The "White Gold of Jihad":[1] violence, legitimisation and contestation in anti-poaching strategies

Natasha White[2]
Graduate Institute, Geneva, Switzerland

Abstract

Since 2011, elephant poaching and the illegal ivory trade have been labelled a "serious threat to peace and security". Rigorous military training and weapons have been provided to rangers, national armies have been deployed in protected areas, and shoot-to-kill policies have been (re-)adopted. Within the framework of political ecology, the article critically approaches this "war" for Africa's elephants. Adopting the tools of discourse analysis, it explores how such violence has been legitimized by the "transnational conservation community" and, in turn, how this has been contested by other actors. It argues that the "war" has been legitimized by drawing on two broader threat discourses – the ivory-crime-terror linkage and the 'China-Africa' threat. Through the discursive creation of a boundary object, poaching has 'become' a human concern that appeals to actors typically outside the conservation community. In the final Section, the case of the Lord's Resistance Army's poaching activities in Garamba National Park is explored, to show how the knowledge upon which judgements are made and decisions are taken is ahistorical, depoliticized and based on a series of untenable assumptions.

Key words: Conservation, violence, discourse, ivory, political ecology

Résumé

Depuis 2011, le braconnage des éléphants et le commerce illégal de l'ivoire sont qualifiés de « grave menace contre la paix et la sécurité des Etats ». Un entraînement militaire rigoureux et des armes ont été fournis aux gardes-parcs; les armées nationales ont été déployées dans certains parcs nationaux et une politique de 'tirer pour tuer' a été (ré)adoptée. Partant d'une approche d'écologie politique, ce papier de recherche analyse d'une façon critique la « guerre » pour les éléphants africains. Adoptant les outils de l'analyse de discours, il examine comment une telle violence a été légitimée par la « communauté de la conservation » et, comment cette légitimation a été à son tour contestée par d'autres acteurs. Cette « guerre » a été légitimée en mobilisant deux discours se référant à des menaces diffuses – la connexion ivoire-crime-terreur, et la menace de la « Chine-Afrique ». Converti par le discours en un « objet-frontière », le braconnage a pris une dimension large, faisant appel à des acteurs en-dehors de la communauté de la conservation. Finalement, le cas des activités de braconnage du *Lord's Resistance Army* dans le Parc national de Garamba, République Démocratique du Congo, est pris comme exemple pour montrer comment la connaissance sur laquelle des jugements sont posés et des décisions prises est ahistorique, dépolitisée et repose sur une série de présupposés intenables.

Mots clés: Conservation, violence, discours, ivoire, écologie politique

Resumen

La caza furtiva de elefantes y el tráfico ilegal del marfil han sido calificados como "amenazas graves a la paz y seguridad de los Estados" por el Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas desde 2011. Los guardabosques son rigurosamente entrenados mientras, las armadas nacionales son desplegadas en áreas protegidas y la consigna de "tirar a matar" ha sido retomada. En un marco de ecología política, este estudio ofrece una perspectiva crítica de la "guerra" por los elefantes Africanos. Aplicando las herramientas de análisis discursivo, se describe la violencia legitimada por la "comunidad conservacionista internacional", así como la resistencia de otros actores. Dos secuencias discursivas han legitimado la "guerra", a saber: la vinculación marfil-crimen-terror y la amenaza "China-África". Con la creación de un "objeto-frontera", estas representaciones "transforman" a la caza furtiva en una cuestión antropocéntrica que genera adherencia

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[1] *New York Times*, 30/09/2013.

[2] Natasha White is research assistant at the Graduate Institute, Geneva's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, Maison de la Paix, 2 Chemin Eugene-Rigot, Geneva-1211, Switzerland. Email: njwhite100 "at" gmail.com. She would like to thank Prof. Marc Hufty and Prof. Filipe Calvao for their extensive input on earlier versions of this article, as well as the anonymous reviewers from the *Journal of Political Ecology* for offering valuable additional insights.

en círculos ajenos a la comunidad conservacionista. El estudio finaliza con un análisis de la caza furtiva practicada por el *Lord's Resistance Army* en el Parque Nacional de Garamba para demostrar que los argumentos conservacionistas carecen de un marco histórico y político mientras se basan en presunciones insostenibles.

Palabras claves: Conservación, violencia, discurso, marfil, ecología política

1. Introduction

In 2012, poachers killed an estimated 22,000 African elephants (IUCN, 2013), a figure comprising around 7.4% of the total population on the continent (Maisels *et al.*, 2013). Media and policy reports have been linking this "systematic massacre" (Groo, 2014) of Africa's elephants to Central and East African armed groups, as well as a transnational organized crime (TNOC) network. Popularized in the media as "blood ivory", tusks have been labelled a conflict resource, in line with diamonds, gold, timber and coltan.

As this blood ivory flows through the continent's capillaries, the "battle for Africa's elephants" (Christy, 2012) has been launched. Elephant poaching and the illegal ivory trade have been labelled a "national security threat"[3] and "post-Afghanistan military priority"[4] by the United States' (US) security community, and a "serious threat to peace and security" by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon.[5] Response strategies across the continent include: the provision of rigorous military training and lethal weapons; the deployment of paramilitary ranger forces, or 'eco-guards', and national armies; private military companies and various other forms of 'guns for hire'; and in some cases, the authorisation of controversial 'shoot-to-kill' policies. Such policies may be accompanied by Indemnity Acts absolving park rangers from criminal liability and protecting them from charges of murder. War, once a common metaphor in anti-poaching strategies (Neumann, 2004a), has become an operational reality. In a range of states, protected areas – what were once, and remain to some, symbolic of "pristine wilderness" (Cronon, 1995: 82) – have become the frontline in Africa's biodiversity "wars" (Duffy, 2014a: 819).

Militarized forms of anti-poaching have a long history (Duffy, 2014a; Neumann, 2004a; Peluso and Watts, 2001). Prior analyses by political ecologists and critical geographers have focussed, for example, on "coercive conservation" (Peluso, 1993) and the violence of community displacement from "fortress" parks (Brockington, 2004). We are experiencing, however, a systemic, qualitative shift in violence and important considerations are glossed over, including "…who we are protecting wildlife from, what we are protecting wildlife for and what methods we deem acceptable" (Duffy, 2014a: 823). Conservationists and the international community present the war for Africa's elephants as a *just* war, reflecting broader paradigms of international interventionism, such as the UN-endorsed R2P (Responsibility to Protect) agenda, traditionally not applied to biodiversity protection (Humphreys and Smith, 2011). The treatment of the issue as a "serious threat to peace and security" has positioned it under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, laying the ground for potentially coercive measures at the international level (Peters, 2014). Yet, the declaration of war to save non-human species sits on the horns of a philosophical and ethical dilemma (Humphreys and Smith, 2011). Although this conservation-development-security nexus received attention in the 1990s and early 2000s, the revival of "green militarization" (Lunstrum, 2014: 2), the securitisation of Africa's wildlife and, importantly, the various discourses used to legitimize such interventions have fallen prey to a dearth of research (Duffy, 2014a; Eckersley, 2007; Humphreys and Smith, 2011; Lunstrum, 2014).

This article seeks to understand why we are seeing such an unprecedented scale of violence in anti-poaching strategies. To explore this question, it shifts the critical lens to the transnational conservation community (TNCC), conceptualized elsewhere as the transnational conservation elite (Holmes, 2011; Sklair, 2001) or the transnational conservation alliance (Ybarra, 2012). Comprised of a diverse range of individuals, international conservation organizations, consultancies, government and private sector actors, united – as the article argues – by a common rhetoric, this community directs, finances and, in some cases, implements such strategies. Situated within the broader field of political ecology, the tools of discourse

[3] H. Clinton, 08/09/2012.
[4] J. Bergenas and M. Medina, 31/01/2014.
[5] B. Ki Moon, 20/05/2013, S/2013/297.

analysis are drawn upon to understand how the war for Africa's elephants has been legitimized by the TNCC and, in turn, how this has been contested by other actors.

The article argues that militarized interventions have been legitimized by the discursive "elevation"[6] of the problem of elephant poaching and the illicit ivory trade from what was once a "niche conservation issue" (WWF, 2014) to a transnational "threat to peace and security"[7] and a "serious crime".[8] Through the TNCC's efforts, the problem has become a 'human' concern, purportedly affecting the security of humanity (and states), rather than just a small conservation audience (cf. Neumann, 2004a). The article argues that this elevation – the 'becoming' – has occurred through the creation of a discursive boundary object, an "object, statement or problem that pulls together a diverse group of actors who participate in its further definition and elaboration" (Timura, 2001: 105; Fujimura, 1992; Star and Griesemer, 1989; Worrall, 2010). The boundary object – in this case, the problem of elephant poaching and the illicit ivory trade – has united the TNCC, facilitated the elevation of the problem and legitimized militarized interventions.

Having introduced the subject and described the data drawn upon, Section two locates the article within the broader academic literature on the relationship between the environment, conservation and violence, paying particular attention to previous analyses of the role of discourse in such dynamics. It continues by exploring the global political and symbolic economy of Africa's nature – the palpable conditions of possibility that today facilitate and provide for the legitimisation of such militarized approaches. Finally, it introduces the TNCC and the theoretical approach. Section three turns to a critical analysis of how the issue has been discursively elevated and militarized interventions legitimized. To do so, it unpacks two storylines at the heart of this boundary object: the ivory-crime-terror linkage and the 'China-Africa complex'. Section four critiques the TNCC's strategies of knowledge production that have informed these storylines and the broader narratives of which they are part, drawing on the case study of the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) poaching activities in Garamba National Park, north-east Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Section five provides a series of concluding remarks.

The arguments presented in this article draw from three sources: a range of policy reports and media articles, published between 2011 and 2014;[9] a series of targeted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, undertaken in late 2013/early 2014;[10] and attendance at the Symposium on International Wildlife Trafficking, a side event to the London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade (LCIWT), in February 2014.[11] The Symposium provided a key interview location, as well as a site for ethnographic observation.

2. Violence, Africa's 'nature' and the transnational conservation community

Multiple research fields attempt to understand the occurrence of violence relating to 'nature', itself a highly contested and politicized concept. For the purpose of this article, nature is understood as a material place external to humanity (i.e. the "natural environment") (Ginn and Demeritt, 2009), a socially constructed category rather than a biophysical reality (Castree, 2005).

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[6] "Elevation" is employed with reference to Neumann's (2004a) earlier work on the legitimization of militarized anti-poaching strategies. In the article, he argued that it was through the discursive elevation of animals into the human moral community that such interventions were legitimized (see discussion below).

[7] B. Ki Moon, 20/05/2013, S/2013/297.

[8] J. Scanlon, 26/09/2013.

[9] All secondary sources were selected according to key words, for example relating to "conflict resource", securitisation, alternative approaches etc., and limited to Africa. The policy reports were obtained online, via interviewees or from the Symposium on International Wildlife Trafficking in February 2014. The 130 media articles analyzed were sourced from print and online media, including online articles, blogs and Facebook. Prior to September 2013, these were obtained via LexisNexis and general Google searches; from September 2013 to April 2014 they were obtained via an electronic daily "elephant news service", the Save the Elephants' Listserv. See: http://www.savetheelephants.org/elephant-news-service.html for more information.

[10] Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted during the Symposium, in Geneva, on the telephone or via Skype. I have also drawn from four interviews transcribed in online media.

[11] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/illegal-wildlife-trade-2014.

Environmental security, political ecologies of war and "conflict resources"

Much of the theoretical work attempting to understand the relationship between the natural environment and violent conflict stems from debates on "environmental security" most closely identified with the work of Thomas Homer-Dixon. A theme common to many environmental security proponents is the militarization of environmental concerns, positing authoritarianism as a logical response to a "deep fear of the poor" (Peluso and Watts, 2001: 7). In general, this approach is rooted in neo-Malthusian understandings of environment-society relations, which view violence as an outcome of natural resource scarcity and largely criminalize poor or marginalized social groups. This, in turn, positions other actors as environmental stewards with "painful choices" to be made, at times involving violence – what Garrett Hardin (1974: 561) articulates as a form of "lifeboat ethics". Indeed, certain opportunistic conservationists taking a pro-militarisation stance would argue that the ends (saving non-human species) justify the means (militarisation and selective human death) (Büscher, 2010).

Ideas on the environment as a source of conflict or security threat also resonate with shifting paradigms in the post-Cold War era, notably the shift from inter-state to intra-state conflict (Peluso and Watts, 2001). In this context, the "deep fear of the poor" was somewhat reconceptualized with emerging neoclassical debates over natural resource abundance (as opposed to scarcity) and greed-driven, irrational belligerents in pursuit of individual gain (see Collier and Hoeffler, 1998, 2004). From a lively literature on the general relationship between natural resources and armed conflict, broad consensus eventually settled on a three-factor model, largely inspired by Gurr (1970) – motivation, opportunity and identity (Arnson and Zartman, 2005; Lujala *et al.*, 2005; Le Billon, 2012). It is from this body of literature that the term "conflict resource" emerged – most commonly associated with "blood diamonds" but, as outlined in the introduction, recently applied to ivory.

More recently, research has reengaged with the geographical dimensions of conflict, paying greater attention to resources' material characteristics – including their distribution, concentration and ease of transportation or "obstructability" (Auty, 2001; Ross, 2003: 62) – rather than focusing solely on socio-political boundaries as a conflict's defining feature (Klare, 2001; Korf, 2011). In the field of political ecology, the notable work of Michael Watts (2004) and Philippe Le Billon (2001, 2004, 2008) has considered the value of various natural resources, their relation to "governable spaces" (Watts, 2004: 53) and the commodity-specific geographies of extraction. Le Billon (2008), focusing on African diamond industries, shows how resource extraction and trade contribute to violence financially (resource as a source of revenue) and discursively (resource-related grievances as a source of rebellion justification). Overall, natural resources[12] (as the unit of analysis) have come to be understood in terms of financing hostilities, as well as shaping motives of violence, the behavior of armed groups and the duration of conflict, not just its onset (Wennmann, 2008).

The closest this body of literature on "need, creed, greed" (Arnson and Zartman, 2005) and geography comes to helping us understand the relationship between violence and conservation is the extent to which ivory (as a natural resource) could be financing armed groups and, hence, is triggering the launch of militarized anti-poaching strategies as a counter-insurgency measure. The focus remains depoliticized, however, resting on a) the environment as a source of conflict and b) a general criminalization of less powerful social groups. The discourses and ideologies underlying violence on behalf of state or non-state conservation actors have largely been overlooked, and their materialization taken for granted as a defense or as a protective measure.

Conservation and violence

Turning back towards the field of focus, the critical conservation literature has gone the furthest towards expanding the chain of explanation on violence relating to the natural environment, widening the net of culpability for actors legitimizing the use of violence.

Historical analyses of conservation practices have unveiled continuity rather than a cleavage with the past. For example, how the cultural influence of the "age of empire" (Hobsbawm, 1987) continues to reverberate into the present, structuring our understanding of and propositions for environmental

[12] Placing elephants and their ivory under the category of natural resources is highly contested. As an important source of tourism income and "natural heritage", many African governments follow such a definition (Garland 2006).

conservation (Neumann, 1997; Saïd, 1994). During this period, African peoples came to be categorized as "morally inferior to Europeans, partly on the basis of what white hunter-conservationists labeled cruel and savage treatment of wild animals" (Neumann, 2004a: 822). As European elites arrived during the nineteenth century, they brought with them deeply cultural ideas of what hunting should entail, by whom it should be conducted and with what methods. Historically, hunting has been widely practised by indigenous populations, not only for trade purposes, but also for livelihood provision, protection and social functions. This came under stark opposition from colonial elites, however, who viewed subsistence hunting as "haphazard, inefficient, wasteful and cruel" (Adams, 2004: 31). Sport or trophy hunting, on the other hand, was – and still is, according to some – deemed acceptable.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new ethos of game preservation in protected areas had emerged and hunters, whether for livelihood purposes or recreation, found themselves transformed into "poachers". Based on what came to be known as the Yellowstone model, protected areas and natural parks demonstrated ideas of pristine nature; a natural wilderness that should be de-peopled and protected from 'irrational', 'rapacious' and 'uncontrollable' local populations. In his analysis of South African national parks, Maano Ramutsindela (2003: 43) further shows how "Africans were prevented from hunting in order to force them to sell their labor under the pretext of protecting wildlife." Dispossessed of their land and/or means of subsistence, they were forced into seeking wage labor: from the early days, conservation policies have been used as a means of expanding capitalist production (Kelly, 2011). Such exclusionary models ignited conflict however, as indigenous communities were forcefully excluded from access to land and resources (Brockington, 2004). These tensions would later be compounded by the rise of international tourism and powerful conservation organisations – early members of the TNCC – as local interests came to be subjugated to those of national and international (often commercial) groups.

In the 1980s, a peak in heavily armed poachers triggered the intensification of militarized conservation practices and the rise of "fortress conservation" (Brockington, 2002). These approaches have been subject much critique (Brockington, 2004; Lunstrum, 2014; Neumann, 1997, 2004; Peluso, 1993; Peluso and Vandergeest, 2011). One branch of research has explored how militarism and associated organizational styles have become deeply implicated in conservation practices. This is no coincidence: historically, there has been a close connection between game parks and military men all over Africa (Ellis, 1994). According to Ellis (1994: 55), ex-soldiers, accustomed to outdoor life and trained in tracking and the use of weapons, "often make good rangers"; moreover, due to the coercion involved in the creation of many protected areas, quasi-military methods have often been adopted to police them. This has led to an infiltration of militarism over time as military skills, or even militaries themselves, have been used to forcibly evict populations to create, maintain or expand parks (Ellis, 1994; Neumann, 2004b; Peluso, 1993).

The recruitment of those with military backgrounds into ranger or park management forces is not limited to the 1980s, as a quick scan through the résumés of many environmental managers shows. Damien Mander, Founder of the International Anti-Poaching Federation, Director of Conservation Guardians and long-time server in the Australian Special Forces in Iraq, is an example. He explains his motivation and approach to training rangers, or his "green army", in southern Africa:

> I had a personal transformation [upon first arrival in Africa]. I realized out there in the bush that there was something much bigger than myself, and it needed protecting … we might be in the African bush here but the principles are no different to the techniques of working around downtown Baghdad.[13]

Many park managers at the Symposium on International Wildlife Trafficking also referred to their military backgrounds in presentations and, recently, a job advert for a manager at the African Parks-run Garamba National Park in DRC requested someone with extensive military experience.[14] Indeed, it is not only those *doing* (i.e. rangers, policemen etc.), but also those *managing* and *directing* conservation work who often come from military backgrounds. Africa's conservation spaces, comprised of an increasingly

[13] D. Mander interviewed by Mike Pflanz, 02/03/2014. See also http://www.iapf.org/en/.

[14] See: http://www.african-parks.org/Blog_102_African+Parks+Seeks+Park+Manager+in+DRC.html. Accessed January 2014.

diverse range of private and public actors, are becoming a post-retirement activity or a second career field. As militarism has penetrated conservation practices, militarized approaches have come to be "taken-for-granted" (Ley, 1977) with few questions asked. While certain individuals within conservation non-governmental organisations (NGOs) contest these, the quantification of rapidly dwindling elephant populations at the hands of terror networks and organized criminal groups displaces such concerns, alternative visions are swept aside and short-term, urgent measures prevail.

Ideology, discourse and legitimisation

Discourse analysis has provided authors within the fields of political ecology and critical geography with a framework to analyse the processes through which ideologies, such as militarism, become operational realities (Lunstrum, 2014; Neumann, 2004a; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Whatmore, 2002; Ybarra, 2012). It provides a 'toolkit' with which the dialectical relationships between discourse (including language – text and talk – and other forms of semiosis, e.g. imagery) and other elements of social practice can be examined (Fairclough, 2003: 205). As a critical approach, it is concerned with understanding how "desires, imaginaries, ideologies and metaphors work to produce textual products that both reflect and shape relations of power", and the prevailing ideologies of specific times and places (Neumann, 2004a: 822). Taken together, these "(textual) products" produce "not only an internally consistent knowledge field, but also the very reality they appear to describe" (Saïd, 1979: 94).

Rod Neumann (1997), for example, connects conservation interventions with the imperial European interventions that preceded them, impelled by ambivalent Western constructions of the 'Other' and the places 'they' inhabit. He explores the discursive process by which conservationists alternatively invoke images of the 'good native' (traditional, nature conserving) or the 'bad native' (modernized, nature destroying) to define legitimate claims to land. Others have shown how crisis narratives are used to drive the protection of nature while at the same time hiding ulterior hegemonic motives (e.g. Rocheleau *et al.*, 1995; Ribot, 1999). In a later article, Neumann (2004a) draws on the concept of "moral community" to examine the differences in intrinsic value and moral standing of human and non-human species. Through discourse analysis, he shows how violence towards poachers is justified by their rhetorical racialization, criminalization and de-humanization, and the simultaneous shifting of boundaries of the human moral community to include non-human species. In particular, his analysis looks at the impacts of three powerful images: the a-moral, brutal poacher/Other, the compassionate and conservation-minded hunter/European, and the intelligent and social wild animal. Section three shows how this European/Other dichotomy has been replaced by that of 'Us'/China. It also shows how, rather than "elevating" non-human species into the human moral community, the need for their protection is instead discursively framed as a 'human' concern using broader threat discourses, such as 'the global war on terror'. Again, these examples illuminate continuity rather than a cleavage with earlier imperial discourses, situating contemporary conservation discourses within broader geopolitical struggles.

In a similar vein to Neumann, Sarah Whatmore (2002) employs the term "ethical community" to examine the assignment of rights within various human and non-human realms; a process she calls "moral extensionism". Megan Ybarra (2012) also uses the tools of discourse analysis to understand violent exclusions in the Guatemalan forest, showing how a "transnational conservation alliance" evokes the violence of scorched earth counterinsurgency and articulations with 'the war on drugs' to legitimize interventions. Finally, Elizabeth Lunstrum (2014) analyses what she terms "green militarization", [15] attempting to explain why this is taking place and how concrete forms of militarisation are authorized in the Kruger Park, South Africa. Combining an analysis of the park's "spatial features" (e.g. its porous borders and expansive territorial reach) with state discourses framing wildlife as part of the nation's rich natural heritage, she argues that the former provide explanatory value "only once they articulate with particular assumptions and values" (2014: 22). She finds a prevalence of militarism among environmentally concerned actors.

Whether we are looking at texts, the spoken word or images, the ideological work of discourse stems from the fragmentation of complex realities – a process of selection of certain fragments and the deletion of

[15] "[…] the use of military and paramilitary personnel, training, technologies and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation efforts" (Lunstrum, 2014: 2).

others – and their reconstruction into a coherent and apparently 'natural' form. Through techniques such as backgrounding and truth claims (Fairclough, 2003; Habermas, 1984), discourse has the capacity to blind its proponents from seeing alternative interpretations and actions (Benjaminsen and Svarstad, 2010). It thus provides an important framework for interpretation of certain issues. Referring specifically to environmental discourses, Peter Brosius (1999: 278) argues that it is "in their constitutiveness, [that] they define various forms of agency, administer silences and prescribe various forms of intervention". The tools of discourse analysis have been employed to render this complex and often implicit process more transparent; to reveal and to challenge what and who have been included and excluded (Hajer, 1995; Dryzek, 1997). By including the questions of "by whom" and "in what context" to the analysis, we can begin to piece together a deeper understanding of the "social life of discourse" (Timura, 2001) and its ideological work.

The tools of discourse analysis are employed in Section three to critically evaluate the process driving elephant poaching and the illegal ivory trade onto the agendas of US and UK policy-makers. First, we turn to the 'bigger picture': what are the wider structures of power and politics that frame our politico-economic, social and cultural realities (Büscher, 2010: 273)?

The global political and symbolic economy of Africa's nature

The way we value, perceive of, construct and produce nature is "embedded in complex webs of relations that string together multiple experiences of expertise, myths, ethics and history" (Moore, 2011: 56). Africa's elephants are no exception: a large, charismatic and majestic species that Western people feel a high degree of familiarity with, thanks to the likes of Disney and continual exposure in popular media. As Elizabeth Garland (2006: 25) affirms, "the ubiquity of African animals in the Euro-American daily life derives itself from the dialectical history of European exploration and colonisation of the continent". Africa's charismatic wildlife, notably elephants and rhino, came to symbolize an "unspoilt Eden" and "wilderness"; concepts, or modes of thought, deeply rooted in colonialism. Vast areas of unspoilt African wilderness were perceived as a vital corrective to the negative effects of industrialisation taking place in the Global North (Moore, 2011); the animals and proximity to them, its antidote.

Over time, Africa's nature in the Western imaginary has become "naturalized" (Garland, 2006: 25). Globalisation has conveyed its dimensions far beyond the shores of Africa or bounds of the European and North American imagination to far-flung corners of the globe (Garland, 2006). In 1989, in the lead up to the international ivory trade ban, the emotional power of such images for the European and American audiences was demonstrated. The preservationist movement was able to create such a valuable and powerful image of the elephant in the Global North that not only eclipsed the value of ivory at the time, but also made the idea of owning ivory socially unacceptable in certain circles (Moore, 2011). The circulation of the imaginary – largely via rhetoric and imagery – was successful in regulating people's relationships with nature (Igoe, 2010; Moore, 2011).

We are witnessing the rise of an increasingly elaborate model of the relationship of Europe to the 'dark continent' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: 88). There is the element of continuity outlined above where Africa is established as a metaphysical stage on which various white crusaders strike moral postures (Achebe, 1978: 9), notably regarding the protection of its prized biodiversity. Yet, globalisation of the imaginary has expanded the concerned audience at the same time as the internet and online advocacy have offered conservation's 'consumers' a stake in distant conditions that were otherwise outside of their control. Jim Igoe (2010: 378) argues that the "stories" circulated "promise escape" from such alienation by "offering connections back to nature and people". However, these stories are "fetishized products", both in their images and the direction of gaze. That is, they appear without reference to the relationships behind them, often treating people as subjects to be administered rather than citizens with inherent political rights (Igoe, 2010: 388). The circulation of romanticized imagery and hyperbolic discourses, their connection to the legitimisation of militarized practices and their questionable underlying assumptions are points that are returned to in Sections three and four.

While the responsibility for protecting Africa's highly valued wildlife, or "common heritage", tends to fall on African shoulders, the terms on which it is undertaken are seldom determined by African people or nations alone (Garland, 2006: 26). Rather, they participate in the provision of wildlife to the world from a global vantage point deeply shaped by the continent's history of colonisation and ideas of nature within Western systems of thought (Garland, 2006). This is by no means a passive participation, however: as

Garland (2006: 61) explains, African governments' willingness to embrace the wildlife cause is in part due to the highly productive character of conservation as a "mode of engagement" with the natural environment.

Nonetheless, and as the LCIWT and the 2014 Symposium showed, conservation is increasingly planned at a global scale (Holmes, 2011). This is a trend that can be located within a broader literature analysing the 'power shift' from state to non-state actors (see Avant, 2004; Tuchman Matthews, 1997). While the notion that power has shifted is contested, non-state actors, including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and other international organizations (IOs) exert significant influence on world environmental politics.

This so-called 'shift' has been occurring within the broader context of neoliberalism. Following general neoliberal principles, the state's role in conservation has been widely reduced, except where it has been redeployed to regulate and facilitate markets (Holmes, 2011). The neoliberalization of conservation (Brockington and Duffy, 2010; Igoe and Brockington, 2006; Holmes, 2012; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Moore, 2011) has altered relationships between states and INGOs, devolving control and influence, rewarding close connections and personal networks, and fostering a two-way exchange of discourse and ideas. This, in turn, reinforces the position of the INGOs (Holmes, 2011). While it is the state alone that can act in the name of sovereignty, it often has to invite other institutions to act and to manage on its behalf in order to realize its policies (Mbembe, 2000). This is particularly the case with national park management, which is either low on the government's priority list, or lacking in logistical and financial capacity. Through such shifts in power, conservation is increasingly linked to a political economy where "value has become ephemeral and located in 'expert' ways of meaning and, more importantly, in their institutional contexts of production" (Graham, 2006: 174).

The TNCC's networks are, therefore, forged in conditions of fragmented state control. These conservation networks are effectively bargains to which outsiders bring money, expertise and technology, and on which officials from impoverished states are highly dependent. These officials in turn bring legitimacy and the power of sovereignty (Mbembe, 2000). While the power balance at this level exists in a dialectical relationship, for local citizens it amounts to what Büscher (2012: 31) terms the "inverted commons": the discursive creation of a common resource whose global ecological, political and symbolic importance trumps their desires and rights. This tactic is cynical, he argues, particularly given how African rights and desires have been and continue to be violated. An example of this is Operation Tokomeza Majangili II in Tanzania – a policy that was initially stopped due to human rights concerns, but has since been re-launched under international pressure to stem the illegal ivory trade.[16]

As outlined above, the symbolic value of, and the West's imagined proximity to (and hence perceived responsibility for), Africa's iconic animals sets tusks apart from other conflict resources 'of the soil', such as diamonds, coltan and timber. The animals' perceived intrinsic value plays a key role in motivating those working for the conservationist cause, as well as in influencing the receptiveness of other (non-conservation) actors traditionally not concerned by biodiversity, such as the human security community. What we are seeing today is the formation of a nexus of exclusionary approaches to conservation led by those who believe in this intrinsic value of nature, directed by militarist ideologies and who, in the context of the roll back of the state and outsourcing of both environmental and security management, are being attributed increasing power. Yet, as the article argues below, it is not an absolute (sovereign-like) power that is facilitating the elevation of the issue, but rather the extent of the "networked-ness" (Holmes, 2011) of the TNCC and the receptiveness of other discursive communities and social worlds.

The transnational conservation community (TNCC)

At the heart of these trends and, indeed, actively driving them, shaping conservation discourse and practices, lies a well-connected and networked elite – the unit of focus. Following George Holmes (2011) and Leslie Sklair (2001), this "transnational conservation community" is defined through ideas of societal networks – in this case, heterogeneous networks of multiple elites, from different countries, working at different scales – where influence is transient, context-specific and predominantly operates through relationships (Holmes, 2011: 2). Actors may be drawn from international conservation NGOs, governmental

[16] East African Business Week, 07/04/2014.

agencies, consultancies or the private sector. Apart from African political elites, most of these groups are headquartered in Europe and North America, and tend to operate transnationally. Their interventions are funded by bilateral and multilateral donors, such as the World Bank and the European Community, various private foundations and, increasingly, corporations from the global North (Dowie, 2009). Since its inception over a century ago, members of the TNCC have mobilized political and financial support, led conservation thinking and produced innovative research. As such, the TNCC's ideological influence is widespread, further "strengthened by claims [on behalf of its members] to be neutral, expert and honest knowledge brokers" (Holmes, 2011: 7).

The TNCC is by no means homogenous, fixed or given, and 'membership' changes with personal relationships, career paths and political or institutional priorities. It is ephemeral and in constant flux, comprised of a group of social actors united and constantly expanding and retracting around a common cause – in this case, elephant poaching and ivory trafficking. Through struggles for power over the terms of debate, solutions and appropriate interveners are continually negotiated and (re-)adjusted. The LCIWT, the Symposium and other events reported in online media are taken as sites of "discourse interaction" (Hajer, 1995; Scoville-Simonds, 2009) – spaces where such struggles over meaning creation, power and control can be observed and the workings of the TNCC analyzed.

Indeed, these events provide a glimpse into one instance of the TNCC. Both the LCIWT and Symposium were small affairs: the former was attended by forty-six governing delegates; the latter by around two hundred and fifty conservation professionals, members of royalty, heads of state and other key stakeholders. Both were dominated by 'experts' from the US and UK, and a glance around the room at the Symposium revealed a highly skewed demographic. As the event progressed, a divide between those promoting militarized approaches and those in favor of more community-based approaches to conservation became evident. This divide was largely along racial lines, illuminating the continuity with conservation's colonial history outlined in Section two. Indeed, it is not the relations of the White park managers that are placed on the frontline in the fight against poachers. As one Namibian attendee stated, "conservation's 'evangelists' seemingly assume that wildlife exists in the sky". The Conservation Initiative on Human Rights [17] was not once mentioned at the conference, despite many of the organizations present being signatories (Duffy, 2014b).

For the purpose of this article, the TNCC is conceptualized as a "discourse coalition"… "a group of actors that, in the context of an identifiable set of practices, shares the usage of a particular set of storylines over a particular period of time" (Hajer, 1993: 47). Storylines act to create social order within a given field (Hajer, 1995). They are devices through which actors are hailed, or "interpellated", into subject positions (Althusser, 1972) and ideas of blame, responsibility and urgency are attributed (Gelcich *et al.*, 2005; Hajer, 1995). They become a vehicle for transmitting and making accessible a framework of meanings out of a set of events or experiences, serving to establish claims, strengthen the legibility of such claims, validate actions and/or situate these claims within wider societal discourses (Gelcich *et al.*, 2005).

In the following Sections, two "storylines" inherent in the TNCC's discourse on the subject are identified and analysed: (a) the ivory-terror-crime linkage – a discourse explicitly connecting the ivory trade to terrorism and transnational organized crime; and (b) a broader, commonly known threat discourse on the 'China-Africa complex.' Taken together, these two storylines form part of a broader cause-perpetrator-solution narrative (Igoe, 2010) – a trichotomy that typically comprises the "threat-defence" modalities inherent in other securitizing discourses (Wæver, 1993).

In order to understand how and why militarized strategies are presented as legitimate "solutions", the article focuses on the "cause-perpetrator" components of this trichotomy. The following Section critically analyses the production and reproduction of the mainstream narrative through the interpellation of certain identities into subject positions of perpetrator, expert and (legitimate) saviour/intervener. It argues that it is 1) through the discursive construction of a boundary object, that 2) the topic was elevated to such a level, 3) calls for militarisation have been amplified, and 4) policies implemented, as two distinct social worlds (Strauss, 1982) – that of the conservation and the security communities – historically opposed in their positions on the use of force (Avant, 2004), are united in the TNCC's discourse coalition. Moreover, 5) that

[17] See: http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/social_policy/sp_themes_hrande/scpl_cihr/.

it is along the multiple boundaries of this boundary object and the dialectical process of negotiation in problem-definition that militarized solutions have been legitimized.

3. A just war? Strategies of legitimization

From a "conflict resource" to a terror threat: explicit strategies of legitimisation

During 2012 and 2013, headlines the world over reflected the response to investigations connecting the ivory trade to regional militia groups and terror organisations.[18] Melissa Groo and Iain Douglas-Hamilton of Save the Elephants refer in particular to Jeffrey Gettleman's article in the *New York Times*, "Elephants die in epic frenzy as ivory fuels wars and profits",[19] and Bryan Christy's blog in the *National Geographic* (2012), "Blood Ivory",[20] as "turning points" for public understanding and media attention on the issue (Save the Elephants, 2014).

These findings triggered a cascade effect within the conservation organisations, IOs, such as the UN and CITES, and among key figureheads of the US and UK security communities. In 2012, a series of hearings were held by John Kerry, US Secretary of State, before the US Senate; the UN Security Council (UNSC) called for a joint investigation with the African Union into the alleged involvement of the Lord's Resistance Army in poaching; and, by the end of the year, Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State and political figurehead, had "upgraded" poaching and the illegal ivory trade to a "national security threat." By mid-2013, John Scanlon, Secretary-General of CITES, led calls for the illegal ivory trade to be treated judicially as a "serious crime"; in a report to the UNSC, Ban Ki Moon referred to poaching as a "grave menace to peace and security"; and conservationists were invited to a high-level briefing at the White House. Shortly after, President Obama announced a US$10 million initiative, the Clinton Initiative was launched and, by December, the UK government had committed £10 million (US$16.2 million) to the cause. These events led up to the LCIWT and Symposium. The alleged link to non-state armed groups has garnered the illegal ivory trade and elephant poaching unprecedented attention, both at a high political level and in the media.

Since 2011, the common narrative on the perpetrators among the conservation community and media has shifted: poachers are "no longer some impoverished farmer with a rusty shotgun" (WWF, 2014: 3) encroaching on protected lands and wildlife reserves for the dual prize of bush meat and a pair of tusks; "new players have entered the bloody business" and they are "as hard as nails" (Kipng'etich, 2012).[21] They are members of "highly organized gangs" (WWF, 2014: 3), "heavily armed African rebels and militias … [and] even terrorist elements" (Cardamone, 2012); they are members of Uganda's infamous LRA, Sudan's Janjaweed and Somalia's al-Shabab, carrying "automatic weapons, GPS systems and [with] the best transport" (WWF, 2014: 3). Moreover, they have trade links that stretch out to transnational organized crime groups across the globe.

It is possible to illuminate some common discursive trends by using a couple of examples. A by-line of one article reads: "The WWF has warned the UN that the illegal ivory trade threatens African governments as rebel forces use the proceeds to fund their wars."[22] Jim Leape, Director-General of WWF International, proclaims in the article that "this is about much more than wildlife … this crisis is threatening the very stability of governments. It has become a profound threat to national security". The WWF is presented as an advisor to the UN and taken to be a "voice of authority" (Van Leeuwen, 2008). However, in this case, the WWF is advising not on conservation issues and biodiversity, but on security threats. It has been positioned as a security advisor, making an affirmative statement about the domestic affairs of, and

[18] For example, "Elephant killings surge as tusks fund terror" (CNN, 20/06/2013), "Poachers funding Al-Shabab, reveals KWS" (Wildlife Direct, 03/12/2013) and "White Gold of Jihad" (New York Times, 30/09/2013).
[19] 03/09/2012.
[20] 10/2012.
[21] Julius Kipng'etich of KWS cited in Der Spiegel, 13/09/2012.
[22] United Press International, 19/12/2012.

"threats" to, African governments; Leape is stepping out of his realm of expertise – conservation – and into another. Similar examples are commonplace in the media and policy reports on the subject.[23]

During key events, such as the US Senate hearings on "Ivory and Insecurity" in 2012,[24] it is possible to trace a more direct path of causality from the truth claims (Habermas, 1984) of organisations such as WWF, Save the Elephants, CITES and Global Financial Integrity, to the elevation of ivory trafficking to a "national security threat". In these sites of discourse interaction, leading conservation actors, like John Scanlon and Iain Douglas-Hamilton, are positioned as "translators" between two different social worlds (Strauss, 1982): the conservation and the security communities. Their translation labor is undertaken through framing the overarching (cause-perpetrator-solution) narrative and its implications in a way that is not only *consistent* among an otherwise fairly diverse and competitive group of organisations, but also in a language that is *coherent* for (and, in some circumstances, even *convergent* with the objectives of) their target audience – US security policy makers. This strategic shift to a securitizing discourse has been made explicit (Charrett, 2009): Will Travers (CEO of Born Free), for example, states that:

> …we need to change the narrative to make it more relevant … there is money, interest and priorities out there … [we] need to make it about crime, poverty, livelihoods etc., not about animals.[25]

This has been undertaken through 1) framing the perpetrators as militiamen, terrorists and/or members of a transnational criminal network, and 2) referring to 'root causes' that commonly feature elsewhere in the foreign policy and development objectives of the countries in question. For example, by highlighting how poaching (as 'resource plunder') destabilizes national economies, robbing them of valuable natural resources; [26] how it undermines good governance, fuels and thrives on corruption, and undermines fragile legal systems; and how it disrupts local livelihoods, is symptomatic of poverty and undermines efforts to promote sustainable development.[27] Poaching has been framed as not only a conservation issue, but as a threat to security, national economies, good governance and poverty alleviation efforts.

During these phases of discourse interaction, leading figures from the target audience receive, interact with, negotiate and, in turn, reproduce the conservationists' discourse (Scoville-Simonds, 2009). For example, in March 2014, after two years of campaigning efforts, John Kerry is quoted repeating the conservationists' discourse almost word-for-word.[28] Similarly, Hillary Clinton has stated that poaching is "more than just a 'cause célèbre': it is critical in the fight against terrorism"; it is "an ecological and moral disaster. But that is not all. Illegal poaching and trafficking also represent an economic and security challenge in Africa and beyond".[29] In January 2014, Johan Bergenas and Monica Medina, former special assistant to the US Defence Secretary, wrote:

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[23] For example, in 2013, IFAW stated that "in the post-9/11 world … the illegal wildlife trade is no longer only a conservation or animal welfare issue. It is a national and global security issue and must be addressed accordingly" (IFAW, 2013: 7); in 2014, the Prince of Wales stated that ivory trafficking has "become a grave threat not only to wildlife and the people who protect them, but also to security of so many nations … [it is] not just an environmental crisis" in The Guardian, 13/02/2014.

[24] US Senate Hearings, 05/2012.

[25] Quoted during a QandA discussion after a presentation at the London Symposium, author's notes, February 2014.

[26] J. Scanlon, Secretary-General of CITES, for example, stated that poaching "poses a serious threat to the stability and economy of affected countries, and robs them of their natural resources" (The Guardian, 01.03.2013).

[27] For example, T. Cardamone (2012) referred to "poverty, ethnic rivalry, terrorism and civil war", and W. Hague, UK Foreign Minister, stated it is "a global criminal industry, ranked alongside drugs, arms and people trafficking. It drives corruption and insecurity, and undermines efforts to cut poverty and promote sustainable development, particularly in African countries" (The Guardian, 13/02/2014).

[28] J. Kerry, E. Holder and S. Jewell stated: "the crime continues to draw in even more nefarious criminal elements, including some groups with links to terrorism and rogue military personnel … undermining rule of law … breeding official corruption" in the National Geographic, 03/03/2014.

[29] H.R. Clinton and C. Clinton, 23/02/2014.

> There is a new threat in the terrorist hotbed of Africa … Poaching of endangered elephants and rhinos has become a conservation crisis, and profits from wildlife crimes are filling the coffers of terrorist orgs. The twin crimes should be cause for alarm for military leaders, not just conservation groups".[30]

In the UK, the key spokespeople external to the conservation community have not been security officials, but members of royalty and the foreign office.

Through these phases of discourse interaction between key spokespeople from the two different social worlds, a 'critical mass' of allies, or a "grand alliance of conservationists and politicians" (Douglas-Hamilton, 2014),[31] has been formed and united around the cause. In this context, the cause – elephant poaching and ivory trafficking – has become a "boundary object", an object or idea that bridges the boundary between multiple social worlds requiring some form of "translation" process to occur (Callon; 1986; Star and Griesemer, 1989; Timura, 2001). As Timura (2001: 105) argues, it is the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept that enables different social worlds to converge on its boundaries. In this case, the discursive construction of the problem's multi-faceted nature has drawn in actors from various policy communities, including those from human security, development and foreign affairs, enabling each to rationalize it according to their respective knowledge fields.

The explicit elevation of the issue through the formation of a boundary object can be further supported by another, more implicit narrative – that of the China-Africa complex. In this case, the claims are less explicit and discourse instead works to facilitate the target audience's "rationalization" (Van Leeuwen, 2008) of the problem, locating it within broader fields of understanding.

The China-Africa complex and implicit strategies of legitimization: creating the villain

China and the Chinese are widely prevalent in all sources discussing ivory trade dynamics, occupying two, largely pejorative, subject positions with respect to "cause" and "perpetrator." Journalist Dean Reed summarizes the general storyline:

> Two aspects of China's growing economy fuel the practice [of poaching and the illegal ivory trade]. At home, more Chinese have money and can buy ivory, previously purchased by only the wealthy. Abroad, China's massive entry into Africa [with construction of public infrastructure by Chinese workers] has created a network of smugglers with easy access to poachers.[32]

The first major implication of China and the Chinese is as the primary source of demand. In general, the story goes: consumer demand in China is high – ivory is treasured for its beauty, religious symbolism and as an investment asset or status symbol for a burgeoning middle class, particularly where a lack of social stigma exists surrounding ivory purchases and/or possession. More recently, references to a "simple lack of consumer awareness" are prevalent.[33] The second major implication of the Chinese comes in reference to China-Africa relations, particularly in the context of increasing investment in natural resource exploitation. Such narratives on the Chinese as perpetrators do not label them directly as poachers, but as part of the networks that transport ivory from African range states to Asia. The China referent is evident throughout policy documents, testimonies, media articles and in headlines.[34]

It is important to clarify at this point that the aim of this article is not to question the size of the illegal ivory market in China (not least because the country is home to one fifth of the world's population),

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[30] J. Bergenas and M. Medina, 01/02/2014.
[31] I. Douglas-Hamilton (2014) in "Save the Elephants' Annual Report 2013", Nairobi: Save the Elephants, p24.
[32] Huffington Post, 28/03/2014.
[33] For example, a recent report of the US Embassy in London, "Combating Wildlife Trafficking: Respect and Protect".
[34] "London Wildlife Crime Summit: All eyes on China" (The Guardian, 13/02/2014); "From elephant's mouths, an illicit trail to China" (New York Times, 01/03/2013) and "China, through its negligence, is potentially indirectly helping to fund international terrorism" (Ian Saunders in Testimony to US Senate, November 2012).

nor to contest evidence for the implication of Chinese nationals in ivory exports from Africa. Rather, it is to unpack a core, and generally oversimplified, component to the threat-defense narratives that, taken together, work to legitimize violent interventions over others. In doing so, it aims to critically assess the knowledge produced on the subject given the (not insignificant) unknowns and to illuminate the broader geopolitical struggles in which the subject is embedded.

Independent research is slowly emerging from China contesting such "finger-pointing" discourses, arguing that they are inaccurate, biased and ahistorical (De Gabriel, 2014; Milliken, 2014; Phu, 2014).[35] Tom Milliken's research into understanding historical ivory demand dynamics and economic imperatives, for example, underlines how "what we are seeing today is simply history repeating itself … not a one-off event".[36] His work reveals the existence of historical cycles of 'boom and bust', closely correlated with GDP per capita growth and middle class expansion over time. This is supported in the academic literature by the work of Chaiklin (2010) and Milner-Gulland and Beddington (1993). Chaiklin's research traces the place of the ivory commodity in human history, from prehistoric times to the 19th century, locating its origins in the West. She explains, for example, how, with the mechanized production of combs, cutlery handles, billiard balls, piano keys and ornaments etc., ivory came to be known as "the plastic of the 19th century" (Chaiklin, 2010: 540). This ivory was largely sourced via European settlers' sport-hunting activities in east and southern Africa (Milner-Gulland and Beddington, 1993) that, in comparison to local peoples' subsistence hunting, were deemed legitimate practices (as explored in Section two).

Tom Milliken, Eric Phu and Grace de Gabriel (who presented at the Symposium on China's social media and the online ivory trade) all emphasize the persistence of significant gaps in our knowledge on demand dynamics. De Gabriel explained, for example, that "the sole reason we are aware that China is such a destination is thanks to the success of Chinese customs and their border enforcement efforts in making large-scale seizures". Indeed, international monitoring bodies, the media and CITES rely on data which is only as robust as the country's seizures and reporting capacities; where customs forces are weak, corrupt or under-resourced, trafficked ivory goes undetected or unreported. Such knowledge gaps are rarely acknowledged in policy or media reports. Where they are made explicit, they are quickly countered by a series of truth claims (Habermas, 1984). An example of this is in the US National Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Trafficking (2014) where the US is acknowledged to be "among the world's major consumer markets", but no further explanation or quantification is given. Instead, attention is redirected towards China, the Africa-Asia supply chain visualized and blame is attributed to a "rapidly expanding Chinese middle class". Reference to re-exports to end-users in the US, Europe and Yemen, or primary ivory exports from Africa to the US, are absent. The exclusion of other major sites of demand in the same paragraph as what appears in comparison as elaborate detail on Chinese demand is a discursive technique that, through a guise of authority, deflects attention away from other culprits (Fairclough, 2003).

The oversimplified, ahistorical discourse and lack of transparency regarding the significant knowledge gaps on illicit ivory trade dynamics point towards its embeddedness within broader discourses on China's "resource plunders" in Africa;[37] a discourse that, in turn, is located within broader geopolitical concerns in the US and Europe regarding China's challenge to Western hegemony. Such threat discourses on the 'China-Africa complex' are associated with China's rapid economic development over the past decade, increasing diplomatic ties with, and investment in, a range of African countries, "under the aegis of South-South cooperation" (Hofmann *et al.*, 2007: 76). The standard canon by which China's relations in Africa tend to be presented in Western media and policy reports is that of economic exploitation, unequal trade relations and lack of respect for human rights standards. Its general principle of non-interference is presented as an irresponsible, 'see no evil' approach (Tull, 2008: 5) that promotes bad governance and corruption (Hirvensalo, 2012: 64).

Again, taking a couple of examples it is possible to explore some broader discursive trends. One article states: "conservationists say tens of thousands of Chinese working on development projects in Africa, as Beijing acquires energy and mineral resources across the continent, are being used in ivory smuggling

[35] Presentations given by Eric Phu, Grace de Gabriel and Tom Milliken at the London Symposium, February 2014, author's notes.
[36] Presentation given by Tom Milliken on behalf of TRAFFIC at the London Symposium, February 2014, author's notes.
[37] For example, see ICG, 2012; *The Economist*, 2013; *The Global Researcher*, 2008.

operations".[38] In this phrase, "conservationists" are again taken as the "voice of authority" (Van Leeuwen, 2008). This indeterminate group of 'experts' (who may or may not have access to robust data from African customs authorities) is placed in direct contrast with an unknown but substantial number of Chinese. The journalist goes on to reveal that the said "Chinese" are development professionals. This is followed by the phrase "as Beijing acquires energy and mineral resources across the continent." This gives the reader some context, but the direct connection made between development professionals and resource investment is tenuous, revealing the underlying assumption that China's politicians ("Beijing") are sending nationals to Africa to "do" development work alongside, in compensation for, or as part of the deal for natural resource extraction contracts. Though this remains implicit, it is clear that there is an underlying allusion to Beijing's soft power influence in Africa, exercised via large numbers of citizens. This locates the article within broader discourses on the "China-in-Africa threat" as an emerging donor and with reference to its "resource grabs" (Hofmann *et al.*, 2007; Tull, 2008).

Adopting a similar tone, Will Travers (CEO of the Born Free Foundation) states how:

> Africa and its wildlife are being hammered by trade to the Far East and China, in particular […] but now the Chinese have the opportunity […] to remove some of the ongoing and relentless criticism they face in relation to Africa and Africa's natural resources … to show international leadership and the respect that Africa is due.[39]

Travers, a British born, Africa-focused conservationist, is another to lay the blame squarely at China's door. The rhetorical strength of his statement lies in his personification of Africa – the way he portrays the continent as an entity demanding respect – as well as his normative claim regarding how China should "show international leadership." Such discourse is representative of the double standards inherent in much of the TNCC's discourses on China's activities in Africa: through such statements, Travers lays aside the colonial ghosts of the past and reveals an inherent paternalism in his implicit claims that a) 'we'[40] (i.e. the West and his social field, the TNCC), know best how "Africa" should be treated, and that b) it is his place, despite being a non-"African", to make this call. In the juxtaposition between his authoritative voice as a Western conservationist and the Chinese's bad behavior is an inherent interpellation (Althusser, 1972) of the TNCC into the position of Africa's patriarchal protector in the face of a grand menace coming from the Orient.

While the implication of China and the Chinese is not framed explicitly to legitimize militarized interventions, it works implicitly to appeal to a broader concerned audience by making reference to a commonly perceived "threat". It serves not as an explicit call from the TNCC, but instead it is crucial in forming a narrative that resonates at multiple levels with its target audience. In this way, the rationalizing capacity of the audience is enhanced (Van Leeuwen, 2008), enabling them to make sense of the otherwise confusing dynamics of the illicit ivory trade within their field of reason.

Overall, through discursive techniques, such as the positioning of expert voices, framing, deletion and truth claims, two core storylines have been constructed – the ivory-terror-crime linkage and the China-Africa complex. These narratives create the perception of a common threat(s) through interpellating (as opposed to intersubjectively positioning) certain actors into positions within a broader "friend-enemy logic" (Williams, 2003: 516). Revisiting Neumann's work (2004a), it is possible to observe a notable shift in the identity construction inherent in the cause-perpetrator narratives: the dichotomy of 'Other/European' has been replaced by that of 'Us/China'. Together, these narratives comprise a discursive boundary object that has facilitated the elevation of what has typically been "a niche conservation issue" (WWF, 2014) to a "national security threat" and a "serious crime."

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[38] United Press International, 19/12/2012.

[39] The Independent, 04/06/2014.

[40] Travers categorizes his subjects by country and continent. "We" is hence deemed suitable for use here, due to the author's identity as a British citizen and self-identified membership of 'the West'.

4. Assumptions and contestation

The threat narratives explored above rely upon socially constructed identities and the interpellation of social actors into certain subject positions, such as poacher, ranger and eco-guard, that tend to both fall within and propagate a "friend-enemy logic" (Williams, 2003: 516). It is upon such logic that militarized interventions are legitimized and, eventually naturalized; as Neumann (2004a: 827) highlights, "these sorts of representations make it easier not only to declare war . . . but also to declare a *just* war" (emphasis added). The following Sections show, however, that this knowledge is based on questionable foundations. Such interventions are 'denaturalized' by bringing to the fore alternative voices and information sources that have otherwise been silenced by the mainstream discourse.

In order to do so, Section four unveils and critiques the "doxa" of the TNCC: the principles, values and tacitly held assumptions that inform a particular definition of a situation and organize its surrounding social field (Bourdieu, 1998). Drawing on the case of the LRA's poaching activities in Garamba National Park, focus is directed towards three such assumptions: 1) that it is possible to identify and label a "poacher"; 2) that the state in question has the legitimacy and political will to manage its resources in the first place; and third, that it has the capacity to maintain its monopoly over the legitimate use of force (Tilly, 1985).

Contesting the "LRA-only" approach in Garamba National Park, DRC: assumption one

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was one of the first militia groups alleged to be implicated in elephant poaching. This was sparked by a report, "Kony's Ivory" (June 2013), by the NGO, the Enough Project, which was subsequently followed by a variety of articles and reports detailing how "tusks fund terror" as "the LRA gains vital resources through its participation in the illegal ivory trade" in Garamba National Park, north-eastern DRC (Titeca, 2013b). The Enough Project's report was initiated following interviews with a number of LRA escapees earlier that year who had made reference to Joseph Kony's poaching operations.

This is relatively unsurprising news: ivory is a low risk, highly profitable, unobstructable resource (Ross, 2003: 62) that is in relative abundance in Garamba, a regional "storehouse" (Lombard, 2012) and the LRA's safe haven since 2005/early 2006 (LRA Crisis Tracker, 2014; HSBA, 2013; Titeca, 2013b). Once supported by Sudan, the group's financing lines and source of weapons have since been dissipating, particularly given the renewed offensive of the Ugandan army and intervention from the US (Titeca, 2013b). This has had implications for the group's mobility, as well as its tactics and motivation to poach (Bevan, 2004; Titeca, 2013b). One interviewee (December 2013) explained how, prior to 2010, the group hunted opportunistically, but never under a direct order from Kony. However, this later changed with its forced mobility and poaching became a deliberate and highly organized strategy.

Yet, as Kristof Titeca (2013a) argues, narrowing down the ivory problem in and around Garamba to the LRA is a problematic oversimplification. Years of research in the region has informed his conclusion that the LRA is a relatively minor actor in poaching and cannot explain its strong intensification in the park since 2011/2012. Rather, a range of actors are active, including: local communities who have always poached for subsistence purposes (including skins and bushmeat, as well as ivory) and are barely embedded in broader ivory trade networks; South Sudanese armed groups; individual Congolese soldiers stationed in Garamba and members of the Ugandan military who take the opportunity to poach, particularly given their ease of access to weapons and ammunition; and professional poachers from as far afield as Chad and Libya. He argues – a claim also supported by other local sources[41] – that the current scale of elephant poaching in Garamba is not directly attributable to the LRA who poach and trade less than other actors, but to the general militarization of the area (albeit in part due to the group's presence) (Titeca, 2013b). Framing the issue by taking an "LRA-only approach" creates problems for the way in which the ivory poaching problem is addressed, not sufficiently engaging with other poaching actors who are either not detected or largely left out of the analysis.

Broader analyses of the Central African political economy help to conceptualize such findings (Latham *et al.*, 2001; Le Billon, 2008; Nordstrom, 2004; Taylor, 2003). Robert Latham *et al.* (2001) refer to

[41] Interviews conducted by author, January-March 2014.

"the regional and transnational forces that crisscross Central Africa", *facilitated by* the "region-wide state of disorder and the *modus operandi* this offers to a variety of actors operating within areas where the formal state is in process of eclipse" (Taylor, 2003: 51). These regional networks simultaneously *facilitate* the emergence of "spaces of opportunity" (Le Billon, 2008: 361) in what is "essentially a kleptocratic political economy" (Taylor, 2003: 45). They offer the conditions of access to markets that bring together a constellation of predatory actors, each seeking to exploit and extract rents from Central Africa's resources and/or construct chains of influence and control in the region (Le Billon, 2008). These spatial interconnections, or "shadow networks" (Nordstrom, 2004: 218), between actors at local, regional and international scales – structures and relations that emerge in the intersection of social phenomena, varying in range as well as form – enable the circulation of commodities and increase the "exploitability" of the resource (Silberberg and Ellis, 2007).

Assumption two: the existence of political will and government legitimacy

In the case of Central Africa, the supply of weapons to local forces to pursue anti-poaching objectives apparently overlooks these dynamics of the regional political economy. It also indicates the assumption that the political will and legitimacy exists within the state to manage the resource in the first place. However, as the case of the LRA shows, local government forces are also often complicit. This is not limited to range states: the seizure and subsequent release in early 2014 of a batch of ivory by the Ugandan authorities in transit from DRC suggests that corruption, impunity and weak law enforcement span the length of the ivory commodity chain.[42] These dynamics are not limited to Central Africa. Dr. Leakey, former head of the Kenya Wildlife Service, has warned that there is "a collusion of corrupt networks. Poachers, police, wardens, politicians, and businessmen, and KRA [Kenya Revenue Authority] officials are part of the cartel threatening to wipe out Africa's elephants." [43] Pratik Patel, Chief Executive of the African Wildlife Trust, further estimates that corruption rates are high among rangers in East Africa, revealing how:

> …a lot of the shooters are in the military. They have armor piercing bullets and government vehicles. They can travel without being stopped. The rangers are paid to look the other way and give information on patrols.[44]

In such contexts, governments may be obliging to external pressure to militarize, simply to dispel pressure from CITES and the international community. By defining a specific site of intervention against a specific set of perpetrators, militarized interventions provide a scapegoat insofar as they deflect the blame away from corrupt officials and other key perpetrators towards generally poorer and more marginalized social groups. Shoot-to-kill policies and other such explicit, extreme and public commitments to anti-poaching efforts could arguably be seen as a fig leaf, therefore, for the ongoing illegal trade in ivory servicing the economic and political interests of the government.

As the above has shown, the construction of friend-enemy binaries used to legitimize violent interventions is, therefore, based upon superficial categories of the Western imaginary (Neumann, 1997): in such contexts, "friends" may also be accomplices; "enemies", misjudged. Such "easy labels" appear simplistic – arbitrary when employed by the TNCC and suspicious when used by regional governments, potentially employed to entice in external help or to demonize poachers as "outsiders" or "rapacious foreigners" (Lombard, 2012: 132).

Assumption three: the capacity to maintain a monopoly over the use of force

Such examples indicate the third assumption upon which support for the implementation of such violent strategies is based: that the state has capacity to maintain its monopoly over the legitimate use of force (Tilly, 1985). Militarized park management strategies inevitably lead to a proliferation of increasingly sophisticated arms and military apparatus. As Raymond Bonner revealed shortly after the shoot-to-kill

[42] Reported by Paula Kahumbu in The Guardian, 26/02/2014.
[43] P. Wafula and K. Some, in The Standard (Kenya), 03/02/2013.
[44] The Guardian, 27/.03/2013.

policies were first introduced, "just about every affected country asked for and received more rifles, bullets, helicopters, vehicles and equipment to conduct their war [on poaching]" (Bonner, 1992: 19). Yet, important questions that appear to be largely ignored include: will this apparatus remain under state control? If it does, will it be used strictly for its declared purpose? Who is being armed, where and when? And how are these arms being used? In the case of shoot-to-kill policies, where convicts are denied the right to a free and fair trial, the space for lethal error is enormous. Yet, as Nancy Peluso (1993: 208) highlighted, "…that these aircraft, radios, vehicles, night-goggles and other anti-poaching equipment might serve another purpose besides conservation … has been a secondary consideration".

Producing "knowledge" or selling success?

Returning to the case of the LRA, not only are the TNCC's narratives based upon questionable foundations, but alternative voices and sources of information are actively silenced. One interviewee (February 2014) recounted his experience as a temporary consultant for two large international organisations, employed to write a background report on the LRA's activities in Garamba. The interviewee suggested that they dilute the "LRA-only" lens, reference other culprits involved and look at the bigger picture, but received a negative response and demands to "show that LRA are the worst group on earth." He nonetheless stuck to his word and submitted a draft report. On receipt of the comments on the draft, he observed that "it had been butchered" and that "they had manipulated the figures." He consequently retracted himself from the team.

The interviewee's analysis of such events returns to the fact that the sudden attention directed on the LRA's poaching activities (despite having been conducted since the group's arrival in Garamba in 2005/early 2006) coincides with the otherwise dramatic decline in the group's activities, "which makes it much harder to attract attention to the LRA crisis." The aforementioned organisations were born out of, and have orientated their mandate around, this slowly dissipating group, which poses potentially grave questions for their survival. The interviewee argues that "the link with ivory makes the movement more marketable again, as … [it] appeals to a broader audience …." Moreover, a "messy image" is much harder to sell to the wider public (cf. Büscher, 2014) and much harder to intervene in. Indeed, the threat is no longer a clearly definable 'evil' outsider, but a multiple threat consisting of both 'insiders' (e.g. individual Congolese soldiers, local bandits, etc.) and 'outsiders' (e.g. the LRA, foreign bandits, different groups of poachers, etc.). This supports the interviewee's conclusion that "these reports are primarily concerned with trying to bring the LRA back into the spotlight in a context where its reduced violence makes it much harder to do so." This interviewee is not alone in such an analysis of the situation: another former-LRA abductee and head of a Lira-based NGO explained how "the LRA are doing atrocious stuff there, but in the context of poaching they're being used as an excuse" (Interview, January 2014). Referring to the 'Kony's Ivory' report, he stated that it was "just seen as the West reporting on what they want, but hiding the realities of what's going on."

These examples are symptoms of how the information used for the production of 'expert knowledge' is increasingly alienated from its original source. It is acquired via researchers based elsewhere (in the case of the LRA, in regional capitals, such as Kampala and Nairobi), tasked with disaggregating and re-aggregating complex realities into textual units comprehensible for, and appealing to, a wide variety of audiences. These researchers are employed by large international NGOs (often headquartered abroad), who do not necessarily have interest in presenting the issue in all its complexity for campaigning purposes. This example does not directly implicate conservationists, as it is NGOs such as the Enough Project, Resolve and Invisible Children that commissioned the research; however, it is another example of how the TNCC has expanded to include security-driven actors; a group united around one common, symbolically powerful and publically appealing cause – elephant poaching and ivory trafficking.

Despite the contested foundations of such research, these findings tend to be referenced and cross-referenced time and time again in policy reports and media the world over. In reality, there has been a handful of investigations conducted on the link between non-state armed groups and *poaching*, and another on the link between individual criminals comprising part of a larger network and *ivory trafficking*. Yet, statements such as "heavily armed militia men" suggest this is an aggregation of data from a limited pool of information from different sources and locations: where it is militia men that are poaching, such as the Janjaweed or the LRA poaching in Garamba and Central African Republic, they are rarely "heavily armed" as the groups do not have such resources (Bevan, 2004; HSBA, 2013). In countries and regions where

poachers *are* heavily armed, such as Kenya and South Africa, they tend not to be militiamen, but individuals who have access to sophisticated weapons and equipment. These claims rarely make reference to the specific country, region or time-period to which their findings apply. While it is perhaps unavoidable, the shift in knowledge production away from local sources into 'expert' hands has led to a blurring of the facts. What follows is that Africa tends to be treated as a country, not a continent, with a handful of 'mega-threats' (i.e. terror groups, a TNOC and, to a lesser extent, China) superimposed onto many contexts and vast regions.

5. Conclusion

This article has shifted the critical lens onto the TNCC conceptualized, according to social networks theory, as a discursive coalition that 'comes to life' and is materially observable through certain nodes; in this case, elephant poaching (cf. Holmes, 2011; Sklair, 2001). It has argued that we are seeing unprecedented levels of conservation-related violence, through the proliferation of militarized anti-poaching strategies, due to the discursive elevation of the issue to a human security threat. Revisiting Neumann (2004a), this has been done not through the humanization of wild animals and the denigration of poachers, but through placing emphasis on the threat to humanity in general. Through the 'elevation' of the issue to a "national security threat" and "serious crime", the TNCC has played an active role in the securitisation of the anti-poaching struggle. It is through this elevation and the rallying of allies around a 'just' cause that the "war" for Africa's elephants has been legitimized and a nexus of exclusionary approaches to conservation has formed.

This has been conceptualized through the notion of a boundary object, an ephemeral discursive formation of the TNCC that has emerged around the issue of elephant poaching and the illegal ivory trade. This boundary object has been formed via two storylines, or at the heart of a series of concentric circles of threat discourses: at the center is the ivory-terror-crime linkage that appeals directly to security communities; this, in turn, is embedded within a more general China-Africa threat discourse that appeals to broader (generally Western) audiences. While the former narrative works to explicitly legitimize interventions, the latter is based on more implicit discursive techniques. This boundary object appeals to diverse communities (e.g. security and development) and facilitates their rationalisation (Van Leeuwen, 2008) of the issue according to their field of knowledge and concerns. As these communities converge on its borders around a common cause-perpetrator-solution narrative (Timura, 2001), militarized calls have been amplified and policy communities mobilized to act.

Yet, drawing on the case study of the LRA's poaching activities in Garamba National Park and research emerging from China, the article has argued that the formation of the boundary object and, hence, the legitimization of the "war", is based on a series of untenable assumptions. Mainstream analyses are oversimplified, ahistorical and depoliticized, excluding many voices of those closest to the issue and, indeed, most affected by it. As shown in Section three, where knowledge gaps, data ambiguities or information uncertainties exist, they are rarely explicitly reported as such. Instead, a series of short, sharp, oversimplified and frequently inaccurate statements are presented as widely known (and, indeed, widely referenced) 'truths.' Where "alternative utterances" (Charrett, 2009: 30) emerge attempting to nuance the TNCC's discourse and question the logic behind militarized, *mano dura* approaches, they are brushed aside or reframed in ways that better suit mandates. This process of knowledge production within the TNCC has come to be 'taken-for-granted' and the strategies based upon it have been naturalized. The TNCC's doxa organize the surrounding social field, limiting the space of inquiry to inform practices and decisions, and providing those chosen with legitimacy. Consequently, the framing of the issue fails to engage with broader dynamics, paying little attention to regional political economies and the multiplicity of actors involved in poaching in ways that have been highly contested.

Taking a step back, this has been rooted in the broader literature, which has not critically addressed the role of the TNCC in the renewed militarisation of anti-poaching strategies. The article has emphasized that elephants' symbolic value, rooted in socio-cultural dynamics dating to the late 19th century, sets ivory aside from other conflict resources, playing a role in regulating distant people's relationships with Africa's nature, uniting diverse communities of actors and mobilizing them to act on its "inverted commons" (Büscher, 2012). This is taking place within a global (neoliberal) political economy where the TNCC, as a transnational agglomeration of state and non-state actors, is able to exert significant influence on African

environmental politics. Within the context of a highly polarized debate on the legalisation of the ivory trade, the threat discourses analysed in this article could be viewed as tools to advance not only the institutional agendas of the TNCC, but also broader ideological positions within the debate. By illuminating the ivory-terror-crime nexus, those against the legalisation of the ivory trade are raising the stakes of the debate.

Nonetheless, the TNCC's power is not absolute and, by taking a tougher stance on poachers, range states could be seen to be simply playing the game – placating CITES and growing their ivory stockpiles, while deflecting blame elsewhere. As such, it is possible to observe a *différend* situation: while the TNCC is legitimizing violent methods to support its position against the legalisation of the ivory trade, range states are instead violently securitizing parks with the opposing end goal of trading ivory. As such, both groups of actors 'talk past' each other while violence continues to escalate on the ground.

These dynamics illuminate the diverse spaces of physical and symbolic conservation-related violence. They raise serious concerns regarding the populations 'caught in the crossfire' of a proxy war of interests, conducted largely at the transnational level. Such dynamics are not limited to the boundaries of protected areas, but it is here that their effects are the most apparent.

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