

Human Discourses, Animal Geographies: Imagining Umfolozi's White Rhinos

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Abstract

The paper reviews recent literature in the field of animal geographies, a scholarship that reflects a developing interest in the way discursive orderings shape human attitudes to animals, as well as a concern with the spatial outcomes for animals of these discourses. Insights from this literature are employed to narrate the historical geography of Zululand's white rhino population from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. The paper traces Umfolozi rhinos' changing location within human networks and corresponding spatial contexts. In the 1890s white rhinos were identified by the Zululand authorities as subjects worthy of special care; but in this colonial context their coding as "wild" animals was called into question by local Zulu people. Later, the spatial consequences of protectionist discourses about rhinos saw the removal of many of the latter from the carceral space of Zululand's game reserves, to zoos and wildlife parks in other countries. This animal geography ultimately proved global in its reach.

Introduction

Some years ago the cultural geographer Kay Anderson called for scholars to pay greater attention to the consequences of "the imaginative act" which has placed "those thinking, sentient, intentional and animate creatures called 'animals' into the black-box category of 'nature'" (Anderson 1997: 277). Anderson argued that the "hyper-separation" between humans and nature, which strengthened in European thought from around the fifteenth century, also had the effect of consigning living animals to "the already inferiorized and homogenized sphere of 'dead' (unconscious) nature – that residual realm inhabited by such diverse things as plants, soils, stones, the elements and the land" (Anderson 1997:277). It was necessary, she said, to begin to reconsider the dividing line between nature and culture. In particular it was important to reconceptualise non-human animals outside of the black-box category.)

This rallying call to scholars was not an isolated one. Anderson is part of a broader movement in human geography and other human science disciplines that argues for a greater focus on human relations with the non-human world. This scholarship draws for its theoretical underpinnings on a range of approaches, including actant network theory (ANT), social constructionism, ecofeminism, political ecology and feminist studies of science (Haraway 1989; Whatmore 2000). A decade ago, the new focus was introduced to human geographers in a special issue of the journal *Society and Space* edited by Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel (1995). This was followed by the collection *Animal Geographies* (Wolch and Emel 1998). “Animal geographies” became the catchphrase for this scholarship in human geography.

The current article reviews the animal geographies literature and tries to show how perspectives it introduces could enliven our discussions of South African animals and their interactions with people. It employs the case study of KwaZulu-Natal’s white rhino population and its conservation history from the 1890s to suggest how trends in the animal geographies literature could fruitfully be applied to understanding human-animal relationships in colonial and postcolonial contexts. I draw on a number of written sources in this account, ranging from court transcripts to official correspondence and diaries to published accounts by conservationists. This article does not claim to give a comprehensive account of the history of Umfolozi’s white rhinos. Rather, significant moments in the rhinos’ story are chosen in order to explore a double focus of interest in the literature: first, the ways in which animals have been imagined in human discourses; and secondly, the spatial consequences such orderings have had for the animals themselves.

1. A focus on discursive orderings: the ‘disgust/respect’ binary and its consequences

Most scholars involved in the animal geographies project argue that animals are not just resources and that their significance to human society goes beyond the material. While familiar to anthropologists, this emphasis on non-utilitarian aspects of human relations with animals has been less common in disciplines like geography (but see Tuan 1984). Social historians have noted that because laws governing the ownership of wildlife invariably favour powerful classes in society, poaching is a symbolic as well as a material act (see Thompson 1975). However, the animal geographies literature goes further, drawing on post-structuralist perspectives to highlight the

significance of *language* in shaping conceptual categories or discursive orderings. As Chris Philo put it, the aim is to explore “the nonutilitarian aspects to how animals become embedded within broader societal orderings of respect and disgust” (Philo 1995:657).

Perspectives from the Literature

Nowhere is the ‘respect/disgust’ binary and its power in structuring human relationships to animals more evident than in attitudes to predators – animals that have been classified as (‘disgusting’) vermin and ruthlessly hunted in consequence. In her work on wolves, Jody Emel (1995) argues that discursive constructions were key in creating a human view of wolves characterised by emotions like disgust and fear. Writing from an ecofeminist perspective, Emel shows how the North American wolf was mobilized in various human discourses, largely to the detriment of this animal. She explores the tropes that made wolves the target of an extermination campaign over the last two hundred years, arguing that while such discourses may have been materially based – the interests of predators did clash with those of commercial livestock owners – social practices of wolf extermination must also be explained in terms of structures of self- and animal representation. In Emel’s words, “How we represent and identify ourselves and others – whether they be animals or people,” is at the heart of our actions towards them (Emel 1995: 708).

Perspectives like these have not yet been widely employed in the environmental history of (post)colonial Africa. One exception is a recent article by geographer JoAnn McGregor (2005) that explores the disgust/respect binary in the case of crocodiles in (post)colonial Zimbabwe. McGregor shows how scientists, conservationists and commercial interests mobilised from the 1960s to rehabilitate the Nile crocodile both conceptually and physically. She examines the discursive strategies used to imaginatively reposition the crocodile as an endangered species worthy of protection. Unfortunately the resulting expansion in crocodile populations at Lake Kariba has played out in a postcolonial situation where local “pestilence discourses” (Knight 2000) remain largely excluded from public debate. The continued marginalization of poor fishing communities is reflected in the silence surrounding crocodile attacks and other damage inflicted by crocodiles on local livelihoods.

Both the North American wolf and the Nile crocodile underwent significant repositioning in scientific and conservation discourse as well as in the public

mind in the later twentieth century, yet historically wolves and crocodiles have stood on the ‘disgust’ side of the binary and been regarded as vermin. The white rhinoceros of colonial Zululand stands largely at the other extreme. The southern white or square-lipped rhino, *Ceratotherium simum*, an endangered species from at least the late nineteenth century, has been afforded respect, even reverence, and care by Zululand’s colonial and postcolonial authorities – specifically by individual men working for these authorities – over a period of a hundred years.

The next section explores some aspects of the positioning of Umfolozi’s white rhinos within the disgust/respect binary and the social practices that resulted. With the aid of Kay Anderson’s work on practices of “domestication” in the context of the zoo (Anderson 1995), competing interpretations of the care afforded to rhinos by a colonial authority are also considered. Anderson argues that as spaces in which animals are confined by people, zoos do partake in broader practices of human domestication and fixity. While the animals contained within zoos are not tame in quite the sense that pets are tame, zoos are nonetheless “supremely domesticated social products” (Anderson 1997:464). Afforded the protection of legislation and given a space in game reserves, Zululand’s white rhinos were drawn into the human sphere in a not dissimilar way.

The White Rhino as an Object of Care

From 1887, for a period of ten years following the conquest of the Zulu kingdom, the territory of Zululand came under direct British control (Guy 1979). While game laws were imposed almost immediately, it took some time for the white rhino to be offered special protection by being declared royal game. This occurred in 1895, also the year in which the ‘Umfolosi Junction’ – the area around the confluence of the two Umfolozi rivers – was chosen as the site for one of five “game preserves”.¹ One reason for Umfolozi’s selection was a growing recognition that this was one of the few places where white rhino still survived in the sub-continent (Brooks 2001).

In 1897 Zululand was handed over to the Natal Colony, and in the early twentieth century the endangered white rhino evoked a marked degree of care and concern on the part of officials in the Natal colonial administration. Sir Charles Saunders, the top official in Zululand, took on the white rhinos of Umfolozi as a personal project. For example, he made sure that the Zulu guards who patrolled the game reserves reported to him directly. When they came across the remains of dead rhinos, Saunders insisted on a detailed

enquiry into the cause of death. In one instance he ordered the retrieval of skeletal remains of two deceased rhinos, with the intention of donating them to the Natal Colony's museums.² Saunders also bought camera equipment with which he hoped to take the first photograph of a living white rhino – not a simple proposition at the time (Brooks 2005).

Saunders was worried about the likely effects of the future advent of white settlement in Zululand on the white rhinos in and around the unfenced Umfolozi reserve. He foresaw that, once white settlers were allowed in and private ownership introduced, conditions in Zululand would change irrevocably and the rhinos would be under threat:

[The rhinos] are as well protected under our present game Law as it is possible for them to be under existing circumstances ... When Zululand is thrown open for European occupation the circumstances will change. That portion of the country the rhinoceroses inhabit, which is unoccupied at present, may be purchased by private individuals, in which case, even if not killed, the animals would be disturbed and in all probability migrate to some other part of the country outside Zululand, and eventually be exterminated.³

It was thus a significant event when in December 1902, two white rhinos were killed by a large group of Zulu people living in the Mahlabatini district. These particular rhinos had been north of the Umfolozi game reserve boundary at the time and were thus in the 'native reserve' area rather than in the game reserve. But rhinos were still subject to state protection as royal game and the state imposed heavy penalties for killing them. The two rhinos were stabbed with spears or assegais: one died on the day it was attacked, and the other two days later. The case occasioned the trial of twenty-five Zulu men, most of whom pleaded guilty to the charge of killing the rhinos. They were found guilty under the 1897 Zululand game law and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.⁴

As the animal geographies literature points out, a sensitivity to language and local idiom may yield important insights into differing cultural constructions of animals in particular places. The trial transcripts provide a fascinating insight into competing understandings of the white rhinoceros in Zululand at the time. To the colonial authorities, white rhinos were coded as 'wild' animals. Umfolozi's rhinos were the essence of endangered 'wild nature' and in the twentieth century their presence in Zululand was to provide an important rationale for conservationists fighting to retain the region's game reserves (Brooks 2004). Yet the authority's actions with

regard to the protection of rhinos and the care they afforded them, bore a different interpretation by local people.

In giving evidence at the trial, the chief's *induna* (headman), Mqageni, tried to defend one of the young men involved by saying that the latter "did not know it was Royal Game they were pursuing".⁵ This was however a weak defence: trial transcripts make it clear that at least some members of the community knew quite well that these particular animals fell under the special protection of government. They had observed the fact that government officials took as much trouble over white rhinos as the local Zulu people took in caring for their own livestock. An important statement by one of the witnesses, Uziwindi, reads as follows:

I first saw the Rhinoceri above our kraal and Tshambezima's Induna Mbabaza said that they were *Government cattle*, and were not to be disturbed. I heard the alarm given, and I ran and called out to another of our kraals – Hlomaza's – that they were *Government cattle*, and were not to be touched. I cannot say if accused heard me. I returned home. [my italics]⁶

The phrase "government cattle" is striking in this context. In the context of colonial Zululand, the government's actions in caring for the 'wild' white rhino could be – and were – read as a partial act of domestication. Uziwindi was remarking not only on the fact that this animal was owned by the colonial government, but suggesting that the animal was cared for, respected and esteemed by its owner in a way that was directly comparable with the attention Zulu people lavished on their domestic cattle. This was of course a society in which enormous symbolic and material significance resided in cattle (Guy 1990). In a single elegant phrase, Uziwindi had reinterpreted the rhino's wildness by emphasizing that it did, after all, come under human control – and at the same time, commented tellingly on the rhino's symbolic importance for the white rulers of Zululand.

Fifty years on, the white rhino remained a focus of attention for Natal government officials, in this case employees of the Natal Parks Board – the semi-autonomous provincial conservation authority created in 1947 to run the parks and reserves of Natal and Zululand. In the early years of its existence, individual conservationists employed by the organisation became deeply involved with the white rhino and determined to save the animal from the perceived threat of extinction.

Ian Player, then a young game ranger posted to the Umfolozi reserve, describes his first encounter with Umfolozi's white rhinos in 1952 as an

almost mystical experience. In the following passage from his book *The White Rhino Saga*, Player recognises in the white rhinos of Umfolozi game reserve “a cause to which I could give my life” (Player 1972: 17):

It was not until the following morning, a dull overcast day, that I saw my first white rhino ... I had a sudden feeling that my life would in some way be bound up with these prehistoric animals ... The mist lifted for a few seconds and I saw the white rhino again on the crest of a small hill, they had stopped grazing and were looking back towards me, their heads held high and tails curled in characteristic fashion. We stared at each other for a moment, then the mist slowly enveloped them and I was left with the memory ... I could think of nothing but the white rhino. Never had I been so impressed and at the same time so strangely involved with an animal. (Player 1972:16-17)

Later Player became head ranger at Umfolozi. The relocation campaign he and his colleagues launched in the 1960s, Operation Rhino, remains the basis for the provincial conservation authority’s claim to international conservation significance. As the website of the (now restructured) organisation boasts, “The recovery of the white rhino from near extinction 100 years ago” is “one of the great success stories of African wildlife conservation”; an achievement that has “earned the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service worldwide fame”.⁷ In the wider conservation world, the saving of the white rhino is indeed viewed as “one of the great miracles of modern conservation,” and this miracle is the basis of the Natal Parks Board’s reputation as “unquestionably the best state or provincial park organization in the world”.⁸ The spatial consequences of the rhino relocation campaign are discussed in the next section.

2. A concern with spatial outcomes: carceral spaces and wildlife networks

If animals are mobilized in various ways within human discourses, a key insight of scholars working in the animal geographies field is that these discursive orderings also have spatial consequences. Animals are enmeshed in complex power relations with human communities and are deeply affected by social practices linked to ideas about particular animals and where they ought (or ought not) to be. Subjected to various inclusions or exclusions from “common sites of human activity” (Philo 1995:656), animals are discursively constructed as either ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’ *in particular spaces*. The animal experience – not unlike that of marginalised groups of human beings – is one of having geographies imposed upon them.

Perspectives from the Literature

Chris Philo's (1995) article was one of the first to consider the spatial consequences of such discursive orderings. In researching the historical geography of the meat industry in London and Chicago, Philo shows how various discourses ranging from the demoralizing effect on humans of association with 'beasts', to the dangers to human health posed by the animals' presence (and their slaughter) in the city, had the effect of gradually excluding livestock animals from urban space. While animals like dogs and cats became pets, a valued element in the urban sphere, animals like pigs and cows were gradually coded as unwanted matter; as "impure, polluting, disruptive and discomforting occupants of city spaces where humans are supposed to live and work" (Philo 1995: 677). Philo locates these changes in terms of the development of western modernity, which strengthened a tendency to categorise phenomena and allocate them to appropriate "spatiotemporal containers".

Other scholars, in particular Sarah Whatmore and Lorraine Thorne, tackle the social orderings that embrace and position 'wild' animals (Whatmore and Thorne 1998, 2000). In exploring various positionings of 'wildlife' in society, Whatmore and Thorne draw theoretical inspiration from two recent trends in the human sciences. The first is the now familiar impetus to reimagine social agency so as to "recognise the creative presence of nonhumans in the fabric of social life" (Whatmore and Thorne 2000:186). The second is an attempt to reimagine social space. To this end, Whatmore and Thorne self-consciously employ "new spatial metaphors, such as networks, topologies, and folds, [which] attempt to hold onto the situatedness of social practices and relationships however long their reach" (2000:185).

In an important (1998) article, Whatmore and Thorne use the idea of a relational topology or network of wildlife in order to illuminate the way animals are caught up in human orderings. In this view, wildlife can be seen as a performance "spun between people and animals, plants and soils, documents and devices, in heterogeneous social networks that are performed in and through multiple places and fluid ecologies" (Whatmore and Thorne 1998: 437). This is a useful frame in which to view the story of animals such as Zululand's white rhinos, increasingly caught up in a global ethic of caring for wildlife. These animals were located within heterogeneous social networks and a performative nexus of ultimately global reach that, as narrated below, took the rhinos from the Umfolozi reserve in Zululand, through multiple spaces *such as the capture bomas as well as the trucks and ships in which*

they were transported, to southern African and overseas parks and zoos.

By focusing on the positioning of animals within networks, Whatmore and Thorne aim to disrupt the taken-for-granted relationship between 'species' and 'spaces' of wilderness. They hope to challenge the powerful moral geographies of wilderness and demonstrate the implication of human beings in the performance and creation of 'the wild'. Viewing wildlife in this way draws attention to a range of sites or spaces in which wild animals are mobilized in human discourses and social practices. It should be noted that if, as Whatmore and Thorne suggest, the primary spaces associated with particular wild animals can be regarded as 'heterotopic' in nature, such spaces are often also confining or 'carceral' spaces. A zoo is an obvious example, and a fenced game reserve could also be regarded as a carceral space. Whatmore and Thorne's point is that heterotopic/carceral spaces like these must be viewed in a wider context. The modern zoo, for example, is located within a topology of social orderings, discourses about animals, and actual transportation routes.

Whatmore and Thorne explore two examples of such wildlife networks. In the first, the "most potent site for the performance of wildlife" is the carceral space of the amphitheatre (Whatmore and Thorne 1998:438). This was the place where large feline animals – leopards and cheetahs, collectively known as *leopardus* – were released to entertain the privileged of the Roman Empire, killing or being killed in the ring. While the amphitheatre is the culmination of the performance, it is far from the whole story. Animals captured in North Africa were transported by land and sea along well-organised routes to imperial centres. The spatial network of connections facilitating this wildlife performance thus placed *leopardus* firmly within the organisational relations of the Roman military establishment, which extended across the known world of the time.

Wild animals in the contemporary world are contained by other kinds of networks, in particular those related to modern science. Over the last two centuries, the Linnaean classification system has been extended to embrace all known animal life on the planet, a vast act of metaphorical positioning that Whatmore and Thorne argue has greatly facilitated the mobilisation of animals for human purposes. In the case of listed species in particular, decisions taken at CITES (the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species), a truly global network of wildlife regulation, have important consequences for the animals concerned. For example, a recent CITES decision that *Caiman latirostris*, a species of alligator formerly listed

as an endangered species, could again be “sustainably farmed” renders the animal vulnerable once more to human exploitation.

In a second article, Whatmore and Thorne (2000) draw attention to the *virtual* spaces in which animals exist in the modern world. Scholars like Bruno Latour (1993, 2004) and Donna Haraway (1991) have focused attention on the ways in which technology interacts with humans to break down old nature/culture boundaries and create new hybrid social formations. When applied to the field of animal geographies, this widens the angle of view from the physical movement of animals located within networks, to the spatialities of other (technology-based) forms of animal exchange.

Whatmore and Thorne use the work of Nigel Thrift (1996) to argue that ordering networks do not exist in a vacuum but are worked through various intersecting spatialities or “spatial formations”. They therefore employ the phrase a “spatial formation of wildlife exchange” to describe the actual and virtual trafficking “in animals’ spectacular properties, sperm, embryos, and genetic codes” that characterises modern conservation practice (Whatmore and Thorne 2000:187). For example, the existence of animals held in modern zoos is extended into the digital world that supports captive breeding programmes. Information on individual representatives of species held in zoos worldwide is recorded in the ISIS (International Species Information System) and ARKS (Animal Records Keeping System) databases, so that each zoo animal has both a lived experience and a virtual identity in the modern-day ‘Noah’s Ark’ of zoo databases.

The next sections apply some of these insights to the animal geography of Umfolozi’s white rhinos. It is possible to see the Umfolozi game reserve as a ‘carceral’ space to which the rhinos were actively confined until the 1960s; and then to trace the geographical expansion of this wildlife network as new technology made it possible for these large animals to be captured and moved alive to new carceral spaces such as zoos and safari parks throughout the world.

Protecting the White Rhino in Carceral Space

The wildlife network that drew in Umfolozi’s white rhinos has always had as its most potent site of performance the Umfolozi game reserve in Zululand. This low-lying tract of land, 72 000 acres in extent in 1935, was in fact formally deproclaimed as a reserve in the 1920s although the province continued to exercise protection over the white rhinos. In the 1930s and 40s the reproclaimed reserve was managed as an effective ‘laboratory’ for tsetse fly and nagana research, with the white rhino the only species receiving formal protection. (Brooks 2001)

The livestock disease nagana, spread by the tsetse fly, was a serious threat to the development of commercial agriculture in Zululand. Wild animals were regarded by settler farmers – on the basis of some scientific evidence – as carriers of nagana disease, and the provincial authorities succeeded in holding on to their reserves only by agreeing to a policy of containment where wild animals were kept confined as far as possible inside the game reserves and away from the farms (Brooks 1997,2004). Under these circumstances, the guardians of the white rhino had first to continually stress the rarity of Umfolozi's rhino population so as to retain flagging political support for the Zululand game reserves. Secondly the rhinos had to be physically confined to the carceral space of the reserve and thus kept out of trouble.

Frederick Vaughan-Kirby, the first Zululand Game Conservator (he served from 1911 to 1928) had thought there were between twenty and thirty rhinos in the 'ex' Umfolozi reserve. In making the argument for stronger protective measures, supporters were careful to stress this low number.⁹ Even today the figure of twenty remaining rhinos is widely reproduced in material on the miraculous recovery of this species.¹⁰ Yet while the animal was indeed endangered in southern Africa, there were more white rhinos in the Umfolozi reserve than anyone had thought. The semi-farcical performance of rhino rarity in the thornveld of the Umfolozi game reserve described below is more than just an amusing story. These events indicate a spatially-based wildlife performance deeply inscribed by the norms and values of a racially divided colonial society, indeed a racially divided world.

In the late 1920s Roden Symons, Vaughan-Kirby's short-lived successor as Zululand Conservator, decided that a proper count should be made of the rhinos. He instructed the Zulu game guards – the men responsible for protecting the rhinos in Umfolozi on a day-to-day basis – to count the animals. They came up with a figure of 150 white rhinos. Soon afterwards, authority for the Umfolozi reserve was delegated to the tsetse fly researcher, R.H.T.P. Harris. Harris felt there had to be some mistake. As he informed the Natal Provincial Secretary, "this information in the light of what the whole World had been led to believe appeared so staggering that I instructed Ranger Werner at once to make a very careful survey of the number of White Rhinoceros in each section of the sanctuary".¹¹

Mali Mdletshe, head game guard and the man responsible for taking care of Umfolozi's white rhinos throughout the 1920s, appeared unsurprised that the new white man did not accept his figure:

Before Mr. Harris came I was instructed by Mr. Symons to make a count of the number of White Rhinoceros. He merely instructed me and others to go into the Reserve and count the white Rhinoceros which we did. I counted 150 White Rhinoceros of all ages. When I returned to report to Mr. Symons he had left on transfer to another Reserve and I told Mr. Harris that I had counted 150 and Mr. Harris doubted the accuracy of the count. Mr. Harris then instructed Mr. Werner to go and count them with me. Mr. Werner was in charge of this count, the Reserve being divided upon into sections ... Each evening we reported to Mr. Werner giving the number counted and the descriptions.¹²

This time the total was 172 white rhinos.

In the view of Dr. Herbert Lang, an American wildlife protectionist who had taken a particular interest in the white rhino, the new information coming out of Zululand was frankly incredible. On Lang's insistence, a third count of white rhinos was conducted by the game guards, this time under the scientist's direct supervision. Lang insisted that only rhinos seen by whites could be counted. As he put it, "no one experienced with the native mentality would be willing to accept data furnished by untutored native rangers no matter how trustworthy they may be otherwise".¹³ Accordingly, each game guard was equipped with a police whistle, which he blew on sighting a rhino. The whole party then proceeded to the spot so that Dr Lang could personally count the animal. Ultimately the American was forced to concede that there were at least one hundred white rhinos in the Umfolozi game reserve, and possibly more.

Chris Philo's ideas about the evolution of spatial containers, where appropriate animals are increasingly confined to appropriate spaces while inappropriate animals are kept away from sites of human activity, are highly apposite in this case. At this time the Umfolozi reserve was considered the appropriate container for the white rhino and the animal was considered dangerously "out of place" when it trespassed onto neighbouring white-owned farms. Yet if this was a spatial container, it was a highly porous one. Unfenced game reserves had to be physically patrolled and a great deal of energy was expended on driving game back into the carceral space of the Hlulhuwe and Umfolozi reserves.

Key figures in the performance of wildlife protection during the 1930s and 40s were the new Game Conservator, Captain Harold Potter (appointed in 1933) and his staff of Zulu game guards. As his official diary makes clear, one of Potter's main tasks was to drive straying rhinos and other large game back into the reserves. Because of the nagana threat, Potter and his team had to

respond immediately to complaints from neighbouring farmers about animals encroaching onto their farms, and ensure that the offending creatures were encouraged back into the reserves as soon as possible. Chasing rhinos back into the carceral space of Umfolozi became an everyday task for their protectors.

Some of the incidents were annoyingly time-wasting, such as the following incident in 1944. Potter's staccato style diary entries tell the story:

7 Nov 1944:

10am Received report from Police Hluhluwe of a white Rhino on Mr Kramer's farm Hluhluwe.

1pm To Mtubatuba re above.

6pm Home.

8 Nov:

5am Lorry with 6 Game Guards to Hluhluwe re White Rhino on Kramer's farm.

6pm Game Guards returned from wild-goose errand. No signs of Rhino after exhaustive search and enquiries from all concerned.¹⁴

A further rhino escape on 6 September 1947 had a more satisfactory conclusion. On this day at 7.40 am Potter "Received report from NP Selley that Rhino had been seen near his farm". At 8.30 am he "sent Station Wagon with 8 natives who drove Rhino back into Reserve".¹⁵

Potter would have been astonished by developments in the 1960s, a decade that saw imaginative and geographical extension of the existing wildlife network in which white rhinos left the carceral space of the Umfolozi reserve and were transported to new sites of rhino performance. It is this new spatial formation of wildlife exchange – one that displayed the social patterning of foresight common to many modern conservation initiatives and described by Whatmore and Thorne in their (2000) article – that is the subject of the next section.

Rhino Relocations: A New Spatial Formation of White Rhino Exchange

The ambitious relocation programme 'Operation Rhino' was initiated in 1961 and carried out by the Natal Parks Board. The men on the ground were a new group of field rangers under the leadership of Ian Player, who had been appointed senior ranger at the Umfolozi game reserve in 1958. Player saw that if it were possible to develop the appropriate technology to enable conservationists to tranquilise rhinos, some of the animals could be moved out of the Umfolozi game reserve: the carceral space of the reserve could be reimagined as a 'reservoir' which could be dipped into in order to replenish

the population of white rhinos that had become extinct elsewhere in southern Africa (Player 1972:171).

By the late 1950s Umfolozi was becoming, if possible, even more of a carceral or confining space for white rhinos. While the nagana problem had been solved through the aerial spraying of DDT, there were new threats to the reserve. Player listed these in his book *The White Rhino Saga* (1972). First, people who had been displaced by apartheid removals were settling as ‘squatters’ on the game reserve boundary and making incursions into the reserve itself. As a result the rhinos were confined to a smaller and smaller space in which they were forced to compete with other game for grazing. In addition, the conservation authorities feared the effects of a potential outbreak of anthrax or some other disease on the spatially concentrated white rhino population of Umfolozi. These pressures, perceived and actual, gave rise to a massive expansion in this wildlife network from 1961. White rhinos were propelled out of the carceral space of the Umfolozi reserves like arrows from a quiver, landing in zoological institutions and parks not only in Southern Africa but all round the world.

In the early 1960s there was a further reason for attempting to relocate white rhinos. Inevitably, this spatial formation of rhino exchange was deeply embedded in the political context of the time. This was the period of Harold Macmillan’s “winds of change” speech, and the fear was that if white power were ever to be overthrown in (apartheid) South Africa, the white rhino too would be swept away. The close identification of the future of white South Africans and that of white rhinos is striking. As Player put it in 1972:

... in 1960 the political future of all Africa seemed uncertain. If we had been forced to fight for our existence on the African continent against outside invaders, as well as keep down possible insurrections in our own country, wild life would have received little sympathy. The poor-sighted, gentle white rhino would soon have been exterminated. (Player 1972:63)

The fact that an important geographical focus for some of the earliest rhino translocations was Southern Rhodesia was not coincidental. A media campaign in South Africa and Rhodesia raised funds and public support for the ‘Rhinos for Rhodesia’ project and in 1962 and 1963 a total of 74 white rhinos were relocated from Umfolozi to various reserves in Rhodesia (Rochat and Steele 1968).

The development of this new network of wildlife exchange involved the physical removal of extremely large wild animal bodies – ones incidentally

well equipped with large, sharp horns – from one place to another. Thus technology was an essential enabling part of the network. The first necessity was to find the correct drugs, and there was only one way to determine the correct drug and dosage required to tranquilize a 4-ton rhino: by trial and error. In working to expand this spatial formation of rhino protection into one of worldwide rhino exchange, the Natal Parks Board drew on the expertise of Dr. Toni Harthoorn who had been working on translocating wild animals in east Africa. In 1963 Harthoorn introduced a morphine-based drug (M99) which required a smaller dosage to be administered and thus minimised the problem of infected wounds from the darts.

In addition to drugs, there were other elements to the network making up the dramatic performance of white rhino capture at Umfolozi. Horses were an essential participant in the drama. Rhinos had of course to be darted in the wild, and this involved getting as close to them as possible before firing the tranquilising dart. Thereafter it was up to the horsemen to pursue the fleeing animal, locate it before it could damage itself, and administer the necessary antidote. Later other aspects of modern technology were added to the rhino capture network, improving its efficiency. As Player noted:

The *lorry* [with automatic winch] meant we could load animals in formerly impossible positions while the *walkie-talkies* saved rhino lives; the horsemen could radio their position to us instead of having to gallop back, and we could be with the rhino in minutes. [my italics] (Player 1972:223)

The story did not end with Rhodesia, or even southern Africa. After the white rhino had been successfully “reintroduced into their former range in large numbers” (see Figure 1), the decision was taken to send some of the rhinos to zoological gardens overseas (Player 1972:239). This was in the nature of an insurance policy, an “added precaution” which would extend the network of wildlife exchange (Player 1972:240).

Publicity associated with Operation Rhino ensured that zoos and safari parks around the world began showing an interest in acquiring Umfolozi rhino. By the late 1960s, new methods of transport, over sea rather than over land, had been incorporated into this spatial formation, and the rhinos were being exchanged for money. The animals now entered a worldwide network of wildlife exchange that operated on publicity, personal contacts, and orders for white rhinos – now transformed into valuable commodities capable of being shipped halfway across the world. As Player put it:

We had a hard-won product to sell and it was soon shown to have a definite place in the burgeoning development of Safari Parks all over the world. This demand for white rhino, unlike the requirements of the conventional zoo, called for spectacular group exhibition under semi-natural conditions. This concept promised two potentials, enhanced breeding possibilities and a financially rewarding outlet for our excess rhino. (Player 1972:241)

Soon buyers were being offered a full ‘rhinocare’ service in which Parks Board staff accompanied the rhinos on their sea voyages, ensuring their health and (perhaps) happiness *en route* to their new destinations (Player 1972:242). Ships became a new if temporary carceral or confining space for rhinos. The latter then found themselves translocated to new sites of wildlife performance – in this case the “spectacular group exhibition” beloved of safari parks – a very long way from the Umfolozi game reserve (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Yet while a new, dramatically expanded spatial formation of wildlife exchange had emerged, it was one built on a history of care and concern. This was a ‘wild’ animal that had in fact from the earliest period of colonial rule been caught up in human discourses and practices of domestication and care.

Conclusion

The main focus in the animal geographies literature has been on the variety of human discourses in which animals have been mobilised and the social and spatial consequences of these. Such an approach is regarded by some scholars as still too anthropomorphic. As Whatmore and Thorne (1998) note, it is all too easy for sentient animals to be reduced simply to “symbolic and material units in some human currency”. Writing that takes animal consciousness seriously, they argue, requires “new practices of witnessing”:

... practices which attend more closely to the *multisensual business of becoming animal* – a relational process in which animal subjects are configured through particular social bonds, bodily comportments, and life habits that are complicated, but neither originated nor erased, by the various ways in which they may be enmeshed in the categorical and practical orderings of people. [my italics] (Whatmore and Thorne 2000:186)

This article has not attempted to penetrate rhino consciousness. It has however suggested some of the ways in which Umfolozi’s white rhinos were caught up in the ‘categorical and practical orderings of people’. In being afforded ‘respect’ and care by colonial officials in Zululand, the white rhino

story makes an interesting contrast to the stories of predators and other animals historically configured in terms of 'disgust'. It also raises important questions about the realms of the 'wild' and the 'domestic' and the differences between them. Finally, in applying ideas about the intersecting spatialities and networks of wildlife, this article has thrown new light on social practices first aimed at ensuring the rhinos' safety within the Umfolozi game reserve and later expanded to embrace not only other parts of southern Africa but the world.

There is a coda to the story told in this article. In the late 1980s, as apartheid structures and thinking were coming increasingly under pressure, the quality of care afforded the white rhino and the publicity it received through the 'Operation Rhino' campaign attracted the attention of activists calling for environmental and social justice in the country. At this time, the white rhino was symbolically employed as a symbol of apartheid South Africa's concern for animals at the expense of people.

In an article titled 'Beyond the White Rhino', Farieda Khan (1990) issued a challenge to conservationists like Ian Player, who thirty years earlier had repulsed land invasions into the Umfolozi game reserve in order to protect white rhino habitat. To Khan, this was just another example of conservationists' lack of concern for black South Africans and of an inability to acknowledge the land issue underlying conservation efforts. Khan challenged the conservation movement to demonstrate that "on its scale of values, the provision of human habitation is *at least* equal to the preservation of the habitat of the white rhino" (Khan 1990: 324). From being the heroes of a celebrated conservation story, Umfolozi's white rhinos and those who cared for them had now been reimagined as the very symbol of an uncaring apartheid state.

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Notes

1. Government Notice, Zululand Proclamation No. 12, *The Natal Government Gazette*, 1895:406.
2. Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Natal Museum (NM) Collection, 2/3, "Collection of Specimens, 1889-1903", Minute Paper NGM 10/1903, "Desirability of Procuring the Skeleton of a White Rhinoceros at present at the Mahlabatine [sic]

- Magistracy". Correspondence between Saunders (Chief Magistrate and Civil Commissioner, Zululand), the Natal Museum Committee Chairman, and the Natal Colonial Secretary.
3. Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Prime Minister (PM) Collection, 18, Minute Papers 1900. Minute Paper 1111, "C.B. Russell, with reference to the preservation of a family of white Rhinoceros between the Black and the White Umvolosi". Saunders to Prime Minister of Natal, 25 June 1900.
 4. Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Zululand Archives (ZA) Collection 95, "Resident Commissioner and Chief Magistrate Native Criminal Cases Submitted for Confirmation or Otherwise". Criminal Case No.309/1902. Rex vs 25 accused (listed).
 5. ZA 95, "Resident Commissioner and Chief Magistrate Native Criminal Cases Submitted for Confirmation or Otherwise". Criminal Case No.309/1902. Rex vs 25 accused (listed). Mqageni's evidence, 27 December 1902.
 6. ZA 95, "Resident Commissioner and Chief Magistrate Native Criminal Cases Submitted for Confirmation or Otherwise". Criminal Case No.309/1902. Rex vs 25 accused (listed). Uziwindi's evidence, 22 December 1902.
 7. http://www.kznwildlife.com/w_gameCapture.htm. Website accessed 17 November 2005.
 8. <http://www.awf.org/news/119>. African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) Headlines and Highlights, "Encountering Rhinos", *African Wildlife News* (October-November 1997), 1 October 1997. Website accessed 17 November 2005.
 9. For example, in the view of Dr. Ernest Warren of the Natal Museum, "We had better say that there are twenty only". (Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, Ernest Warren Correspondence (EWC), File "June 1923 to December 1923", Ernest Warren to James Stevenson-Hamilton, 29 October 1923).
 10. For example, the AWF website claims that the Natal conservation authority "brought the endangered southern white rhino back from the brink of extinction, *from 10 to 20 animals in 1920* to some 2,400 today in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi alone" [my italics]. <http://www.awf.org/news/119>. African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) Headlines and Highlights, "Encountering Rhinos", *African Wildlife News* (October-November 1997), 1 October 1997. Website accessed 17 November 2005.
 11. Pietermaritzburg Archives, Natal Provincial Secretary (NPS) Collection, Box 897; 8/9187 "Tsetse Fly Campaign: Campaign Reports". Report from Harris, Director of Tsetse Fly Operations, for Month ending October 1929.
 12. NPS Box 869, 8/9187 "Fauna and Flora: Tsetse Fly Campaign Reports". Affidavits from game guards, translated by Magistrate, Empangeni. Mali Mdletshe's affidavit, 11 October 1929.
 13. Pietermaritzburg Archives, J.M.N.A. Hershensohnn Papers, XIII/2/1, "General Remarks on Counting the White Rhinoceros in the Umfolozi Reserve", Herbert Lang: 11.

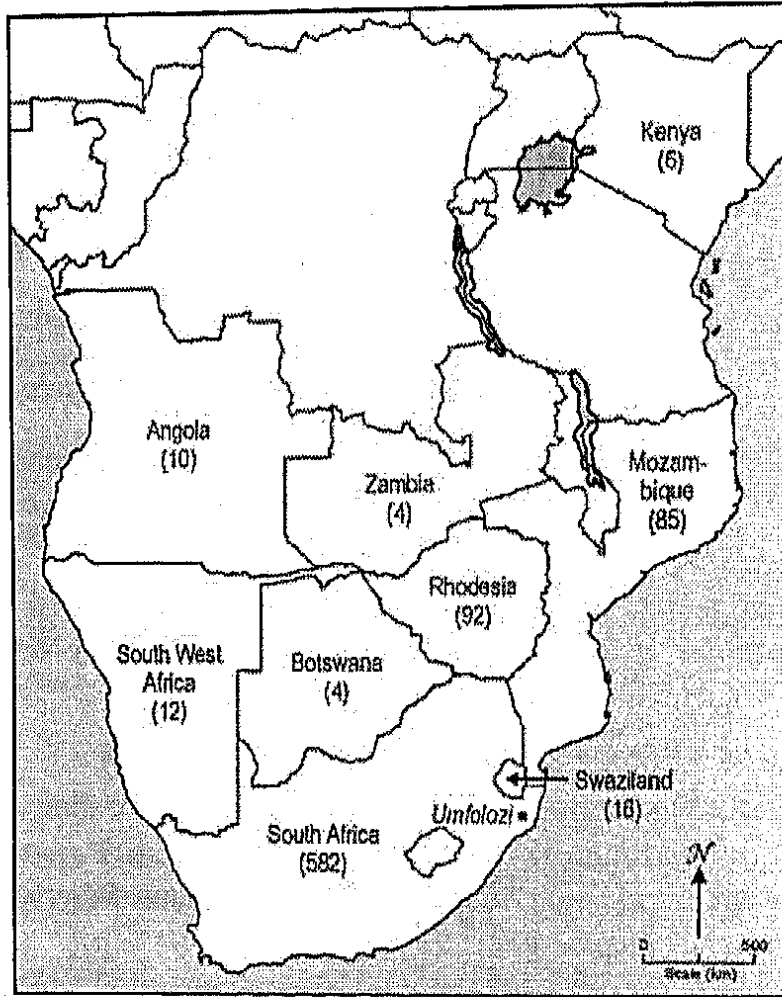
14. Zululand Game Conservator's Official Diaries, in Private Collection of Derek Potter, KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Services. Potter Diary Vol.12, 1944. Entries for 7 and 8 November 1944. My thanks to Derek Potter, Captain Harold Potter's grandson, for permission to view the diaries.
15. Potter Diary Vol.14, 1947. Entry for 6 September 1947.

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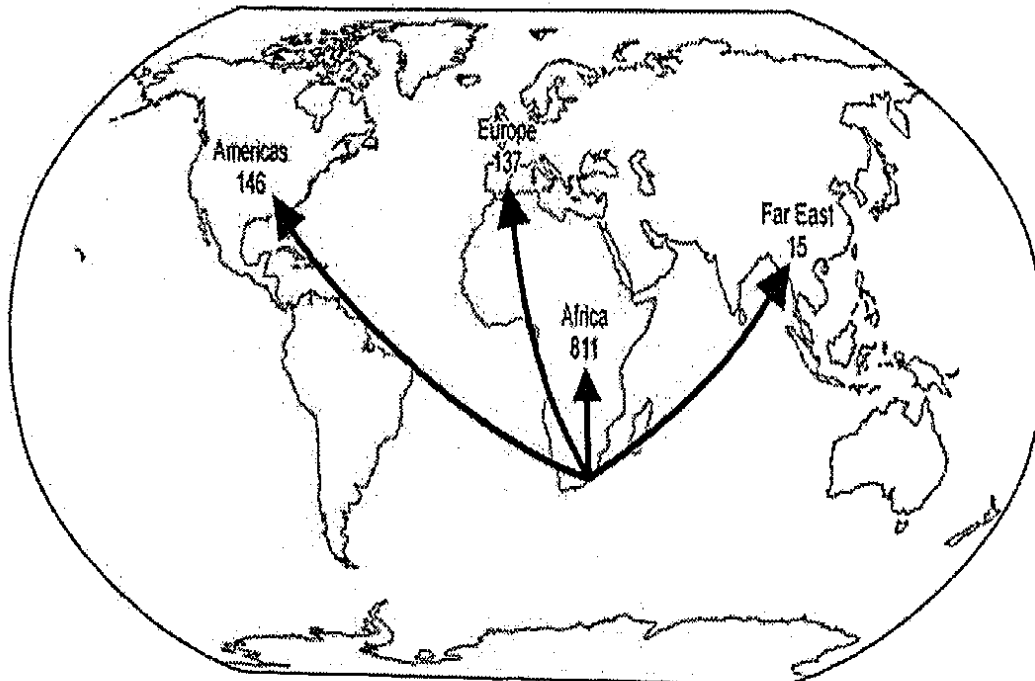
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Figure 1: Map of Rhino Relocations in Africa, January 1961 to March 1972



Source: Player, Ian. 1972. *The White Rhino Saga*. (New York: Stein & Day): 245-249.

Figure 2: Map of Rhino Relocations to Overseas Destinations, January 1961 to March 1972



Source: Player, Ian. 1972. *The White Rhino Saga*. (New York: Stein & Day): 245-249.

Table 1: Rhino Relocations to Overseas Destinations, January 1961 to March 1972

| COUNTRY | ZOO OR SAFARI PARK | TOTAL |
|------------|--------------------|-------|
| Burma (4) | Rangoon | 4 |
| Canada (6) | Calgary | 2 |
| | Edmonton | 2 |
| | Toronto | 2 |
| Cuba (2) | Havana Zoo | 2 |

| COUNTRY | ZOO OR SAFARI PARK | TOTAL |
|------------|--------------------|-------|
| India (3) | Mysore Zoo | 2 |
| | Calcutta Zoo | 1 |
| Japan (4) | Tokyo | 2 |
| | Sindai Zoo | 2 |
| Taiwan (4) | Taipei Zoo | 4 |

| Europe (Western) | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|----|
| Denmark (5) | Copenhagen | 5 |
| Europe (39) | Destination unknown | 39 |
| Holland (4) | Rotterdam | 2 |
| | Arnhem Zoo | 2 |
| Portugal (2) | Lisbon Zoo | 2 |
| Spain (6) | Majorca Zoo | 2 |
| | Barcelona Zoo | 2 |
| | Toledo Zoo | 2 |
| Sweden (2) | Kolmarden | 2 |
| Switzerland (4) | Rapperswil | 2 |
| | Zurich | 2 |
| United Kingdom (51) | Whipsnade | 22 |
| | Woburn Park | 6 |
| | Longleat | 6 |
| | Regents Park | 2 |
| | Chester | 2 |
| | Windsor Park | 7 |
| | Colchester | 6 |
| West Germany (7) | Bremen Zoo | 2 |
| | Hanover | 1 |
| | Leipzig | 2 |
| | Gelsenkirchen | 2 |

| Europe (Eastern) | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|----|
| Czechoslovakia (10) | Dvur Kralove | 10 |
| East Germany (7) | Berlin | 2 |
| | Dresden | 2 |
| | East Berlin Zoo | 3 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----|
| United States (138) | Bronx, New York | 2 |
| | Catskill, NY | 2 |
| | Chicago | 2 |
| | Detroit | 2 |
| | Fort Worth | 9 |
| | San Diego | 22 |
| | Albuquerque | 2 |
| | San Antonio | 2 |
| | Los Angeles | 2 |
| | Louisville | 2 |
| | Memphis | 4 |
| | Milwaukee | 3 |
| | New Orleans | 2 |
| Oklahoma City | 2 | |
| Omaha, Nebraska | 2 | |
| Phoenix, Arizona | 2 | |
| San Francisco | 2 | |
| Tampa, Florida | 2 | |
| World Animal Park, Dallas | 8 | |
| Gladys Porter Zoo, Brownsville | 2 | |
| Lion County Safari International | 40 | |
| Animal Exchange | 20 | |
| Fresno Zoo | 2 | |

Source: Player, Ian. 1972. *The White Rhino Saga*. (New York: Stein and Day):245-249.