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Visualizing an Anti-Capitalist Future Amidst a Commodified Landscape: Learning from the African Savanna Elephant

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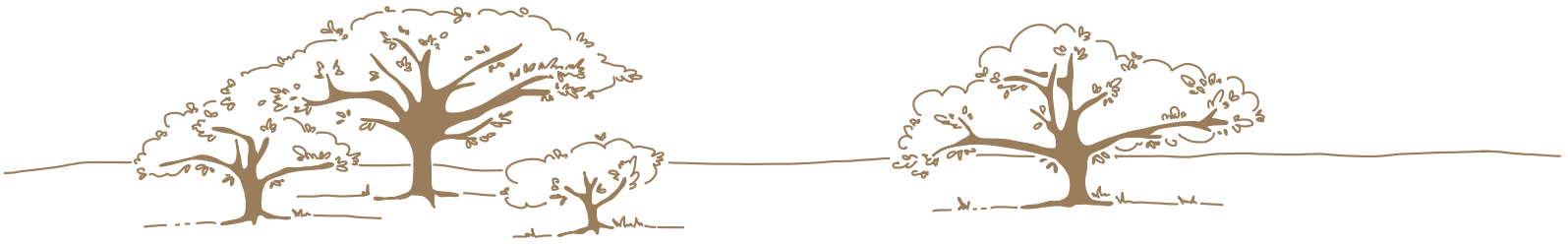

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introduction: unbound to constrained elephants

The elephants were everywhere. They took lengthy strides with massive feet across the landscapes of Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, leaving patterns in their footprints and gentle, thunderous sounds in their wake.

The same animal now lives in vulnerable populations restricted to just two of the earth's continents. All three species of Savanna, Forest, and Asian elephants are threatened by human population growth, urban expansion, habitat encroachment, and profit-driven targeting. Physical boundaries on previously navigable terrain have decreased their natural habitat and cut off migratory routes that hinder the continuation of century-old habits. The greatest threat to elephant survival, however, comes from centuries of fixation on their ivory tusks and the consequential persecution of the species for profit. The valuation of ivory within a society structured by capitalism and a desire for growth caused not only damage to elephant populations but also the mass exploitation of landscapes, theft of value from local communities by imperial powers, and racialization of environmental issues. Simultaneously, a trade and trafficking network of ivory as a valued material perpetuates imbalanced global power dynamics and violent crime on local and global scales. As a species that has been commodified since their initial interactions with our own, elephant livelihoods have been connected to these complex issues, in turn rendering the species' existence far more significant than the resiliency of one animal but symbolic instead of capitalism and its repercussions.

Living in an era of what seems like climate change-driven apocalypse, the need to upend the pervading system of capitalism that demands resource and labor exploitation has become

increasingly apparent. In the case of the elephant, a growing and changing pattern of commodification forced elephants to become intertwined with a human-driven capitalist system which has in turn impacted the way conservation efforts approach the species' role in human-wildlife ecosystems today. I argue that evolving forms of commodification have shaped the way human-elephant relations are addressed through contemporary conservation to the extent that elephant lives have been valued over the humans they coexist with. Consequentially, I question if it is possible or advisable to decommodify elephants in an effort to shift the global paradigm of capitalism.

mapping my intentions

Describing the commodification of elephants as an *evolution* implies that the elephant moved linearly through time, adopting the newest form of commodity brought about by changing time periods. However, the contextualization I deem necessary and intend to develop in order to critique current paradigms of conservation and capitalism is more accurately visualized as a map. A map in which overlapping layers representative of various significances attributed to elephants are visible all at once, rather than disappearing to the left as a timeline moves forward. Elephants first roamed naturally across the base layer of this map made up of coexisting biotic and abiotic systems. By overlaying the relationships elephants maintain with one another and the role they play within their natural biome, the map already becomes more complex and realistic. As they come, layers of human interaction can be placed on existing non-human animal ones, defined by lines of connection or borders of separation. Finally, layers in which the elephant no longer traveled autonomously but as a commodified entity of culture, entertainment, wealth, and symbology, interact across the landscape. Trade in ivory itself, along with the transfer of capital

and its accumulation and disparity, continue to contribute to this visual conceptualization. While the landscape of human-elephant interaction has been forcibly shaped by imperial powers with profit-driven intentions, the map I create incorporates knowledge with origins more often separated than compiled together: the voices of the communities geographically close to elephants that have been dismissed or silenced throughout the elephant's evolution to a globally sought-after object of resounding significance and value. As a result, part of this geography comes from 20,000-year-old knowledge of elephants while other aspects stem from some of the most recent international policies regarding ivory trade. In order to present my argument, I will develop the geographic evolution of elephants as a commodity as mentioned above, outline the parallel emergence of a once legal trade, a now illegal network of trafficked ivory, and conclude with an analysis of the current theory of conservation and where anti-capitalism can play a role in future resolutions. I have woven a few of my own doodles throughout my thesis inspired by the power of visualization I hope to underscore and with the intention to provide a few instances of captivating visual relief throughout a landscape of words.

I want to preface my work by explaining that this thesis is an in-depth case study of African savanna elephants and the ivory trade, a species that can be read into as representative of a broader discussion of wildlife commodification. I chose to focus on the African savanna Elephant for three reasons: firstly, in order to avoid generalizing the intricacies between the remaining Asian and Forest species, secondly, because factors such as tusk size and geographic location have made them the most involved in an international ivory trade and at-risk of

extinction, and lastly, because their role as a keystone species extends beyond the importance of their survival alone.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge that asking whether decommodifying wildlife to further anticapitalism is possible or advisable is an overarching question capable of engaging with an exhaustingly wide range of contemporary lifestyles. From eating meat to domesticating animals as pets, animal commodification covers a spectrum of extremes I could not possibly nor do I wish to address. Instead, I hope to expand upon just one instance of wildlife commodification in order to understand how this situation, where a consistently commodified elephant is threatened by a lucrative trade network rooted in a superficially attributed value, interacts with capitalism and offers insight to break from it. I hope that by focusing on one species in particular I can illuminate the complexity of a consistently over-simplified system of marketable wildlife in a way that is applicable beyond the African savanna elephant.

get to know the elephant

as a keystone species

The African savanna elephant is at the greatest risk of extinction from poaching simply due to the overbearing size of their tusks that make them highly sought after. The largest ever continent-wide wildlife survey, called “The Great Elephant Census”, was published in 2016 and is the most up to date collection of elephant population data. 352,271 savanna elephants and a far more uncertain estimate of 63,157 forest elephants live dispersed across the continent (Allen). Expert spotters crisscrossed savanna and forest habitats in low-flying planes, flying a combined distance of 285,000 miles (surely with an immensely high carbon output consciously omitted), aiming to

generate a reliable database rather than the insufficient data points that have been relied on extensively in the past (Allen). Forest cover that obstructs easy views of elephants as well as the complexity that comes with compiling data from various collectors and locations have contributed to uncertainties regarding the accuracy of past census counts, however, population trends resulting from The Great Elephant Census are relatively clear, reliable and telling, showing that between 2007 and 2014, savanna elephants across Africa declined by 30% (Nuwer).

Savanna elephants are the largest living land mammals and weigh between 3 to 6 tons (Laws 252), of which 97 to 340 pounds (Laws 254) comes from their tusks. Part of my appreciation for these massive creatures stems from these simple statistics, elsewhere boring, but mind-blowing to my elephant-riddled brain. They have 100,000 different muscles in their trunk: a “muscular multitool” (Sima)! And their ears, three times larger than those of Asian elephants (Milne) and iconized by Disney’s Dumbo and Dr. Seuss’ Horton, perform the tasks of a signaling organ: regulating body temperature, warding off threats via movement and body language, and communicating with their herd (Moss).

As integral megafauna within their ecosystems they quite literally form corridors to provide space for cross-species movement and connection while eliminating geographical barriers that would otherwise limit the complexity of natural interaction and cohabitation. Elephants clear the very trees that would disrupt the African savanna, otherwise making it into a dense woodland biome, inhabitable for so many of the creatures and plants that already live in the exposed terrain (Guldemond and Van Aarde 328). They eat woody vegetation, facilitating a fast nutrient cycle

that benefits a diversity of plants at their feet. Lizards thrive in the broken branches that elephants leave behind after foraging in tree canopies for sustenance (Pringle et al. 1639). Elephants eat amounts of fruit proportionate to their physically massive size every day, passing many seeds through their digestive system and consequently releasing them across their habitat in dung, aiding the growth of underbrush and other plants that rely on seed dispersal for survival (Guldemond et al. 3). Elephants are seen not only as keystone species, but also as ecosystem engineers, using their tusks and trunks to dig waterholes in times of drought (Pringle et al.). As iconic keystone species, the responsibilities elephants maintain along with their unique anatomical features alone render them compelling to say the least, but their social structures and mannerisms elicit even more fascination.

as a social being

As an ethologist, Cynthia Moss spent thirteen years observing elephants in Kenya's Amboseli National Park where she compiled all observable details from habits, to emotions, relationships, and personalities. Her work contributed to a growing foundation of knowledge that emphasizes the character of the elephant, humanizing their species in a way that demands attention and cultivates empathy. She describes their strong social bonds that form the structure of individual herds, adorably maintained via tactile interactions and vocal communication. Elephants greet each other with "spinning, backing […], ear flapping, entwining of trunks, and slicking of tusks" producing jubilant sounds of greeting that "rent the air as over and over again they gave forth rich rumbles and piercing trumpets of joy" (Moss 125). Family members uphold a very anthropomorphic idea of a physical love language as they touch each other with their trunks and lean against one another. Family units are clearly established and structured matriarchally where

mothers and infants share the strongest bonds of all (35). Elephants even mourn the dead; upon finding a carcass, “they approach slowly and cautiously and begin to touch the bones[...] trying to recognize the individual” (34). With notoriously impressive memories and a brain capacity capable of recognizing their herds and remembering geographies riddled with threats or treasures, elephants have captivated human curiosity.

Seeing an elephant mourn a loved one is known to trigger an empathetic response to heartbreak in which humans often resonate with the emotions we see in them. It is exactly our ability to see these charismatic creatures through the lens of human interaction (Ritchie and Roser) that causes people to turn to wildlife conservation as the most valid form of protection. One of my favorite videos of all time shows a young elephant attempting to take a bath in a kiddie pool. Unable to bend his legs at the knees as humans do, he can't get over the lip of the poor and tumbles in, splashing almost all of the water that had filled the tub out of it and rolling around, unable to regain his bearings. He seemed so goofy, childish, defenseless, even. Unable to bathe, how could *he* protect *himself*? Ecologically and conservation minded audiences center elephants in their conversations precisely because of the characteristics Moss observes and the intimate and personable characters she creates.

the geography of a commodity

The term *commodity* has dual meaning as both an economic good available to be bought and sold and something that is useful or significant regardless of direct fiscal value (Merriam-Webster). Throughout the evolution of elephants as a commodity, the animal has fallen under both of these definitions, representing forms of social and cultural capital far before capitalist motives aided the commodification of the creature to the extent of creating a product worthy of trade. The

elephant as an image has been incorporated into religion and iconized as spiritual symbols, associated with varying values from wisdom to luck, while their bodies have been shaped into valuable weapons of war or viewed as vessels of entertainment amid eye-catching circus tricks. Their massive size alone demands attention while observable characteristics facilitate the creation of an anthropomorphic creature with enticing personalities capable of captivating human populations for centuries. The significance and heritage of elephants themselves within cultures around the world can be viewed as an initial form of commodification, when value was first ascribed to their being beyond any subliminal role they played in the shared ecosystem. I will begin in what I hope is a chronological place: 29,000 years ago in Tanzania, where rock art of elephants pervaded the landscape's plateaus.

visual, verbal & symbolic functions

in rock art

Despite their presence in art from all over the world, African art that depicts elephants is less likely to romanticize or simplify the animal but instead show what Doran Ross describes as its "complex reality" (65). They have been a "source of food, material, and riches; a fearsome rival for resources; and a highly visible, provocative neighbor" (65). Consequentially, their image has been transformed across mediums and imaginations, some of the earliest of which come from excavations of rock art in Tanzania and Libya. They make frequent appearances throughout Mary Leakey's book, *Africa's Vanishing Art: The Rock Paintings of Tanzania,* as subjects of the hunt, of observation or of appreciation. The role they played in art itself varied across landscapes, where large elephant-like creatures were frequently shown in active hunting scenes among paintings of Southern Bushmen in Libya while Tanzanian images showed elephants

occupying space in solitude, away from humans. Carbon dating technology traced the earliest engravings published in Leakey's analysis to 29,000 years ago (21) while evidence of ocher pigment in other pieces proved some engravings could have been made no longer than 1,500 years ago (27).

One of the most engaging and eye-catching pieces of art Leakey presents is a frieze that centers an elephant amidst a chaotic scene of other wild mammals and humans of disorienting shapes and sizes. The elephant itself is vastly disproportionate to the elephant of today, with lengthy limbs, a slim torso and small, almost mouse-like ears. Their tusks with menacingly sharp points drape over a hunter, threatening to their small head and thin figure. The elephant is clearly alive despite the tiny figures onto its feet and equally tall hunters with sticks surrounding its face. In comparison to other more visibly removed and observational depictions of elephants from regions nearby, this image stands out as an interpretation of an elephant's role amidst, rather than apart from, an integrated human-wildlife ecosystem. Additionally, the elephant is shown as a subject of prey. Elephant hunts occurred not only out of a need for protection or a desire for resources but also as symbolic tests of manhood (Ross 66). The hunts can be seen frequently in African art and allude to elephants as not only a central threat to local communities but also as an appreciated species embedded in a larger scheme of balanced cohabitation visible in innumerable other art forms such as "sculpture, masquerade, dance, and song" (Ross 65).

Among the few scholarly reports of African rock art alongside Leakey's work is Maarten Van Hoek's article, "Defecating Elephants in Messak Rock Art. An Anomaly?". Expanding on his already intriguing title, Van Hoek explains his findings geographically as he wanders over the

Messak plateau in Northern Libya. The frequency of elephants in the art he describes alone seems to "establish the elephant as the most powerful and awe-inspiring of all animals of the Messak" (18), but the unexpected yet frequent display of elephants and their dung must have some consequential significance as well. Hoek writes that San hunters and gatherers would follow elephants, recovering nuts to eat, seeds to plant, and the dung itself to burn for fuel (18). The dung depicted could allude to its various uses, to references of fertility typically associated with pachyderm mammals, or even a quasi-ritualistic "attempt to avert increasing drought" (20) due to connections between dung, fertilizer and growth. Again, elephants are already shown as interactive beings with observed and valued roles within human livelihood. Elephant dung, so seemingly insignificant in value compared to the value strung from ivory today, may have been the earliest form of economic-minded commodification to stem from elephants.

As one facet of visible significance, art transforms its subject into a cultural commodity, duplicating elephants as inhabitants of their natural geography and facets of culture itself. Analyzing elephants in rock art touches just the very surface of their presence in creative imagery throughout history but provides a preliminary example of the reproduction of elephants and their transformation beyond keystone species.

in African folklore & mythology

Unsurprisingly, elephants roam abundantly throughout African mythology and folklore in addition to their artistic occupation of the same landscape. They appear in whimsical myths, creation stories, and educational, observatory lessons. In one myth a woman is tricked into taking the form of an elephant while in another, a man traps a woman in a stolen elephant hide (Moore). The fight between an elephant and a crocodile that ended when the crocodile pulled the

elephant's nose, elongating it to create a trunk and angering the hurt animal, explains not only the elephant's anatomy but cautions against tempting the anger of both species (Moore 336). While not intended to be interpreted literally, folk tales, creation myths and fables all provide instruction for social behavior or aim to explain the rise of existing behaviors and cultural constructs. The various myths and stories I read provided a way to uncover some of the most deeply rooted impressions of elephants and the surroundings, social values and attitudes, that make up human-elephant relations. Other more educational pieces of oral history instead gave guidance and instruction regarding a peaceful coexistence with elephants. Their presence in any form of story provides another example of transformation in which the elephant became a useful *tool* as a form of knowledge dissemination.

Lorraine Moore conducted over 100 interviews with Namibian locals for her article, "Beware the Elephant in the Bush: myths, memory and indigenous traditional knowledge in North-Eastern Namibia". She focused on the contemporary Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) held by the Khwe people in Caprivi, a narrow strip of land jutting out from Namibia, sandwiched by Angola, Zambia and Botswana. A Khwe farmer from the region shared his understanding of elephant warning sounds and signs with Moore, speaking of knowledge that is common among his community out of pure necessity, without which, human-elephant relations would escalate, rife with violent interactions. He explained that "the elephant is afraid of us too, we give each other problems", that "you can see their silent behavior as a clue as well you pay respect and face the other way: it will see you but not charge because you are respecting it" (336). Many instances of elephant-human interactions that result in injury or death occur due to a lack of the shared knowledge of elephant behavior rendered communicable via these educational stories. Warning

signs and sounds, obvious given a background in local knowledge, otherwise go unnoticed by the naivety palpable among visiting tourists, scientists or hunters. While the manipulation of elephants in various stories and oral histories takes both metaphorical and literal forms, they all allocate new concepts of value where the animal is manipulated into a form of commodity that transports knowledge.

in religious symbology

Iconography of the elephant intermingles with spirituality and religious practices in both foundational and artistic ways. The enlightened Buddha is often imagined as a multi-armed elephant. Seen as an incarnation into “the wisest and most munificent of all beast”, Buddha’s depiction prompted ongoing worship of the elephant (Wylie 74). In Buddhism itself, elephants are seen as an ultimate embodiment of calm and sacredness, godliness and royalty, while their symbolism extends far wider as one simply of power. Similar to the incarnation of Buddha, many African cultures believed that their chiefs were reincarnated as elephants (Wylie 72).

The importance of elephants within varying belief sets themselves has made ivory a popular material for the display of religious devotion as well. Elephants are often representative of Thailand itself, where tourists visit to experience elephants or buy amulets of ivory from temple gift shops (Payne). Crafted into “ivory baby Jesuses and saints for Catholics in the Philippines, Islamic prayer beads for Muslims and Coptic crosses for Christians in Egypt, amulets and carvings for Buddhists in Thailand" (Payne), the use of ivory in physical displays of religious faith extends beyond the presence of the elephant. Known as the ‘Elephant Monk’ in Thailand, Kruba Dharmamuni explained in an interview with National Geographic that “ivory removes bad spirits” to justify why Thai monks give out ivory amulets in return for donations at their

monasteries. The word ‘garing’ in Cebuano, spoken in the southern Philippines, means both “ivory” and “religious statue” (Payne), and displays the deep seeded nature of ivory’s place within religious practices. A Chinese ivory collector added to the justification of ivory use in religious displays as they explained that in order to be respectful, “one should use precious material. If not ivory, then gold. But ivory is more precious” (Payne). The claim that ivory is the only material precious enough to replicate sacred iconography pulls at the concept of manufacturing value even before the growth of outright capitalistically driven commodification. The connection between ivory removed from the elephant itself and both religion and its relics has aided the development of a sense of sacredness inherent in the material, creating a value beyond dollars per pound and extending instead into cultural, even otherworldly, capital.

transforming tusks to ivory

The commodification of elephant ivory represents a drastic shift from past concepts of more sentimental and appreciative forms of commodity to one that has driven an entire species to near-extinction on multiple occasions. A tragic irony resides within the contemporary human-elephant relationship in the fact that the grave threat to their population has been born entirely out of the value that we have given to them. Acquiring ivory, especially internal extections of the tusk, leaves an elephant’s face gruesomely destroyed and their life ripped from them. The process of commodifying ivory to the extent that its value outweighs that of the elephant it comes from displays the ultimate depravity of capitalism and its inherent prioritization of profit over wellbeing.

Humans saw elephant tusks as valuable and distanced the concept of ivory from the living animal, instead lumping it in with materials such as jade, teak, ebony, amber, and even gold and silver (Moss 291). Similar to the process of valorizing diamonds, ivory came to be a symbol of wealth despite a lack of inherent value to anyone besides elephants themselves. It could be called teeth or tusk or even elephant ivory, but the reduction of this body part to a simple term distances the concept of life from the material. It is far easier to forget the living being that once grew a tusk itself when its name has no connotation of life, let alone those lost to obtain it. Ivory is a color, rather than a body part, and became a vessel for human modification, rather than something its original creator and owner cannot live without. Material called ivory, no longer seen as the incisor tooth of our planet's largest mammal, became a symbol of wealth all over the globe, detached from the violence that took place to acquire it.

borders & boundaries

Arguing that in the "expanding Anthropocene, elephants simply have nowhere to go" (227), Helen Kopina maintains that two diverging systems of life have been pushed into ever-closer forms of coexistence within the past century in different ways than ever before. This increasingly complicated coexistence has created an additional facet of commodification that permeates ivory trade through the implementation of continental, national, biometric, and cultural boundaries. Creating a cyclical model, a drive for capital accumulation seems to motivate the construction of boundaries that restrict or enable movement while the same boundaries ensure the perseverance of capitalism itself. In the case of ivory trade and the elephant's lively capital, boundaries such as National Parks and wildlife preserves/reserves provide the space for further commodification to take place. Game reserves can be read as some of the first physical implementations of colonial-

era boundaries, which Nicoli Nattrass develops in detail in her article "Conservation and the Commodification of the Anthropocene: A Southern African History". Spatial pressures on the land such as expanding commercial agriculture and livestock farming and the persecution of big-game species like elephants (Nattrass 96) prompted transformation of the land itself. Game reserves were constructed alongside National parks and conservation preserves, three forms of land use that have been implemented with varying degrees of conservationist aid and have each posed separate problems concerning the fair use of land across Africa.

Serengeti National Park in Northern Tanzania is one of the most iconic natural landmarks across the continent is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The park is also a prime example of British colonial attempts to control land use practices and to alienate local communities through privatization for the sake of conservation. Serengeti's name comes from the Maasai word 'siringet', meaning "great open space where land goes on and on" ("History of Serengeti") in reference to the open plains where the Maasai could once, but no longer, freely graze their cattle. The first manufactured reconstruction of the Serengeti landscape occurred in the early 1920s, after British colonial administrators observed that hunting lions was causing the population to decrease and constructed the boundaries of a game reserve to address ironic threats to the species' survival. Roderick Neumann describes this process as one of "nature production rather than nature preservation" (150) in his article, "Ways of Seeing Africa: Colonial Recasting of African Society and Landscape in Serengeti National Park". This shift in land control and definition in Africa was inspired by models of Yellowstone and Yosemite in the United States and the concept of 'pristine nature' that drove conservationist thought in the mid-20th century (Neumann 150). The park quickly took on symbolic significance as a blueprint for creating

bounded reserves where separate governing bodies could implement restrictive policies on local communities such as the Maasai, Ndorobo, and Sukum (Neumann 158). By way of what Neumann calls a "crude, top-down orientation of park conservation" (159), British imperial authorities evicted Maasai residents from their land based on clauses in a bill that, entirely unsurprisingly, was written without consent or input from the Maasai themselves. The construction of National Parks in Africa is the subject of extensive literature and I in no way intend to explain the complexities of the role of an idealized 'wilderness', the creation of an 'Eden' or the subjugation of local African communities to Western views of nature. Neumann demonstrates the influence of boundaries that I hope to convey as he writes that "nature, as represented in national parks, was produced by removing the people who, ironically enough, had influenced the ecology of the Serengeti through thousands of years" (163) while also commodifying entire landscapes, not only the species they intended to 'protect'.

harnessing charisma

Returning to the definition of commodity as something useful and valued, the most recent rendition of a commodified elephant has emerged from conservation efforts that link the species to conservation values and calls to action. The elephant's face, a stoic, aged, ultimately massive, and captivating image, has endured manipulation into yet another cultural symbol, this time as one of the most popular contemporary flagship species. Above other threatened species, their face dominates Western conservation discourse and wildlife management debates and has consequently come to represent the survival of an entire ecosystem living under a network of complex human relationships and exchanges. Endangered and threatened animals already exist within a relatively observable hierarchy, where elephants are joined in their high priority status

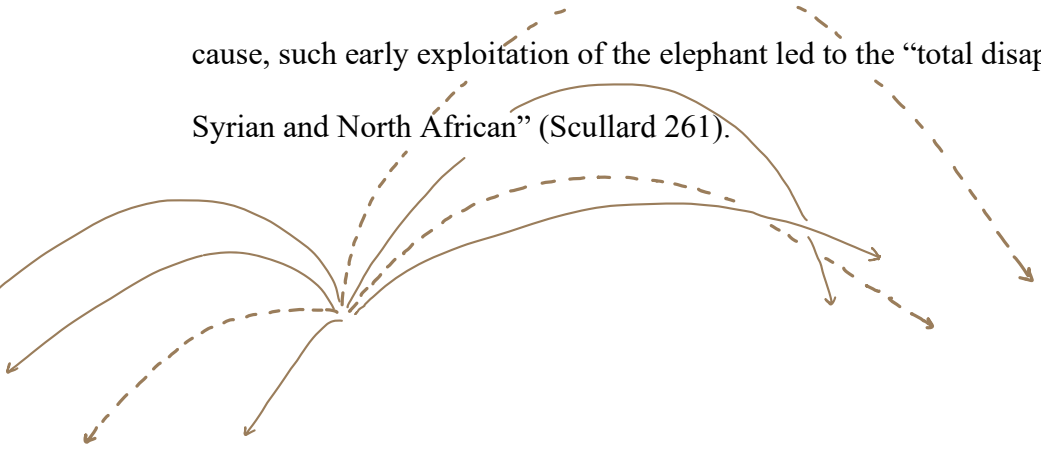
by polar bears, sea turtles, giant panda bears, bonobos, bald eagles, dolphins and tigers (Ritchie and Roser). They are all relatively large in size, which is an attribute easily overlooked but surprisingly decisive when it comes to deriving human empathy and concern. They hold a position high in the pecking order of their ecosystem as predators to many, in some cases even to humans, which reinforces their hierarchy. Above all, they share charismatic attributes, at times majestic associations, varying cultural significance and a certain 'cute' component. We don't see the plight of what have been deemed "charisma challenged" (Hance) animals abound in the media; they are usually the creatures too small, lacking in color, character, familiarity or relevance to those with money, status, or ulterior motives to conserve. Without charisma, among other factors as mentioned above, equally endangered species tend to be overlooked by the public, overshadowed by the charismatic megafauna deemed worthy of our attention. Elephants have been granted the attention and care that many endangered creatures have not, largely due to their existence as a commodity of conservation.

Simplified, I would call this ethos appeal a harnessing of cuteness wherein cuteness is mobilized as a political tool and serves to oversimplify issues entrenched in the ivory trade. Imagery of the elephant's physical form has been transformed into an icon for preservation in the West, particularly circulating among conservationist nonprofit organizations in the United states as a symbol that successfully garners support. Contemporary conservation iconography that relies on elephant imagery mobilizes the elephant again as a symbolic commodity, one that functions as a visually persuasive tool to promote conservation theory and action.

the emergence and growth of ivory trade & trafficking

Regardless of its destination or use, elephant ivory has been a fundamental commodity within a global trade system since ivory lyres were far more popular than piano keys. Many timelines of ivory use and claimed-to-be histories of the trade start in the 18th century, when Europeans dominated trade routes and countries in the global North became obsessed with this new notion of foreign "white gold", a term popularized by Derek Wilson's *White Gold: the story of African ivory*. However, a fixation on ivory's value over that of the elephant itself can be traced back far longer. As Africa was quickly established as *the* source for ivory, with passageways, trade routes and the only population of elephants with tusks large enough to supply the world's demand, hunting elephants for ivory had an equally quick impact on their populations.

In his book *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, Howard Scullard explains that tusks were prized in Minoan and Mycenaean times, involved in Punic trade in 350 BC, and made increasingly available to much of the world in the Hellenistic era. In "Ivory and Ptolemaic Exploration of the Red Sea: The Missing Factor", Stanley Burstein also attributes the origin of elephant and ivory commerce to the third millennium BCE when the Red Sea basin, bordering Northeastern African States, and Saudi Arabia and the Indian Ocean were sites of extensive elephant trade. Some scholars attribute waves of elephant extinctions in North Africa to the Ptolemaic Kingdom's extensive use of war elephants (Burstein) while others blame the Roman empire's simultaneous demand for lively weapons (Kelly). Regardless of the exact regional cause, such early exploitation of the elephant led to the "total disappearance of two groups, the Syrian and North African" (Scullard 261).



Exponentially decreasing populations in the North only triggered hunters and poachers to seek ivory in Eastern countries where a less depleted source of capital could be found. Extracting tusks from elephants found in Eastern Africa opened paths across the Mediterranean, bringing the material more consistently to Europe as well as Central and East Asia (Kelly). The movement of ivory supply is reflected by fluctuating elephant populations and exemplifies the disregard for welfare that elephants faced so immediately.

By compiling extensive references to ivory throughout Greek and Latin literature, scholars have put together a list of uses of ivory during this time period consisting of: “statues, chairs, beds, scepters, hilts, scabbards, chariots, carriages, tablets, book-covers, table-legs, doors, flutes, lyres, combs, brooches, pins, scrapers, boxes, bird-cages, [and] floors” (Warmington 163). A visibly reliance on ivory material serves to underline its importance and seemingly irreplaceable qualities within society and habitual, daily life. Uses ranged from fanciful items like chariots and statues that connote ideas of wealth to more commonplace objects like combs and brooches, simple yet elevated in status by their material. Tusks were worked by early Italian artists to decorate fanciful tombs of the ruling class and exemplified luxury (Scullard). According to Scullard, ivory resembles the skin tone of white human flesh which made the material a “suitable substance for exposed parts of statues of gods and men” (261). Ivory was quickly seen as a malleable substance to be maneuvered by mankind, sneaked into homes and lives devoid of elephants themselves, in which the physical substance was many humans' only connection to the species that had once created it.

Alexandra Kelly, the author of *Consuming Ivory: Mercantile Legacies of East Africa and New England,* observes a blatant disparity, remarking that despite the absence of a comprehensive understanding of what the precolonial ivory trade looked like, "Europeans entered an already vibrant commercial system in East Africa and the Indian Ocean in the 16th century" (32). The pre-existence of a trade in ivory implies that "non-western actors were active generators of modern capitalist systems" (32), a notion that also serves to demonstrate how long the commodification of elephants had already taken place as a longstanding commercial tradition upheld by civilizations prior to the timeline that western history usually relies on.

Jumping quite far closer to the present day, Kelly's book on *Consuming Ivory* centers two American port towns that are emblematic of the obsession and impact of ivory in the US. The Connecticut town of Ivoryton became emblematic of the trade, where the first manufacturing plant for ivory combs was established in 1785 and hundreds of thousands of pounds of ivory were coming from Eastern Africa by the 1850s (Kelly). Constantly associated with the animals themselves, photos from 1870 show "factory personnel posing with two large tusks outside the Comstock Cheney factory", itself "topped by an elephant weathervane" and Ivoryton baseball players wearing "elephants on their uniforms " (54). Despite extensive geographical distance and physical separation from the species themselves, elephants were famous in the US, though not for their existence but for attributed capital.

Throughout the 19th century a continuous trade maintained a high demand for ivory, fueled by social expectations and definitions of class. Upper class homes were defined by pianos in their parlor rooms. Pianos which themselves required 52 ivory piano keys. An average tusk alone

could be used to produce 45 piano keys, after which scraps were turned into “combs, handles, dominoes, [and] dust became black paint and fertilizer” (Conniff 60). In this sense, the presence of ivory in a home instilled a sense of class irreplaceable by other materials. Simultaneously, the concept of ecotourism involving elephants grew as white western men started going on safari trips guided by locals with the intent to shoot and kill elephants. Returning home with ivory itself along with stories of wild adventures increased a demand for marketable experiences and put elephants in danger for even more reasons. By 1913, the African elephant census had already decreased to 10 million individuals (Ritchie and Roser) and the United States accounted for the number one consumer of ivory, importing 200 tons of the material per year (Christy).

A comprehensive explanation of the ivory trade and trafficking through its passages, transitions, beneficiaries, and exploitations makes up the content of innumerable books and journals. My intention behind including this brief historical survey of the trade is to underscore a major point Alexander Kelly makes: that “communities on both sides of the commodity chain were simultaneously drawn into the capitalist system via commodity consumption.” (67) Living elephants were coveted, commodified and made central to global markets, attributed a value in dollars per pound, and their populations were subsequently demolished in a race for displayable wealth. The commodification of these living beings determined, in a sense, an entire global order that still formats international relations to this day and also constructs the way in which we go about posing so-called “solutions” to the decimation of nature caused by capitalist greed.

banning

The question of banning legal ivory trade is at the forefront of resolutions to resulting inequalities, violence and other problems. Given an outlook that prioritizes elephant preservation and an end to trafficking-related violence and exploitation, a universal ban on legal ivory appears logical. But various factors muddy this assumed clarity as more economic-minded players argue for implementing a highly regulated legal trade that could generate and maintain consistent funding for conservation efforts and allow local communities to benefit from the existence of lucrative natural resources at their disposal. After reading numerous articles about banning, it seems that a one-stop solution is altogether unreasonable to expect, and that part of the problem with so many attempts at regulation in the past has been that they force a one-size-fits-all answer on a problem that spans across continents, between bounded regions and open ecosystems, and over innumerable languages and cultural beliefs. Generally, fitting one answer on a landscape of all shapes and sizes is an absolutely impossible task regardless of the issue at hand.

Before accepting the rather unappealing yet obviously far more encapsulating conclusion that the ivory trade issue simply cannot be solved one political measure, I admit I was swayed by articles that called for an all-out ban on ivory trade such as Elizabeth Bennet's *Legal Ivory Trade in a Corrupt World and its Impact on African Elephant Populations.* She cites figures that make any form of legal trade seem illogical and nonsensical: that ivory trade has doubled since 2007, tripled since 1998 and six out of the eight countries identified as the worst offenders in ivory trafficking globally also fit in the bottom 50% of the most corrupt countries in the world (55). Multiple instances of one-off sales have temporarily legalized ivory stockpile sales and made way for the flooding of then anonymous and untraceable illegal ivory in a network of trade that

had previously no reason to expand with more material. Bennet argues for the closure of all ivory markets, citing corrupt governments and the existence of bribery at essentially all points within the trade chain as factors that make some form of legal trade simply incompatible within current political and social contexts. She deems the implementation of a sustainable, highly regulated trade in ivory a "Sisyphean task" (58), implying that regulation is impossible when paired with corruption. In addition, a system built upon a legal trade would place the responsibilities of continuous and ineffective labors on people who simply could not limit a wave of increasingly illegal trade. For example, a highly regulated trade would necessitate putting increased pressure on Eco-guards and park rangers to protect the wildlife within their reserves, which has the almost surefire potential to increase militarization and reliance on automatic weapons and violence for the sake of protection and regulation.

Within a binary-driven mindset, the alternative to a complete ivory trade ban is creating a highly regulated trade. A regulated trade would be dependent on strict law enforcement and harsh punitive measures that would deter underground and illicit trade, as mentioned above. This form of trade would no doubt increase the value of ivory commodities and create what Bennet calls a "super luxury market trade" (58) geared toward exclusively wealthy consumers. Her overall argument however, in addition to points made addressing corruption, faulty financial incentives and bribery, is that elephants themselves do not have the time for a legal trade. In a speech at the New York State Assembly Standing on Environmental Conservation, Bennet shared that the "time to address the corruption throughout a trade network that permeates countries across the globe [...] will take decades" (57), meaning that a legal trade undermines any elephant conservation. While I think complications render an all-out ban or a universally regulated legal

market too simplistic given the political context we live in, I agree with Bennett's argument that consumers "determine the demand" (*Testimony*). Accepting that consumers oceans away from elephants themselves are the ones that insist upon the continuation of wildlife commodification is a necessary step towards reversing resolutions that target symptoms of the issue rather than their root cause.

creating the poacher

Words themselves hold so much power and the terminology that makes up facets of the ivory trade carry connotations that can easily go unnoticed without a close analysis. Even conceptualizing the 'ivory trade' connotes subliminal messages, some of which pertain to the intentional removal of associations of life from the word ivory which I mentioned earlier in my introduction. The word 'trade' implies legality and is a far more accepting, normative term than 'trafficking', which is more accurately reflective of the dangerous, illegal reality which exists in most cases of current ivory movement and sales. Of all ivory-related terminology however, the words 'poacher' and 'hunter' have arguably had the most impact on the racialization and politicization of ivory, its use, and its value.

The terms 'poacher' and 'hunter' are still widely used, but their origin can be traced to colonial era language that reflects and continues to perpetuate race and class-based stereotypes. Rosaleen Duffy, a prominent scholar and critic of ecotourism and conservation practices related to elephants, clearly articulates the definitions of these terms in her book *Nature Crime: How We're Getting Conservation Wrong.* An individualized concept of hunting resulted from the popularization of big game safari trips which quickly became a commodified experience for

wealthy elites in the early 1900s and provided the revenue to subsidize and assist British imperial expansion throughout the century (MacKenzie). Colonial authorities outlawed all hunting practices that strayed from western methods (Duffy) in order to reserve the resources to sustain a market in hunting safaris and also make space in an idealized 'wilderness' landscape for western outsiders. These laws immediately criminalized local practices and were justified by Western hunters who deemed their own killing methods more humane: a shot gun took the elephants life so much more quickly than the use of snares or spears (Duffy). The effect of these laws "meant that hunting by African communities was instantly redefined as a criminal act (poaching) while hunting for sport, leisure and trade by Europeans was defined as legal and acceptable" (Duffy 85). Now, even though the words are used to describe what the media and most scholars present as vastly different actions with diverging connotations, the difference between the terms is really rooted in race and power. The colonial origins of these two words function to continually complicate elephant-related policy as, for example, the expansion of national parks systems has continued to further criminalize local "subsistence poaching" by equating it to "commercial poaching" despite vastly different motives (Duffy).

Criminalizing poaching and linking it to the actions of local African communities and violent gang and syndicate-related activity continues to place blame on the individuals driven to kill elephants, rather than those who create the demand they serve. As Duffy argues: the "broad political context of poaching clearly demonstrates how poaching and individual poachers operate to serve the demands of bigger networks and global markets" (94). NGOs such as the African Wildlife Foundation continue to perpetuate these misconceptions by blaming elephant deaths and threatened extinction on the "insatiable greed of ivory hunters" (Bonner 54). A relatively recent

'anti-poacher' narrative has emerged that perpetuates a 'hunting' versus 'poaching' dynamic in conservation policy and has simplified ivory related issues by creating a set of main characters: a morally justified conservationist, a villainized poacher, and the emotive elephant.

countering 'anti-poaching'

The overall issue with strictly anti-poaching viewpoints and action initiatives is that they tend to address violence and injustices that result from the ivory trade as issues stemming from individuals, specifically poachers, rather than the result of a larger system of organized crime and demanding parties. A classic example of attention given to the symptom of issues rather than their root cause, the intense villainization of poachers ignores the emotional factors that lead to poaching such as anger, disempowerment, marginalization, shame and stress (Hübschle and Shearing). Conservationists such as Richard Leakey, one of the most prominent conservationists in the 1980s and 90s, promoted a viewpoint that prioritized elephant livelihood so heavily over human wellbeing that he went so far as to joyfully declare that soon "journalists would be able to take photos of dead poachers instead of dead elephants" (Duffy 100). This horrifying statement came as a result of the ignorance of conservationists towards the genuine driving factors behind poaching and from increasingly militarized anti-poaching programs (Duffy) that re-enforced the continued characterization of the conservationist, poacher, and elephant.

The combined emergence of commercial poaching, the observable organization of poachers, and increased use of military grade weapons (Edmond and Titeca) created a sense of urgency and threat which gave rise to intense anti-poaching campaigns. In her article, *Wild Animals and Justice: The Case of the Dead Elephant in the Room,* Helen Kopnina describes these campaigns as a pastime of wealthy white people, in reference to the embedded racialization of anti-poaching

programs. This statement is eerily similar to the way big-game hunting has been regarded as somewhat of a simple itinerary checkbox or a bucket list activity which serves to desensitize visitors and re-write the conversation regarding regulation. Attempts to solve subsequent issues has become a pastime to those less invested in short-term, localized repercussions, and more intent on reflecting surface-level moral values and creating a global impact.

Some small-scale anti-poaching programs such as the African Parks' 'Poacher-to-Protector' amnesty program exist to address the intersection between animal welfare and local poverty by training ex-poachers to serve as Eco-guards and wildlife monitors within national parks (Cheryl and Edwards). 'Poacher-to-Protector' programs theoretically address some of the complexities embedded in an over-simplified poaching narrative but still subliminally insist upon villainizing poachers in their name alone and, more importantly, their training style. 'Reformed' poachers-turned-park rangers are trained in a way that perpetuates military style protection. Existing anti-poaching actions are driven by the concept 'green militarization', coined and defined by Elizabeth Lunstrum in her article, *Green Militarization: Anti-Poaching Efforts and the Spatial Contours of Kruger National Park,* as "the use of military and paramilitary (military-like) actors, techniques, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation" (817). The concept of green militarization is also visible amid 90s era conservation programs that employed private military companies to guard protected areas (Duffy) and strategies as intense as Shoot-to-Kill (S2K) policies in countries with high levels of poaching such as Tanzania.

Ivory driven profits are often used to subsidize gang-related activity and weaponry; however, the issue still remains that according to Shoot-to-Kill (S2K) policies, elephant lives are valued higher

than human lives. In response to similar issues pervading trade of rhino tusks, Julius Malema, a leader of the Economic Freedom Fights, proclaimed that “Black people are worth less than rhinos” (Hübschle and Shearing 16). S2K policies demonstrate this ranking of living value, as do conservationist policies that prioritize elephant lives purely out of care for the creature over the impact that ivory trade regulations and policy have on African communities.

In 2013, Tanzania’s tourism minister Khamis Kagasheki called for perpetrators of the ivory trade to be executed “on the spot” (Huynh) going so far as to conclude that “poachers [...] are merciless people who wantonly kill our wildlife” and “the only way to solve this problem is to execute the killers” (Smith). The dehumanization of poachers results not only from a view of them as merciless elephant killers, but also as members of cruel, often terrorist-affiliated gangs that have violently ravaged local communities.

expanding on poaching: ivory & global security

The involvement of armed organized groups such the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the ivory trade is undeniable. The LRA alone has been implicated in poaching to maintain local ivory and bushmeat trade before expanding to foreign trade and launching civil massacres, child abductions, forced involvement and enslavement, and other “terrible exactions upon local populations” (Edmond and Titeca 267). A violent history predates the misrepresentation of poachers and the LRA’s involvement in ivory poaching, which I by no means want to dismiss or minimize. Led by the infamous guerilla leader Joseph Kony, the LRA arose in Uganda in 1987 in response to government-implicated marginalization and abuse within communities of native Acholi people (Edmond and Titeca). Their reputation for civil violence expanded and demanded increasing attention which was soon reflected in international media as a global security threat

beginning around 2013 (Edmond and Titeca). This exact link, extrapolated to create a correlation between poaching and threats to global security and more generally between threatened wildlife and crime, has come to dominate so much of the narrative regarding the ivory trade. Both *Outside the Frame: Looking Beyond the Myth of Garamba's LRA Ivory–Terrorism Nexus* by Kristof Titeca and Patrick Edmond and Natasha White's *"White Gold of Jihad": Violence, Legitimisation and Contestation in Anti-Poaching Strategies* dive into the narrative that defines poaching solutions created by western media and over-simplifies the issue to the point of idealization.

Further interpersonal and global conflict has been exacerbated by this same simplification of human involvement *in* and responsibility *for* elephant endangerment, particularly by the villainization of poachers, victimization of elephants, and glorification of western involvement. In a 2016 report made by the UN based on data collected in the Democratic Republic of Congo, experts concluded that only 10-15% of elephant poaching could be attributed to "local groups, including [the] LRA" while the remaining 85-90% of incidents resulted from "foreign groups" (Titeca and Edmond 264). Despite this data, the directly opposing connection between organized poaching and elephant population has dominated the media because it simplifies the situation. This simplification results from the narrative's existence in an "echo-chamber, [...] less concerned with local dynamics" (White) than with rewriting the issue to form a more approachable solution. In one swoop, mainstream western media attributed the demolition of wild elephant population to an easily villainized group of already armed and violent Africans whose a-morality was easily believed by a population of conservationist westerners with preconceived notions of cause and guilt. This connection was further complicated by a threat of

global security and the fear that the profit derived from poaching was funding international crime and terrorism. In the United States, “linking terrorism and wildlife crime ticked all the right boxes” (Edmond and Titeca 263), satisfying the simple need to justify a militaristic response. Within a federal government that can decide on very little, one thing the United States consistently determines is a shockingly high military budget. The militarization of non-military issues has been a way for America’s divided government to come to some semblance of agreement on issues in the past, so the combination of elephant conservation and global security is not an altogether surprising evolution of the elephant as a commodity. If making species conservation an indicator of global security, or at least a by-product of it, is what has diverted energy and monetary resources in conservation’s direction, maybe that has had to be the method of action in the past. But just like my overarching critique of the role of commodification and capitalism values embedded in conservation action, I see this process as severely outdated and damaging to any concept of surviving an enduring, sustainable world.

contemporary reflections and resolutions

One of the most iconic attempts at sending a straightforward message and setting a global example of anti-ivory trafficking sentiment has to be the burning of massive ivory stockpiles, a strategy that has been repeated 29 times since 1989 (Duggan and Robyn). According to reports from CITES in 2016, a total of 256 tons of ivory have been burned or otherwise destroyed with the intention to raise awareness, send messages to consumers, and set a potential precedent for what to do with stockpiled ivory (Duggan and Robyn). The largest ever ivory burn took place in 2016 when Kenya’s government set fire to 105 tons, equal to over $105 million, of ivory in what was seen as a massive publicity stunt (Braczkowski et al.). The Director General of Kenya’s

Wildlife Service, Kitili Mbathi rationalized burning ivory by arguing that "the only value of the ivory is tusks on a live elephant" (Duggan and Kriel) and that the towering, almost artistic piles of ivory were worthless stocks of old material rather than the equivalent of $105 million. Read from a certain perspective, these ivory burning stunts could be seen as anti-capitalist protests, as valiant attempts to de-commodify an object through its very destruction. At the same time, many argue that because one elephant can generate up to 76 times more in revenue as a lively commodity in ecotourism than through ivory sales, ivory burning serves only to underline the inherent lack of value in ivory itself. The sites of ivory burning are reminiscent of graveyards, where piles of ivory serve as place markers for lives lived and taken away, the burning of which renders the commodity worthless and the lives attached, the opposite. Unfortunately, like all arguments and policies I have encountered and attempt to engage with, ivory burning has entirely expected controversial elements that bring into question the idea of sensationalizing issues for the sake of media exposure and the perceived frivolity of burning what amounts to more than half of what Kenya puts towards environmental and natural resource agencies every year (Duggan and Kriel).

Botswana emerges as an example of this burning phenomenon and its repercussions where around 40% of Africa's savanna elephant populations live. Botswana's government has had relative success preserving wild elephant populations while contending that ivory burns send a harmful message. They argue that burning ivory contradicts the idea that "the value of a live elephant should be upheld at all costs" and instead projects the sentiment that "the animal has no value" (Khama). Responding to an invitation to attend Kenya's 2016 burn, government officials expressed the need to preserve whatever remains of elephants, explaining that we "cannot burn

the shame associated with this [trade] and hope it will disappear in smoke" (Khama). In alignment with their argument, the country has instead used portions of their own stockpiles to make symbolic work such as sculptures intended to raise awareness of ivory induced devastation to elephants and the country's determination to address related violence and crime. Despite sharing the intention to discourage ivory consumption, these instances vastly different approaches to using stockpiled ivory, one act attempts to destroy the commodity while the other re-invents it by replacing fiscal with symbolic value. An easy agreement made by the two visual statements, however, is that a live elephant is far more valuable than a dead one.

where we are now

Mapping an evolution of the commodified elephant and tracing how capitalism informed an unsustainable trade in ivory contextualizes present day human-elephant interactions, but still leaves proposed resolutions to trade-related issues up for debate.

As of 2016, the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Hong Kong among other prominent markets, implemented near-total bans on ivory trade (Bergin et al.). A year later, China closed its domestic ivory trade. As the strictest bans to date, these regulations have come over 45 years after the implementation of some of the most instrumental wildlife trade policy, compiled in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. More commonly known as CITES, these proposed resolutions and allocations of responsibility continue to be instrumental policy partially responsible for these far-reaching bans. As such, CITES is an important starting point for a critique of conservation-motivated tactics regarding trade regulation and attempts to respond to its failures and oversights.

CITES

Michael Glennon provides a comprehensive description of CITES in his article, “Has International Law Failed the Elephant?”. CITES was officially signed into action in 1989 by 103 different states and primarily served to delineate three appendices of endangerment with corresponding requirements pertaining to trade and protection rules (Glennon 10). Facing rapid population decline, the African savanna elephant was placed under the guidelines of Appendix I along with other highly threatened animals like the Black rhinoceros and various leopards. Appendix I species require the highest levels of protection including permits for both import and export alongside strict provisions regarding producer states, middleman and consumer states (Glennon 11). CITES made the determining assumption that strict trade regulation and banning would be the most effective way to conserve a species, without acknowledging ways non-consumptive trade could actually benefit not just the species in question, but also people and the ecosystems they cohabitate. CITES has been critiqued before, largely for failing to adequately protect elephants and instead opting for an under-financed and inadequately supplied regulation of international trade; a trade so elaborate and complex, it cannot be touched by unthreatening and un-backed policies like these.

Initially, set quotas of permissible elephant deaths established within each African state were used to implement CITES’ goal of regulating ivory trade and elephant populations via the use of permits and identification numbers. It became clear that these idealistic forms of control simply didn't translate from paper to protection. Another attempt at trade control involved the 1988 African Elephant Conservation Act (AECA) whereby the US Congress called for the implementation of a country-by-country review of elephant protection programs and subsequent

moratoriums on trade from states with 'inadequate' responses (Glennon 14). After the failure of these simplified and regulation-focused policy programs which attempted to control a trade by ignoring factors such as poverty, crime, and even the origins of ivory demand, Kenya became the first country to call for an all-out ban of legal ivory trading. Daniel Arap moi Ordere, the president of Kenya in 1988, demanded that "all poachers be shot on site" (Perlez). In doing so, Ordere openly placed blame on poachers rather than consumers and governmental structures and relied on the harmful construction of villainized poachers I outlined previously. Motivated by a fear of what could become an "elephant holocaust" (Glennon 16) France announced a ban on importing ivory in 1989 and was followed by the United States, Germany, and the EU (Glennon 16). While this sudden rush to ban all imports of ivory was far from universal (for example Hong Kong promised to ban only raw ivory and Japan still planned to accept ivory from non-CITES managed states) the Senior Vice President of the World Wildlife Fund declared a premature near victory on June 11th, 1989: "The ivory trade has been shut down" [...] "the African elephant is now in far less danger of extinction than it was only a week ago" (Hawkins). In an all-too ambitious statement, this VP voiced what so many others agreed with at the time: that a ban would cut off elephant deaths, cull corruption, and systematically instigate the conservation of the species, an expectation far from reality. Accepting the failures of CITES and its naive attempts to render a complex issue binary, does however leave space for solutions that verge on integrating new paradigms of anti-capitalism including implementing localized knowledge and reconstructing boundaries.

CBNRM

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) emerged out of a major environmental paradigm shift from imperial theories of fortress conservation to ideas of sustainable use (Hübschle and Shearing). The goals of CBNRM are to reframe wildlife as an asset to local Indigenous and African communities while amplifying their voices in decision and policy-making processes. CBNRM has been implemented as a response to the limits of top-down resource management and in theory seeks to decentralize power thereby allowing communities to manage their own resources and gain the economic benefits of local sources of profit. Direct actions take the form of local employment in anti-poaching campaigns as rangers or tour guides and promises of compensation to local communities for giving up their rights to use wildlife in protected areas (Duffy). CBNRM is deeply connected to elements of ivory-trade regulation and elephant conservation due to the existing pattern of outsiders profiting from elephants that, viewed commercially, are a lucrative local resource. CBNRM hinges on the hope that people have a higher regard and tolerance for wildlife if they receive benefits from it (Moore) and embodies the theory that the commodification of elephants can be harnessed as a tool for their conservation. Nicoli Nattrass writes that this strategy rests on the assumption that "by enabling local communities to generate and control income from hunting and tourism, this will provide incentives to protect animals and otherwise promote environmental conservation" (97).

Nattrass also eloquently articulates a main critique of CBNRM, that it continues to marginalize non-western cultures, disguise power imbalances and disregard elephant agency through what she deems a "communalizing rhetoric" (82). Like so much previous policy, CBNRM is seemingly well-intentioned but is so deeply bound by existing capitalist structures that it cannot

escape these critiques. The commodification of wildlife through CBNRM practices has returned a portion of local autonomy to communities close to elephants, but action is still mediated, and conservation remains commodified. Additionally, the places where CBNRM is implemented the most tend to be where locals engage in subsistence poaching to "meet basic economic needs" (Duffy 23), a far less significant threat to elephant populations and a focus that perpetuates the pattern of placing blame on subsistence and local 'poaching' despite rampant global trafficking.

Programs including Community Area Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe and Community Conservancies in Namibia provide insightful examples of the success and remaining failures of CBNRM initiatives. CAMPFIRE programs rely on trickle-down benefits of profit from safari hunting, game cropping (essentially the culling of overpopulated animals) and photographic safari drives. An analysis of CAMPFIRE profits and distribution in Dr. Annette Hübschle's article "Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime" shows that while US $20 million was generated by involved ecotourism projects, only 52% was directed to local communities. Of 100,000 households participating in income-generating projects under CAMPFIRE, each house received an average of US $5 in direct earnings in 2001 (20). While other statistics such as a decline in elephant poaching in the Mbire district from 40 cases in 2010 to five in 2017 (20) imply success, lack of fiscal follow-through to involved communities shows a blatant failure ignored by conservation parties from the global North that fixate on fluctuations within elephant populations as the most important quantifiable indicator of success. Community conservancies in Namibia are "self-governing democratic entities, run by local people, with fixed boundaries" (Hübschle and Shearing 21) which similarly derive funding from hunting and tourism but most importantly serve to employ former poachers

and other community members. In 2017, approximately 190,000 Namibians were living in 82 registered conservancies where 7,544 individuals were employed and US $6 million was earned (Hübschle and Shearing 21). Sadly, the program also faced allegations of nepotism and corruption along with reports that the benefits made do not successfully extend to women, youth and elderly, being the most marginalized community members.

boundaries

CITES, the divisive trade ban that emerged and CBNRM initiatives all are structured by preexisting boundaries of various scales from physical borders between a wildlife preserve and a neighboring town to metaphorical boundaries that restrict involvement or input based on still inherent imperial and patriarchal ideas. A specific facet of boundary-forming that I find interesting particularly due to the limitations of existing literature on the subject, is the use of physical boundaries and border creation intended to preserve a species. Large-scale, far reaching boundaries that border countries or parks often determine the implementation of ivory regulation and elephant conservation. On a smaller and more localized scale, boundaries held up by physical borders such as barbed wire fences exemplify a type of conservation known as fortress conservation that relies on 'fines and fences' (Duffy) programming and infrastructure to symbolize a very brutal and upfront implementation of Westernized concepts of protection. A reliance on human-made constructions of landscape such as fences can go so far as to embody the commodification that occurs within their borders. Fences such as these serve to limit the movement of elephants that would occur naturally but have been raised out of necessity in most cases to confront the human-elephant conflict resulting from population growth and landscape encroachment. Some incredibly interesting work is currently taking place to replace the reliance

on physically intrusive borders with naturally occurring deterrents such as honeybee alarm pheromones!

Mark G. Wright, a professor of in the Plant & Environmental Protection Department of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa led a research team to explore the potential for using African honeybee pheromones as a form of sustainable and passive wildlife management. Elephants have incredibly strong senses of smell and follow natural cues to avoid these particular bee alarm pheromones. After strategically placing collected pheromones in buffer zones between elephant habitats and human communities, the group found that "86.2% of [elephants] showed distinct hesitation or were repelled, not stimulated to bolt in fear, but showed a calm response" (Wright et al.). Wright himself explains that he hopes to "develop additional tools for sustainable passive management of elephant movements" as an alternative to elephant culling programs or increased physical barriers in elephant and human conflict-mitigation. While not necessarily an anti-capitalist or radical program at first glance, initiatives like this example of fence deconstruction serve as a way to re-imagine landscapes that have been sculpted by economic and social theories that are simply unsustainable at this point. Part of the change necessary to productively and sustainably move forward is physical, some social, or spatial, and others, mental. While small in terms of broader sentiments of global political and theoretical change, replacing the physical features that symbolize efforts of imperialism and forced maintenance of nature with features that coexist with natural are more meaningful than seemingly small impacts of a bee pheromone study.

complicating my conclusion

Spending time delineating between forms of commodification has been enlightening and has served to expand my own definition of what creates capital and what motives drive the mobilization of livelihoods as yet another form of commodification. From cultural capital to literal crime-driving profit, it is clear that elephants have been reshaped by human hands throughout our coexistence to fulfill a vital role in our capitalist system for centuries. What makes this observation worthwhile however, is the fact that these forms of capital still play such a strong role in how humans approach conservation and problem solving and have manufactured an elephant that is treated with higher economic value than a human. One way in which the deconstruction of evolved capital can help is by exhibiting the ability for complex structures to mirror capitalism's ability to take on many different forms, meaning that anti-capitalist strategies too, can range in shape, size, and implementation.

From larger scale programs like CBNRM to reconstructions of boundaries that are quite literally small in, solutions to the threat of elephant extinction and the violence and responsibilities placed on local communities vary across the board. Josphat Ngonyo and Mariam Wanjala's contribution to *Ignoring Nature No More,* a collection of essays seeking to recreate a global mindset regarding nature, centers various solutions to environmental injustices present in Kenya that have potentially far-reaching impact. Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) share the vision of healing relationships between state-managed land and their governing bodies with neighboring communities by transferring money from tourism, creating jobs, and stimulating agricultural productivity (348). These projects tend to succeed in limited geographies, where national park boundaries or forest delineations simplify where revenue

comes from and who neighboring communities are, but leave complications up for interpretations elsewhere. Ngonyo and Wanjala go on to call for the Kenyan government to "develop a value system for Africa's natural ecosystems that integrates their cultural, ecological, and economic values" (348), a task they demand but fail to engage with in much detail. The goal of implementing a form of resource valuation here would be to "protect the integrity of Africa's ecosystems against pervasive and exploitative international profit markets" (349), a valiant intention, but a strategy that continues nonetheless to rely on the systems of capital and commodification of wildlife that these profit markets uphold. They argue that "local people, the ultimate owners and guardians of natural ecosystems, must be the direct beneficiaries of the income that accrues from the use of ecosystems" (350), a sentiment upheld by platforms such as the Northern Rangeland Trust, a group including a Council of local Elders and various other nominated stakeholders that come together, emphasizing the value of opening up the table to a diverse range of voices. Alternatives to existing structures can also be implemented in the ecotourism sector as another vessel through which Traditional Ecological Knowledge can be shared. In a state of acceptance that wildlife commodification through sustainable and humane forms of ecotourism presents itself as a potential compromise in the face of decommodification, it is also possible to see the space sustainable reliance on wildlife creates for education and the dissemination of valuable knowledge, if done carefully.

While I aimed all along to conclude my thesis with some semblance of a list of future-facing action items, and still aim to do so, I also learned along the way the age-old lesson that bringing about sustainable, equitable, inclusive and overall successful change is contingent upon learning from past patterns of failure. Every potential 'solution' I came across or thought of, from the

strict decommodification of elephants to community-based initiatives came with crumbs of complexity that called into question the very premise of each solution. CBNRM is largely critiqued for failing to garner adequate economic benefits and existing under the direction of commonly corrupt governments, but corrupt governments are largely the symptom of otherwise unjustly distributed global resources. This resulting issue raises problems of global inequality that extend far beyond human-elephant conflict. Ecotourism, on the other hand, is often presented as a method of ensuring the profit made from natural resources such as elephants stay within local communities, rather than transferring profit to disconnected parties abroad as ivory trade capital does. However, so many locations where elephants and humans reside together are not cohesive with ecotourism: some landscapes are simply harder to navigate than others, existing infrastructure may not support tourism or actors pertaining to health and safety may render some locations far less profitable than others. The inability to support tourism is not an inherently bad thing but consequently creates a vastly uneven geography across which communities can or cannot benefit from the elephant's appeal.

Even further complexities surrounding a normative understanding of elephant crises exist in the oversimplified status of elephant populations as constantly declining. Rather, populations in some distinct parks and reserves ranging between Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe have encountered issues with populations so large they have contemplated implementing controversial culling programs in which elephants are purposely killed to limit population growth (Duffy 106). In 2008 alone, the population of elephants in Kruger National Park, South Africa, swelled from 8,000 to 12,000 (Duffy 145), toting along the destruction of landscapes by overgrown populations and increasing interaction and conflict with humans across

park and reserve borders. The rarely seen existence of overgrown elephant populations serves to underscore the hierarchy of publicized problems associated with elephants and their ivory. Western media prioritizes displaying the plight of threatened elephants while obscuring the complexities of intra-special relationships that plague only local communities bordering on elephant habitat. This priority also seems to romanticize the elephant's situation, returning to the creation of malleable characters of victimization and villainization. Extending this problematic romanticization from conceptual to tangible, simplifying the elephant's problem to one of threatened extinction exposes massive hypocrisy and double standards that dominate the allocation of Western resources. Duffy lists solutions to overpopulation such as female contraceptives to control population growth and translocating elephants to countries with decreasing populations that have been dismissed due to their high costs as evidence of a dual hypocrisy. While "organizations expect the world's poorest states to pay the costs of keeping large elephant populations [...] there is little financial support from the international community for wildlife management" (Duffy 145). Furthermore, the international community as a whole is clearly against organized strategies like culling and licenses to kill rogue or violent elephants but still refuse to fund alternatives under the harmful assumption that corrupt African governments will pocket and launder the funds (Duffy 147).

These complexities and overly employed miscommunications are rarely compiled into one place, most likely because it is arguably impossible to do so without simplifying the situation down in ways that have harmfully affected policy and action in the past. But that is still what I have attempted to do. I acknowledge that in doing so I have come to the conclusion that complexities require variation, meaning that because the ivory trade and the influence it holds over human and

non-human populations is so strong, resolutions require a system of solutions that vary across the landscape they influence. Parallel to the way in which the geography of the elephant is complex, dynamic, and asymmetric, so is the way we must turn to address the threats they face and the risks of those who neighbor them. As Eric Sheppard writes in "Thinking Geographically: Globalizing Capitalism and Beyond", alternatives to capitalist solutions constitute a "valuable and diverse experimental ecosystem of norms, practices, and trajectories" (17) that when applied to difficulties emerging from the ivory trade would create a future far more accepting of variation and geography-based visions of sustainability and conservation.

Capitalism has provided a justification for the domination and exploitation of natural resources and lives while conservation has provided a way for capitalism to maintain a hard grip on human and non-human livelihoods. The assumption that conservation-backed decisions are inherently "ethical and environmentally sound" despite "counterproductive, unethical and highly unjust outcomes" (Duffy 111), has contributed to the villainization not only of actors like poachers but also of anyone who goes against the powerhouse that is contemporary conservation theory. Part of the problem I envisioned confronting when I started my thesis was the question of protecting and maintaining beneficial and secure relationships with a species without reliance on an objective trove of value, aka, their commodification. How can an argument for the protection of a species without fiscal repercussions be made in a convincing and enduring way? The answer to this question is visible in the various presences of elephants that continue to "litter the histories and geographies of civilizations and everyday lives" (Whatmore and Thorne 187). A capitalist-backed desire for economic growth with its fixation on ivory-based capital has diminished the value of elephants and rendered their cultural significance, symbology, and theoretical

importance obsolete, but not irretrievable. Disregarding values that uphold collective identities that are intertwined with environmental heritage and elephant species themselves serve as another form of disempowerment that needs to be addressed and resolved in order to face a decolonized landscape with the potential to uphold an anticapitalistic future.

hopeful lessons from the elephant

Elephants are commonly seen as symbols of strength, power, good luck and prosperity: characteristics that shroud the species in positivity. While they have such a unique history and irreplaceable roles in human lives, they are also vessels through which to tell an all-too-common tale of wildlife manipulation and human exploitation. The point of my thesis is not solely to discuss elephants for the sake of themselves, but for the role they play as the supply of a commodified and desired resource, a role that will quickly be filled by another animal if we do not alter our paradigm of what it means to conserve and protect. Ivory trade bans that extinguish ivory as a source of wealth isolate the elephant and ignore other forms of wildlife trade and related environmental injustice. The elephant's ivory will just be replaced by pangolin scales and we will soon have a situation rife with threats to another species' survival and constant community exploitation on our hands.

For this reason, the connections between elephant conservation and upholding Indigenous and local African community knowledge and opinions expand beyond this case study. These are a few indicating factors that can be used to uphold decolonizing and anti-capitalist values going beyond instances of human-elephant interaction:

- Amplification of local and indigenous voices
- Inclusivity of alternative conservation models
- Returned authority and rights to local land use
- Redirection of money flow to locations that interact naturally with the animal(s) in question
- Correcting vocabulary-based discourse that impacts public opinion and action

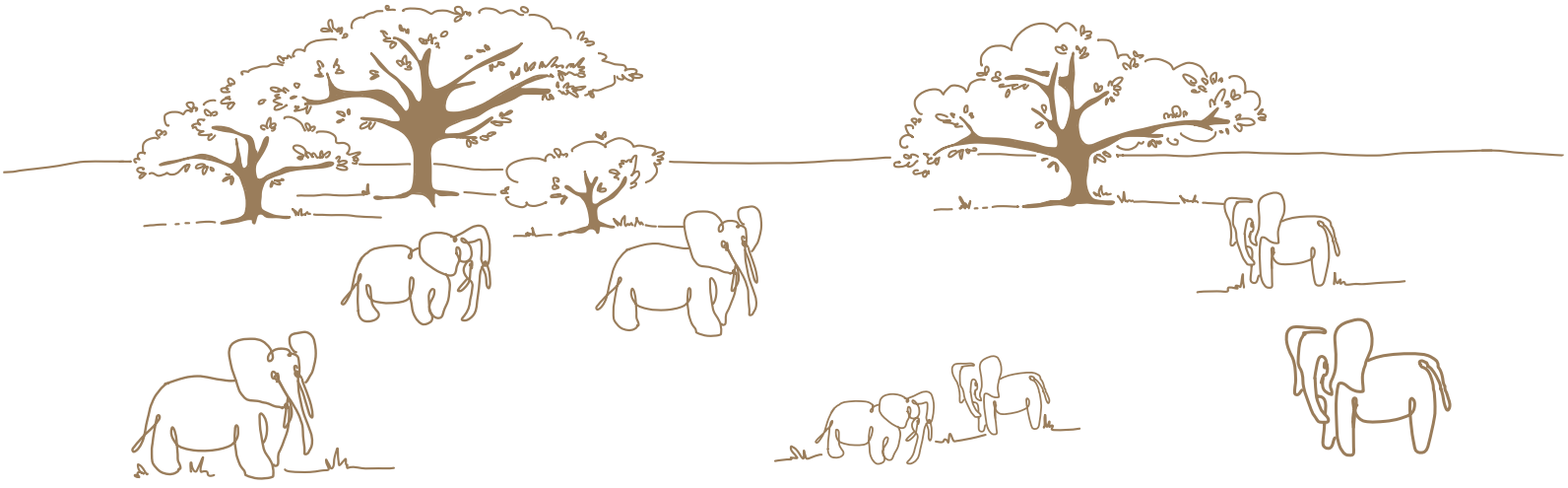
Understanding the connections and specific facets of interlocking ivory, elephant, and human relationships is key to restructuring a future based on local knowledge and values and reflective of global diversity, but there is always more. It is possible to read even further into the symbology of an elephant, into elements of gender study where landscapes themselves allude to "social spaces where racism and rugged masculinity frame the commodified safari experience" (Brandt and Josefsson 32). Structures such as toxic masculinity define the space in which hunting occurs in game reserves and facets of conservation such as the over-militarization of male-dominated groups, but these pervading influences are coming to light too.

Groups of all-women anti-poaching units including the Black Mambas (Hübschle and Shearing) and the Akashinga, 'Brave Ones' ("Meet the 'Brave Ones'" Nuwer) have found ways to confront landscapes of patriarchal tradition. Akashinga manages and protects the Phundunu Wildlife Area in Zimbabwe and has become a model to implement across the continent with the hope to employ some "4,500 female rangers" by 2030 ("Meet the 'Brave Ones'" Nuwer). Groups such as the 'Brave Ones' have the potential to restructure conservation by changing the patriarchal power dynamics that have historically driven elephant conservation and anti-poaching programs

by turning to methods that are "far less violent and which empower women and improve communities in the process" ("Meet the 'Brave Ones'" Nuwer). Another example of female empowerment amidst elephant and ivory-related policy and protection is the story of Josephine Ekiru, who saw the "tangible value of protecting a region's wildlife and how it filters down to the human community" ("The Bold, Tech-Fuelled Plan" Nuwer). Ekiru committed to implementing new elephant tracking software in an effort to protect places, people and wildlife. Ekiru explained that she wants to "see a society with good smiles, with peace and with more women empowered" ("The Bold, Tech-Fuelled Plan" Nuwer).

Elephants themselves have endured so much change and adaptation brought about by ever changing landscapes while their metaphorical selves too, have morphed to reflect simultaneously evolving cultures. They have occupied cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical space since elephant-human relationships arose and continue to grow new meaning as time goes on. Their centrality to human geographies emerged out of the commodification of their tusks which created an enduring market for ivory. However, the commodity they have become is just one of the identities elephants can adapt. Years of consistent disturbance and killing has led some elephant populations to evolve into tuskless beings (Campbell), an evolutionary tragedy that reflects the dire situation humans have put elephants in; one in which it is more evolutionary beneficial to lose a body part that is not only a tool, but a defense mechanism and a form of communication, in order to lessen their capital value. But to some, seeing the existence of tuskless elephants may serve to emphasize their inherent non-fiscal value. Value that instead resides in the elephant's ability to mobilize humans to see the necessity of conservation. Value that can aid the decolonization of nature by returning local autonomy and restructure traditional

society hierarchies. Value that is more significant alive than dead. Elephants can be read as a symbol of our own need to evolve, like some of them have, to discard outdated reliances on harmful commodities and reach instead towards empowerment and localized decisions.



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