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The politics of mourning in conservation conflicts: The (un)grievability of life and less-than-human geographies

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ABSTRACT

Accounts of conservation conflicts often reveal that people living around protected areas feel like their lives are less valued than animals' lives —they are confined to 'less-than-human geographies'. Recent literature on necropolitical ecology illustrates how such geographies were created and maintained by the state, which holds the power to decide over life and death in and around conservation areas. This paper integrates Judith Butler's politics of mourning into necropolitical ecology to interrogate which lives are considered grievable and which ones are not in conservation landscapes. It focuses on two vignettes of violent human-carnivore interactions in Queen Elizabeth National Park, western Uganda: the poisoning of allegedly 11 (but actually three) lions and the killing of a baby girl by a leopard. Both incidents happened in the park's condoned fishing villages, where historically marginalised Basongora pastoralists have been confined to live since the park's creation. We examine how the lost lives —of humans and animals— are publicly mourned and which lives are actually considered *lost*. We show how the politics of mourning in violent human-wildlife encounters goes beyond the (colonial-)state; rather, the unequal distribution of precarity is entrenched by a range of public authorities (e.g., (social) media, (I)NGOs, and politicians). This is, in part, because sovereignty in conservation territories has become transnationalised as post-colonial states allow international NGOs to carve out their own zones of influence. This coloniality of power influences human-carnivore relations and reifies racialised conservation spaces as less-than-human geographies.

1. Introduction

Literature on so-called human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) often focuses on contemporary direct (violent) contestations and wider nature-society relations. The relationship between humans and wildlife is temporally and spatially imbued with various colonial durabilities. Outside conservation actors seek to claim authority over wildlife and, in doing so, carve out control over territories and people (Cavanagh & Himmelfarb, 2015; MacKenzie, 1988; Neumann, 1998; Schauer, 2018). As others have argued, it is fruitful to reconceptualize negative HWC incidents as 'conservation conflicts' (Pooley et al., 2017) or 'human-human conflicts' (Redpath et al., 2013). These conflicts rarely exist between humans on the one hand and wildlife on the other. They are directly linked to the conservation regimes framing these interactions, including how nature-society relations are 'understood' and managed (Hill et al., 2017; Redpath et al., 2015). Additionally, some cases of wildlife killings can be understood as a form of resistance against certain conservation regimes (Holmes, 2007; Mariki et al., 2015).

The HWC framing has a depoliticising effect. It presents violent incidents between humans and animals as an unavoidable and 'natural' meeting of two actors with incompatible interests and aims (Hill et al., 2017; Margulies, 2019; Redpath et al., 2013). Conservation organisations present themselves as external to the problem they are describing, producing data on, developing expertise around, and subsequently intervening in (Pooley et al., 2017). However, a longer temporal perspective reveals how conservation regimes (since colonization) have reconfigured nature-society relations between humans and wildlife. Paradoxically, this contributes to many of the contemporary conflicts between humans and carnivores for which conservationists claim to offer solutions.

Colonization was inherently about controlling people and nature to establish territorial control; thus, coloniality's continuing influence on

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nature-society relations concerns control over landscapes (Cavanagh & Himmelfarb, 2015; MacKenzie, 1988; Neumann, 1998; Schauer, 2019; Sluyter & Duvall, 2016). Part of the colonial reconfiguration of nature involved detaching local people from their longstanding subsistence livelihoods and legitimate access to wildlife resources (Neumann, 1998). As Cavanagh and Himmelfarb (2015) have shown, people were dispossessed and subjected to conditions of Mbembe's (2003) 'the living dead'. Margulies (2019) argues that such conservation regimes transform spaces into 'less-than-human geographies' (Philo, 2017), areas where human lives are easily expendable. This explains why people living around protected areas often feel like their lives are valued less than the wildlife, a sentiment commonly raised in the critical conservation literature (Noga et al., 2018).

This article examines fatal human-carnivore encounters, when people kill wildlife or when wildlife kills people around protected areas —and how such incidents are linked to unequal power relations (Garland, 2008; Margulies, 2019; Neumann, 1998). The two cases presented illustrate how the politics of mourning in violent human-carnivore interactions is entrenched in enduring legacies of colonial conservation. Butler discusses how mourning is not a private emotional experience; it is inherently political: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). Therefore, Butler foregrounds *public* acts of mourning and how society considers some lives lost, while others remain ungrievable. We apply this approach to analyse how some conservation landscapes, have historically been constructed as 'less--than-human geographies', where the loss of human life in conservation conflicts is considered ungrievable in the public realm, while the deaths of 'more-than-animal' animals are publicly mourned.

This article empirically reviews two separate but interlinked violent incidents between humans and carnivores that occurred in the fishing villages within Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) (see Fig. 1), where historically marginalised Basongora pastoralists have been confined to live since the park's creation. On the 10th of April 2018, eleven lions were said to have been poisoned in Hamukungu village in northwest QENP. This event made national and international headlines. It later became clear that only three lions were killed; however, this error was never officially rectified and some conservation actors still

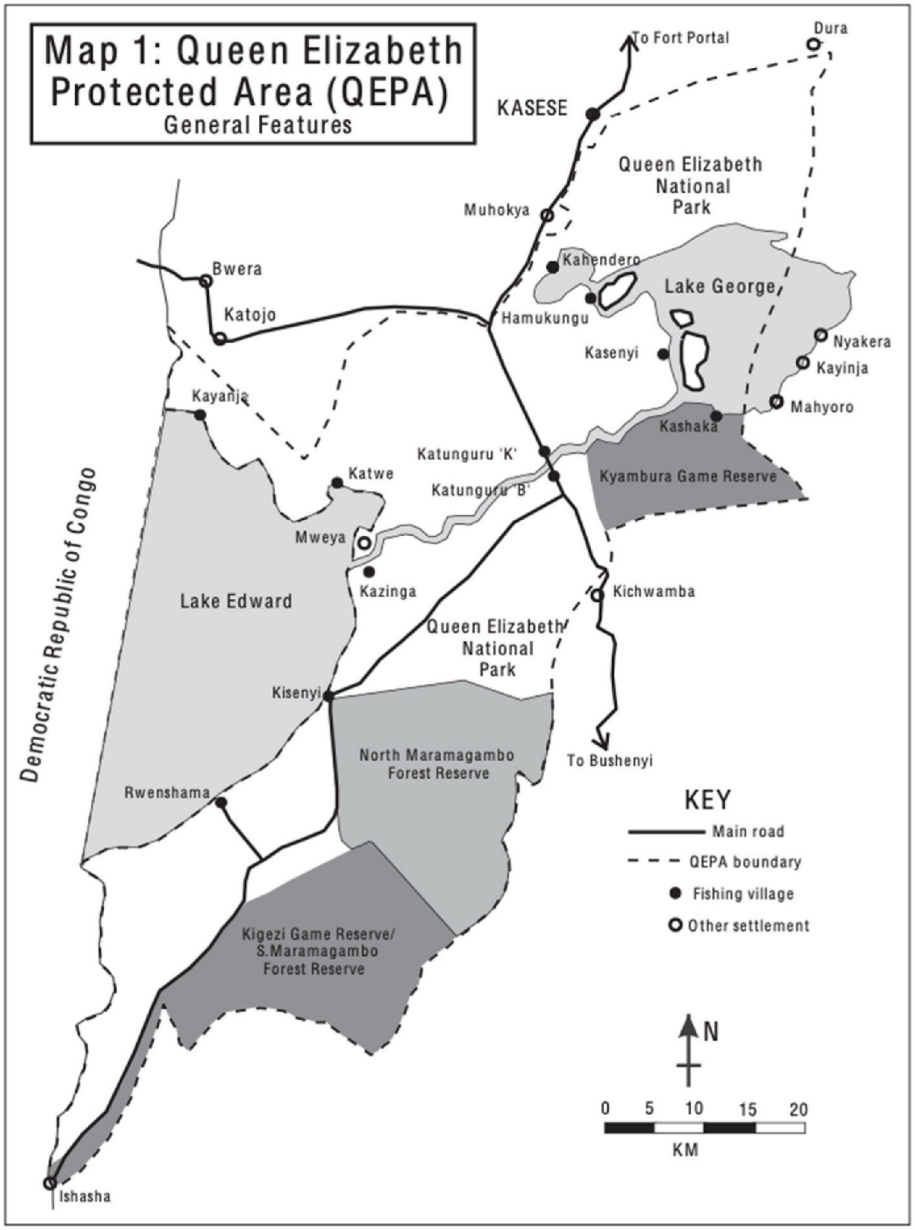


Fig. 1. Queen Elizabeth National Park, including Hamukungu and Kasenyi, 'fishing villages' within the park's borders (map from Blomley, 2000).

actively promote this misinformation. This proved a powerful crisis narrative and ensured funding and legitimacy for continued conservation and for new actors to enter the scene. The second, less-known incident happened exactly one year later when a leopard killed a two-year-old baby in the nearby village, Kasenyi. Conservation actors on the ground tried to spare the life of the leopard and accused the mother of being irresponsible. By pairing these incidents, we underscore how various colonial durabilities continue to guide the structures and actors of authority that make authoritative decisions vis-a-vis violent interactions between humans and carnivores: Who decides when an animal can be killed to protect human life? Who decides when an animal becomes a danger to humans, and when humans constitute a danger to animals? Finally, when violence does occur, and humans or animals have died, which lives are allowed to be mourned and grieved?

We build upon the necropolitical ecology framework introduced by Cavanagh and Himmelfarb (2015), which itself is built on Mbembe's necropolitics (2003) and Foucault's biopower (1978; 2003). However, we advance the necropolitical ecology framework to analyse the politics that unfold *after* fatal human-carnivore encounters have occurred: which lives are publicly mourned and which ones are not? To do so, we introduce Judith Butler's work (2004; 2020) on the politics of mourning. We consider how a range of different public authorities (beyond 'state' actors) contribute to the creation of historically shaped geographies where "specific lives cannot be apprehended as inured of lost if they are not first apprehended as living" (Butler, 2016: 1). This nuances the literature on necropolitical ecology, which generally places the sovereignty of decisions over life and death with the (colonial) state (Cavanagh & Himmelfarb, 2015; Margulies, 2019). We also heed Büscher's (2022) warning that the more-than-human turn's focus on human-non-human entanglements risks depoliticising the dehumanisation of people who are considered less-than-human.

This article is based on in-depth research carried out by the first author over a period of 17 months between 2018 and 2021. Interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were conducted in the Hamukungu and Kasenyi villages on the shores of Lake George in Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP), Uganda (see Fig. 1) These villages are part of the eleven officially authorized fishing villages located within the park's boundaries. During his stay in the villages, the first author had numerous informal interactions with people while grazing livestock, fishing, and attending community meetings, parties, funerals, and church services. We also collected archival data from the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the National Archives in London, and received permission to analyse Alexander Lee Risby's historical notes and transcribed interviews with 1950s-1980s-era QENP wardens. Ninety-two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted—82 with people living in the villages, seven with UWA representatives, and three with conservation NGO staff working in QENP (some were conducted by both authors). Throughout the research period, the first author also followed the public debate about human-carnivore conflicts in QENP by collecting (social) media posts and statements from politicians and other conservation actors. In addition, we conducted a systematic analysis of the Anglophone media coverage of human-wildlife conflict in Uganda (in Ugandan, British and American media outlets).

The next section outlines our theoretical framework and links existing necropolitical ecology literature to the politics of mourning. We then briefly review the colonial history of conservation in Queen Elizabeth National Park and how the Basongora pastoralists came to understand that their lives are worth less than the carnivores living in the area. Third, we discuss the two violent human-carnivore interactions in QENP before analysing these encounters and the colonial geographies they reproduce. We conclude with a call to attend to the politics of mourning that unfold in the aftermath of fatal human-animal interactions: which lives are considered lost by public authorities (e.g., state representatives, media, politicians and (I)NGOs), and how does this reify historically constructed less-than-human geographies.

1.1. Necropolitical ecology, politics of mourning and Less-than-Human Geographies

Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics extended Foucault's biopolitics —the power to 'make' live' and 'let die' (1991; 2003: 239–264)— into a more structural condition of life. Some people are relegated to specific spatial/territorial arrangements known as "death worlds […] forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe, 2003: 40). For Mbembe (2003), Foucault's biopolitics does not account for the continued racialised death in the governmentality of letting die. He argues that the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the authority and capacity to decide "who may live, and who must die" (Mbembe, 2003: 11). To deploy this ultimate form of power requires a high degree of recognised authority embedded in larger structured power relations (shaped by colonialism, law, unequal economic relations, and other created dependencies). These structurally constructed inequities systematically and tactically reduce people to nothing, so they may be more easily killed (Mbembe, 2003).

Necropolitics is structured by racism: 'savage life' occupies a "third zone between subjecthood and objecthood" (Mbembe, 2003: 24, 26) that can be subjected to various forms of civilising violence when deciding "what must live and what must die". Mbembe emphasises how necropolitics is spatially executed —designated territories become places of death (e.g., the plantation and the slave ship). Cavanagh and Himmelfarb (2015) build on Mbembe, introducing *necropolitical ecology* to understand how communities were disenfranchised by colonial necropolitics. They discuss how conditions of violence, taxation, and reengineering of agrarian livelihoods produced a surplus to be reinvested in the colonial process. In other words, these communities were not physically stripped of their lives but were subjected to less-than-human conditions; with nothing but their physical bodies, they were relegated to a perpetual state of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). Their physical bodies were meant to serve the colonial machine. The colonial state introduced conservation to maintain this necropower and the capital it provided. Conservation closed off the commons, limiting communities' resource access and forcing them into work in capitalist agriculture. As such, for Cavanagh and Himmelfarm, the purpose of necropolitical ecologic projects was "to override and reconfigure the socio-environmental relations that enable largely nonfinancial, non-capitalist livelihoods, or, to paraphrase Marx (1867: 501) to facilitate the process of divorcing the producer from the subsistence-based means of production" (2015: 60).

Margulies (2019) subsequently used a necropolitical lens to analyse human-wildlife interactions and determine which (non-)human life is classified as expendable by the state and which life is not. He analysed how the Indian state reclassifies tigers that sometimes roam beyond the boundaries of protected areas (and into plantations) as "man-eaters". This transforms a protected and endangered animal into a 'killable' animal to avoid the potential loss of human lives. He also discusses how certain minorities are structurally confined to live and work near the plantation/protected area spaces, where they are at perpetual risk of violent interactions with tigers (Margulies, 2019, p. 158). Margulies describes how decades of colonialism and conservation dispossession have created "less-than-human geographies." Philo (2017) positions this as an important counterweight to the burgeoning academic interest in more-than-human geographies, which instead

> alert[s us] to what diminishes the human, cribs and confines it, curtails or destroys its capacities, silencing its affective grip, banishing its involvements: not what renders it lively, but what cuts away at that life, to the point of, including and maybe beyond death. It is to ask instead about what subtracts from the human in the picture, what disenchants, repels, repulses, what takes away, chips away, physically and psychologically, to leave the rags-and-bones

(and quite likely broken hearts, minds, souls, spirits) of 'bare life' (after Agamben, 1998; Philo, 2017: 258).

Thus far, work on necropolitical ecology has convincingly shown how the colonial state, and later the post-colonial state, helped create racialised less-than-human geographies. While states are often obligated by law to put down 'problem animals' (animals that are a threat to people), many conservation authorities, including international NGOs (and their donors), consider carnivores to be of high value and prefer other solutions, including animal relocation or the removal of humans from the area (Margulies, 2018). However, these alternative solutions generally have little effect (Fontúrbel & Simonetti, 2011). Necropolitical ecology analyses the politics of who can be killed, who is 'disposable' —the ultimate act of sovereignty in designated conservation spaces. From this perspective, repeated wildlife killings are not only a form of resistance against conservation regimes (Mariki et al., 2015) but an effort to reclaim sovereignty.

Necropolitical ecology analysis has generally focused on the role of the (colonial) state in the creation and reification of less-than-human geographies. However, we argue that a range of other public authorities also hold the power to entrench precarity within these geographies. In the aftermath of violent human-carnivore interactions in QENP, some lost lives are considered grievable and publicly mourned, while others are not. To understand these underlying processes, we bridge Judith Butler's work with critical conservation literature (e.g., Masse, 2020). We consider how the necropolitics of nature-society relations are reflected in public authorities' (e.g., media, politicians, NGOs) practices of mourning.

Rather than asking which lives are disposable, which are not, and who has the authority to make such determinations, Judith Butler's concept of 'precarious life' (2004) sparks a related question: which lost lives are mourned and which ones are not. Here, sovereignty resides beyond the state, in the politics of distinction over the grievability of life. Butler's (2004) main concern is the differentiation between human lives, and she draws on the less-than-human conditions of life in Gaza and Guantanamo Bay. However, the same question can be posed about how sovereignty evolves when human lives are pitted against animals. Political and public constructs and frames determine which lives are worth living, and which ones are not. Before a life can be lost, it must be considered as a life in the first place (Butler, 2004).

As such, the politics of mourning not only occurs in the aftermath of violence but also, in Butler's words, prepares for war. It reifies and, to a certain extent, naturalises less-than-human geographies. Moreover, "this is also why mourning can be a form of protest (…) when losses are not yet publicly acknowledged and mourned" (2020: 74). Butler argues that the demand for forensic evidence is often an important aspect of such protests to "establish the story of the death and who is accountable. The failure of accounting for violent death makes it impossible to grieve" (2020: 74). Both aspects are important for understanding how the lives and livelihoods of Basangora pastoralists in QENP are publicly constructed as "lives not considered grievable (those treated as if they can be neither lost nor mourned)" (2020: 11). This structurally limits their political power to demand for equality, basic social services, and to contest the "forms of power that establish the unequal worth of lives by establishing their unequal grievability" (2020: 17). Communities living in the fishing enclaves understand that their way of life (and their lives) are not safeguarded from attacks by carnivores, nor by the state or non-state conservation authorities (e.g., international and national NGOs).

The subjugation of people in the fishing villages—through the colonial and post-colonial periods, and by conservation and other public authorities—is structured by ongoing racism and coloniality. Humans living in these restricted enclaves understand that their lives are valued below those of the animals. By expressing this, they critique the subjugation of their lives and livelihoods in these historically created less-than-human geographies.

We are not the first to introduce Butler into critical conservation literature. For instance, Massé's (2020) work on conservation law enforcement analysed how park guards act as 'petty sovereigns' (Butler, 2004), deciding over life and death during anti-poaching patrols. However, this article extends the focus beyond state officials; it examines how a range of different public authorities exercise such sovereignty. This includes external NGOs and conservation actors who may also become petty sovereigns. For example, forms of "white-authorized green violence" (Marijnen & Verweijen, 2016)—that is, when white conservation experts direct 'green violence' (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016Ramutsindela and Büscher, 2016)—underscore how necropolitics occurs in and reinforces the existence of racialised spaces (Mbembe, 2003).

This article also moves beyond the decision point over life and death—it considers how deaths are subsequently mourned to further reify conservation spaces as racialised and 'less-than-human geographies" (Margulies, 2018; Philo, 2017). As Butler argues, we must account for how lives are framed within wider society. A frame "does not simply exhibit a reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what counts as a reality" (Butler, 2016: xiii) and certain frames "seek to institute an interdiction on mourning, there is no destruction, and there is no loss" (Butler, 2016: xiii). Therefore, to unravel the politics of mourning, we must focus on media coverage (both traditional and social media) as a reflection of the broader public debate promulgated by politicians and civil society.

Wildlife killings are often explained as poaching or as resistance against conservation regimes (Holmes, 2007; Mariki et al., 2015; Neumann, 1998). Reprisal killings of animals often garner more attention in the media and public discourse than when wildlife kills people (Garland, 2008; Margulies, 2019). Additionally, the media coverage when a person is killed often omits the victims' names and even blames the victims (Conover, 2008; Garland, 2008). Garland (2008) cites the example of a baby who was killed by a chimpanzee in Gombe, Jane Goodall's famous research site. According to Tanzanian law, the chimpanzee should have been killed, as it was a proven danger to humans. However, Goodall leveraged her international popularity and power as a petty sovereign by lobbying the president not to kill the chimpanzee. The animal continued to live, while the mother of the baby was blamed for being irresponsible:

> The vulnerability of African people in the face of the world's fascination with African wildlife: a murderous chimpanzee could be accorded empathy and forgiveness, while a bereaved and traumatized African woman was not. The fact that the boy's death received virtually no coverage in the Western media is hardly surprising. After all, African children die every day, and who wants to write a story that will bring negative attention to Jane Goodall (Garland, 2008, p. 55).

Similar dynamics unfolded in QENP after a leopard killed a baby girl.

In sum, to analyse violent human-carnivore interactions, we focus on two sets of interlinked questions. First, we ask who has the authority to decide which life needs protection, and which ones are neglected or put in danger; what is the legal framework in these situations and how does it work *in practice*; who holds actual authority in key moments of life and death? Secondly, we consider what happens after the violent interaction; which lives are acknowledged as lost and are publicly mourned, and by whom? Which lives are forgotten and not deemed worthy of mourning? How is the precarity of living in and around protected areas represented by conservation authorities, politicians, state agents, the media, and society at large? Specifically, how does society more broadly understand human-carnivore interactions; how are people drawn into the spectacle of violence through (social) media and other outlets to express sympathies and/or outrage? By answering these two sets of questions this paper critically examines how the coloniality and necropolitics of conservation reduce some people to less-than-humans, by rendering life in and around protected areas even more precarious.

The following historical section discusses the production of QENP's

enclaves as less-than-human geographies produced by the colonial, and later the post-colonial, state. We then discuss the various practices, contestations and policies that further reify these geographies.

1.2. The fishing villages and human-carnivore relations in QENP: a long durée perspective

This section briefly reviews how human-carnivore relations have evolved from the pre-colonial period, and how colonization fundamentally rewired these relations in and around Queen Elizabeth National Park. QENP was established as a national park in 1952. Notably, it includes eleven enclaves (so-called fishing villages[1]) within its borders, making it a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve (Blomley, 2000). We review how Basongora pastoralists became spatially confined to these fishing enclaves and were forced to alter their livelihoods and territorial presence. Secondly, we discuss how British authorities dealt with problem animals and how the loss of human and animal lives has been mourned and politicised over time. This historical account contextualises the Basongora's belief that their lives are valued less than the area's carnivores and situates the fishing villages as less-than-human geographies.

In the pre-colonial period, the area around Lakes Edward and George was part of a booming regional economic, cultural, and political hub that included fishing, salt mining, and pastoral areas (Good, 1972; Marijnen, 2022). The Basongora presence in this area is estimated to go back at least 500 years, based on the Euphorbia trees they introduced to build kraals to protect their cattle from carnivores (Risby, 2002). 'Explorers' like Lugard and H.M Stanley noted that the area included the Basongora's ancestral grazing lands (Blomley, 2000). However, both reported that a large part of the land had been depopulated by epidemics and raids by the Bunyoro and Buganda kingdoms as early as 1870 (Ephraim, 2006). The Basongora contest this narrative, attributing the depopulation of their ancestral lands to forced displacements and the intentional massacre of their cattle by the British in an effort to control sleeping sickness (Kashagama, 2016).

In the 1900s, the British protectorate government established colonial rule in Uganda through agreements with different kingdoms, including Toro (whose subjects included the Basongora). The British began removing people and livestock from Lake George and Edward in 1911 and 1913, respectively, to establish sleeping sickness-restricted areas (Risby, 2002). These areas were subsequently gazetted and demarcated as Lake George and Edward Game Reserves in 1925 and 1930, respectively, by the Uganda Game Department. This Department was created in 1925 to control game (especially elephants), manage European hunters, and criminalise indigenous hunting methods (Uganda Game Department, 1925). Thus, the Basongora were never fully allowed to return to their land, even after sleeping sickness was resolved (Ephraim, 2006).

This history of war, epidemics, and displacement greatly impacted the social-economic position of the Basongora and other ethnic groups were confined to the remaining villages of Hamukungu, Kazinga, Kasenyi, Kahendero, and the salt mines in Katwe. Their activities were restricted to fishing and salt mining—agricultural cultivation and livestock rearing were restricted. While some turned to fishing, many migrated to Belgian Congo, Uganda's Ankole region, and other parts of Uganda (Ephraim, 2006).

In the 1940s, the British started making plans to combine the Lake George and Edward Game Reserves into a single protected area, the QENP. The protectorate government formally consulted the *Omukma* (king) of Toro and his council about the national park and its size, resulting in a Rukurato (king's council) vote of 48 against and 13 for the creation of the park (Kamurasi-Omukama of Toro, 1952). The British did not take the Omukama's opposition seriously, and the protectorate government continued with the park because "it felt that in the long run, their creation would benefit the people of Toro and Uganda" (District Commissioner Toro, 1952, para. 1). The District Commissioner tried to assuage the Toro king in a letter:

> The protectorate government hopes that the Toro Local Government will now accept the position and cooperate over the progress of the park and although it may seem to you that your government has been overruled, the protectorate government wishes to emphasise that the decision to create the park was not taken lightly and that it was done because the government believes that the park is in the best interests of the Batoro (District Commissioner Toro, 1952, para. 5).

He explained that some of the council's concerns—like the loss of arable land to the park—had been addressed by the Attorney General, Mr. Dreshfield, who determined that most of the land was not good for cultivation. The British colonial government's blatant override of Toro sovereignty through claims to know the Batoro's interests is reflected in contemporary conservation policies and practices in QENP and contributes to conservation conflicts (Akampurira, 2023).

The colonial authorities also intervened in the relationship between people and animals. Initially, protectorate policy permitted killing so-called problem animals (Uganda Game Department reports, 1923–1961); however, only British park managers had the authority to determine which problem animals could be killed. When Ugandans killed livestock predators they were reprimanded, sometimes even arrested, and blamed for not taking good care of their livestock, as illustrated in a report by a British warden,

> Unfortunately, there are not a big number of lions left in this district outside Busongora and Semuliki valleys; and elsewhere the inhabitants are unwilling to accept the lion as a fine insurance against pigs and prefer it dead than alive. Stock losses are frequently due to carelessness, cattle being forgotten and left out at night (Uganda Game Department, 1934).

Five years later, another report describes lions as a nuisance and advocates for killing them,

> The trouble seems to have started early in the year (or at the end of 1937) when a pair of lions with cubs turned [to] livestock predation. When the parents were killed, the cubs, by then full-grown and evidently accompanied by some others, carried on the menace. Special efforts have been made to escalate these murderous brutes, and 8 have been killed by the game guard in the vicinity of Lweshamire (Uganda Game Department, 1939).

Between 1925 and 1950, over 100 carnivores were poisoned with arsenic and strychnine, and half as many were lethally shot by the British protectorate and licensed white hunters (Uganda Game Department reports, 1923–1961). The wildlife ordinances of 1926 and 1952 stipulated that the authority to designate a 'problem animal' and determine whether it should be killed remained firmly with white wildlife managers (Uganda, 1952; Uganda Protectorate, 1926).

After the national park was officially designated in 1954, the stance on exterminating 'problem' wildlife changed (Uganda, 1952). The protectorate's agricultural and administrative departments and people living around the park advocated for tougher ways to deal with 'problem animals,' especially carnivores and elephants. Conservation authorities remained hesitant to kill animals, so the park management blamed local people for not caring for their livestock and cultivating inside or near the park. A letter written to the regional administrators by the Uganda National Parks (UNP) director confirmed that UNP would take no responsibility for anyone, nor their property, who enters or lives in the 'fishing villages' within the park (Director, UNP, 1957, para. 1).

During this era of colonialism, Basongora pastoralists and other communities in the 'fishing villages' began to feel like their lives were

[1] They include Hamukungu, Kasenyi, Katunguru-B, Katwe-Kabatoro, Kahendero, Kasenyi, Katunguru-K (Kasese District), Kayanja, Kazinga, and Rwenshama and Kashaka

less valued than those of the animals. They were forced to change their livelihoods and were not protected from animals. According to the Basongora we spoke with, contemporary conservation authorities and broader public opinion in Uganda continue to prioritise the lives of animals, effectively transforming human settlements in the park into 'less-than-human geographies'.

1.3. Post-independence – shifting conservation authorities?

In the early 1990s, the World Bank funded and supported a restructuring of the Uganda National Parks and Game Department, leading to the creation of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). A new wildlife law, the Uganda Wildlife Act 1996 (currently the Uganda Wildlife Act, 2019), was enacted and provided for the management of problem wildlife inside and outside the protected areas. It gave the Executive Director of UWA the power to declare 'vermin' and 'problem animals' and to dictate how to deal with such animals in an ecologically acceptable manner. According to the act, "wildlife is designated 'vermin' (rodents, bush pigs and vervet monkeys) and can be killed when they become a problem to people outside the protected area" (RoU, 2019: 59). However, for other species that are not designated vermin (e.g., carnivores), the act compels individuals whose crops, property, livestock, or life is negatively impacted to make a report to a park official:

> The officer in return, will make an assessment of the threat, make a report and also take the necessary steps to minimise the damage. However, the officer is also compelled by the law that in deciding what action shall be taken to minimise damage to property or life caused by a wild animal, he should carefully consider the status of the species and if he or she decides to kill, or attempts to kill the animal, he or she shall do so as a last resort and if he or she has reasonable ground to believe that this course of action will not endanger the survival of the species (RoU, 2019: 59–60).

These protections do not apply to the communities who live within the park because the law defines a 'problem animal' as "any wild animal that poses a threat to human life or property outside protected areas" (RoU, 2019: 11). Since the creation of UWA, other 'mitigation strategies' have been privileged over the killing of problem animals. These include support for more reinforced kraals, revenue sharing, sensitisation, monitoring carnivore movement, solar lighting in pastoralist villages, and sending UWA rangers to protect people's property (UWA, 2011). In addition, UWA works closely with numerous conservation NGOs that help to mediate carnivore and human relations and have carved out spaces of authority from which to influence human–carnivore relations.

1.4. Non-state conservation authorities

The Uganda Carnivore Program (UCP) is an NGO working with Uganda's large carnivores: lions, leopards, and hyenas. UCP primarily focuses on the northern sector of QENP and works closely with UWA. In addition to monitoring and research, UCP aims to reduce tensions between people and carnivores by "educating communities" on how to best protect their livestock from carnivores (Uganda Carnivore Program, 2015). It also runs a compassion program meant to console people who have lost livestock to carnivores by offsetting their losses. This is financed by the proceeds from an experiential tourism project run by UCP and UWA (tourists pay extra to actively monitor carnivores using locator devices).

UCP has been managed by its founder, a European, since the 1990s. It radio-collars lions, leopards, and hyenas to better monitor their health and movement into human communities, where they can be exposed to hazards like poisoning. According to UCP, between 2006 and 2012, 70% of carnivore deaths in the northern sector were directly caused by humans. Ninety-six carnivores were poisoned in less than six years (Uganda Carnivore Program, n.d). UCP positions itself as an authority supporting carnivore conservation and mitigating people-carnivore conflicts. However, it has a strained relationship with many pastoralists despite compensating people who lose cattle to carnivores. Focus group discussions revealed that people perceived UCP as a foreign enterprise trying to control their way of life by diminishing their livestock, with the objective of removing them from the national park (Hamukungu, March 2019). Many people in Hamukungu and Kasenyi believed that the lions causing problems had been introduced into QENP by UCP. The myth of introduced lions was also repeated by some UWA staff:

> Domesticated lions from South Africa were introduced, and these ones never want to leave people's homes because they can't hunt and rely on livestock which is an easier kill for them. We wonder why we cannot be like other parks like Lake Mburo NP, where cattle keepers live peacefully with wildlife. As a matter of fact, we were also like this before they introduced lions. The wild lions of Queen Elizabeth NP never came into homes, they feared people, but UCP and UWA brought us domesticated lions to increase tourism but also push us out of the boundaries of our ancestral land (Interview pastoralist, Hamukungu, May 2019)

Numerous people in Kasenyi and Hamukungu believe that UCP is solely responsible for the increase in carnivore-human conflict between 2005 and 2019. They say that there were fewer cases of carnivores killing livestock before UCP. Though they accept that the area always had lions, the lions they grew up with were supposedly not as aggressive towards livestock. According to an elder,

> The introduced lions were brought to plunder our stocks and make our lives miserable to the extent that we are forced to emigrate from our ancestral lands just like the British did with rinderpest and sleeping sickness (Hamukungu, March 2019),

These narratives reveal the importance of adopting a longue durée perspective when analysing how colonial conservation practices influence human-carnivore relations. Contemporary conservation actors and practices are experienced as a continuation of the longstanding political project to remove the Basongora from their ancestral lands by threatening their livelihoods and effectuating 'less-than-human geographies'. As Stoler, (2016) powerfully argues, "colonial pasts, the narratives recounted about them, the unspoken distinctions they continue to 'cue,' the affective charges they reactivate, and the implicit 'lessons' they are mobilised to impart are sometimes so ineffably threaded through the fabric of contemporary life forms they seem indiscernible as distinct effects, as if everywhere and nowhere at all" (2016: 5).

Although current wildlife laws specifically outline how problem animals should be handled, most recommendations are either impractical or contradictory on the ground. For example, the law allows people to kill a wild animal to defend their communities or property outside the protected area. However, Hamukungu and Kasenyi exist inside QENP, meaning residents cannot legally kill wild animals, even in self-defence. By law, these villages are wildlife sanctuaries that allow people to coexist with wildlife (UWA, 2011). Within these sanctuaries, people are stripped of the right to defend themselves from wildlife, grow crops, and look after cattle. These spaces become less-than-human geographies, where people are made vulnerable and exposed to death through necropolitical conservation practices (Margulies, 2019; Mbembé, 2003; Philo, 2017).

Additionally, the Basongora who returned from DRC in 2006 to resettle within and around QENP have been embroiled in violent ethnic clashes with other groups that settled in their former ancestral homes (KRC, 2012). The Basongora, who occupied almost 90% of the QENP landscape in precolonial times, now make up only 1% of the population. They feel like other groups have displaced, dispossessed, and marginalised them (Reuss & Titeca, 2017, p. 2). We now explore how this plays out in practice by analysing two incidents of violent human-carnivore interactions and how the loss of life was subsequently mourned and publicly grieved.

2. Two vignettes of violent human-carnivore interactions

2.1. The poisoned lions

In the days following April 10, 2018, national and international media reported that eleven lions had been poisoned in Hamukungu village in QENP (New Vision Reporter, 2018). According to an official UWA report, three lionesses and eight cubs were poisoned by pastoralists at Hamukungu in retaliation for lions killing livestock. It is suspected that Carbofuran, a pesticide, was laced into a livestock carcass; when the lions returned to complete their meal, they were poisoned (Interview, UWA staff June 2018). In the aftermath of the poisoning, the entire Basongora community of Hamukungu was condemned for the act. National conservation organisations and tourism companies fiercely condemned the poisoning and expressed concerns about its impact on the tourism business. Others called for tough collective penalties for all the pastoralists, including their expulsion from the national park. As one official from the Uganda Tourism Association stated,

> This affects the tourism sector very much because lions are among the topmost animals that attract tourists to QENP. The government should actually use force to get the people out of the park or not allow them to graze their animals in the park (Byaruhanga, 2018)

An MP representing Kasese Municipality (which covers part of QENP) stated in parliament,

> Eleven lions were poisoned in Queen Elizabeth National Park. We are left with only 19; this is going to affect our tourism and hinder our competitiveness. The communities bringing domestic animals in the protected areas should be dealt with (Parliament of Uganda, 2018, April 12)

For their part, Basongora pastoralists at Hamukungu expressed disappointment and anger about this narrative. They often lose livestock to lions but never receive public sympathy for their losses (Hamukungu, June 2018). They do not deny that the poisoning happened in their village; however, they do contest who killed the lions and how authorities presented the incident to bolster their own power and expand control over Basongora livelihoods and lives. As one leader explained,

> It is very true that lions were killed here in Hamukungu. What we contest is the number of lions killed and who killed them. UWA says 11 lions were killed and that pastoralists from Hamukungu killed them. We were the first to see the dead lions, but we didn't see 11 carcasses. We honestly don't know why UWA and UCP claim 11 lions were killed. In addition, they failed to admit to the public that they did not recover 11 carcasses. We asked them to allow a member of the village to join the post-mortems, but they refused. Even to this date, no post-mortem has been released, and no pictorial evidence of the 11 lions. A week after those lions were killed, we found a lioness with about four cubs just behind the school. We called UWA and UCP, and we believe those lions are part of the 11 they say we killed. However, have you seen UWA or UCP mention to the public or media that lions were found? (FGD Hamukungu, June 2018)

According to a UWA official, "The report of dead lions was based on the number in that particular family, which was 11 and since the rest could not be found, it was assumed all may have been killed" (Interview, June 2018). The Basongora's demand for UWA to publicly release the forensic evidence from the carcasses is an important aspect of the politics of mourning. As Butler argued, "forensic evidence will establish the story of the death and who is accountable. The failure of accounting for violent death makes it impossible to grieve" (2020: 74). The warden admitted that it was hard for UWA to retract their statement, as this would make the organisation seem incompetent, especially since they were still trying to locate the rest of the family. In October 2019, more than a year after the incident, UCP told an international journalist that only three lions had been killed in April 2018 (Bastmeijer, 2019). UCP wrote to the executive director of UWA, informing him that the rest of the family had been located. Still, UCP felt that it was UWA's responsibility to correct the mistake (UCP staff Interview, July 2021).

Another warden admitted, "yes, we know the media had overrated the issue" (Interview May 2021) before referring us to the UWA communication manager, who never responded to our inquiries. When asked if UWA has a duty to the pastoralists, the nation, and the international community to set the record straight, the warden added, "I think UWA will do it at the appropriate time" (interview, May 2021). During focus group discussions in Hamukungu in May 2021, people reiterated what they had said in 2018 and 2019. By continuing to facilitate a public narrative that eleven lions had been killed, UCP and UWA were trying to villainise the community in the hopes that mounting political and social pressure would force them out of the national park:

> They can't tell us the truth; they want to keep us in fear and guilty so that they can take advantage of us. But their real goal is to displace us from here (Hamukungu, May 2021).

During our visit to Hamukungu in May and June 2021, we learned that carnivore attacks on livestock had decreased. People told us that the problem lions had been translocated to another part of the park,

> UCP shifted its domesticated lions to other parts of the park, which is why the attacks on our livestock have reduced in the past two years. However, indigenous lions are still around, [we] still hear them roar (Focus group discussion, Hamukungu village, May 2021).

Everyone seemed to agree with this statement, nodding their heads in acceptance. A UWA warden dismissed these narratives as conspiracy theories, instead attributing the decrease to regular monitoring by UWA rangers and UCP and the lions' natural movement (interview, June 2021). However, UCP confirmed that some lions had indeed been translocated from Hamukungu to other areas in the park (Interview, July 2021).

As devastating as it is, the death of lions has been used to further the necropolitical subjugation of Hamukungu pastoralists and deny their rights to livelihood and presence in the park. In refusing to make a public statement on the exact number of lions killed in April 2018, UWA and UCP are seen to be either inadvertently or intentionally perpetuating the demonisation of Hamukungu. Their (in)action may be an effort to maintain support for lion conservation through "blackwashing … the inflation of claims and employment of scare tactics to win public support for conservation and environment causes" (Koh et al., 2010, p. 68). After the lions were poisoned, the NGO-Ecological Trends Alliance received a €90,000 grant from the IUCN Save our Species fund for the project, "Lion queens and kings with the aim of empowering local pastoralists as custodians against lion persecution in Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda."[2] The NGO continues to cite the eleven poisoned lions as motivation for their presence. The Uganda Conservation Fund (UCF) also carved out space and influence in carnivore conservation in the wake of the 2018 lion poisoning. UCF had worked in QENP for more than a decade, mainly focusing on law enforcement and human-elephant conflicts. However, after 2018, it also began collaring carnivores in previously neglected areas of the park due to the state of 'crisis' (interview with UCF board member, July 2021). The exact number of lions killed remains officially unconfirmed, but this has not stopped conservation NGOs from asserting their financial and political influence to 'rescue' carnivore conservation in QENP.

Meanwhile, Basongora pastoralists remained insignificant to politicians, tourism operators, UWA and UCP. There are still public calls to remove them from the park; less media and political attention is given to the livestock killed by carnivores, which communities see as a direct attack on their own lives. This lack of public mourning for the lives of the

[2] For more on Ecological Trends Alliance see http://www.ecotrendsalliance.org/Lion%20Queens%20and%20Kings.htm.

people inside the park becomes even more apparent in the next vignette, in which a carnivore attacks and kills humans in the fishing villages.

2.2. The leopard and the girl

The second incident occurred in the neighbouring Kasenyi fishing village. Numerous eyewitnesses saw a leopard around 2 p.m. on the 8th of April. They immediately called the rangers in Kasenyi, who called their superiors at Katunguru (the park headquarters) to send a team to remove the leopard from the village. Unfortunately, the response was slow, and the team —two UCP staff and two UWA rangers— only arrived after 5 p.m. They planned to chase the leopard out of the village into the park or to dart it with a tranquillizer and carry it away. Yet, as it got darker, the team struggled to corner the leopard, and the animal actually ran further into the village. The leopard was likely scared and overwhelmed by the crowd of frantic people chasing after it. According to the village chairman, this scared the animal and made it more aggressive (a conclusion shared by UCP).

As the leopard fled from the crowd, it attacked two chickens, a goat, and tragically, two-year-old baby Getrude it found lying in a house while the mother was outside cooking.[3] At the funeral, the village chairman added,

> When the leopard entered the house it stumbled over a few things, baby Getrude started crying, and it's likely to have moved towards the sound of the baby and latched onto the baby killing her instantly. It then rushed out as more people got closer to the house. The moment the UWA and UCP team realized that the baby was dead, they jumped into their Land Cruiser vehicle and drove away from the village leaving the leopard at large and a dead baby girl. Can you imagine all along we had begged UCP to allow the rangers to shoot the leopard as it got darker? Unfortunately, they were more interested in saving the leopard at the cost of human lives and indeed it happened as we predicted. In the end, the police were forced to shoot the leopard after we confronted them. This clearly shows you how much UWA takes our lives for granted and they want us out of our ancestral home by any means possible.[4]

Interestingly, people in the village believed the UCP representative, a non-state conservation agent, held the authority to decide between life and death for the leopard, even though armed UWA park rangers were also present and officially represented the state. Non-state actors are regarded as petty sovereigns in the decision over life and death, especially in conservation territories. Where authority has been *trans*-nationalised, outside actors can act like (or at least are perceived to act) a "state within a state" (Marijnen, 2018). Like the colonial conservationists who blamed carnivore attacks on supposedly careless herders, a UCP official blamed Getrude's mother for her death, stressing that she should have been arrested for negligence for leaving her baby unattended (UCP staff Interview, July 2021). As Garland (2008) recounts, the mother of a child killed by a chimpanzee in Tanzania was also blamed and reprimanded.

In Kasenyi, many people reiterated, "We asked UCP to allow the rangers to kill the leopard. If only UCP had allowed the leopard to be killed". For the people in Kasenyi, only UCP can sanction the killing of a leopard; many view carnivores in QENP as synonymous with UCP, calling them "John's lions, John's leopards (with John being a staffer at UCP)".[5] In contrast, other species like hippos and crocodiles that attack more people than carnivores are never said to belong to UCP —they are "UWA's hippos, UWA's crocodiles". However, UWA insists that the partnership with UCP in carnivore conservation is collaborative. One warden explained,

> UCP doesn't make decisions involving carnivores without consultation with UWA, and the reason UCP went with rangers to Kasenyi in response to the problem leopard was because the leopard had a collar, and their role is technical; they were needed for monitoring and translocating the leopard (Interview UWA staff, June 2021).

UWA's relationship with UCP is mutually beneficial. UCP is allowed to carve out a space to operate and, in return, gives much-needed support, including monitoring carnivores, managing experiential carnivore tourism, and operating the compassion program. However, the people living in the fishing villages see UCP as yet another authority (including UWA) whose carnivore conservation activities add to the subjugation of their livelihoods. Moreover, the UWA-UCP team's rush to disappear from the scene when the baby was killed appears not to be an isolated incident. As a villager explained,

> UWA responds very quickly when an animal is hurt or killed or a poacher is sighted. But let wildlife attack a person or livestock. It is hard for UWA to show up and empathise with us; if they do, it will be a ranger but none of the wardens (Interview respondent, May 2019).

This sentiment was shared by many respondents. Furthermore, no representatives from UWA, UCP, the parliament, or the central government were present at the baby's funeral,[6] and the incident did not make international headlines. Two local media outlets reported on the incident but gave minimal and inaccurate details. Furthermore, both linked it to the "11 lions" that were killed the previous year. [7] In contrast, when the lions were killed in Hamukungu one year earlier, it only took a few days for several UWA staff, the minister in charge of tourism and wildlife, a delegation of government officials, foreign and local media, researchers (including us), and NGOs to flock to Hamukungu to show support for conservation and condemn the poisoning.[8] This was followed by widespread news coverage nationally (New Vision, Monitor Publication, Independent magazine, Observer newspaper) and internationally (The Guardian, CNN, Sky News, National Geographic and many others). In many other cases, wildlife has killed people, and the victims remain nameless and unacknowledged (Garland, 2008).

The problem of human victims remaining nameless in violent human-carnivore interactions is further amplified because animals are often given human names. In interviews, people felt like their lives were equated to lions because every collared lion in QENP has his/her own name. This confirms Basongora's belief that the 'problem lions' are domesticated lions that UCP brought from South Africa. In a meeting with UWA and UCP, people from Hamukungu were very curious to know why lions have names,

> It is not something accepted in our culture to share human names with wildlife. I was surprised to find that one of the lions shares a name with one of my children. In our culture, we can give domestic animals names and naming lions, on the other hand, only confirms our suspicions that these lions are not wild but rather domesticated. They were likely brought from elsewhere to increase tourism and appease white researchers' curiosity.[9]

The UWA representative at the meeting responded, "Lions are given names for easy monitoring and research. But also, most of the names are

[3] Account from various people at Kasenyi.

[4] Eulogy by the local council chairman of Kasenyi village at the baby's funeral.

[5] We have used an alias, and do not mention the name actually used by people around the park.

[6] Observation during the funeral of the baby killed by the leopard on 10th April 2019.

[7] https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1498375/baby-killed-leopard-queen-elizabeth-national-park, https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/revenge-act-kasese-residents-kill-leopard-1819534.

[8] Observations from focus group discussions in June 2018.

[9] Local person 2: submission in community meeting with UWA and UCP at Hamukungu 16 April 2019.

given by the NGOs or individuals funding their conservation."[10] People were also curious to know why rangers killed buffaloes to feed lions, "your lions (implying the lions belonged to UWA and UCP) are treated like human children whom food is foraged for."[11] Many wonder how wildlife can be more important, or even equated to humans, a sentiment is built upon people's historical interactions with colonial and contemporary conservation authorities.

3. Conclusion

This article analysed the necropolitical ecological creation and reification of less-than-human geographies in and around Queen Elizabeth National Park through a focus on the politics of mourning. It asks which lost lives in violent human-wildlife interactions are grieved and which ones are not to unravel how distinctions are drawn between "more-than-animal" and "less-than-human" lives in and around protected areas. This explains why people come to experience their lives as less worthy than those of animals, a sentiment often expressed in areas with high rates of human-wildlife conflict. As such, we argue that the politics of mourning and the "radical inequality of grievability of life" (Butler, 2020) are productive tools for understanding conservation conflicts in Uganda and beyond.

Since colonization, Basangora pastoralists in and around QENP have lost land, livestock, and access to resources. Initially, they were displaced from their ancestral land by the creation of sleeping sickness-restricted areas, and later by game reserves and national parks. Colonists portrayed wildlife as a resource that could only be managed and enjoyed by white hunters, tourists, and conservationists; Africans were said to not understand its value and were a threat to its existence (MacKenzie, 1988; Neumann, 1998). In QENP, pastoral livelihoods are considered especially dangerous to conservation. Current conservation authorities—including UWA and international conservation organisations — repeatedly frame the condoned fishing enclaves as major design errors in the planning of QENP. As a result, pastoralists perceive that many conservation actors and practices have an ulterior motive—to get them out of the park. This subsequentially influences people's relationship with wildlife, especially carnivores. Our study confirms that so-called Human Wildlife Conflict should be approached as conservation conflict (i.e., between conservation authorities and people living and around PAs).

Moreover, communities that live inside the enclaves contest their broader marginalisation in society and politics. In the case of the poisoned lions, the number of lions was exaggerated, the incident made headlines, and it provoked national and international outrage. The opposite occurred when a leopard killed baby Getrude: the victim remained nameless and her mother was held responsible by conservation authorities. Moreover, the incident was only covered by two local news outlets, not by international media. This is a striking difference for people in the fishing villages, and just one example of how their lives are valued beneath those of animals.

Existing literature on necropolitical ecology mainly focuses on the role of the state in the creation of less-than-human geographies. Certainly, in the case of QENP, the colonial state initiated a reconfiguration of nature-society relations through its conservation regimes. However, it is important to broaden necropolitical ecology to include the politics of mourning —which lives are regarded as worthy of living and which lives can actually be considered *lost*. As these cases have shown, the social and political marginalisation of communities that live within the park – and the ungrievability of their lives — is not only perpetuated by the state and non-state (international) conservation actors; it is mainstreamed into wider Ugandan society (e.g., through media, tourism and public sentiments).

Scholars must move beyond simplistic and essentialist dynamics of human-wildlife interactions (e.g., population pressure and intra-species competition). This article also calls on conservation authorities to reflect critically on their own positionality. Conservation NGOs, researchers, and other advocates are not neutral 'outsiders' (Collins et al., 2021) who merely regulate, mediate, and 'solve' human-wildlife conflicts. Indeed, as others have stressed, colonial legacies and racialised power relations persist in conservation approaches (Kashwan et al., 2021). Decolonized, inclusive, and regenerative approaches to conservation need not only to focus on the "usual suspects": state institutions and national and international conservation NGOs. Rather, we must consider how a range of public authorities shape public opinion and reproduce ideas about which lives are worth being mourned. As long as the victims of violent-human-carnivore relations are not publicly recognised by politicians, (social) media, and conservation authorities, the people living in and around protected areas will remain subjugated to life in colonially-created, contemporarily-maintained less-than-human geographies.

To conclude, we argue that a focus on the politics of mourning is of interest beyond the study of conservation conflicts, and has a broader relevance to the field of political ecology, and necropolitical ecology in particular. Beyond the subject of nature conservation, the political processes behind the grievability of some (forms of) lives, versus the ungrievability of other lives can be studied in a range of different topics, such as: the politics of extinction, ecological and human loss in times of armed conflict and war, contestations and forms of destruction in relation to extractive industries and other sacrifice zones, and loss from climate change and a variety of disasters like floods and extreme droughts. These are just a few examples of how political ecology could draw on the work of Judith Butler to unravel how unequal power relations and the radical inequality of the grievability of life profoundly impact nature-society relations.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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[10] UWA representative 1: submission in community meeting with UWA and UCP at Hamukungu 16 April 2019.

[11] Local person 3: submission in community meeting with UWA and UCP at Hamukungu 16 April 2019.

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