"Elephant-induced displacement and the power of choice: Moral Narratives about Resettlement in Mozambique’s Limpopo National Park"

Abstract: Conservation-related resettlement is a problem for people working and living in protected areas across the globe, around which diverse ideas, meanings, and narratives emerge and circulate.

In the first part of this talk, I draw from participant observation and interview data to assess the interactions between two 'moral narratives' that emerged in Mozambique's Limpopo National Park (LNP) where international wildlife translocations were ongoing and resettlement is underway. LNP residents employed a 'moral narrative of protection' to achieve their objective of living free from conflict with wildlife. Conservation managers employed a 'moral narrative of choice' to advance their goal of achieving a voluntary resettlement programme. These divergent narratives reflect these actors' morally defined standards and expectations regarding people's responsibilities towards the environment, other species, and/or other people. Taken together they reveal important contradictions to the state's claim that the resettlement programme is voluntary. Instead, they indicate that resettlement processes are taking place in a displacement context wrought by conflict with wildlife, elephants in particular. My findings advance understandings of the (as of yet under-examined) moral dimensions of conservation discourse and the complex relationship between displacement and volition.

In the second part of this talk, I take the opportunity to discuss other aspects of my ongoing work on human mobility, resettlement compensation, environmental assessment, and the rights movement in international biodiversity conservation.

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