

## Extinctionscapes

Bersaglio, Brock; Margulies, Jared

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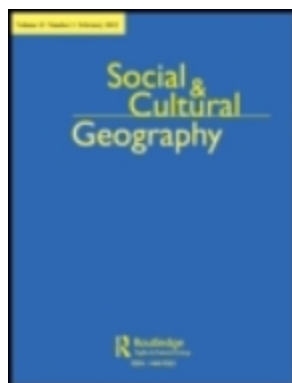
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# **Extinctionscapes: Spatializing the commodification of animal lives and afterlives in conservation landscapes**

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**Extinctionscapes: Spatializing the commodification of animal lives and afterlives in conservation landscapes**

**Abstract**

This article advances a more-than-human perspective on geographies of death and dying, engaging with extinctionscapes as spaces where the memorialization of nonhuman life generates affective and commodifiable experiences with species loss in conservation landscapes. Bringing geographical concepts, such as absence-presence, into conversation with recent literature on lively commodities, we describe how animals at the threshold of life and death are made to work for conservation as well as how their afterlives are subjected to ongoing forms of commodification through acts of memorialization in landscape. Specifically, our analysis focuses on the stories of three rhinos at a conservancy in Kenya to consider the themes of death and dying, value, and commodification in relation to endangered species conservation. By situating the lives and afterlives of these rhinos in the history of settler colonialism and capitalism in Kenya, we examine how commodification, as a social and cultural process, becomes entangled with the corporeal and discorporate lives of animals and contributes to the reproduction of historic injustices through extinctionscapes. Ultimately, we argue for ongoing critical engagement with the amorphous borderland of life and death in geographies of conservation, which represents an important space of biopolitics and commodification.

**Keywords:** lively commodities; geographies of death and dying; absence-presence; extinction geographies; Laikipia

## 1. Introduction

Conservation landscapes around the world are marked with the affects of past and possible extinctions (Garlick and Symons, 2020; McCorristine and Adams, 2020). Animals at or beyond the brink of extinction actively shape the ecosystems and environments where they once crawled, roamed, soared, and swam, imbued with social and cultural meaning that persists long after their corporeal lives end (Heise, 2016). The modern field of conservation plays a significant role in constructing the social, cultural, and spatial attributes of extinction. For instance, acts of memorialisation in conservation landscapes reassert the presence of absent animals – or animals that may soon be absent – into physical space (Jørgensen, 2018). In this article, we explore the connection between these practices of ‘absence-presence’ (Maddrell, 2013) and the production of value in conservation.

Based on fieldwork and content analysis of rhino conservation at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya, we consider the themes of death and dying, value, and commodification in relation to endangered species conservation. Our aim is to think further about how and why value embodied by black (*Diceros bicornis*), southern white (*Ceratotherium simum*), and northern white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) changes as they near, surpass, and linger at the threshold of death and extinction. To do so, we draw from established literature on the spatialities of death and dying in social and cultural geography (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010; Stevensen et al., 2016) and developing literature on lively commodities in political ecology (Collard and Dempsey, 2013). As we later discuss, lively commodities are ‘live commodities whose capitalist value is derived from their status as living beings’ (Collard and Dempsey, 2013: 2684). In bringing these literatures into dialogue with each other, we make the following contributions to relevant debates and discussions in both fields of scholarship:

First, in the field of social and cultural geography, scholars have engaged with the ways spaces and spatial practices of human death, dying, and bereavement intersect with politics and power relationships in wider society (Sidaway, 2009). Yet, to date, spaces of conservation and spatial practices of nonhuman death, dying, and bereavement have received less attention (see McCorristone and Adams, 2020 as an exception). This article advances a more-than-human perspective on geographies of death and dying, engaging with ‘extinctionsapes’ as spaces where the memorialization of nonhuman life generates affective and commodifiable experiences with species loss through practices of absence-presence in physical landscapes. Relying on geographical concepts such as absence-presence, continuing bonds, and deathscapes, we advocate for an expanded understanding of lively commodities that is attuned to commodities whose definitive liveliness is in decline or indiscernible, but whose value remains active in the political ecology of conservation.

Second, our analysis grounds the value of rhinos in actually-existing political ecologies, demonstrating how economic value accrued by humans from animal life, death, and afterlives contributes to the production and reproduction of extinctionsapes. As a field of scholarship, political ecology ‘highlights the interwoven character of discursive, material, social, and cultural dimensions of the human-environment relation’ and involves the ‘the study of manifold articulations of history and biology and the cultural mediations through which such articulations are necessarily established’ (Escobar, 1999: 2-3). By situating value attached to rhinos in the history of settler colonialism and capitalism in Laikipia, we sketch a rough outline of how biological, cultural, economic, political, and social forces come together over time, get entangled in the corporeal and disincorporate lives of animals, and contribute to the reproduction of historic injustices in extinctionsapes and their

surrounding environs. Ultimately, we argue that value is a productive lens to adopt in both fields of scholarship, as it encourages deeper engagement with spaces in-between life and death where social and cultural processes of commodification take place but risk being overlooked.

This article proceeds by providing more information about the conservation landscape in Laikipia, beginning with the story of Sudan, who was the last male northern white rhinoceros. Next, we discuss relevant literature in the fields of social and cultural geography and political ecology. Our subsequent analysis and discussion highlights spaces in-between the life and death of rhinos where important processes of bodily and affective commodification unfold. In concluding the article, we discuss the ways in which value accrued through the lives and afterlives of rhinos contributes to producing and reproducing landscapes of settler colonialism and capitalism in Kenya. This final section involves consideration for the biopolitics of conservation, which we loosely invoke without much theoretical discussion to articulate the political nature of rhino afterlives.

**2. Endangered species conservation in a former white highland**

***2.1. Sudan, the last of a kind***

In March 2018, Sudan, the last male northern white rhinoceros on the planet, was euthanised at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya, due to an illness. In the years before his death, the aging rhino had become an international sensation. Seen by many as the last hope for the future of his species, Sudan was made the poster child of global campaigns that aimed to raise funds for the conservation of critically endangered northern white rhinoceros. International conservation organisations, such as Save the Rhino, also used Sudan’s story to raise awareness and funds for rhino conservation. Furthermore, international celebrities and tourists travelled from around the world to encounter Sudan in person at Ol Pejeta, knowing their photo shoots and tourism fees would support the conservancy.

Behind all the campaigns centred on Sudan’s status as the last male northern white rhinoceros is a story of deep global connectivity. Born in the country of Sudan in 1973, Sudan was captured in 1975 and transported to Czech Republic, where he was held in captivity at Dvůr Králové Zoo for over 30 years. In 2009, Sudan was relocated to Laikipia, where he was released into a 700-acre enclosure at Ol Pejeta. The course of Sudan’s life was both shaped and made possible by flows of bodies, expertise, and materials across borders, as well as the international exchange of ideas, paperwork, and, not least of all, money. As the last surviving male of a species on the brink of extinction, Sudan became a powerful source of value for many people around the world: as the last of a kind, the rhino’s affective value, entertainment value, and normative value all contributed to his celebrity status (Jørgensen, 2017). These moral and symbolic values also intersected and interacted with economic value embodied by Sudan as a ‘lively commodity’ in ways that had real and material implications for the political ecology of rhino conservation.

With this in mind, we think it is significant that the circulation of value embodied by Sudan did not cease with the rhino’s death in 2018. Rather, value embodied by Sudan as a living being was rendered into novel forms of value after his death. A recent example of this is the documentary film, *Kifaru*, in which Sudan posthumously offers audiences ‘a once in a lifetime experience to feel what extinction feels like’ ([www.kifaruthefilm.com](http://www.kifaruthefilm.com)). Moreover, Sudan is not the only rhino at Ol Pejeta Conservancy to experience such an afterlife: it seems that value embodied by other rhinos at the conservancy increased as their health, vitality, and liveliness decreased. Like Sudan, value embodied by some of

these rhinos continues to exist and be exchanged in disembodied forms even though their corporeal lives have ended. Thus, when analysed through the lens of value, rhinos are capable of transforming into afterlives where their value as corporeal beings continues to circulate for use by humans through practices of absence-presence. This means the physical act of dying does relatively little to free rhinos from commodification, or to sever them from the power relationships inherent to commodification as a social and cultural process.

## **2.2. Conservation landscapes in Laikipia**

Laikipia is a county located in north-central Kenya, where the western foothills of Mt. Kenya stretch into a vast plateau. Described as a land use mosaic, Laikipia supports various economic sectors, including cattle ranching and dairy farming, agriculture and horticulture, and subsistence farming and transhumance pastoralism. Yet, Laikipia is best known internationally for wildlife tourism, which is supported by a vast network of private- and community-owned conservancies. Although the following numbers sometimes change and are contested, some 48 private conservancies occupy about 382,000 hectares or 40% of Laikipia (Letai, 2015). Community-owned conservancies in Laikipia account for approximately 71,200 hectares or 7% of the county (LWF 2012).

For our purposes, two attributes of Laikipia's wildlife tourism sector are particularly important to note. The first is that Laikipia is internationally recognised as a conservation success story, as numerous endangered and endemic species are protected in the county through decentralised, marketised conservation arrangements – such as eco-tourism ventures on private land. Laikipia is said to contain more wildlife than Kenya's national parks, Amboseli, Nairobi, and Tsavo East and Tsavo West, combined (LWF, 2012). This includes half of Kenya's black rhinos, the country's second largest elephant population, and strong numbers of lion, hunting dog, and cheetah. Laikipia is also renowned for the protection of endemic species like Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, and Laikipia hartebeest. Laikipia's wildlife sector was constructed around the notion that attaching value-added activities to an otherwise traditional safari tourism model would help wildlife pay for its own conservation (Bersaglio 2018).

The second attribute of note is that prior to being seized as part of Britain's East African Protectorate in 1898, the Laikipia Plateau was largely regarded as the territory of Il Aikipiak Maasais. However, the plateau was also a source of seasonal pasture for other pastoralist groups in the area. In 1911, the colonial administration evicted Maasais from the plateau to support its project of white settlement (Hughes, 2006). By 1933, Laikipia was officially segregated as a 'white reserve', meaning indigenous Africans were barred from property ownership and economically restricted to selling their labour from 'native reserves' (sic) to white farms and ranches. In the decades after independence from Britain in 1964, dwindling beef markets directed settlers toward Laikipia's emerging for-profit wildlife sector. Their large farms and ranches became the internationally-acclaimed conservancies and premier safari destinations that have made Laikipia famous. Ol Pejeta is one of these conservancies.

Located west of Nanyuki Town in Laikipia, the 37,000-plus hectares occupied by Ol Pejeta was historically granted to Lord Delamere – one of Kenya's earliest and most politically influential white settlers. Our analysis is largely based on a detailed content analysis of Ol Pejeta's website, social media platforms, and other discursive materials. However, it is also supported by contextual insights developed by the first author through regular ethnographic research activities carried out in Laikipia over the past five years. For this reason, we occasionally make use of first person narrative when



discussing empirical information. Thus, although Ol Pejeta is the focus of our analysis, our conclusions are both informed by and relevant to the wider landscape of endangered species conservation in Laikipia.

### **3. Value and the commodification of nonhuman labour and life**

In recent years, geography and political ecology have experienced a resurgence of scholarly interest in value. Much of this work highlights growing interest in nonhuman experiences with the politics of (de)(re)valuation and the production of capitalist value (Kallis et al., 2013; Goldstein, 2014; Kay and Kenney-Lazar, 2017; Collard and Dempsey, 2017a; 2017b). Recognizing that the extent to which nonhumans are capable of producing value through labour is debated (see Kallis and Swyngedouw, 2018), we agree with Haraway's assertion that human labour is 'only part of the story' of capitalism (2008: 46). Thus, we enter into ongoing debates and discussions concerning nonhuman value relations from the position that animals are capable of producing value, and that they do so as labourers, through their circulations, and as lively commodities. This entry point aligns politically with feminist critiques that Marx's labour theory of value ignores fundamental forms of labour that, if appropriately valued, might collapse or radically alter capitalist economies (Battistoni, 2017).

#### **3.1. Animal labour**

Nonhuman labour can be understood as 'structurally related to (though not the same as) the role of the unwaged labour of many humans, which ... "constitutes the eternal basis for capitalist accumulation"' (Collard and Dempsey, 2017a: 80). Yet, there are many forms of nonhuman labour, and not all of them equivalent in relation to value production (Collard and Dempsey, 2017a). For the purpose of this article, it is helpful to think of unwaged animal labour contributing to value production through three forms of labour suggested by Barua (2018): metabolic, ecological, and affective.

Metabolic labour refers to processes that make the animal body an accumulation strategy, 'where conditions for its growth are intensified to realize relative surplus value' (Barua, 2019b: 654). This form of animal labour is common in industrial dairy and meat production, which fully integrates metabolic labour into capitalist systems of production (Beldo, 2017). For example, the reproductive labour of dairy cows is harnessed and transformed through industrial milk production, as cows are kept in a near-constant state of pregnancy to ensure a continuous supply of milk (Gillespie, 2014).

Ecological labour describes value produced through interactions between animals and other living organisms in ecosystems. This form of labour is often not fully integrated into capitalist systems of production, as it occurs through the 'quotidian rhythms and ethological propensities' (Barua, 2019b: 655) – i.e. routine actions and behaviours – of living organisms rather than through the metabolic processes of individual bodies. For example, through interactions with plants, bees perform a form of ecological value that is both essential and lucrative for agroindustries (Kosek, 2010).

Affective labour encompasses intangible forms of work done by animals that generate desired emotional responses, such as feelings of comfort, intimacy, spectacle, or wonder, through encounters with humans (Parreñas, 2012). This form of animal labour is most relevant to our subsequent analysis, as it produces value through the 'relational achievement' of culturally-inflected desires and emotions (Barua 2016). For example, domesticated elephants perform affective labour by satisfying tourists' cultural imaginaries of wilderness safaris (Duffy and Moore, 2010).

### 210 3.2. *Animal circulations*

211 In addition to performing various forms of labour, animals also produce value through their  
 212 circulations (Shukin, 2009). The circulation of giant pandas around the world exemplifies how the  
 213 movements of animals transformed into zoo spectacles or captive breeders can produce value (Barua,  
 214 2019a), as well as how giant pandas become enrolled in geopolitical alliances (Collard, 2013). In a  
 215 different sense, value also circulates the globe in the form of animals that have been ‘rendered’ into  
 216 mediatic images of living things or broken down into commodities that were once part of living things  
 217 (Shukin, 2009).

218 Although animal circulations can be understood as distinct from animal labour, the two are also  
 219 interconnected. The affective labour of animals, through exceptional wildlife encounters for example,  
 220 cannot be disentangled from the cosmopolitan lives many animals lead via their representation in  
 221 films, advertisements, and campaigns, which incite desire and demand for tourist encounters (Igoe,  
 222 2017). This is illustrated by international volunteers who provide free custodial services to orangutan  
 223 rehabilitation centres in Malaysian Borneo: it is because of affect – the desired swelling of intensity  
 224 produced through interactions between bodies – that mostly British women pay thousands of dollars  
 225 to clean orangutan cages (Parreñas, 2012).

### 228 3.3. *Lively commodities*

229 Finally, animals are capable of producing value as lively commodities (Haraway 2008: 46; Collard  
 230 and Dempsey, 2013). Lively commodities are living organisms whose value in the commodity form is  
 231 tied to their status as living beings, opposed to ‘dead commodities derived from living things (for  
 232 instance, agricultural commodities like meats, fruits, vegetables, and grains)’ (2013: 2684). The  
 233 concept of lively commodities may refer to the commodification of nonhuman life at the aggregate  
 234 (e.g. ecosystems) or individual (e.g. exotic pets) level (Collard and Dempsey, 2013).

235 Aggregate lively commodities are ecosystems or, more specifically, the reproductive constituents of  
 236 ecosystems, that have been valued through regimes like carbon markets or ecosystem services  
 237 (Dempsey, 2016). Tourism landscapes can also be understood as aggregate lively commodities, as  
 238 they provide habitat for animals and plants that are encounterable through viewing, photographing, or  
 239 trophy hunting (Vasan, 2018). Individual lively commodities may be abandoned, ailing, and cuddly  
 240 animals who are ‘consumed’ in affective economies – ranging from physical encounters in zoos to  
 241 intimate experiences at animal cafés to medical and palliative care services to fundraising campaigns  
 242 using flagship species (Plourde, 2014).

243 Conceptualising animals as lively commodities is useful for ongoing analytical engagement with the  
 244 capitalist enclosure of animal life. Yet, the process of becoming a lively commodity is not necessarily  
 245 permanent or irreversible, nor can it be fully realised at the expense of other ways of knowing,  
 246 valuing, and living with animals (Taylor and Carter, 2020). For example, captive dolphins involved in  
 247 dolphin-assisted-therapy are neither *just* commodities nor *just* companions. Through their labour, they  
 248 are ‘working subjects, not just worked objects’ (Haraway, 2008, as cited in Taylor and Carter, 2020:  
 249 69). It is in the grey areas between ‘working subject’ and ‘worked object’, between living commodity  
 250 and dead commodity, that the field of social and cultural geography stands to enrich and necessarily  
 251 complicate our understanding of what it means to be a lively commodity. It does so in particular by



enabling us to situate the commodification of animal labour and life in social and cultural processes that produce certain types of space.

#### **4. More-than-human geographies of death and dying**

##### ***4.1 Absence-presence, continuing bonds, and deathscapes***

In the field of social and cultural geography, much has been written on spaces and spatial practices of death, dying, and bereavement (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010; Romanillos, 2015; Stevensen et al. 2016). This literature highlights differences in cultural practices of death and mourning across space, place, and time, and seeks to understand how ‘experiences of death, dying and mourning are mediated through the intersections of the body, culture, society and state, and often make a deep impression on *sense of self*, private and public identity, as well as *sense of place* in the built and natural environment’ (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010: 2). Prominent themes in this literature include: the medicalization of death and dying in EuroWestern cultures; historicizing contemporary issues of social class, spatial ordering, and cultural change through a focus on spaces of death; and understanding how practices of absence-presence or continuing bonds with the deceased shape physical landscapes (Stevenson et al., 2016). This final area of inquiry in particular blurs commonly held distinctions between life and death and stands to offer political ecologists fresh and nuanced insights into how commodification unfolds in a more-than-human world.

Absence-presence describes relationships people have with those who have died and are physically absent. In geographical terms, the concept draws attention to the ways in which the absent deceased exert agency in the physical world through spatial practices of the living. For example, empty bedrooms, barren industrial landscapes, and memorial benches may all evoke the presence of absent individuals through the material topography of peoples’ houses, environments, and everyday lives; so too may peoples’ mundane spatial practices, such as constructing, acknowledging, or reflecting at altars and memorials (Maddrell, 2013). Through absence-presence, those who are absent and/or deceased are ‘given presence through the experiential and relational tension between the physical absence (not being there) and emotional presence (a sense of still being there) ... through enfolded blendings of the visual, material, haptic, aural, olfactory, emotional-affective and spiritual planes’ (Maddrell, 2013: 505; see Meier et al., 2013). Absence-presence connects the absent to people and other living organisms in dynamic landscapes, blurring cognitive boundaries that demarcate life and death.

Absence-presence intersects with a wider body of geographical scholarship on relationships between death, dying, memorialization, place, and space (Jones et al., 2012; Parr et al., 2015). Informed by Appadurai’s (1996) understanding of social processes as ‘scapes’, deathscapes emerged to describe places associated with death and the dead, and the processes through which these places become imbued with association and meaning (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010). Deathscapes refers to mundane spaces, such as sites of border crossings or roadside memorials (Kong, 1999; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007), exceptional spaces, such as sites of battle or genocide (Tyner, 2018), and their interconnected spatialities that affect peoples’ everyday experiences (Sidaway 2009). Deathscapes also intersect and interact with other scapes, ‘including those of sovereignty (sovereignty-scapes), memory (memory-scapes) and work, life and beauty (landscapes)’ (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010: 5). Thus, nonhuman life and ecological relationships are fundamental to understanding deathscapes as

places and processes; yet, the more-than-human nature of deathscapes has received little attention in geographical scholarship.

#### **4.2. Animal life, death, and memorialization**

Literature on geographies of death and dying remains quite anthropocentric; although, a growing number of scholars have begun to adopt more-than-human perspectives. Ginn's (2014) work on the commemoration of death and afterlives in British gardens pays notable attention to plants as living 'commemorabilia'. Relatedly, Micieli-Voutsinas and Cavicchi (2019) draw attention to ecologies of memorialization by focusing on nonhuman survivors in 9/11 commemorations in New York. Although this work is enlivened by engagement with nonhuman life, it remains focused on human death and memorialization partly due to the fact that 'the trees and animals which perish in disaster events are not commemorated. Memorials enact the presence of lost *human* lives upon public space so that the dead are not forgotten' (Heath-Kelly, 2018: 63).

Despite this anthropocentrism, geographers have a growing interest in trying to understand how humans experience and memorialise animal death (DeMello, 2016). For example, a growing body of literature focuses on pet cemeteries as spaces where humans mourn and memorialise companion species (Howell, 2002; Schuurman and Redmalm, 2019). Additionally, Jørgensen's (2017; 2018) research focuses on the affective dimensions of efforts to save species going extinct and to resurrect extinct species. Recent work in these two areas shares a fundamental concern with how processes of nonhuman death and dying are culturally mediated and become imprinted in landscapes (Heise, 2016; van Dooren, 2016). It also provides an avenue for extending absence-presence, deathscapes, and other related geographical concepts into the more-than-human world in ways that remain attentive to intersections of emotion, gender, identity, labour, materiality, memory, power, and the contested nature of space (Stevenson et al., 2016: 158).

Building on this recent scholarship, we seek to understand how meanings of extinction come to shape ecosystems and landscapes through the commodification of animal lives and afterlives. Our analysis reveals some of the ways in which dead and dying rhinos at Ol Pejeta Conservancy have been made to work and memorialised in spaces of conservation, providing insights into how practices of absence-presence are used to produce affective landscapes where humans pay fees to encounter endangered species, experience the weight of extinction, and, ultimately, sustain conservation as an economic sector. By reconceptualising these conservation landscapes as extinctionscapes, we highlight the importance of paying closer attention to the political *and* ecological fabric of deathscapes.

#### **5. Rhinos as labouring ambassadors, spectral presences, and lively commodities with afterlives**

In this section, we unpack empirical examples of how rhinos 'hovering' at or beyond the threshold of death are put to work and enrolled in activities of value production for conservation, and how this work has become inscribed in ecosystems and landscapes through absence-presence. Specifically, we discuss three rhinos at Ol Pejeta Conservancy whose liveliness is in decline, ambiguous, or persists beyond the threshold of death, but who are no less productive from a value perspective: Baraka, Morani, and Sudan. Our analysis of the lives and afterlives of these rhinos demonstrates just how fundamental death and decline are to the reproduction of conservation landscapes, as well as to a sector that understands the labour of the living, the dying, and the dead as commodifiable.

### 5.1 *Baraka, ambassador against extinction*

Something striking about Baraka's story is that a series of unexpected interactions entangled the rhino in a web of encounters where he routinely performs labour for Ol Pejeta Conservancy. Baraka, a black rhino, originally roamed freely within the boundaries of the conservancy; but after reaching maturity, he was wounded in a territorial fight with another male black rhino and lost sight in his right eye. Baraka later developed a cataract in his left eye, at which point the conservancy moved him into a 100-acre enclosure, where he is now visited daily by tourists who take turns feeding, petting, and taking selfies with the blind rhino.

Ol Pejeta likens the work done by Baraka to that of an ambassador, explaining that, since being moved to the enclosure, Baraka 'is doing a splendid job of being Ol Pejeta's black-rhino ambassador to humans' (OPC, ND). As an ambassador, Baraka has extended working hours: Tourists can visit him any day of the week between 1030 and 1800. The concept of 'encounter value' helps to clarify how interspecies encounters, such as those tourists experience with Baraka, become commodified. 'Encounter value further constitutes the scope of economic activity in that surplus is generated from specific processes and nonhuman labour rendered into commodity form' (Barua, 2016: 738). From this perspective, Ol Pejeta has put Baraka to work as an encounterable, labouring rhino – and the affective experience of feeding, seeing, and touching Baraka is now a commodified tourism experience that generates revenue for the conservancy.

Beyond his role as ambassador, Baraka does other work for Ol Pejeta: His life has been 'rendered' into digital and visual form (Shukin, 2009). On the one hand, Baraka's life story has been broken down into a few key moments that justify his position as an ambassador and package his ailing status in a way that is accessible to donors and tourists. This rendering process includes images of Baraka on display in public spaces and accommodation facilities Ol Pejeta, as well as narratives told about the rhino by conservancy personnel and tour guides. As the conservancy's website reads, 'Baraka now lives in the enclosure, located next to the Morani Information Centre, for his own safety, and has taken to his new role as rhino ambassador' (OPC, ND). On the other hand, Baraka has a growing online profile. Images and videos of Baraka circulate on Facebook, TripAdvisor, and YouTube – not to mention the websites of conservation organisations and digital news sources. On Ol Pejeta's website, representations of Baraka and his life story are surrounded by flashy banners that read 'Adopt Baraka Now', 'Book Now', and 'Support Us' (OPC, ND).

Even though Baraka might not be involved in literally reproducing Ol Pejeta's rhino population, his daily behaviours, routines, and tasks are no less productive. This is often recognised in discourse surrounding the rhino. According to Ol Pejeta, Baraka's 'total loss of eyesight meant he could no longer survive in the wild. Lucky for him just then we recruited him into our workforce' (OPC, nd). USA Today's Animalkind says the following about Baraka: 'He may be living a life of leisure, but he still has an important job as an advocate for his species' (USA Today, nd). These renderings of an ailing-but-labouring ambassador are significant, as, in addition to the labour Baraka does in producing encounter value, they also extend Ol Pejeta's ability to extract additional value from the rhino: 'By adopting Baraka for a year, you will help us to give him the life he deserves. You will also help us to secure the future of all the rhinos that live on Ol Pejeta' (OPC, ND).

### 5.2 *The ghost of Morani and other rhinos past*

The enclosure that Baraka inhabits used to be occupied by another black rhino named Morani. In 1974, Morani was born in Amboseli National Park. After his mother was killed, he was translocated multiple times before arriving at Ol Pejeta in 1989, which was then a new rhino sanctuary called Sweetwaters Game Reserve. Morani's last stop on the way to Ol Pejeta was at nearby Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary (Lewa Wildlife Conservancy) where, according to Ol Pejeta, the rhino 'fell in love' with a young female named Shaba. After getting into a fight over Shaba with Ngare Sergoi's dominant male, Morani was neutered and sent to Sweetwaters where 'At last he could live without male competition!'<sup>1</sup> Morani was considered Ol Pejeta's first rhino ambassador. According to the conservancy, 'He helped raise awareness about the plight of black rhinos and other vulnerable species in the wild' (OPC, NDd). Even though Morani was unable to produce offspring during his 19 years at Ol Pejeta, he was considered a productive addition to the conservancy.

From a value perspective, the biological death of Morani in 2008 marked the beginning of his most productive years. Morani has been memorialised in ways that enable the conservancy to continue extracting value from the rhino. For example, Morani was the first rhino to be buried in a cemetery that was created as a memorial for poached rhinos, even though Morani died of natural causes. The cemetery is situated on a vast plain under a single tree, which is surrounded by headstones of jagged rocks. It is common for tourists to stop at the cemetery on their way to visit Baraka and the Morani Information Centre, which is another way that Ol Pejeta capitalises on Morani's memory. According to Ol Pejeta, the Morani Information Centre was developed to continue the rhino's educational work. The centre is a place where tourists go to encounter the living memory of Morani and other rhinos, as well as the skeletal remains of less valuable animals, as they learn about why Ol Pejeta's conservation efforts are worth supporting. The centre also contains information about how to financially support the conservancy and a Safari Diner has been built on site, where tourists can purchase drinks and food.

Turning to McCorristine and Adams' (2020) work on the spectral geographies of species conservation, Morani can be understood as a 'ghost' whose presence haunts the ecosystems and landscapes of Ol Pejeta Conservancy. This 'ghostliness' 'reflects the precarious and vulnerable status of the disappeared body, and provides that body with the power of making itself and its history known through haunting and/or reappearance' (McCorristine and Adams, 2020: 106). Importantly, the associations and meaning attached to the spectre of Morani at Ol Pejeta are mediated by practices of absence-presence that create potential for more and novel commodified tourist encounters in affective landscapes – i.e. extinctionscape.

Although Morani died of natural causes, his headstone was placed alongside others that memorialise rhinos poached at Ol Pejeta. This rhino cemetery conjures Morani and other deceased rhinos back to life through absence-presence. As Maddrell writes, 'absent presence reflects the apparently contradictory binding together of things absent with the present; whatever or whomever is absent is so strongly missed, their very absence is *tangible* (i.e. it becomes a presence)' (2013: 503-504). In this particular form of afterlife, Morani continues to affect tourists in ways that generate moral and economic support for rhino conservation at Ol Pejeta.

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<sup>1</sup> This information was sourced from original materials accessible in the Morani Information Centre on Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

Like Baraka, the daily behaviours, routines, and tasks performed by Morani when he was alive provided opportunities for revenue generation through encounter value at Ol Pejeta. However, Morani's biological death appears to have made the rhino even more valuable. When looked at through a value lens, Morani's deadness is not a barrier to value production. His biological life may have ended, but every day dozens of people encounter his living memory by visiting his headstone while on safari, donating to the conservancy after reading his biography at the information centre bearing his name, or eating a burger at the Safari Diner. As the conservancy's Head of Wildlife Conservation explained, 'we thought it fit for Morani to continue with raising awareness on the dangers of poaching' after his death (Chebet, 2018).

### ***5.3 The afterlife of a lively commodity: Sudan***

When northern white rhinos were pronounced extinct in the wild in 2009, Sudan, the last male of the species, was relocated from the Dvůr Králové Zoo to Ol Pejeta Conservancy along with three female northern white rhinos: Suni (deceased), Najin, and Fatu. It was hoped that a 'more natural habitat' would help the rhinos reproduce (OPC, NDe). Ol Pejeta turned Sudan into a rhino ambassador, and the rhino quickly became an international sensation. Tourists from around the world travelled to Laikipia just to see Sudan. The rhino was also visited by international celebrities, such as Elizabeth Huxley, Khaled Abol Naga, Leonardo DiCaprio, Melissa McCarthy, and Nargis Fakhri. Sudan's celebrity status was solidified during a 2017 collaborative fundraising campaign involving Ol Pejeta and Tinder, which raised \$85,000 for rhino In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) out of a targeted US \$10 million (OPC, NDf). This campaign involved the creation of a Tinder profile for Sudan, which read: 'I'm one of a kind. No seriously, I'm the last male white rhino on the planet earth. I don't mean to be too forward, but the fate of my species literally depends on me. I perform well under pressure ... 6ft tall and 5,000lbs if it matters' (Winter, 2017). According to Ol Pejeta, the Tinder campaign made Sudan 'the most prolific rhino ambassador in history' (OPC, NDf).

Conservation scientists began to prepare for the use of IVF to help save northern white rhinos from extinction in 2015, after tests confirmed that Sudan was incapable of natural reproduction. At that time, veterinarians started to collect samples of Sudan's semen and freeze them for storage alongside specimens collected from other northern white rhinos before their deaths. After Sudan was euthanized in 2018, efforts to artificially reproduce the species focused mainly on the use of sperm cells procured from these stockpiles of frozen semen. Recognizing that IVF was likely to be unsuccessful, resources were also directed at other Advanced Reproductive Technologies (ART) and high-tech reproductive science, including stem cell technology and gene editing (Pilcher, 2018). Eventually, in 2019, five oocytes were collected from both Fatu and her mother Najin at Ol Pejeta for use in IVF procedures (Save the Rhino, 2020).

In early 2020, it was announced that scientists from the Avantea laboratory in Italy had successfully created three northern white blastocysts after injecting eggs produced by Fatu with sperm cells from two deceased northern white rhinos (Save the Rhino, 2020). As neither Fatu nor Najin are capable of carrying a pregnancy to term, scientists plan to transfer the eggs into a southern white rhino surrogate with the hope that this will lead to the birth of a northern white rhino calf. However, there has yet to be a case in which a viable pregnancy has been realised in a surrogate white rhino (Save the Rhino, 2020). Even if this were to be realised, calves produced using this method may not be genetically diverse enough to sustain a future population of northern white rhinos (Gilliland, 2019). Regardless of whether or not ART helps to save or bring back northern white rhinos from extinction, global



circulations of northern white rhinos in the form of cells with life-giving potential exemplify the posthumous or disembodied value of lively commodities.

Like Morani and Baraka, Sudan was incredibly valuable to Ol Pejeta as a working ambassador and as a rendered 'spectacle' (Igoe, 2017) that circulated digital platforms, mobile apps, and websites. There is little indication that this value is diminishing with the rhino's biological death.<sup>2</sup> As Ol Pejeta explains, '[Sudan's] distinguished but tenuous role was a catalyst for scientists to come up with technological innovations that could potentially bring back northern white rhinos from the brink of extinction. Such advances ... may hopefully be used one day in preventing the extinction of other species, breaking new ground in global conservation technology' (OPC, NDf). From this perspective, the definitiveness of Sudan's deadness is complex. In addition to posthumous renderings of the rhino, Sudan's cells also continue to circulate in the global economy of conservation and, possibly one day, in the physical bodies of other rhinos. In this way, Sudan continues to produce value for the conservation sector during his afterlife while also storing up reserve value for the future, should scientists succeed in artificially reproducing northern white rhinos or hybrid species. The rhino's value as a lively commodity continues to circulate beyond the threshold of death.

## **6. Concluding discussion: Extinctionscapes and the political afterlives of lively commodities**

In a world where 'virtually every nook and cranny of everyday, everynight life is subject to colonisation by the commodity form' (Pred, 1998, 149–150), political ecologists have started to pay greater attention to the commodification of nonhuman life. Yet, because lively commodities are defined by their liveliness, it is also important to consider how their demise – both 'quick' and 'slow' (Collard, 2018) – factors into the workings of capitalist economies, in general, and the modern field of conservation, specifically. In response to Marx's notion of commodities as dead labour, Mitchell asks, 'What if we understood that [dead labour] in less-than-metaphorical terms? ... Can there be a theory of the geography of commodity production that accounts for labor that is killed, maimed, or assaulted in the course of work. Or is such violence quite literally invisible in theory and in the landscape?' (2000, 761). With this in mind, our analysis makes the labour carried out by animals during their lives *and* afterlives visible and situates their labour in commodified landscapes produced, in part, through practices of absence-presence.

Thinking about Baraka, Morani, and Sudan, as well as Suni, Najin and Fatu, as lively commodities with afterlives suggests that death is not necessarily a definitive episode for these rhinos or other lively commodities; rather, it is a slow process marked by various degrees and mutated renderings of liveliness. In broader terms, the threshold of life and death under capitalism can be understood as an amorphous borderland where 'dichotomic categories [of being alive or dead] are no longer discernible' (Agamben, 2004: 1048). Although numerous scholars, including Agamben (2004), have written about the indeterminacies, spaces, and temporalities of life and death, we are less concerned with theorizing further about this threshold and more interested in considering how the colonisation of life through the commodity form unfolds at and beyond this biopolitical threshold (Colombino and Giaccaria, 2016). The notion of extinctionscapes helps to illuminate the ways in which this amorphous borderland maps onto physical geographies and interacts with biological, cultural, economic, political, and social forces to produce affective landscapes through the absence-presence

<sup>2</sup> The posthumous donation webpage for Sudan can be accessed here: <https://donate.olpejetaconservancy.org/projects/sudan>.



of species. In this regard, extinctionscapes reflect particular modes of governing animal lives and afterlives.

While avoiding broader debates and theoretical discussions about the biopolitics of conservation (see Srinivasan, 2014), we invoke biopolitics loosely in reference to the ordering, ranking, and valuing and/or devaluing of animal life in conservation discourse and practice (Biermann and Anderson, 2017). Conservation discourse and practice makes the (de)(re)valuing of certain species appear natural, technical, and universal, just as they do related efforts to nurture and sustain some forms of life while letting others die (Hodgetts, 2017). In reality, who is made to live and who is left to die in relation to extinctionscapes is also determined by social and cultural notions of which lifeforms are valuable and worth saving and which are not (Fredriksen, 2016; Margulies, 2019). These notions may be influenced by ageist, racist, speciesist, and sexist interpretations of difference; but, they nevertheless inform which species are managed (and how) and which individual animals are disciplined (and how) for conservation to function in capitalist economies (Dempsey, 2016).

The extinctionscapes of Laikipia intersect and resonate with the historical biopolitics of animal population management: Throughout the colonial era, settler farmers and ranchers considered rhinos vermin and hunted them prodigiously for eradication, money, and sport (Steinhart, 2006). After the independent government of Kenya banned hunting in 1977, settlers began to experiment with different ways of utilising the wildlife that had begun to repopulate their properties. With support from Kenya Wildlife Service, African Wildlife Foundation, World Wide Fund for Nature, and other conservation organisations, some settlers entered into the business of rhino conservation. As early as 1970, Solio Ranch was breeding rhinos to stock sanctuaries and reserves. In the 1980s, Ngare Sergoi, Ol Ari Nyiro, Ol Jogi, and Sweetwaters established rhino sanctuaries on their properties. Thus, within a couple of decades of Kenya's hunting ban, rhinos went from being nuisance vermin worthy of extermination to valued species worthy of protection. Nevertheless, rhino life has always been administered in ways that serve to reproduce iterations of settler colonialism and capitalism in Kenya (Bersaglio, 2018).

These species management practices suggest that the commodification of animal lives and afterlives is also interconnected to biopolitics at a broader level. This is certainly the case in Laikipia, where the willingness of settlers to revalue rhinos was more than just a form of economic adaptation. Rather, transforming their farms and ranches into rhino sanctuaries – with tight security features and armed personnel – was a way for settlers to morally justify and re-enact their property rights, and to stave off land redistribution in a country that had recently gone through a violent liberation struggle. As one settler explained of Ngari Sergoi, which was located on a large cattle ranch owned by the Craig family, *'The Craigs were smart. They put rhino on their land. That got the whole international community behind them'* (interview, white Kenyan tour operator, Laikipia, Kenya, April 2015). In other words, the value of rhinos as endangered species became an effective means to maintain an unequal, racialised property regime with support from the national government and international institutions.

With this in mind, consideration for the affective and related economic value of rhinos reveals the processes and techniques by which animals continue to produce value as lively commodities beyond the threshold of death, as well as the ways in which rhinos are made to work through afterlives that contribute to the reproduction of colonised landscapes as a biopolitical ordering of space. In Laikipia,

these biopolitics can be observed in the journey that rhinos, as a species, have made up and down the 'rungs' of value over time. However, biopolitics are also pronounced at the level of individual, where, somewhat ironically, ailing, neutered, and dead male rhinos have been cast as the epitome of conservation success in Laikipia. In contrast, female rhinos represent what Collard and Dempsey (2017a) call 'reserve' or 'underground' value. Unlike Sudan, Najin and Fatu are viewed as increasingly superfluous in their old age – a condition exacerbated by the fact that conservationists appear to view the uteri of northern and southern white rhinos as interchangeable. Our analysis also reveals the biopower embodied by rhinos in Laikipia, or, in other words, the interplay that exists between human and nonhuman biopolitics. As afterlife commodities, novel types of value can be extracted from the absence-presence of rhinos. As this value circulates the globe in increasingly abstracted forms, it continues to be reinvested into conservation landscapes, such as Ol Pejeta, where it contributes to the maintenance of a property regime rooted in settler colonialism and to the reproduction of racial capitalism (Mbembe, 2003; Robinson, 1983).

To conclude, 'extinctionscares' names the profound reordering of conservation landscapes as haunted landscapes (McCorristine and Adams, 2020) – geographies of absence-presence where extinction, economy, and memory collide with biopolitical implications that reverberate through a more-than-human world. In demonstrating how conservation landscapes are assembled to extract value from animals who occupy the amorphous borderland of life and death, this article reveals how extinctionscares intersect and interact with politics, power, and (in)justice in a more-than-human world. In doing so, it also offers further evidence of the troubling capacity of commodification to lay claim to the exploitation of life-in-landscape beyond the grave and lays additional groundwork for engaging with the spectral work of extinction as a powerful social and cultural, as well as political and ecological, force in the world.

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