing the two living men. At approximately 2pm, George and Morris encountered a herd of elephants, and they split up. George hid in a river to elude the elephants then emerged on an open plain where the helicopter caught up with him. Rangers apprehended and arrested him round 4pm, and George spent the following four years and three months in a South African jail. Morris managed to escape the elephants and the rangers then reportedly went into hiding. Eli's relatives arranged for his body to be brought back home to Mozambique and buried.

George's account, which he shared with me in 2018, well after his release from prison and his return home to the LNP, appears to confirm predominant understandings of people's motivations for illegal wildlife hunting. Most scholarship and policy documentation that examines the problem of "rhino poaching"[3] either relies on the assumption or advances the explanation that the promise of economic gains against a background of poverty drives people to hunt (Duffy et al. 2016). George began our conversation with the unprompted explanation, "we wanted money so we went to Kruger looking for rhinos." When George referred to rhinos as "the mine", he underscored with remarkable clarity the economic gains poachers hope to extract from rhinos, thus doubled-down on the idea that people's motivations for illegal hunting are unflinchingly economic. Yet, there are also *more*-than-economic meanings at work in George's story.

By 'more-than-economic meanings', I mean the social benefits, values, connotations, and significances that material objects may come to represent as well as those that adhere to the mechanisms, practices, and relationships for obtaining and trading those objects. Take a related case in point: In contexts of illegal wildlife hunting, the purchasers of horn, tusk, and skin may derive social benefits from their ability to own exotic and scarce animal parts. As they put these objects on display, they also display their wealth, affluence, and masculinity; their access to or memories of 'far away' places; their connections to cosmopolitan, underground connections; and/or their capacity to commune with, and ultimately dominate, nature even if via surrogate hunters (Miliken and Shaw 2012; Hübschle 2016; Sollund 2020).

Now, to the case in point: Those who hunt protected animals to source their highly-valued body parts may also derive more-than-economic benefits, values, connotations, and significances. In the GLTP context, such meanings have been described in terms of the social status that accrues with the ability to provide for oneself and others in a context of limited and diminishing career opportunities (Fenio 2014; Hübschle 2016; Haas and Ferreira 2018). There is the affluence symbolised by the acquisitions that poaching can afford; for example, 4x4 trucks (for younger men) and cattle (for older) and the sense of awe, respect, and righteousness sometimes afforded to those who take up such risks on increasingly militarised grounds (Fenio 2014; Hübschle 2016). Far from being "non-economic" or "non material," these benefits and values cojoin and amplify the economic and the material. Such meanings have important implications for improving understandings of people's motivations to take up illegal wildlife hunting, yet these have been widely neglected in discussions about hunting motivations.

In what follows, I take up the question of meaning making with a focus on the meanings that are underneath and fugitive to economic explanations of people's motivations to engage in illegal wildlife hunting. Before proceeding, I emphasise that the theorisations I advance in this writing – and not just my findings – are *co*-produced. In addition to drawing from those I cite and acknowledge, I draw, first and foremost, from the knowledge (experiences, observations, theories, and ideas) of those who live in and/or work for the LNP as well as from the interpretations of my partner in research, Divy Mavasa. I emphasise this point as a small step in a larger struggle to decolonise my work. I also emphasise it in the spirit of generous peer provocation. Recent scholarship has underscored the need to improve understandings how affected communities experience and respond to the militarisation of conservation (Duffy et al. 2019; Witter 2021). As conservation scholars and decision makers work towards this goal, their explanations need to be better informed by, indeed co-developed with, the people who are living (and dying) with protected area conservation.

What I continue to learn from George is the importance of recognising and valuing the meanings underneath conventional economic explanations of individual human behaviour. Rhinos as "the mine" is a clear signifier of George's desire to extract money, and George's involvement in illegal wildlife hunting *was* a matter of economic gain. But it was also more than that: a matter of status, self-determination, dignity, and cultural continuity. I do not suggest a history of culturally relevant trade in the horn of rhinoceros. Instead, I point to the continuation of cross-border institutions (inclusive of strategies, practices, relations, and ethics) for salvaging benefits from colonial and post-colonial processes that create value via rural dispossession. Among the contexts wherein this strategy has played out is in the generations-long involvement of black African men in a different form of extractivist, environmentally destructive, exploitative, but potentially lucrative labour: gold mining.

I develop this analysis in conversation with political ecologists who have assessed protected area conservation in terms of Harvey's (2003) accumulation by dispossession. I specifically invite in Anna Tsing's "salvage accumulation," to think through the labours involved in creating and extracting value produced, at least in part, through conservation's accumulating dispossessions. In the "Limpopo borderlands," the cross-border region now comprising the Kruger and Limpopo National Parks, institutions of labour are both product of and response to contexts of colonial and post-colonial dispossession. They include waged labour, which is sanctioned by the state and operates within recognised market structures, as well as "peripheral labour", which may be illegal and positioned antagonistically towards these structures. In both

typologies of labour, benefits accrue to capitalist others as well to self (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1987; Miller and Gibson-Graham 2019). I also draw from scholarship that examines structure and agency in the contexts of mining and protected area conservation in colonial and post-colonial South African and Mozambique. I argue that illegal wildlife hunting is a form of peripheral labour that enables people to salvage some gains, however ephemeral, on a landscape of accumulating losses. These gains are fundamentally economic and material, and they are fundamentally more than that.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CONSERVATION BY DISPOSSESSION

Over the past two decades, a growing body of work in political ecology has theorised protected area conservation in terms of Marx's primitive accumulation and it's direct descendent, Harvey's (2003) accumulation by dispossession (e.g., Kelly 2011; Benjaminsen and Bryson 2012; Doane 2014; Massé and Lunstrum 2016; West 2016; Loperena 2016; Barbora 2017; Büscher and Fletcher 2020). The logic follows that the enclosure of land and other "environmental resources" held in common dispossesses people from their means of production rendering them more available for and reliant upon waged labour. Following a Marx-Luxemburg-Harvey trajectory of thinking, labour is a set activities, practices, and relations that produce commodity value, the benefits of which accrue to those who accumulate and control capital while the costs accrue to dispossessed labourers and the environment (West 2016).

Applying the accumulation by dispossession framework to protected area conservation is complicated by the fact that protected area conservation involves, at least ostensibly, very different patterns and institutions. In contexts of protected area conservation, lands and resources become, more open to the public rather than privatised, and environmental resources become protected from extraction and commodification (Holmes 2007; Kelly 2011). Moreover, state and conservation authorities rely on dispossession to create and protect uninhabited "nature" rather than a source of waged labour (Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012). Such distinctions are important, but far from clear cut. The point to underscore for now is that accumulation by dispossession is instructive for understanding processes widely shared in protected area conservation (Kelly 2011).

The dispossession part of the equation, while not simple, is increasingly clear – in the sense that dispossession is now widely acknowledged as a key problem for conservation. A recent review demonstrated that across the world, state and NGO-supported conservation implementation separates indigenous peoples and local communities from their lands and resources, delegitimises and criminalises their knowledge and worldviews, and justifies evictions and killings (Tauli-Corpuz et al. 2020). Further dispossession ensues, because the appropriation of "non-capitalist or peasant conservation achievements" obscures, ignores, and potentially annihilates the institutions and practices "that gave rise to conservation in the first place" (Doane 2014: 234).

In the Limpopo borderlands, conservation-related dispossession comprises practices, policies and relations that span more than a century on the South African side of the border (Carruthers 1995) with the most recent nexus of dispossession unfolding in Mozambique. The Mozambican government established the LNP in 2001 and in 2003 targeted 7,000 park residents for resettlement. Due to a series of project delays and failures, many targeted residents – including the families of George, Eli, and Morris – remain living in the park under increasingly harsh and challenging conditions (Witter and Satterfield 2019). They face food and water insecurity, conflict with wildlife, the criminalisation of livelihood practices, diminished access to employment opportunities, marginalisation in and from decision making processes, and the inability for residents to plan for the future (Witter 2013; Witter and Satterfield 2019). Over the past decade, the increased securitisation of the Limpopo borderlands in response to the "poaching crisis" has exacerbated these dispossession trends, contributing to the increased monitoring and arrest of park residents; to lethal harms against suspected poachers; as well as to extending justifications for land grabbing, economic marginalisation, and societal abandonment (Lunstrum 2014, 2016; Büscher and Ramutsindela 2015; Massé and Lunstrum 2016; Ramutsindela 2016; Witter and Satterfield 2019; Witter 2021).

Turning to the thornier question of what is being accumulated and by whom: In an effort to achieve win-win sustainability outcomes, government authorities often hinge their aspirations for conservation to those of economic development via ecotourism (Kelly 2011; Büscher and Dressler 2012; Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Ojeda 2012; Doane 2014; West 2016). In such contexts, the protected areas designation pushes lands, waters, forests, and species, and local communities "out of the realm of subsistence and into market economies" (Kelly 2011, 688, drawing from Büscher and Dressler 2012). Thus, the conservation of biodiversity often emerges with triple ambitions: to be held in trust by the state for the public good; to be commodified by private, governmental, and non-governmental investors and purchased, experienced, and consumed, albeit, in largely non-material ways, by tourists; and to create development opportunities and paying jobs for dispossessed groups. In these and other ways, protected area conservation contributes, even if sometimes indirectly, to the creation of market subjects, inclusive of those who control the means of production, those who consume, and those who labour (Sodikoff 2012; Büscher and Dressler 2012; West 2016; Barbora 2017; Kikon and Barbora 2020)

This brings me back to the aforementioned point – that conservation by dispossession (a term also employed by Kelly 2011) is intended to generate environmental protection rather than a source of labour. The distinction is important, but it is also partial since protected area conservation involves enclosures that divorce people from their means of production rendering them more available for and in need of waged labour (Kelly 2011). Thus Jane Carruthers' (1995)

argument that colonial efforts to limit hunting in the game reserves that came to comprise the KNP had little to do with irresponsible hunting techniques; rather, Africans who could not hunt, had to work. In contemporary contexts, conservation by dispossession often advances under the assumption that impoverished people will become integrated into the market economy, and international standards require displaced people to be assisted in (minimally) restoring and (ideally) improving their livelihoods. Instead, conservation-related displacement consistently diminishes labour opportunities and creates joblessness leaving people "expelled from their source of livelihood and further impoverished" (Cernea 1997; Cernea and Schimdt-Soltau 2006: 1819). While there are promising examples of people gaining and creating meaningful labour in conservation (e.g., Singh 2012; Kikon and Barbora 2020), the work is often insufficient or non-existent (Li 2007; Sodikoff 2012), thus workers risk becoming "permanently indentured" in low paying positions (Dowie 2009: xxvi), and/or or they take up peripheral labour opportunities.

According to the logics of accumulation by dispossession, those who join the labour force become subjects of the market and state while those who are unable, who evade, or who refuse to join remain "outside or on the edge of the [capitalist] system" (West 2016: 14). Dispossessed people who continue to access protected areas to hunt, gather, and graze after their dispossession become perceived as "squatters," "criminals," or "poachers" (Thompson 1975; Caruthers 1995; Neumann 2004; Mavhunga 2014; Duffy et al. 2015; Ramutsindela 2016; Barbora 2017). Scholars have argued that dispossessed people who hunt wildlife illegally do so for food, for money, as well as to ensure self-determination and to question, resist, and defy the legitimacy of state authority (Thompson 1975; Scott 1990; Holmes 2007; Hübschle 2017; Witter 2021). Hunters thus gain the material and economic benefits from a carcass while "simultaneously… making a statement that they have a right to kill animals" (Holmes 2007: 193).

METHOD: UNEARTHING FUGITIVE MEANINGS

Assessing the question of why people become involved in or otherwise support illegal wildlife hunting presents a number of ethical considerations. Given the nature of my ongoing research – I focus on practices that are illegal (hunting) and controversial (dispossession, violence, and species endangerment) – research ethics remain at the forefront of my consideration in the conduct of my research and of this writing. Had this hunt been successful, I probably would not know about it, and even seven years after the fact, I would not be at liberty to write about it. In George's case, much of the story is public and, even as the hunt failed, those involved already paid costly penalties. The story, nonetheless, is sensitive, discussed relatively openly, but contentiously, among residents and conservation authorities.

Further methodological and conceptual challenges arise, because people's motivations for illegal wildlife hunting may be hidden or "fugitive". Motivations may be hidden, because the people ostensibly involved in or knowledgeable about hunting may refrain from talking about it due to the complexity of the situation, lack of time or lack of trust, or to avoid rebuke and legal or ethical consequences (Thompson 1975; Scott 1990; Neumann 1998; Holmes 2007). Or, they may refer to more tenable, socially acceptable, or easier to articulate motivations; for example, in contexts of apparent poverty, an interviewee may find it easier and more expedient to express the need for money (not least to an outsider) than to explain their desire for autonomy, ancestrally-derived rights, or revenge. Meanings and motivations may also be stronger when left unstated.

Fugitive meanings and values are adjoined to, yet obscured beneath, more explicit and tenable explanations (Satterfield and Levin 2007). When left unstated, such meanings, may "go underground but do not go way" (Satterfield and Levin 2007: 179). Instead, they re-emerge and "masquerade" in other forms and on other fields where meaning continues to play out. Moreover, meanings can emerge, distil, and then change through time, and there can be considerable slippage between motivation, which is presumed to be premeditated, and post facto justification (von Essen et al. 2014). The lively field on which people derive, make, and remake meaning necessitates an approach to research that prioritises emergence, where researchers derive significance, connation, and value from the understandings, experiences, and explanations of research participants in light of changing conditions, stakes, and relations.

The findings I develop in this article draw from interviews and observations Mavasa and I collected in the LNP in 2018, supplemented with past interviews and observations conducted over the course of long-term ethnographic field research (2003, 2006-7, 2011, 2016). I also draw from an historical review of Mozambican mine labour in South Africa. 2018 interviews took place in residents' homesteads with me conversing in English and Mavasa translating to Shangaan. We undertook the research as a concerted effort to learn from and with, rather than just about, those living on the front lines of conservation by dispossession. I nonetheless acknowledge that the research operates on a landscape of systemic inequities, including those between researcher and researched, where the physical, linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic distances between us mean that the work unfolds as a practice of building and rebuilding trust and understanding amid inequity and uncertainty.

These dynamics informed my decision to keep the interviews semi-structured, guided by common themes (e.g., residents' experiences moving over the border for work), yet open enough to ensure that while we could explore uncertain territory (e.g., personal stories about being arrested) in some cases, we could also pivot away where such exploration would be unwelcome or unwise. Moreover, given the potential danger to all parties involved, when asking questions about illegal wildlife hunting, we focused our questions on past events, interactions, and arrests. Shifting the direction of our questions away from residents' potential knowledge of illegal or contested acts recently committed offered greater

protections and eased anxieties (both for interviewees and interviewers). We also ensured space, during our interviews, for non-questioning, where interviewees led the conversation. Their unprompted reflections provided details comparisons between past and present conditions, especially with respect to the declining access to labour opportunities in South Africa and the increased intensity of conservation enforcements. I analysed the interviews thematically, paying particular attention to the repetition of some themes (e.g., again, changes in residents' labour experiences and opportunities) as well as to the element of surprise in the emergence of others (e.g., comparing rhinos to a gold mine). I also analysed interviews according to kinship, enabling me to link contemporary stories about labour relations to the experiences of interviewees' elder relatives.

RESULTS: LABOUR AS PRODUCT OF AND RESPONSE TO COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL DISPOSSESSION

Current and former residents of the LNP, including George, Eli, Morris and their families, share long-term, ancestrally-based claims to land throughout the Limpopo borderlands. They also share a history of colonial, apartheid, and post-colonial dispossession, and they share a common strategy whereby, for an equal measure of generations, borderland residents sought to ensure social reproduction via subsistence-based livelihood strategies supplemented by institutions of migrant, and historically male, labour. Colonial dispossessions in the Limpopo borderlands occurred with the establishment of mining operations and conservation areas on the South African side of the border echoed by the establishment of a labour reserve then hunting concession on the Mozambican side. As borderland residents became divorced from their means of production, some turned to waged labour. Throughout the colonial period, the ancestors of George, Eli, and Morris worked in the South African mines; they worked as rangers, cooks, stable keepers, and repairmen in the KNP; and they worked as guides for a colonial hunting concession on land now comprised by the LNP[4]. Some men also took up peripheral opportunities, including in the form of hunting for trade.

Regardless of the type of work, there were options – relative to the contemporary context where the majority of LNP residents are cut off from opportunities for paid work. Having options, however scant and precarious, enabled some men to access, when the conditions warranted, and to evade, when the conditions did not, competing claims on their labour. Moreover, since much of this labour involved regularly crossing the border, it extended ancestral claims to and relations with South Africa while institutionalising the practice of traveling over the border for economic gain.

The more-than-economic meanings of gold mining

Since the late 19th century, gold mining provided the South African state with a tremendous source of wealth that hinged on a tremendous source of African male labour. Following the discovery of gold near present-day Johannesburg in 1886, tens of thousands of Africans trekked to the mines annually to work, with Portuguese East Africa (colonised Mozambique) supplying the primary source of the labour (van der Horst 1971). By the end of the 19th century, a suite of labour laws made work in the Portuguese colony a legal and moral obligation (Newitt 1995: 384). Thereafter, agreements among colonial administrators and agricultural concessioners ensured that foreign owned agricultural concessioners had "all rights" to the labour of those residing in northern Mozambique while the labour of those residing in the south remained subject to the mines (Newitt 1995). By the mid-twentieth century, more than 300,000 men from Portuguese East Africa worked in the South African mines (Wilson 1972: 70; First 1977). This includes current and former residents of the region now comprised by the LNP, the fathers and forefathers of George and his fellow hunters.

On the mines, Portuguese East Africans were valued for their skill, their flexibility, and because they generally worked longer contracts than men from other countries (van der Horst 1971; First 1983; Harris 1959). A mobile, massive, and relatively steady flow of labourers enabled the mine operators to keep investments in labourers low and helped to stabilise seasonal fluctuations in mine employment (van der Horst 1971; Wilson 1972). In the words of Patrick Harries (1994: 226), the Portuguese sold "Mozambique's basic means of production … at bargain-basement prices and passed on the costs to the miners." Portuguese colonial administrators and labour recruiters also benefitted from the export of labour via the fees paid for transportation to the mines, the taxes collected when labourers crossed the border, and the system of deferred pay, which mandated that men return home to receive their pay, thus spend their earnings in the Portuguese colony (Harris 1959; First 1977; Harries 1994; Newitt 1995)[5].

Labourers took tremendous risks working underground, while *en route* to the mines, with their relations back home (miners left for months and years at time), and by enduring life-long health effects. Yet, for the ancestors of George, Eli, and Morris, working underground was a risk worth taking. First, the work could be lucrative, providing men with money to purchase food, cattle, guns, and ivory; to pay colonial taxes and recruiting fees; to offer *lobola* or bride price; and to establish independent homesteads apart from their parents (Wilson 1972; Harries 1994; Roesch 1991; Norman 2004). Second, migrant labour enabled some African men to negotiate and evade the colonial impositions of taxation, conscripted military service, and forced agricultural labour back home (First 1977; Harries 1994; Newitt 1995). Third, and as I illustrate next, the work was affirming of labourers' status and dignity (Harris 1959; First 1983; Harries 1994).

For the fathers and grandfathers of LNP residents, work in South Africa became a rite of passage – they left for the mines as 'boys' and returned as 'men' (Roesch 1992: 465; Norman 2004: 72). On the mines, men were organised in compounds along ethnic and linguistic lines, a strategy that protected mine

owners from the formation of labour unions (Harries 1994). For the ancestors of present-day LNP residents, that identity was "Shangaan". In a literal sense, 'Shangaan' should be applied to people who adopted the material culture of the Gaza Nguni chief, Shoshangane (Harries 1989: 86). Instead, Shangaan identity crystallised for migrants working on South Africa mines and in the KNP (Bunn 2001). As expressed to me by an elder, now deceased, relative of Eli's, "everyone knew that we Shangaans were the best workers." Here, "Shangaan" is a reference of solidarity that linked the speaker's identity to Mozambique (Harries 1994). Mozambican men took up the stereotype to etch out a place for themselves as valued labourers abroad, and they employed it back home to convey their status as migrant labourers (Harries 1989).

In sum, the processes of enclosure that characterised colonial gold mining were essential to the larger project of what Ruth First (1977: 11) described as "the use of the colony of Mozambique as a labour reserve… [to fuel] centres of South African capital accumulation." When dispossessed and exploited labourers unearthed and extracted gold from underneath the ground, they developed the wealth of colonial states. However, labourers also salvaged and co-produced, from a system that hinged on their dispossession, material wealth, social status, and dignity.

Post-colonial dispossession and changing institutions of labour

Post-colonial dispossessions in the Limpopo borderlands fundamentally changed institutions of migrant labour. Following Mozambican independence in 1975, the South African government constructed a fence on the eastern edge of the KNP. Reportedly built for wildlife protection, the fence also corresponded to South Africa's discontent with the fall of white minority rule in Mozambique. In addition, South Africa ceased recruiting Mozambican labourers and failed to honour the system of deferred payments for work already completed (Newitt 1995). By the mid-1980s the violence associated with Mozambique's prolonged Civil War compelled the vast majority of borderland residents to leave the region. While some borderland residents became internally displaced in Mozambique, most fled, travelling through the KNP to take refuge in the South African homelands (Witter 2010). For those residents who eventually returned to Mozambique, the dispossession-labour nexus continued anew. In the early 1990s, expatriate hunters gained a concession from the Mozambican government, and they established a hunting safari on land that was claimed and formerly occupied by war refugees. In the ensuing years, several male returnees worked for the safari operation as road builders, cooks, hunting guides and skinners, thus continued the legacy of labour as product and response to dispossession.

The contemporary dispossession context comprises a national park, the success of which authorities have hinged to resettlement and, more recently, to the securitisation of the borderlands. The national park has produced employment, and a few borderland residents have gained (and some later lost) work as rangers or camp attendants. Labour opportunities have been limited, however, with the better positions reportedly given to young men from outside the park. Thus most residents still living in the park, socio-economically dispossessed and seeking waged labour, have turned back over the border to South Africa for work.

George was born in South Africa during war, but grew up in the Limpopo borderlands, herding cattle and sometimes hunting warthogs for food. He neared adolescence when the Mozambican government established the park then targeted his village, along with several others, for resettlement. Due to the series of resettlement delays, George was still resident in the LNP in the late 2000s when he was old enough for waged labour. By George's generation, men, women, boys, and girls took up the journey over the border and into South Africa for work. They found it not so much underground anymore, but picking oranges on farms, moving crates in factories, and selling "air time" (for cell phones) on the street. Residents who have worked these latter jobs show some ambivalence about their experiences. The labour does not appear to have the same cultural currency as that of their elders, who were miners underground or rangers in the KNP. Nonetheless, those who cross the border for work still participate in and reproduce an institution of more-than-economic value and merit.

Securing the borderlands and the emergence of peripheral labour

George crossed the border for a few of seasons of migrant labour. That work commenced just before marriage and provided him the means to establish an independent household. Within a matter of years, however, this option, newly opened for George, closed. The dramatic increase in illegal hunting of rhinoceros in the KNP commenced around 2008 with the numbers of rhino deaths climbing dramatically in the years thereafter (Lunstrum 2014). In recognition that much of the hunting traffic came from Mozambique, anti-poaching measures in the KNP focused on securing the borderlands. This had major implications for labourers who travelled through the KNP. LNP residents have described the uptake in security in the Limpopo borderlands in stories about heavier-handed responses to their attempts to travel through the South African park. For example, one interviewee told the story of travelling with a group of others, on their way home from a season of work in South Africa, when two KNP rangers stopped them, "shot at the ground, then arrested us". While three fellow travellers managed to escape, he and the others went to jail in South Africa. The interviewee presented this account in contrast to previous instances where rangers looked the other way when confronting residents in the KNP and "wouldn't mind, because they knew we were going to work." Other interviewees told similar stories, signalling the perception that rangers had become increasingly suspicious of traveller's intentions. As one resident explained it, "When they find you

there [in the KNP], they don't believe you are going for work [anymore]. They think that you are hunting."

The increased securitisation of the Limpopo borderlands meant for George that peri-legal travel over the border for a sustained season of labour was no longer a risk worth taking. Yet, as the option of migrant work on the other side of the KNP closed, the opportunity for peripheral labour, ripened.

George, Eli, and Morris undertook the failed hunt in 2013 during the period when most traffic into the KNP for the purposes of hunting rhinos came from Mozambique (Lunstrum 2014; Hübschle and Joost 2017). By then George had married and fathered his first child. When I spoke to George in 2018 about the hunt, he explained to me in notably clear terms, that he hunted for money. He had expected about a $5,550.00 personal take from a successfully procured horn with the pricing estimated at 350,000 Rand (South African currency) per kilogram. Though a fraction of what the imagined horn might eventually sell for, this was a lot of money for a relatively short amount of time away from George's family. That the money that could be made from a single hunt, and that the hunting group had already confirmed the presence of eager and experienced buyers further changed the border calculus for George. An overnight trip just over the border for a lucrative hunt with people he trusted *seemed* viable and worthy.

However, over the course of our conversation, it also became clear that George's hunt had, or that it eventually came to have, more-than-economic meanings. Before detailing these, it's important to underscore that by the time George shared his story with me, borderland security had intensified and expanded,residents' material conditions had worsened further, and so too had their fear and resentment. The conditions residents faced in 2018, some of which I demonstrate next, do not change what motivated George before and during his 2013 hunt, but they did animate and inform the meanings he attached to the hunt when he told the story to me five years later.

To illustrate these conditions, I turn back, first, to residents' reports of travel through the KNP. By 2018, residents were not just concerned about arrest, as they had been in the early 2010s, now they feared death. Thus, the curt explanation of one interviewee: "There's a lot of stealing in Kruger now; if they find you there, they will kill you." Stealing in this context as in others, I confirmed, referred to the illegal hunting of protected animals (see Witter and Satterfield 2019; Witter 2021). Another interviewee shared a similar lament, "Now if they see you, they shoot to kill. Even if you have women with you, they don't care." Thus, he explained my ability to find him (and his wife) in the village this time, and not working in South Africa.

Such commentary merits care and critical consideration. Reports indicate that between 2010 and 2014, an estimated 200-500 Mozambicans were shot and killed in the KNP in association with rhino poaching (Smith 2015; Hübschle 2017: 439). These and any subsequent numbers are contested and widely *un*available, but I have not found any other indication that the deaths include migrant labourers killed in the KNP mistaken for hunters. My intention here is not to suggest otherwise. Instead, it is to underscore that regardless of the numbers reported, the death toll *is known* by borderland residents to include people with whom they shared their lives. This includes Eli, who was the son and grandson of migrant labourers before he became George's hunting companion.

Mounting security on the Mozambican side of the border comprised a second and related source of fear and anger. By 2018 LNP authorities had partnered with a military advising group that specialised in anti-poaching. They had also hired several more rangers, procured a helicopter and more 4x4 trucks, and deployed a canine unit. Thus, in addition to a minority of residents who had been arrested, imprisoned, and killed for their involvement in rhino poaching on the South African side of the border, a majority of residents now faced increased securitisation back home in Mozambique (Witter 2021). Interviewees reported being questioned, intimidated, and harassed while undertaking day-to-day formerly permissible subsistence-based activities (like fishing and gathering forest products), and they reported responding with fear, resentment, and outright indignation (Witter 2021). By 2018 some borderland residents had engaged in a series of coordinated strikes against the park, and there were also reports of physical threats and harms against park rangers. In the meantime, some residents had continued, or they had newly taken up, illegal hunting.

This brings me, alas, to the more-than-economic meanings at work in George's story. Among these, George knew the attempted hunt was dangerous and precarious; thus, he underscored the importance of traveling with people who "knew the way" and of working with buyers who knew the trade. He also indicated that the hunt was morally questionable, if not apprehensible. Even in 2018, George avoided talking about it in front of his wife and children. However, he simultaneously underscored that in a context of accumulating dispossessions, hunts like this were a risk worth taking. With his reference to rhinos as the "the mine," George signified the potential economic gains to be extracted from rhino horn while also signifying migrant labour over the border. Cross-border labour is a cultural institution to which many LNP residents still advance a claim and an institution that is very much at stake in the post-colonial context of conservation by dispossession.

George also smuggled into our conversation less subtle meanings. After detailing the border routes taken, the extensive chase that ensued, the amount of money expected, and the losses he endured, George emphasised the importance of "showing them" [park authorities] what he could do, beckoning them in a moment of frustration, to "open the fence" after their promised resettlement so that residents could "show them" yet again. The threat was excessive and performative, yet it was also emblematic of the collective sense of betrayal and resentment that some residents have expressed towards park authority.

George's threat provided him with a sense of justice and retribution. He was not, I contend, making a decision, then and there, to hunt rhinos illegally again. Nonetheless, the threat

should be taken seriously. Stories of anger and resentment have been used, in this and other locales, to justify illegal hunting, and they lay groundwork and can inform the decision to engage in peripheral labour again.

DISCUSSION: THE MEANINGS AT STAKE IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE HUNTING

A narrow reading of George's provocation looks like this: rhinos as "the mine" means George hunted for money. That interpretation is clear, and it is true, but it is also partial and problematic. It obscures the socio-political context of conservation by dispossession; it devalues the historical legacy of people's agency and their labour amidst enclosures; and it denies the fugitive meanings being conveyed underneath the readily apparent monetary dimensions of George's explanation. Moreover, because reductionist explanations of illegal hunting motivations foreclose considerations of other important drivers for hunting, they also foreclose consideration of other ways to promote anti-poaching.

The need for alternatives to heavy-handed and violent anti-poaching strategies is critical and has been addressed elsewhere (e.g., Challender and MacMillan 2014; Cooney et al. 2017; Massé et al. 2017; Duffy et al. 2019). Of particular relevance to this analysis, scholars have identified the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities as a key driver of illegal hunting in the Limpopo borderlands, thus the need for meaningful work (Fenio 2014; Hübchle 2017; Haas and Ferreira 2019; Lunstrum and Giva 2020). LNP authorities have long envisioned and planned for resettlement as an opportunity for residents to become better market subjects, including as labourers for planned development projects outside the park (Witter 2013, 2014; Lunstrum 2016). An important counter to market optimism is the fact that conservation-related resettlement consistently creates or contributes to joblessness (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006). Indeed, for most borderland residents, access to livelihood and employment opportunities has not been realised. Instead, implementation of conservation has further impoverished residents by criminalising livelihood practices at home and diminishing opportunities for waged labour in South Africa. Thus, the argument follows, conservation-by-dispossession risks fixing people to poverty and the very types of activities that conservationists abhor (West 2006; Li 2007; Sodikoff 2012; Witter 2021).

Answering the question of why people engage in or tacitly support illegal wildlife hunting demands an approach that is context specific, interpretive, and attentive to meaning making. To get at these meanings, environmental scholars, activists, and decision makers need to acknowledge (conceptually, methodologically and ethically) that people's motivations for illegal wildlife hunting may be hidden or concealed, implicit rather than stated, and fugitive (underneath and co-joined) with other meanings. These challenges to research underscore that improved understandings of poaching motivations cannot be derived solely or even primarily from an aggregation of individual statements indicating individual motivation or drive.

Nor can improved understandings of illegal hunting motivations be derived solely or even primarily from critical assessments of political economic structures and contexts. When researchers engage with and extend the logics of accumulation by dispossession, they do a disservice (not least to their research subjects) when they limit themselves to the apparent primary purposes of revealing processes of enclosure and commodification. Many scholars have done this well, and their theorisations are clearly important here. Yet, scholars risk reducing their work to structural determinism when we fail to extend the frameworks of accumulation of dispossession to understandings of how people respond to and making meaning out of enclosure, commodification, accumulation, and dispossession. Vital to improved understanding of people's motivations for illegal wildlife hunting are theorisations that are much more explicitly co-produced, derived from and responsive to the people living with conservation by dispossession.

Not least because George shared the story of his failed hunt and subsequent arrest and imprisonment with me nearly five years after the events occurred, I cannot know all the meanings and motivations George attached to and derived from his hunt in the days and weeks that he prepared and planned, on the night before he departed for Kruger, in the moments that he lost his friend, or in the hours that he fled the authorities. Moreover, some of those meanings may have changed or developed while in jail, after returning home to his family in the LNP, or in the moments he talked with me. This limits my ability to verify premeditated motivation, and opens the door instead to post hoc justification. Rather than seeing this conflation as a problem, I see it as precisely on point.

If one contends, as I do here, that the question of motivation is, fundamentally, one of meaning making, then it matters that George's story unfolded in a context of securitisation still mounting and of injuries further accumulating. Contexts of struggle and dispossession co-produce the meanings and motivations at stake in practice (Moore 1993), including the meanings (and not just the money) at stake in the practice of illegal wildlife hunting. Taking seriously the co-constitutive work of meaning making means recognising, first, that meanings develop, change, and shift co-joined with material circumstances. Second, the meanings people attach to and derive from past events can lay the ground work for and inform the decision to take up (or not) these acts again.

CONCLUSION: SALVAGE ACCUMULATION

George's story, along with the stories I relay in this article, unfolded in a cross-border region where residents have experienced generations of colonial, apartheid, and post-colonial dispossessions and where, for an equal measure of generations, people have responded to and navigated these borderland dispossessions through itinerant male labour. Much of this labour (like work in the mines) was formalised under the

banner of state, corporate, or protected area institutions while some of it (like illegal wildlife hunting) has been positioned precisely against these institutions. Borderland residents have used both types of labour to salvage benefits from contexts of dispossession, the more-than-economic benefits of which certainly accrued to others (e.g., mine operators and those further up the chain of wildlife trade), yet also became meaningful to community and to self.

According to Paige West (2016: 27), "what emerges with the process of dispossession… is not simply a new set of economic structures…" but a re-ordering of life with "new modes of being, living, making, and knowing the world" and, I add, new and reconfigured modes of deriving, generating, or salvaging value, meaning and authority. Thus dispossession, while not "good", can be productive. This analysis has underscored that in contexts of accumulation by dispossession, states, NGOs, private land owners, corporate investors, and tourists are not the only actors who engage in benefit capture. The challenge for dispossessed people seeking to reclaim their rights and to repossess the benefits derived from those rights is to disrupt patterns of accumulation, to create proximate forms of value, and to redirect some of those benefits to themselves.

National parks encourage the public to value threatened and endangered rhinos for their intrinsic, ecological, and nationalistic values and to pay for that value, for example, in the form of park entry fees. Hunters subvert and pervert conservation goals, government authority, conservation fees, and, relatedly, a sense of national identity when they violently destroy these animals. The killing of threatened and endangered wildlife to trade in their parts provides dispossessed illegal hunters means to translate public values into personal profit and to extract more-than-economic value from a suite of environmental protection practices and policies that impoverish and dispossess. Thus, rhinos as "the mine" points to entanglement of people's lives and labours in fugitive meaning-making as well as to the risks worth taking for salvage accumulation.

I have argued here that in a context where the protection of threatened and endangered animals diminishes people's rights to land and self-determination, exacerbates their poverty and marginalisation, criminalises their livelihoods, and threatens but fails to deliver resettlement, hunting for the lethal global trade provides a peripheral opportunity to salvage relatively lucrative benefits from state-sanctioned dispossession. Salvage accumulation is very much about extracting and obtaining economic benefits from material matters, in this case money in exchange for the horn of dead rhinoceros. Yet the benefits illegal wildlife hunters also salvage include the establishment of status, cultural continuity, and dignity. These latter benefits are non-substitutable. Status, cultural continuity, and dignity may follow and accrue with money, but they may also adhere to demonstrations of defiance among dispossessed people against institutions of property and authority that threaten to limit and destroy these.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Terre Satterfield, Dana Powell, Jen Westerman, Diane Mines, and two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and valuable contributions to this article. I presented a portion of this research at the Savanna Sciences Meeting in the Kruger National Park (March 2020), and am grateful to those who provided their support and their challenges at that meeting. The College for Fine and Applied Arts at Appalachian State University provided financial support for the research; the Faculty of Agronomy and Forestry Engineering at Eduardo Mondlane University provided institutional support; and the National Administration of Conservation Areas (ANAC) in Mozambique graciously approved the research. Nicia Giva and Kenly Fenio, among others, also provided invaluable intellectual and logistical support. I extend my sincere gratitude to my long-term partner in research, Divy Mavasa. Finally, I am eternally grateful to the people who live and work in the Limpopo National Park. Their cooperation, experience, and knowledge made this work possible.

Declaration of Competing Interests

NA.

Financial Disclosures

The College for Fine and Applied Arts at Appalachian State University provided financial support for the research.

Research Ethics Approval

This research informing this publication was approved by Office of Human Research Ethics at Appalachian State University on April 17, 2018 (Reference #: 102637).

Data Availability

The data is not accessible due to privacy restrictions and ethical protections.

Preprint Archiving

NA.

NOTES

1. 146 in 2010, 252 in 2011, 425 in 2012, 606 in 2013, 827 in 2014, 826 in 2015, 662 in 2016, 504 in 217, 421 in 2018, 327 in 2019, and 245 in 2020. (DEFF 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021).
2. Shoot-to-kill-practices are not an official component of South Africa's anti-poaching programming (DEFF 2015; Hübschle and Joost 2017), but these have been employed in the KNP.
3. I primarily use the term "illegal wildlife hunting" rather than "poaching" to signal the need for a more neutral and objective treatment of the topic. See Duffy et al. 2016 for a fuller discussion of the merits of this alternate terminology.
4. Guided, as I am, by George's provocation, the focus of this analysis is migrant mine labour, but the involvement of men in the labour of colonial conservation in the KNP also has important

implications. I take up this theme in other, as of yet unpublished, writing.

5. For their part, South African administrators sometimes sought to extract further benefits from the cross-border movement of labour – in the form of two weeks of compelled work for men caught moving through the park through KNP without proper documentation (Harris 1959; Harries 1994; Carruthers 1995).

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Received: 06-Aug-2020**; Revised:** 14-Apr-2021**; Accepted:** 16-Apr-2021**; Published:** 04-Aug-2021

View publication stats

ISSN: 0972-4923

Conservation & Society

Volume 19 • Number 3 • 2021

www.conservationandsociety.org.in

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