

Political Ecologies of Security: Privatisation, Militarisation and Conservation

The illegal wildlife trade has risen to international prominence since the spikes in poaching of elephants and rhinos from approximately 2008-2010. This has forged a renewed sense of urgency in conservation, a call to *do something* to tackle poaching and trafficking before they drive species to extinction. The sense of urgency has produced a series of important conceptual and practical shifts in conservation. This is a new phase characterized by pressing nature into the service of security, which has opened opportunities for the security sector to benefit from engaging in conservation, both financially and in reputational terms. However, this is deeply problematic and is changing what conservation *is* and what conservation *can be* in the future. Some responses to the illegal wildlife trade mean that conservation has become a useful ally in the security strategies of powerful actors at the national and global scales. Conservation can be used for other motives, a convenient excuse to (amongst other things) quell or evict resistant populations, open new markets for private sector security companies and allow militaries to justify allocation of greater resources to themselves.

Taking a security approach to illegal wildlife trade, ultimately will not solve the problem. It may save a few plants or animals in certain locations, it may even prevent an extinction or two, but the underlying pattern of species losses will continue. This is because security-oriented approaches distract from dealing with the actual drivers of extinctions and reduced numbers of wild animals and plants. It conveniently sidesteps the real problem, which is the dynamics of global wealth and inequality, produced by the wider system of capitalism. Further, the security-oriented approach actually opens new opportunities for accumulation, or profit, thereby deepening and driving the very logics that produce the problem in the first place. Wrapping conservation in a security framework has produced a cloak for wider forms of surveillance and monitoring of people, animals and ecosystems at one end of the spectrum, but at the other it facilitates and encourages violent enforcement strategies, including exclusion, human rights abuses and the use of deadly force.