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Gorillas in the Mist (1988)
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Review/Film; Saving Africa's Gorillas
By JANET MASLIN

When Sigourney Weaver, as the naturalist Dian Fossey, is first seen arriving in Africa, she towers over everyone else in view. A trim, impatient, utterly confident white woman, she is instantly at home giving orders to the impoverished black tribesmen who gather around her. This supreme self-assurance of Miss Weaver's, sometimes less than helpful in other films, is perfect for "Gorillas in the Mist," the story of a smart, determined, well-bred and physically commanding woman who brooks no frailty in others. Like Katharine Hepburn, who might well have played this part if Dian Fossey had lived earlier, Miss Weaver was made for such a role.

"Gorillas in the Mist," which opens today at the Beekman, is the story of Miss Fossey's extraordinary exploits among the mountain gorillas that she studied for 18 years. It's a story of stirring and unusual heroism, though not one of many surprises. Indeed, though there is no set formula for films about mountain gorillas, the satisfying and largely unremarkable progress of this one suggests that such a thing might be possible.

As Miss Fossey, Miss Weaver is seen arriving in Africa with the wrong wardrobe and the wrong attitude, demanding that her luggage be carried, and setting up shop at a remote campsite, with a picture of her fiance from Kentucky by her side. In voice-over, she corresponds with Dr. Louis Leakey, who has commissioned her to conduct a mountain gorilla census. "Surely you didn't expect the poor beggars to come out of the the jungle and line up just so we can count them!" Dr. Leakey writes, when his protégé encounters problems. But soon after this she finds her first fresh gorilla droppings. And soon after that, the first gorillas are seen. "So beautiful!" exclaims Miss Weaver, as she will on many occasions throughout the film. Moments like this do have an irresistible appeal.

Like an American friend (Julie Harris) who has lived in Africa long enough to cultivate an astonishingly lush flower garden, Miss Fossey determines to set down roots. She begins hammering out an uneasy truce with local tribesmen, who suspect her of being a witch ("Oh yeah? They wouldn't be the first," says she). She begins to fight the local practice of gorilla poaching, used to supply baby animals to zoos and, more brutally, gorilla heads and hands as trophies for tourists. The scenes depicting these raids on the animals are staged with heart-rending urgency.

Most important, Miss Weaver's Dian Fossey is seen establishing her rapport with the animals themselves, in remarkable scenes that show the gorillas approaching her tentatively and then clambering playfully all over her. (The fact that Rick Baker, the makeup wizard who specializes in simians, has contributed special effects indicates that a little of this footage is artificial, but it all looks utterly convincing.) Though much of the strength of Miss Weaver's fine performance comes from the intelligent, muscular resilience she projects so fiercely, a lot of it also derives from the wit and abandon with which she mimics the gorillas' behavior to win their confidence.

As directed by Michael Apted, "Gorillas in the Mist" has an unusually powerful sense of place. The glimpses of mountainous Rwanda, where these rare gorillas live, are indeed breathtaking, and the local culture is made as palpable as the landscape itself. There are excellent African actors in a couple of key roles: John Omirah Miluwi as Miss Fossey's trusted guide and close friend, and Waigwa Wachira as the local official who expects her to place her ideas about gorilla preservation in the larger context of Rwanda's strapped economy. There is even, when Miss Fossey visits town, a dilapidated-looking Grand Hotel, into which she marches, on one memorable occasion, to berate a gorilla trader in the middle of a crowded dining room. She does this with a baby gorilla in her arms.

"Gorillas in the Mist" takes its title from Miss Fossey's own memoir, and it was to be a film recounting her heartening efforts to save the species from extinction. But her brutal murder, in 1985, has necessitated another ending, one with which the film does not easily cope. The screenplay, by Anna Hamilton Phelan, makes the killing (which is still unsolved) almost an afterthought, and follows the brief sequence detailing the naturalist's death and burial with an incongruously upbeat closing title lauding her achievements. There seems little question that the woman herself was more complicated than this portrait.

"Gorillas in the Mist," an engrossing but long film with a tendency to meander, devotes an idyllic central section to Miss Fossey's affair with Bob Campbell (Bryan Brown), the National Geographic photographer whose films first called attention to her accomplishments. Though this makes for a sunny episode, it is destined to end unhappily when the couple find they have irreconcilable differences. That much is clear when Mr. Campbell brings Miss Fossey, hardly a woman who needs pets, a little dog.

Guys:

In places where you see this symbol [….] in this (and other articles I may assign you) it signifies deletions of text by me to make it easier for you to digest the article.

The basic thesis of this article is that we should look at the wildlife conservation efforts in Africa by Westerners as constituting more than a seemingly altruistic endeavor: it is a form of a capitalistic economic enterprise in which the Africans do not necessarily come out faring better.

A few other points for you to keep at the back of your mind as you go through this article:

(a) Are U.S. administrations doing enough to protect the wilderness areas here in the United States? What about the fate of the mountain lion or, now, the polar bear? The conservatives in this country, as the unthinking handmaidens of the corporate capitalist class, are obsessed with destroying wildlife habitat here if it holds out the potential for making oodles of money from it (grazing lands for cattle, prospecting for oil, etc.). So, shouldn't the Africans—who often are among the world's very poor—have the same right to destroy their wildlife habitats if that allows them to put food on the table?

(b) If, as the Western wildlife conservation movement usually implies, all wildlife belong to the world as a whole and not just to the countries among which they are to be found, then shouldn't it be the responsibility of the whole world (especially the wealthy West) to help in the conservation of this wildlife—which then necessitates taking care of the basic needs of the poor first, before everything else? Are the needs of wild animals more important than the needs of human beings? Or is it possible to meet the needs of both at the expense of neither?

(c) A thought experiment regarding "whiteness": imagine an African wildlife enthusiast obsessed with only one animal, bears, decided to come to the United States to study the *black bear* in Alleghany National Park here in New York State. Now imagine white folks scrambling to help her in every way possible: carrying her baggage, building her a camp, cooking for her, fetching water for her, and so on. Do you get my drift? (Learn to think outside the box!)

(d) By the way: did you notice the similarity in the attitudes of both white protagonists in *Never Cry Wolf* and *Gorillas in the Mist* toward the native inhabitants: they both expected to be helped as a matter of course.

A couple of general questions not directly concerning the topic at hand: what is an "abstract" and what does the term "West" (and Westerner) mean in the context of this course?

What does the expression "elephant in the room" mean? (What is the elephant in the room in this article?)

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The Elephant in the Room: Confronting the Colonial Character of Wildlife Conservation in Africa

By Elizabeth Garland

Abstract

This article draws attention to the structural inequalities that characterize the position of Africans within the global symbolic and political economies of African wildlife conservation, and theorizes these inequalities in ways that move beyond the critique of conservation as simply a colonial or neocolonial imposition. Conceptualizing wildlife conservation in Africa as a mode of global capitalist production, the article argues both for broadening the analytic lens through which the effects of conservation on Africa are assessed, and for redressing the global power dynamics that currently surround the protection of African wild animals.

In the Euro-American West, the continent of Africa has long been associated with iconic wild animals. China may have its pandas, India its tigers, the Amazon its jaguars and anacondas, North America its bison, wolves, and bears. But Africa has lions and leopards, gorillas and chimpanzees, elephants, rhinos, hippos, ostrich, zebra, giraffe, and more! Not only is the continent home to more large, charismatic species than other regions of the globe, but its animals are also highly familiar to Western

people, who are exposed to them in the form of toys, visual media, and the display of live creatures in zoological parks, often from early childhood on.

The ubiquity of African animals in Western daily life itself derives from the dialectical history of European exploration and colonization of the continent, processes through which Africa came to figure as an important space of nature in an emerging Western imaginary—a wild and natural backdrop against which people of European descent could define themselves as belonging to a civilized, specifically Western, world (see esp. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Curtin 1964; Mudimbe 1994). Over time, the role of African animals in this imaginary has become so naturalized, so unremarkable, that today an American parent might well point out a lion in a zoo, or put a child to bed in pajamas covered in cartoon hippos, without consciously associating either with Africa, or with the West's historic relation to Africa. Indeed, as globalization has conveyed dimensions of the "Western" imaginary far beyond the bounds of Europe and North America, animals like lions and hippos have become part of the natural symbolic repertoire of people around the world, their existence taken for granted as the birth-right of people everywhere.

It is in Africa, however, that wild African animals actually live, and on African shoulders that the primary responsibility for maintaining this "global" inheritance falls. The burden that this responsibility represents is substantial, and the terms on which it is undertaken are seldom, if ever, determined by African people or nations alone. On the contrary, African actors participate in the provision of wildlife to the world from a global vantage point deeply compromised by the continent's history of colonization and association with nature in Western systems of thought.

In this essay, I draw attention to the structural inequalities that characterize the position of African people within the global symbolic and political economies of African wildlife conservation, and theorize these inequalities in ways that move beyond the critique of conservation as simply a colonial or neocolonial imposition on the continent (e.g., Neumann 1998). I begin by recounting two recent true stories that evoke the transnational power dynamics characteristic of the contemporary African conservation field. I then argue that these dynamics may be understood by conceptualizing wildlife conservation in Africa as foremost a productive process, a means of appropriating the value of African nature, and of transforming it into capital with the capacity to circulate and generate further value at the global level. Finally, I suggest some ethnographic directions in which formulating conservation in this way might lead, and point to the potential of such an approach to help re-imagine, and possibly even begin to reconfigure, the global power dynamics that currently surround the conservation of African wild animals.

Gombe Stream, Tanzania

[…..]

The juxtaposition of [Jane] Goodall's extraordinary celebrity with the death of an African child at the hands of one of her study animals, however, raises a number of uncomfortable issues. Her fame, after all, depends fundamentally on these animals, and on her special intimacy with them. The thought that a Gombe chimpanzee could stalk, kill, and eat a human toddler clashes jarringly with the dream of a peaceable kingdom that Goodall has worked to promote (see Haraway 1989:170–79). Her life is a testament to the potential of compassion to span the cultural divides that separate us from animals, and by implication, from one another. But where does the boy Frodo killed fit into Goodall's vision of cross-cultural harmony? And how are we to think about the structural conditions—for example, the role of African laborers in maintaining her famous research site, or the susceptibility of Tanzanian government officials to the pressures of international public opinion—that are associated with her vision?

The affair foregrounds the fact that there is a human cost to Good-all's eco-humanitarian mission, a rough underbelly to its smooth, seemingly apolitical surface. The contrast between Frodo's treatment and the blame suffered by the boy's mother in the wake of the incident sends a potent message about the vulnerability of African people in the face of the world's fascination with African animals: a murderous chimpanzee could be accorded empathy and forgiveness, while a bereaved and traumatized African woman was not. The fact that the boy's death received virtually no coverage in the Western media is hardly surprising. After all, African children die every day, and who wants to write a story that will bring negative attention to Jane Goodall?

Libreville, Gabon

[….]

Now there can be no doubt that wildlife populations and habitats in central Africa have come under serious threat in recent decades. Years of instability and war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and escalating rates of logging and mining throughout the entire region, have lead to greatly intensified pressure on central African forests, as rural people have turned to resource extraction and commercial fishing and bushmeat hunting to support themselves in the absence of social stability or a tenable agricultural infrastructure (see Bushmeat Crisis Taskforce 2008; Nasi 2007). Increasingly, the fates of internationally cherished species like the lowland gorilla depend on finding a way to rein in the intensifying scope of human impact on these African ecosystems.

Even in the context of such urgent conservation need, however, much about Fay's recent triumph in Gabon gives cause for concern. For one, with the stroke of a pen, President Bongo effectively alienated a massive swath of his nation's land. The areas designated to become parks will continue to belong legally to Gabon, of course, but if the experience of other African countries is any indication of things to come, the international conservation community will henceforth expect to have a stake—and a say—in the parks' management and use. Further, the new park system is very likely to have a detrimental impact on many Gabonese people, more than one-quarter of whom are employed in the nation's logging industry and who are said to earn fifty million dollars annually from the trade in bushmeat (Quammen 2003:59). In the National Geographic coverage, no mention is made of a plan to relocate people living within the proposed park boundaries, as has happened in so many other protected areas in Africa and elsewhere (see Brockington 2002; Brockington & Igoe 2006; Neumann 1998).[4] But even in the absence of forced

resettlements, it is hard to see how the creation of zeroextraction zones in some of the richest pockets of national forest will not cause many Gabonese to lose their sources of livelihood, and many others to be effectively criminalized as poachers. Conservationists would say to this that ecotourism can generate revenue to offset such harms, and that tourism has the potential to be a more sustainable form of resource use than large-scale logging or bushmeat hunting. Tourism industries often require major investments of time and capital before coming on line, however, and when they do, the gains seldom accrue to the same people who were previously benefiting from the earlier extractive activities. Moreover, income from tourism is highly capricious, vulnerable, in particular, to swings in demand caused by the kinds of political instability for which central Africa is notorious.

Other kinds of issues are also troubling. In this postcolonial era, for instance, the blatant recycling of retrograde colonial fantasies about white explorers discovering and saving Africa from itself seems a particularly cynical maneuver on the part of both Fay and his supporters at NGS and WCS. Robust as certain kinds of Western discourses about African nature may be—images of golden savannas teeming with animals but devoid of human beings, and of Eden-like jungles, innocent in the face of an onslaught of African humanity—numerous scholars have shown how such representations have more to do with the West's historical relation of domination over Africa than with the realities of African environmental history and practice (see, e.g., Fairhead & Leach 1996; Grove 1995; Neumann 1998; Shetler 2006). By invoking such tropes, Fay and his supporters reinforce a global image of Africa in which African nature and African people are pitted against one another in a zero-sum game, and in which wise and far-sighted outsiders are required to step in and moderate the contest. Western conservationists, as the title of the National Geographic series asserts, are the ones said to be "saving Africa's Eden." President Bongo is needed to sign off on the vision, but the articles make it clear to readers that it is Fay who had the vision in the first place.

Indeed, with his Megatransect adventure, Fay has joined the ranks of other Western biologists who claim the status of privileged interpreters and advocates for the African environment. Like Jane Goodall, George Schaller, Dian Fossey, Cynthia Moss, Joyce Poole, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, David Western, Craig Packer, Ian Redmond, Bill Webber, and Amy Vedder—and this is only an East Africa–centered, partial sample—Fay has become what I think of as a "charismatic mega-biologist," a human counterpart to the "charismatic mega-fauna" that such high-profile scientists invariably study.[5] Western scientists like these—the great majority of whom have published popular memoirs and appeared in television and film documentaries—are the human superstars of African wildlife conservation. It is their (white) faces that most readily spring to mind when audiences worldwide think about the study and conservation of African animals.

For every Western conservation superstar in Africa, however, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of African people enabling their stardom, by allowing land and other natural resources to be allocated and used in ways that accommodate these Westerners' desires and priorities, and by carrying out the actual day-to-day work of protecting and managing the wild animals and habitats they care about. The inequalities that exist between the foreigners (and descendants of white settlers) who are the global face of African wildlife conservation, and the Africans who sacrifice and work to make conservation a reality on the ground, are a shockingly stable feature of the African wildlife field. They are inequalities grounded in centuries of literal and symbolic appropriation of African nature by the West, and also in the structures of racism that this history of appropriation underpins. There is not a single African who has achieved the kind of global fame from working with African animals that dozens of Western conservationists have attained. To be sure, many African people have reached significant levels of responsibility and influence within the ranks of the conservation industry, but even figures as powerful as Gabon's President Bongo have remained primarily enablers of the global phenomenon that swirls around African wildlife. Rarely are they represented as heroic actors on its stage in their own right.

Imposing Wilderness?

Needless to say, drawing explicit attention to the ways in which conservation in Africa relies upon global power relations rooted in the continent's history of colonization is not something that is often done within African wild-life circles. On the contrary, for conservation practitioners both in and outside of Africa, the unequal, and frequently racialized, transnational aspects of African conservation practice remain something of an unacknowledged elephant in the room. Facts such as the differential rates routinely paid by tourists for safaris led by white versus black tour guides, the far greater professional mobility and access to resources of expatriate wildlife professionals as compared to their African colleagues, and the influence wielded over national conservation priorities by donors and investors based in Europe and North America are taken for granted as more or less inevitable features of the social landscape in which African wildlife conservation takes place. In the course of my own ethnographic research among African conservation professionals in Tanzania in 2001–2, I tried to probe people's attitudes about such inequitable structural dynamics. I found, not surprisingly, that they were broadly resented, or at least regretted, by most of the African professionals whom I met, whereas the expatriate conservationists I spoke with generally enjoyed—if a little defensively, or in some cases guiltily—the advantages such inequities typically entailed. Neither the Africans nor the expatriates, however, saw the dynamics themselves as being particularly amenable to change. It was as if the project of protecting African wild animals somehow required (neo)colonial power relations to remain in place.

[….]

In the scholarly attention to conservation's effects on the lives of African villagers, however, and to the sensibilities and ambitions of Western conservationists, the nature of the interaction between Western conservationist ideology and African social reality has tended to remain relatively untheorized. In Imposing Wilderness, for example, Neumann draws upon the work of art historians, literary theorists, and cultural critics to describe the worldviews that led colonial administrators to create the park, but relies upon the tools of peasant studies and human ecology to analyze effects the park had on the local Meru population. His reliance on these different analytic toolkits asserts a separateness, presumably not intentional, between the two worlds he describes: where the West has ideology and discourse, the Meru have a moral economy and ecology. Although his book describes the imposition of the one on the other, he does not explicitly discuss his thinking about the relationship between these differently conceptualized domains. Instead, he relies on a largely unremarked model of domination and resistance, with

conservation undermining the welfare and livelihoods of the Meru peasants, and the Meru resisting and adapting in variously effective ways.

While I am not suggesting that an account such as Neumann's is inaccurate, framing things in this way obscures a number of crucial aspects of the African wildlife conservation phenomenon. Left out are the shifts in desires and worldviews, new social identities and relationships, and forms of discourse and practice that conservation processes themselves bring into being, not only at the relatively localized level of rural communities displaced by parks, but also in the broader frames of reference represented by nations and the world system. Thinking of conservation as a colonialist assault on the cultures or subsistence strategies of local people cannot, for example, explain the enthusiasm of many independence-era African nationalists for protecting wildlife, or the appeal of work in the fields of wildlife conservation and tourism for both rural and urban youth in many African countries today. Nor can such a framework address the kinds of global power dynamics, such as those demonstrated by the narratives about Frodo and Mike Fay, with which I began my discussion. For these kinds of questions, I suggest, a more comprehensive analytic framework is required.

Conservation as a Mode of Production

Instead of framing wildlife conservation primarily as a Western imposition on Africans, I believe conservation may be more usefully conceptualized as a productive process in which both Africans and non-Africans are engaged, albeit often from differently empowered vantage points. Specifically, I suggest that wildlife conservation be conceived as a particular kind of capitalist production, one which lays claim to the intrinsic, or natural, capital game animals represent, augments this value through various mediations, and ultimately transforms it into capital of a more convertible and globally ramifying kind. Formulating conservation in this manner is in keeping with the way many contemporary African people and governments speak about game animals, which are often cited together with other "natural resources" such as fertile soils, fisheries, forests, and deposits of gemstones, fossil fuels, and other minerals as part of the base wealth (mali asili in Swahili) of African nations, the endowment of natural capital from which future development and prosperity may be fashioned. By emphasizing the role of conservation in incorporating African animals into the circuits of global capital flows, such a formulation also helps clarify the difference between a conservationist mode of appropriating wildlife value from other, generally more localized, forms of human engagement with wild animals—for example, in subsistence hunting, efforts to manage vermin, or indigenous ritual and folkloric practices. Perhaps most relevant for the focus of this essay, emphasizing the fundamentally productive nature of wildlife conservation draws direct attention as well to the labor and relations of production necessary to generate the value created by conservation processes.

As is the case with other kinds of natural resource exploitation, the relations of production involved in wildlife conservation depend greatly on the social organization of control over the productive assets in question, and on the politico-legal frameworks through which this control is exercised. The recent efforts of many African rural communities to assert their right to exploit wildlife through community-based conservation and tourism projects, often in the face of opposition from governments claiming state ownership of wildlife, may be understood as struggles over resource control in precisely these terms (see, e.g., Igoe 1999, Igoe & Croucher 2007). And similarly, legally designated geographic spaces such as national parks and game reserves, privately owned game sanctuaries, and community operated conservation areas effectively represent different structural arrangements in the production of value from wildlife through conservation, analogous, in many respects, to the various regimes of ownership and exploitation of oil, minerals, and other natural resources currently in operation on the continent (see Ferguson 2006).

The parallel between African wild animals and "primary commodity" resources such as oil or minerals is an imperfect one, however, on several counts. For one, game populations are not inherently depleted by capitalist exploitation. Mineral extraction is by definition a finite undertaking, generating wealth from nature only until the unhappy day when veins or pipes run dry. Wild animals, in contrast, offer the possibility of wealth creation in perpetuity, through nonconsumptive photographic tourism, sustainable trophy hunting, and the more general productive processes of the conservationist venture itself. Fisheries and commercial forests may also be exploited sustainably, of course, as could, in principle, stocks of game animals for commercial bushmeat consumption. But as with other explicitly extractive enterprises, industries such as these are premised on the harvesting and physical removal of the natural commodities (fish, timber, game meat) from their sites of production, and on the sale of their use value in domestic or foreign markets. The conservationist mode of exploiting wildlife differs from such practices, in that it relies heavily upon ideological mediation to add value to the initial natural capital that game animals represent. Indeed, wild African animals generate the most globally relevant value when they are exploited in ways that have virtually nothing to do with their immediate material use. Instead, what is crucial to the symbolic and economic capital produced by conserving African wildlife is the image of Africa as emblematic of all that is wild and natural—of the continent as a privileged space of nature within the global symbolic imaginary.

Such an image of the continent as quintessentially natural itself hinges on a particular vision of nature in Africa—a nature that is both the pre-condition of African wildlife conservation (that which is conserved) and simultaneously the product of conservationist processes. Perhaps the most important feature of this conservationist nature is that it is ostensibly external to human society. Its plains are empty of settlement or livestock, its forests untouched by horticulture, hunting, or logging. Nature so envisioned is also, by presupposition, disappearing, intrinsically threatened by the pressures of human encroachment and destruction. After all, it is the specter of loss on the horizon that justifies the need for nature to be conserved in the first place. The disappearing temporal quality of conservation's nature relates to its distance from the realm of the social, for this nature is cast as that which existed prior to the impact of human action: it is nature in a state of nature, not yet subsumed by the modern, social domain. The question of the condition of this nature, its degree of naturalness, is taken by conservation to be an objective matter, an issue for scientific evaluation and description (for example, in the course of an expedition like the Megatransect), rather than something open to "subjective," or social, interpretation.

As we know from African environmental historians, however, such a vision of empty, unsocialized, prior nature bears virtually no historical resemblance to most of the African continent, where even if peoples had not actually settled on the ground, they nevertheless encompassed terrains within ecological, geopolitical, and cosmological frames of reference and systems of practice.[9] It is also clear that human beings have long played a constituent part in the ecology of Africa's diverse landscapes, directing the flow of waters, burning and grazing savannas, clearing bush, manipulating soils, hunting animals, and planting and harvesting trees and crops. Consequently, rendering African nature empty and outside of society has often required significant effort on the part of people who are committed to conservation. In the area now encompassed by Serengeti National Park, for example, Africans grazed livestock, gathered wild foods, and hunted wildlife extensively prior to the park's creation, and had done so for as long as the history of the region can be reconstructed (Hodgson 2001; Neumann 1998; Shetler 2006). To form the park, conservationists evicted these people (see, esp. Neumann 1998:ch.4), purging them from the landscape in order to "reconstitute" it as it had been before the presence of humans. But there had been no presocial before; it was the emptiness of the plains that was the new phenomenon. Indeed, so significant had been the role of human activity to the ecology of the Serengeti that, from its inception, the national park has required continual intervention by park managers, who use fire, brush-clearing, and other techniques to manipulate the landscape to correspond to the images held by conservationists, television audiences, and safari-goers of a "natural" African savanna.[10]

As the experience of the Serengeti suggests, the conservationist contention that areas of Africa are wild and natural and in need of protection from humanity is itself a highly social act. Making such a claim, as did Mike Fay in his pitch to the president of Gabon, disembeds swaths of African land from their existing social roles (as sources of timber and bushmeat, for example), and reinscribes them in others, transforming them into objects of interest and desire for National Geographic readers, sites for speculation about foreign investment and national prestige by government officials, political talking points for U.S. congressmen, centerpieces in the fundraising campaigns of international conservation NGOs, objects of research by wildlife scientists, recreation grounds for foreign tourists, and many other things. Such spaces are not a bulwark against the forces of human activity and global capitalism, but rather products of a very particular mode of engagement with these forces. Among the more consequential implications of this conservationist mode is that, at least under its current logic, the value of such spaces has been made fundamentally contingent on the desires and fantasy structures of people with a historically colonial relation to the continent of Africa.

Bringing a Broader Range of African Engagements with Conservation into View

Conceptualizing wildlife conservation as a productive process in which African animals and landscapes get embedded within global political-economic and symbolic systems enables a widening of the analytic lens through which the effects of conservation on African people may be examined. Within such a framework, conservation emerges as an important translocal social field, a set of socially and historically situated practices through which Africa's position in the world is (at least partly) articulated and shaped, and through which a wide range of people, both African and non-African, seek to fashion and position themselves within the various social contexts that matter to them. If many critical studies—and virtually all social research and outreach efforts by conservation NGOs and government agencies—have remained narrowly focused on the effects of conservation programs on local African communities, thinking of conservation in this broader sense opens the door to consideration of dynamics that reveal the embeddedness of ostensibly local contexts within supralocal cultural and political-economic processes. Such studies might, for example, examine the tradeoffs and calculations that get made at the level of African nation-states when a decision to pursue a conservationist strategy is taken, or how such a strategy could affect both the nation-state's standing in an international context and its relationship with rural populations on the ground in the areas where the programs are to be implemented. Other research trajectories might focus on the ways that conservationist considerations intersect with national and international political-economic and social dynamics, things like processes of class formation, the global economics of African resource exports, or the shifting tides of attention and interest of North American and European publics.

For Africanist ethnographers, topics such as these pose new methodological challenges, requiring us to find creative ways of examining how conservation works and fits within the lives of the people we study. One solution deployed in several suggestive recent studies has been to focus on conservation encounters, tracing the often far-flung strands of locally implemented conservation projects to weave together the practices of nation-states, international conservation NGOs, scientists, and tourists with analyses of more localized sociocultural dynamics. A particularly fine example of this kind of work is Christine Walley's account of the creation of a marine park on Tanzania's Mafia Island (2004), in which she combines ethnographic descriptions of engagements among villagers, foreign NGO agents, government officials, tourists, and urban entrepreneurs, with historical analysis of other formative encounters in the history of coastal Tanzanian peoples. Through richly rendered attention to conservation processes, Walley is able to document the ways that local ideas about key concepts such as history, community, nature, governance, and development shape and are shaped by the park venture.[11]

In my own work on wildlife conservation in Tanzania (Garland 2006), I take a different ethnographic tack, organizing my research not around a particular geographic location or conservation project, but rather around the work of a specific category of person, the African wildlife professional. My focus on Africans who work in the wildlife field derives from my understanding of conservation as a form of production requiring labor, and aims in part to address the relative invisibility of African participants in African wildlife conservation, given the historic centrality of charismatic white people to the industry's international image. While essential to the implementation of virtually every wildlife-related initiative on the continent, African game scouts, rangers, wardens, extension agents, and other similar figures nevertheless exist as something of a black box in the discourse of the Western conservation agencies typically backing wildlife projects. Western wildlife scientists and advocates often know little about the worldviews or motivations of Africans who work in the conservation field, and frequently lament them as corrupt, "in it for the money" (rather than for the love of animals, as the Westerners are said to be), or lacking in the capacities necessary to carry out the work required. For their part, African wildlife professionals must sign on to facilitating and

perpetuating the world's fascination with African animals, tasks that frequently require them to act as stewards of a vision of African nature—with its celebrity chimpanzees, pristine forests, and white mega-biologists—that has little to do with the environmental priorities of most African people, and that arguably reinforces the ongoing subaltern position of Africa and Africans within the broader world system.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the African conservationists I met during the course of my fieldwork in Tanzania were often ambivalent about a profession structured in such compromising terms. They had generally sought out training and employment in the wildlife field because of the cosmopolitanism and resources associated with the conservation and tourism industries, and viewed their career choice as central to their ambitions to consolidate secure middle-class lives for themselves and their families. Many had made quite significant sacrifices in order to obtain the training and connections necessary to land jobs in the state wildlife agencies or NGO sector, and held high hopes that their positions would enable them to tap into the well-spring of value that wildlife represents in a country with protected areas as iconic as the Serengeti and Mt. Kilimanjaro.

In the course of their day-to-day work, however, the Tanzanian people I interviewed often found themselves reminded of the disadvantaged structural position they occupied in relation to the processes of value creation and extraction under way in the nation's wildlife field. Even though, in their capacities as rangers or wardens, for example, they officially controlled access to valuable spaces such as national parks, they often found the sovereignty they were able to exercise over these spaces to be partial at best, given the alienation inherent in an industry so dependant on the desires and resources of foreigners. Expatriate tour operators, scientists, and donors are crucial to the financial viability of the Tanzanian protected area system, and they frequently wielded the influence this affords them in ways that undermined the authority of the African wildlife officials—ignoring inconvenient government regulations, for example, or by claiming to have superior knowledge of Tanzanian game populations and habitats, and demanding a say in shaping national conservation priorities.

In addition to direct challenges to their authority over the wildlife resource base, the Tanzanian conservationists I worked with grappled, too, with the personal inequities that existed between them and their expatriate colleagues, many of whom were able to parlay their involvement with African animals into wealth and prestige through circuits that remained largely mystifying and inscrutable to the Tanzanians. I frequently heard rumors about such expatriates, who were often said to be engaged in illicit practices of wealth extraction in the parks and game reserves, smuggling gemstones, trafficking in wild animals and animal body parts, and conducting tourism operations without the permission of the Africans ostensibly charged with protecting such spaces. Western field biologists were considered particularly suspect in this regard because they spend a great deal of time alone in the bush and yet somehow always seem to have plenty of money to buy expensive equipment and keep petrol in their vehicles. In a country in which wealth and status are generally understood to be gained through social connectedness, the apparent asociality of the biologists—who are often dirty and pass their days in the company of animals, yet clearly have more resources at their disposal than most Tanzanians—suggests to many that more comprehensible, covert processes of wealth-creation must in fact be going on.

And of course, extraction of value is going on, as Western scientists and conservationists translate their intimacy with African animals into Ph.D.s, research grants, jobs with international NGOs and tourism companies, academic positions, gigs on the conservation lecture circuit, popular memoirs, starring roles in National Geographic specials, and on and on. Many Africans have similar sorts of contact with African wildlife—as researchers in their own right, as trackers, guides, and assistants to Western researchers, and as guardians and caretakers of African protected areas—but the historical and racial politics of the international wildlife field are such that their intimacies rarely translate into the kinds of successes enjoyed by their non-African counterparts and employers. Africans are simply not currently a central part of the narrative that renders African wild animals glamorous and valuable in the global scheme of things.

By Way of Conclusion, Some Possible Ways Forward

So what, if anything, might be done to alter this situation? Shifting the terms under which African animals are protected can hardly be easy, given the colonial history of conservation on the continent and the well-entrenched symbolic dimensions of the African wildlife phenomenon in the global imaginary. Still, attending to the human experiences and structural circumstances that surround the production of wildlife-related value may at least open the door to such a reconfiguration. What is needed, in short, is to find ways to render the value created by conservation in Africa less alienated in the colonial sense—to limit its appropriation by powerful external agents and enable it to remain more firmly in the service of African people and nations.

Retaining the value-generating potential of wildlife in this way is already a high priority for African countries with significant experience in the realms of international wildlife research and tourism. In Tanzania, for example, the state's three national wildlife agencies routinely impose park entry fees, fees for hunting permits, research permits, and safari operator licenses, and bed-night levies and concession fees on safari operators and lodge and campsite owners, all in the effort to capture a portion of the wealth being derived from the nation's game populations. Yet the capacity of even experienced and well-institutionalized African states to lever-age effective control over the capital generated from their nation's wildlife populations is often quite attenuated. The neoliberal reforms of the past two decades have led to downsizing of government bureaucracies, privatization of government-run wildlife enterprises, reductions in private sector oversight and regulation, and a generalized sense that foreign involvement (typically couched as "investment") in the wildlife sector is something to be courted by the state, rather than regulated or constrained by it. Moreover, the depoliticized, narrowly economic focus of state policies governing foreign involvement—a focus itself derived from the current neoliberal climate—has left few levers for African states to use in intervening in the more symbolic and political-economic processes of capital creation that conservation frequently entails for those from non-African backgrounds. As a result, few African governments have been in particularly strong positions to shape the conservation field in ways that might alter its inequitable global characteristics.

Accomplishing a shift at that more fundamental level, I suggest, will require not just taxation of the wildlife-derived revenue stream, but also revision of the core ideological transformations that are responsible for converting African game animals into globally important symbolic objects in the first place, for it is upon these transformations that the principal value of African wildlife currently rests. New scripts must be introduced into the global imagination of African nature, ones that replace colonial narratives of Western exploration of unspoiled, Eden-like landscapes with more realistic visions of actual African environments in their full, historical, inhabited complexity. Gradually, the desires on which African wildlife conservation and tourism depend must be redirected, and in ways that do not unduly undermine the productiveness of the conservationist mode of value-creation in the process. To bring about such a challenging shift, African states will need to broaden the scope of their efforts beyond strictly economic measures, and nonstate—and often non-African—agents such as filmmakers, tour operators, and international conservation organizations will have to alter their assumptions and behaviors as well.

African government wildlife authorities might insist, for example, that Western filmmakers depicting their wildlife must incorporate the social contexts in which animals live and are conserved, as did a recent "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" episode featuring two Kenyan rangers in their quest to protect a threatened elephant population in Mount Elgon National Park from poachers (Discovery Communications Inc. 2006). Or they might require non-African field biologists working in their countries to learn the local language as a basic precondition of their research permits, and to insist that foreign researchers and activists establish partnerships with host-country counterparts, or contribute funding for local staff training, infrastructure, and the like. African governments might also institute, as have Kenya and South Africa, licenses and standardized pay scales for tour guides, so that premiums for whiteness are eliminated within the safari industry.

The desires and expectations of tourists who travel to Africa to view wildlife will need to be gradually redirected as well, so that the safari tourism experience begins to reflect more accurately contemporary African life, rather than appealing so often to the continent's colonial past. As the industry is currently framed, a large part of the product provided to tourists in many African countries is the chance to reenact a colonial hunting safari—to be precise, the colonial safari depicted in the Hollywood blockbuster Out of Africa, in which Robert Redford and Meryl Streep memorably viewed wildlife in between eating gourmet meals and flirting with each other while a fleet of crisply uniformed African servants attended to their needs. But it is hardly necessary for today's tourists to be waited upon by silent Africans in white gloves. Indeed, many of the North American and European tourists I interviewed at luxury lodges and camps in Tanzania expressed discomfort and surprise at being cast in such a colonial role, and wished they could learn more about the country they were traveling through.

It is in fact quite possible for tourists to have less colonial experiences, while still generating significant revenue for African countries. In the gorilla parks of Uganda and Rwanda, for example, the experience of gorilla tourism is a postcolonial, rather than a colonial, phenomenon, not having been invented until the 1980s, when the first groups of mountain gorillas were habituated to tolerate the presence of humans. There has never been a time when the experience of gorillas was mediated for tourists by white people. African guides have played a central role in the industry from the outset, and are the ones who have relationships with the apes, who interpret the gorillas' behavior to the tourists, and who help the foreigners navigate the difficult terrain in which the gorillas live. I don't doubt that many tourists who travel to Africa to view gorillas are motivated in part by the legacy of Dian Fossey and her depiction in the film "Gorillas in the Mist"; yet in tourist lore about gorilla trekking the African guides are often the heroic intermediaries, and tourists frequently cite their friendships with them as a highlight of the entire experience. Not all African countries have wildlife resources as desirable or scarce as habituated mountain gorillas, to be sure, but there is clearly room for innovation in tourism practice across a broad range of African contexts, as tourists could be encouraged to disembark from their Land Rovers and minibuses and walk across landscapes in the company of local landholders, or visit with African people rather than focusing exclusively on the colonial safari experience. Widening the scope of tourist encounters in these ways would not only contribute to the establishment of more meaningful cross-cultural connections between Africans and non-African tourists, but could also help inform outsiders about issues of African history and cultural diversity, and not just those having to do with animal behavior or natural landscapes.

Of course, the desires of tourists will not simply shift of their own accord, and so a large share of the responsibility for reframing the terms of the African safari industry must fall to the principle purveyors of the imagery and information on which the structures of tourist desires are built: the major international conservation organizations involved in Africa. Organizations such as the National Geographic Society (NGS), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) must begin to exercise restraint in glorifying the accomplishments and personas of individual charismatic conservationists. Instead they should emphasize the ownership of wildlife resources by African nations and the crucial dependence of conservation efforts on the goodwill and labor of African people. Education campaigns run by NGOs and zoological parks need to broaden their message, contextualizing the threats of poaching and habitat loss within discussions of the histories and legal statuses of the habitats in question, and of the issues of poverty and rural development that shape these habitats' positions within the surrounding African societies. Reconfigured in these ways, conservationist discourse could become an important vector for educating Western publics about the challenges that African people face, and about the legacies of colonialism and marginalization on the continent, not just for African landscapes and game populations, but for African people as well.

Embracing such an expanded vision of their mission will require the biologists and others who work for the major international conservation organizations to educate themselves about the complexities of African culture and history in ways they have not previously. They must accept that their social responsibilities extend beyond a few outreach programs in the rural villages surrounding protected areas on the ground in Africa, and assume responsibility for the role they play in shaping the world's imagination of both African animals and African human beings. Getting international conservation NGOs to change in this way seems a hard sell given the highly productive nature of the status quo for them, but I would suggest that the long-term willingness of African publics at all levels to support the conservation cause ultimately hinges on their doing just that. The future of Africa's game populations surely lies not in the endless recirculation of colonial narratives of Western exploration and

conquest over African nature, but in the redefinition of African wildlife conservation as a source of dignity and parity for African people on the world stage.

Notes

1. See Goodall et al. (1994a) and Goodall et al. (1994b) on predation by chimpanzees, and the Jane Goodall Institute (2003) for a brief biography of Frodo.

2. The term megatransect is derived from the ecological research practice of walking transects through a section of terrain in order to assess its biodiversity or other conservation factors. [End Page 73]

3. The parallel with Stanley is made explicitly by David Quammen, the National Geographic reporter assigned to the Megatransect story. Eager to establish Fay's stature as a grand explorer in the colonial tradition, Quammen draws analogies between him and Stanley, David Livingstone, Meriwether Lewis, and even Ferdinand Magellan. Mining a different, though related, cliché, he also, at one point, compares Fay to Brando's Kurtz in the film Apocalypse Now (Quammen 2000, 2001a, 2001b). See Reading National Geographic (Lutz & Collins 1993) for a detailed analysis of the magazine's discursive tendencies and practices.

4. A detailed examination of the local impacts of park creation in Gabon is beyond the scope of this article, but see www.wcs.org/gabon for reports on the current status of WCS efforts to liaise with local communities in and around several of these new protected areas.

5. Conservationists use the term "charismatic mega-fauna" to describe animals like pandas, gorillas, and whales—species that are useful for fundraising for conservation of endangered ecosystems more generally.

6. See especially Anderson and Grove (1987); Beinart and McGregor (2003); Broch-Due and Schroeder (2000); Brockington (2002); Grove (1995); Homewood and Rodgers (1991); Igoe (2004); Marks (1984); MacKenzie (1988, 1990); Neumann (1998); Schroeder (1999); Shetler (2006). Such work forms part of a broader body of scholarship on colonial conservation and land-use policies in Africa more generally, including research on colonial programs to regulate soil erosion, water use, forestry, and animal husbandry practices (e.g., Fairhead & Leach 1996; Giblin 1992; Hodgson 2001; Maddox, Giblin, & Kimambo 1996; Moore & Vaughan 1994; Peters 1994; Schroeder 1999).

7. Research along these lines has been particularly vigorous in the Tanzanian context (the site of my own fieldwork), where the socialist leanings of historians and political economists at the University of Dar es Salaam have combined with the interests of Western scholars in issues of agrarian history, peasant resistance, and political ecology to generate a strong focus on the material subsistence of the nation's peasantry and pastoralist populations.

8. Also along these lines, a number of suggestive studies from southern Africa have recently explored the connections between early settler attitudes toward landscapes and animals, and broad questions of settler identity and nationalist politics (Bunn 2001, 2003; Carruthers 2003; Gordon 2003; Ranger 1999).

9. See, e.g., Bank (2003); Conte (2004); Fairhead and Leach (1996); Giblin (1992); Giles-Vernick (2002); Iliffe (1995); Jacobs (2003); Kjekshus (1977); Maddox, Giblin, and Kimambo (1996); McCann (1999).

10. As Sayre points out (2002: xvi–xvii), rangeland ecologists are increasingly concluding that semiarid grassland ecosystems do not, in fact, naturally stabilize in any particular "climax community" of vegetation, but rather fluctuate between various different ecological states in response to both human actions and natural events. See Dublin (1995) for an analysis of vegetative changes in Serengeti over time.

11. For a similar approach in a Papua New Guinean context, see West (2006).

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