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Virunga: Guns, Gorillas, and the Construction of Transnational Natures

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A discursive analysis of the consumption and contradiction of contemporary conservation practice

by

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Preface

During my first semester at Bucknell, a professor of mine assigned environmental historian William Cronon's essay titled "The Trouble with Wilderness", a piece that questions the authority of the society vs. nature divide that pervades environmental relations today. The essay is thought provoking, and at the time of its publication in 1995, was fairly novel in the realm of scholarship examining interactions between human civilization and natural systems. As a first-year environmental studies student with a hardline preservationist attitude, I found it groundbreaking. As I sat in the library with my highlighter and the essay, it was like Cronon had thrown in front of me the solution to the environmental crisis that continuously haunted me; do away with the human-nature divide and a whole new world opens. He posits that if rid ourselves of the distinction between human and nature, and cease to glorify certain areas as untouched wilderness, then opportunities to value all space as important come to life, leading to a more harmonious existence of what we see as the human and the natural. This suggestion is still salient even in the present where the topic has been elaborated over and over again. It proposes a new perspective and a new way to go about our daily lives, seeing inherent value in all living things. For me however, the truly fascinating aspect of the essay, was its suggestion that "nature" was not a concrete place, but was rather something fluid, which was arbitrarily constructed.

Both unfortunately and fortunately, the following years at Bucknell have shown me that a change in perspective is likely just one small piece of the puzzle when it comes to global "environmental" problems. What has remained constant however, is my questioning of the term "nature". I went through one particular phase where I was deeply unsettled that that the term at the heart of my discipline of "environmental" studies appeared to be something that simply

didn't exist. In the course of a few years I had gone from seeing the natural world as something completely separate from humanity, defined by a certain type of inherent value in its untouched state, to seeing the natural world as artifice, produced by capitalist expansion and violent colonial processes. Fortunately, my intellectual journey did not end there. In the spring of 2017 I left for Tanzania to participate in a semester of critical conservation study. Unsurprisingly I returned with more questions than answers. I did come back however, with a sense of newfound excitement for a discipline that sought to explore the questions I was fixated on; political ecology.

This thesis, like my intellectual formation as an undergraduate student, has been a long work in progress. Its regional focus was informed by my interest in East African politics, yet its central case study seemed to fall into my lap through the haphazard choice of a Netflix documentary one night of my sophomore year. It is also however, an expression of my belief that now, after 4 years, I can begin to provide my own answer to the question "what is nature". Political ecology approaches put forward the idea that social systems and environmental problems cannot be separated. As I saw time and time again in Tanzania, contemporary conservation is not simply the way society seeks to preserve endangered biodiversity; it is an expression of colonialism, a capitalist tool, and reinforcement of hegemonic western ideals of nature, and a driver of dispossession and economic depravity. It is also at times, however, a pursuit enacted with the best of intentions.

That night in 2015, as I sat in bed watching the "Virunga" documentary, I saw all of the above: colonial narratives, capitalism, and commodification. At the same time though I saw an ecosystem bursting with life, and portrayals of genuine human-nonhuman relationships. I don't claim to provide any answers in this thesis about what can be done to fix global patterns of

environmental degradation and exploitative capitalist expansion. I do, however, seek to problematize hegemonic western ideals of a “perfect wilderness” in order to make more room for marginalized ideas of what “the natural” has the potential to be. This thesis is an expression of my own analytical voice, but also my renderings of the voices of those who have influenced me, and taught me that the ability to think critically, and to question the world around you, is perhaps the greatest life skill a liberal arts education can provide.

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Abstract

The recent western media attention surrounding Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo has brought up significant scholarly questions about the discursive portrayal of "ideal" Natures. In this thesis, I undertake a discursive analysis of western media materials about Virunga National Park in order to understand how ideas of Nature are transnationally constructed. In doing this, I undertake an analysis of the western oriented discursive material associated with three socio-political processes within the park: green militarization, conservation, and the ecotourist industry. Ultimately, I conclude that the discursive material portrays a highly spectacularized and commodified "ideal" nature, which is consumed by western viewers, thus reinforcing the marginalization of alternative notions of the "natural" by global hegemonic forces. Drawing from alternative ideas of the "natural", I highlight that in a world increasingly enveloped by what scholars coin "capitalist ruination", finding ways to problematize ideal nature discourses, such as those demonstrated through a study of Virunga, and thus develop new ways of thinking about human and nonhuman relationships is imperative.

Introduction: Virunga, Conservation and Contradiction

In April of 2014, the release of Netflix's documentary film "Virunga" thrust the Democratic Republic of Congo's, Virunga National Park, into the western mass media spotlight. The film, which chronicles the plight of the Virunga mountain gorillas, and the Virunga park authorities fight against the seemingly villainous British Oil Company "SOCO", triggered an international outpouring of support, both on social media and in the form of donations. Taken at face value, this mobilization appears commendable, and like most contemporary conservation efforts, was likely rooted in genuine good intentions.

Good intentions however, do not always yield desirable results. The film, filled with racial tropes and militarized spectacle, produces a view of the park that is completely separate from the realities of conservation practice in the Democratic Republic of Congo today. Yet, due to the dominance of western media discourses, the problems with such a representation are not readily apparent to the non-critical eye. Attempts to conserve endangered species and to protect wilderness areas are afforded a type of moral exceptionalism within western societies, thus proving largely un-criticized beyond the academy. After all, what type of person would object to efforts to save baby African Elephants? or to protecting the Giant Panda?

In the face of an eager acceptance of contemporary conservation practice by western consumers, exploring the realities of protected areas, and problematizing the discourses which claim to represent those lived realities becomes increasingly important. First, in a world where the consequences of fortress conservation model may be devastating for communities that live in proximity to protected areas, unearthing the realities of such abuses is imperative from a human rights perspective. For example, in the film "Virunga", though we are presented with images of

armed park guards and of enforcement of park boundaries, we are never shown the impacts of such enforcement on the livelihoods of those who live in or around Virunga National Park. Second, looking past popular media representations of conservation may allow for a more accurate ecological evaluation of the effectiveness of efforts to save global biodiversity, as more focus is placed on the geophysical nuances of individual ecosystems. Lastly, and most significantly for my analysis, discourses which emerge from protected areas, and parks like Virunga, have the potential to shape the larger ways in which society conceptualizes nature. An examination of media surrounding Virunga National Park presents a unique opportunity to interrogate the ways in which different conservation discourses propagate limited imaginaries in the western world of what "nature" is. As I will outline, the consequences of such limited conceptions of the natural are significant, especially when considering precarious ecological futures and rapidly changing nature-society relationships.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which western oriented discourses emerge from Virunga, and the potential impact that such discursive formations may have upon how western societies think about nature. While this piece centers around a central case study, it explores transnational ideas. That is, this thesis deals with ideas which are not contained by the boundaries of the nation-state, nor in this case, by continental borders. My chosen case study provides a crucial starting point for these transnational ideas. In this thesis, using Virunga National Park as a center-point, I explore three main categories of discursive production: Green militarization and the fortress conservation model (FMC), Mountain Gorillas and the commodification of the non-human body, and ecotourism and the performative production of national natures. I preface these three discussions with a theoretical introduction (Chapter 1) and historical background (Chapter 2 and 3). These foundations are then followed by what is best

thought of as a series of three interconnected essays, each exploring a unique social or political process within the park. Methodologically, I employ critical discourse analysis, which I will continue to discuss in subsequent chapters in order to conduct this examination.

In the first essay (Chapter 4), I explore legacies of fortress conservation within Virunga, and the promotion of exclusionary land use policies. Situating my argument within scholarly discussions of green military practice, neoliberal conservation, and the "spectacular mediation" of conservation, I explore the ways in which militarization operates in the park, both historically and in the present day. Drawing from historical archives and previous scholarly work performed in the park by authors such as Marijnen and Verweijen (2016; 2016; 2017; 2018), I focus on the archetype of the wildlife ranger in Virunga. Ultimately, I conclude, through an analysis of media sources, that the militarized actions, and oftentimes premature deaths, of Virunga's rangers are heavily spectacularized through western discursive production, creating imagery which depicts them as swilling "conservation martyrs". As a result, I argue, the spectacle of their sacrifice can be capitalized on, to fund further militarization and park operation.

In the second essay (Chapter 5), I address the deployment of Virunga's Mountain Gorillas as a mechanism to garner international conservation support, in the form of funding and popular engagement. Drawing from work on non-human agency, such as Lorimer's conception of charisma, scholarly discussions of "flagship" species, and an application of Brockington and Scholfield's "conservationist mode of production" (2010), I argue that the mountain gorilla is archetyped and marketed by the various western medias surrounding Virunga, and is therefore rendered a tool through which to accrue popular support and donations. I analyze materials such as websites, news media, and books, to examine the ways in which the charisma of the mountain gorilla is capitalized on and cultivated. Ultimately, I discuss how commodification of the

mountain gorilla for conservation aims ultimately removes any potential for the recognition of nonhuman agency, and thus a more cohesive human-animal existence, with additional consequences for material efforts to conserve Virunga's gorillas.

The third essay focuses on the recent manifestation of ecotourism in Virunga. I begin by analyzing how ecotourism appears in the park and how it has developed over the last decade. Then, using the work of scholars who take a critical approach to ecotourism development, such as Duffy (2013) and Lisle (2004), I begin to discuss the ways in which tourism, as an economic venture, requires a unique performance of the nation state in order to attract visitors. Drawing on examples from websites, travel reviews, and advertisements for ecotourism in Virunga, I apply ideas of the "consumption of catastrophe" in tourist ventures to demonstrate that the promotion of tourism in the park has required a further vilification of human political activity in the Congo, and a return to "heart of darkness" imagery. In this way, I propose that the ideas of a "morally innocent" nature, which are produced in order to promote ecotourism in Virunga, further damage human lives in the area, as well as promote "primitive" tropes of the African continent.

The purpose of these three analyses and this thesis as a whole is to provide a critical evaluation of the mainstream discursive formations produced via conservation in Virunga. I critique three major categories of discourse, grounding my criticism in the aforementioned scholarly works within the realm of political ecology. With regard to Virunga, scholars such as Marijnen and Verweijen (2015, 2016, 2017) have critically evaluated the discursive legitimation specifically of conservation militarization in the park. In a more general sense too, scholars such as Büscher (2016) have analyzed the way that the "othering" of those involved in wildlife "crime" in South Africa manifests via discourse produced in social media.[1] Although, my thesis

follows a number of the same methodological principles as these works, instead of placing a focus on the legitimation of militarization in conservation, I instead choose to center my critique on the ability of conservation discourse to produce specific hegemonic conceptions of "the natural".[2]

My main and unique contribution to the literature then, is to identify the natures which are co-produced via discursive formations in Virunga. I argue that the consumption of this discourse fosters the dominant re-inscribing of wilderness narratives by the western world. I find that the "natures" suggested through the discursive processes that I choose to analyze are overwhelmingly dualistic, and promote limited imaginaries of what future human-nonhuman coexistence may look like. I also find that the natures produced in relation to Virunga are embedded in colonial processes, and rely heavily upon affective commodification of living beings, human bodily exploitation, and are in and of themselves performative. I argue then that the "nature" produced via discursive processes in Virunga is ultimately damaging to the people who live around the park and work inside it, for the nonhumans who reside in the park, and more broadly, limits conceptions of more inclusive forms of "the natural". Above all, this thesis is a critique of existing discursive productions. I do point to alternatives to this oppressive nature, highlighting the work of scholars such as Whatmore (2001), Escobar (1999), Lorimer (2007),

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[1] Büscher's article "Rhino Poaching is Out of Control! Violence, race and the politics of hysteria in online conservation" (2016), along with Marijnen and Verweijen's piece "Selling green militarization: the discursive (re)production of militarized conservation in Virunga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo", have both served as methodological guideposts and intellectual inspiration for my thesis. I view my work as a theoretical expansion of their analyses, with a specific focus on the discursive production of "nature".

[2] There is a large body of scholarly work that seeks to investigate militarized natures and the nuances of fortress conservation. While I do to an extent engage with such ideas, my focus is on the discursive formations produced by militarized conservation practice, as opposed to the reciprocal legitimation of militarized conservation via discourse. Though the two are not mutually exclusive, I analyze one part of what can be seen as a discursive cycle.

and Tsing (2015), and incorporate their vision of nature-society coexistence into my analysis.

Although I will continue to discuss the logics for the discursive material I have chosen to use, it is worth mentioning now that this thesis is only an exploration of specific discourses emanating from Virunga National Park, and conservation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although I am not able to address discursive material produced by residents in close proximity to the park, or perhaps by individual park officials, I believe that is it still extremely valuable to problematize the "westernized" material produced in association with the park. In this sense, I refer not entirely to the geographic "west", but rather to nations in an economic and political position to produce (and reproduce) hegemonic ideas of nature, even if those same ideas are not globally universal. The increasing neoliberalization of conservation by colonial forces has necessitated that protected areas in the global south "market" themselves to consumers in the global north via avenues in mainstream media, or face ecological devastation. This selling of conservation practice however, produces images of what an ideal "nature" looks like, and those images are then internalized and reproduced by the culturally hegemonic western world.

This thesis is therefore more about the mediation and discursive implications of the park than it is about the lived experiences of the people who reside and work there. My choice, to interrogate the mainstream western discourses emanating from Virunga National Park, is rooted in a belief that the "ideal" Nature being promoted is theoretically problematic, damaging to human and non-human lives, and capable of overshadowing more inclusive understandings of ecological coexistence. In doing so, I hope that attention can be brought to marginalized ideas of nature, which have routinely been overwritten by both the colonial project and late capitalist processes.

Chapter I: Un "Earthing" a New Nature

"For at the very moment that the 'human mastery of nature' appears to have arrived, so the safety net that holds 'us' (humans) and 'them' (other animals) apart unravels as the instruments of this supposed mastery render our own species genome just one more entry in the vast informatic menagerie of life science."

(Sarah Whatmore in *Hybrid Geographies*)

William Cronon and A Brief History of Wilderness

For those unfamiliar with the nuances of environmental studies today, the idea of "nature" as a controversial term may seem strange. Indeed, the idea of an independent "natural world" which exists apart from human civilization has proven contentious amongst environmental scholars over the past two decades. In this section, I explore the origins of the idea of nature, pointing to different scholarly contributions, in order to provide a foundation through which to understand the myriad of ways nature comes to be discursively constructed within Virunga National Park.

In a scholarly sense, the quest to define and deconstruct "nature" has now been labeled as a primary aim of political ecology (Escobar 1999, Whatmore 2009 in Gregory 2009). Ideas of a world separate from human civilization have long permeated Western literature, religion, and society. Relatedly, Williams, in "Problems in Material and Culture" notes that "the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history". Many scholars have engaged with ideas of a "constructivist nature", but a particularly accessible jumping off point (and my original entry way to understanding the debate about nature) appears in the form

of Cronon's seminal essay "The Trouble with Wilderness". In the essay, Cronon begins by pointing out that ideas of wilderness originally appeared primarily from a biblical context (Cronon 1995). In this way, "wilderness" was not a pristine escape from the ills of contemporary human society, but rather a terrifying, vast, uninhabited space, imbued with raw power and the angry wrath of god (Cronon 1995). As Cronon points out, this imagery soon gave way in the 18th century to literary romanticism and ideas of nature as a sublime entity (Cronon 1995). Through this view, in the eyes of society's intellectual elite, conceptions of the "natural world" shifted from a harsh wilderness unfit for human existence, to a pristine place with the capacity to elicit spiritual responses through beauty which was impossible to find in the built environment (Cronon 1995). In describing this shift, Cronon says,

> The wastelands that had once seemed worthless had for some people come to seem almost beyond price. That Thoreau in 1862 could declare wildness to be the preservation of the world suggests the sea change that was going on. Wilderness had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good—it had been the darkness, one might say, on the far side of the garden wall—and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself (Ibid., 72).

Following the Romantic movement, and with the incorporation of American "frontier" nostalgia and subsequent desire to remove oneself from ills of an industrialized life, the American preservationist movement began, and with it the removal of native Americans' communities from large swaths of land deemed to be too pristine for human use (Cronon 1995). While ideas of wilderness have evolved over the subsequent decades, contemporary notions still stem from 19th century ideas and social movements, and were maintained through the American National Park system and preservationist tradition, thus yielding much of the conceptual "natural" world we see today (Cronon 1995). From this point on in this thesis, following scholars such as

Cronon, I will now refer to this idealistic conceptualization of the natural as "nature" with a capital "N".

This is, of course, a summarized version of a complex reality, and is only an introduction to the vast scholarly theorizations about what "Nature" means, both today and in the past. Yet, this background is enough to begin to explain the transient form of the "natural world", not as a concrete object, but rather as a constructed entity. Today, much of Cronon's original analysis is still relevant to the tumultuous process that is nature-society relations. Aside from its origins however, defining nature and navigating the human role in relation to it is still a continuously evolving scholarly process due to our constantly evolving way of life. In his discussion of the quest to define nature, Escobar quotes Bender to state that "people's experience of nature and landscapes 'is based in large measure on the particularity of the social, political, and economic relations within which they live out their lives" (Bender 1993 in Escobar 1999). In the next section then, I propose to take a brief survey of the evolving ways in which "Nature" has been theorized, while also pointing to alternative visions of the "Nature" that Cronon describes.

The Path of Constructivism: Theorizing Nature

Perhaps the best way to continue this discussion is through Arturo Escobar's point that suggesting Nature is a socially constructed concept is *not* the same as saying that there "is no nature out there" (Escobar 2004). In other words, I don't move to deny that there is no "nature" which exists, rather I seek to critically evaluate the concept of an "ideal nature", or going back to Cronon's analysis, "nature" with a capital "N". Escobar, drawing from Soper, defines what I label an "ideal Nature" as an "essential Nature", or "nature as an essential principle and foundational category, a ground for both being and society, nature as 'an independent domain of

intrinsic value, truth, or authenticity'" (Soper 1996 in Escobar 1999). This essential Nature then, has come to be deconstructed in a number of different ways, as we move away from what Escobar calls the "modern ideology of naturalism" (1996).

Critical scholars, in relation to Cronon's work, have theorized a number of different ways to deconstruct ideas of Nature, with some success (See Castree and Braun 2001, Neumann 1998). Notions of pristine wilderness as they relate to conservation have now come to be seen as colonial export, a means of neoliberal accumulation, and a by-product of late stage capitalism (See Smith 1984, Castree 2001, Buscher 2015, Brockington 2006). In the past few decades, one of the most significant analyses of Nature have come from geographer Neil Smith, who in his work *Uneven Development*, pointed to Nature as an entity produced by processes of global capitalism (1984).

This idea, of Nature as a by-product of capital accumulation is one worth exploring, as it leads to further reconceptualizations of the topic. In *Uneven Development,* Smith explores the ways in which capitalism has produced global inequality, but also produced the spaces in which global inequality exists (1984). One of these spaces, Smith states, is the realm of Nature. Prudham points out, that at the most basic level, Smith's thesis is that Nature is socially produced. More specifically however, Smith argues that Nature is a literal material "artefact" of late capitalism (Prudham 2009). This statement, makes up what has come to be known in geography as "the production of nature".

Smith's argument points to the myriad of ways in which biophysical processes of capitalism, such as pollution, genetic modification, and agriculture, have transformed the material world, thus creating new ideas of what is Nature and what is not (Prudham 2009). In

discussing aspects of the natural world that are arguably untouched by human influence, Smith states,

> But there is a more stringent case where, indeed, even the form of natural substance has not previously been altered by human activity. Substantial parts of the geological substratum would probably count here, if one went deep enough. So too would the solar system if one went far enough, that is beyond the moon and beyond some of the planets and beyond the assorted debris that has been jettisoned in space. But these rather extreme examples hardly testify to the falsity of the "production of nature" thesis, especially when one looks at more down-to-earth examples of supposedly unproduced nature, such as Yellowstone Park or Yosemite. These are produced environments in every conceivable sense. From the management of wildlife to the alteration of the landscape by human occupancy, the material environment bears the stamp of human labor; from the beauty salons to the restaurants, and from the camper parks to the Yogi Bear postcards, Yosemite and Yellowstone are neatly packaged cultural experiences of environment on which substantial profits are recorded each year. The point here is not nostalgia for a pre-produced nature, whatever that might look like, but rather to demonstrate the extent to which nature has in fact been altered through human agency. Where nature does survive pristine, miles below the surface of the earth, or light years beyond it, it does so only because as yet it is inaccessible. If we must, we can let this inaccessible nature support our notions of nature as Edenic, but this is always an ideal, abstract nature of the imagination, one that we will never know in reality. Human beings have produced whatever nature became accessible to them (1984, 81).

In order to distinguish the "production of nature" from an inclusion of all anthropogenic change (which has been happening since the advent of the first agricultural practices), Smith argues that contemporary capitalism allows society to alter the world in a way that is unprecedented in human history (Prudham 2009).[3] This alteration, Smith argues, is distinctly global in nature. Global processes of capital exchange and accumulation allow for new scales of production that transform resources on a spatial level not possible outside systems of capitalist expansion (Prudham 2009).

Furthermore, Smith argues that capitalism does not just physically produce Nature, but also transforms the way in which we think about the Natural (Prudham 2009). In this way,

[3] Here, I make brief reference to the idea of the "Anthropocene", or a global era dominated by human alteration of the "natural" environment. While not directly relevant now, the idea of the Anthropocene comes up again towards the end of my analysis.

commodification and the circulation of material through global markets has a significant impact on the human conceptualization of what is purely Natural, and what is human. Prudham, in his analysis of Smith's work states,

> Smith's argument is that such an instrumentalist disposition specifically towards nature is reinforced by capitalist social relations and processes of valuation, and that these ideas become increasingly influential in the construction of meaning around nature in a capitalist society. Examples would include instrumental, utilitarian arguments for biodiversity conservation, which tend to both render species in terms of net present value of future benefits, while also individuating such species in relation to their ecological (and social!) context (2009,1).

While Smith's work has retained a relatively prominent position amongst critical geographers, some scholars have argued that a purely productionist oriented outlook ignores the ontological influences of the non-human world (Castree 1995). In other words, what the production of nature theory misses, is a recognition that non-human entities may have a profound impact on the ways in which we view the world, and the ways in which we exist in the world. Castree too, argues that too much of an emphasis upon human capitalistic production may in fact undermine the "productive capacities" of the biophysical world, in regards to life systems (Prudham 2009). This is not to say that Smith's thesis is untrue, yet it points to an important weakness in doing away with Nature completely.

Criticisms of the "production of nature" thesis point to the fact that moving to an entirely "post-natural" standpoint has its shortcomings when it comes to recognizing the biophysical and ontological influences of non-human beings and ecosystems. In his essay "After Nature", Escobar emphasizes this theoretical balance, writing:

> It is necessary to strive for a more balanced position that acknowledges both the constructedness of nature in human contexts- the fact that much of what ecologists refer to as natural is indeed also a product of culture- and nature in the realest sense, that is, the existence of an independent order of nature, including a biological body, the

> representations of which constructivists can legitimately query in terms of their history or political implications.

Thus, holding on entirely to the production of nature theory, and viewing capital "N" nature as an entity that was entirely produced by economic circumstance and human intervention seems to leave society at an intellectual cliffhanger of sorts. As an alternative therefore, scholars such as Escobar (1999) and Collard et al (2015), have proposed that viewing Nature as an economic product of the colonial/capitalist project can be combined with efforts to re-evaluate and restructure the term itself. In this way, as Escobar says, we can "navigate between 'nature-endorsing' and 'nature-skeptical' perspectives in order to 'incorporate a greater awareness of what their respective discourses of 'nature' may be ignoring and politically repressing (Escobar 1999, 4; Soper 1996, 23). Theoretically, accepting Nature as a capitalist invention of the past, and acknowledging the ruins it has left in its wake is a worthwhile endeavor, especially when paired with attempts to find a new meaning of the term, and revise its dualistic nature (Collard et. al 2015).

As previously stated, my aim in this thesis is to critically evaluate the discursive production of Nature as it relates to western media coverage of Virunga National Park. At times I also hint at potential solutions to the oppressive, essentialist Nature model, providing a baseline for imagining more productive socio-ecological futures. While many scholars have put forth ideas of how to "do away with" nature society dualism, Escobar (1999) and Whatmore (2001) put forth two particularly compelling, and interrelated, theorizations of a "new" nature. In the simplest of terms, new scholarly definitions of the natural, or the ones which I cite in this thesis, revolve around Escobar's central question in "After Nature". He asks, "Is there a view of nature that goes beyond the truism that nature is constructed to theorize the manifold forms in which it is culturally constructed and socially produced, while fully acknowledging the biophysical basis

of its constitution?" (1999, 3). He, and other nature-society scholars, would argue there is a possible new way of viewing nature, starting with Whatmore's conceptualization of "hybrid natures".

Hybridity, at its most basic level, refers to two ideas which manage to transgress some type of established binary; a form of conceptual mixing (Whatmore 2009). Whatmore viewed one of the main problems with the "production of nature" idea as the fact that even after deconstructing "Nature", the dualism remained, then leaving the world with a strange mix of capitalist ruination and natural systems, and no real way to reconcile the two besides Cronon's ideas of valuing all natural systems as if they were on the same plane as the pristine wilderness left behind. (Castree 2010). The true value of Whatmore's "hybrid natures" therefore, if that it allows for an acknowledgement of the damage Nature with a capital N has done, but then seeks to completely re-envision human and natural systems relationships, with an emphasis on the world as a place that has always been messy and confusing (Castree 2010).

Whatmore suggests that the ideas that Nature relied on during its foundation, don't actually exist (Castree 2010). Rather, she argues that there is no ontological divide between natural and non-natural things, nor are there any qualities that make "nature" separate from human society (Castree 2010). In this way, hybridity seeks to deterritorialize the "creatures and spaces" that fall under the historical category of "wild" (Whatmore 2002, 12). Following Whatmore, I problematize existing discourses of a traditional "wild" in effort to develop a more inclusive understanding of human-nonhuman networks.

Escobar though, takes this analysis of hybridity a step further, suggesting then, that the various "hybrids" which form our world, can be categorized into "regimes of nature" in order to "facilitate the task of visualizing the span of articulations of the biological and historical" (1999,

4). He suggests, that concept of "social nature", that is, nature which is produced via social experience and processes, can be theorized as three overlapping entities: capitalist nature, nature, and techno-nature (1999, 5). He maintains that,

> the nature regimes can be seen as constituting a structured social totality made up of multiple and irreducible relations, without a center or origin, that is, a field of articulations...The identity of each regime is the result of discursive articulations- with biological, social, and cultural coupling- that take place in an overall field of discursivity wider than any particular regime (Escobar 1999).

These articulations co-produce each other, and are inherently relational. Escobar's point therefore, is to decentralize the human-nature, subject-object dualism in favor of a more unsettled conceptualization of the processes responsible for the construction of "the natural", whether they be cultural, biophysical, or historical. In this thesis, as I will discuss, the nature that I point to as being discursively produced tends to fall under Escobar's classification of "capitalist nature", a nature which is "uniform, legible, manageable, harvestable, Fordist" (1999, 5). The significance of this classification arises via his emphasis on the fact that what matters about these regimes is "examining their mutual articulations and contradictions- the ways in which they vie for the control of the social and biological" (1999, 5).

Through this thesis, therefore, I seek to investigate the ways through which capitalist natures produced via discursive processes in Virunga potentially overpower other ideas of socio-ecological relationships, such as the "organic" regime that Escobar identifies. Later in the thesis I will articulate further how other socio-ecological ideas might emerge once we critically evaluate the discursive processes present in the park. First it is necessary to engage in that critical discourse analysis in order to reveal other possibilities. Western discourse coming out of Virunga National Park in the DRC reinforces the normative nature-society dualism when consumed by society. This is, I argue, both to the detriment of humans, and nonhuman actors in

the park, actively preventing possibilities of developing more equitable socioecological coexistence.

The Political Ecology Approach

Much of the contemporary work of defining nature has been undertaken by scholars of human geography, or more specifically the multi-disciplinary approach known as political ecology. Far from a highly structured discipline, political ecology, since its relatively recent emergence in the 1980's, has continuously managed to defy concise definition (Watts 2009). The political ecology approach is one that seeks to critically address environmental problems by examining environmental degradation in the view of social, historical, cultural, and economic contexts. Therefore, for the most part, those in the field of political ecology set out to show that environmental problems are both political and ecological simultaneously (Valdivia 2011). To perhaps put it most concisely, the approach seeks to investigate the "complex metabolism between nature and society" (Watts 2009).Geographer Gabriela Valdivia outlines the main themes of inquiry which have come to dominate the field, including political analysis, historical analysis, ethnographic analysis, discourse analysis, and analysis of ecological field studies (2011). Researchers who employ political ecology themes typically seek to understand how different cultural phenomenon come together to interact with, and produce environmental problems (Valdivia 2011).

I believe that bringing forward the brief but significant history of the political ecology approach may help in clarifying its current goals. While some scholars argue that the general concepts behind political ecology are evident in colonial criticisms from the early 19th century (see Davidsen 2010), post-modern political ecology re-emerged in the 1970's-1980's with a number of foundational scholarly pieces. As Valdivia states, critiques directed towards the

shortcomings of the cultural ecology movement and mainstream development projects drove forward a more environmentally centered critical approach to hazard and disasters (Validivia 2011). At this time, other scholars also sought to incorporate political economy, Marxism, and colonial critiques into what many saw as Malthusian dominated environmental management disciplines (Valdivia 2011). The result was that critical scholars coming from multiple different fields were arriving at the same conclusions about dominant environmental paradigms, thus fostering the desire for an interdisciplinary approach. What many political ecologists pinpoint as the quasi-official start of the approach however is geographer Piers Blaikie's cornerstone work on soil erosion, titled "Land Degradation and Society (Watts 2009) (See Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). While attempting to understand dramatic soil depletion in a rural Nepalese community, Blaikie eventually posited that the erosion was not due to environmental mismanagement, but rather external conditions that forced residents to act in a certain manner, and created unchangeable economic conditions. Deeply entrenched in a Marxian inspired view of political economy, Blaikie's study was the first to synthesize and consolidate the ideals of political ecology into a somewhat cohesive body of work (Validvia 2011).

In a similar vein, I also seek to employ a multi-disciplinary approach to understand an environmental problem, biodiversity conservation, through a specific case study, Virunga National Park. Through a political ecology lens, it becomes quickly obvious that Virunga's loss of biodiversity is not simply a problem of environmental mismanagement, although it may appear that way via various popular media representations. I, therefore, specifically utilize a political ecology based discourse analysis in order to evaluate conservation within Virunga through a critical lens, and to challenge popular media narratives of environmental degradation.

Discourse, Power, and Method of Analysis

In this way, in the case of Virunga, the "discourse analysis" aspect of the political ecology approach becomes critically important. I employ political and historical analysis to provide a solid theoretical foundation to the object of Virunga. Yet, many of the questions I seek to answer, revolve around how ideas of nature, specific to Virunga, are discursively constructed; thus requiring a specific emphasis on the importance of discourse analysis to my approach. Valdivia provides a clear definition of how discourse analysis fits into the framework of political ecology approaches:

> Discourse analyses...explore and aim to make visible the ways in which "the environment" and "environmental problems" are discursively constructed. These analyses emphasize a critical perspective towards modernist notions of objectivity and rationality. They interrogate the relationship between power and scientific knowledge and recognize the existence of multiple, culturally constructed ideas of the environment and environmental problems (2011, 3).

Discourse analysis therefore, can be employed in order to understand how ideas of nature are constructed at different multi-scalar levels, in direct contradiction to the notion that ideas of the environment represent independently existent realities of the natural world.

In regards to social construction of the natural world, the importance of discourse cannot be over-emphasized. In a very literal sense, discourse can be seen simply as the linguistic action of conversing about a specific topic or subject. In the post-structuralist critical tradition however, discourse occupies an extremely important space within the production of material realities (Escobar 1996).

Originating out of Foucault's approach to language and power, in a theoretical sense discourse can be seen as a "system of representation" (Hall 2001). As opposed to simply a linguistic context, Hall points to Foucault's intention to portray discourse as a combination of statements and practice with the ability to create meaning (Hall 2001). Hall states,

> Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the subjects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others (133).

Discourse and the system associated with are not just linguistic practices then, but a series of individual ideas, actions, and statements which, when referring to the same subject, come together to create a "discursive formation" (Hall 2001). Therefore, because of its role in constructing how a topic can be talked about, this discursive formation also retains the ability to define how a subject *cannot* be talked about; thus limiting the possibilities for imagining, acting, and speaking in relation to the topic (Hall 2001). In other words, the discourse on a subject, because it creates the subject effectively limits the practice of the subject (Hall 2001).

Foucault's intention however, in pointing out discourse's ability to limit construction of lived reality, is also to suggest that meaning in material reality does not exist without discourse (Hall 2001). Thus, in post-structuralism, discourse is the articulation of what is seen as "material reality" to lived social reality (Escobar 2011). This is not to say that a "material reality" does not exist; on the contrary Foucault does acknowledge the existence of real "things" outside of discourse; but in his constructionist theory of meaning and representation discourse is what ultimately imbues meaning onto the material world. With regards to the aspects of discourse around an object, "*They do not define its internal constitution, but what enables it to appear, to juxtapose itself with other objects, to situate itself in relation to them, to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity, in short, to be placed in a field of exteriority*" (Foucault 1972, 60). Thus, as with most of the Marxist post-structuralist tradition, Foucault states that discourse is able to articulate the meaning in an external field of an existing material reality,

despite its inability, as with language, to demonstrate the essence of the existing object (Hall 2001).

Returning to discourse and Nature, understanding the discursive construction of the natural world is imperative to understanding the social significance of the subject, and its material existence within the "external field", or society. As political ecologist Arturo Escobar states, "discourse is the process through which social reality inevitably comes into being", thus rendering the discourse surrounding the natural world critical to understand its social significance and relations (Escobar 2011).

In this sense, the discourse surrounding Virunga National Park can be seen as belonging to the larger discursive formation of *biodiversity conservation*. Thus, a discourse analysis of the specific place is able to inform the larger societal context of the formation as a whole. I therefore seek to analyze various different examples of discourse related to conservation in Virunga National Park.

Discursive (and other) Methodologies

Like all undertakings in the social sciences, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has an associated methodology. It is important to note, as Wodak and Chilton argue, that CDA is implemented differently across academic disciplines, and is better viewed as an approach, as opposed to a definitive set of methodological practices. As Van Dijk notes though, most CDA is united by a set of common goals including aims such as being problem oriented, paying attention not just to verbal/written discourse but also to "other semiotic dimensions of communicative events" (picture, film, music), and paying specific attention to societal power dynamics (1994, 18). Van Dijk also states that,

> Among the descriptive, explanatory and practical aims of CDA-studies is to uncover, reveal, or disclose, what is implicit, hidden, or not immediately obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideologies. That is, CDA specifically focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimation, and the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds (and indirectly the actions) of people in the interests of the powerful (1994, 18).

In accordance with the principles of CDA, I undertake my analysis of westernized discourse in Virunga with the aim of uncovering the implicit transference of ideas of capital "N" nature. To do this, I spent this past academic year researching and collecting discursive material relating to the park, retrieving content from English-language based sources.[1] This material includes entities such as news reports, images, facebook posts, tweets, web pages, travel reviews, etc. Once collected, the material was uploaded to my Zotero database for further analysis. To conduct a more detailed CDA on social media perceptions of political processes in the park, I undertook a full content analysis of a set of tweets about the park. In order to collect these tweets, I used a pre-programmed Google Sheet which collected all of the tweets which were hashtagged"(#)Virunga", from the period of November 1st 2017 to March 1st 2018.[2] Then I imported the entire set into Nvivo - a qualitative data analysis software - and performed different analyses which are detailed in Chapter 3.

In accordance with the interdisciplinary principles of political ecology, I have supplemented my CDA with archival research about the park. At times, I also draw from my experience with similar forms of conservation during my time spent on a political ecology semester-long program in Tanzania in 2017.

Imagining Possible Discourses

As I stated previously, it is important to note that this particular discourse analysis is only part of the story of Virunga Park. This thesis is the first half of what ideally should be a multi-

part analysis. The discursive material that I have chosen to examine is easily accessed by western citizens of the global north. Thus, this analysis aims to understand how western ideas of nature are discursively constructed in relation to the Park. In thinking about Virunga, there are a myriad of discourses which are produced that I am not able to access. For example, I have neither the language skills nor the resources to access more localized discourses that may emerge from Congolese communities in close proximity to the park. I am not fully able to incorporate statements made by Congolese government agencies about the park. Significantly, I also fail to address discourses which potentially emerge from Congolese park ranger communities, or pro-conservation organizations within the DRC.

As with all academic research, oftentimes resources, time, and skill sets become limiting factors. As an undergraduate student, I have neither the timeframe nor assets to conduct long-term fieldwork in the Virunga area to access these discourses. Nor, am I able to access discursive materials such as media, advertisements, or conversations which may exist that are not in English. I am however, able to apply my skill set as a researcher in order to better understand western conservation discourse about the park and the potential consequences that discourse may have in its relation to constructing ideals of nature. What is helpful in this, is that as a white American woman, I am in fact a consumer of mainstream western discourses. Thus, I focus on analyzing discursive material that comes from sources that I, and others like me, interact with on a daily basis.

Western ideas of nature as they appear in biodiversity conservation practice represent one part of the cultural hegemony that western constructs of "wilderness" retain in contemporary society. Mainstream ideals of a constructed natural world wield enormous power on the global stage, and are inscribed into the mechanisms of various institutions, governments, and

knowledge paradigms. In a Foucauldian sense therefore, understanding the discourses of western constructs of nature within conservation is crucial to understanding how those ideas may wield power. And, as will be discussed, the power that these ideas hold may very well have a myriad of consequences for global biodiversity as a whole.

Returning to political ecology, the approach aims to understand environmental problems and phenomenon through a variety of different lenses, only one of which is discursive. Therefore, in order to truly understand the ways in which nature exists in relation to Virunga, an ethnographic and alternative discursive methodology would be ideal in order to incorporate the voices of people who live in and near the park. The world is a complex, and oftentimes messy, place and discursive constructions as they relate to mainstream society likely do not tell the whole story. Ethnography, as evidenced by the work of scholars over the past decade, is a critical component of political ecology research. Ethnographic approaches allow for an authentic, and potentially de-colonial approach to environmental problems, while at the same time elevating subaltern voices (See Igoe 2004, Choy 2011, Hathaway 2013). I therefore seek, in the following chapters to incorporate ethnographic work that others have done to create a more robust style of analysis.

Understanding the Discursive Implications of Virunga National Park

Conservation, and conservation discourse ties directly into Whatmore's ideas of hybridity, as it has the ability to form theoretical natures which run directly counter to deconstructing dualistic ideas of the natural. In regards to biodiversity conservation discourse based on preserving Nature with a capital "N" she states, "such discourses, Cronon argues, get us back to the wrong nature (1995), in the sense that they reproduce categorical binaries between

society and nature, human and animal, domesticated and wild that are intellectually and politically moribund" (Whatmore 2002). In keeping with the heart of this statement, I intend to demonstrate that ways in which discourse surrounding specific aspects of Virunga enforce the type of binaries that Whatmore points to, thus pointing to their culpability in enforcing a type of wilderness protection that allows for no way forward if the world is to value all types of biodiversity in the face of environmental crisis, and develop more effective means of dealing with species decline.

Additionally, however, I believe that this discourse does in fact, hold consequences for the biodiversity, human and non-human, residing in the area of Virunga National Park. While understanding just what these consequences may be, is perhaps the work of ethnographic inquiry, it's easy to see how drawing binaries can lead to exclusionary resource politics, militarization, and a devaluation of human life in relation to wilderness areas. As I will show, Virunga National Park as an entity, is perhaps the epitome of Whatmore's "hybrid". The park is a messy conglomeration of human residency, megafauna, armed warfare, colonialism, uninhabited space, and valuable "natural" resources amongst many other beings and processes. Yet, it is also a place teeming with life, holding the title for "most biodiverse" area on earth. Not recognizing the park, the land, and the region, as the subject of human and non-human co-production does an injustice to all life in the area, and allows for the same blind dualism to be applied to other conservation areas, with the same consequences. As Foucault notes, discourse has the potential to determine the possible ways to imagine material realities. So, through problematizing the discourses I've found, I hope to expand the possibilities for imagining a different reality of conservation within Virunga National Park.

In the next two chapters, before directly addressing the discursive material that I have collected, I will undertake a historical analysis of conservation in the DRC, highlighting the processes of colonialism and late capitalism. I will also specifically discuss the formation of Virunga Park, and the current state of the park, thus setting the stage for a critical analysis of contemporary social and political processes within the park.

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[1] I chose to use English because discursive material published in English is frequently consumed by western citizens. Also, while I have actively pursued French at Bucknell and am partially proficient in Kiswahili thanks to my time spent in Tanzania, I am not at the point where I would feel comfortable interpreting materials for scholarly analysis.

[2] The word "Virunga" refers to nothing else besides the park. It is a deviation of the Kinyarwanda word for "volcanoes". I was therefore not concerned about getting hashtags which were not about the park.

Chapter II: Colonial Roots: Virunga as Imperial Artifact

In the following two chapters, before engaging with different contemporary social and political processes in Virunga, I will first contextualize Virunga National Park within larger histories of the Democratic Republic of Congo and colonial land use on the African Continent. This chapter specifically will focus (briefly) on pre-colonial environmental histories, the rise of European colonialism and subsequent imposition of western conservation models, and resource use in the era of Independence. In this way, I seek to weave the narrative of Virunga into a larger body of historical context, situating it not as a singular national entity, but rather as a product of imperialist forces. To chronicle these various historical processes, I draw from the work of a number of Central African scholars and historians, including but not limited to Giles-Vernick (2002), Hunt (1999) Gondola (2002), Hochschild (1999), and Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001). Prior to this historical analysis, I provide an ecological and physical overview of the park in order to give the reader a spatial reference for the area being discussed.

Spatial and Physical Characteristics

Currently, Virunga occupies 7,800 km2 in the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is located directly in the center of the African continent, and spans from the west African coast, just south of the Republic of Congo, to its most eastern point at the border of Uganda and Rwanda (See Map Appendix 1). Of the 2,344,858 square miles that make up the DRC's surface area, roughly 12.1% are protected "terrestrial areas" (Global Forest Atlas 2018). Additionally, according to the WWF, the DRC is home to

over 50% of the landmass of Africa's tropical forests, as it is by far the largest semi-tropical nation on the continent (WWF 2018).

In conjunction with its vast mass of forest land, the DRC is, according to environmental governance agencies, "the most biologically diverse country in Africa, and one of the most important centers of biodiversity in the world" (WWF 2018). It is likely home to over 15,000 species, a fifth of which are endemic, or only found in that particular region (WWF 2018). Because of the imposition of imperial ideas of wilderness, along with this status of much of the Congo as a "biodiversity hotspot", a vast number of western model based reserves, parks, and protected areas have been created in the country over the past century (See Map Appendix 2).

Virunga is one of the many protected wilderness areas within the Congo. While not the largest (Salonga Forest Reserve retains this spot at 36,000 km2), it is both the oldest and perhaps the most well-known. Situated in the "great lakes region" of East Africa, Virunga is tucked into the Eastern Congo, in an area known as the Kivus (See Map Appendix 3). Spanning the entire length of the North Kivu province, the park touches the boundary of South Kivu, just north of the eastern capital city of Goma (See Map Appendix 4). As I noted previously, Virunga operates as a type of geographical nexus, as it is flanked by Uganda to the Northeast, Rwanda and Lake Kivu to the Southeast, and is dissected almost in half by Lake Edward (See Map Appendix 5). Additionally, on the Rwandan border in the Southern sector, Virunga National Park continues directly into Volcanoes National Park.[1] The park area itself is also flanked by a number of other protected areas, bumping its total "landscape" area to over 15,155 km2 (Kenfack 2013).

[1] Volcanoes National Park is administered as a separate entity from Virunga National Park, and is located on the Rwandan side of the Virunga Landscape. While it is technically part of the physical landscape, I spend very little time discussing it because politically, socially, and economically it is a very different entity than Virunga.

In an ecological sense, the Virunga landscape is diverse, vast, and exceedingly complex. As a whole, the ecosystem is part of the general area known as the East African Rift Valley, a divergent plate boundary which has produced much of East Africa's mountains, lake valleys, and volcanism. The park is made up of three ecosystem regions: pine barrens, mountainous forests, and forest/savannah conglomerates (Kenfack 2013). It is also home to a number of aquatic ecosystems, including the majority of Lake Edward (Kenfack 2013).

In addition to landscapes such as forests, savannahs, and barrens, Virunga also has a large topographic diversity. It is home to three mountain ranges: the Mitumba, Rwenzori, and Virunga. The Virunga range, located in the south of the park is comprised of regularly active volcanoes, the most well-known of which is Mt. Nyiragongo (VNP 2018) (See Appendix 7). While clearly an environmental hazard for those living in the vicinity, this volcanism helps to explain both the diversity of Virunga's landscape and the extremely fertile volcanic soils (VNP 2018). In stark contrast to the Virunga Range, the Rwenzori mountains in the northern park sector contain a number of glaciers amongst their peaks, on the border of Uganda (Kenfack 2013).

Aside from the physical environment, the park encompasses a wide variety of nonhuman residents. A number of large and well-known species inhabit the park, including 22 different species of primates, 3 of which are classified as "great apes". These residents include mountain gorillas, eastern lowland gorillas, and eastern chimpanzees (Kenfack 2013). Another large mammal of the park that receives a fair amount of attention is the critically endangered Okapi, a deer-like relative of the giraffe (Kenfack 2013). It is also important to recognize that the park hosts approximately 706 species of birds, 109 species of reptiles, and 78 species of amphibians.

The park landscape supports a multitude of human communities where people rely on small scale subsistence agriculture and fishing (Kenfack 2013). According to a number of

sources, the Virunga area is actually one of the most densely populated areas of the DRC, with 300 human inhabitants per km2 (Marijnen and Verweijen 2018). Many of these communities are located outside of the official park in the city of Goma, or in smaller towns such as Rutshuru (VNP 2018). There however, a number of "permitted" human settlements along the shores of Lake Edward within the official boundaries of the park (VNP 2018). These villages are subject to park regulations and their livelihood practices (mainly fishing) are restricted Marijnen and Verweijen 2018) Understanding humans and human impact as part of the Virunga ecosystem is therefore crucially important. Therefore, In the subsequent sections I will place a significant emphasis on understanding the human history of Virunga, and the role of (and consequences for) people in the park.

Pre-Colonial Land Use and European Imperialism

The creation of Virunga National Park was a direct result of overarching patterns of colonial resource exploitation and the imposition of Western imperial conservation practice (Marinjen and Verweijen 2016). I will continue to elaborate upon the connection between colonial land dispossession and contemporary conservation in the chapters to follow. For the time being however, without delving too far into the theoretical underpinnings, I seek to outline the basic political and colonial apparatuses constructed in the Congo region which led to Virunga's creation and maintenance over the past century, beginning with a brief discussion of land use in the DRC prior to the colonial era.[2]

Prior to the impacts of European colonialism, the Congo Basin was largely inhabited by Bantu-speaking people, who at some point arrived in the area from present day Nigeria (Gondola

[2] I am by no means an expert on pre-colonial land-use histories of the Congo Basin. Additionally, much of this research is beyond the scope of my thesis. For more information on the topic see the entirety of Giles-Vernick's "Cutting the Vines of the Past" (2002) and Klieman's "The Pygmies were our compass" (2003)

2002).[3] The arrival of the Bantu-speaking people pushed forest dwelling, non-Bantu speaking populations (popularly known as the Central African Pygmy people) northward (Gondola 2002). Additionally, nomadic cattle herding communities from East Africa traveled up the Nile River to settle in the Great Lakes Region (Gondola 2002). While all of the Congo region was therefore a culturally diverse area, the Northeast Congo, where Virunga would be created, was especially diversified in a cultural and ethnic sense, and was (and is) home to many different types of human communities (Gondola 2002).

These different communities brought with them different agricultural techniques and ways of living. Gondola points out that in particular, Bantu-speaking peoples contributed heavily to the development of intensive agricultural practices and the use of iron smelting (Gondola 2002). In regard to pre-colonial land-use practices, I place an emphasis on the Pygmy people of the Great Lakes Region, known as the Batwa.[4] The Batwa can be thought of as the primary indigenous community in the present-day Virunga region (Lewis 2000). While Klieman does dispute whether from an anthropological standpoint they can truly be considered as autochthonous to the region, they are treated politically, and culturally, as a minority indigenous group (Lewis 2000; Klieman 2003, xvii).

With regard to land use, the Batwa of the Great Lakes were (and still are) hunter-gatherers and forest dwellers. In particular, the Batwa of the Great Lakes Region did not practice settler agriculture but rather relied on forest resources for subsistence, employing small scale hunting, fishing, and craftsmanship (Lewis 2000). Like many indigenous communities across the globe, pre-colonial Batwa society can be described as both sustainable with regard to resource

[3] The "Congo Basin" different from the Democratic Republic of Congo in that it is an ecological term which describes the sedimentary basin of the Congo River. This area stretched from the eastern border of the present-day DRC, to the Atlantic coast in West Africa.

[4] With regard to naming, Lewis states that "Batwa" and "Bambuti" are used somewhat interchangeably in the Kivu Region

use and environmentally low-impact (Lewis 2000). The arrival of the Portuguese in 1482 however, brought about significant (and devastating) changes to the workings of human society in the Congo Basin, including the Batwa. I will come back to the Batwa people of the Great Lakes, but first, will begin to address the development of European colonialism in the Congo Region.

As with most of sub-Saharan Africa, the nation now known as the DRC endured a period of oppressive European colonialism ushered in by the era of exploration (Hochschild 1999). In 1482, ten years prior to when Columbus would accidently arrive in the Americas, the explorer Diogo Cao of Portugal, on a journey towards the southern tip of Africa, stumbled upon the mouth of the Congo River (Hochschild 1999). Following this "discovery", Portuguese missionaries began arriving in the territory in steady supply, bringing with them European goods, Christianity, and much disruption to the Bantu speaking Kingdom of the Kongo, a bustling sovereignty occupied by tens of thousands of people, which covered the three hundred square miles adjacent to the river's mouth (Hochschild 1999; Klieman 2003, 173). Within a decade however, this interference developed into a full blown Atlantic slave trade, fueled by the Portuguese arrival in Brazil in 1500 (Hochschild 1999). By the 1630's it was estimated that European slavers shipped 15,000 people a year from the mouth of the Congo to the Americas, effectively destroyed the political and social infrastructure of the existing Kingdom (Hochschild 1999; Klieman 2003, 175). Klieman writes,

> The devastation and tragedy wrought on central Africans by the Atlantic slave trade was immense. Because this region served as a source of captives throughout the entirety of the Atlantic slave trade, the demographic losses were exceedingly high. Current estimates indicate that nearly 45%, roughly five million of the total eleven million Africans imported to the Americas between 1519 and 1867, were embarked from central African shores. Yet it was not simply the loss of loved ones or neighbors these peoples had to cope with; warfare, dislocation, famine and the introduction of new diseases led to the unprecedented loss of life among those who remained on the continent. These tragedies

> were accompanied by the transformation and/or destruction of the political, economic, and religious systems that had sustained central African societies for centuries (Klieman 2003, 177).

As Congolese historian Nzongola-Ntalaja notes, the Atlantic slave trade continued to dominate European-African relations through the 19th century, allowing for the acquired capital accumulation to drive forward the industrial revolution (2002). Starting in the mid 1800's European countries began to export raw materials from the African coast to fuel industrial processes back home (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). [5]

In the summer of August 1877, journalist Henry Morton Stanley successfully completed the first European cross-continental navigation of the African continent (Hochschild 1999). Leaving violence and destruction in his wake, Stanley began in the Zanzibar archipelago, and with the forced labor of hundreds of enslaved African porters, made his way along the Congo River to the West Coast (Hochschild 1999). The importance of Stanley's journey to colonial Congolese history, however, is the fact that it captured the attention of King Leopold II, of Belgium (Hochschild 1999). Leopold had long wanted his own personal colony and viewed Stanley's exploration as a starting point through which to acquire it (Hochschild 1999). Under the guise of a charity organization called "The International Association of the Congo", Leopold commissioned Stanley to journey back into the interior of the Congo to establish trading posts, and force chiefs into signing protectorate treaties (Gondola 2002). Unsurprisingly, these "treaties" were not legitimate in any sense of the word. As Hochschild writes,

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[5] Interestingly enough, as Nzongola-Ntalaja points out, while European colonists wreaked havoc upon the economies and people of coastal communities in the Congo area, the vast majority of the inland areas were untouched. While the Congo River originally provided a marker to identify the Kongo Kingdom, it was also a formidable obstacle into the inland of the region (Hochschild 2002). Portuguese missionaries and various other European expeditions failed to clear the gorge, and consequent rapids, that lead to the inland part of the River, thus sparing the rest of the Congo region, for the most part, from the perils of the colonial slave trade until the arrival of Stanley (Hochschild 2002).

> The very word "treaty" is a euphemism, for many chiefs has no idea what they were signing. Few had seen the written word before, and they were being asked to mark their X's to documents in a foreign language and in legalese. The idea of a treaty of friendship between two clans or villages was familiar; the idea of signing over one's land to someone on the other side of the ocean was inconceivable (72).

The next part of the story will perhaps be more familiar to those with exposure to European history. In November of 1884, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened what has come to be known as the "Berlin Conference" for the European powers to settle conflict over their African colonies (Gondola 2002).[6] In relation to the Congo however, unbeknownst to many of the attendees of the conference, Leopold the II had preemptively ensured that his claim on the Congo region would be recognized (Hochschild 1999). He did this mainly through clever political maneuvering, strategically confusing foreign delegates, and using fake philanthropic organizations as fronts (Hochschild 1999). Leopold II's tactics worked, and in February 1885, conference delegates signed *The Berlin Act on Congo*, recognizing Leopold's title to what was then known as the "International Association of the Congo". Leopold quickly renamed his new land-holding the Etat Independent du Congo, or, the Congo Free State, declaring himself the sole "owner" for the next 26 years (Gondola 2002).

Colonial Rule in the Congo is split into two phases: King Leopold's personal rule as "king-sovereign" of the territory from 1885-1908, and Belgium's formal acquisition of the Colony which lasted from 1908 until independence in 1960 (Gondola 2002). Both eras were marked by the looting of natural resources, extreme violence against local populations, and occupation of the region by either Leopold's "Force Publique" or Belgian authorities (Gondola 2002). One of Leopold's first actions upon receiving international recognition to his claim on the

[6] Popular narratives of the conference label it as the meeting where European leaders each took a "slice of the African cake". In actuality, it served as a meeting to establish the "rules" of colonial commerce on the continent, and set in motion the infamous Scramble for Africa (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002).

Congo Free state was to assert his reign over the vast interior of the Congo region (Gondala 2002). Leopold had covertly commissioned Stanley during his previous trip to the continent to establish a railroad up past the treacherous rapids to allow for the possibility of transportation. Once complete, this railroad allowed for steamboat parts to be brought up and assembled on the banks of the calm stretch of river, creating the potential for a vast inland network of colonial posts (Hochschild 1999). With this new infrastructure in place, Leopold and the colonial forces quickly moved towards his ultimate goal: profit.[7] As Nzongala-Ntalaja remarks,

> As a good capitalist, the king had to judge the success of his colonial enterprise in strictly business terms, that is, in terms of whether or not it was profitable. Given the low level of development of productive forces in the Congo, the king and his agents, who included quite a lot of Italians and Scandinavians, had to resort to primitive accumulation. This meant the use of torture, murder, and other inhuman methods to compel the Congolese to abandon their way of life to produce or do whatever the colonial state required of them (2002, 20).

Nzongala-Ntalaja introduces an important point. While most European colonial regimes employed some type of violent rule, and all operated on the basis of exploitation and cultural oppression, Leopold's Congo was a particularly horrific episode in African colonial history. What was once a prosperous and culturally diverse region was quickly destroyed, and the people, most of them previously residing in small networks of Bantu-speaking communities, were enslaved (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). To make matters worse, many of these communities, some of which had previously been large kingdoms, had already been weakened and fragmented by Swahili slave raids from the East, thus making them particularly vulnerable to Leopold's conquest (Hochschild 1999).

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[7] Leopold II had spent a massive amount of money to make his dream of ruling a colony possible (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Due to the fact that the government of Belgium did not "own the colony", the royal family did, Leopold had to borrow (and swindle) money to fund his endeavor from the Belgian government, willing donors, and other miscellaneous sources (Hochschild 1999). Consequently, he was in debt, and needed to quickly repay his loans, and make it appear that his new landholding was to the benefit of Belgium itself (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002)

Leopold, while already taking advantage of the Congo's resources, and employing forced labor, soon saw an opportunity to generate the type of profit he desired (Hochschild 1999). In 1891, Edouard Michelin patented the rubber tire, thus creating a vast global market for raw rubber, which the Congo region had much of in the form of *Landolphia Owariensis*, or the Congo Rubber Plant (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). In order to harvest the plant, Leopold's forces decided to enslave the local people to perform the laborious task of extracting the raw rubber. To force them to do this they employed a wide range of torture and other violent methods such as kidnapping of family members, whippings, and public executions, amongst other violent acts (Hochschild 1999). During Leopold's reign, archival documents demonstrate that the population dropped by half due to killings, disease, starvation, and a plummeting birth rate (Hochschild 1999).[8]

While perhaps seemingly far removed from a National Park established in 1925, and the conservation practice happening now, understanding what went on in Leopold's Congo is crucial for understanding the DRC and Virunga today. I will continue to emphasize colonial resource exploitation and disruption of land usage later, yet just as Yosemite cannot be separated from the forced removal of Native American populations, Virunga cannot be understood without the violent colonial history that precedes it.

By the early 1900's much of the world had caught on to the horrors of the regime, calling for reform.[9] Belgium, under intense international pressure because of its rogue king and his

[8] I do not have the space nor the expertise to chronicle the details of Leopold's reign. Scholars such as Gondola (2002), Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002), Hochschild (1999), Hunt (1999, 2016) however, have fortunately chronicled both the atrocities committed and the acts of resistance, such as armed uprisings and nationalist religious movements made by local communities in response to such terror.

[9] By the early 1900's, a number of individuals had caught on to the horrors of the operation Leopold was running, most famously a shipping clerk named Edmund D. Morel (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). In cooperation with other witnesses to the atrocities of the colonial regime (missionaries, employees, merchants), Morel used a combination of humanitarian appeals and prolific journalism to mobilize what is now commonly recognized

personal colony, eventually forced Leopold to "hand over" authority of the Congo to the Belgian Parliament (Nzongola-Ntalaja). Thus, in 1908 the "Congo Free State" became the Belgian Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja). This transition, however, was not a liberation of the Congo and the people who inhabited the region. Rather, it was simply a transfer of power from one violent colonial regime to a more discreetly violent colonial regime. Nzongola-Ntalaja makes a crucial point in stating that the organization leading the charge against Leopold, the Congolese Reform Association (CRA), was not directly opposed to colonialism, but rather advocated for a humanitarian reform of the colonial movement:

> the CRA did not represent a radical departure from humanitarianism as a social practice, because Morel and his partners did not call into question the colonial and imperialist bases of that system of exploitation. They were still dealing more with the symptoms of the Congo problem, the atrocities and a particular form of colonial practice responsible for them, rather than with its root causes, the subjection of a people's entire social process to foreign domination (2002, 26).

Furthermore, Gondola argues that the decision made by Belgium to annex the Congo (commonly referred to as the "Belgium-Solution") was not motivated by a desire to right Leopold's wrongs, nor even regain a positive international reputation (2002). As a relatively poor fledgling nation in a precarious diplomatic position, members of the Belgian government viewed annexation of the massive colony as a liability (Gondola 2002). What ultimately convinced Belgian politicians to go through with the "Belgium-Solution" was the economic promise that the Congo presented (Gondola 2002). As Leopold's regime had already

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as the world's first human rights campaign under the name of "The Congo Reform Association" (CRA) (Nzongola-Ntalaja). With the material circulated by the CRA available to the world, global public opinion turned quickly against Leopold and his regime (Hochschild 1999). Hochschild notes, with some amusement: *"The crusade that E.D Morel now orchestrated through the Congo Reform Association exerted a relentless, growing pressure on the Belgian, British, and American governments. Almost never has one man, possessed of no wealth, title, or official post, caused so much trouble for the governments of several major countries"* (209).

demonstrated with the exploitation of rubber and ivory, the Congo Basin was rich in minerals and natural resources (Gondola 2002). (This status as a resource rich area would continue to draw exploitative economic interest to the Congo Basin well past the official end of colonialism.) Consequently, in 1908, Belgium had no intention of overhauling the colonial system. In this way, the transition of colonial power from Leopold to the Belgian state represented no real change to the oppression enacted upon the people of the Congo Basin, and in no way returned any type of right to self-determination (2002, 15). Rather, the "state" administration of the colony simply continued the larger patterns of abuse present in European colonialism.

The structure of the colonial regime remained largely the same under Belgian state authority (Gondola 2002). The Belgian government intervened in the societal structures of Congolese communities, and also upon the personal lives of the colonized people, enacting a significant burden of cultural oppression (Gondola 2002). Gondola points out that while the colony's main function was, in the eyes of the Belgians, to generate profit, colonial authority was also dominated by a "*mission civilisatrice"* (civilizing mission) (Gondola 2002). As Hunt notes in her work on colonial maternal interventions, the people of the Congo basin became the subjects for European missionary work, and the imposition of a re-education campaign that sought to "westernize" the culture of the region, going so far as to regulate personal facets of life such as reproductive practice (Hunt 1999).

Perhaps one of the most damaging structural changes enacted by Belgian authorities was the establishment of "chiefdoms" (Gondola 2002). As I pointed to previously, colonialism destroyed the political organization and infrastructure that had existed within the region, such as the large communities like the Kingdom of the Kongo, and smaller community, such as the Batwa. Looking for a way to govern "indirectly", the Belgians, in 1908, started creating small

political communities that became "chiefdoms". By deposing any community leaders that who disagreed with regime policies, Belgian authorities effectively bribed individuals into the positions (Gondola 2009). Unfortunately, many of these appointed "chiefs" were then automatically at odds with the local people as they were then paid to enforce colonial rulings and supervise/recruit forced labor (Gondola 2009). Over time, this chiefdom system was expanded to larger administrative units, as the Belgians found it hard to manage the 2,496 chiefdoms that they had established originally. Regardless of size, the establishment of arbitrary administrative units is a crucial piece of colonial legacy for the Congo, and other colonized African nations. As Gondola points out, the Belgians assumed that communities in the Congo basin were organized as small ethnic tribes, whereas in reality society in the pre-colonial Congo Basin was made up of large political districts (2002, 79).[10] Thus, the Belgian established administrative areas had nothing to do with existing relationships or social orders. We need not look very far to understand the imposition of arbitrary state boundaries on colonized nations and on contemporary conflict in postcolonial countries. As with the Rwandan genocide, and political unrest in post-colonial countries such as Algeria, imperial boundary drawing is a crucial piece to understanding the proliferation of armed groups, and land use conflict in the Congo today.

Virunga and the Colonial, Capitalist Endangerment of Biodiversity

The advent of Belgian State colonialism in the Congo is an opportune time to transition into a discussion of the founding of Virunga, and a larger analysis of the imposition of the colonial conservation model. The concept of the "national park" is typically traced back to Yellowstone National Park in the United States (Brockington et al 2008). As Brockington et.al

[10] See Klieman (2003) for a thorough analysis of the structures of various different societies that existed in the Congo Basin before colonialism

point out, however, ideas of conservation of natural resources, whether for religious, nationalist, recreational, or utilitarian reasons, existed far before the establishment of Yellowstone in 1830. The history of conservation on the African continent too begins far before the 19th century, as burial sites for some African communities "known as sacred groves" were left untouched to flourish (Brockington et al 2008; Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008). Additionally, the Batwa people of the Congo I mentioned previously, held a deep respect for the forest, considering it be a sacred entity (Lewis 2003). Lewis writes,

> For the Mbuti people of the Ituri forest of northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a nomadic hunter-gatherer society, the forest is sacred. It is the source of their existence – their god, parent and sanctuary. The Mbuti are *bamiki bandura*, "children of the forest", enveloped from birth in a rich symbolic tradition that stresses the supreme value of *ndura*, or "forestness". Mbuti speak and sing reverently and lightheartedly about, and to, the forest. They sing "leaf-carrying" and "honey-bee" songs. The most valued are songs without words, sung to awaken the forest and make it rejoice through the beauty of the sound alone. Dances performed for ritual purposes or for pure enjoyment include the mimetic "elephant hunt" and "honey-bee" dances, enacted to attract, and give thanks for, game and food (Lewis 1).

In this way, it is clear that in the Central African, and global context, conservation of biodiversity and natural resources certainly did not begin in the United States.

Virunga National Park, however, emerges from a specific conservation tradition embedded in more imperialist ideas of wilderness and resource usage. As Brockington et. al point out, during the colonial era, sub-Saharan Africa had by far the most protected areas established within its boundaries. Other colonized regions, such as southeast Asia, also too have high numbers of established protected areas (Brockington et al 2008). This phenomenon therefore, is closely tied to the dominant imperialist model of conservation, rooted in a desire to hunt big game and to practice the taking of "natural history" (Brockington et al 2008). Dunn notes,

> Paul Jepson and Robert J Whittaker (2002) have argued that the modern western conservation ideology emerged because of changing views on the human-nature relationship, which were rooted in Anglophile natural history and hunting traditions. The study of natural history, though largely the privileged domain of the aristocracy, was intimately tied to European exploration, expansion, and conquest. Hunting, also largely a luxury of the elite, became tied to the practice of imperialism, particularly through the rise of big game safaris (435).

However, with the rise of Darwinian ideology about human-induced extinction of species, Dunn argues that the commonly held view of "nature" as a robust and resilient system began to gradually give way to the notion of flora and fauna as fragile entities (Dunn 2009). Thus, European hunters and natural historians began to undertake the mission of western conservation models; natural historians being motivated by the desire to preserve species, and hunters being motivated by the desire to preserve big game (Dunn 2009). Another layer to this colonial switch though, is that through the creation of conserved "spaces", colonial conservation ideology quickly drew a clear line between the "human" and the "natural" (Dunn 2009). Dunn claims,

> In creating national parks, the colonial state spoke of the need to preserve landscapes unspoiled and untamed by man. Such a claim of course, often ignored a long tradition of land use by the local populations, and posited a separation between humans and nature, the latter being constantly at threat from the former (435).

Literal boundary drawing therefore became a type of figurative boundary drawing between what was "society" and what was "nature". Additionally, conservation and views around resource usage also held consequences for the fate of the colonial project itself (Dunn 2009). With the delineation between "human" and "natural" also came stipulations about the management of "natural" spaces (Dunn 2009). Unsurprisingly, European imperialists deemed the African people unfit for this task and by European imperialists, and therefore likely to "mismanage" flora and fauna into extinction through this "uncivilized" cultural practices. In this way, the mission of

conservation also became an overarching justification for the European colonial project, and a mandate for colonial state intervention (Dunn 2009).

Virunga National Park came to fruition within this context of the imperial conservation movement. Established in 1925, it was officially the first "National Park" on the African continent (beating Kruger National Park by less than a year) (Van Schuylenbergh 2009). The year 1925 can be described as perhaps the "peak" of the Belgian Congo, thus tying the state colonial regime to the very foundation of the park and the fortress conservation model under which it currently operates.

Many of the protected areas on the African continent were inspired by the hunting of large game by European colonists. In the case of parks such as South Africa's Kruger, or Tanzania's Serengeti, these animals tended to be species such as lions, elephants, rhinos, leopards, etc. In the case of Virunga however, it was the Mountain Gorilla which quickly came to be the star of the conservation movement (2009, 64). Van Schuylenbergh claims that after two mountain gorillas were shot by a Captain in the East African Navy, a type of rivalry was started amongst the imperial European nations to collect specimens and establish them within museums back in Europe. Soon, conservationists began to voice concern about the extinction of the species (Although it is important to note that this potential for extinction was likely driven by European hunters as opposed to local people). Real momentum towards the establishment of a protected area however, occurred with the arrival of Carl Akeley.

Akeley, a taxidermist by training, arrived in Kivu during the early 1920's to collect a gorilla specimen for the American Museum of Natural History (Van Schuylenbergh 2009). According to Van Schuylenbergh, Akeley "returned to the United States with the conviction that Mountain Gorillas in the area were rare, but as they were neither scared nor aggressive their

extinction was imminent" (2009, 65). Apparently, Akeley then waged a lobbying campaign from 1922-1925 to establish a gorilla sanctuary between the "triangle formed by the three extinct volcanoes: Mikeno, Karisimbi, and Visoke" (2009, 65). In a passage from the book chronicling his expedition, *Brightest Africa*, Akeley writes,

> This sanctuary would not interfere with any other activity in the country, the gorilla range is not fit for agriculture, the natives use it now as a source for firewood and a grazing ground for their cattle. It could continue to be put to as far as the gorillas would be concerned. Elephants, buffaloes, and other animals so as to become something of a problem, but their numbers could be kept down without disturbing the gorillas sense of security (2015, 2)

After an extensive campaign and meeting with King Albert I of Belgium (Leopold's successor) Akeley was successful in accomplishing his goal. On April 21st, 1925 the protected area was established by royal decree and named Albert National Park (Van Schuylenbergh 2009). At first, the park only encompassed the mountain gorilla habitat (between the three mountains), as Akeley had defined (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016). Soon after however, Belgium and colonial authorities decided to expand the park boundaries beyond the gorilla habitat to encompass Lake Edward and other geographic features (See Van Schuylenbergh for a specific description of this process). However, as Marijnen and Verweijen point out, the expansion of the park coincided with an evacuation of the residents of the area by the colonial government due to an outbreak of sleeping sickness (trypanosomiasis) (2016). Thus, the park was expanded under the guise of a state of emergency, effectively dispossessing local residents of their land without having obviously forced them off of the land. As Marijnen points out, drawing from Congolese land use expert Nzabandora, most residents never received their land back, nor were compensated for their loss.

Appendix

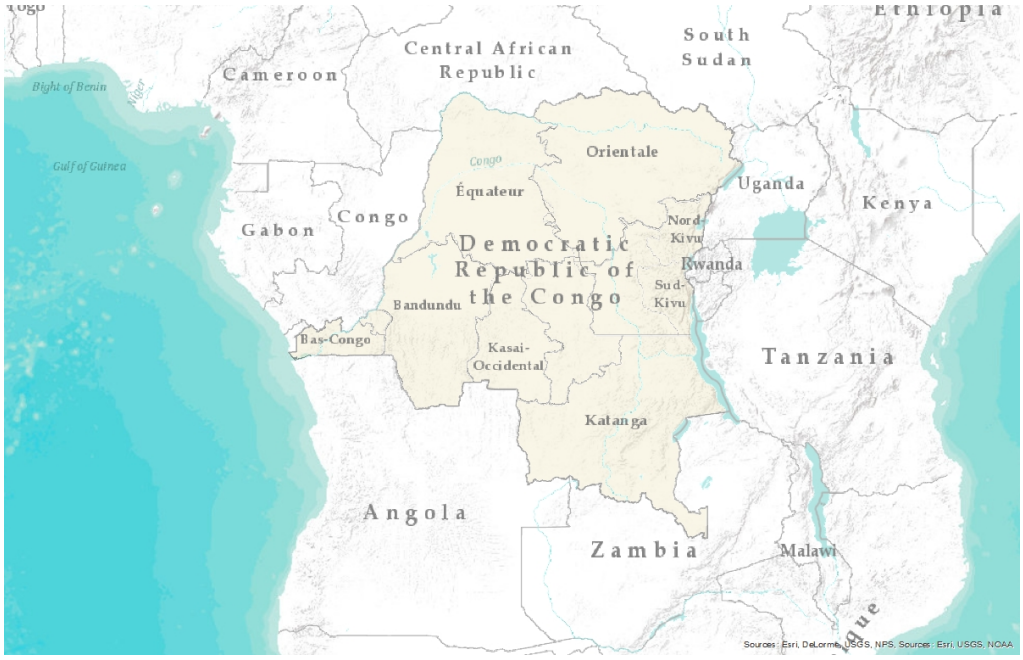
1. 

Figure 1 Source: DiSilvestro via ArcGIS

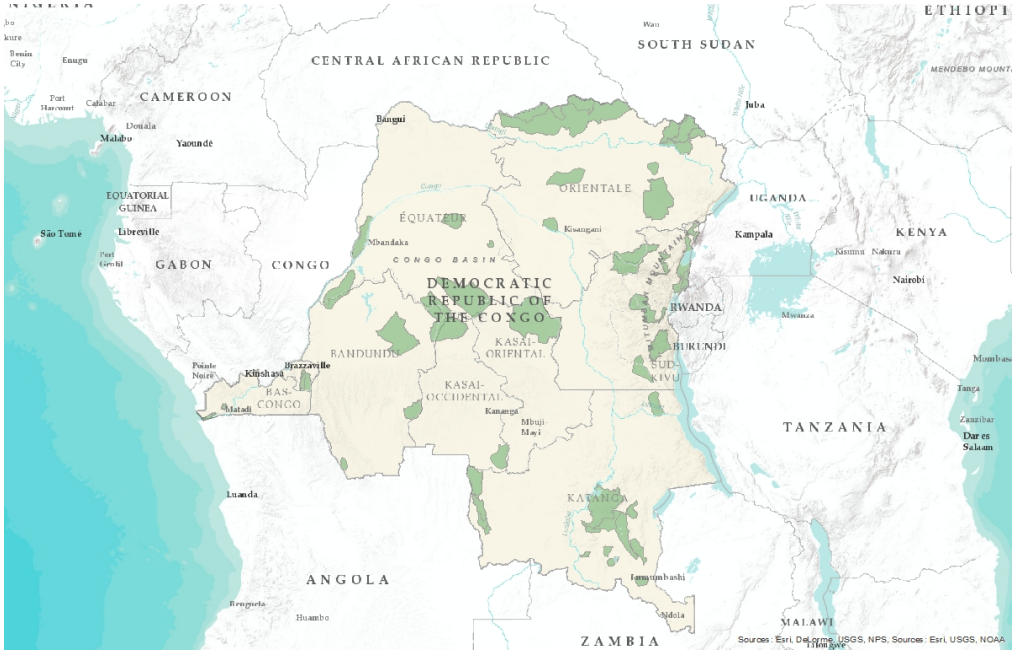
2. 

Figure 2 Source: DiSilvestro via ArcGIS

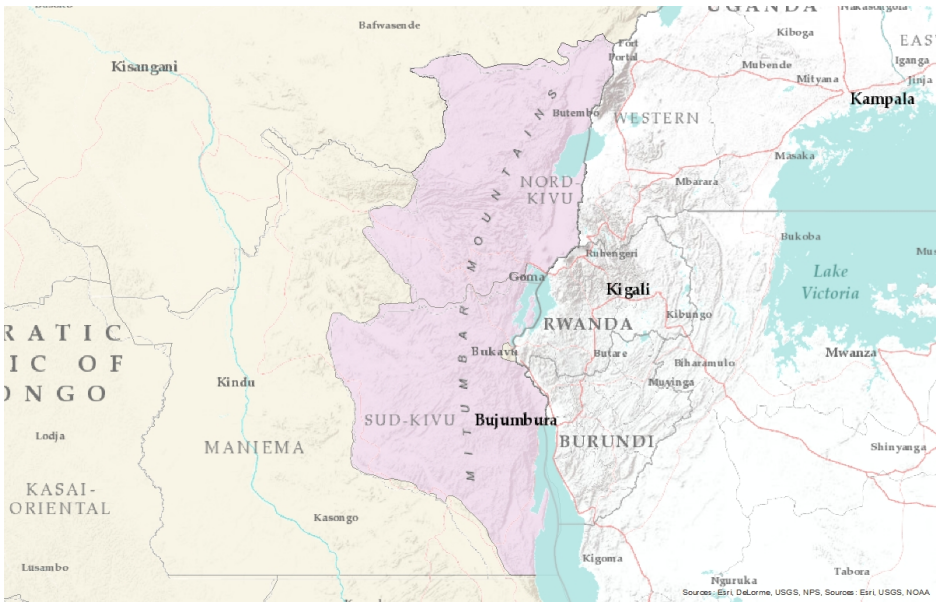
3. 

Figure 3 Source: ArcGIS

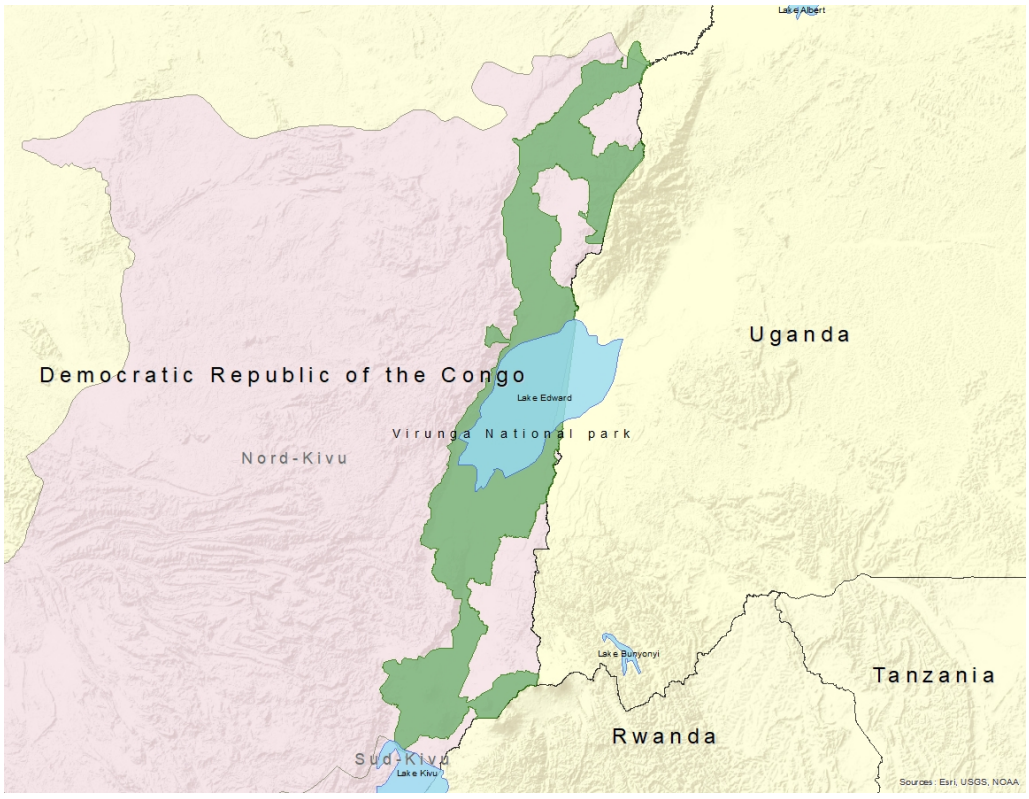
4. 

Figure 4 Source: ArcGIS

5.

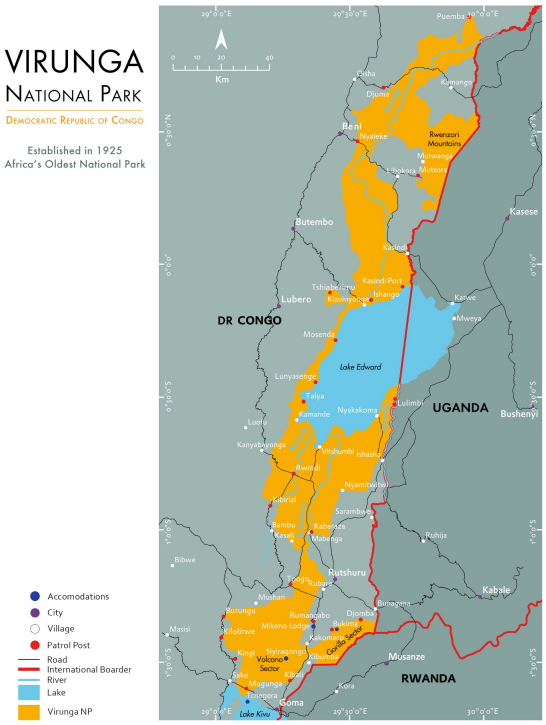


Figure 5 Source: Virunga.org

Chapter III: Landscapes of Conflict: Post-Colonial Virunga and the DRC Today

"*To say it's a trip of a lifetime is a little under rated. To hike in the mountains was great in itself, then to see gorillas and get to spend an hour with them, is beyond compare. If you are in the region and you love animals do this trek. They have porters who will carry you if you are unable to walk. It's amazing how fast they can walk carrying someone. There were two people in our group who used this service. I hired a porter and he helped me in difficult spots. This is life changing.*"

(Trip Advisor Review, 2017)

In this chapter, I will build from my explanation of the history of the DRC and specific history of Virunga National Park, with a particular emphasis on the park as a colonial relic. This chapter encompasses the process of decolonization, the reign of Mobutu Sese Seko, and the First and Second Congo wars, supplemented by an explanation of conservation in Virunga throughout. Additionally, in the final section I address the current state of the park including the dominant conservation models, prominent actors associated with the park, and funding mechanisms.

Towards Independence

Under Belgian authority, economic exploitation under the state regime proved equally lucrative as it was under Leopold. I hesitate to emphasize the abundance of "natural resources" in the Congo Basin, as this is typically a facet of the region which is both over-emphasized and sensationalized (for example the film *Blood Diamonds* with Leonardo DiCaprio) The narrative of African nations and the "resource curse" is a slippery slope to environmental determinism and

not useful for understanding the history of extraction. It is not "valuable resources" which determine the political fate of a nation, but rather the capitalist exploitation of said resources, which, in the case of the Congo, is carried out by industrialized nations of the global North. However, I believe that it is worthwhile to recognize the significance that resource extraction played in the Belgian colonial regime as this is directly connected with current resource use in the Virunga area.

As I mentioned earlier, the present-day nation of the DRC is swathed in forest, thus making it a prime area for timber production. In addition to this, and to the ivory and cotton that Leopold had exploited, the Belgians took advantage of a variety of other natural resources present within the region. In 1892, a Belgian mineral exploration company discovered valuable minerals and ores in the southern province of Katanga (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002). Today, we know that the extent of these minerals includes things such as diamonds (and other precious gems), gold, tin, copper, cobalt, coltan, uranium, iron ore, tungsten, etc. Operating under what Gondola refers to as the "colonial trinity" (state, mission, and company) the Belgian government gave extensive authority for freedom of operation to large mining and extraction corporations in the form of mandates (Gondola 2002). Thus, corporations were not only in control of land and the land's resources, but were also given the authority to build schools, medical centers, and other infrastructure, thus inserting capital accumulation into the material fabric of the colony itself (Gondola 2002). As the period of Belgian rule wore on, two processes were at work that would prove important to the decolonization movement: rapid economic growth and productivity of the colony (essentially none of which reached the colonized population), and urbanization; both which would be important to the movement towards decolonization.

Communities and individuals within the Belgian Congo resisted colonial exploitation, both under Leopold and the Belgian state, in a myriad of ways. While under Leopold's rule, some communities participated in armed campaigns against the colonial regime. By the time the Belgian authorities arrived, the communities of the Congo Basin were already weakened by the constant violence, oppression, and exploitation of the colonial regime. Yet, many groups still managed to resist, through avenues such as workers' protests and peasants' revolts. Nzongola-Ntalaja defines three main avenues through which colonial subjects resisted all forms of imperialism: primary resistance (categorized as early, armed resistance to the imposition of colonialism), religious based protest (The Kimbanguist movement), and anti-colonial revolts including peasant rebellions and urban uprisings. In regards to three major uprisings between 1941 and 1954, Nzongola-Ntalaja writes,

> All three revolts were partially a result of the hardships imposed on the African population as part of the [WWII] war effort between 1940 and 1945. But they were above all a response to colonialism as a system of exploitation and oppression. After their brutal suppression, which included massacres, the Belgians responded to their fear of urban unrest not only with the infamous operations policieres in African townships, but also with better economic and social services for their restless subjects, in the hope of keeping the public eye on bread and circuses. Fortunately, the improved standard of living in urban areas could not quench the thirst for an even better life of freedom and material abundance (2002, 53).

This often-violent struggle for human rights and liberation from colonial violent oppression continued through the 1940's and into the late 1950's, gradually evolving into a large, yet fractured African Nationalist Movement. The movement accelerated particularly quickly however, amongst the educated urban elite, known as the "evolues" (Gondola 2002). From this movement arose three main political parties, all advocating for some form of national independence. The first was a moderate independence party known as MNC (Congolese National Movement) led by former schoolteacher Patrice Lumumba. The second was a more

radical group known as ABAKO and led by politician Joseph Kasavubu. The third was a secessionist movement in the southern Katagan province led by a man named Moise Tshombe, (Gondola 2002). Under these groups, political activism accelerated, and in January of 1959, a pro-independence demonstration held in Leopoldville ultimately dissolved into a riot. The Belgian government responded by ordering the colonial enforcement group the *Force Publique* to massacre over 100 protesters (Gondola 2002).

The fallout from this event was significant, as it was perhaps the first time that the full force of the nationalist movement was spread from the urban elites to the rural peasantry. The Belgian, alarmed by this mobilization, called a roundtable meeting in Brussels with the leaders of the three major Congolese parties in attendance. Belgium, not surprisingly, sought a deal in which independence would not fully occur for 30 years. In the face of a growing decolonization movement on the African continent however, and the shifting western public opinion away from imperialist enterprises, favor was on the side of the Congolese. Congolese leaders successfully negotiated terms which set Independence for summer of 1960. Thus, on June 30th 1960, the Belgian Congo officially became the Republic of the Congo, with Joseph Kasavubu as president and Patrice Lumumba as prime minister.

In the immediate aftermath of independence essentially about the operation of the Congo changed, as the nation was still entirely dependent on colonial infrastructure and institutions. Belgian authorities made it abundantly clear that they had no intention of giving up their positions nor leaving the Congo. This proved especially contentious in the colonial police and military force known as the *Force Publique*. Congolese soldiers had been under the impression that independence would mean both better working conditions and a pay raise. [Once it was

made evident that this was not the plan, Congolese *Force Publique* soldiers staged a mutiny against their Belgian superiors and colonial loyalists.

The mutiny quickly spread throughout the territory, with Force Publique soldiers took up arms and attempted to violently overthrow colonial institutions, and the Belgian population of the Congo. Belgium, alarmed by the riots, deployed paratroopers to the republic on July 9th 1960. They did so however, without consulting Lumumba or Kasabuvu, thus further demonstrating that they in no way viewed the now independent nation as autonomous or beyond Belgian control. While Kasabuvu attempted to justify the invasion, Lumumba loudly denounced it, thus demonstrating the beginnings of a split between the two. Both however, ~~c~~ould do little as the situation devolved further; the central government was essentially rendered non-functional in the face of widespread riots. To make things worse, under the direction of Moise Tshombe, Katanga, the richest province resource wise, made a proclamation of secession on July 11th 1960. Another southern province, South Kasai, followed on August 8th.

Belgium, under pressure from their citizens who lived in the Congo, issued a statement that they would attempt to provide for Belgian citizens who had been residing in the Congo if they decided to return. This produced a mass exodus of 10,000 Belgian colonists and settlers from the territory. On July 14th 1960, the United Nations, under the direction of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, called for the removal of all Belgian troops from the nation, replacing them with UN "peacekeeping" forces. This is not the last time that the Congo would meet a UN occupying force, as we will see. Characteristically ineffective at mitigating conflict, UN peacekeeping troops were under orders not to take sides, nor support the struggling Congolese government by helping to put down the Katangese secession movement.

At this point, Lumumba decided to seek help elsewhere. He first asked the U.S and president Dwight D. Eisenhower for support, which was quickly rejected. Desperate, he turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. Kruschev was cooperative, and Soviet troops arrived and quickly put down the South Kasai secession, but at the same time massacred hundreds of members of an ethnic minority in the province, thus undercutting Lumumba's credibility. The United States and the Central Intelligence Agency viewed Lumumba's request to the Soviet Union as a surefire sign that he himself was a communist, and that the Congo would become a communist state; the exact opposite of what the United States wanted at the start of the Cold War. Thus, the US government began looking for ways to undercut Lumumba's authority, finding a potential solution in the recently appointed Congolese army chief of staff, Joseph Mobutu.

With the chaos raging on, Mobutu quietly began amassing aid and personnel support provided by the U.S CIA. Then, on September 5th 1960, Kasabuvu publicly announced on national radio that he had dismissed Lumumba from the position of Prime Mminister, using the South Kasai massacres as reasoning. Lumumba denied the dismal, thus creating a constitutional crisis. Claiming military authority, Joseph Mobutu then staged a coup d'etat, siding with Kasabuvu and placing Lumumba on house arrest. With his supporters fleeing to Stanleyville to set up a rebel government under the remaining MNC leadership, Lumumba escaped house arrest and attempted to move Eastward. Not long after however, he was captured by Mobutu's forces, and was executed by Katanga loyalists on Jan 17th 1961 (stuff about assassination, U.S role). With Lumumba gone, Kasabuvu (who had been re-appointed president by Mobutu in 1961), Mobutu, the Belgium government, and the UN began fighting the Katanga secession with force, eventually ending it on Jan 21st 1963. Following this, some attempts were made at political

reconciliation, a new constitution was drafted, and the county was renamed the "Democratic Republic of the Congo" in June 1964. The unrest however, was not over. Unhappy with a centralized government, communities staged a number of rebellions, the largest of which was the Simba rebellion, in which half of the country was rebel occupied. From 1964-65 the region was flooded with European mercenaries, Belgians, and the UN, attempting to put down the various "rebel" movements.

In September 1965, after quelling most of the major conflicts Mobutu staged a second coup, with U.S and European support, deposing Kasabuvu and thus ushering in one of the most devastating kleptocracies of the 20th century. Fanon, in his work on the violent processes of decolonization can perhaps help us understand the violent processes of decolonization mentioned above,

> National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. At whatever level we study it—relationships between individuals, new names for sports clib, the human admixture at cocktail parties, in the police, on the directing boards of national or private banks—decolonization is quite simply the the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men...To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded (1963, 65).

From Prince Albert National Park to Virunga

After independence in 1960, just as with most facets of the new formed DRC, the Belgians stayed closely involved with conservation, and with Park Albert (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016). Mobutu appointed a Belgian official as the director of state conservation in 1969 and gave the park administration the authority to expel poachers and trespassers on the Park Albert Land with force (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016). Additionally, Mobutu's re-africanization campaign attempted to rid Zaire of colonial names, which included Park Albert;

thus, the name Virunga National Park was adopted. During the postcolonial period, foreign aid was crucial to the functioning of the park, specifically aid from the European Commission and the Frankfurt Zoological society (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016).

With regard to larger scale historical processes in the Congo, in the period following the Congo crisis, the political intricacies become less important than the dominant economic and social impacts of Mobutu's western sponsored demagoguery. The story however is not quite as an autocrat gone bad. In the wake of massive upheaval and violence, the Congolese people were at this point, exasperated by` the unsuccessful plight of armed struggle (Wrong 2000). Thus, the stability that Mobutu provided, was at the time, both welcome and extremely popular, and would be for years to come (Wrong 2000).

Mobutu's consolidation of power was slow. He was extremely charismatic, easily developing a "cult of personality" around his. Additionally, he was propped up by the US government, who feared the "iron curtain" they saw closing around the African Continent. (Tanzania, the Congo's eastern neighbor had adopted a type of nationalist socialism, further panicking The United States and its allies,) Throughout his regime, the U.S, along with organizations such as the IMG and World Bank, repeatedly appeased Mobutu, hoping to keep an anti-socialist regime in power.

In the years directly following independence and into the early 70's, Mobutu retained the support of the majority of the Congolese people. So much so that the formation of his own political party, The Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR) did not immediately signal an abuse of power. Mobutu even held elections, in which only his party was allowed to run. Despite this clear movement towards a despotic state, the consolidation of power that his regime accomplished was extremely successful. In 1971, he mandated the start of an authentic "re-

africanization" movement in order to allow the people of the Congo to "rediscover their African identity" (Wrong 2000). This movement was perhaps one of the only positive legacies of Mobutu's time in power. The Re-authentication involved renaming The Democratic Republic of the Congo, to "Zaire" and renaming Prince Albert National Park to Virunga, as mentioned above. Additionally, colonial names of buildings, streets, and infrastructure, were erased and replaced with more traditional African ones. Western dress was banned, and children were banned from having European names. Additionally, in a final condemnation of colonialism, statues of Leopold and other colonial figures were toppled.

This display of Zairean nationalism however, would not last. Although Mobutu took back foreign economic holdings and "redistributed" them to the Zairean people, it soon became apparent that he himself was holding onto quite a few properties, such as the largest plantation in the country. The regime quickly devolved into nepotism, corruption, and embezzlement. As Mobutu amassed more and more personal wealth, the Congo plunged into an economic downturn, plagued by massive inflation and international debt. Wrong notes that the Zairean people were keenly aware of such behavior, once again failed by a government which did nothing to prevent economic devastation,

> The Zaireans had developed their own language to deal with this depressing reality, ironic word games replete with skepticism, the only form of quiet rebellion on offer in a system seemingly imperious to change. Cock-ups were attributed to 'Facteur Z', the Zairean factor, delays to "Heure Zaairoise', the lethargic local time scale. The capital once known as 'Kin-la-belle' was now dubbed 'Kin-la-poubelle' (Kinshasa, the rubbish dump), testimony to the mountains of garbage collected but never taken away. The men who sold stolen petrol on the roadside were known as 'Khadafis', in tribute to Libya's oil rich president, while the urchins who slept on the street were called 'phaseurs' (Lingala slang for sleepers) because, a friend joked, 'they were in phase with life'. The unemployed young men with nothing to do but stand on street concerns discussing topical issues were scornfully dismissed as 'parlementaires debouts' (standing parliamentarians). Ask one of these how he was doing and the answer would never be the automatic 'bien'. 'Au rythme du pays', (in time with the country) he would reply, with a

> shrug, or ‘au taux du jour (at the day’s rate) a reference to the national currency’s unstoppable decline. (135).

By the time his reign was over, its estimated that Mobutu amassed anywhere between 4 billion and 15 billion U.S dollars; he spent itd on things such as expensive clothes, and his numerous estates spread across the nation. Although he at times seemed imperious to forces working against him, Mobutu’s reign did in fact come to an end, in spring of 1997.

The Kivus in the First and Second Congo Wars

It is at this point that the national history of the DRC begins to become directly relevant to the Kivus, and to Virunga. While understanding the basic political and colonial histories of the nation is crucial to avoiding tropes of the tribal warfare and the danger discourse tied to the African continent, the following events quite literally had a profound physical impact upon the park itself. I do not have the space nor the expertise to chronicle the entirety of the Rwandan genocide. Yet, what occurred in Rwanda is closely tied to the contemporary state of affairs in the DRC. Though I provide an extremely simplified summary of what occurred, narrating the impact of the Rwandan genocide and the resulting First and Second Congo wars, is imperative to understanding building the historical foundation on which conservation in Virunga rests.

Beginning in 1994, as the tide turned against Hutu forces in Rwanda, Hutu (and Tutsi) refugees, numbered in the hundreds of thousands, began fleeing into Eastern Zaire (recall that Virunga lies over the Rwandan border) (McCalpin 2001). Most of these people ended up in massive refugee camps just across the Zairean border. With the fleeing refugees however, came high ranking commanders and soldiers of the *Interahamwe*, or Hutu militia, commonly the group

commonly known and accepted to have committed much of the genocide (Prunier). In his seminal work on what has come to be known as "Africa's World War", Prunier writes,

> "Contrary to other refugee exoduses from countries at war, this was not the light of individuals wishing to escape danger; rather, just as the genocide had been, it was an organized system of mass mobilization for a political purpose. The refugees settled in their camps in perfect order, under the authority of their former leaders, ready to be used for further aims. (2004, 24).

Here it can be assumed Prunier writes of the Hutu soldiers settling into the camps, as opposed to many women, men, and children who sought shelter only to find a military camp unofficially sanctioned by the UNHCR's (United Nations High Council for Refugees) refusal to counteract the situation (Prunier 2004). Thus, as he writes "these camps were an uneasy compromise between genuine refugee settlements and war machines built for the reconquest of power in Rwanda (2004, 25).

As this was taking place, Mobutu was gradually losing power. Following the end of the cold war, the U.S drew back support along with the IMF and the World Bank, thus wielding a blow to the power of the regime. Additionally, the people of Zaire became adamant that the ban on opposition parties was no longer acceptable. Yet, Mobutu still retained mass amount of political power. McCalpin writes,

> In the over three decades of Zaire's independence the only constant had been patrimonialism, authoritarianism, and political decline. Neither a political culture strong enough to build democracy no an opposition strong enough to oppose an authoritarian regime had emerged. This period of the unraveling state (1990-96) reaffirmed the postcolonial instability and lack of a national consciousness. In the absence of a formidable alternative to the Mobutu regime, the Zairean state reached very near to the point of collapse (2001, 46).

In a seemingly last-ditch attempt to hold onto power, Mobutu initiated a mass persecution of the Banyamulenge people (an indigenous tutsi minority) as a type of scapegoat to detract from the failure of his regime, and to display support for the genocidaires that he had allowed to take up

residence in the refugee camps (McCalpin 2001). This however, did not proceed as he had hoped. By 1996 the Banyamulenge had begun a full-scale rebellion in the Kivus. Additionally, Rwanda in September of 1996, Rwandan forces invaded Zaire in an effort to dismantle the militarized refugee camps. Paul Kagame, president of Rwanda, was anti-Mobutu and saw the invasion as part of a long-term plan to eventually end his regime (Prunier 2004). All of this resulted in an extreme political destabilization of both the weakened central government, and most of the eastern region, specifically the Kivus.

In the midst of all this, a politician, /soldier, and /activist named Laurent Kabila, who had originally opposed Mobutu's rise to power, took advantage of the destabilization. Under the banner of an organization known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL), Kabila garnered support from Rwanda, Uganda, and Angola. While Mobutu was away seeking medical treatment for prostate cancer in Europe, Kabila began his march on the capital. Recognizing his imminent defeat, Mobutu fled to Morocco in May of 1997 and succumbed to his cancer 3 months later. Kabila quickly assumed control, proclaiming himself president and once again restoring the name of the nation to the Democratic Republic of Congo (McCalpin 2001).

Laurent Kabila, despite his Lumumba-ist and Marxist origins, was disappointingly Mobutu like in his career as president. It's well accepted that his governing practices were aimed at maintaining political power; as he used mechanisms such as ethnic politics and patrimonialism (McCalpin 2001). More importantly however, Kabila's rise to power was not the end of the Congo conflicts. A year after the official end of the first Congo war, another conflict broke out in the already war-torn eastern region, lasting until 2003. This conflict, driven by a number of

similar factors to the first Congo war, was devastating, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 5.4 million people. Additionally, in January of 2001, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by his bodyguard, likely for reasons pertaining to the war and conflict with Rwanda (Kabila had quickly alienated his Rwandan and Ugandan allies while in power). His son, Joseph Kabila assumed the Congolese presidency as his successor, and remains in power today.

Noting the impacts of the aforementioned conflicts is arguably more important than focusing upon the political intricacies. It is self-evident that the colonial devastation experienced by the Congo region, the interference of external international bodies, and the failure of international peacekeeping, must all be seen as factors in the numerous conflicts that make up the DRC's history. More specifically however, the most recent conflicts have had a profound impact on both the state of the Congo today, and the political climate of the Kivu region, home of Virunga National Park.

The second Congo war is an extremely complex event that has received little scholarly attention. Its impacts however, are frequently noted, oftentimes with little reference to the context which created them. Despite the official end to the Second Congo War in 2003, the proliferation of armed groups, specifically in the Eastern region, is a continuing phenomenon. (As recently as January of this year, Joseph Kabila has refused to hold fair elections, thus furthering a distrust of the central government.). Additionally, most of the deaths recorded during the second Congo war, were due to malnutrition and disease, as opposed to being the direct result of armed conflict (Koyame 2001). As Koyame notes, displacement played a large role in these casualties, "Large-scale death, it would seem, is the ultimate consequence of economic disruption for those living on the economic margins of a developing society" (2001, 202). The war has produced extremely unfavorable economic conditions resulting in a decrease in GDP,

inflation, undercutting by the growth of the "informal sector" (black market), and the lack of integration between government held and rebel held areas (international trade is effectively impossible) (Koyame 2001). Population statistics remain dismal, with high rates of disease, poverty, and average life expectancy of 59 years.

Accordingly, the proliferation of armed factions or "rebel groups" (the term rebel to refers to any armed group that acts independently from the central government) is widespread, particularly in the eastern border regions. Peace agreements in the early 2000's saw some progress, but the refusal of the younger Kabila to leave office has exacerbated existing problems, leading to a re-proliferations of certain rebel groups. At present, the political future of the nation appears to be uncertain. It is from this context and this history that I move to chronicle the development and operation of Virunga in the present day.

Park Operations Today: Tourism, Anti-Poaching, and Enforcement

In 1994, following the Rwandan genocide, refugees and internally displaced persons flooded into the Kivus and the general Virunga areas. Their presence, according the Marinjnen caused environmental damage and resulted in another "state of emergency" for the park. Following the second Congo war, a number of militia groups are still active in the region, most of which oppose the central government now run under the younger Kabila. According to park management local militias oftentimes seek to exploit the park's natural resources (Virunga 2018). This unrest therefore, is still utilized as legitimation for far reaching foreign involvement in the park. In a problematic sense therefore, it is apparent that little has changed from the colonial rhetoric of the inability of African people's to "manage" the environment, thus necessitating European guidance in order to ensure the survival of flora and fauna.

Today, the park, is heavily funded by the European Commission, the Frankfurt Zoological society, USAID, and run via a public-private partnership between the Virunga Alliance (previously the African Conservation Fund) and the central government of the DRC, specifically the ICCN (L'Institut Congolais Pour la Conservation de la Nature) (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016). Emmanuel De Merode, a Belgian prince and conservation, is the head director of the park, appointed in 2007 after the previous Congolese director was accused of allowing local militias to kill a number of the park's gorillas to decrease the economic value of the park (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016).

The park area itself does encompass a number of small fishing villages on the shores of Lake Edward (Virunga 2018). Resource usage in these communities is highly. regulated by the park. Other local communities on the outskirts of the park are forbidden from harvesting any type of natural resource from the park areas, including firewood, fish, game, etc. (Virunga 2008). Poaching is of large concern to park authorities and the armed wildlife rangers who patrol the park regularly are in place to deter both poachers and militia groups (Virunga 2018). The park has recently attempted to improve relations with local communities through providing infrastructure such as schools and community centers, and through a "sustainable economic development plan" which includes the development of a large-scale hydropower plant in the Virunga area (Virunga 2018). As I will discuss however, problems still abound. Marijnen makes an insightful point in stating that, "external and militarized interventions also continue to be legitimized by colonially scripted images of the Congo as 'the heart of darkness', a place of backwardness and irrationality that needs to be civilized" (280).

Chapter IV: Neo-Colonial Natures: Militarization, Exploitation, and the Spectacle of the Wildlife Ranger

S: "What's interesting is that Virunga seems to have become an island of stability and hope in eastern DRC, whereas other parks in Africa are often viewed quite negatively because they don't seem to bring any benefits to the local communities or the local people".

E: "It's nice to hear it put that way, but the reality is that there are still enormous tensions between the park and the people..."

(Emmanuel De Merode in an interview with African wildlife photographer Scott Ramsay, 2017)

From the outside, The Pasiansi Wildlife Training Institute, in Mwanza, Tanzania, looks like any other school campus. With bright green lawns, manicured flower beds, and simple white-washed buildings, it more resembles a teacher's college or forestry school rather than a paramilitary institute. What gives it away is the students. Clad head to toe in khaki and combat boots, with the Tanzania National Parks Logo emblazoned on their chests, students march to and from their classes, saluting their instructors as they went. I visited Pasiansi Institute to conduct interviews about ranger trainees' perceptions of conservation practice in Tanzania. As I visitor, I too, was offered the usual passing salute, which I returned awkwardly in my faltering Kiswahili.

Most of the students at the institute were around my age. Every day for two weeks I came to the school to talk with around 10 of them, one on one, in the Institute's main conference room. Some days, I watched evening drill practice outside, led by an ex-commander of the Tanzanian People's Defense Force. I sat on the grass with my notebook and watched in stunned silence as 120 students executed perfect marching drills, command relays, and rifle draws. In each of my interviews, I asked the students how they envisioned using their military training when they were assigned to a Tanzanian national park. Some said that it would help them survive if they were ever lost in one of the larger areas, others would mention that knowing how to use a weapon could protect them from animals like African Buffalo or Hippos, yet almost all the interviewees, without exception, responded that their military skills would help them fight poachers.[1]

My findings at Pasiansi were no surprise. I had been in Tanzania long enough to witness the militarized models under which protected wilderness areas were run. Parks like the Serengeti were regularly patrolled by armed rangers, and any nearby residents, never mind poachers, who entered the park without permission faced devastating consequences, ranging from the confiscation of their cattle to grievous bodily injury. Yet, Tanzania depended heavily upon the revenue generated from the parks, making the extreme measures taken to preserve wildlife appear economically logical. This mode of conservation, known in political ecology scholarship as "fortress conservation" is now arguably the most common mechanism of operation employed by wilderness areas across the world. In this way, Virunga is no exception. In this next chapter, I will explore the deployment of the "fortress model" and "green militarization" in Virunga, outlining underlying causes of this shift in conservation practice, and its potential consequences. Next, I will explore the work of Marijnen and Verweijen on the discursive production of

[1] The African Buffalo and Common Hippopotamus are actually two of the animals on the African Savanna which pose the greatest risk to humans.

militarization in Virunga, outlining their theoretical argument that the violence associated with militarization is legitimated via discursive processes and wealthy foreign actors. Next, building off of Marijnen and Verweijen's arguments, I will incorporate an analysis of Debord's theory of spectacle in the discursive production of militarization, undertaking a brief analysis of recent twitter data about Virunga. Then, transitioning from this analysis, I move into a discussion of the portrayal of Virunga's rangers. Finally, I end with a discussion of the type of "nature" fortress conservation is able to produce.

Green Militarization and the Fortress Conservation Model

Trained to defend the park's boundaries and prominent megafauna from poachers, trespassers, and militia, wildlife rangers are typically portrayed as bearing the brunt of the labor associated with making a protected wildlife area a "secure" one. This "securitization" typically manifests in parks such as Virunga as keeping unauthorized others (local people) out, and wildlife inside. This process, as I will discuss, is removed, in discursive materials, from the factors which produced it, leading to little popular engagement with the consequences of militarized conservation mechanisms. The contemporary figure of the wildlife ranger, specifically within the context of Central-East Africa, is closely tied to larger social and economic forces, which have the potential to drive the visualization of an "ideal" wilderness and exclusionary nature discourses. I propose, along with others (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016; Marijnen 2017; Verweijen and Marijnen 2018, and Marijnen 2018) that the usage of wildlife rangers and associated technologies in Virunga can be seen as a form of "green militarization".

Understanding green militarization, and its manifestation in protected areas, particularly in the global South, is crucial to understanding the state of wildlife conservation today.

Lundstrum, in her work on conservation in South Africa's Kruger National Park, introduced the term "green militarization" as *"the use of military and paramilitary (military-like) actors, techniques, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation"* (817, 2014). Thus, green militarization in contemporary conservation practice manifests itself in a variety of ways. As Lundstrum points out, in Kruger National park, militarization manifests via the use of a national defense force (South African National Defense Force) as park guards (2014). In Tanzanian parks, east of the Congo, green militarization appears as advanced weaponry, military grade detection technology, and increasing use of violent force in anti-poaching policy.[2] Relatedly, in Virunga itself we see these processes at work in exclusionary land use policies, military-style anti-poaching tactics, and the participation of park forces in regional militia infighting.

Green militarization is an undeniable defining feature of the larger preservation model known as *fortress conservation.* The fortress model, as described by Doolittle, is a predominant mechanism of biodiversity conservation, in which it is assumed that the protection of ecosystems is best accomplished with people, and "human society" absent (Doolittle 2007). Thus, parks that fall under the "fortress" categorization are exclusionary entities; at some point or another, the people who had lived there were dispossessed of their land and expelled from the premises (Doolittle 2007). In this way, the fortress model assumes a type of Malthusian inability of humans to exist peacefully with so called natural systems (Doolittle 2007). Individuals expelled from fortress conservation areas are thus separated from their "natural resource base" and from the subsistence that the land may have previously provided (Doolittle 2007). Furthermore, in his work on the Mkomazi protected area in Tanzania, Brockington notes that land loss and

[2] I spent over a month camping in Tanzania National Park in Spring of 2017, studying the political ecology of conservation. Fortress conservation in Tanzania manifests itself extremely clearly, as exclusionary land policies, and advanced military training for Wildlife Rangers.

dispossession is an unfortunate, but common occurrence within the realm of East-Central African conservation practice (Brockington 2002).

Doolittle points to three main defining factors of fortress conservation: separation of previous land tenants from the natural resource base, enforcement of a "fence and fines" model by park rangers or other related officials, and the prohibition of activities that do not fall under the umbrella of tourism, safari hunting, or research (Doolittle 2007). If we bring together these elements it becomes evident that the protected areas in question quite literally become a type of "fortress", in which those who don't belong are expelled, and kept outside via forced borders and laws. Not surprisingly, these types of policies tend to promote ill-will between state or conservation authorities and local residents forced out of their homes. With regard to the Maasai people of East Africa and their concerns about the process, Igoe writes,

> Many of my informants described conservation as indistinguishable from any of the other global processes they confronted in their daily lives. Its bottom line was the alienation of traditional grazing lands for the benefit and enjoyment of other people, the majority of whom, from their perspective, were white and not even from Tanzania. As far as they were concerned, this was essentially unfair (2007, 9).

Brockington adds, pointing to the ineffectiveness of the fortress model, "parks are surrounded by people who do not condone their presence and who actively, in their daily lives, undermine or defy the regulations protecting the park's wildlife and resources*"* (2002, 8).

Thus, the fortress model has come under significant scholarly criticisms for both its marginalization of local populations (oftentimes bordering upon a violation of human rights), and for its ineffectiveness at preventing the very degradation it supposedly aims to stop (Igoe 2004, Brockington 2002). Moreover, green militarization functions as the primary way to physically enforce conservation areas' exclusionary principles. This exclusion is built into the ability of conservation areas to generate capital as commodities in the global economy. A

discussion of militarization in conservation areas would, therefore, not be complete without a mention of neoliberal processes.

Neoliberalisation and Primitive Accumulation

The fortress model, as many scholars argue, is closely tied to processes of late capitalism, namely neoliberalism. Brockington and Igoe argue that neoliberalism is the process of restructuring the world to allow it to better participate in free markets (2007). In this way, while typically popularized as a type of economic "deregulation" in order to rid states of the interference of corrupt governments, and to allow the free market to work its magic, in conservation, Brockington and Igoe argue, neoliberalization functions in reality as a type of "re-regulation" (2007). In this way, landscapes and institutions are transformed so to better participate in a capital driven market (Brockington and Igoe 2007).

According to Büsher, over time capitalism has shifted from a "blood and fire" approach to primitive accumulation (i.e colonialism), to creating what he calls "enabling environments", or environments transformed by neoliberal processes to allow for capital accumulation (Buscher 2009). Thus, many contemporary conservation areas can be viewed in the context of their ability to enable capital accumulation in line with neoliberal principles.

It follows that the commodification of nature and biodiversity within conservation areas, relies on the continued dispossession of local residents, to allow for the "ideal nature" to be "saved through its submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms" (Büscher 2009).

Virunga as Fortress: A Continuation of the Colonial Project

Within Virunga National Park, the realities of the fortress model are consequential primarily for the individuals who either previously resided within park boundaries or whose livelihoods depend upon resources inside in the protected area. Yet this model also involves significant risk of bodily harm for those who work in the park. As I mentioned previously, exclusionary land policies are a significant part of the park's history. Verschuren writes that in an early attempt to expand the park in 1932, colonial authorities reasserted that,

> the objective of maintaining the absolute integrity of areas within the National Park by reducing human intervention to an absolute minimum, not just for aesthetic reasons, or for the promotion of tourism (as had been emphasized when creating both Yellowstone in the United States and Kruger Park in South Africa), but also for the sake of preserving a natural heritage as a basis for increasing scientific understanding (2009, 67).

Park policy still operates under this assumption that good aesthetics, attractive tourism, preservation, and successful scientific expeditions cannot be achieved with a significant human presence in the park. Additionally, within a historical framework, the desire of indigenous/local populations to have access to land rights or resource use rights, is still consistently framed by park authorities as an "economic agenda" (Van Schuylenbergh 2009). The park's history is marked by antagonism between park authorities and local populations, fueled by land dispossession and the separation of indigenous people from their resource base. Indeed, as Verwijen and Marijnen write,

> The antagonism resulting from the way the park was created and managed sparked widespread resistance. Displaced populations regularly occupied parts of the park and continued to cultivate, hunt, and fish on its territory (Vikanza 2011). Furthermore, in particular in the second half of the 1950's, acts of aggression against park guards, park installations and wildlife, or what Van Schuylenbergh (2009. 39) calls 'braconnage du resistance' (resistance poaching), were frequent, as part of wider hostility against (symbols of) what was seen as unjust land occupation and the colonial regime. In response, surveillance was increased and a military-trained and arms-bearing corps of park guards was recruited, including from among ex-soldiers of the colonial army (Van Schuylenbergh 2009) (2016, 9).

Jacques Verschuren, Belgian biologist, and an explorer of the park through much of the of the 20th century, attempted to offer a defense of the dubious exclusionary land policies, stating,

> Early land-use surveys carried out in the Northern Sector of the park, detected no sign of contemporary human occupation. A few claimants, opposed to the park's creation, were diplomatically persuaded, without pressure from the authorities, to settle on better lands, and were given generous financial compensation. There are no surviving eyewitnesses, however, and living descendants now know nothing at all about the events of that period. Most of the official documents detailing such transfers of financial compensation were destroyed during the troubles of 1960....Throughout the 1950's, problems relating to land claims were the last thing park rangers ever had to deal with.... In all the years I have spent roving, no Congolese associate of mine has ever said: 'This is the land of my forefathers; it is where they are buried (2009, 79).

Vershuren's explanations are both rosy and exceedingly convenient; they also directly contradict much of the recorded history of the Virunga and the legacies of park-community conflict, referenced in Chapter 3, which still exists in the present.

Mediating Militarization

Thus, the fortress model in Virunga began not long after its official founding. Within this model, we can also see historical evidence of the development of militarized methods and an early ranger force. Carl Akeley, in this 1926 publication "In Brightest Africa" about the Gorillas of the Virunga area, encourages the development of a gorilla sanctuary in the land between three of the volcanoes. He writes,

> To create this sanctuary would be comparatively easy and inexpensive. I think it would require first of all that the sanctuary be bounded by a road….The road would be chiefly for police purposes to make it easier to be sure that hunters stayed outside. The policing of the road could be done by the natives. As the pay for such a policeman is about five cents a day, the maintenance of the force is not a great matter (1926, 250)

In the very founding of Virunga therefore, we see the origins of militarization and the establishment of a ranger force which is clearly rooted in the colonial project. As white colonialists were able to purchase gorillas hunting permits, it's safe to assume that "hunters" refers to the activities of the local population. Moving through the 20th century, the militarization process under the fortress conservation model continued to develop.[3] A 1985 Frankfurt Zoological Society gorilla conservation project report chronicled the state of facilities in the park, explicitly mentioning anti-poaching teams and patrols. In one section of the report, the authors discuss how retired military gear from the UK is shipped to outfit park staff. Worth noting is another section which states,

> Rations have been provided for regular 10-day patrols from Kabara gate, and with the incentive of a 2-Zaire bonus for every trap collected, many traps have been removed from the park. On several occasions gun fire from elephant poachers has been heard deep in the park near the border with Rwanda, and rations have been provided for emergency patrols when necessary (Aveling 1985, 4).

Apparently, Zairean rangers were "incentivized" via a monetary bonus in order to collect as many snares as possible. Referring back to the history of the DRC, 1985 is the beginning of the decline of Mobutu's regime, therefore making it extremely likely that the communities around Virunga were suffering economically. Additionally, this type of economic exploitation harkens back in a disturbing manner to the supposed "payment" that Congolese men would receive during the colonial period based upon how much rubber they could harvest (see Chapter 2).

A discursive analysis of the portrayal of these militarized methods in Virunga would not be complete without mentioning the work of Marijnen and Verweijen. Over the past five years, Marijnen and Verweijen have published a number of works discussing the prevalence and

[3] This report was retrieved from the online archives of the Belgian Museum of Central Africa, which maintains a limited database of material relating to conservation in the belgian congo and post-colonial Zaire.

impacts of militarization in Virunga, from the approach of state-building, community participation, and international funding and intervention (see Marijnen and Verweijen 2016; Marijnen 2017; Verweijen and Marijnen 2018; and Marijnen 2018). The pair has conducted extensive ethnographic and discursive research, highlighting the perspectives of residents in close proximity to the park. In particular, in "The counterinsurgency/conservation nexus: guerilla livelihoods and the dynamics of conflict and violence in the Virunga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo", they address the livelihood practices of local residents, with an emphasis on resistance to park regulations (Verweijen and Marijnen 2018).

Of particular relevance to my thesis is their work on the "discursive (re)production of militarized conservation" within Virunga park (Marijnen and Verweijen 2016). In this particular piece, Marijnen and Verweijen argue that intense militarization within the park is legitimized via a "range of discursive techniques" that allow it to be seen as a 'normal' and 'legitimate' response. This legitimation however, is not, they argue, new, but rather draws from colonial tropes and "moral boundary drawing" (2016). They argue that today's green militarization is therefore based on colonial "othering" but has been transformed and intensified by the advent of global neoliberalism and neoliberal conservation (2016).

Drawing from Lundstrum, Verweijen and Marijnen define green militarization as "the use of military and paramilitary (military-like) actors, techniques, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation" (Lundstrum 2014, 817; 2016). Methodologically, both authors undertook a discourse analysis of materials from the park, and conducted ethnographic field work in the Virunga area between 2013-2016.

The heart of Marijnen and Verweijen's argument is that current militarization within the park is justified via colonial mechanisms that have been transformed and intensified by

neoliberal processes. They begin by explaining the manifestation of green military practice in conservation as a two-fold discursive and material process in which "military actors and instruments are only deployed to 'save nature' when this is seen as a 'normal', 'rational', and 'legitimate' response" (2016, 285). This process is therefore justified by a set of discursive techniques, which the authors define as "re-curring configurations of narratives, imagery, and discursive practices that frame social phenomenon, thereby authorizing and privileging certain forms of knowledge, actors, and modes of action, while delegitimizing and obscuring others" (2016, 285). Pointing back to my discussion of the importance of discourse analysis, in defining discursive techniques, Marijnen and Verwijen articulate the ways in which discourse is able to "privilege" knowledge in order to form possible realities and actions. In this same way, dominant discursive techniques are able to obscure those with less power, such as the discourses emerging from the subaltern voices of the Congo and the area surrounding Virunga.

The authors perform an extensive discursive analysis of the forms of militarized discourses emerging from the park to legitimate the violence used in enforcing park boundaries. Of particular relevance to my analysis is their discussion of colonial discourses. Marijnen and Verwijen point to a long history of conservation on the African continent as dictated by colonial and racial tropes (2016, 273). Europeans' justification for the establishment of protected areas was frequently tied to ideas of African racial and cultural inferiority, and therefore the presumptions of inevitable "mismanagement" of the environment by local people (2016, 273). They argue that discourses that emerge from Virunga National Park unconsciously draw from this these tropes in an attempt to gain popular support for conservation initiatives and to legitimate the use of force in dispelling poachers. They write,

> Although the Virunga Park's marketing and communications strategies are carefully designed, and media reporting on the park often deliberately paints a positive image, this

> does not imply that they are consciously engineered towards legitimizing and normalizing militarized interventions. Rather, those producing discourses and imagery, often with the explicit intention to mobilize support and funds for the park, draw on exiting tropes and narratives and representations of conservation as currently practiced (2016, 273).

In this way, the deployment of colonial narratives is not necessarily a conscious choice by actors within the park, but rather in keeping with larger themes of the global neo-imperialist discourse that pervades contemporary fortress models. Marijnen and Verweijen's analysis of the legitimation of militarization in the park also relies on Debord's idea of spectacle and the subsequent "spectacular mediation" of violent realities inside Virunga. Debord's "spectacle" proves particularly useful when discussing the mediation of reality by images (discourses). The essence of the spectacle points to the idea that images render realities and lived experience as commodities to be consumed (Debord 2010). As Igoe states, "Debord saw such mediation as a central feature of late capitalism, in which images become commodities alienated from the relationships that produced them and consumed in ignorance of the same" (2010, 375).

In this way, images of militarized conservation practice are also alienated from their material realities. Those exposed to the images consume them in ignorance of the potential consequences of such a process through removed fetishization of the discursive formations. Marijnen and Verweijen argue that images of green militarization in Virunga are heavily "spectacularized", thus the representations are vastly different than the realities of park practices. In the same way, the processes which have produced this militarization, and the consequences of it, are obscured via mediation. Drawing from Igoe's "The spectacle of nature in the global economy of appearances: Anthropological engagements with the spectacular mediations of transnational conservation" (2010), Marijnen and Verweijen write,

> Conservation spectacle generates a self-referential universe based on a dialogical process between images of wildlife and wilderness landscapes and the representation that informed their production. These spectacular visual meditations, which are engineered to communicate 'conservation success' and mobilize consumers, are only indirectly connected to the place they represent, characterize as they are by "a double act of fetishization" (Igoe, 20120: 389): Not only is the history and context of the featured phenomenon obscured, thereby fetishizing the presented relationships, the relationships that enabled this concealment in the first place are also rendered invisible. In this manner, spectacular production "become their own evidence, continuously referring back to themselves in affirmation of the realness of the world(s) that they show their viewers (Igoe in Marijnen and Verweijen 2014, 273).

Marijnen and Verweijen point out that almost all of the imagery of Virunga has some sort of spectacularized presentation associated with it. As we will see in Chapter 6, Debord's theory also applies to ecotourism within the park. Following Marijen and Verweijen, in the next section I will explore the application of spectacle to the representation of the actors associated with enforcing the militarized conservation model: wildlife rangers.

Spectacle and Exploitation: The Virunga Ranger as Conservation Martyr

In their article, Marijnen and Verweijen provide numerous discursive examples of the way in which militarization is legitimated via colonial and racial narratives. In particular, they point to the way in which the faceless depictions of "rebels" and poachers is used as a kind of othering device that deploys neo-barbarism imagery, thus justifying the use of violence to combat them (2016, 278). In particular, I would like to focus on the role of the individuals expected to combat the "others": Virunga's wildlife rangers.

In popular media, Virunga's rangers are portrayed as heroes who are quite literally willing to die in order to save the gorillas and maintain the integrity of the park. In regards to the imagery of the ranger Marijnen and Verweijen write,

> Complementing but ultimately remaining subordinate to, the white-commander in chief or trainer, the self-sacrificing African guards form the 'boots on the ground' in the way for biodiversity. By strongly emphasizing the dangers to which the rangers are exposed, and the tragedy of their occasional loss of life, the park guard emerges as a martyr of conservation. Consequently, the violence employed by the guards is moved beyond the realm of scrutiny-because it is effectuated by a heroic figure, we merely assume that it is necessary and legitimate (2016, 277).

While Marijnen and Verweijen do mention the ways in which the deaths of park rangers are spectacularized (nothing is ever published about how they have died yet we are bombarded with imagery of their funerals), they primarily address how the militarized actions of the park guards are legitimated (2016, 280). Taking this topic in a different direction, I will analyze the ways in which the personhood and lived experiences of Virunga's rangers are rendered invisible via an intense spectacularization process, ultimately exploiting their role in conservation in an attempt to gather donations and popular support. While problematizing the role that rangers play in militarized conservation and in the penalization of communities nearby to Virunga is important, so too is acknowledging their status as a subordinated group encased within larger legacies of the colonial conservation project.

I will begin this analysis with a brief discussion of twitter data pertaining to Virunga's Rangers. As explained in Chapter 1, I collected all tweets containing the hashtag #Virunga for a period of three months. Then, I generated a word cloud showing the most commonly used terms within the dataset (See Appendix 1). Next, using Nvivo, I searched the entire collection of tweets for the word "ranger" or similar terms. Using the "word tree function", I created a chart demonstrating frequent phrases used before and after the word "ranger" in tweets that were hash-tagged "Virunga". What is important to note here is that a relatively high percentage (1354 of 1884) of the tweets collected were ultimately "retweets" of institutional accounts such as @savevirunga (independent advocacy group for Virunga Park), and @gorillacd (Virunga's

official account). Nonetheless, the retweeting of institutional accounts related to Virunga still provides productive insights in how aspects of militarization, specifically rangers are portrayed, perceived, and amplified.

One of the first things that is clearly apparent in the word tree is the perceived notion of rangers as a type of "conservation hero". Frequent phrases which follow the word "ranger" include "risk their lives everyday", "risking their lives to save", "are at war to save", and "have been killed since 1996". Frequent phrases which precede the word ranger include "courage and dedication of #Virunga's (rangers)", "support #Fallen Rangers Fund and Widows of (rangers)", and "watch the story of heroic (rangers)", thus clearly promoting the idea that rangers are noble and willing defenders of Virunga's endangered wildlife.

Another interesting dynamic is that the institutional account @savevirunga, which tweets once and sometimes twice a day about the park, seems to actively promote a specific imagery of Virunga's ranger. The "Save Virunga" advocacy organization website states "Save Virunga brings out the power of local communities and conveys their messages to protect the most precious nature reserve in Africa and preserve the integrity of its ecosystems for future generations" (Save Virunga 2018). The website however at no point lists who authors the articles it posts, any local community members it has interviewed, or what is actually involved in "bringing out the power of local communities" (Save Virunga 2018). Interestingly enough, the account is prolific on twitter and seems to actively combat any view which problematizes the role of Virunga's rangers in conservation practice. For example, on February 7th, 2018, the account tweeted "*#Virunga #Environmental Defenders should be thought of as #heroes rather than obstacles to #Sustainable #Development #DRC*" (Twitter via @SaveVirunga 2018): in

support of an [4]article published by the Los Angeles Times newspaper about state interference in the work of "ecowarriors".

Non-institutional users, that is, individuals not representing specific organizations, also tweeted about the role of rangers in the park. One individual remarked, "*Also, just watched the heartbreaking documentary @virungamovie on @netflix. Park rangers risking their lives to save mountain gorillas, amid big oil and rebel fighters. #Virunga*". In this way, it's clear that discourse about Virunga pervade twitter in ways that support the idea of Virunga's ranger as environmental heroes working for the preservation of the park's flora and fauna in harrowing conditions. Recently one twitter user floated the idea of nominating African wildlife rangers for the Nobel Peace Prize. In response, the twitter account "SudantheRhino", an account which advocates for Rhino conservation, tweeted: "*I want the names of the protectors myself, but it would be @OlPejeta as an organization and then all African wildlife Rangers like @gorilladc Virunga National Park, etc as a general category, 'African Rangers'. We need EVERYONE to RT this Nobel Peace Prize idea NOW.*"[5] [6] (Twitter via Sudantherhino 2018). In fact, one of Virunga's rangers, Rodrigue Mugaruka Katembo, did win the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2017 for his role in protecting Virunga from foreign oil exploitation.[7]

There is no disputing the fact that Virunga's rangers are constantly at risk from armed violence while working in the park. As of August 2017, 160 rangers had been killed "in the line of duty"; 8 of those deaths were in 2017 (Virunga 2017). Yet, as Marijnen and Verweijen point

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[4] See the LA Times' Article "Defending the Environment Has Become a Type of Suicide Mission in Many Parts of the World" published on December 22nd, 2017

[5] Ol Pejeta is a rhino conservation area in central Kenya, the former home of Sudan, las the Northern white Rhino

[6] This tweet was not hash-tagged #Virunga, but was found through a twitter search for the phrase "Virunga Rangers"

[7] Katembo is featured prominently in the 2014 documentary "Virunga"

out, we are never given details by any of the Virunga associated outlets about how they died, or at whose hands (2016: 276). Instead, we are typically informed by the official Virunga website that they died in an "attack" or "ambush" by local militias, the most commonly mentioned group being the Mai-Mai "rebels" (Virunga 2017). Death is not just a quantifiable category, yet 150 lives lost, at a visceral level, seems to be an extremely large number.

As we take a closer look at how rangers are portrayed, both in life and death, in the park, problems with these portrayals begin to arise. To begin with, we are never presented with the direct opinions, thoughts, words, of the rangers themselves. There is also no listing of the individual rangers on the Virunga Park website unless they are closely associated with a task like Gorilla caretaking and featured in a blog post. In fact, the most information provided on the lived experiences of the Virunga rangers is at the time of their deaths. Each time a ranger is killed, the official Virunga website posts an obituary about their life and service to the park. For instance, in a July 2016 web post, the park memorialized Dudunyabo Celestin, one of their recently fallen rangers,

> Célestin was originally from Bunia and joined the ranger force in 2011. He did his comprehensive ranger training at Lulimbi Station in the Virunga's Central Sector. His first assignment was mountain gorilla protection in the southern sector. He also worked from Kibati Station and helped protect the Nyiragongo volcano area. In his most recent role, Célestin was charged with protecting the flora and fauna surrounding Mt. Tshiaberimu, where Virunga's only population of eastern lowland gorillas live. Virunga National Park will provide for Celestin's wife and children through the Fallen Ranger Fund. If you would like to help support them and and other families of Virunga's Fallen Rangers, please make a donation (Virunga 2017).

What is immediately obvious about this memorialization of Celestin is that it is strictly about his logistical role in the park. The reader is completely unaware of how he became a park ranger, his thoughts about the park, his relationships, feelings, or really any other details that mark the nuances of a human life. In this way, his role as a ranger is spectacularized to seem to

revolve solely around the work of "saving Virunga", and then projected into the world of media to procure donations. "Fallen Rangers" have become a type of brand associated with a park fund, not individuals' lives lost.

The Fallen Ranger Fund, which the quote refers to, was set up in order to support the widows and families of rangers who were killed in "the line of duty" in Virunga (Virunga 2016). The fund originally just provided families with a monthly stipend to assist them in the loss of their husbands or wives (Virunga 2016). In a recent turn of events however, the park has now established a "widows workshop" in which widows of the park rangers are recruited into a type of crafting workshop to make merchandise for the park that can be sold to tourists at the main lodge. A post about the workshop on the park website reads,

> After several years of planning and building, Virunga's Sewing Workshop for the Widows of Fallen Rangers has opened. The workshop was created to help widows regain a sense of control over their lives after suffering the devastating loss of their ranger husbands. These women have faced challenges that most people can't even imagine, yet as you can see from the images that follow, they are doing so with grace and determination (Virunga 2016).

The images that the post speaks of, includes pictures of smiling widows, a white conservationist helping the widows cut the inaugural ribbon (see Appendix 3), and pictures of the napkins that the widows have created which are to be sold to support the park (see Appendix 4).

I argue that it is difficult not to see the patterns of exploitation hidden in the spectacularization of the lives, and deaths, of Virunga's rangers. The glorification of their logistical role in the park as "heroes" and the projection of this image via various media sources renders invisible humanity and the processes which brought them to the park in the first place. Additionally, I argue that this spectacularization of their lives in death is also marketed as a way through which to garner funds for the park. In this same way, the exploitation of the spouses of

deceased rangers is problematic in that their status as widows is used an avenue to generate more funds for the operation of the park, which caused the death of their husbands in the first place. To make matters worse, the direction of all of these processes by "white authorities" such as [8]Park director Emmanuel de Merode and partners such as the European Commission harkens back to problematic colonial processes in which African lives were extended for resource production with little attention paid to their individual humanity.

Additionally, in a highly populated area with little opportunity for high earning jobs, rangers, and their widows, may not always "choose" to work for the park. While everyone associated with the park is portrayed as entirely invested in the park's mission, we are never told just how they ended up working there, a topic I will address in the next section.

Colonial Natures and the Erasure of Lived Human-Environment Connection

The spectacle of Virunga's wildlife rangers as "conservation martyrs" is clearly problematic in the way that it relates to colonial narratives and its ability to undermine the violent realities of working in the park. Bringing the discussion back to construction of nature, this spectacle is also able to undermine any type of connections that rangers may have had with the land or wildlife. I do not mean to suggest that Virunga's rangers or staff do not want to protect Virunga's wildlife. Instead, I argue that this spectacularization actually renders invisible any kind of connection between the Congolese rangers and the wildlife in Virunga. From interviews in the "Virunga" documentary with gorilla caretaker Andre Bauma and other rangers, it is evident that there are real emotions and complex backgrounds present in the relationships between the staff, the land, and its non-human inhabitants. We however, are never told, in the

[8] In a 2017 article by The Sunday Times, Emmanuel De Merode is referred to as "The Prince of the Congo", a reference which sparked outrage from a number of scholars and those aware of the DRC's colonial past

voices of the rangers, about their role in Virunga. In this way, western media presentations erase Congolese voices and connections to the "natural" elements of the park, instead presenting a highly mediated version of rangers as "conservation martyrs".

Processes of fortress conservation, as mentioned previously, draw a physical and metaphorical boundary between what is "natural" and what is not, in a way that reinforces the society-nature binary. Through the mediation of this process, potential connections between human and non-human are effectively erased, instead replaced by exploitative colonial narratives and images of death intended to initiate donations.

Another aspect of this "Nature" is the inherently capitalist aspect. Fortress model conservation transforms conservation landscapes to be accessible to capital markets ((Brockington and Igoe 2010). The spectacularization of the rangers' lives renders them a type of commodity to work for the benefit of the park. Yet, in order to for this mechanism to be successful, their humanity, and the problematic processes which led to their premature deaths, must be erased. In this way, there is an inherent removal of human characteristics, and human agency in the "Nature" being created. Here, there is significant interplay with the next processes I highlight in my thesis: gorilla conservation. In the next chapter, I will move my attention from the western mediation of human lives in the park, to the commodification, charismatic exploitation, or Virunga's mountain gorillas.

Appendix

1. 
describes
#colonialnarratives
@timesmagazine
orphans
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portraying
#aerialphoto
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#rwanda
kpasvp2hkr
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senkwekwe
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@savevirunga
#gorillas
des
#rdc
world
#thisiswanda
espace
unique
connected
#aerialphotography
#wildlife
approaching
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sbqyfwqyuc
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parc
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checkbasis
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#tourism
bauma
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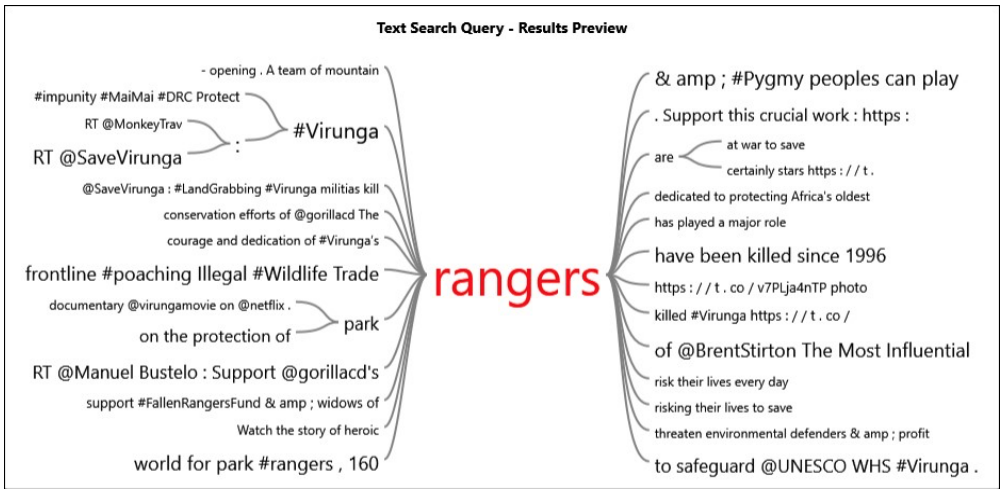
pigs
save
#sabyinyo
heritage
@africanconserve
@esthermarijnen

2. 
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conservation efforts of @gorillacd The
courage and dedication of #Virunga's
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risk their lives every day
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to safeguard @UNESCO WHS #Virunga .

3. 

Figure 6 Source: Virunga.org

4. 

Figure 7 Source: Virunga.org

Chapter V: Flagship Species: The Mountain Gorilla and the Commodification of the Non-Human Body

"*But the magic when you step through a glade and find yourself in the presence of gorillas is indescribable. In their natural habitat, these majestic creatures will implant the most precious memories in your mind as you get to watch infants affectionately cuddle their parents or see the silverback male command the attention of the tribe of gorillas...*"

(Excerpt from Virunga's Profile in "World's Best Travel Experiences")

On most days, The Great Ape House at the Smithsonian National Zoo is packed close to capacity with zoo-goers of all ages, hoping to catch a glimpse of its occupants. Home to two troops of western lowland gorillas, and a troop of Bornean Orangutans, the exhibit is undoubtedly one of the most popular attractions in the park. The building itself is set up as a type of gallery, where the many visitors stand in the center and are able to watch the primate occupants through a large glass wall that runs the entire span of the structure. Moving along the glass wall, one has full view of the primates' habitat, from the ground to the tops of the playground equipment provided for the residents. Unlike many other exhibits, the Great Ape house is regularly staffed with volunteers who stand throughout the building, explaining to excited groups of visitors exactly what the animals are doing.

On my many visits to the Smithsonian National Zoo, I too sat in the Great Ape House, taking time between the Small Mammal Exhibits and the Elephant Pavilion to observe the

animals behind the glass. The draw that large primates like the gorillas and Orangutans have to humans is undeniable. I often sit in amazement watching the adults solve the puzzles given to them by their trainers, or the mothers care for their newborns. Admittedly, I also felt a sense of guilt walking out, as I find it disturbing that someone whom I feel so closely resembles me must spend their life behind glass.

Since human encounters during the colonial period, large primates have occupied a central place within western conceptions of wildlife and cultural expressions of these widely held views. From cultural phenomenon such as Curious George to Planet of the Apes to King Kong, Westerners are seemingly both fascinated and afraid of these beings to which humans bear so much resemblance: both seeking connection and fearing their potential abilities. In a more real sense, primatologists such as Dr. Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey have become a type of public hero, exalted for their ability to connect to their respective species and their devotion to the conservation cause.

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of my research at this particular point to effectively and accurately report on historic or contemporary conceptions of the relationships between Congolese societies and the large primates of the area. For more information on the interactions of the indigenous Batwa people and their forest environments, both in the colonial past and present day see Trumbull (1967), or Crews (2003).

In this chapter, I will explore the discourse and ideology surrounding the conservation of one of the most prominent large primates, the mountain gorilla. As the flagship species of Virunga National Park, the Mountain Gorilla is extremely significant to the park's stated mission, and to public support of the park's conservation efforts. Recall that Carl Akeley's desire to preserve mountain gorilla habitat was the original inspiration for establishing the

protected area. Thus, while Virunga is home to many large mammals, including elephants, hippos, and the endemic Okapi, the mountain gorilla retains an elite status amongst the park's wildlife.

Deconstructing the way that the mountain gorilla "archetype" is mobilized via popular western conservation discourse is therefore imperative in order to problematize mainstream ideas of nature as evidenced by Virunga Park. While processes of green militarization, when deconstructed, pointed to exclusionary ideas of which landscapes constituted "Nature", Gorilla conservation relates to different aspects of western nature discourse, in the form of human vs non-human, or "us" versus "them" narratives. Wrapped into the gorilla "archetype" are an array of themes about non-human agency, the value of biodiversity, and the commodification of the living body. In this chapter, I begin by highlighting the role of the Mountain Gorilla within the context of conservation in Virunga, and the role of primates within western society at large. Then, I move to address Lorimer's concept of non-human charisma, relating the ideas back to the popular appeal associated with animals such as the mountain-gorilla. Next, drawing from Lorimer, and Brockington and Scholfield's discussions of flagship species, I analyze the ways in which the non-human charisma of the mountain gorilla is deployed as a capitalist tool, and how it is commodified and deployed within discourses rising surrounding Virunga National Park. Finally, I will analyze the consequences of this commodification, which manifest in direct opposition to ideas of hybridity and new conceptions of nature.

Gorilla Beringei Beringei

The Virunga Landscape is home to a vast array of large mammals, as Emmanuel De Merode, director of the park, states, however, "primates are without question the primary

attraction that Virunga, with its 22 species, offers" (Languy and Merode 2009, 50). With 22 species in total, the landscape hosts populations of Golden Monkeys, Eastern Lowland Gorillas, Mona Monkeys, and various others (Languy and Merode 2009). Out of these various species, the Mountain Gorilla, or *Gorilla Beringei Beringei*, is undeniably the most internationally recognizable.

The *Gorilla Beringei Beringei* is technically a sub-species of the *eastern gorillas*, its counterpart is the Eastern Lowland Gorilla, which also lives within the Virunga Park boundaries (WWF 2018). There are however, far fewer Mountain Gorilla individuals left than their eastern cousins. Classified as "critically endangered" by the WWF, biologists estimate that there are 880 mountain gorillas left, half of which reside in the Virunga Mountain region, split between Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and Virunga Park (2018, 189). As their name implies, the Virunga gorilla population resides in high elevation on the slopes of the park's southern sector (Languy and Merode 2009). They have thicker fur than their lowland relatives, stand at 4 and a half to 5 feet when fully grown, and can weigh up to 440 pounds. The species as whole has been the subject of a massive body of research, with particular attention being paid to group dynamics, behavior, and intelligence (see particularly Schaller 1965, Fossey 1983). Accordingly, *Gorilla Beringei Beringei* retains a high-profile position on the international conservation stage and has been the subject of various films, campaigns, and books.

Recent studies addressing the population dynamics of the Virunga gorillas indicate that that the group as a whole has sustained a 1 percent growth rate over the past 40 years (Robbins et. al 2011, 5). Robbins et. al suggests that this growth rate, as compared with the decline of other gorilla populations, can likely be attributed to "extreme conservation measures" (2011, 5). They define "extreme" conservation as "efforts targeted to deliberately increase positive human

influences, including the detection and veterinary treatment of potentially life-threatening conditions and close surveillance of individual animals" (2011, 5). These measures are in contrast to "conventional conservation" which they say emphasizes law enforcement and community development projects (2011, 1). Despite this, *Gorilla Beringei Beringei* is still listed as "critically endangered" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Robbins et al 2008). The "justification" sub-section for the IUCN listing reads,

> This assessment includes both the Virunga and the Bwindi subpopulations. There are only about 300 mature individuals of this subspecies in both subpopulations combined, closely approximating the threshold for criterion C under Critically Endangered. Given the loss of 1-2% of the subspecies in 2007 due to renewed poaching and illegal killings, the continuing political instability of the DRC region of the Virunga Volcanoes, and the risk of disease transmission by humans or unregulated incursions into the gorillas' habitat, there is a distinct possibility that the subspecies could experience a 25% reduction in the next generation of ~20 years. However, as conservation efforts are re-established and political stability returns to the region, it is also possible that this subspecies would warrant down-listing to Endangered (Robbins et. al 2008).

As of now, the future of the species is seemingly uncertain. Consequently, Virunga park authorities are continuing to engage with threats to the gorilla populations via these "extreme measures". There is a facility for orphaned gorillas in the park's southern sector, known as the Senkweke center, where specially trained staff raise baby gorillas who have lost parents due to poaching, illness, etc. (VNP 2018). Additionally, the park regularly employs "Gorilla Doctors": specially trained, international veterinary staff, to care for injured or sick individuals (VNP 2018).

As threats to the Mountain Gorillas increase, so does the international attention paid to their plight. In the western world, the gorilla population specific to Virunga is highly popularized, via media campaigns, celebrity attention, and the 2014 documentary named for the park, "Virunga". Within the context of Virunga National Park, the figure of the mountain gorilla

became what is known as a "flagship" conservation species, a concept that I critically explore in the following section.

Cute, Furry, and Cuddly: Exploring Non-Human Charisma

The western fascination with the Great Apes is well documented. In recent times, primatology has become a sort of social phenomenon through which non-human intelligence and relationships are framed. In her seminal work "Primate Visions", Haraway writes,

> Primatologists and the animals on whose lives they reported command intense popular interest – in natural history museums, television specials, zoos, hunting, photography, science fiction, conservation politics, advertising, cinema, science news, greeting cards, jokes. The animals have been claimed as privileged subjects by disparate life and human sciences- anthropology, medicine, psychiatry, psycho-biology, reproductive physiology, linguistics, neural biology, paleontology, and behavioral ecology. Monkeys and apes have modeled a vast array of human problems and hopes. Most of all, in European, American, and Japanese societies, monkeys and apes have been subjected to sustained, culturally specific, interrogations of what it means to be 'almost human (1989, 2).

In this way, gorillas, and their primate cousins have become a mechanism through which the human experience can be understood, but also made separate from the "non-human". As Haraway mentions, the notion of the 'almost human' is consistently mapped onto the primate subject thus interrogating yet sustaining the "human-animal divide". Haraway explores the nuances of primatology practice, drawing conclusions that point to science as not an objective discipline, but rather a performance with implications for ideas of gender, race, and the science-humanities divide (1989).

While Haraway would argue that much about the human-primate relationship is unique, many characteristics of the relationship follow similar patterns of other human-megafauna interactions. The cultural fascination and elevation of other large, expressive mammals such as elephants, big cats, etc. is well documented in critical conservation literature (see Lorimer 2005).

These relationships, and their formation, are perhaps best explored through the lens of 'non-human charisma'.

Lorimer defines non-human charisma as, "the distinguishing properties of a non-human entity or process that determine its perception by humans and its subsequent evaluation" (2005, 915). Through his emphasis on "process", Lorimer acknowledges that entities such as spaces or ecological processes (think a waterfall or a mountain) are also capable of holding "charisma". His particular emphasis, however, as is mine, is on the way charisma operates on the scale of species. Moreover, Lorimer stresses that charisma of a species is not an innate property, but rather a relational one, that emerges in response to culturally and corporeally constrained human bodies (Lorimer 2005, 915). In this way, we can understand charisma as a type of affective property which triggers human and non-human connection, and a subsequent valuation of non-human life by humans. Other scholars too have addressed this facilitation of human and nonhuman relations via corporeal characteristics, with Kohn (2013) noting that nonhuman sounds, such as the barking of a dog, have the potential to point to the fact that another being understands, and reacts to the world around it. The bark of a dog therefore, may signal that a dog has a "self" because the act of barking at something is an act that displays understanding and interpretation of the surrounding world. In this way, the ethological characteristics as described by Lorimer have the ability to help humans recognize perceptive subjectivity in nonhuman being (2013, 71).

Understanding the properties of nonhuman charisma becomes important because, as Lorimer notes, charisma tends to play a large role in conservation prioritization (2005, 915). In other words, non-human charisma can largely explain why mainstream western society places a large emphasis on the conservation of elephants and gorillas, but pays little attention to the plight

of, say, the red-barbed ant. Later, I will use non-human charisma to outline the use of the gorilla figure as a flagship conservation species. Before this however, I believe it is worth exploring the specifics of Lorimer's explanation of charisma, and the tenents of what makes a species like the mountain gorilla "charismatic".

Lorimer outlines three distinct facets of non-human charisma: ecological charisma, aesthetic charisma, and corporeal charisma. To begin with, the idea of ecological charisma emanates from the discipline of ethology, otherwise known as the science of animal behavior (Lorimer 2005). Lorimer states, "ethology starts from an understanding of a being- human or otherwise – as an ecological entity immersed in its environment" (Lorimer 2005, 916). It follows then, that as organisms immersed within an environment, human beings interact with a number of other living organisms on a daily basis, which also share our same ecological space. Our interactions with other organisms, however, depends upon our specific ethological characteristics, or, as Lorimer puts it, the human "modus operandi" (Lorimer 2005, 916). In this way, while we share a physical space with billions of other living things, only a certain number are "detectable" within our limited worldview.

> The important affordances in this comparative ontogenesis (Thrift 2005), which determines an organism's detectability, include a range of parameters that determine its visibility, including size, colour, shape, speed, and degree of movement. They also include aural characteristics such as the presence of absence of a noise, call, or song, and the frequency and magnitude of this sound (917).

Other predictors of "detectability" include characteristics such as ecological rhythms (nocturnal vs. diurnal), or whether an organism undertakes hibernation periods (Lorimer 2005). Overall, these characteristics come together to form an organism's detectability *in relation* to the ethology of the human being. Organisms that are highly detectable to humans contain considerable ethological overlap with us. For example, the average domestic dog has an extremely high

detectability when compared to that of a deer tick. Additionally, Lorimer points out that detectability can account for why most human beings don't care much about the conservation of an organism such as the deep-sea nematode. Thus, the more "detectable" an organism is, the higher its ecological charisma.

Along the same lines, aesthetic charisma is also constructed via human and non-human commonality. Lorimer writes that aesthetic charisma "relates to the aesthetic properties of an organism's appearance and behavior when encountered visually by an observer either in the flesh or as textual inscription" (2005, 917). In this case, the emphasis therefore is not on the aesthetic properties themselves, but rather in their ability to trigger an affective response in another being. This response, as Lorimer mentions, can be good or bad, in the same way that a puppy may trigger happy emotions in a human, but a cockroach my trigger feelings of disgust. In relation to human and non-human interactions, there are a multitude of aesthetic characteristics that may trigger a variety of different responses. A few, however, are worth mentioning as they pertain to future discussion about gorillas and other megafauna. First, Lorimer points out the well-recorded fact that humans tend to have strong positive responses to animals which closely resemble human babies. Additionally, organisms with a large, well-defined and detectable face tend to generate positive human emotions and attachment. Humans rely upon the face and facial expressions to communicate in daily life, thus an organism with no conventionally defined "face" (worms, jellyfish, etc.) triggers no response, or a negative one. In the same way, Lorimer claims that the presence of human-like hands works to imbue of a sense of individualized personhood, an aesthetic quality necessary for human bonding. Aesthetic qualities thus play an equal role in determining non-human charisma as do ecological characteristics.

Lastly, Lorimer outlines the third tenant of non-human charisma: corporeal charisma. Corporeal charisma perhaps is not as easily defined as the previous concepts, yet is crucially important to understanding the relational aspect of non-human charisma as a whole. Corporeal charisma relates directly to the experiences of long-term interactions with the species in question. Lorimer writes that corporeal charisma "refers to the affections and emotions engendered by different organisms in their practical interactions with humans over varying time periods" (921). Lorimer places a specific emphasis upon groups of natural historians, and their experiences with their target organism. He notes that practitioners who routinely interact with non-human organisms in a significant manner can usually recall a type of epiphany moment in which they felt a type of "enchantment", or emotions that are difficult to articulate. In this moment, Lorimer states that a type of "animal-becoming" takes place, in which the line between the two organisms is briefly bridged, and the interaction allows for a type of "reterritorialization" of the human subjectivity. Thus, corporeal charisma refers directly to the ability of the non-human to trigger this type of "animal-becoming" in its human counterpart.

Now, it quickly becomes clear in what ways the Mountain Gorilla begins to fit into the picture of non-human charisma. As a whole, it is a highly detectable species, both in its size, its vocal communication, and sleep/rest patterns. Humans who share spaces of residence in proximity to Mountain Gorillas are likely well-aware of their presence (not that this is always a good thing). Additionally, with regard to aesthetic charisma, Mountain Gorillas have a number of features which maximize their affective influence on human beings. With large faces, humanoid features, opposable thumbs, and clearly distinguishable individual bodies, the mountain gorilla has all of the requirements to be especially appealing to human society. Lastly, many practitioners who have worked with the animals note epiphany type moments which qualify as a

type of "corporeal charisma". Dian Fossey, Virunga-based primatologist from the 1960's to the late 1980's, discusses one such moment in her memoir "Gorillas in the Mist",

> I shall never forget my first encounter with gorillas. Sound preceded sight. Odor preceded sound in the form of an overwhelming musky-barnyard, human-like scent. The air was suddenly rent by a series of screams followed by the rhythmic rondo of sharp pok-pok chest beats from a great silverback male obscured behind what seemed like an impenetrable wall of vegetation. Joan and Alan Root, some ten yards ahead on the forest trail, motioned me to remain still. The three of us froze until the echoes of the screams and chest beats faded. Only then did we slowly creepy forward under the cover of dense shrubbery to about fifty feet from the group. Peeking through the vegetation, we could distinguish an equally curious phalanx of black, leather countenanced, furry-headed primates peering back at us. Their bright eyes darted nervously from under heavy brows as though trying to identify us as familiar friends or possible foes. Immediately I was struck by the physical magnificence of the huge-jet black bodies blended against the green palette was of the thick forest foliage (Fossey 1983, 3).

In addition to the type of "shock and awe" moment that Lorimer mentions, Fossey's quote also displays the role ecological and aesthetic qualities in determining non-human charisma. Thus, in this sense, the mountain gorilla becomes a highly relatable, and highly charismatic being in relation to human subjectivity.

In his piece "Non-human Charisma", Lorimer moves beyond the simple concepts underlying non-human charisma to suggest that a comprehensive understanding of the topic allows for a more developed notion of non-human agency. Non-human charisma therefore, is not simply relational, but rather a way to understand how non-human organisms may become agents in their influences upon human life and emotions. Lorimer writes,

> nonhuman charisma thus engenders a particular form of environmental ethics. In contrast to the panoptic, normative, utilitarian ethics of the official discourse of biodiversity conservation – which exhorts to save everything, everywhere, to preserve our life support system- an environmental ethic of non-human charisma is relational, ethological, and affective. Concern for non-human organisms is here shaped by the alternative taxonomy sketched out by the parameters of ecological, aesthetic, and corporeal charism (2005, 928).

Lorimer's suggestions point to non-human charisma as a potential way to bridge subject-object dualism across the nature-society divide, or more specifically the human-nonhuman divide. He does however, acknowledge that some of the more common manifestations of non-human charisma in conservation practice are perhaps not as liberating.

Flagship Species and the "Conservationist Mode of Production"

Without knowing anything about contemporary conservation, and even without naming a particular protected wildlife area, anyone exposed to mainstream western culture could likely name an endangered species. The snow leopard, the giant panda, and the African elephant are all examples of animals which have been thrust onto the international conservation stage as reasons for "why" biodiversity conservation is necessary. This mobilization, and the processes surrounding it, construct what Lorimer, and other scholars (See Brockington and Scholfield 2010, Walpole and Leader-Williams 2002, Leader-Williams and Dublin 2002) call "flagship species" (Lorimer 2015).

Drawing from Leader-Williams and Dublin (2002), Lorimer defines a flagship species as "popular, charismatic species that serve as symbols and rallying points to stimulate conservation awareness and action" (2005, 228). In his discussion of the way the non-human charisma can work to promote ideas of non-human agency, Lorimer highlights ways that "flagshipping" can be productive, mainly to call attention to less charismatic species (2005, 228). More often however, he recognizes that the charisma of flagship species is both spectacularized and neoliberalized in the name of rallying conservation support (Lorimer 2015). In this way, charismatic species are "archetyped" and deployed as mechanisms by conservation NGOs to gain material and economic support. He writes, "affective images of charismatic species act as a commodity fetish,

encouraging a superficial and ineffectual politics insufficient for understanding and addressing the social and ecological complexities of conservation" (Lorimer 2015, 143).

This commodification of the non-human body, and capitalization on nonhuman charisma, in the name of garnering private sector support for conservation has been coined by Brockington and Scholfield (2010) as the *conservationist mode of production.*

Thus, I argue that in the discourse emerging from Virunga park, the mountain gorilla is achetyped, and deployed to accrue private sector and public support for conservation within Virunga's boundaries. While the archetype of the gorilla is deployed in a multitude of ways, I will place a particular emphasis on the way its which is relational charisma is affectively commodified and used to trigger affective support for the conservation cause. Following this, I will go on to examine the potential consequences of this archetypal mobilization, both for the species itself and for ideas of nature.

Selling Conservation: Marketing Virunga's Gorillas

The "conservationist mode of production", as it relates to the mountain gorilla, is omnipresent within media material surrounding Virunga National Park. In fact, it begins with the logo of the park, an image with an orange background and an illustration of a silverback gorilla looking off to the side, with the words "Virunga National Park" written along the top, and "Democratic Republic of Congo" written along the bottom (see Appendix 1). This image appears on everything Virunga related, from the website, to press releases, to the newly minted "Virunga water bottle" now available for purchase (if you buy this, the website states, park authorities will be able to provide 100 cucumbers to an orphaned baby mountain gorilla). While perhaps not seemingly significant, the logo can be seen as the first step in the marketing of the gorilla

archetype, making the figure of the mountain gorilla synonymous with the name of the park; thus creating a constant association between Virunga's institution the gorillas that live within park boundaries.

The mobilization of the charisma of the mountain gorilla is a ubiquitous within discourses produced by the park. The website in particular, Virunga's main outlet to western audiences, makes regular use of photographs of the animals in the forest, playing together, and with rangers. As opposed to a simple representation of what it means to be a mountain gorilla however, these images are almost always accompanied by calls for support or monetary donations, thus making use of the gorillas' appeal as a potential "mode of production". Referring back to Lorimer's discussion of non-human charisma, these images frequently make use of the aesthetic charisma of the animals, so to create a strong affective response. In one particularly clear example, if you click on the "make a donation" tab of the website, you are immediately brought to a page with a "donate" window, asking you how much you would like to contribute. In the background of this window, however, is a screen-sized picture of a baby gorilla, staring directly into the camera, thus invoking a charismatic connection between the baby gorilla and the potential benefactor (see Appendix 2).

Virunga's facebook page too presents a number of examples of the flagshipping of charisma in the name of garnering support and funds. Much of this material centers around the gorillas' ability to connect with humans, and their corporeal similarities to the human mode of existence. In one of many posts about ranger's relationships with gorillas, we are shown a picture of Andre Bauma (a staff member at the orphaned gorilla center) and told that he "d*escribes himself as both a mother and a father to the mountain gorillas he cares for on a daily basis <3*"

(Virunga National Park via Facebook 2018) (see Appendix 3). In another post, we are shown a picture of a "grumpy" gorilla and told that,

> mountain gorillas share over 98% of their DNA with humans. Meaning, Virunga's mountain gorillas can also get a little grumpy on a monday morning. Regardless of their mood, our rangers are committed to protecting these amazing animals and the park that they call home. To support the ongoing work of Virunga's rangers visit Virunga.org/donate (Virunga National Park via Facebook 2018) (see Appendix 4).

In this post, it's clear that human characteristics and an imposed anthropomorphization are applied to the gorilla pictured in order to invoke a type of emotional connection that will potentially lead to donations. Interestingly, we also see the use of the authority of "scientific" evidence to "prove" this human-gorilla connection.

In the documentary movie "Virunga" mentioned in Chapter 3, gorillas make regular appearances in their forest habitats and at the orphaned gorilla center in the park's northern sector. Placing emphasis upon the gorillas as individual, "named" beings with anthropomorphic personalities, the movie highlights intense interpersonal connections between rangers and the orphaned babies. The rangers pictured continuously refer to the gorillas by their names, rendering them "humanized" individuals capable of being consumed via their "aesthetic charisma". Additionally, the movie, which was marketed heavily by Netflix, came out with a number of different movie posters used to advertise the documentary. One in particular shows what we can assume to be a mother gorilla protectively cradling her baby, reinforcing "familiar" notions of the gorilla existence (see Appendix 5).

In the same way, a popular children's book titled "Looking for Miza", funded by the Clinton Global Initiative and supported by the Congolese Nature Conservation Authority, chronicles the "real life" plight of a baby mountain gorilla lost in the Virunga wilderness (Hatkoff et al 2008). The book, dedicated to "*The Children of the Democratic Republic of*

Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda, and to a better future, which will always include mountain gorillas" centers a mountain gorilla family as protagonists, after their youngest member, "Miza" mysteriously disappears. Projecting characteristics of human family dynamics onto the gorillas, the book takes great care to emphasize that gorillas can express "human" emotions such concern about family members and joy. However, the book also pairs these points with the efforts of park authorities to save them, thus creating a connection between conservation efforts and humanized features. The last line from the book states,

> It is easy to believe that the members of Kabirizi's family are joyful too. One of their youngest members has survived and is now healthy and happy. Miza will grow up with her family. She will continue to learn from Tumaini and Mivumbi. Kabrizi will carefully watch over his whole troop, but we can be sure that he will always keep and extra-careful eye on Miza, the little, lost gorilla he rescued and brought home (Hatkoff et. al 2008).

In perhaps one of the most easily identifiable instances of commodification of gorillas within the park, visitors must purchase a "gorilla permit" in order to trek to see the gorillas (Virunga 2018). In the way, the gorillas are quite literally turned into commodities which can be bought via an "experience package". These permits, and discounts on them, are frequently advertised on Virunga's various sites and social media pages using images that highlight the gorilla's charismatic features. In one particular instance on the "Visit Virunga" facebook page, we are shown a picture of a baby gorilla staring into the camera, overlaid by the words "*Off season special: experience a one in a lifetime encounter with Virunga National Park's wild gorillas for $200 per person*" (Visit Virunga via Facebook 2018) (See Appendix 6). In this way, and the others mentioned above, Virunga's gorilla population is commodified, branded, and consumed via the deployment of their non-human charisma.

Undermining Agency: The Consequences of Commodified Non-human Corporealities

Lorimer's original purpose in discussing the characteristics of nonhuman charisma is to highlight the potential of charisma to contribute to a re-conceptualizing of non-human agency. He argues that through the acknowledgement on nonhuman charisma as a relational entity, we can further view human-and non-human relationships as participatory on both sides, unsettling the traditional human-nonhuman, subject-object dualism. In relation to Whatmore's work on hybridity, we see that an application of non-human agency can thus allow us to further acknowledge the constant mixing of society and the wild along with the productive ontological capacity of all living beings.

The commodification of the gorilla-body runs directly counter to Lorimer and Whatmore's argument for acknowledging a type of ontological co-production in the vast menagerie of life structures. The "branding" of Virunga's mountain gorillas in an effort to garner profit undermines both the ecological aspects of their being by capitalizing on their similarity to human-beings, and prevents effective engagement with more effective ideas of human-gorilla coexistence. Additionally, in thinking about the ways the process of the commodification of the gorillas interacts with the spectacularization of Virunga's rangers, it's clear that in being labeled an affective commodity, the gorillas are humanized in a way that the people around and in Virunga are not. So, for this particular brand of apitalist "nature" to work, human agency is rendered invisible as in relates to people (in a way that harkens back to colonial narratives), while nonhuman agency is taken away from the gorillas and replaced with a commodified, humanized, agency.

In their "Manifesto for Abundant Futures", a declaration of proclamation of the ways in which to promote abundant sociological futures in an era marked by the Anthropocene, Collard, Dempsey and Sundberg state,

> abundant futures include nonhuman animals, not as resources or banks of natural capital that service humans, but as beings with their own familial, social and ecological networks, their own lookouts, agendas, and needs. An abundant future is one in which other-than-human have wild lives and live as 'uncolonized others' (Plumwood 1993 in Collard et al. 2015).

In relegating gorillas as objects to be consumed by humans, the discourse surrounding Virunga National Park undermines the autonomy of the nonhuman body, thus limiting the potential for a western re-conceptualization of traditional nature-society dualism. Building off of western consumption, in the next section I will continue this discussion through an analysis of Virunga's ecotourism industry and the consumption of catastrophe.

Appendix

1.

Figure 8 Source: Virunga.org

2.

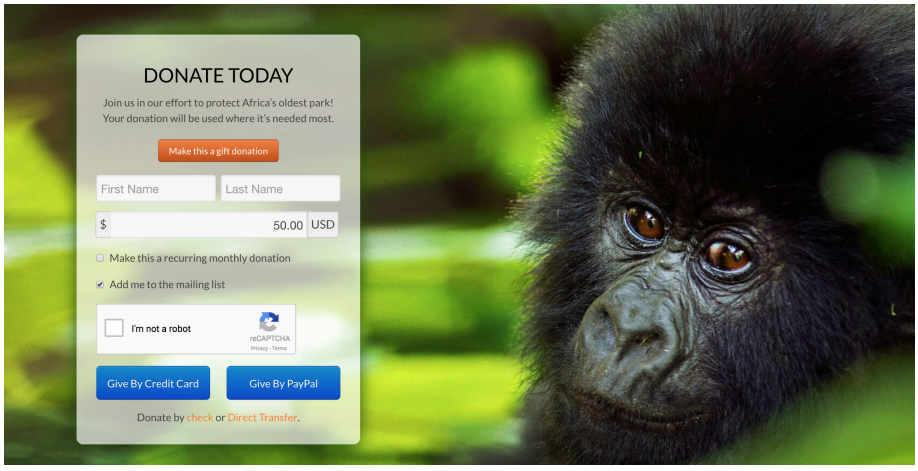


Figure 9 Source: Virunga.org

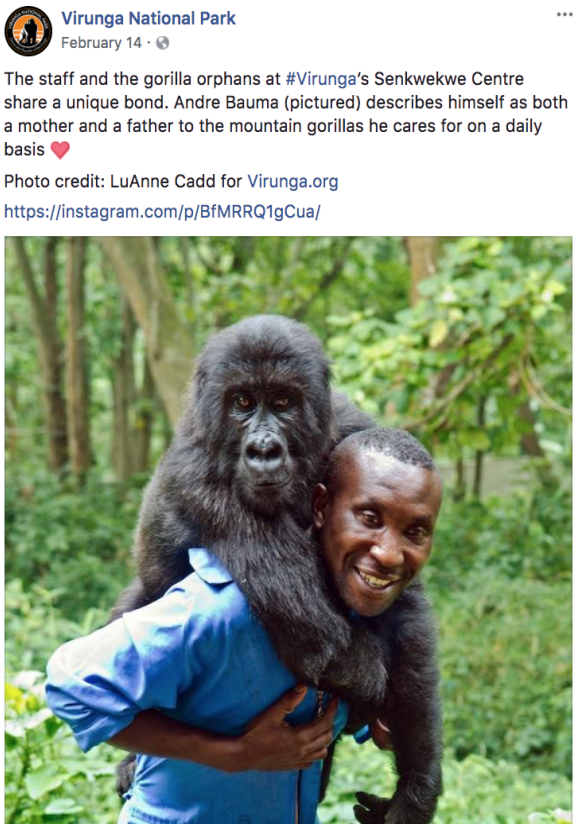
3. 

Figure 10 Source: Virunga.org

4. 

Figure 11 Source: Virunga.org

5. 

Figure 12 Virungamovie.com

6. 

Figure 13 source: Virunga.org

Chapter VI: Eco-Tourism and the Mediated (Re)Production of the Nation State

"After years of civil war that claimed the lives of more than six million people and a long history of corruption and political instability, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not on many travellers' bucket list. But there is now one very good reason why they may be more interested. Africa's oldest national park, the beautiful and other-worldly Virunga, in the east of the country bordering Rwanda and Uganda, reopened this year after the war ended. It is a magical place, 3,000 square miles of snow-capped mountains, glaciers, active volcanoes, lush mountain forest and savannahs. Yet another battle is now playing out here, one between integrity and greed."

(Excerpt from a Guardian Article Titled "Wildife Tourism in Virunga Gives New Hope to Congo)

Every once in a while, in my time spent in Tanzania's Serengeti Park, my friends and I would catch a glimpse of a strange object hovering over the seemingly endless sea of grass: a hot air balloon. While we had been informed during a lecture upon our arrival that "Balloon Trips" were a popular (and expensive) tourist attraction in the park, their slow, looming presence always seemed out of place in contrast to the pace in which the ecosystem around us was moving. We would look on in silent but unified disapproval, knowing well that the current occupants of the balloon would likely finish their day with a luxurious, multi course "bush meal" catered by uniformed wait staff, an experience far removed from the realities of both the park and the surrounding communities. None of us disputed, however, that the views over the plains were very likely breathtaking.

We discussed with similar bitterness, the multiple five star lodges located within the park boundaries. A particular object of derision was the "Serengeti Four Seasons", a hotel where visitors can spend $1,000 per night on a room to "get up close and intimate with lions, leopards, and elephants - yet always feel safe and pampered" (SFS 2018). To make matters worse, the lodge offered "safaris on horseback" to guests willing to pay an extra one to two thousand dollars.

Putting aside the flawed logic associated with riding horses in the Serengeti (why ride around on a large ungulate in the area with the highest concentration of big cats on the African Continent?), it was more than the exorbitant prices and "in your face" luxury that irritated me and my fellow students (four nights in our one-person tents may have made us a bit disagreeable). There was something deeply unsettling about the enormous displays of wealth being paraded around the park when we were well aware of the enforcement policies which kept nearby residents out of it. Additionally, on the way into the Serengeti, we passed scores of white tourists on day trips to nearby Maasai Bomas, where local people "performed" traditional dances for them, presumably in return for payment either by the tour guides or by park authorities[1]. Even though we respected the agency of the various actors involved in the tourist industry in the park, it was hard not to wonder how the massive influx of economic wealth into the area impacted the different "roles" people were asked to play. Additionally, it was evident that tourism had transformed the landscape itself, producing a type of "amusement" park feel. With tourism contributing over 5.9 billion US dollars to Tanzania's overall economy however, it was clear that Tanzanian authorities saw the value in cultivating the foreign tourism industry.

[1] See Igoe's "Conservation and Globalization" (2009) for an in-depth discussion of the impact of tourism and globalization on Tanzania's Maasai communities

As I discuss in this chapter, various scholars have argued that tourism, specifically ecotourism, has the ability to shape and produce landscapes so as to be competitive attractions within the global economy (Duffy 2002, Bluwstein 2017, Brockington et al 2008, Ojeda 2012). In a similar way to Tanzania, but to a lesser extent, The Democratic Republic of Congo has in recent years experienced modest growth of the ecotourism industry (WTTC 2018). At the forefront of this expansion has been Virunga National Park. Consequently, I will spend this next chapter analyzing the various ways that the production of Virunga's landscape for tourism reinforces a mediated image of the DRC as a "dangerous" place, juxtaposed with the image of the "purity" of the landscape inside the park. This, in itself, may seem counterintuitive, as Duffy argues that in order to attract a wide tourist base, nation states are forced to market themselves as "safe and secure", thus erasing histories of violence and war (Duffy 2002). In response, I argue that the promotion of ecotourism in Virunga has created a park as a type of entity apart from the bounds of the DRC, thus rendering the violence which exists outside of it consumable.

First, in this chapter I outline the growth of tourism in Virunga and the DRC in general. Then, drawing from authors such as Duffy, Ojeda, and Brockington, I outline the various ways in which ecotourism has the ability to produce "national" natures. Next, using Lisle's arguments about the consumption of catastrophe and Baudrillard's simulacra and simulation, I suggest that tourist ventures in Virunga can be seen as attempts to make contact with the "real". In conjunction with this, I present various discursive materials about ecotourism in the park, displaying how they reinforce nature as "pure", thus reinforcing narratives of the DRC as the "heart of darkness", thus recalling and relying on colonial racist tropes. In this way, I argue, violence and political strife (that occur at a distance) become part of the "ultimate" tourist

package. Finally, I discuss how the production of nature via ecotourism therefore capitalizes on the moral innocence of the wild, therefore vilifying and profiting off of regional human conflict.

Recent Tourism Trends in the DRC and Virunga

In the DRC, tourism as a whole has begun to increase in recent years, producing 1.9 percent of the National GDP as of 2016 (WTTC 2017). The industry is expected to grow significantly, with the World Travel and Tourism Council estimating that by 2027, the industry's total contribution to national GDP will have grown by 6.1 percent (WTTC 2017). Virunga experienced a recent uptick in tourism related activities. The tourism program in the park began in 2009, based upon gorilla trekking and Mt.Nyiragongo climbs (Virunga Alliance 2018). The Alliance claims that during the years 2010 and 2011, the Main Park lodge hosted 5,000 visitors, generating almost 1 million USD in revenue. This number fell though, effectively to zero, after the park was forced to close between early 2012 and January 2014 due to militia activity in the area (Virunga Alliance 2018). Numbers recovered quickly in the years 2014-2015, bolstered by the release of the 2014 aforementioned documentary, "Virunga", and began climbing back up to pre-closure statistics with 3,000 visitors annually by August 2015 (AU 2015).

A 2013 report by the WWF indicated that in "ideal" conditions tourism to Virunga has the potential to generate 235 million USD per year in revenue, from things such as gorilla permits and accommodation fees (WWF 2013). Additionally, the report indicates the ability of tourism to generate employment opportunities, thus paving the way for "economic recovery through tourism" (WWF 2013). The park has embraced the promise of the tourism industry wholeheartedly, formulating a 4-pronged sustainable economic development plan build around investment in sustainable energy, sustainable fisheries, agro-industry, and lastly, tourism

(Virunga Alliance 2018). The Alliance estimates that starting in 2016, tourism was, and is still projected to increase by 90% annually, and that the average visitor to Virunga now spends USD $1,400 in associated park fees and accommodations payments (Virunga Alliance 2018). Additionally, the Alliance and park authorities expect that tourism will foster economic growth in the region and produce surplus revenue which can be used to support the park's community development projects (Virunga Alliance 2018).

As one of the many protected wilderness areas in East-Central Africa, Virunga has to compete on the international tourism stage to make itself a desirable destination. As Duffy notes, ecotourism destinations are above all a type of commodity, and are marketed and designed as such (Duffy 2002). The park then, must cultivate a specific identity, or brand, in the context of the DRC, in order to be an attractive and "secure" place to vacation. In the next section, I will draw from scholars who discuss the "production" of ecotourism to begin constructing an explanation of the type of landscapes (and discourses) ecotourism produces in Virunga.

Distinguishing the Eco-Tourist

To begin with, it's worth quickly distinguishing between "tourism" and the more specific "eco-tourism". Duffy states, "Eco tourists are thought to be a new type of tourist, distinct from mass tourists because they are environmentally conscious as well as socially and culturally aware" (2002, 20). Building off of this, conventional tourism, specifically western tourism, is typically conceptualized as a type of "selfish" or "wasteful" undertaking primarily for the purpose of personal leisure (Duffy 2002). Ecotourism on the other hand, while certainly also incorporating personal wants, aims (or at least presents the illusion of aiming) to "do good" as a visitor to a specific site. In some cases, as Duffy mentions, this may mean forgoing certain

amenities in the name of sustainability via self-denial, or securing reassurance that their economic input is directly benefiting local communities (Duffy 2002).

In Virunga's case, the park makes no claims that its facilities are environmentally friendly in any specific ways. While the park does offer different types of "tented camp" experiences, these too are outfitted with amenities such as full-service food options and unlimited hot showers (Virunga 2018). What qualifies tourism to Virunga as a form of eco-tourism is the fact that the park makes it abundantly clear that visiting Virunga will "help the gorillas". In a special piece she wrote for the guardian about tourism in Virunga, the producer of the "Virunga" documentary film, Joanna Natasegara, writes,

> It may be luxurious, but visiting Virunga will help save the gorillas, and is a statement of support for the honourable rangers who have lost many of their colleagues in recent times, fighting on the front line of conservation to protect an asset, not only for their country, but for the rest of humanity" (Natasegara 2014).

Clearly, this idea has been internalized by tourists who visit the park. A tripadvisor commenter who had apparently visited the park wrote about the gorilla permit fees, *"$200, or $400, don't think too much about it, your contribution means a lot to manage the National Park".*[2] In another case, a tour guide wrote on the independently run, yet popular, "Save Virunga" website,

> In cooperation with several trusted tour operators, Virunga Foundation and ICCN provide exceptional opportunities for nature tourists to meet with habituated mountain gorillas and experience other natural wonders of the park. As the use of entrance-, gorilla- or other fees are made transparent to the travelers, and financial income clearly supports both the management of the protected area, its wildlife as well as the surrounding communities, results in the willingness to spend and donate relatively high amounts of money. This way tourism is a significant financial supporter of the Virunga national park (Bakunzi 2017).

[2] I sourced this and other comments from TripAdvisor. I search the website for the page titled "Virunga National Park

In this way, tourism to Virunga can be classified as a form of ecotourism in that the actual act of paying to visit the area is seen as a type of contribution. Willingness to spend money which is going to support the gorillas, and apparently the "honorable rangers", is given a moral quality which makes it clear that the money is going to benefit people and animals in productive ways. In this case, the "self-denial" or sacrifice associated with the ecotourism venture comes in the form of paying, what would seem to many in the world as, a lot of money. Now that we have established tourism to Virunga as a form of ecotourism, I will move to discuss the relation of the ecotourism industry to imagery of the nation state.

The Productive (and Destructive) Capabilities of the Eco-Tourism Industry

The beginning of understanding ecotourism and its relation to the nation state requires understanding that as a circulating commodity, ecotourism destinations must develop ways to compete on an increasingly competitive international stage (Duffy 2002). In her work on ecotourism in Belize, Duffy lays out the consequences of this need to compete, stating that in order to be competitive, nation-states, particularly within the global south, have to carve out specific tourism markets. One of the ways in which to do this, she argues, is through particular images of nationhood. She writes, "In the process of creating this image, governments, tour operators, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other related organizations conjure up a peculiar idea of nationhood that is viewed through a prism designed for an external audience" (2002, 71). What is important to note is that as opposed to other processes of nation-making, constructions of nationhood as they relate to ecotourism tend to be transnational projects, as the appeal of the nation is not being directed towards those who actually live in the area (Duffy 2002).

In order to be appealing destinations, Duffy suggests that countries in the global south must market themselves as "exotic destinations promising pristine environments untainted by Western-style development" (2002 72). Additionally, she argues, aspects such as political stability, "friendly locals", and striking wilderness features are crucially important to ensuring tourism interests (2002 72). In the quest to assure tourists that their trip will be safe then, nations may choose to effectively erase information about crime against foreigners, armed conflict, or terror threats (2002 72).

Duffy continues by highlighting the "performance" aspect that this type of production of imagery requires. If a nation state markets itself in a particular way to tourists, local populations may feel compelled to act in a certain way to "fit the bill". For example, if NGOs and governments market an ecotourism destination as remote and authentic, indigenous/local peoples may feel compelled to "perform" certain personas, or worse, stereotypes, in order to appeal to foreigners (Duffy 2002). The promotion of ecotourism destinations by transnational actors may also rely on popular "regional" identities, such as means to belong to a certain place (for example what it means to be "African"). In a similar vein, cultural values are shaped by the marketing of ecotourism, and are thus commodified. Citing Hall (see chapter 1) and other scholars, Duffy writes,

> In tourism, cultures and societies become commodities to be consumed by an external audience. McCrone, Morris and Kelly argue that the commercialization of culture is an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition (1995, pp 8-12). The role that tourism can play in transforming collective and individual values is inherent in ideas of commodification, which imply that what were once cultural displays of living traditions or a cultural text of lived authenticity becomes a cultural product, which meets the needs of commercial tourism. Tourism can redefine social realities; when advertising creates images of a place, these create expectations on the part of the visitor, which in turn lead the destination to adapt to such expectations. The destination then becomes caught in a tourist gaze from which it cannot escape without abandoning its status as a destination" (2002, 74).

Ojeda, in her discussion of ecotourism and paramilitary conservation enforcement in Tayrona National Park, Colombia, presents a similar argument. Acknowledging that tourism necessitates the production of consumable natures, she constructs an analysis of how ecotourism destinations may produce "bodies out of place" (2012 364). In this way, artificial constructions of "paradisiacal" vacation spots are able to designate local populations as either "eco-warriors" (think Virunga's Rangers), or "eco-threats" (think poachers) (2012, 364). She writes,

> In addition to the problematic ways in which local elites and paramilitary forces participate in definition of Tayrona's public/private character, tourism-based strategies of neoliberal conservation have had significant effects on local communities. One of its most problematic aspects is their capacity of producing bodies out of place. Environmental protection discourses and practices have translated into land-grabbing mechanisms under which the protection of nature - allegedly made possible by its commodification for tourist consumption - justifies and even legitimates the dispossession of local community members such as fishermen, transporters, and peasants (2012, 364).

On par with her arguments about paramilitary forces, Ojeda adds that part of constructing the ideal wilderness involved erasing past histories of Colombian military violence (2012). Stating that "Tayrona's historical geographies of violence seem to contradict its effective conjuration as a paradisiacal spot, Ojeda suggests, in the same way as Duffy, that creating and marketing an ecotourism destination requires imageries of peace, safety, and security (2012, 361).

Intuitively, this makes sense; in order to attract visitors it seems logical that a destination, or nation, would want to market the less controversial aspects of its identities, but this "blurring of the truth" has serious repercussions for the lives of the nation's citizens. As I will discuss, however, when it comes to Virunga, internal strife and "danger discourses" are packaged within the larger tourist appeal.

Consuming Conflict: Virunga's "Dangerous Allure"

In the marketing of Virunga park, we are constantly presented with images of both life and death: heroics and heinous acts. Whether it is images of "murdered" gorillas (See Appendix 1), or a particularly striking picture of park staff lowering a fallen ranger's coffin into his grave (See Appendix 2), the consumer is made constantly aware that while bursting with an abundance of wild-life, Virunga is a place continuously threatened by violent forces which seek to undermine it, and those who support it.

Marijnen, in her most recent piece about Virunga, argues that local actors increasingly perceive the park as separate from the whole of the DRC: a functioning "state within a state" (Marijnen 2018). Writing that during her field work she, "met numerous Congolese observers, who perceive the park in just that way, as a 'state within a state', and representatives of aid donors who perceive the park as a place that 'works' in the otherwise chaotic and conflict-ridden eastern DRC" (Marijnen 2017). Drawing from Marijnen's conclusions, I argue that when it comes to eco-tourism, Virunga is not portrayed as an entity belonging to the Congolese state, but rather a morally pure transnational entity, engaged in a constant battle with armed Congolese Militias and other "dark" forces. In a two-fold discursive process present in the consumption of ecotourism, the park and its inhabitants are accorded extra value because of their threatened status and the heroics associated with preservation, while the larger fabric of the Eastern Congo falls away into a type of bloodied, conflict ridden vortex.

While Duffy and Ojeda argue that nation-states and transnational actors are motivated to make ecotourism destinations more appealing by minimizing the conflict and political instability which may surround them, this process is reversed in Virunga. In reality, the park can and does assure its visitors a certain degree of personal safety (mainly through the fact that they are

constantly accompanied by armed park guards), but the realities of the military threat to the landscape are not erased, while the reasons for such a threat are. This 'threat" and the actions taken to combat it then become "alluring" for adventurous travelers and those seeking an "authentic experience". Take for example, a recent Telegraph article titled "Is This the World's Most Life Affirming Destination?" In it, the author writes,

> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo there is more lightning than anywhere else in the world. Of the 10 hotspots most affected by lightning strikes, five are in DRC. It is an apt metaphor for a country that has been riven by civil war and exploitation, but one that is beautiful and spirited and exciting. And there is nothing more life-affirming than sitting on the magnificent wooden balcony of Mikeno Lodge, which overlooks the forest in Virunga National Park, and staring out at a really violent tropical storm (Telegraph 2017).

In this way, the constant conflict that has been present in the Congo in recent years translates to being "spirited and exciting", while the area is afforded the same ethos as a lightning strike. In that same article the author continues by saying,

> This is not a place to see the 'Big Five' in a Land Rover convoy with sundowner gin and tonics; it's a bit more edgy than that. Anything to do with Congo is edgy; it's part of its allure. That isn't to say it's without royal approval – Virunga enjoys a healthy relationship with the Royal Foundation, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry's charitable trust, and Virunga's director, Emmanuel de Merode, was a keynote speaker at the Duke of Cambridge's United for Wildlife launch, in 2014 (Telegraph 2017).

In an equally problematic way, we can assume that this "edginess" comes from perceptions of poverty, conflict, and lack of infrastructure and translates to a type of "thrilling" tourist experience. Yet at the same time, we are assured that Virunga is "sanctioned" via the approval of high-ranking westerners, in a way which presents troubling evidence of neo-colonial processes. The article goes on to talk about the "life affirming" experience of meeting the gorillas, and then chronicles the 2007 murder of a gorilla family by "bandits".

In another article, published by Bloomberg in 2016, we see Virunga described as inhabiting the "Heart of the Congo" (perhaps an unintentional reference to the "heart of darkness"). A travel writer states,

> In the early morning light on Mikeno Lodge's terrace, it's hard to appreciate the risks that DeMerode and his team face every day. Over the past decade over 150 rangers have been killed, including two in March. De Merode himself was shot two years ago; the gunmen were never found (Bloomberg 2016).

In another 2016 article, published by Getaway Magazine, titled "Virunga, the Wild Park with Fire in its Soul", wildlife journalist Scott Ramsay writes with regards to the areas surrounding Virunga,

> The state of infrastructure and roads is abysmal, even by African standards. The demand for natural resources is a huge source of concern and conflict – armed militias profit from illegal charcoal and fishing industries. Virunga itself is surrounded by agriculture and hundreds of villages. For all its natural splendor, it's a small island of immense natural resources in a sea of humanity at odds with itself (Getaway 2016).

He then goes on to quote a safari guide, who says, "*Yes, Virunga is definitely not Serengeti, or Mara, or Kruger. It offers something so different. If you're tired of the typical Safari, then Virunga will blow your mind*" (Getaway 2016). These quotes suggest a type of "authentic" or adventurous experience that Virunga can provide, with its turbulent history and high stakes conservation. It is "safe", and it is "sanctioned", but perhaps brings a thrill that other parks cannot. Yet in reality, the accommodations and time spent in Virunga by tourists is entirely separate from the conflict and poverty mentioned in these articles. One tripadvisor reviewer states,

> The Congolese staff is super nice and attentive. The tents are very comfortable, with queen size bed, en suite bathrooms and hot showers. They even thought of small details like including two wall outlets for your camera or phone...Another thoughtful detail: a hot water bottle under your bed sheets at night. Food is fabulous and almost too much! Lunch and dinner are three courses. On our gorilla tracking day, we asked about a packed lunch,

> since we departed very early and returned to Kimumba at 3pm. They don't do packed lunches and serve you a full 3 course meal when you return. Perhaps that will change. If no, consider bringing a snack from Goma for the gorilla outing (Trip Advisor 2018).

In this way, the park provides an experience of safety and luxury that juxtaposes the "danger" of the Congo as a nation. Thus, allowing tourists to experience the "thrill" and "life" that traveling to Virunga apparently brings, while at the same time feeling like they are taking a morally justified vacation.

Tragedy and the Search for the "Real" via Tourist Sites

A possible lens through which to explain this relationship between wilderness tourism and Virunga's "dangerous allure" is through Lisle's analysis of the tourist consumption of catastrophe. Drawing from Baudrillard, Lisle argues that the appeal of places marked by war, or violence, or disaster originates from an intense desire to "consume catastrophe" (2002, 13). Lisle draws a particularly telling quote from Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulation" (1994),

> The South is a natural producer of raw materials, the latest of which is catastrophe. The North, for its part, specializes in the reprocessing of raw materials, and hence also in the reprocessing of catastrophe….Other people's destitution becomes our adventure playground….We are the consumers of the ever delightful spectacle of poverty and catastrophe….Our whole culture lives off this catastrophic cannibalism, relayed in cynical mode by the news media (1994, 66-68; 2004 14).

In this quote, Baudrillard points to a twofold process in which the consumption of catastrophe is fed by a media cycle of "charitable condescension" in which western tourists consume sites of catastrophe and are compelled to offer "assistance", thus securing a market for such disaster consumption (Lisle 2004). I would argue, therefore, that this consumption and condescension then feeds the continued colonial project through constant mediation of disaster through the western gaze.

While Baudrillard's lens is a helpful one through which to begin deconstructing tourism to Virunga, Lisle extends her argument to a more nuanced discussion of the tourist search for the "real" in a heavily spectacularized world. In this way, drawing from Debord's spectacle, Lisle argues that the mediation of everyday relationships by relentless imagery renders the entire world a type of theme park (2004, 15).[3] In this way, the entire globe, even sites that would seem unfit for the tourist experience, become a type of pre-packaged commodity ready to be consumed (2004, 15). Lisle however, offers a particularly compelling argument in stating that essentializing all tourists as non-critical consumers of a spectacularized world would be remiss. Instead, we should at least recognize that some tourists as being aware of the mediation of this theme park world (2004, 15). These tourists, Lisle argues, are instead searching for something which is "real" or authentic, and frequently, that experience is catastrophe (2004, 15). Lisle states,

> I want to defend the possibility that tourists are perfectly aware of the society of the spectacle- that tourists know the world is mediated and commodified for their consumption. What I am suggesting is that even for "reflexive" tourists, sites of atrocity function in specific ways with respect to "the real". These sites are coveted because they are the only places left which haven't been commodified and turned into a spectacle. In effect, the only "real" thing anymore, the only thing that can be differentiated from the surrounding spectacle, is catastrophe. Everything else is mediated, simulated, banal (2004, 15).

It is quite possible to view tourists to Virunga through this lens of "seeking the real". Bombarded with images of dead gorillas, funerals for rangers, and discourses of the Congo as a place of abject poverty and violence, tourists may view the "realness" of Virunga in the ever-prevalent discourses of death, armed warfare, and martyrdom. In this way, the "fight for the park", marked by actors who seem (at least in media) willing to die for the cause is an "authentic" experience in a theme-park world. The irony, of course, is that in the search for the authentic, tourists find

[3] Lisle's analysis of the production of a theme park world is reminiscent of the popular show "Westworld" in which tourists are able to transplanted into a fake "western style" universe where they are able to commit crimes (and consume crimes) with impunity; afterwards returning to their normal lives.

more heavily mediated discourse, ultimately convincing them of realities and lived experiences, which may after all, not even exist.

Safe, Sanctioned, and Thrilling: The Problematic "Nature" of Virunga's Ecotourism

Acknowledging tourists' potential search for the "real" in Virunga is important, yet this search is not without consequences, both for the DRC and for constructions of Nature. Even though ideas of Virunga as an "alluring" destination may not be rooted in the type of voyeuristic processes that Baudrillard mentions, the search for the authentic in catastrophe is still deeply problematic. As shown by the trip advisor comments, tourists are given just enough exposure to the "real" experiences that they seek. Exposed to rangers, gorillas, and luxurious accommodations, Virunga becomes a type of haven within a larger "threatening" entity, the DRC.

In this way, ecotourism in Virunga relies heavily upon the idea that nature is a type "morally innocent" entity. As stated above, the "realness" and life-affirming aspects of the Virunga experience come from the "fight for the park", and the violence that comes with it, in the midst of what tourists may perceive as impoverished ruination. In this way, Virunga's "wilderness' and the animals that live within it, retain a type of primeval innocence, that is portrayed in western media as quite literally worth dying for. Juxtaposed to the purity of the wild, tourists to Virunga may see the human society that is supposedly engaged in constant conflict, or attempting to exploit the park's resources, as morally corrupt, reinforcing a type of barbaric archetype, reminiscent of colonial "heart of darkness" narratives.

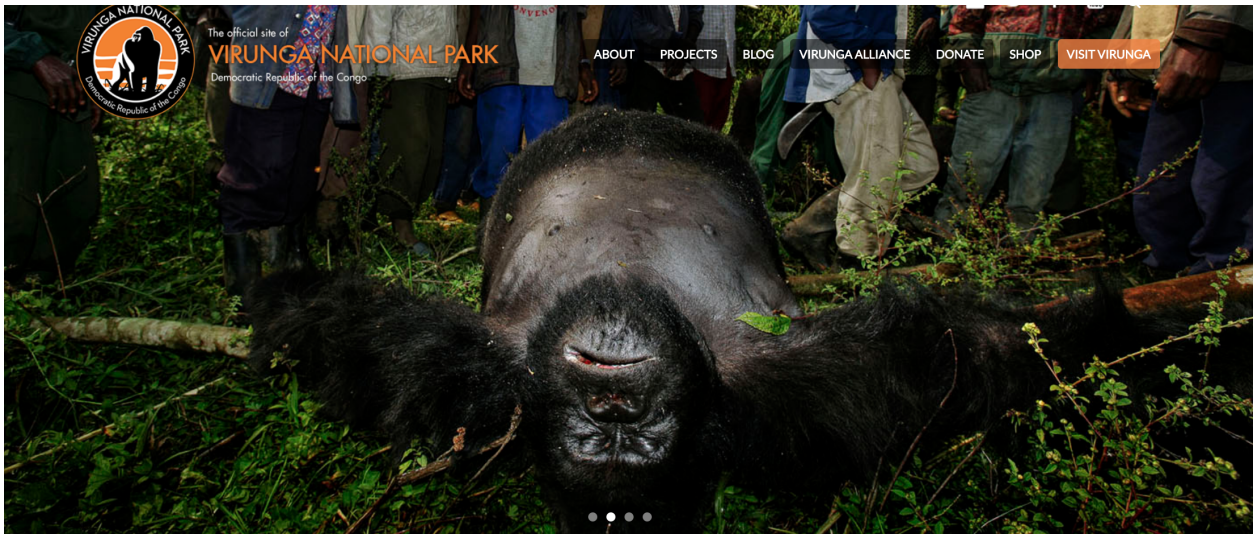
In the way of ecotourism, these ideas become consumable and are reproduced via Baudrillard's explanation of the cycling of the western consumption of catastrophe and

consequential condescension. Yet, in the same way that colonial narratives of the DRC as a blood soaked and economically devastated wasteland can be consumed in a capitalist economy, ideas of "pure" nature as humanity's moral salvation in a morally corrupt world are also able to circulate, thus, reinforcing the idea that we, as consumers, should assist in preserving this primeval nature by any means necessary. In this way, a strict boundary is drawn between "villainous" humans corrupted by technology and a "greedy nature", and wilderness, the only place left that is supposedly non-corrupted by human innocence. In this way, via ecotourism, wilderness is morally elevated, and human life, especially in the DRC, is devalued.

Here, the potential for valuing nature and human society as two interconnected equals is destroyed, especially as this dualism between evil-humans and good-nature garners a market value via tourism. It also cripples any possibility that conservation in Virunga can be altered to be more inclusive of local populations, or humans in general. Instead, it creates a desire for the continued conflict that rangers, staff, and nearby residents have to engage with on a daily basis.

In this chapter, and the two that precede it, I provide a discursive analysis of social and political processes in Virunga, problematizing entities such as spectacle and colonial narratives, commodification, and the consumption of conflict. In next section, I will begin to conclude this thesis, with a more thorough analysis of how these processes, as discussed above with the ecotourism industry, are capable of reinforcing constructions of nature-society dualism. I will, though, move towards thinking through possible approaches to these discourses, in order to suggest a more productive, and potentially just, path forward.

Appendix



1.

Figure 15 Source: Virunga.org

Figure 14 Source: Virunga.org

2.

Conclusion: Critical Evaluations and the Potential for Alternative Futures

"*Without stories of progress, the world has become a terrifying place. The ruin glares at us with the horror of its abandonment, It's not easy to know how to make a life, much less avert planetary destruction. Luckily there is still company, human and not human. We can still explore the overgrown verges of our blasted landscapes-the edges of capitalist scalability, and abandoned resource plantations. We can still catch the scent of the latent commons- and the elusive autumn aroma.*"

(Tsing (2015) "The Mushroom at the End of the World")

In the final scene of the "Virunga" documentary, we are presented with voiceover, from Rodrigue Katembo, Virunga central sector warden, proclaiming that he accepts that he may have to risk his life to save the park. He states,

> I have accepted to give the best of myself, so that wildlife can be safeguarded beyond all pressure, beyond all spirit of greediness about money. Beyond all things. All that could happen to me...I will accept it. I am not special. We cannot stand weak and say 'SOCO go ahead'. In the end, we will be judged if we just stand by as the park vanishes. But our wish is that this park lives forever.

As Rodrigue's voice is heard in the background, video clips of Virunga's "wildlife" roll across the screen: a pied kingfisher takes off from a branch, hippos play in the water, African buffalo stand warily in the grass, all supplemented with wide-angle shots of Virunga's vast landscapes. As the voiceover progresses, the images shown begin to be people: children playing a field, a bustling coast line where a Marabou stork walks amongst the fishermen, and a park guard standing watch as a boat floats across Lake Edward below. The last image is, of course, the

gorillas, staring wide-eyed into the camera. The filmmaker's intention in this final scene is unknown, though it is clear that Rodrigue's monologue about sacrifice in the name of the park is supposed to be the focal point. Each time I've watched the film, the final images of charismatic megafauna and other organisms mixed with human communities, all placed under the umbrella of "the park", seem to me to represent a different type of human-nature coexistence than the one that I continuously point to throughout this thesis.

At the end of the documentary I see a hint of a potentially different conception of "nature" which values all life, human and nonhuman, as part of a living and inclusive system. As I demonstrate in this thesis, this inclusive non-dualistic conception is not the "Nature" produced via mainstream discursive formations surrounding Virunga National Park. Through my analysis of three socio-ecological processes in Virunga, I find that the conception of the "natural" produced is capitalist, commodified, and exploitative, promoting exclusionary ideas of what kind of "life" should, or should not be, valued.

I have detailed the ways in which western discourses about different social and political processes in Virunga National Park come to be consumed by western citizens and westernized Congolese citizens. In the fourth chapter, we see that the spectacular mediation of militarization, and the role of rangers, undermines "real" connections that park staff may have with the area's nonhuman residents. This process also reinforced models of fortress conservation, rendering invisible the exploitative colonial processes used to create the "fortress" in the first place.

In the fifth chapter I outline the role of gorillas in Virunga. Drawing from Lorimer's theories of non-human charisma, it is clear that acknowledging non-human charisma as a relational property has the potential to push forward a recognition of human and nonhuman co-production in lived realities. As I demonstrate, in western discourse the charisma of the gorillas

is instead “archetyped”, commodified, and used as a capitalist tool through which to accrue economic support for the Park, thus in some ways “colonizing” the nonhuman body.

Lastly, in chapter six I combine both consumption and commodification to discuss the role of ecotourism in the park. Using discussions of the western consumption of catastrophe, I argue that the armed conflict in the Congo is seen as a type of “alluring image” in a world that is spectacularized and inauthentic. In the search for this authenticity, ecotourist consumption creates a market for violent images, a “fight for the park”, and heart of darkness narratives. In the same way, this consumption also assigns market value to the image of “pure” nature as the only authenticity left worth fighting for, in a world of morally corruptible human society.

In a number of ways, my thesis builds on the work of other scholars who have examined Virunga, and related protected areas. Virunga National Park specifically, has been the subject of work which examines the ways in which militarized conservation practice is legitimated (See Marijnen and Verweijen 2016; 2017; 2018; 2018). These studies also incorporate discursive analysis in order to better understand how conservation practice is mediated. What is unique about my argument, and what I believe this thesis has contributed to conservation literature, is a critical evaluation of the ways in which mainstream media surrounding high-profile protected areas is able to inform and reinforce hegemonic (and oppressive conceptions of nature).

As evidenced through the course of my work, the “Nature” which is co-produced via discursive production and consumption in Virunga is a dualistic one. Rather than moving away from traditional us-them/society-nature constructs, westernized discourse - emerging from the three sociopolitical processes I analyze - moves us farther away from a re-thinking of the human and nonhuman relationship. As shown via these processes, the “Nature” which is produced is capitalistic, exploitative, and relies heavily on the commodification of both human and non-

human living bodies. Colonial tropes are utilized to enable both the dehumanization and gorilla anthropomorphization that make this commodification possible. I stated previously that this thesis, above all, is a critical evaluation of discursively produced ideals. In this evaluation though, I also seek to perhaps "hint" at alternative conceptions of Nature, and what type of potential those conceptions may have for cases such as Virunga.

As I researched Virunga, and attempted to understand the ways that "N" Nature is projected and consumed by western viewers at the expense of both the humans and nonhumans that live there, I frequently found myself asking: what next. I don't live near Virunga, in fact I've never set foot there. I'm also a white, American, woman who can't claim to understand what it's like to live in a postcolonial nation that is continuously undermined, politically and economically, by the global North. I don't claim to have any knowledge of the lived experiences of the communities in proximity to the park, and I don't claim to know how to change discourses to create a space for the expression of their conceptions of natures, their connections to the land, and their relationships to their nonhuman neighbors. What I can do though, is problematize the hegemonic discourses that I am exposed to, in the hope that this will potentially make room for those voices which have been oppressed now for centuries.

Beyond Virunga, I also find myself asking the "what next" question in many of my classes, and in my daily life, as the evidence that we will all be living in a very different (and unpredictable) ecological world in a few short decades piles up. How do we move forward to face the sixth extinction? Is there a socio-ecological future available to us that does not involve placing the remaining flora and fauna under lock and key? I would argue, along with scholars such as Escobar (1999) Tsing (2015), and Collard et. al (2015), that there may be.

Now, in the interest of infusing a sense of hope into my argument (something that I do surprisingly have for our socioecological futures) I would like to outline what I view as some of the most compelling alternative conceptions of Nature, in opposition to the hegemonic mainstream discourse of conservation in Virunga. The first of these, mentioned briefly in the introduction, is Escobar's "regimes of nature" and subsequent politics of hybridity (Escobar 1999). Escobar, in his analysis, deconstructs "Nature" into separate but overlapping regimes, dividing the term into what he views as separate articulations of the "biological and historical". One of these regimes is "capitalist nature", a byproduct of late capitalist process and global imperialism (1999). The Nature constructed by the mainstream discourses examined in this thesis, is, I argue, a form of capitalist nature. Part of Escobar's point in defining these regimes' a Nature is to interrogate the balance between the regimes as they exist now.

"Capitalist Nature" receives much of our attention and protection, likely due to its ability to generate capital as a utilitarian commodity. Existing as a corollary to this capitalist Nature is what Escobar calls "organic natures", based off of cultural and local knowledge. He writes,

> Understanding the regime of organic nature calls for different forms of analysis; ecosystems and production analyses are no longer sufficient. One defining feature of this regime is the fact that nature and society are not separated ontologically. Anthropological and ecological studies demonstrate that many rural communities in the Third World 'construct' nature in strikingly different ways from modern forms; they signify and use their natural environments in very particular ways (1999, 8).

"Organic Natures" then, call for attention to be paid to seemingly subaltern conceptions of human/nonhuman relationships and a more robust interrogation of how the "nonmainstream" constructs ideas of the natural. In this way, Escobar suggests that paying attention to such "organic natures" may help to inform political questions of "sustainability" and uncertain socioecological futures (1999).

Collard et. al's adoption of a "pluriversal ethic" also support this notion of organic nature. In "Manifesto for Abundant Futures", they call for a recognition that the world is not a singular ontological construction, but rather reality (and the reality of human/nonhuman interaction) emerges differently across different cultures and lived experiences. In recognizing this, they argue, we are able to stop "performing" the universe as a singular dichotomy, thus allowing the emergence of other ways of thinking about our role as humans. They write,

> If different stories perform different yet interconnected worlds, then worlding practices can be evaluated in terms of their effects; some worldings might be wrong in the sense that "they enact worlds (edifices) in which or with which we do not want to live, or that do not let us live—or lets some live and not others" (Blaser, de la Cadena, and Escobar 2014). Creating abundant futures, we believe, means supporting already existing worlding practices that enact worlds different from those produced by European imperialism and settler colonialism (2015, 328).

I propose that this "world" of Nature suggested by the mainstream discourse surrounding conservation in Virunga is not one in which we want to live. The Nature that I point to continuously throughout this thesis is commodified, exploitative, and devaluing to all forms of life. But as Collard et. al and Escobar point out, there may be other ways to conceptualize the Nature of the future.

The trouble is then the continuing hegemony of the "European imperialism and settler colonialism" Nature model. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, previous understanding of human/nonhuman relationships that come from the Batwa people of the Virunga area are quite different from those that are promoted today, yet the "capitalist" nature retains economic and political dominance. Understanding the best ways then in which to "unearth" or make room for alternative conceptions of ecological co-existence is not an easy question and is not one that I can answer in this thesis. But this question is a necessary one to ask and explore.

The effacing of entwined human and nonhuman lives hinders any possibility for incorporating understandings of co-production in our daily lives as human beings. In a world where capitalist ruination is rendering any "untouched wilderness" increasingly "tainted", Whatmore's ideas present an opportunity for the recognition that Nature has never existed, and will most definitely never exist again in the illusionary way it has in the past. If we are bent on holding onto capital "N" Nature in our Anthropocene era, suddenly everything, every nonhuman living being will no longer be pure, and what then?

Shedding the old shell of ideal wilderness allows for an imagined socio-ecological future in which there is no boundary drawing between human-man, society-nature, subject-object, yet still a deep respect for the unique corporeal characteristics of the world's biodiversity. In this way, a philosophy of acknowledging material realities as co-produced requires acknowledging the agency and relational force of all living things; an acknowledgement that our very reality is shaped by forces besides our own hands. This recognition, I have no doubt, will become increasingly important as we humans are forced to turn our attention to relating to nonhumans in new ways, as the Anthropocene progresses, fueled by seemingly unending capital accumulation. Yet, as always, we can resist. As Tsing states, we take joy in the idea that even in the supposed throws of ecological ruination, "there is still company" in the endless menagerie of living beings.

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